

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, LIBERATION AND NIGERIAN FEMALE PLAYWRIGHTS: A STUDY OF THREE PLAYS

Ngozi Udengwu

Dept of Theatre and Film Studies
University of Nigeria, Nsukka
Nigeria.

Abstract

*Violence against women seems to defy solution, as recent media reports show that the problem is escalating rather than diminishing. Most of the literary and critical works on the subject seem to focus more on exposing the problem and less on suggesting its solution. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine how Nigerian female playwrights have appropriated their dramatic writing in addressing domestic violence against women. Based on the idea that "he who feels it, knows it better", the study is focused on three plays written by women – Stella Oyedepo's *Our Wife is not a Woman and The Wife's Fury*, and Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh's *Nneora: An African Doll's House*. The focus of the study is on the third play, because while the first two adopt the same approach to the problem and end in the usual failure for the heroines, the third one adopts a different approach and ends in success for its heroine. In the play, the heroine confronts her oppressor in the virtual world of a play script in which fortunes are switched so that the oppressor becomes the oppressed and the oppressed becomes the oppressor engendering a cathartic dénouement and restoration of harmony in the relationship. The play combines some elements of revenge drama and theatre of cruelty. The paper observes that there is need for a more result-oriented approach that is capable of engendering attitudinal change individually and collectively. This study, ultimately, expands Liberation Literature to include writing for self liberation from domestic violence.*

Keywords: Domestic violence, liberation literature, female playwrights, revenge drama, theatre of cruelty

Introduction

Violence, particularly against women, has been taken for granted until relatively recently when United Nations, through its Human Rights organs, declared it illegal to abuse women and member nations pledge to change the mindset of their citizens to respect women. The main question that drives this study is how are female playwrights using their writing to fight violence against women? It is not certain where and when violence against women began. While some writers blame culture, others blame religion. Religion should be part of culture except that these days people tend to separate the foreign religions being practiced in Africa from culture since they are not part of African culture. But it seems more likely to find support for violence against women in monotheistic religions such as Christianity and Islam, than in polytheistic ones such as African Traditional Religion. It is not surprising then that the majority of the cases of female abuse are found among these religious groups. They believe God created women to be appendages to men, and this is recorded in the reference books and doctrines of these religions. For instance, Collins Ikenna Ugwu and Añuli B. Okoli (2012: 147) place violence against women at the door steps of male chauvinism which was entrenched in the Christian Holy Bible. The authors concur with Carroll and Turner (2009) that "the Bible is the

problem in our society, in as much as patriarchalism and male domination has been and continues to be interpreted as sacred decree and mobilized in our lives as such" (quoted in Ugwu and Okoli 2012: 147). To further illustrate the veracity of this claim they refer to five books of the Old Testament – Genesis, Exodus, Numbers, Leviticus and Deuteronomy – quoting passages that act as reference point for the validation of male chauvinism and violence against women. The negative images of women as contained in the Old Testament, some of which were not rightly interpreted by the authors, sound like a script from Islamic states where women are merely properties that have no mind of their own and can be done away with as men deem fit.

According to World Health Organization's fact sheet of October 2013, 35% of women, globally, have experienced intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence. Again, 38% of violence against women by intimate partners end in murder. The article also reports that violence can result in physical, mental, sexual, HIV, and other problems. The dangers of violence against women in real time is much more than is reported because the majority of cases go unreported by the victims. The world is yet to get over the shock of the case of Reeva Steenkamp, a South African model, paralegal and reality television star, who was shot to death by her boyfriend, the Olympic and Paralympic athlete, Oscar Pistorius. The incident occurred in the athlete's home on 14th February, 2013 where the model had just cooked and served food for the romantic Valentine's night. It is even scarier to know that this could happen three months into a relationship. The media is replete with such cases especially when celebrities are involved. As if in response to that incident, but actually in reaction to criticisms levelled against its apparent insensitivity towards violence against women by its players, the National Football League, through its commissioner, Roger Goodell, very recently instituted a tougher penalty for any NFL employee that is found guilty of domestic violence. Penalty now ranges from six-game suspension for first offenders and life time ban for repeat offenders.

It is against the above backdrop that this paper examines approaches to solving domestic violence as proposed by the targeted victims of the crime themselves – women. Hence, the three plays selected for this study are written by women. How do female playwrights portray domestic violence and abuse against women? Through a study of the following three plays by some notable female playwrights, it is hoped to have an insight into how the problem of domestic violence and abuse of women should be addressed. How may women, following the example of the three female characters in these plays, liberate themselves from the problem? It has to be noted that violence against women is a complicated situation considering its very long history, universal coverage, and its near total acceptability in societies. Fight against it is expected to be complicated as well. Bose Afolayan (2009) hints at this when she states, "When women express anger against men, they are seen as strident, unfeminine and sexually unattractive (as well as dangerous)" (183). Knowing what they stand to lose for expressing anger, how then can women fight violence without anger?

Women Fighting Abuse

The selected plays share the commonality of being written by Nigerian women and about women's marital experiences and frustrations, but they differ in their approach to the old subject and this difference in approach impacts on the expected outcome. It has to be pointed out at this point, however, that the study is not on suppression and frustration of the female characters in the plays, per

se, but on the technique of presentation by these female playwrights and an examination of the effectiveness of the approaches. It is not so much about the content as the form of presentation, that this writing is concerned.

Domestic Violence

The term domestic violence has widened to include harmful practices of people involved in intimate relationship. It is no longer limited, as the term implies, to husband and wife because it occurs in other forms of intimate relationships such as dating, courtship, co-habitation and any other form of intimate or love relationship, be it formal or informal, legal or not legal, official or unofficial. It is also not about man and woman since the phenomenon of gay/lesbian has come to challenge the concept of love relationships and marriage. It does not matter the legal status of a love relationship, or the gender of the individuals involved in it, violence, ironically, has always been part of it and feminine (or effeminate) partners are most often at the receiving end of such abuses.

Domestic abuse tops the list of all the ills perpetrated against women, globally. For proof of this assertion all one needs is to look around him beginning from his home to around his neighbourhood. That is where the greatest proof lies, and it is the best place to search since most of the abuses and violence against women are never reported and never made public. Further evidence can be found in media, police and hospital reports as well as in creative writing, too numerous to count. The enormity of these abuses must have moved United Nations to declare an edict against all forms of violence against the female gender. Compelling documentary evidence can be found on Human Rights Watch website.

Domestic violence takes many forms. It can be verbal, psychological, attitudinal/ behavioural, emotional or physical. Though the physical form of it is more visible and attracts attention, the rest are no less harmful. As a matter of fact, the less obvious the abuse is to the public, the more dangerous it is for the victim. Richard Gelles (2008) took time to enumerate types of domestic violence to include;

Denial of access to resource or money, restraint of normal activities or freedom (including isolation from friends and family), sexual coercion or assault, threats to kill or to harm, and physical intimidation or attacks. In extreme cases, domestic violence may result in the death of a partner.

In the last sentence, Gelles is referring to physical death, but there is perhaps another form of death that can be caused by domestic violence – mental illness. It will be difficult to have a comprehensive list of all forms of domestic violence because it differs according to religion, culture, society, occupation, political system, financial status, educational level and many other conditions that provide conducive environment for domestic violence. It is important to observe that Nigerian female playwrights rarely represent physical domestic abuse, probably because these women come from more liberal part of the country – Eastern and Western Nigeria – where women are relatively more respected because families exercise the right to intercede in marital problems. Physical abuse is, therefore, rare in plays written by women from these regions. The question raised and addressed in the present writing is how are female playwrights using their drama to liberate women from domestic violence?

Writing for Self-Liberation

Liberation literature discourse, which Maria Lauret (1994: 4) refers to as “oppositional literatures of non-dominant groups”, have almost always revolved around group struggle for liberation – political, economic, social, gender, and so on – but rarely do either creative writings or critical discourses explore the possibility of a dramatic character fighting an oppressor through dramatic writing. It is more popular to find oppressed characters applying the usual confrontational approaches. In marriage situations, these methods tend to solve one problem and create another for the woman. When the purpose is to re-establish harmony in a relationship, a more subtle and less drastic approach is required. This paper is focused on self liberation through dramatic writing hence the choice of a play that captures this process in a special way – *The Wife's Fury* by Stella Oyedepo. Award winning Asian American writer, teacher and activist, Purvi Shah states, in her work titled *Writing for the Heart: A Practice for Self-Liberation* has observed that,

When we come to writing, we often imagine we must pen (or type!) something that stands the test of time. But this view elides what writing can enable in one's present life, how writing can serve as an act of healing or moving towards self-recognition and wholeness regardless of how long the writing—or even such feeling—lasts.

This general tendency for writers to write for victims of oppression is explored in the first two plays studied in this work – *Nneora* and *Our Wife is not a Woman*. In *The Wife's Fury*, however, the playwright seems to step aside and allows the character to write her story and address her oppressor directly. Of the three plays under review here, it is only *The Wife's Fury* that does not end in a disaster for the heroine, due to its reconciliatory technique.

Our Wife is not a Woman (2004)

Though published in 2004, *Our Wife is not a Woman* was first written and performed in 1979, and it is the first play by Stella Oyedepo, the most prolific playwright in Nigeria, to date. Written a few years after UN's Declaration of the Year of Women, the play centres on the main socio-political debate unleashed by that declaration – gender inequality against women.

The condition of a childless woman in an African society has been the subject of discussion in some African writing. In *Our Wife is not a Woman* it takes a different twist. Some women writers have the opinion that financial independence and education can secure freedom from oppression for a woman. *Our Wife is not a Woman* has put that hypothesis to test. In this play, the heroine, Dupe, has it all – education, financial independence – all the survival kit needed to manage marital pressures and escape violence and abuse. It appears to be working initially until eight years into the marriage. In many African societies, childlessness is a big problem for a woman no matter how educated and financially stable she may be. Dupe's husband does not mind, or so he seems. It is not clear why they have failed to have a child in eight years when all tests have failed to detect any problem.

The tension in the marriage is obvious from the start of the play, in the form of constant bickering and arguments about what the duties of a wife should be. It is obvious that Dupe and her husband, Kola, have opposing views on that issue. Kola does not say that his wife should abandon her

career to serve him hands and feet in the house, but he thinks that a woman's primary duty is to her husband. It all begins from page two of the play when Kola comes out from the bathroom to comb his hair in the sitting room, and his wife says, "Kola, why don't you finish that in the bathroom? Isn't it a bit unseemly to have hairs flying about the whole place?" [3]. His response is that his wife is "unnecessarily finicky" and immediately he turns to another subject, one that is more serious to him, "Do you know there is no single shirt or clean underwear I can wear?" When his wife asks who is to blame for that, he states categorically.

Look, i would love my wife to see to such things. I would want her to, personally, see to what i eat and wear. If she doesn't, it amounts to negligence of duty. [3]

The triviality of this constant argumentation points to the fact that the course of tension in this marriage lies elsewhere. Though it rarely comes up during these incessant altercations, the major tension threatening the sanctity of Dupe's marriage is childlessness. For people who believe that primary purpose of getting married is to have children, eight years of marriage without a child is a major source of unhappiness. Again, a childless marriage is prone to interferences of all kinds, especially from the wider families. Sure enough, Kola's mother wades in with a solution for her son. Believing that Dupe's lifestyle of smoking and lack of decorum in dressing and manners are responsible for her childlessness, Mama decides to marry another wife for Kola. Thus, Adekemi is brought from the village to be the perfect wife, who will give Kola a lot of children and serve him as a woman should serve her husband. A domestic war breaks out with Kola, his mother and the new wife on one side, and Dupe, alone on the other. When it becomes too much for her to cope with, Dupe takes an overdose of sleeping pills and dies. In a twist, it turns out that Dupe was pregnant at the point of her death, but nobody was aware of it. In yet another twist, the new wife turns out to a hermaphrodite, with physical attributes of a female and internal organ of a male. In a simple expression, she is not a woman.

Separation, divorce or any form of marital instability is a huge source of stress and should be avoided as much as possible. Depending on the level of intensity, marital abuse can lead to sadness, depression, mental illness, death, separation, and the woman is often worse hit. She is often the one that is either ejected or forced to quit. Those with no sustainable economic power suffer the most, hence, some writers such as Juliet Okonkwo (1975), CU Ogbuehi (1999), opine that education and financial independence are the panacea for female liberation. This hypothesis is flawed by Dupe's experience in *Our Wife is not a Woman*.

Nneora: An African Doll's House (2005)

This play is a brilliant adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's controversial play, *A Doll's House*. The word "nneora", in Igbo language, means "mother of all". Mother connotes nurturer or caregiver; thus in Igbo land mothers are respected because of the selfless service they render in the family and the traditional society. In this play, Tracie Utoh adequately reinvents Ibsen's heroine, Nora, for critical evaluation of the condition of women in marriage. Time and place, it seems, has had little or no effect on the situation of women in marriage. It only changes in semantics, hence, whether she is called Nora or Nneora, the experience remains the same.

It is necessary to mention that Tracie is a vibrant emerging female playwright who has written a number of plays prior to *Nneora*. However, her earlier plays about women tend to be critical with the condition of women. From *Who Owns this Coffin?* to *Our Wives have Gone Mad Again*, Tracie has often been unsentimental about women. *Nneora*, therefore, is her first deep insight into the condition of women in marriage and one in which she takes a clear stand on what a woman should do in an abusive relationship.

The play gives insight into the condition of a virtuous woman, the ideal wife, docile, dependent, submissive and doting on her husband, with all the ideal feminine behaviours. But, in this play the virtuous woman wakes up from her romantic reverie to the realisation that her man is taking her servitude for granted, for, instead of fetching for her the expected love and respect from her husband, all the selfless service and devotion earn her only spite and disrespect.

Nneora, the heroine, is an ideal woman who is ready to sacrifice everything she owns to improve her husband. From the first day they meet, she has not held back her desire to be his guardian angel. The day they meet, Ikenna has come to get some food stuff on credit as he has often done. But his creditor, Mama Uduak, does not only refuse to sell on credit any more, she also insists Ikenna clears the areas of debts he owes her. Nneora wades into the case and offers to clear Ikenna's debts. That same day Nneora offers to help him find a job in a bank, through the help of her boyfriend, Osita. A relationship develops from there and soon culminates in marriage. Her desire to continue to act as a ladder for Ikenna continues well into their marriage. Though her relationship with Osita is supposed to be over now that she is married to Ikenna, however, she does not fail to prevail on approve an expensive Overseas treatment for Ikenna on the bank's account.

The greatest of her sacrifices for Ikenna is, perhaps, her willingness to close down her boutique. This decision is taken to make her husband happy, since he has expressed his aversion for working women. His theory is that working-class women do not have enough time to devote to their domestic responsibilities. Without thinking, and without any argument, Nneora closes down her boutique. It had to be pointed out that the boutique was a gift from Osita, her former boyfriend. Having lost her only source of income, Nneora is now totally dependent on her husband, and therefore, vulnerable to domestic abuse. Her main desire and ambition is to be a dutiful wife. She soon discovers that "good wife" or "virtuous woman" means different things to different people as it soon becomes clear, as the play unfolds, that she and her husband have different ideas about this indefinable concept.

Her disillusionment comes when her husband finds out about her and Osita and shows so much disgust and calls her all sorts of names and would not listen to her explanations. Nneora will not take that from somebody she has sacrificed so much for, so she takes the bold step to quit the exploitative and abusive marriage. Quitting a marriage when one has no means of sustenance does not seem a good decision. The quantum of problems she is going to face is obvious and how she is going to deal with them bits the imagination. She no longer has any means of sustenance. She has four children and a set of twins due in two months. She has no certificate and so no prospect of finding a job. She is from a poor parental background, meaning that she has no blood relations to go to for help. Her former boyfriend, Osita, has reunited with his family and so she cannot go to him for financial assistance any more. It also bits all logic when she declares that she will go back to school, making

her one of the most inconsistent characters one has read. It is likely that her discussion with her friend, Linda, has had the effect of making her see her mistakes, and now she is ready to correct them.

The fact that Nneora has to quit the marriage she worked so hard and sacrificed so much to build is the central concern of this writing. Why quit now? Is quitting the best option in this circumstance? This question is answered in the third play in which the heroine refuses to either die like Dupe or quit like Nneora.

The Wife's Fury (2009)

This unique play presents a refreshing approach to tackling spousal frustrations. Divided into six "Views" and an epilogue, *The Wife's Fury*, as the author explains, "...is the cry of agony of a neglected and emotionally traumatized wife who vehemently pours out pent-up anger and marital frustrations in a fantasized framework" [iv].

It is a story of a middle-aged couple obviously having marital issues. The play opens with the wife, Alero showing little or no compassion for her husband Sebi who is rendered quadriplegic by a car accident. Her husband complains that going out has become his wife's pastime ever since he had the accident. In that state, he depends on his wife for everything including to bath him, change his clothes, feed him as well as change his position when he has sat or laid down in one position for too long. Apparently she does all these but will not fail to go out in the evenings and come back late in the night, leaving her quadriplegic husband alone in the house. This first scene of the play begins with her returning from one of her usual nightly outings at exactly five minutes past midnight.

The picture in View One, therefore, is that of a callous and uncaring wife and an unfortunate helpless, sick and emotionally traumatized husband, as can be understood from the following excerpt on page 6 – 7;

SEBI

(Sulkily) Help me to the chair, will you? Simply help me to the chair.

ALERO

Why don't you sleep where you are?

SEBI

I haven't changed my position since morning...

ALERO

You may as well not change it till tomorrow morning.

SEBI

(Downcast) I never knew you hid an incredibly callous nature under your deceptive good nature.

ALERO

Say what you like.

This picture of a heartless woman and a helpless husband remains in the mind of the reader until the middle of View Two, precisely on page 12 after Sebi expresses his suspicion that his wife is cheating on him, and she makes no attempt to deny it. He invokes a spiritual principle thus;

SEBI

You believe in the law of retributive justice? Alero! You exploit my state of helplessness and you prick my soul with a thousand needles. You give me emotional battering and you want to send me to early grave!

ALERO

I am a firm believer in the karmic law. But i wonder why you can't see that you have been paid a visit by nemesis. You talk of emotional battering. My dear husband, you are my very good model. Throughout your active marital life you know how you've always treated your wife. You gave this recipe which i am now using very accurately. I'm emulating your ways. [12].

From this point on, the table turns and the image of callousness in the mirror changes to the image of Sebi. Alero reminds him of how he neglected her and their children to the point that when she was ill he still saw no reason to look after her or their children. When she was ill with a life threatening disease, he abandoned her and went rollicking with other women. He would come back at an ungodly hour of the night and treat her like trash. Now that the table has turned it is her turn to pay him back in his own coin. This is a revenge situation.

What do women do when faced with marital instability? They quit and quit here takes a wider meaning. The word quit, according to Cambridge Advanced Learners Dictionary, third edition, is a verb meaning "to stop doing something, or to leave a job or a place". In two of the three plays under study, the heroines quit their disillusioned marriage – Nneora walks out on her husband while Dupe takes an overdose of sleeping pill and dies. But, perhaps not wanting to continue this trend Oyedepo decides to change the outcome by experimenting with a style. She designs a new tactic for her heroine. Thus in *The Wife's Fury*, the heroine, Alero engages her abusive husband in an exclusive communication which is private and direct and without the usual distractive elements in interpersonal dialogue that often dilutes the effect of the meaning being communicated. The play seems to have the same goal as stated by Antonin Artaud that theatre if it must reclaim its essence, must avoid obstacles of indirect representations.

A matter as delicate as marriage should be handled with utmost care because it has a potential to cause serious emotional trauma and stress. What happens when marriages break up, especially long time marriages with children are best avoided. In spite of the abuses, which she has suffered in her marriage, yet Alero does not want to quit. She does not want any of the abuses either. Her desire is to have a normal relationship with her husband devoid of acts of callousness, a marriage of mutual respect and harmony. She wants to liberate herself from the emotional trauma that Sebi unfeelingly metes out to her. A little cruelty will help give him the necessary jolt back to reality. She imagines that if Sebi would find himself in a situation of helplessness where he will have to depend on an irresponsible spouse, it will help him feel what she has been feeling. Most importantly it will help him realise it can happen to him. What he needs is a reality check.

Drama is the best tool for conscientization, so she creates a harsh reality for the callous husband in which the couple's fortune is reversed. In the play, Sebi is involved in a car accident that leaves him in a vegetable state. Now it is Sebi's turn to search for love and care and would not find it, and it is Alero's turn to put her own pleasures first at the expense of her bed-ridden husband.

The virtual world of drama which is chosen as a safe ground for making difficult statements affords Alero the opportunity of subjecting Sebi to the emotional abuse without being accused of husband hating. If she verbally expresses her desire for this reversal, she will be in trouble. But she scripts it all down and steps aside to watch.

Two things this writing technique has achieved are first it gives Alero the opportunity to bare her mind, uninterrupted and receive emotional release that is therapeutic. Secondly it impacts Sebi with same force as a nightmare that leaves one grateful for the second chance to live and the opportunity to put things right in his life. He is truly conscientized and he is grateful to change his attitude because he just learned, from the play, that it can happen to him.

In *The Wife's Fury*, however, the heroine takes her own faith into her own hand by confronting her abuser because this abuser happens to be someone she is emotionally connected to and shares responsibilities with – her husband and the father of her children. It is a domestic problem, a private problem that is best handled privately. The scope of the problem dictates the size of the canvas. The canvas of *The Wife's Fury* may be regarded as narrow because it is more or less personal. It is no less political. Women's oppression at home, after all, is linked with women's oppression in the wider society, and vice versa.

Stella Oyedepo the author, is one of the most prolific playwrights in Nigeria, so it is not surprising that she makes her heroine adopt playwriting as a tool for addressing the age-long problem of domestic abuse. The two character structure of the play makes it easily accessible to readers who would ordinarily consider a play too cumbersome to read because of its performance elements of stage directions, scene description, many characters speaking at once, and so on. It also creates an intimacy that helps Sebi recognise himself in the character, as King Claudius does in *Hamlet*.

The Wife's Fury is more attuned to *Hamlet* by Shakespeare in having a direct and instant effect. Hamlet is able to solve a difficult question about the death of his father through drama. It would have been difficult, even impossible for him to prove that his uncle, Claudius, was the one who killed his father, even though the ghost of his father has told him so. Hamlet is too intelligent to confront his wicked uncle without concrete prove. He, therefore, relies on a dramatic performance to expose the murderer. Based on the information he receives from his father's ghost, a play is devised to show not only how, but also, who murdered the late king. Claudius recognizes himself in the villainous character and is shocked to know that his secret has leaked somehow. His instant and violent display of frustration becomes a confirmation of the crime he committed.

It has to be pointed out that it is the reality of the action of the drama, the exposure of actual crime of King Claudius that shatters his false demeanour and exposes him to the world. If Hamlet had confronted him verbally, it would have been his word against that of King Claudius and in such a situation Hamlet would stand no chance.

The Wife's Fury and *Hamlet* also share the technique of play-within-a play in which the culprits are lured into a trap-like situation and compelled to confront their inner selves. The insert

plays are tailor-made for the purpose of re-enacting the hidden truth about the characters of Claudius and Sebi, and they are able to recognize themselves in the plays.

The Concept of Cruelty in the Wife's Fury

The cruelty, which Antonin Artaud proposes is not that which connotes inflicting pain rather cruelty in this sense is understood as the act of shattering the false reality which humans create and wallow in. He states in his book, *The Theatre and its Double*, "Without an element of cruelty at the root of every spectacle, the theatre is not possible. In our present state of degeneration, it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to re-enter our minds." [1958: 99]

It has been reported that Robert Walker uses the technique of theatre of cruelty to perform the problem of deforestation in the Amazon basin. When the concept of theatre of cruelty is employed, an existential problem is elevated to a catastrophic proportion and the culprits are left in no doubt about the role they have played in causing the catastrophe that is affecting others.

Regarding Artaud's idea of cruelty, Zarrilli et al comment,

At the fierce heart of his vision, the ultimate goal was an embodied performance that would give access to some metaphysical plenitude, unimpeded by the secondary representations of written language. [455]

Hence, the cruelty seen at the beginning of *The Wife's Fury* appears justified at the end of the play when the fully repentant Sebi tenders his unreserved apology to his wife.

Revenge as a Liberation Strategy in *The Wife's Fury*

The Wife's Fury resonates with Freire's theory of the oppressed, especially the part that advocates the liberation not only of the oppressed but also of the oppressor. Freire declares,

This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors who oppress, exploit and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both. Any attempt to "soften" the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity; indeed, the attempt never goes beyond this. To have the continued opportunity to express their "generosity," the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well.

Oyedepo had expressed her conviction that an oppressor needs to be liberated from his oppressive tendencies. She expresses in one of her newspaper columns titled, "I am for men's liberation". In that column, which appeared in *Kwara Weekly* newspaper [April 11-17, 1990, p.7], she declares that men need liberation from chauvinism if gender balance will ever be achieved.

When the purpose of writing is to liberate one from an endemic malady, almost a pristine myopia, through the art of conscientization, that writing must have the power to assault the secure precinct of the intended culprit's psyche to jolt him back to reality. To liberate somebody from his dangerous personality trait such as chauvinism is a task as difficult as treating addiction or madness. The process of liberating both oppressor and the oppressed is explored, graphically, in *The Wife's*

Fury through a virtual revenge process. Revenge, in this context, is not meant to hurt but to enforce a change of heart by turning the table on the accused and making him have a taste of the malefaction he inflicts on others. Revenge, in this case, is not physical because the aim is not to end the marriage but to restore respect and grace to it.

By passing the bulk to her abuser, Alero is able to liberate not just herself from emotional trauma, but also her husband who, otherwise would never have been able to understand the wound he has been inflicting on his wife. He has no way of knowing because he does not feel it, he is not at the receiving end. Now that he has been made to feel it, even though in a virtual world, he knows it better. He has tasted a bit of the emotional trauma which he has been meting out to his wife without thinking. He has also had a rude awakening to the possibility of a law of retributive justice. At the end of the play, Sebi is mortified, and he tenders a public apology to his wife, saying,

SEBI

May God forgive me. May God forgive us all. (Sebi descends into the auditorium) Huh... ladies and gentlemen, in your presence I tender my most sincere apology to my wife. I ask for her forgiveness. May God forgive us all. (Light goes dimmer and dimmer until final fade out).

Sebi, probably, feels like one waking up from a very bad dream with the gratitude that it was only a dream. With that gratitude, he realises what he needs to do avert the chance of the nightmarish experience becoming a reality in his life.

Conclusion

The foregoing is an evaluation of three plays written by three Nigerian female playwrights, with particular focus on their different approaches to addressing marital frustrations. We have seen in *Our Wife is not a Woman* by Stella Oyedepo, how Dupe, a well educated and financially stable senior civil servant, loses her life because she is unable to withstand the antagonism against her because of her childlessness. Her fate calls to question a feminist assumption that educational and financial empowerment are catalysts for women liberation. Dupe's financial empowerment is unable to secure her marriage or her life because she tows the line of antagonism in addressing the problem. Since, apparently, she wants to remain married to her husband, a more subtle approach would have produced a better result than the verbal confrontation she adopts. In *Nneora: An African Doll's House*, Nneora does not escape the frustration despite the fact that she devotes her life to being everything her husband wants her to be. Unable to continue to live with a man who has no respect, whatsoever, for her feelings, she quits her marriage to face the problem of raising children without any source of income. Quitting, in this case, is not a good option because the heroine is, obviously, not financially equipped for it. *The Wife's Fury*, on the other hand, replaces confrontation with conscientization to restore harmony. We have seen how Alero uses her craft to effect the much needed attitudinal change in her husband, Sebi, and how it has resulted in the restoration of mutual respect in their relationship.

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