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**WOMANHOOD IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN DRAMA: A STUDY OF THREE
NIGERIAN PLAYS BY J.P. CLARK, ROTIMI JOHNSON AND EMEKA NWABUEZE**

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ABSTRACT

Whatever be the genre, womanhood attracts a significant attention in all creative works of every generation. Our study focuses on Nigerian Drama. This is mainly because drama is distinguished from other literary genres essentially by its intensity and immediacy. The paper sets out to study three contemporary Nigerian plays, namely: *The Wives' Revolt* by J. P. Clark, *The Court of the Queens* by Rotimi Johnson and *A Parliament of Vultures* by Emeka Nwabueze. The paper purports that perception of womanhood is neither static nor universal but highly variable. The work evaluates the role of women in current sociopolitical events in Nigeria as projected in the three plays chosen for the study. It should be pointed out, however, that our perspective of study sees the views expressed in each of the plays as a reflection of the Nigerian contemporary assessment of women and not just the playwright's personal perception of women. The study shows that gender balance can only be reached when women assert their rights and that the Nigeria of our dream where there will no form of political corruption can only emerge through concerted efforts of men and women of integrity.

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INTRODUCTION

Literature or an imaginative work of art and aesthetics, could simply exist to give pleasure through a play on words. However, African literature, the mother of Nigerian literature, has right from its oral nature, been a means of entertainment and a social corrective medium. For instance, Abigbo, the popular Mbaise song, 'Onye gara hall ga-adi ime' (She who attended a ball-room dance is now pregnant), through its rhythm, gives pleasure; but condemns the act of sexual immorality that leads to pre-marital sex and unwanted pregnancy. A study of the literary works of any age would depict a given perception of humanity at that point in time. The present study focuses on the perception of womanhood in contemporary Nigerian drama as presented in three Nigerian plays: *The Wives' Revolt* by J.P. Clark (1991), *The Court of the Queens* by Rotimi Johnson (1991) and *A Parliament of Vultures* by Emeka Nwabueze (2000). J.P Clark's *The Wives' Revolt* is a

comedy set in an oil-producing community in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria. In this comedy, Clark presents an interplay of men and their wives in a society where two-thirds of everything to be shared for the benefit of all adults go to two categories of men, that is, the elders who get the lion share and the young men who get the second largest share leaving the least and often menial or despicable share to the women. However, trouble began in this community when the women decided to fight this injustice against them by refusing their share of money paid by an oil company. To register their protests against the men, they abandon their wifely and motherly duties. The men, who could not cope effectively with the traditional women roles of cooks and mothers, accuse the women of being witches who turn into goats to destroy lives. Consequently, without consulting the women, the men enact a law forbidding the rearing of goats in the community, the seizure and eventual slaughtering and consumption of any goat caught by any man. The wives perceived this law as obnoxious and asked the men to repeal same as goat rearing was the women's economic mainstay. Adamant in implementing the law, the wives exiled themselves to an enemy community and vowed not to return until the obnoxious law of goats is repelled. The women also demanded that the men would pay a token as damages to them before they would resume their duties as wives and mothers. The men eventually acquiesced and the women returned and peace was restored in the community.

The Court of the Queens by Rotimi Johnson is an unusual and evolutionary comedy. In this comedy, young unemployed Nigerian graduates evaluate their state of unemployment and the general magnitude of corruption in the land and one of them Metu, begins to think deeply about the state of the Nation. His peers Labo and Akin, see him as an intellectual dreamer. He sets himself to educate them on the need for an intellectual revolution in the land. Suddenly, a strange thing happens in the land. The Amazons, Queen Amina of Zaria, Moremi of Ile-Ife, Funmi Kuti and Emotan of Benin, women of influence in Nigerian history; along with Angela Davis, a black woman from California plan a coup d'état and take over power from corrupt Nigerian men. After toppling the all-men government in power, the Amazons judge the leaders and vest power on a man of integrity, Molongo, as the new leader. They ask him to appoint men and women of integrity he would like to work with. Among others, he appoints Akin, the intellectual revolutionist who introduces Labo, the young female graduate to Molongo as his partner in progress. Hence we are ushered into a new era of sociopolitical realities where men and women of integrity pilot the affairs of the nation.

Emeka Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*, is also a comedy and a vitriolic critique of corrupt unpatriotic Nigerian politicians who equate politics with money stealing and self aggrandizement. In consonance with the present practice in the country, there is gross gender imbalance with regards to the number of male and female politicians. However, Madam Omeaku, the lone woman politician among the men, is as much of a vulture as her male counterparts. Through a symbolic representation of these politicians as vultures, Nwabueze paints the picture of a depraved political system where morality and integrity have no place.

Since no notion of womanhood can dispense with the idea of women, it is necessary to examine the concept of woman as conceived and its implications in a patriarchal society. From *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, we learn that the term 'woman' refers first to a female human, regardless of age, and that typical women who have not gone through menopause are capable of giving birth, though some intersex women and transgender women cannot. Secondly 'woman' refers to an adult female human. In this second sense, womanhood, would refer to the developmental process of a female from birth till death (see Woko iv-vii). However, the state of being a female human and the realities thereof, have a lot of sociological implications as gender roles vary from generation to generation and from society to society as shown by Foluso Okebukola:

Gender imbalance, gender inequality, gender bias, gender discrimination- these are all labels given to the practice of favouring and giving preferential treatment to males at the expense of their female counterparts. Gender inequality is no myth and its social geography has striking contours. (89)

Based on the above ideas, womanhood would be conceived in this study as the state of being a woman, that is, a female human, and the composite of qualities thought to be appropriate to or representative of women.

In what follows, our evaluation of the three plays would be shaped by the concepts of wifehood, motherhood, politics and revolution. We shall examine how each of the concepts that address the notion of womanhood in these plays is handled by the three dramatists

i) Wifehood

A woman, from the Biblical account of her physical sojourn on earth, appeared first as a woman, then as a wife, as recorded in Genesis Chapter two:

Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man.... Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2: 22-23).

Wifehood, according to this Biblical account becomes the first biological and sociological role of womanhood. Although recent gay culture in some parts of the world assigns the role of wifehood to a man, in contemporary Nigeria, wifehood has remained the exclusive right of women as would be seen in the three Plays under study.

In Clark's *The Wives' Revolt*, the wives in question are undoubtedly women and not men. Just at the beginning of the Play, Okoro, Koko's husband and the town crier, proclaims this:

Okoro. Erhuwaren! Erhuwaren!It is the matter of the oil money sent by the oil company in our land... However, our women-folk, led by a few reckless ones, fed up with doing simple duties for their husbands and children as befits good housewives... (1)

Since this play is set in a typical traditional Izon community in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, the women could be qualified as rural women as used in contemporary Nigerian parlance as seen in such programs as 'Better Life for Rural women.' These rural women are conscious of infringement on their rights by their husbands and they decide to fight for their rights through non-violent means. Clark artistically develops this idea of the oppressed fighting for her liberation without recourse to violence. How then is this developed? Firstly, the wives are organized as could be inferred from Okoro's words 'our women-folk, led by a few reckless ones...' (1). Secondly, the women have a focus, that is, the unequal distribution of the oil money paid to the community by an oil company. Thirdly, the women do not just weep and moan over the injustice meted out to them by the men through an oppressive sharing formula that ascribes two-thirds of community proceeds to the men and only one-third to women, rather they take an action against the injustice. According to Okoro, 'our women-folk... are repudiating this fair and reasonable distribution of the money... (1), these women therefore raise their voices in vehement protest against that sharing formula and reject their share of the money which they consider to be dehumanizing.

Realizing that nature hates a vacuum, the women do not stop at rejecting their share of the money. They go further by asking for equity as proclaimed by Okoro, the town-crier, to the whole community "...our women-folk... demanding that it should have been divided into two equal parts, one going to them, and the other to the men, the elders being in their opinion all male..." (.1). With the repudiation of their share of the money and their subsequent demand of an equitable sharing formula that would no longer marginalize the women, each wife faces the wrath of her husband. Nevertheless, the wives are resolute in their demand for equity against all odds including invocation to tradition. Koko, Okoro's wife, puts the women's grievances straight to her husband:

KOKO. ...You rigged the whole thing to do us out of our fair share of the money...

OKORO. ...it was in strict observance of tradition that we shared the money into three parts... (7)

Rather than address the issue of injustice inherent in the formula used in sharing the money, Okoro goes on to inform his dear wife that, 'Responsible men' (8), have passed a law against the keeping of goats in order to check the havoc caused in the community by witches who change into goats. Goats being the women's economic mainstay, Koko quickly perceives the banning of goats as a calculated attempt by the men to emasculate women economically and she wastes no time in pointing out this injustice against women. This can be seen in this dialogue between her and the husband:

KOKO. The law you have passed is bad, unfair and discriminatory, being directed against women because of our stand. We will not accept it (11).

To Okoro, the issues raised by Koko and other wives on the unjust sharing of the money and the obnoxious law enacted by men are none issues. To him, mere women's talk cannot change the traditions that favour men and suppress women. He affirms, 'I don't see what you women can do. You cannot even speak with one voice on any one matter at any time. (11).

In *The Court of the Queens*, we notice that wifhood is also represented though not as explicitly as in *The Wives' Revolt*. The unique ambition of Labo, the young unemployed female graduate is to be married to Akin, the intellectual revolutionary, whom she loves. Labo in a bid to be given more attention by Akin, explains to him that 'it takes an intelligent man and an affectionate woman to build a happy home' (63). By this she shares her dream of being Akin's wife. Although she patiently waits for Akin to be ready to marry her, she is ever quick to remind Akin of what she would have been enjoying if she gave in to the advances of other men.

LABO: Akin you have nothing to tell me. I believed in your stupid revolutionary ideals when I should have been more realistic... I still have to queue for a bus under the burning sun when I should have been riding a Peugeot, a Volvo or a Santana, if I had yielded to the advances of Yemi, the Lawyer or Ngozi, the Medical Doctor.... (10)

In Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*, there are essentially two wives, one visible one, Madam Omeaku and an invisible one, Barrister Umeh's Canadian wife. Contrary to the situation in *The Wives Revolt* where at the beginning of the play none of the wives was part of the political class, of the two wives in *A Parliament of Vultures*, one of them, Madam Omeaku, is not only a top politician but a unique one in that she is the only honourable member of the House of Assembly who is a woman. We see in her a wife who is busy not just running her household but helping to run the affairs of the state with her male counterparts. Indeed her political concerns determine all her actions and assignments as could be seen in the excerpts below:

MADAM: ...A whole honourable member of the House of Assembly! A future aspirant to the Senate... What will my political colleagues say... (2).

MADAM: ...You have started to tow the path of your father. To have a bushman for a husband is already too much... (2).

Furthermore, Madam Omeaku is an adulterous wife as seen in her illicit affair with Brown. The dialogue that follows, between her and Brown explains this clearly:

BROWN: ... (Opens his brief-case and brings out a wad of notes, and gives it to her. She removes the top of her wrapper and wraps the money, then embraces him, smiling. MR BROWN caresses her hair).

(The door is flung open and MR OMEAKU enters... MR BROWN tears himself from MADAM OMEAKU).
OMEAKU: Do you know I can invoke the powers of a husband and stop you from continuing in politics?

MADAM: ...Do you call yourself a husband? Husband for mouth! Do you know the duties of a husband?

(5-6)

Wifhood has different connotations in the three Plays. In *The Wives' Revolt*, a wife is a mere cook and an housekeeper who is treated as a door mat by the husband. When we come to *The Court of the Queens*, we see a make-believe wife who dreams of how she will help her husband to build a happy home but in *A Parliament of Vultures*, we see an irresponsible wife that treats her husband with levity and has no regard for virtue and integrity.

ii) Motherhood

Wifhood naturally leads to motherhood as an attribute of womanhood. In the Biblical account of Adam and Eve, from being a wife Eve graduates to being a mother as seen in Genesis Chapter 4:1 "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain..." Though in recent times the idea of child free women has emerged in some Western countries, in many cultures of the world motherhood is sequel to wifhood. In fact, one of the present realities in contemporary Nigeria is the torture that some women go through as a result of childlessness because a childless wife is seen as a dry and fruitless tree that is good-for-nothing. The

life of drudgery that wifedom imposes on the Nigerian woman makes her devote her life so much to her children, believing that if they grow into responsible adults someday, she might enjoy a measure of comfort before her death. Procreation and nurturing of children become the mark of acceptability and a guarantee for the wife that she would not be seen as a failure in marriage. To a large extent, wifedom and motherhood could be said to be complements as could be seen in the three plays under study. Firstly in *The Wives' Revolt* wifedom and motherhood are inseparable as captured below:

OKORO. ... Our women-folk, led by a few reckless ones, fed up with doing simple duties for their husbands and children as befits good housewives... (1)

To Okoro, a woman's greatest achievement is to be a good housewife, that is, one who uses all her natural endowments doing simple duties for her husband and children. What Okoro calls simple duties of a mother is the hard manual labour women embark on reechoed in Ajima's poem 'The Stone Breaking Woman of the Plateau.' In the poem, women break stones with hammer in order to get money that would enable them feed their children.

They pour their
Centre Point Energy
Into these hammers
For life to flow
For the future
Of their siblings (9-14)

Furthermore, motherhood is often used to scare women away from maximizing their potentials. The fathers often leave the feeding of the children to the women and see it as unbecoming when a woman tries to take certain steps that might better her lot in life. This stance is seen succinctly in Okoro's reaction to Koko's advice to eat against hungry days ahead if the men neither apply equity in the sharing of the oil money nor revoke the obnoxious law banning women from keeping and rearing goats as illustrated below:

KOKO. ... And better make sure you eat against hungry days ahead...

OKORO. ...I suppose you'll also starve your own children to death in your unnatural plan to floor your men? (12)

Again in Rotimi Johnson's *The Court of the Queens*, motherhood is also seen as a feature of womanhood. Although not quite detailed, we see few indices of motherhood in the play through two characters, Moremi, one of the historical Amazons and Alhandu, one of the corrupt leaders, judged by the Queens:

MOREMI: Where were you when I, Moremi, sacrificed my child to save
Ile-Ife from the onslaught of the enemies?

ALHANDU: A woman's place is in the kitchen. Period! She should be a mother to her children and she should be attractive. That's all. (*The Court of the Queens* 47).

We learn from Moremi, that women nationalists place national interest far above personal interests. What on earth could be dearer to a mother than her child? By presenting this aspect of motherhood to us, Rotimi Johnson succeeds in painting vividly to us the glorious path certain Nigerian mothers have trod in reminding us that no price is too much for a man or woman to pay for national peace. Nevertheless, Alhandu's assertion that a woman's motherhood or beauty should keep her in the kitchen, brings to the fore once more, the ignorance of certain men who have refused to accept both the historical and contemporary facts about womanhood in Nigeria and beyond.

In *A Parliament of Vultures*, Nkechi, the second visible female character is Madam Omeaku's daughter. Whereas in *The Wives' Revolt* we do not see the lessons of a mother to her children, in *A Parliament of Vultures*, Nwabueze gives us certain details about the lesson Madam Omeaku gives Nkechi, her nineteen year old daughter as follows:

MADAM: What's this you're wearing, Nkechi? You people have sworn to kill me in this house...What will my political colleagues say if they find out that I have a daughter who dresses like this... (2)

Madam Omeaku tries to undermine her husband's efforts to give Nkechi some lessons on morality. He emphasizes the supremacy of knowledge to riches and desires to give his daughter a University education. Contrary to his emphasis on knowledge, Madam states emphatically that 'what matters now is not what you know but whom you know.' (10). Hence, Madam starts off her young daughter on the lesson of life on outward dressing with no lesson on morals that would guarantee her inner beauty and enable her grow into a virtuous woman. To Madam, diligence is a waste of time and her axiom of life which she strives hard to teach her daughter is that 'What matters now is not what you know but whom you know.' Madam's home becomes a battle ground between morality and immorality as the excerpts below indicate:

MADAM: Shut up! I can't have a bush girl for a daughter. Having a bush husband is already too much for me. ..(7)

OMEAKU: Do you mean that my daughter should not answer my question? What's this house turning into? I can't allow you to misuse my daughter as you misused yourself (8)

The young Nkechi is now expected to be influenced by either her father's morality or her mother's immorality. It becomes clear that Nkechi has rejected the virtuous lessons of her father as she now becomes notorious for bringing down Madam's political opponents as depicted in the following:

BABAMERO: ...Perhaps the Very Reverend Jossy does not understand the role of Miss Omeaku in the House. Perhaps he does not understand that Madam used her pretty daughter to bring down the former Speaker of this House. And Madam has more jobs for her. (16)

MADAM: Nkechi will keep him busy, and cause him to be absent from Parliament. Then we shall appoint a new Secretary in his place (16)

Nkechi willingly puts her beauty and youth to immoral purposes and she becomes highly immoral like Chinyelu in Meunier's *Chinyelu*. The Playwright captures vividly how wayward Chinyelu is as Chinyelu herself reveals:

Chinyelu: You must understand Emeka. My heart is too big to become attached to only one man. Give the others a chance and let them enjoy my body as you have (22)

With her mother as her tutor, Nkechi ends up becoming as sexually immoral as her mother, a true case of like mother like daughter. Indeed, in consonance with her husband's prophecy that with her lessons on dressing and make-up that she would end up messing up another daughter of theirs, Nkechi's life becomes highly morally decadent. Hence, we see womanhood at its lowest ebb as the two visible female Characters in *A Parliament of Vultures* see themselves as mere sex objects and are squarely treated as mere toys by the men in the play. Madam's vision is to amass immoral wealth and her self-assigned mission of motherhood is all about training her daughter, Nkechi, in the art of prostitution and pulling down men with her youth and beauty. Nwabueze then shows us how destructive an immoral mother could be to the family and to the society at large.

iii) Politics and Revolution.

Politics is conceived here as the art of governance. We would align politics and revolution in this part of our study given that culture is dynamic and customs and traditions ought therefore to change in consonance with present societal realities. Marginalization of women in politics has remained from ancient times till today. Sometimes when one considers the nocturnal and the financial undertones of politics in Nigeria, one would understand why a few women have been able to participate actively in Nigerian politics over the years. Our study shows that politics and revolution feature prominently as aspects of womanhood in contemporary Nigerian drama, as seen primarily in Clark's *The Wives' Revolt*. At the beginning of the play the women do not participate in the decision-making process. Koko, the representative of the voice of women in Erhuwaren, voices out her dissatisfaction to her husband:

OKORO. ...Kama could become the Odede of Ade any day the chair is vacant.

KOKO. And again money, no matter how it was got, will do the trick. Oh, we know who has the money has the title in this land. That's why you men are today keeping to yourselves part of the money that belongs to everybody (6)

One would think that Koko, being an illiterate, as she intimates us in the following speech to her husband, ‘... Koro... You know I never went to school; so how can I write?’ (43), would be politically unconscious. Surprisingly, she is extremely politically conscious and no doubt, this political consciousness equips the women to confront the men and demand that they no longer be marginalized. The courage and boldness with which she disagrees with her husband who wants her life to be restricted to the kitchen is incredible. She categorically tells the husband that life would be worse in the community if the men do not consult the women before laws are enacted. This is reflected in the following dialogue:

OKORO. A witch in the kitchen, that’s what you are. Why don’t all women stay that way and leave affairs of state to us men? Life would be so much better for everybody (14-15)

KOKO. Life is going to be so much worse, if you don’t listen to us women while making your laws (15).

Okoro’s recognition of Koko’s Kitchen expertise reminds us of the sociological status of women in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* which according to Onyemelukwe “Shows the relegation of the African woman to the background to appear at various levels, even to the level of traditional position for love making” (15). Clark is invariably drawing our attention to the short-sightedness of certain men who still equate womanhood with running domestic duties when women’s influence on the national and global scenes is increasing day by day as shown in Madugba, Kpolugo and Hefferman. Indeed there are instances of living legends of Nigerian women whose impacts have crossed national boundaries.

Quite contrary to the women in *Things Fall Apart* who are content with being relegated to the background, Koko tells her husband bluntly that things can only get better if men listen to women while making their laws. She refuses to be treated as an ‘underdog’ (King 47). Indeed, she vehemently says no to the age-long gender bias captured by Okebukola in the following excerpts:

Gender imbalance, gender inequality, gender bias, gender discrimination- these are all labels given to the practice of favouring and giving preferential treatment to males at the expense of their female counterparts. Gender inequality is no myth and its social geography has striking contours. (89)

In a bid to silence his wife, Okoro tells Koko to tell the Erhuwaren women to turn their anger over the unjust distribution of money by the oil company upon the government, but Koko knows where to direct her bullets as captured in the dialogue below:

OKORO. ...Since you women feel so incensed by what you say is an unjust distribution of the proceeds from our oil industry, why don’t you turn your anger upon the government?

KOKO. Which government? Government that is so far away, and has no face?

OKORO. It is there in Benin, and it is there in Lagos (15)

Koko and her fellow rural women who know very well that charity begins at home decide to settle scores with their husbands who refuse to carry them along in the political affairs of the community. These women know that if they win the grassroots battles, that the State or Federal battles would also be won someday. Clark teaches us through these women the need to fight from our vantage point. Although Clark does not tell us how these women were trained for battle, Koko bluntly tells the husband that they, the women, would not accept the unjust law enacted by the men against them. Hence:

KOKO. The law you have passed is bad, unfair and discriminatory, being directed against women because of our stand. We will not accept it.

OKORO. We’ll wait and see nothing. So give up this matter and go in and get your husband his dinner to eat...(12)

Contrary to Okoro’s claim that the women lack the needed cohesiveness to effect a change, Idama comes to inform Okoro that their wives have emigrated to an enemy community, Iyara, in protest against the men’s unjust law, Okoro faced with that bitter truth, exclaims “Who would have thought they had the might and mind?” (20). While Idama tries to educate the adamant Okoro on the fact that women have rights, the women send in their demands to be met if their husbands want them to return. Okoro, still insisting that “Women have no rights...” (21), comes to a full realization of the new era as it dawns on him that the onus lies on him as the town crier, to announce publicly that women have rights and that their demands must be granted for peace to return to the community. Koko and her fellow women patiently press on for their rights through non-

violent and non-sanguine means until all their demands are met. Peace returns and an egalitarian Erhuwaren emerges as illustrated in the following excerpts:

OKORO. (Reclamation): ERHUWREN! Erhuwaren!...The town has been brought together...with immediate effect... the obnoxious law banning all manner of goats from our city...is hereby revoked...our womenfolk...deserve the specially fattened cow...No award is too much for this singular set of women... (61)

The above clearly depicts how rural and uneducated wives through a walk-out on their husbands, revolted against a fractured and male-dominated political system that marginalized women and brought about gender balance to the community.

In *A Parliament of Vultures*, Nwabueze paints a realistic picture of the present political structure in Nigeria where politics is seen by many as an opportunity for personal aggrandizement. Madam Omeaku, the only female politician among the males, is as much of a vulture as her male colleagues. Hence, being a woman does not prevent her from being corrupt. In the conversation that follows, we see her exhibit those corrupt traits:

MADAM: But what's going to be my reward for supporting you?

BROWN: Reward? That will wait.

MADAM: What will wait? ... I want half a million naira before I support you. I say my own ho-ha, and that's why they call me Madam ho-ha.(5)

Madam boasts of not being euphemistic about her reason for being in politics hence her nickname, '*Madam ho-ha*', educates us on the fact that the votes of our law-makers are bought and that the highest bidder wins. She goes on to point out as shown in what follows, that being in politics means accumulating enough money that would last for generations to come:

MADAM: ... Now that God has buttered my bread, I'll never allow myself to be poor again. Not in this world, or even in the world to come. I'll make enough money to last me two lifetimes. (68)

Quite contrary to *The Wives' Revolt* where action is taken against certain unjust practices bringing about a revolution and a positive change, in *A Parliament of Vultures*, there is a measure of cynicism as the few male politicians who do not approve of the gross misconduct of their political colleagues take no positive action against them and the play ends with the nation being highly politically decadent.

PARKERS: Ignorance, Illiteracy. How can people reason like this in the twenty-first century? Sometimes one begins to get ashamed of being a black man!

OTOB: I've said that eating and drinking will be the destruction of our people.

PARKERS (Shrugs his shoulders) Shameful! This is a generation of vultures! The way things are going, a full-scale revolution may be the only answer.

OTOB: Revolution? (Laughs) Revolution is not an exercise in simplicity. Revolutions are carried out by men, not the robots. Revolution is the handwork of a progressive generation, not the making of selfish, hypocritical, materialistic vultures in human attire. (24)

In *The Court of the Queens*, Johnson presents a historical flashback on the roles of the Amazons- Moremi of Ile-Ife, Funmi Kuti, Queen Amina of Zaria and Emotan of Benin, in the Nigerian politics of their times. Again, Angela Davis, a black writer and activist is symbolically included as a compatriot of the Amazons to show that black women cannot only participate actively in politics but can also bring about a revolution as vividly captured below:

ALHANDU: ...It is against our tradition and custom for a woman to sit in judgment over a man.

AMINA: You don't have a sense of history...

FUNMI KUTI: Leadership roles have always been open in our society. Culture itself is not static; it is evolutive. (46)

FUNMI KUTI: Where were you when I fought single-handedly to bring equality, freedom and social justice to our country?

AMINA: Where were the men when I brought new dimensions to leadership in Zaria, bringing peace, dignity and prosperity to our land?

EMOTAN: A woman's beauty is not merely for the delight of empty-headed men. It is a weapon of negotiation, a weapon of social influence... Where were you when I, Emotan, used my feminine charm, beauty and intelligence to bring peace and progress to my people? (46-47).

Though in *The Court of the Queens* Labo, the young female undergraduate, in her discussion with Akin, asserts that "revolution is not for women" (13), the Amazons carry out a coup d'état, judge the corrupt leaders and in their place appoint a new leader, Molongo, a man of integrity who is to choose men and women of integrity to work with him. The actions taken by the Amazons lead once more to a revolution as Amina hands over power to the new leader Molongo, the patriot, and urges him to run a government in which men and women of integrity would complement one another's efforts as explained in the following excerpts:

AMINA: ... Molongo, I hereby hand over to you this scroll of responsibility as the new ruler of our people. You are free to choose your own men and women. Make a judicious choice and the future will be bright. You're welcome to the dawn of a new life. (59)

Conclusion

As a young teenager, we learnt the Acronym 'WEEK' which is said to mean 'Women's education ends in the kitchen'. Today, well into the 21st Century, many men still see women by the dictates of that acronym. Regrettably, some women accept that acronym as a succinct representation of womanhood and allow that to determine their lot in life. Although Nigerian History, past and present is replete with women like Funmi Kuti, Professor Grace Alele Williams and Professor Dora Akunyili who could never be forgotten whenever a roll call of makers of modern Nigerian is made, the acronym continues to be the summary of womanhood to many Nigerian men and women.

Our study of Clark's *The Wives Revolt*, Johnson's *The Court of the Queens* and Nwabueze's *A Parliament of Vultures*, has enlightened us on the contemporary perception of womanhood in Nigerian drama. Firstly, womanhood could be virtuous or immoral. MADAM Omeaku's nauseating sexual immorality, corruption and disdain of her husband and political opponents, is not a universal mark of womanhood but a trait of just a woman. MADAM Omeaku and her all-men political colleagues are aptly described by the playwright as Vultures. Symbolically then, immoral men and women politicians have made Nigeria sick not as a result of their gender but as a result of their individuality. Again, the revolt of the wives, who could be regarded as uneducated rural women, which led to the revoking of the obnoxious law against women brings to the fore the fact that women, no matter their educational background or lack of same can enjoy their rights only through a fight. To help women in fighting for their rights, we agree with Uhegbu that:

Information should also be disseminated to the rural women in the language they understand- clear in its content, localized and devoid of ambiguity. Its channel of dissemination should be easy to access, cheap to implement and familiar to the women.(77)

We would however, point out that rural women and other women must try to look for available information in the Radio, the Television, the Newspaper and the Internet. Since knowledge is power, women must equip themselves for community, national and international relevance by acquiring current information on community, national and international affairs.

It is noteworthy that the long-awaited National Sanitation that would sweep off corrupt and domineering male politicians who marginalize women, is pioneered and successfully implemented by 'The Amazons', whose commanders are Nigerian women who occupy an enviable place in Nigerian History. These are Funmi Kuti, Emotan of Benin and Queen Amina of Zaria, as well as Angela Davis, a black lady and Commander-in-Chief of the 'The Amazons.' Nigerians, old and young, men and women, would appreciate better the contributions of women in the development of the Nation if they are properly taught by Nigerians who believe in Women's rights, be they men or women. We think that Nigerian men and women need to read books such as Heffernan's *Women on Top* and Madugba's *The Glory of womanhood*, so as to better appreciate

the individuality of every woman. Johnson's creative ingenuity can be appreciated as seen in his recourse to Nigerian and Black history. However, he failed to reveal to us the historical facts about Angela Davis. A glimpse into her past historical prowess would enhance the reader's comprehension of her present role in the play. *The Wives' Revolt* and *The Court of the Queens* are revolutionary plays that could be grouped together with such Plays as Femi Osofisan's *The Chattering* and J.P Clark's *All for Oil*. Though *A Parliament of Vultures* only sensitizes the reader and the audience, it is however, one of those literary works that could serve as a strong weapon of change and development.

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