

**“MOTHER IS GOLD: THE MATER THE MATTER AND WOMEN-CENTRED
APPROACHES IN NIGERIAN DRAMA AND THEATRE”**

**AN INAUGURAL LECTURE
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BY

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Protocols

The Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration), Registrar, Bursar, University Librarian, Provost of the College of Medicine, Dean of the Postgraduate School, Deans of other Faculties and of Students, Directors of Centres and Institutes, Heads of Department, Esteemed Colleagues, My Lords Spiritual and Temporal, Beloved Students, Gentlemen of the Press, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I give glory to the Almighty God for giving me the chance to stand before you all today to deliver this Inaugural Lecture, the 18th in the series in the University of Abuja. This is happening after twenty five years of my teaching in this great university. I thank the Vice Chancellor, Professor Michael U. Adikwu, for giving me the chance to deliver this lecture.

I dedicate this lecture to the memory of my late parents, my late siblings: Raymond Ugborikuayinre Tobrise, my elder brother; and younger sister, Eva Amenaghawon Ovromojowho Okoh (née Tobrise). You are all gone, but not forgotten.

There is a need to bring my mother into this intellectual discourse mainly because she birthed me and I believe made the right decision for her children to be educated, despite the difficulties at that time: widowhood, and harsh economic circumstances.

Commencement

Mr. Vice Chancellor, it is an honour and privilege to stand before you, as the second, but first female Professor to deliver an Inaugural Lecture from the Faculty of Arts, University of Abuja, and the 18th in the series of lectures. Now, Professor James Omole is the leader or first of all that shall present a lecture of this nature from our great faculty. I am happy to come after him mainly because his lecture, the 9th in the series, titled, “Letter and Spirit of Language,” delivered on 24th April, 2008, focuses on a tool of communication dominant in our primary activity, as humans first, and second, as lecturers. Thirdly, the Theatre Artist dwells in the domain of language for that is a basic tool of engagement, be it verbal or non verbal. However, I record primacy in some areas: First female *Head of Department*, Theatre Arts; First female *Professor* of Theatre Arts,

University of Abuja; First female Professor of Theatre Arts to be *Dean of Arts*; First female Professor to present an *Inaugural Lecture* from Faculty of Arts; First Female Professor from Faculty of Arts on the *Governing Council* of the University of Abuja; and recently pioneer *Director of Development Office* all in this great institution.

The major grounds proffered to deliver an Inaugural Lecture is to let town and gown be acquainted with what the conveyer of the lecture has focused on in that particular or chosen turf. The chances are either to offer a snippet view of accomplishments in the field, or reveal the sum total of the research focused upon. Every Inaugural Lecture often assumes the fancy of the lecturer thereby reflecting the strong points of her or his interests in the academy. The major indicators of these interests are the titles of the lectures. Mine was queried by associates who wondered at my choice. In checking through the titles of delivered Inaugural lectures, I found some to be very intriguing, mainly from my Alma Mater. "Choose Your Mother Right and Live" by Kikelomo O. Osinusi; "That Our Children Will Not Die", by Festus Doyin Adu and the one I find very special – "Lord, That I May Urinate" by Linus Ikechukwu Okeke and from Obafemi Awolowo University, "Thespian and the Cineastes as Engineers of the Nigerian Soul" by Foluke Ogunleye.

I begin with some notable quotes:

Don't curse the darkness, light a candle – Chinese proverb.

If my mind can conceive it, and my heart can believe it, I know I can achieve it – Jesse Jackson.

The vision must be followed by the venture. It is not enough to stare up the steps – we must step up the stairs – Ray LeBlond (University of Ibadan Souvenir notepad).

Clarifications

The Latin word, *mater*, means mother. The use of the term *mother*, by different people spans domestic, spiritual, professional spheres. Languages and drama are also suffused with the term. Who is a mother? Is a mother the woman in the kitchen, the controller of the cradle? The answer to this question can be both factual and metaphorical. Let us say a mother is one, who gives birth and nurtures. It connotes an understanding of the factors that translate womanhood to motherhood. Some accept that these factors are the same ones that prove inter-generational grounding for the woman, as giver and nurturer of life. Nigerian drama was born and it is constantly in the process of rebirth and birthing of intricate ideas. The female dramatist is therefore a kind of mother, whose significant efforts have proved noteworthy in actualizing dominant aesthetics for women in text and context. A mother embodies contribution, sacrifice and the future in any setting. There is no human being who has lived on earth, without a mother, surrogate, adoptive, or not, or devoid of nurture by her resources. No human being has an origin or progeny devoid of an indication of real, motherhood from source or after in *vitro* processes. It is for this

reason that I pay tribute to the womb that bore me, the hands that rocked my cradle, and, perhaps, unwittingly impelled me along the path of women-centred study, especially the critique of drama and theatre.

The mater or mother is an originator, who brings about life and she matters indeed. There are several connotations of the word mother and images connected with the word include the earth, nature, origins, or instinct. In superlative terms, *mother of all battles* is reminiscent of *Operation Desert Storm*, during the Iraq war. Others are mother image, mother goose, mother hen, mother board, mother drum, mother country, motherland, and mother figure, among several others.

Many believe that Nigeria worked better as a sovereign motherland than a fatherland to be served! This light hearted claim signifies the need to reflect, compare and where there are opportunities, revise whatever restrains the quest for better life in Nigeria. The mother's quest to constantly revise, amend, and adjust her offspring's ways and means to survive and suit contemporary realities is similar to what female dramatists engage in. Female critics of drama are also engaged in a similar quest to attain the good for women audience or receivers of texts or performances. The mater-centric is not new in scholarship. There have been many aficionados of the mother locus in theory and research. It is this matrifocal essence that has given the prefix, *mother* to many words. The mother-centrist location in the Academy should be most cherished. To D. Alissa Trotz, it was the Anthropologist, R. T. Smith who developed the term, *matrifocality* (372), linking it initially to female-headed households. The word later connoted female dominance. Ifi Amadiume also identified the roots of matriarchy in Africa as a basis for the matricentric. (29-30). I constantly affirm the strength of the woman, through my essays as she is one on whose back generations of ideas and values are borne. One other clarification is needed. Nigerian drama and theatre come in different classifications and categories; there are traditional, modern, indigenous language drama and theatre and of course drama in the mass media. In this lecture, my focus is mainly on the modern drama and theatre written in English.

Gold

Gold is a precious metal valued by human beings. Gold is special. I believe it would not have sounded well if I said 'Mother is Silver', or 'Mother is Platinum', even though they are in the same group and exhibit almost the same characteristics as transition elements. Therefore, a mother is valued, precious like gold. The foundation for this lecture was laid by my mother, Late Princess Theodora Airenvinkiekie Ewemade Tobrise, née Aiwerioghene, who gave in moments of lack to see her children succeed. I decided to utilize this lecture on woman-centred drama, a celebration of motherhood to underpin my major endeavours in the academy. Through this treatise, the matter of knowledge production and dissemination, as well as consumption by African, nay Nigerian is in the foreground of my standpoint. I must emphasize here that my proclivity is for hegemonized African/Nigerian discourse in drama, theatre, or culture. It is a

commemoration of womanhood, motherhood and the feminine in drama, theatre, and miscellaneous forms of artistic creativity on, for, or by women. For long, the theoretical or critical stances on women in drama and theatre were seen as, the *soft* side of play analyses or criticism. How wrong we have found these to be. History was only being repeated for it was a huge challenge to accept theatre arts as a discipline in the university days of yore at Harvard and Yale (Adelugba 1).

The major textual influence for this lecture is evident in Adrian Roscoe's *Mother is Gold: A Study in West African Literature*. Published in 1971, Roscoe's work focuses on Nigerian literature, as an emerging form that needs to be studied mainly for its size, problems and direction (ix). Due to the bias for male dramatists, Roscoe's efforts at analyses are on male authored plays, though female characters are dwelt upon in some of the plays analysed. Despite the influence of the title of the analytical book, some of the standpoints in it are clearly dated, especially those on national literature. To Roscoe, "Critics talk of national literatures arising in Africa. We should accept this with caution" (252). Almost five decades after this assertion, Africa boasts of national literatures.

Consolidation: Women-Centred Drama in Retrospect

Women feature in drama and theatre greatly to espouse the views of the dramatist, who in turn showcases the mutual or conflicting binaries of text and context. In the 21st Century, no dramatist can afford to present the realities of life, as lived and experienced without a little, no matter how small, focus on the imperatives of women, as co-contributors with men to development. The focus on the woman-centred in plays is a look back to years before the colonial contact when women had considerable influence in the community (Oyewunmi 12-13). Today, I stand before you to discuss the *mater* as prized entity and how this translates to drama and theatre. No longer can a devotion to the female essence in play appreciation and criticism be termed unpopular. Thus, this can be seen as a direct response to the near absence of strong women as agents of change and development in plays. Ahmed Yerima has been criticized by Dorcas Ewejobi for continuing the patriarchal tradition of female silence (260-261). This example runs through many plays by male dramatists. Strong women are not new in Africa, or Nigeria and many writers were late in reflecting the dominance of women in texts, after depicting weak women with several consequences for the identity of women. To whom do readers and audience, especially women, turn to for formidable dynamism in reflection of the real situation of women? To female dramatists, that can infuse the *mater* element into dramatic creativity.

Recently, WFM was launched by Toun Okewale Sonaiya out of the same gap noted by female playwrights – the need for a female voice and perspective in society. There is need for women to take the centre stage of creativity, for any existence on the fringe of creativity will not augur well for women as characters, readers, audience or even critics. This has led to the creation of self-actualizing 'sheroes' or heroines, or dominant female characters. It should be stated however that it is not only female dramatists who create

such characters. Therefore, the onus lies on female dramatists to project into coming times, what female characterization should be. The lack of influence of women shows that they are construed as major minority. They are out of power, or out of the game of power to relate this context to Hedrick Smith:

But formal titles of power confer less automatic authority than people imagine... all too often people equate position with power, and overlook the soft sides of power: the intangible ingredients that add up to influence and authority....

In short, the most vital ingredients of power are often the intangibles. Information and knowledge are power. Visibility is power. A sense of timing is power. Trust and integrity are power. Personal energy is power; so is self-confidence. Showmanship is power. Likability is power. Access to the inner sanctum is power. Obstruction and delay are power. Winning is power. Sometimes the illusion of power is power (41-42).

Again, Ato Quayson, in *Strategic transformations in Nigerian Writing*, opines that,

No literary history can avoid tackling questions of continuity and change. However, the specific dynamic that is identified in the relationship between literature and culture or society has an important effect on how change and continuity are perceived (158).

Dramatic Ideologies

Goran Therbon holds forth that,

Ideologies themselves are equally protean ... different ideologies may be identified according to their on-going processes of interpellation, they have no natural criteria distinguishing one ideology from another or one element of an ideology from its totality. Particularly in today's open and complex societies, different ideologies, however defined, coexist, compete and clash, but also overlap, affect and contaminate one another (79).

In Nigerian drama and theatre with regard to the plays on or about women, or where selectivity applies in picking on women as focus of analyses, certain ideologies have been propounded. They include but are not limited to: patriarchy, by Susan Walby (19-21); feminism, by Chimalum Nwankwo (151) or Carole Boyce Davies (6). The feminism that is African, and which supports the African female consciousness in literature, "is not antagonistic to African men, but it challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspects of women's subjugation" ("Maidens, Mistresses and Matrons: 8-9). Davies' pronouncement above is all about racial pride for the African feminist. *Africana Womanism*, propounded by Clenora-Hudson-Weems ((25, 30); *Womanism*, by Alice Walker (xi); *Womanism* by Okonjo-Ogunyemi from an African perspective (65) and Mary Kolawole (201); showing the race problematic, as elicited by Chioma Philomina

Steady: “African brand of feminism includes female autonomy and cooperation, an emphasis on nature over culture. The centrality of children, multiple mothering and kinship, and the use of ridicule in African women’s world view. (41). Maureen Eke and Vivian Azodo discuss intergender and the ideals of Sugaku (xi) which are also espoused from outside Africa like feminism; and Stiwanism the African context for feminism expounded by Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie to avoid the imitation of Euro-American ideologies (550) and lastly, motherism, another locally-bred ideology. On motherism, Catherine Acholonu concentrates on the mother as the guiding spirit of Art and life and that feminism is “anti-mother, anti-child and anti-life” (84). She explains that this made African women hesitant to align with the ideology. This argument prompts Acholonu to focus on humanist approaches that are not radical in the feminist sense. Acholonu therefore proposed an alternative she christened motherism, a denotation of ‘motherhood, nature and nurture’ which to her is “a multidimensional theory which involves the dynamics of ordering, reordering, creating structures, building and rebuilding in cooperation with mother nature at all levels of human endeavour” (110-111).

Ideology is like a vehicle for the thoughts or ideas that are theorized in drama and theatre. In this regard, I have dwelt on approaches at formulating local and home-grown ideologies, which I consider to be feasible alternatives to feminism and womanism. These are: *Gynocentrism* which denotes the centrality of what pertains to the female gender and female sex; the idea of ‘*African-Femalism*’, which signifies the entrenching of all that is female in text and outside it with a thrust on Africanness; the ideology of *womanness*, akin to the one above, would represent the woman, in every sense of the word. Others are ‘*African matriarchism*’, which would indicate the study of the matriarch as opposed to the patriarch, in plays and the society; ‘*Mamarism*’, from the word *mama*, which universally stands for mother, as the ‘mother’ suckles, mothers the husband as well as children, hence this concept is another good choice. It is akin to Acholonu’s alternative concept of “motherism” (110). Linked to the above is the concept of ‘*materism*’, from ‘mater’ so, the ideology of materism in texts could be researched as the characters that fall under this category are analyzed as charted by Evwierhoma, (2002: 260). Materism also underlines my concern in this lecture. Recently in 2015, an outcome of my study of people of colour and identity in drama led me to argue out the concept of *meso-identity*. I saw that many expatriate academics make names and fortune from studying or engaging in the criticism of African drama. Many, who do the same on Euro-American drama, do not go far. Even theories by Mary Kolawole, Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi, Joel A. Adedeji, and Sam Ukala, among others, are thought little of. Soyinka enjoys prominence with *The Fourth Stage* as it connects with European pedagogy at some point. Therefore, we African academics must need to produce knowledge, disseminate as well as consume it. The corollary is that if Africa is the continent of origins, the female dramatists can give the mater impetus as the originator of identity and norms in drama.

I submit that Nigerian scholars of drama and theatre should not be theory-introverted. In seeking the above alternatives, to Euro-American theorizing of women-centred drama and theatre, the ones suggested above arose out of my doctoral thesis submitted to University of Ibadan Postgraduate School in 1996. Theorizing women issues by Nigerians attributes status and agency to women in play texts by women, or by men. In the area of the new genders, I have not been fortunate to see any popular play by the Biosexual, Gay, Lesbian and Transsexual (BGLT) in Nigeria.

At another level of scholarship is criticism. Criticism is crucial in the espousal and reception of any ideology. This makes criticism champion and align with what William Simon refers to as ‘empathic introspection’, while Dapo Adelugba asserts that,

The theatre arts critic should pay attention to form, subject matter, style, structure and content, to production, to the environment of the stage and of the audience, to various aspects of performance, design, technical realization, production and management, to the medium and the message, the script or the scenario and the non-script or non-scenario elements, to the big issues the work in question addresses, to the bee in the artist’s bonnet. At its best, theatre arts criticism should attain lucidity and the theatre arts critic takes his place among artists in his own right (32-3).

Plays dominated by woman-centred concepts or ideologies are protest-oriented, and there is evidence of the relevance of different ideologies to African drama, especially if they are home grown. One other major fact is that any ideology transferred from a foreign scene onto the dramatic locale of Nigeria should be relevant therein. Dramatic ideologies should enhance local content in drama and underscore application when criticism of texts or performance is carried out. Again, Nigerian drama needs more home-grown ideologies. The need for the enlightenment factor in local ideologies is important in instances when they are applied to plays by Africans first, then other areas of the world, irrespective of race. When applied to plays by women, we see how the roles of women in texts have changed. It becomes pertinent to reiterate Eldred Jones call for a ‘discerning readership for African literature’ (412). He reiterates this standpoint by recommending “the additional task of applying ... minds in a special way to the critical examination of African literature (412). This calls for a transformation that reflects how women have been depicted in the past, and how contemporary portrayal can be seen in relation to the empowerment of women. I believe the attempt at this forum will inspire other dormant authors and playwrights to defend the cause of women as characters and readers through their play texts.

Usefulness of Theatre

The theatre artist studies texts and people, people and their cultures and the sundry forms of creativity accruing or evolving there from. Theatre Arts is a versatile course that affords everyone, who studied it the opportunity to adapt to any situation. The skills and

competencies acquired by the theatre artist are enough to sustain her or him through life in every time and clime. With the body, voice and space and an audience to consume or appreciate the performance output from the theatre artist, a meal ticket is established. Theatre Artists make language walk, as words are dressed up and made to come alive on the performance space. By this, the functions of drama and theatre to inform, educate, entertain, sanction and be an agent of surveillance are realized.

To Ossie O. Enekwe:

... we advise that our communities, including educational institutions, should ensure that our people are allowed and encouraged to perform drama, based on their creativity and skills. In every institution, there should be at least one theatre or gathering space where people can rediscover and fulfil themselves, instead of spending their time in idleness (26).

I add to this clarion call that after existing for close to three decades, the opportunity to research indigenous Gbagyi culture should be exploited before it slips by. The Department of Theatre Arts of University of Abuja should have in its repertory, indigenous aspects of the drama of FCT, Abuja. To study these cultural manifestations of performance, culture and theatrical expressions, it may be important to employ what Uvie Igun refers to as mixed methods of research (130). This novel paradigm entails diverse means of studying, creating and infusing generated impact on society, town and gown inclusive. This need for amalgamated or crossbred means of research may be why Dele Layiwola averred that,

the theoretical resources and methodological varieties in the study of culture and the humanities will continue to create mind-boggling propensities within the academy even as we contend with the global interaction of erstwhile traditional disciplines of the last century.... Cultural structures are as diverse as the roots of languages themselves. This is the point which both defeats universality and reorientates us that as we interact globally, we must, at the same time seek and locate particular peculiarities within global realities ... (17-18).

Before these positions, Joel Adeyinka Adedeji had declared:

The theatre in an African University is an investment par excellence. It exists as a centre for change and modernity, for resources and experimentation in artistic concepts, for cultural development. The African university must be more than an academic citadel for learning. It must have a clearly defined purpose and commitment to cultural development... (16).

Adedeji continues:

In our naivety we indiscriminately embrace the products of foreign cultures and allow genocidal acts to be perpetrated on our own. It is high time we began to plan for modernization using our culture as the basis of orientation (16).

To align myself with the ideas above, the Abuja school of theatre is gradually becoming one that is tool-kitted to interface with governance issues and the cultural bases should not be left out. As a pioneer in the Abuja school of theatre and dramatic interventions to address women-centred issues, I believe that the idea has come to stay. I have enabled open doors for others in the area of women-centred approaches to drama and theatre.

With the utility of theatre arts established, the female dramatists across Nigeria can be categorized along geo-political lines: North Central, North East, North West, South East, South-South, and South West. From all evidence, more female dramatists are from the eastern and western parts of Nigeria. Initial reactions to these female playwrights were unsavoury as seen in the criticism of Tess Onwueme's plays by Afam Ebeogu and Chidi Amuta. These critics are both patronizing, as they consider female texts to be immature and lack merit. The focus of male feminists, who were dramatists helped to change the trend as the more strong female writers were portrayed in their plays, the more context was relied on to reflect more of such women by female dramatists. Osofisan leads the pack, later Ola Rotimi, Wale Ogunyemi, Iyorwuese Hagher. The pattern of female dramatic creativity thus became well-drawn in both male and female authored plays. We can therefore boldly categorize plays by women into early and recent, which in about five decades from now would become old and recent, or old and new women's playwriting from Nigeria. Other groupings of plays include, but are not restricted to: The female aggressor motif; The patient achiever; The dominant woman's plot; All-through female visibility; Muted victim; Complementary heroine; Female villain; among other categorizations. Woman-centredness has merit because it is not cynically segregational, and does not set apart women, but only affirms them in a way that enriches society for development. The endeavour to infuse Women's Studies in the Theatre Arts Curriculum in this university met with resistance because of the perceived foregrounding of women and women alone. Let us note that women as units of focus mostly facilitate a spotlight on family, children, and development. Even with regard to Women's Studies in the curriculum, the battle to accept it by male colleagues in the department was rife.

Active Playwriting

Dramatic creativity has come a long way although Nigeria has just recently witnessed an upsurge in the number of female dramatists. Female dramatic creativity has so far passed through two phases. The first phase encompasses the first generation of female playwrights whose works began to appear from shortly after the colonial encounter, through the period before independence, and to the end of the civil war, which almost ripped the nation apart, like Zulu Sofola, Patricia Ogunjipe; while the second phase embraces the second generation of female writers, who were published from after the

civil war (1970) to date. This upsurge in female creativity arose out of the need for women to articulate themselves through the media of drama, prose and poetry, so that their audiences would have a first-hand account of Nigerian feminine realities, which had hitherto been dominantly rendered by male writers. I had categorized them before:

The first generation of African female writers includes Mabel Segun, Flora Nwapa (from Nigeria); Ama Ata Aidoo, Efua Theodora Sutherland (Ghana); Grace Ogot, Hazel Ogot, Charity Waciuma (Kenya); Bessie Head, Nadine Gordimer (South Africa). In the other category, however, there are writers like Adaora Lily-Ulasi, Buchi Emecheta, Zaynab Alkali, Zulu Sofola, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, Stella Dia Oyedepo, Esther Bali, Ifeoma Okoye, Remi Adediji, Tess Onwueme, Teresa Meniru, Helen Ovbiagele, Folashayo Ogunrinde (all from Nigeria) and similar younger generation of women writers from other parts of Africa such as Mariama Ba, Aminata Sow Fall (Senegal); Micere Githae Mugo, Joyce Ochieng, Asenath Odaga, Wangui wa Goro (Kenya); Penina Muhande (Tanzania), Jane Bakaluba, Sindiwe Magona and Lauretta Ngcobo (South Africa), and others across the continent. It is worthy of note that some writers like Mabel Segun, Ama Ata Aidoo, Flora Nwapa and some others span both generations of writing since their works appear in the first and second periods of literary creativity (Evwierhoma, 2002: 24).

Female writers of both categories display the need to address definite female needs and audiences in their various societies. One can wager that women's dramatic creativity commenced so their plays could co-exist with male writings and depict identities they could more readily identify with. However, there are few female playwrights in comparison with the number of male dramatists and this imbalance should be corrected. The information bank of emerging Nigerian dramatists reflects this imbalance. Out of almost eighty dramatists listed, by Femi Osofisan and Gbemi Adeoti, only fifteen are women. Nevertheless, these few female dramatists constantly and actively bring to the fore in recent times, the prominence women characters have not enjoyed in the past in dramatic manifestations by men. These women's plays challenge the negative portrayal of women characters by especially, the male as well as female writers.

These plays seek equality between the genders and balance the portrayal of gender, affirm the rights of women with those of men and to correct the masculinist views in and on drama. This is so because many of these views continue to seek to downgrade the women to the rear of dramatic portraiture. Female dramatic creativity that is women-centred identifies the need to liberate women from hemlining forces. These forces of limitation are obvious in socio-economic and political spheres. This creativity from the stable of women is radical, challenges and where possible, changes women's oppressive conditions. In text and context, the macro world in which female domination is highlighted includes performance. In some of the settings, female dramatists recognize the need for balance and consciousness-raising. The intention of this variety of creativity

is corrective in purpose in pursuit of rectitude in character portrayal and experience. Rolf Solberg's justifies female creativity and recommends that, "One of the ways of correcting one's faulty image of the African woman would be through the African woman seen from the "inside", in other words, rendered by women (249). After correcting, female dramatic creativity, seeks, according to Dorothy Driver to make accessible to its audience, genuine feminine consciousness as created by women. Driver opines that writing by women is also desirous of using:

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

Driver's opinion regards women's creativity as distinct from those of the male and in harmony with the series of ideologies women employ to marshal out their views to their audience. The woman dramatist therefore, is engaged in an active role play. Furthermore, writing empowers because it facilitates the female writer's confrontation with the hemlining forces threatening to silence her. Through drama, the female writer becomes a creator, initiator and originator who creates characters – women especially – roles and situations, which help her, assert her existence in time and history.

In Nigeria, the dramatic history is dominated by male dramatists. This dearth of female writers emphasizes the need for the few female writers there are to emphasize women-centred ideologies in their writings. Some were discussed above. Through plays by women, female pride, femininity, bodily integrity, female dissent, remonstrance and female perspectives are denoted. Liberty for the female gender, sustainable livelihoods that ensure development are also upheld. Elaine Showalter in *The New Feminist Criticism*, declares that female writing has "its own unique character whether because it draws on female body images, uses a 'women's language' expresses the female psyche or reflects women's cultural position" (14). This stance also helps the female dramatist to settle the issue of female invisibility or even near absence, of women in important spheres in the society. Female drama generates female reality as a creativity that originates from being birthed from the womb of thought of the woman. The four major characteristics of female writing enumerated by Showalter above – the use of 'female body images'; 'woman's language'; 'expressing the female psyche'; and showing women's cultural position, reflect the assertion of self-determination, or self-affirmation. Xaviere Gauthier in "Is There Such a Thing as Women's writing?", argues for the vocalization of the reality of women. To her reasons are advanced why women should not remain silent and avows: "Women are in fact caught in a very real contradiction. Throughout the course of history, they have been mute, and it is doubtless by virtue of this mutism that men have been able to speak and write. As long as women remain silent, they will be outside the historical process (162). Dale Spender also declares:

The dominant reality in which women are diminished and in which their mutedness and invisibility are constructed and maintained is still the prevailing reality, the one which is legitimated and generally accepted... The dominant reality remains the reference even for those of us who seek to transform it (229).

History proves the subjugation of women and Gerda Lerner advocates that women's writing should replicate women's real place in the history of mankind. It is only women who can make history and determine that their experiences become historical input. In her opinion, "women have been left out of history not because of the evil conspiracies of men in general, or male historians in particular, but because we have considered history only in male-centred terms. What would history be like if it were seen through the eyes of women and ordered by the values they define? (52, 54). It results I what female activists refer to as 'herstory'. This may be linked to Christine Obbo's assertion that, "The need to control women has always been an important part of male success in African societies" (4). If we consider Lerner's opinion to be embroidery of overstated claims, not to be taken seriously, we may counter her view that as Nigerians, the absence of women from history has not been total. The important factor is to reconceptualize women's place in the history of dramatic creativity as opined by Janelle Reinelt (160). Reinelt declares that,

Reconceptualizing women's place in history has been a fertile ground for feminist struggle. Not only have women discovered that they have been systematically excluded from the "great-man" orthodoxy of most historical interpretation, they have also discovered that many traditional attitudes towards women have historical precedents ("Beyond Brecht" 160).

Ama Ata Aidoo, the Ghanaian female dramatist, proclaims every female dramatist should channel her creative energies to the work of delineating and exposition of female experience. In her opinion, the female writer should feature the undertaking of "exposing the sexist tragedy of woman's history, protesting the on-going degradation of women, celebrating their physical and intellectual capabilities and above all, unfolding a revolutionary vision of their roles" (16). At another level, Dorothy Driver had affirmed a view, which matched Ama Ata Aidoo's. Her standpoint places the burden "to reveal explicitly and aggressively, their consciousness and consequently address themselves to the problem of defining that consciousness" (209) on women writers.

We have accentuated the necessity for female writing. If women do not write, they become absence from literary and performative history. The "significant contributions of African women in traditional African society", according to Mary Linton-Umeh, "have been ignored and minimized by Men". Ewrierhoma discusses the claims and assertions by female theorists and critics copiously and states the views of Umeh's in *Sturdy Black Bridges* (19), Barbara Christian in her edited collection of essays, *Black Feminist Criticism* (218) and affirms both writers highlight on the urgent need for women's writing

(Evwierhoma 28). Women can create realities that condition human existence. They should not be considered as blank entities as argued by Susan Gubar who shows that women's writings are deviations from the norm. The (re)presentation of women as symbolic spaces to be inscribed upon by the 'phallic or male pen' is also wrong. Hence, "female writers redefine the creative act in female terms of giving birth rather than in male terms of inseminating" (Gubar 15). The little number of female dramatists is an outcome of the situation described by Gubar, Christian and Umeh above. It continues to remain the reality to be countered by female writers. The transformation of this trend, according to Dale Spender, ought to be effected by female writers, who seek a "redistribution of power, a reclaiming of the right to name, and end to silence" (63). The creative power should be employed by women to (re)write history. There are often false impressions of the woman's fundamental nature in a sexist and male-dominated world. Nelly Furman believes that "in a world defined by man, the trouble with woman is that she is at once an object of desire and an object of exchange, valued on the one hand as a person in her own right, and on the other considered simply as a relational sign between" (61). Making women pedestrian or mediocrities should be countered by female dramatists through creativity. Dale Spender affirms that language should be used to counter sexism because,

Historically, women have been excluded from the production of cultural forms, and language is after all, cultural form and a most important one. In fairly crude terms, this means that the language has been made by men, that they have used it for their own purposes (52).

Women must discover and utilize their own textual imagery and move from patriarchal domination to selfhood, as opined by Rosemary R. Ruether who advocates that theological grounds for the oppression of women be challenged (12). Ruether says women should reject male writers' endorsement of women as temptresses and "reject a concept of the fall that makes them scapegoats for the advent of evil and uses this to 'punish' them through historical subordination" (37). Writing helps to counter masculinist views. Female playwrights should reject the laws, religious teachings, creeds and doctrines that seem to hemline women and insist on the required and even radical alteration in the way theology places women in text and context.

Latent Reception and Reading

Female creativity renders women to be received by the reader. In performative contexts, the receiver of texts is more active as audience. The female writer has a primary task, considered by Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie to concern informing her reader what it is to be a woman "in the real complex sense of the term", as well as highlighting facts of biology and society as they impact on the form, content and technique of her writing (8, 9). Every female reader responds to facts exposed in a text and makes meaning. Douglas Atkins in exegetical terms identifies a reader and the need for authority and pleasure in reading (81-116). The female reader is an alternative to the masculinist decoding of

women and performances. Reading as women helps bring to the foreground the values of women. Raman Selden states that “If we think positively in terms of reading as women, we immediately see that for a long time reading has assumed a male perspective and that there is a real difference of view when the experiences and values of women become central in the act of reading” (142). Every text is to be uncovered and exposed by the reader, to be read, re-read and perceived in order that concealment be unveiled and interpreted. Selden continues “The reader must act upon the textual material in order to produce meaning” (108). The meaning sent by the dramatist and that produced or unearthed by the reader or audience do not have to conform as various referents are released. The sign systems decoded or signified are very important (Kowzan, 53). Reading as a woman has advantages for the writing woman and reading woman share experiences that unveils the worldview or *weltanschauung* of the writer. Adele King cites Marks and de Courtivron that this contact between text and reader gives pleasure (36). This *jouissance* or pleasure is the realization of the ‘merging’ of the reader and the read. Robert Scholes submits his opinion on this union that,

The reader ... studies to mate with the writer's viewpoint, to come fully to terms with the sensibility and intelligence that have informed this particular work... When the writer and reader make a “marriage of true minds” the act ... is perfect and complete (27).

This pleasure is close to that of bringing to birth or showing empathy. Stage or textual meaning can shift from the meaning intended by the writer as stated above. Stanley Wells asserts that, “no text has a single, essential untransformable meaning to which, all said and done, we can finally turn” (299). Well’s proves there is no consistent female reader. Therefore, male and female readers can approach the universe of the texts competently. Why then should the female perspective be couched in debilitating terms? The role of women as storytellers should be accorded status and esteem (Showalter 3). In these stories, there should be the exposure of “strong impressive female characters” in the position of Toril Moi (47). The female reader would see these women characters in the reality of her own existence and empathize with them, especially when they are self-actualizing or contributors to social positive value. The counsel here should be against the over idealization of female characters. Female writers should desist from unreal character portraiture in their bid to satisfy the reader. Cheri Register cautions: “Although female readers need literary models to emulate, characters should not be idealized beyond plausibility. The demand for authenticity supersedes all other requirements” (21). The reality of women is different from men and this should be evident in creativity (Cixous 245; Koenig 10). The next counsel is not to assume that every female reader reads as a female, or adjudges the text from the female perspective. Raman Selden advances this advice: “Being female and therefore having female life experience does not mean that one reads as a woman. In order to bring into play female experience at all, women have to actively question the way in which texts construct them as readers” (*Practising Theory* 142). This can occur also between a male reader and a text written by a

male dramatist. Therefore, the reader or audience may not be as active as the writer, the role played in interpretation and derivation of meaning contributes to the worth of the text.

The Centrality of Woman as Character

We established above that the paucity of female dramatists remains a challenge in Nigerian drama and theatre. To Katherine Frank female writers “are still hardly represented among African writers even though they have so much more to write about (15)”. This shortage of plays by women writers has been attributed to the factors of age, education, gender, sex and marriage as well as to a critical attitude by male critics. The onus lies on women as creators of texts, to see inscription, or writing as a very central feat that can advance woman-centredness. This chance affords the creation of central characters that challenge the textual inferiorization of women on stage or in text. In the words of J. K. Gardiner the female writer employs her text, “particularly one centering on a female hero as part of a continuing process involving her own self-identification and her empathic identification with her character” (187). Other critics focus on this dire need (Ojo-Ade 161; Davies 86; Linton-Umeh 45). Just as a mother can be regarded as a role model, female dramatists help to propagate a female identity that does not parasitize on male identity (Conway et al. xxii). Female characterization and experience in female writing also attempts to gauge the perception of women and her body of creativity (Shulman 596). To Shulman, the body relates to power, and control and she links this female experience in writing and creativity to the female body and reproduction. The production and reproduction of meaning is fundamental here. The concept to note here is that true art has no gender and the capacity to be a good storyteller is not conditioned by gender (Koenig, *Interviews* 10; Prescott 112). Nevertheless, Kate Millett proclaims that “Male and female are really two cultures”, and to her, the ‘life experiences’ of both sexes “are utterly different – and this is crucial” (53). In clarifying sexual orientation, gender is no longer couched as binaries of self and the other, even when women are seen in reference to men. Beauvoir’s hints that there is a gap between man (self) and woman (other) and she opines for the reverse instead. The woman character, perhaps to the man, is an unfamiliar entity, negative as well as dependent on the man, as we see in some texts by men. The other is unfamiliar and unusual, and what is not understood is often vilified (Otto 26). To consider what is familiar therefore, is to perceive the female character created by the female dramatist, as the apposite ‘self’ that properly represents women. It is a position of power to effect, astute female characterization. The text is employed by the dramatist as the self, who through drama, defines herself and utilizes the text to give birth to, or create the people in the text who highlight women’s perspectives (Gardiner 37). This emphasis reveals why many male dramatists do not reflect female characters actively. The misrepresentations that show as inadequate portrayals are what woman-centredness challenges. So far female stereotypes in male-produced literature has a negative influence on women readers in imposing traditional roles upon them” (Blamires 375; Donovan 375). Tess Onwueme reveals a poignant problem on such stereotypes: “women were ... relegated to the background as docile inconsequential personalities ...”

(113). These negative handling of female roles by some Nigerian male dramatists is frowned upon by Onwueme who assesses Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark and Ola Rotimi's plays. Other male dramatists are blameworthy for the negative illustration of female characters.

Apart from the texts cited by Onwueme, other texts reveal female inertia as far as role-playing is concerned. Few examples are found in Ahmed Yerima's *Attahiru*; Bode Sowande's *A Sanctus for Women*; Kalu Uka's *The Hunt for Sugar Baby*; Fred Agbeyegbe's *The King Must Dance Naked*; Rasheed Gbadamosi's *The Mansion*; and *Echoes from the Lagoon*; Gabriel Okara's *Woyengi*; and Barclays Ayakoroma's *A Chance to Survive*. Do we now see why female characterization by female writers is necessary? However, certain male dramatists bestow their female characters with very strong roles. We mentioned Femi Osofisan in this category. Onwueme identifies some of the characters in his plays. They are Ibidun in *Red is the Freedom Road*, Yajin and Funlola in *The Chattering and the Song*, Alhaja in *Once Upon Four Robbers*, Titubi/Moremi in *Morountodun* and Olabisi in *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage*. All these female characters, many of whom are maters, are "determined to affect positive change in the society" (115). I identified some other positively portrayed female characters in Tar Ahura's *Udoo's Journey*; Harry Hagher's *Mulkin Mata* also presents women in an insurgent mood, although one is left wondering about the gains of the militant women's insurgency. Hannah in Ola Rotimi's *Hopes of the Living Dead* is a woman worth emulating. Hand in hand with Harcourt White, she resettles her fellow disabled men and women to a better environment. In contemporary terms, we see the focus on internally displaced persons (IDPs). Bode Sowande's *Farewell to Babylon* presents Jolomi and the two women who participate in the farmer's revolt as tough women (Evwierhoma, *Female Empowerment* 42). What this proves is that with determined involvement by women in dramatic creativity, weak women will no longer dominate Nigerian dramatic firmament. The participation should be proactive in getting good scripts to the public sphere. Evwierhoma continues:

Through dominantly positive, self-actualizing and strong female characterization, women writers seek to justify the exclusion of 'namby-pamby' women from their art by infusing into their creativity female characters that are powerful. However, it must be agreed that it is a fact of life that such weak women do indeed exist in reality and their exclusion from female-authored texts may be considered unrealistic by some critics especially as texts do sometimes portray life as it is (42).

Portrayals by Women

If the mallet has been on male dramatists so far, how have female dramatists fared in drawing the portrait of female characters in drama? We have averred that when women write, female characters are plausible in their plays and reflect the contemporary realities of female power and accomplishment. Employing Femi Osofisan and Gbemi Adeoti the data bank of playwrights in Nigeria, the female dramatists listed are: Bunmi Adedina, Praise Daniel-Inim, Akachi Ezeigbo, Osita Ezenwanebe, Olubunmi Fasoranti, Onyeka

Iwuchukwu, Zainabu Jallo, Ogochukwu Promise, Juliana Okoh, Stella Oyedepo, Irene Salami-Agunloye, Tosin Tume, Pamela Udoka and Julie Umukoro. Both compilers tag the writers 'emerging playwrights'. In different emergence, the works of other writers like Zulu Sofola, Tess Onwueme, Foluke Ogunleye, Adenike Akinjobi, Folashayo Ogunrinde, Julie Okoh, Tracie Utoh Ezeajugh, consistently oppose the weak women shown in plays by their male counterparts. In some of the plays by these women, female characters are central as sheroes, dominate the subject matter and act as proactive agents or tools that serve the woman-centred purpose whether they are main or trivial characters. A look at Julie Okoh's *Edewede* shows a deliberate campaign against cultural practices that cause impairment to women.

Apart from Tess Onwueme, whose *The Reign of Wazobia*, *A Hen Too Soon* and *Then She Said It* strongly underscore female militancy and strong portraiture, other instances will suffice. Irene Salami's *More Than Dancing* asserts the complementarity between the sexes and women's ability to access mainstream political structures. Nona the sheroine proves that women can do more than entertain at political rallies and in fact be president of a country. Where Foluke Ogunleye is concerned, female portraiture needs to gauge value and add it to every sphere where interpersonal relations exist. In *The Innocent Victim* matrimony is depicted as a shelter for spouses and offspring. The necessity of sexuality is foregrounded. Onyeka Iwuchukwu in the play *Choices* prove that Nkechi the disempowered and inhibited young woman can get to the peak of her career against all patriarchal odds. Like every battered woman, Desola in *Once Upon an Elephant* by Bosede Ademilua-Afolayan recovers from sexual violence and battery despite the weight of customs, traditions and patriarchy upon her destiny. Nkeiruka Akaenyi in *Akunne* centralizes the eponymous heroine to balance work and family spaces, trust and marital rights, areas where many women face a lot of challenges today.

It is crucial therefore those critical approaches to woman-centred creativity reflect the needs of the moment. If writers create characters as they are in real life, it would conform to a large extent with the concept of social reality. However, when characters are exposed, as they ought to be, it is assumed that they are held up to correct errors of portraiture and exhibit what actually subsists in the society. Nevertheless, it is the position of the present writer that female characterization should be positive, corrective and imitable by readers who encounter them. This gives much room for identification with such characters; hence, the concept of empathy is relevant here. Therefore, dramatists should portray characters, as they ought to be in real situations, without degenerating into falsification of characterization, stereotypy as well as oversimplification of portraiture. Critics need to be alive to their responsibilities.

Challenges

Mr. Vice Chancellor, sir, do not think it has been a rosy affair throughout these academic adventures in the campus and city. Any relevance within the academy should reify links between town and gown. This remains a challenge for scholars often perceived guilty of

public engagement. Some scholars faced and surmounted this challenge of perceived 'travelling' (Albert 46-51). Over the years in the university system, I have summed up all the challenges academics face, especially women as *empathy deficiency*. That crass inability for fellow-feeling has robbed us of the benefits expected from shared kindness. Most of my press forward has been with clenched fists of dispute insisting or demanding inclusion mainly as a woman demanding equity and balance in situations. The university system necessitates care-giving attitudes to teaching, research and extension services. We all know the dominance of the mater-centric approach can never be out of place as it assures us of mutual understanding and consideration. In support of the role of male dramatists, who have *womanized* the play text and stage performance, it is crucial to acknowledge the efforts of Femi Osofisan, who emblemized heroic women in drama. It is not out of place to uphold the end of oppressive masculinity in plays of contemporary times. Repressive masculinity or male-centred drama dominated the plays of the first era of dramatic creativity and this should change for the better by 2020.

Mr. Vice Chancellor sir, since 1990, when I got employed in the University of Abuja, I have engaged in the trifocal service of teaching, research and extension service. May I briefly present a half decade-by-half decade sum of my research output in the Academy in the following trend:

A: 1990-1995

Sir, I denote this half-decade as the period of inchoation in my scholarship. One book was published in collaboration with senior colleagues (Biakolo & Oyeleye) in 1990. This text was to guide candidates, who sat the Senior Certificate Examinations, to facilitate their entry into university. The process provided a chance to be mentored by two of my teachers at University of Ibadan – Prof. E. A. Biakolo and Prof. A. L. Oyeleye.

Two book chapters were recorded at this period, the first book was in honour of Wale Ogunyemi, the renowned actor-dramatist of blessed memory. The title examined Wale Ogunyemi's "*Partners in Business as a Domestic Melodrama.*" Here, the sanctity of marriage, elusiveness of marital bliss, infidelity, guilt and the need for just social contracts among individuals were themes examined by my young probing mind. The primary launch into feminist studies came from a study of the ideology of revolt in feminist theatre of the Nigerian variety. Stella Oyedepo and J.P. Clark were chosen for study in 1993. The plays, *Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested* and *The Wives' Revolt* were respectively analyzed. Here, it would seem that motherhood was on trial in both plays because rebelling women abandoned the natural, sacrificed their families to agitate for justice, using unorthodox means. Koko abandons her home and a young child to lead a revolt. However, it is important that mothers are relevant to any agitational ethos in rural or urban settings or among educated or unschooled women. Nevertheless, motherhood remains central to positive value-addition in society and should not be sacrificed for whims; neither should the negative aspects of mothering evinced.

Apart from the above, two journal articles were published during this embryonic period. The first article, in 1993, assessed the impact of the Victorian period on the image of women in Rasheed Gbadamosi's plays. Here, the impact of Victorian Lagos on the playwright's women, are evident in manners, sensibilities like dressing, language, architecture among other tastes in them. Of pertinence is how the settled slaves, immigrants and the aborigines developed Lagos, setting for most of Rasheed Gbadamosi's drama. Female stereotypes people his plays, like, *Echoes from the Lagoon*, *The Mansion*, and *Trees Grow in the Desert*. The second journal article for this period came a few years after my entrance into the university system. I was engaged in the teaching of the course Drama and Theatre in Education, which entailed the use of primary and secondary schools for field work. This helped to justify the existence of drama within the school curriculum. During the 1993/94 session, schools were closed because of teachers' strike. Children within the Gwagwalada metropolis close to University of Abuja were used to fulfil the requirements for the course. This resulted in my coinage of the phrases 'Neighbourhood Theatre Practice' and Neighbourhood Theatre Experience. Here, location, technique of teaching and people involved differ from drama in the school system in 1994. Where extension service is concerned, between 1990 and 1995, I was able to reach out to Women Organizations in facilitating advocacy programmes

B: 1996-2001

Mr. Vice Chancellor, the next half-decade was one that saw some confidence building in the tripartite engagement I had within the Ivory Tower, the city and community. One book: *Nigeria Feminist Theatre* was published in 1998. Furthermore, my first interface with scholars from other parts of the world culminated in the field work for the International Workgroup for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), which took me to my natal community Ukpiovwin, in Udu Local Government Area, Delta State to focus on the work of indigenous women therein. This endeavour showed the need to eschew forced silence in the lives of women. The findings were that not only were the Ukpiovwin women cogent contributors to development, they had a right to a voice and to land. Again the need to build solidarity, confront change and modernity, as well as actively participate in the different environments they found themselves were the core standpoints of the contribution in 1998. A brief side track into traditional and modes of communication resulted in a book chapter on "Communication Media" in 1998.

In furtherance to the need to affirm the rights of women, as a member of Women in Nigeria (WIN), Abuja Chapter, I attempted an examination of the role of the one of the foremost women's organization in the quest of Nigeria for democracy in 2000. This also helped to affirm the rights of women in suing for a just society. This period also, I centred my writings on women in text and context. I engaged with the works of Zaynab Alkali, in 2001, zeroing on the woman figure in her collection, *Cobweb and Other Stories*. Womanhood was the focus here, with the intertwining factors of marriage, motherhood and social control. Thereafter, I again dwelt on *Feminist Ideology* and how it can assist in development of the sustainable kind. For the first time in my election to dwell on

women's issues, I contributed a book chapter on plays by a female dramatist. This effort helped to establish my erudition on Tess Onwueme, being the first to do a Doctoral study on her plays, globally. Sustainable livelihoods still elude women in the pursuit of development and the import of feminist drama from the stable of Tess Onwueme was emphasized.

Between 1996 and 2001, my output reflected a spotlight on plays by female and male dramatists. The political dispensation of that period warranted a stay on the argument on female inaccessibility into mainstream Nigerian politics. In 1997, plays that were generations apart and from the racial divides of black and white authors were employed to treat this topic. *Aikin Mata*, an earlier play by Harrison and Simmons and *Mulkin Mata* by Hagher, similar to the latter, but different in the manipulation of borrowings from and adaptations of *Lysistrata* an ancient Greek play by Aristophanes, were critiqued. The oppression of women in the political sphere in *Aikin Mata* is clearly evident in Alkali's declaration: "***The very idea: Women bothering their little minds about serious issues like politics and war***" (34) (Emphasis mine). Today, we all know this idea is anachronistic. Meanwhile, in *Mulkin Mata*, it is a woman Hajiya Usumanu, who makes pejorative remarks about matrimony (18). I submitted that both plays "... are mere conjectures on the role of women in politics and are therefore dystopian-they have no place in the Nigeria of here and now" (Tobrise, "Female Inaccessibility": 130).

Most exertions in different disciplines at this period were on the Millennium, some foreboding the Time Bomb and its involvement in the crash of technologies which did not happen. Others, however, focused on what the year 2000 and beyond had in store for Africans in general and Nigerians in particular. The female dramatist, I wagered, had a lot to offer in view of the cultural concerns that permeated her text. Zulu Sofola was the paradigm here. I hinged my thesis in the analyses of three plays by Zulu Sofola on this assertion: "more dramatically creative efforts on the part of women should be directed at making posterity have a sense of history and belonging" (Evwierhoma, "Zulu Sofola's Cultural Concerns": 23).

In line with Wole Soyinka's assertion that a concern with culture strengthens society," the centrality of proverbs in the plays of Ola Rotimi afforded me the prospects of carrying out an interpretive analysis on the proverbs that were unambiguous about gender with regard to women. Proverbs entail the verbal arts of our culture and involve expressions that are witty and humorous, "paradoxical statements, expletives, epigrammatic, metaphors, anticlimactic and antithetical sayings ... these verbal arts give quality to processes of communication, which are of folk essence" (Evwierhoma, "Gender-Specific Proverbs": 93). The gender toned proverbs reflect relationships between women and men, and the sexist nature of our societies. One proverb that reflects motherhood in *Kurunmi* is also a prayer: "May ours not be bad luck of mothers. When a child is a failure in life, the mother bears the blame. When the child succeeds the credit naturally goes to the father" (74). On womanhood, Oba Ovonramwen tells

Gallwey and Hutton: “A woman without a man is like rich farm soil without the feel of roots. A beautiful woman without a man is a crab over-protected by shells: selfish (18). Today, it is evident that beauty is not prerequisite to marriage. In 2001, the focus on women in Olu Obafemi’s plays reveals that women who undergo and endure psychological angst are often not treated with empathy by male playwrights. Often, male dramatists handle the pains of women differently from their female counterparts. To therefore reach out to women and facilitate rather than impede their contributions to social advancement, it is pertinent for female dramatists to render and mitigate the psychosomatic abrasions women experience (Evwierhoma, “The Wounded Women”).

Another off-shore outing resulted in my focus on race and identity challenge for blacks in Tess Onwueme’s play *Riot in Heaven*. It was a bold attempt to centre the black race in the scheme of global events, where blacks are often subjugated. In this journal essay, it is my strong opinion that, “A necessary return to our roots whether as failures or successes is essential if we must make our African lives meaningful” (“Onwueme’s *Riot in Heaven* and Racial Centring”: 105). Today, that return is being actualized as many sojourners in the African Euro-American dispersal are coming back home. It is relatable from the above that cultural imperatives are *sine qua non* for development to be real. For this speaker, a bottom-up approach is vital and anyone who refutes the claim for this inclusive system of appropriating development misses the point. The grassroots factor in development in all that have been reasoned out above remains forceful. This sphere is where women are dominant and it is my argument that most mothers initiate communal and social development here. Therefore, the need remains that grassroots women should be cultivated for, as they remain germane to development. Community-based organizations where women refer are indispensable for development to be real for all (Tobrise, *Nigerian Feminist Theatre*: 64). The hope at this moment was for the future to hold promissory notes for cultural imperatives that fore-grounded women and development.

It was in 1997 that the fulcrum of my existence was shaken. Reason, my mother died in September 1997 and to attack grief, work became a panacea. It was during this period I realized that work could be that effective a solution to deep pain.

C: 2002-2007

The mini decade signified above was productive in terms of single and joint authorship of books. The first was the outcome of my Doctoral Thesis on the plays of Tess Onwueme that culminated in a book, *Female Empowerment and Dramatic Creativity in Nigeria* (published in 2002, revised in 2014). In this text, the contribution to knowledge arose from the need to reify the dominance of women dramatists and the female characters they generate in texts. The rectitude of this stance, which was amorphous in 1985/1986 was no longer in question by 1996 and was clearly defined in my criticism of plays and other texts. The seminal work designates female dramatists as fundamental to society, and had the prerogative to depict characters especially the women in their plays

to go well with her authorial and contextual goals. It was my standpoint that the female dramatists had also the right to make the women in their plays to match the goals or tenets of active radical groups. Again, they had the due options of presenting the current male picture of women who were passive and subservient. While I deduced the trend in plays that featured strong and radical women, where the female characters played main or minor roles the resistance of male hegemony or dominant patriarchy in society, was common. Here, equality for men and women and a search for justice were sought. The female playwrights struggled to visibly stamp out some of the traditional roles that male dramatists often exploited to limit women in plays. I employed Tess Onwueme to prove that these hem-lined roles that restricted the strength of women in plays to speak out and affirm themselves were no longer going to be common. I was right. Through female dramatists, therefore, the female characters in their texts are tools to establish the socio-political realities of glass ceilings being broken, the seams of (con)textual oppression being frayed so women could be reflected positively. Through this effort, the Nigerian female dramatists' situation remains eternally beneficial and seen in relation to that of the male dramatists. It was again in this book that the trial theories discussed above were broached by this speaker.

Thereafter, another attempt was made to discuss gender in drama and the terrain of culture. The effort was an assortment of essays in the specified areas. The initial effort was not constructive due to inexperience of the printer, but a bolder attempt to situate the essays in proper context resulted in the discussion of traditional practices, women in politics, militant women, as well as the practicality of feminism in the Nigerian context. The question of women and change management, internationalizing Nigerian culture via theatre and uneasy masculinity were raised in the collection of essays. In the prefatory notes, it was avowed that: "The spaces considered above whether private or public, constantly provoke women to make choices that influence their standing or visibility within them, at the top, or bottom of the ladder. Many times, these choices are in themselves inhibiting and cost women a lot to make, especially in a marital union" (Evwierhoma, *Female Empowerment*: x).

An additional endeavour two years later brought about *Essays and Concepts on Society and Culture*. Therein, it was my task to interrogate the interrelatedness of theatre, society and culture in the critical areas of education, mentoring, customer reception among others. The onus fell on Gbemisola Adeoti and Mabel Evwierhoma in 2006 to consider the universe of African politics and letters, two decades after Wole Soyinka won the Nobel Prize for literature. The title, *After the Nobel Prize: Reflections on African Literature, Governance and Development*, was jointly edited by both of us. It was commissioned by the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), as a tribute to the literary giant Wole Soyinka. This eye-opening book of treatises proved the paradigmatic shift in African politics from autocracy to democracy and the emergence of imitators of the *Soyinkaesque* manner in text construction. It proved the literary politics of authors and critics alike on the African continent with regard to literature and its progeny. My focus in the book was for agenda-

setting revisionist stance to African drama from women-centredness (Evwierhoma, "Soyinka After the Nobel Prize": 143-154). I soon after delved into the need to squarely impart women into mainstream activities of writing and the performance of actuality. The essay, "Scripting Women into the Mainstream? Ahmed Yerima and the Women of Tomorrow in *Angel* and *The Sisters*," emerged in *Muse and Mimesis: Critical Perspectives on Ahmed Yerima's Drama*.

Like Obafemi's wounded women above, and the psychologically hemmed-in characters of many male dramatists, motherhood is at risk where the home is constantly under external and internal attacks. When this occurs, women and children and the future are in jeopardy. Herein lies the importance of culture for peace at home and in the society through positive educational stratagem (Evwierhoma, "Culture and Education as Imperatives": 137-154). There cannot be peace without liberty, or justice. The mater in society is influential in marshalling out the tactics that relay freedom within the home and national life. To entrench the crux of this autonomy and lack of restrictions against women, especially the female dramatist, Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls* and Tess Onwueme's *Riot in Heaven* are critiqued. In the application of freedom to drama, the exercise of freedom in text is posited against context and both plays provided proofs of free will and self-determination as well as their limits for women. The American context confirmed more freedom for women as artists and individuals, while the Nigerian circumstances reflected women at the edge of opportunities. Only artists showed more proclivity to break boundaries through creativity. Despite this, Nigeria is yet to produce a female dramatist as daring as Ntozake Shange (Evwierhoma, "The Female Dramatist and Freedom": 233).

A shift to a male dramatist and the confinement of women to a mono-site continues the attitude of male domination of the space of women. Here, inaction, belated action, choices in motherhood, concubinage and other social options. The gender implications of a mother's feeble and sluggish attempts to chase away the threats to the peace and stability of her home to wit, her children manifest in Bode Osanyin's *Woman*. In the play, a mother's travails denote every mother's fight to affirm the future of her children. Despite these legitimate responsibilities, Bode Osanyin's contribution to theatre practice in Nigeria is well noted. It is this validation of Osanyin's potent creativity that warrants the feminization of inaction in the play. To this writer,

... the play's scenario warrants its counter re-reading as a conservative play text. In view of this re-reading, *Woman* poses some problems, some of which are salient in womanist, humanist, cultural, visual or even feminist terms (Evwierhoma, "The Travail of Feminine Inaction": 57).

Without the re-reading of texts, which is assistive in the quest to uncover causes of women's subordination, patriarchy reigns supreme. The performance of male dominance clearly remains a threat even in the plays of reputable female dramatists. Most times, the

subversion of male hegemony in plays is short-lived as female dramatists are accused of attempting to be men, or guilty of the same offence they accuse male dramatists of. Tess Onwueme is often seen to perform maleness. Women may be actively dominant in the plays by women,

... we still see them as outsiders inhabiting the fringes of their world. The universes of ... texts therefore still highlight maleness, the dominance of maleness and the ubiquity of patriarchy in all its ramifications within an African cultural context (See Evwierhoma, "Patriarchy and Maleness": 75).

Nevertheless it is crucial to avoid female victimhood in texts and the infusion of inferiority complexes in female characters an outgrowth from the socio-political oppression of women.

We discussed the weight of criticism above. One critic whose ground-breaking efforts in the scrutiny of traditional theatre remain evergreen is Oyin Ogunba. He counselled African critics against a fixation on Europe and America and apportioned integrity to what is African. He advises critics to abstain from the theory of drama developed in foreign lands or the Western tradition. The essays in his honour show the specified tributes to his path-finding role in African theatre (Evwierhoma, "Oyin Ogunba": 10-16). To practice the need for local inspection of culture, I ventured into film review from a cultural perspective in the critique of the film by J. P. Clark and Frank Speed, *Ozidi: Tides of the Delta*. The documentary film is based on the epic play by J. P. Clark *Ozidi*. In the evaluation of the documentary film, this writer asserts

In essence, the film ... projects the mythic image which delimits the Izon communal consciousness. The communal thrust of the film emphasizes the general object in the community and not the individual subject. Hence the wide shots utilized by the filmmakers to merge the palm stump, the river, the sky and the swamp as epitomes of a general world-view of the Izon, are apt (Evwierhoma, "Ozidi: Tides of the Delta": 95).

Certainly, a concern with cultural indices in texts and contextual predispositions are means of making society stronger.

Mr. Vice Chancellor sir, this speaker's journal publications did not depart from the passion for the women-centred axes despite the above seeming change in direction. By this time my ideological immersion into campaigning ethics in writing, criticism and activism was predominant in almost all my academic outings. There was a return to the scrutiny of women, this time, modern women in the plays of Tess Onwueme. Definitely the worldview of urban and rural dwellers are distinct and this divergence is observable in *Go Tell it to Women*. In the text, the empowerment and disempowerment issues as they relate to modern women are underlined seen through the Better Life Programme

launched in 1987 by Maryam Babangida, Nigeria's First Lady then. There is a major venture by the female dramatist to review the feminist ideology pet projects and appraise their relevance in an African communal setting. The dramatic irony discloses the power of rural women and the disempowerment of the city women. How is this so? You may ask. The city women pay lip service to matrimony, motherhood, and respect for tradition as their marriages and mothering strategies are weak more or less. Daisy is an example of this failed motherhood. The village or traditional women identify with the energies from the earth from which they draw much strength. These women, who are not victims, influence and advance the plot of *Go Tell it to Women* by asserting their worldview and visibility (Evwierhoma, "The Image of the Modern Woman": 22-29). It is important to interrogate the impact of social chameleons on the advancement of women in Nigerian society. Is it essential for only the wives of government officials to allay the challenges of women? Where is the place of self-help and communal interventions to enhance women in society? Whatever the answers are, one agrees that they contribute to the policy summersaults in the efforts of public servants, political leaders and their spouses to alleviate some of these women-centred challenges.

To flip the side of criticism from female authored to male authored texts, I return to a male dramatist Iyorwuese Hagher. This preoccupation saw this writer affirm the diverse ideological content of Nigerian dramatic creativity. In *Aishatu* and *Antipeople* early plays by Hagher, the position extended is that early Hagher understood women more than latter Hagher as in *Mulkin Mata*. This essay reveals choices that women make when confronted by hard or conflicting conditions. A major choice reflects the conflict involved in whether to be or not to be a good woman, or mother, or member of the society, in productive and value-additive ramifications (See Evwierhoma, "Hagher and Women": 22-29). Obviously, the receiver of these texts or performances would be geared towards right options and correct choices.

D: 2008-2013

One lesson learned during this period was that theatre studies apparent in textual or performative creativity remains a formidable means of addressing community and social challenges. In this regard, theatre scholarship in Nigeria towers above that of many nations and has a lofty status globally.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, the review of Oga Steve Abah's Theatre for Development (TfD) landmark influences resulted in my postulation that any indication of the tools that assist in achieving development reveals communication for development. The drive towards cultural economics evidently emulsifies both culture and livelihoods with a strong indicator of economic forces. When gender is performed, life is performed, and when life is presented before an audience, every function of theatre is achieved including the gains from viewing life on stage. The cause of theatre for development needs furtherance using culture. Olu Obafemi argues for folk theatres and performances that ensure "continuity and development of our cosmos" (55). For this to be real, this writer maintains that,

theatre for development programmes must “include gender parity ... (be) inclusive of the male-female perspective as regards the gender orientation prevalent in the community of project activities (Evwierhoma, “Oga Steve Abah”: 408).

Many female critics discard the predilection of male dramatists for inactive female characters. This displayed penchant was what I censured in my critique of Kalu Uka’s ‘Observer Women’ in two of his plays. Women are depicted as, “villagers observing war” and only one female character is named, while several others have no names. It is this approach that makes the impact of war on women not to be made profound enough in *The Hunt for Sugar Baby*. Despite the disapproval of the namby-pamby women created by Kalu Uka in the climate of war, one cannot fault him as a realistic poet-dramatist, humorist-chronicler, evergreen critic who upholds racial consciousness and self knowledge (Evwierhoma, in Johnson & Inegbe: 37).

The state of dramatic creativity, academic scholarship and criticism of the literature of the arts constitute history and discloses the dynamism evident in our arts evident in Ezechi Onyerionwu’s interview with me in 2012. Schema in the world of theatre and performance manifests signposts that expose regimes in Nigerian critical landscape. This exposes the critic to cross-generational critical practice and the need to implicate drama in governance. Soyinka, Clark Osofisan, Ukala, Onwueme and other dramatists have done this. For I surmise: “it is in the literature of an era that you get the sense and sensibilities of that era” (Evwierhoma, “The Present Generation of Nigerian Playwrights”: 587). Earlier, it was my contention that, “if you consider certain strategic factors militating against contemporary practice of Nigerian drama in particular and literature in general (586). In regard to women dramatists, I argued “... from that drive for the equality of the sexes, there is an emergence of this struggle for equity and justice, not just where gender is concerned, but for humanity. So plays by women ... address the problems of equity and justice...” (589-590).

Female Academics savour mentorship, perhaps borne out of natural instincts inherent in their roles as sister, wife, mother and eventual engagement in child upbringing and nurture. It is for this reason that, Evwierhoma and Fati Binta Shuaibu opted for learning leadership through mentorship. The challenges are legion, but women and mentees can actualize positive leadership from mentoring programmes. We focused on the University of Abuja and from the staff distribution by gender, and found that at that time, opportunities for women to learn leadership within the system were limited. Male-centredness was an indicator in the leadership strategies women would learn. Female mentors for women as staff or students were very few. If mentorship programmes for female academics are actualized, there would be chances to equip women and even men, to stand the strain and burden of teaching or “mediate any leadership predicament.” We assert that,

the prospects of women learning leadership through mentorship cannot be quantified. When women lead, there may be greater balance and organizational or academic harmony. There are prospects for mentoring and protégés grow more and have their careers monitored. Sexual harassment cases at work also reduce as bonding between women may give support to victims of sexual harassment or even reduce its occurrence (Evwierhoma & Shuaibu: 200).

One major recommendation in the work is for new entrants into the academy to be mentored for three years before they move along their career paths. It is therefore agreeable that mentoring is like mothering, an aspect of burnishing to make jagged surfaces smooth. This is the mater's constituency and it matters most in academic spheres.

Consequential to the above, was an earlier submission on the reasons for African women to lead. The challenges and prospects of leadership by women were considered. It was averred that, "when women are leaders, they enjoy little or no clout and are often required to defer to men, with only few exceptions" (Evwierhoma in Dakolo: 85). Three case studies were put forward to depict different experiences of women leaders. Five questions were engaged to gauge the possibilities of women leadership, challenges faced by women leaders, how facile it was for women to become leaders, leadership styles linked with women, and the development options for such leaders. I ventured to conclude that "Any woman who reaches the peak of any leadership position, one may say, does so on behalf of all women. The time for a true global sorority, where leadership is concerned has truly come" (Evwierhoma in Dakolo: 97-98).

In another alliance publication, Mabel Ewvierhoma and Ande Yacim searched out the duality of self and nationhood in Niger Delta Drama. We deciphered how female characterization was at crossroads, knowing that any literature about the geography of conflict and the struggle for the control of resources affect women as characters or authors. The options are to either relay insurgent or passive women, and either way, where the Niger Delta is concerned, women lose centrality despite the awareness of male dramatists that they exist. We asserted that women can be scripted into strong portraiture in texts by men. To this end, we declared that:

the Niger Delta playwrights should through drama, therefore, make more women to be aware of the contemporary realities and even help shape them in favour of humanity in general and nationhood in particular (Ewvierhoma & Yacim, "The Self and Nationhood": 271).

In a prophecy-like avowal, it is our affirmation that,

... future plays will attempt to mitigate Niger Delta human capital and environmental problems, ... we may have to engage communities towards an

inward search that can only bring about cogent renewal and development. Drama can do this and this resource should be exploited (Ewvierhoma & Yacim, “The Self and Nationhood”: 271).

In the community engagement with Ukpiovwin women discussed above, it was to my paternal community that I turned to tender cogent reasons for women to fundamentally vital to development. Tanure Ojaide already captures these sensibilities in every work of his typified in the world of the Niger Delta shown in his poetry and fiction. *The Activist*, a novel reflects issues of eco-centredness, and the role of women in the Niger Delta question. One believes the filmic version of the novel would give agency to the woman-centred quest in the Niger Delta. In assessing the works of the female sculptor and artist, Peju Layiwola, I had the opening to evoke contemplations I harboured as a young individual on art. However it was from the very dignified maternal culture, aspects shared by Layiwola the artist and this writer. The purpose of the reasoning in the essay was the compulsory restitution to be made by the looters of priceless Benin artworks which are in museums all over the world. Every artist- visual, verbal, kinaesthetic, aural, literary, and the like, has an obligation to origins that form her or his artistic materialization. In this outing, it is my strong opinion that maternity can be destiny. In the case of Layiwola, it grounded her artistry and imposed on her indebtedness to her mother-a fellow artist, and an alignment with the call for reparation. Sir, I concluded my paper thus:

The Benin Kingdom would therefore connote the mother who needs a return of her children (the art works) in means physical, psychological, economic and social, among other forms of return for more value to be added to the lost heritage at home and in the Diaspora. In beholding her children, certain requirements or processes are needed, ditto in the beholding of the mother by her children flung apart throughout the world. This regard for Mother Benin and the children of Benin is one outcome of 1897 that has other ramifications in spheres that are mental, fiscal, collective, cultural and political. These consequences are still with us at home in Benin, Nigeria and outside of the region (Ewvierhoma, “Material Culture, Maternal Culture”: 71).

Mr. Vice Chancellor sir, the recognition of my critical exertion on the plays of Tess Onwueme is evident in *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*, a reference material on writers from Africa in contemporary times published in 2009. What seeps through the biography of the dramatist is the resilience of women especially mothers and daughters in her plays. When viewed in relation to other female writers, Nigeria is placed on the global map of literary-cum-performative activism. The relationship between this essay and others published outside the country is that the context of the play is within the text and *vice versa*. The prose, biographical works of the dramatis are seen in unanimity and establish Onwueme as the epitome of a woman birthing activism on the pages and stages of African drama.

The next contemplation on the rights of peoples held to be minorities served as inquisition into the manner Nigerian female dramatists as minorities themselves could resolve the rights dilemma. It is often said that ‘women’s rights are human rights.’ Minorities are conceived as, *the reverse of majorities less visible in any landscape and who are inferiorized or made not to have major stakes in any geographical or sociopolitical terrain*. Women are gender minorities and are like ethnic minorities where oppression is concerned. (Evwierhoma, “Theatre, Minority Rights and the Gender Question”: 247). At the close of the essay the proposition was for a balance in the advancement of the rights characters, rather than absolutes in doing that. This could be accomplished via gender analyses between male and female characters to fathom decision making, decision taking, actions on the bases of who does what, when, where, to who and at whose expense, and with what implications? (251).

Within my purview as critic, the investigation and analyses of Nigerian films as texts to be read constantly launch up aesthetic challenges, many of which denude from the significance of the films. The world sees Africa, to wit, Nigeria through the films encountered. Many of the films reveal moral issues that may eventually make the classification of films into ‘high’ and ‘low’. The construction of the image of women in some of these films leaves much to be preferred in them. Many ‘assault’ the sensibilities of women. This generated the stance that many more female film producers and camera women should be in the industry to challenge ‘malestream’ film production and mitigate the challenges highlighted in the paper (Evwierhoma, “Women Through the Eye of the Camera”: 117-118).

The journal publications for this period were in liaison with fellow academics in other institutions. They exposed deliberate concentration on literature as building blocks for development, where a national literature that relays our historical and social processes will help build Nigeria. This calls for “a literature of engagement, intervention, relevance and social responsibility” (Evwierhoma & Daniel-Inim 168). A further connection with film issues addressed the problem of grassroots mobilization in film distribution. Here, the roles for government in film for development were canvassed especially in the fight against diseases like malaria, HIV/AIDS, human trafficking and other social aberration. Government intervention in film as the case was decades ago when film was a tool for development augurs well in the quest to rebrand Nigeria. (Evwierhoma & Uji 144). The assessment of Wole Soyinka’s *The Trials of Brother Jero*, and the visual effect of his cape as sign concerns visual and textual aesthetics. The morality and probity intrinsic in Jero’s verbal performance are issues that resonate in contemporary actualities. Nigeria and Jero’s space are similar. This writer maintains that,

Men like Jero succeed in a season of deprivation as it is being experienced today, when political structures should have catered for them or seen to their basic welfare.

Instead, religion serves as an opiate for a cheated people alienated from the structures of power (Evwierhoma, “Pastoral Verbal Performance”: 500).

Albeit the appeal in the three outings considered above do not centre on women, they revolve around humanistic issues that affect women.

Variations of this writer’s engagement with the plays of Irene Salami-Agunloye appeared in 2006 and 2008; the latter being more comprehensive than the first. Both dwelt on the rise of the female dramatist as a voice against the hegemonic oppression of women in plays and in society. The summation of the matter in both essays revolves round the prominence of Irene Salami-Agunloye as a dramatist. Not to take heed of this verity is to be uninformed of the grounds covered by the identity themes in her plays. It is expected that her plays “present proactive, forward-looking, non-reactionary textual and contextual women” (Evwierhoma in Salami-Agunloye: 37).

E: 2014-Date

Mr. Vice Chancellor, in the past two years, I revised a book published in 1998, in 2014 which is a compilation of essays on feminism and the female axes in Nigerian Drama. In 2015, I jointly edited a collection of essays on the female ethos with Jeremiah Methuselah, who was a doctoral supervisee. The prefatory statements reflect that “Gender complementarity as a framework for ...analysis of texts is argued for ...” (Jeremiah & Evwierhoma: xii). My contributions to the book viewed snapshots of sundry female paradigms in drama and theatre and assessed the women in Osofisan’s plays engaged in open struggle. During this phase, I had the chance to reappraise my intellectual depository and discovered that the early attraction I had for film studies did not have tangible materialization in my academic cache. I furthered the drive and a journal paper on Urhobo film materialized. In it, *Akpogbeku*, an Urhobo film was received and as critic its inherent forte, inadequacies and concerns were the focal point of my analysis. This writer opines in the essay:

... the consumption of Urhobo home video films as they are presently produced may only last for a while for as the audience taste improves, the viewership of these home videos will decline, they may start to compare the local films with the ones produced elsewhere ... (Evwierhoma, “The Aesthetics of *Akpogbeku*”: 160-161).

The crux of my submission was that, “the entrance of Urhobo films into filmic space in Nigeria is weak.” The second one on Urhobo film written during this period revolves round inter-communal conflict in Urhobo films. The additional treatises reflect humanistic inclination in disability, governance, and the challenges of collusion within African scholarship. Specifically, I showed that drama can modify behaviour,

and assist in changing the manners and conduct of the mentally unbalanced child positively. It should be employed by the family, school and community to treat different kinds of disorder (Evwierhoma, "Ability in Disability": 6).

It should be recalled that the utility of theatre cannot be glossed over and my effort to consider the crux of theatre in the era of infectious diseases became essential. I orated that,

Theatre is discourse and it entails people-oriented and people-centred creativity that at once enriches through the spirit of cooperation. Whether it is identity-based or not, theatre pursues the values that make the world a better place, for the actor and audience, and in between the lifelong factors that breed a valuable world (Evwierhoma, "Theatre, Creativity Governance and Democratic Dividends": 2).

How could theatre thrive in the season of Ebola? Or be effective in the climate of Lassa Fever? The pessimism of the times in Nigeria is illustrated thus:

How can these times be full of prospects when news headlines daily scream tragedy, mayhem, commotion and diseases threaten our communal living and our collective ethos as theatre artists? ... Where do we situate the theatre experience where the fear of handshakes, close contact and collaboration evident in the theatre experience threaten theatre going? (Evwierhoma, "Theatre, Creativity Governance and Democratic Dividends": 2).

The next journal outing appraises Africa's contemporary challenges, based on the collusion factor. I recognized the fact that Africa had challenges caused by Africans and non-Africans who profit from these tribulations (Evwierhoma, "The Humanities and Africa's Contemporary Challenges": 24). The attempt to consider the diversity of Nigeria yielded a book chapter where in conjunction with a co-author it was affirmed that "... people keep culture alive and make it flourish ... any investment in people through good governance is one sure way of making culture flourish" (Evwierhoma & Yacim, "Nigeria": 80).

Mr. Vice Chancellor, I have facilitated some drama workshops, some of which were my personal initiatives and others sponsored by local and international agencies. Some slides are available for your perusal. The workshops include:

- 1) Theatre for Development Drama Workshop on Sensitization of Apo Auto Dealers Association, Apo Abuja on Violence Against Women" on 17th January, 2015, a private initiative.
- 2) Workshop to Support and Enhance Women and Girl Child Education, with Stakeholders, sponsored by T.Y. Danjuma Foundation and Change Managers

International Network at Wukari, Gidan Idi and Rafin Kada in Wukari LGA Taraba State in August, 2013.

- 3) A UNICEF Theatre for Development Workshop, " Bridging the Gap Through Community Dialogue" which held in Benin City Edo State, in May, 2007.
- 4) A UNICEF Theatre for Development Workshop, in Jos, Plateau State, in 2007.
- 5) The FCT Department of Women Affairs organized Drama Workshop Project on Women in Decision Making in Garki in May 2006. I facilitated the drama efforts.
- 6) A Drama Workshop on Protecting the People's Mandate, facilitated for Global Rights Nigeria, Yangoji, FCT Abuja, in June, 2006.
- 7) Drama Project on Support for People Living Positively with HIV/AIDS in Kubwa, organized for the FCT Department for Women Affairs, also in 2006.
- 8) The Dukwa Community Theatre Workshop was part of the Higher Education Link (HEL) between DFID/British Council, Change Managers International Network, University of Abuja and University of East London, in 2003.
- 9) A Drama Workshop for FCT Rural Communities, which I assisted in facilitating, was organized by the Centre for Democracy and Development, in Garki and Chibiri in 2003.
- 10) A Workshop on "Media Skills For Economic and Political Empowerment of Women at the Grassroots" organized by the West African Media Network, (WAMNET) Nigeria and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation in July 1997.

Creativity

My poetry collection *Out of Hiding* was republished in 2003 and essays have been written on them by reviewers and critics. It is currently receiving attention by a graduate student at Kwara State University, Malete. Before then there was the appreciation of the stages of life reflected in pigmentation on cloths in *An Anthology* edited by Tidjan Sallah and Tanure Ojaide (213). Nuptial Counsel and Returnee Sisi were respectively on advice to a young bride and the scourge of cross-border and international prostitution. Fred Moramarco edited the collection in 2008 (107-109). When my alma mater turned sixty Femi Osofisan edited a collection of poetry. My entries celebrated womanhood and its strengths. (70). *A Song as I Am and other Poems* appeared in 2005. Most of the entries celebrated womanhood, motherhood and female experiences. Of note is "My School of Drama- A Tribute (1983-1996); where I eulogized my teachers (37-8).

Vice Chancellor Sir, it is not a surprise therefore that most of my life in the university system, the focus of my research has been women and how they can complementarily contribute to development with men. There is therefore an evident coherence in my intellectual output which as you can see has permeated my NGO service and CBO uplift. I am happy that the nascent, though unpopular issues on female characters which I raised as far back as 1986, in my study of J.P. Clark's plays, have become centre stage in critical focus on women in play texts and performance, politics and society in Nigeria. There were however some of my research output (though minimal) that did not deal directly with women issues, but I managed to infuse a female schema into some of them.

Others were ethnographic works which constituted some portion of my research experiences that were ethnomethodological- some on the field, others from the scrutiny of plays, films and performance for the cultural indices therein. There have been engagements with the city as seen in some segments of my scholarship. Where commitment to extension service is concerned, my support goes with Isaac Adewole on his view on town and gown activities. To him, “the survival of the university system lies in its ability to bridge the existing gap between the gown and the town” (University of Ibadan Souvenir notepad). I am also involved in the linkages between academy and NGOs. I have worked in consciousness-raising activities for community empowerment; used the techniques of play building and community theatre to engage different communities in the FCT and beyond. Drama methods through community theatre were employed to tackle the violence against women. I wrote a play to combat girl child marginalization and inculcate bodily integrity in young female school children FOR Centre for Democracy and Development. The first ever tripartite link between a University, The British Council/DFID and an NGO- Change Managers International Network (CMIN) happened in University of Abuja and led to the establishment of the Centre for Gender Security and Advancement. This linkage also produced the Dukwa, Pyakasa and Giri projects involving drama, theatre and development communication. Some matters arose from linkage programmes or project administration in the university that need to be looked into: These are:

- 1) Claims to ownership of externally-funded projects
- 2) Administration of projects
- 3) Input from staff
- 4) Local apathy
- 5) ‘There must be something in it for me’ mentality
- 6) Attitude towards project management team
- 7) Delay or stagnation of project life cycle
- 8) Tussle for recognition/visibility
- 9) Transparency and Accountability

Again, there were periods of engagement in the northern and southern parts of Nigeria where I worked at the community level to engender dialogue on the essence of girl child education. Again, drama was a handy resource. There were alliances with colleagues that produced seminal texts which I have dwelt upon above. However, one irony in book production exists: There are four books to my credit and three co-authored with fellow academics; ironically, all joint authors are men!

Continuity

It is not out of place to make some recommendations Vice Chancellor Sir because I look forward, beyond the present to more creativity, scholarship as there are more roads to be covered in terms of sorroral teamwork that is academic. I may not be considered prolific in some quarters, but humbly I affirm, VC sir, that the thoughts and the few activisms I

have been involved in have added positive value to scholarship. I wager that it is better to be profound in scholarship than to be prolific and not profound.

The future has to be one of collaborative efforts by women in the area of theorizing women-centred drama and theatre, in indigenous languages or English. The knowledge production in this area is a cogent back-up for us with which we face future challenges in the university system and grow or even develop younger female academics. Currently, in Nigeria, the status of women academics in the world of theorizing women in drama and the production of knowledge about women is not high. Wither local knowledge about women in these areas? Formal or informal partnerships that strengthen academics are also needed, across gown and town, rather than cleavages that seek to pull down achievements. Through connections, using the mentoring process, I can make bold to say that within the next two decades, the University of Abuja school of drama and theatre shall have more concerns focused on the womanness of life and art, of academy and society, and above all, of continuity and change. Good initiatives should not suffer because some individuals feel excluded as it happened during the British Council/DFID/UEL/CMIN Link. Ideas regulate the universe and must be so in an academic setting.

Another issue is to rejigger education policy to centralize literature and drama. A revised curriculum for drama and theatre in education is needed. Teaching facilities for the teaching of drama and theatre should be of standard whether locally fabricated or not.

In the opinion of Eghosa Osaghae, “no state is homogenous”. (22). Drama in Nigerian Languages, apart from the three erroneously tagged, ‘major,’ will increase and demand attention, giving rise to more cultural diversity. Therefore, more orthography of Nigerian languages should be developed. Furthermore, plays by women that extol family life and structure community strengths, reveal the vicissitudes of environmental degradation should be prescribed for schools. Female characterization has primed and the profile should continue to rise.

There should be an end to the denigratory look on drama and theatre or liberal education. Many university administrations should appreciate, encourage, and support drama and theatre. This lack of patronage has been criticized by Fareed Zakaria in his seminal book, *In Defense of a Liberal Education*. Drama and theatre remain viable for the non-Nigerian critics to make inroads into our culture and universe.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, earlier on in this lecture I suggested that the matri-focal or mother centred ethos should be treasured in the university system. Why should this be? The answer is simple: No mother would ask for sexual gratification from her children in return for grades or vice versa; in view of sacrificial nurturing, no mother would extort her child for privileges, no matter how beneficial or productive. It is for this reason that *Medea* an ancient Greek play shows us what a mother incapable of nurture and love

looks like. Therefore, should we asphyxiate the ones we are supposed to birth and nurture through knowledge sharing, dissemination and enhancement? Again sir, universities with high ranking encourage the focalization of women at a high level. Here, equality, equity, complementarity, and justice for female and male academics are accented.

My bearing at the start of my espousal of women centredness has not altered. What has shifted is the ability to accommodate exceptions to the rules earlier established at the on start of my career. I have doubled the age I was when I commenced teaching here at University of Abuja in 1990 and so the ability to remain particular all the time in appointing critical tenets or canons is now impartial and even-handed. This shows that critical approaches allotted to elected plays, films and other texts and performances can only get better with the age and exposure of the critic.

CODA

In this lecture, I believe we went on a journey to treat, *Mother is Gold: The Mater the Matter and Women-Centred Nigerian Drama and Theatre*. The mater is of worth and the source of living humans. This topic cannot be exhausted but as a chance to be inaugurated into the university system, it is my modest contribution to the crux of the maternal essence in dramatic creativity and women-centred drama as well; which I know can flow into general scholarship. I believe that which was to be shown has been shown: *Eureka* or *Quod erat Demonstrandum* (QED) at last! My vision for a woman-centred drama I believe will continue to yield dividends, seen in the number of efforts at similar goals in many departments of Theatre Arts across the country. Dear listeners, do not think the road has been without bends, or bumps. Many Inaugural Lecturers are diffident in making public the challenges they faced on the journey to inauguration. They focus on the successes and not the processes that hindered them in some respects. It has been very challenging as a female academic. Many of us did not always succeed without challenges or even antagonisms. There were times I wondered why the Academy seemed to be a male world without the dominance of, or even respect for complementarity. I am convinced that Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) need mater strategies to manage people and other non-human resources.

To end this lecture, first I give ALL praise and adoration to God, the good and great, the mighty and merciful creator who made today possible. He alone be honoured and given worship. Second, I sing a praise chant to my mother, Theodora, fondly called. Dora, the pinhole through which light flooded my life:

Iye mwen, Iye n'Ogie
Eka, Ene, Oni me,
Okpakor'eya
Iya rere Iya to ju wura lo
The mother who had no gold but had gold

Azu na e kwu nwa I, of the Universe!
Bayan guyon mai rayuwa
Mama!

Thank you for your patience, and for listening with your ears and hearts.

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