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Women and the Girl Child: Creating a Conversational Space of Equality

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Abstract

The depiction of events in the society and storing the knowledge of such is an important forte of the dramaturge. Drama has been a very pertinent cultural form (whether textual or performative) through which writers create memory and knowledge of varying issues, especially issues of women and the girl child rights. Methodologically using content analysis of Tess Onwueme's *The Reign of Wazobia* and *The Broken Calabash*, the article explores the language of revolution against the domination of women and the girl child by patriarchal structures. It is anchored on Donal Cabaugh's theory of cultural discourse analysis (CDA) that focuses on how communication is shaped as a cultural practice. It illustrates the significance of theatre in the unpacking and interrogation of socio-cultural assumptions of cultural discourse that perpetuate the marginalization and abuse of women in Nigeria. It further examines the strength of theatre and drama as capable of creating a space for all concerned to explore and interrogate extant realities. The findings, through the content of the texts treated showcase an extensive subjugation and discrimination against women and the girl child. It is in light of this that the study suggests a deployment of a revolutionary space to address the issues of discrimination and marginalization through conversations by using theatre for development (TfD) method.

Keywords: Women and the girl child rights, CDA, Nigeria, Gender equality, TfD, Patriarchy.

Introduction

Tess Akaeke Onwueme is grouped among the first generation women writers in Nigeria, though about 20 years after the foremost woman writer, Zulu Sofola. The focus of their works is not only

122 *International Journal of Current Research in the Humanities*, No. 23, 2019

circumstantial, but significant within the culture they were born into. Examples of these could be seen in Sofola's *The Wedlock of the Gods* and Tess Onwueme's *The Broken Calabash*. It is a common knowledge in Nigeria that the socio-cultural processes and the historical placement of women as properties owned by men not only disempowers them, but denies them the capability to freely express themselves on issues that rob on their humanity. The irony is that when anyone gets too close to apprehending these realities, the cultures set on ground take such as fuelling conflict not only against the community, but the gods as well. Having lived and experienced these trauma, it appears to be convenient for them to expose, interpret, challenge these issues through their writing and by so doing create a democratizing space for all concerned to involve in questioning the cultural constructs against the reality of the time.

Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie is a foremost advocate of gender equality; Stella Dia-Oyedepo joined the train with her play *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested*. Oyedepo's play is constructed in the feminist paradigm of *Lysistrata*. Playwrights of the feminist tradition have been able to use language and communication to deconstruct patriarchal dominance. Onwueme in her plays contends that cultures that relegate the women and children should be eroded. This artistic form of writing these issues is very significant, because it could easily aid one to relate it with other cultures of the world. However, it is not sufficient to respond to the change that propelled their link to question these cultures. Thus this article in trying to appreciate how these writers have used the written forms to create the awareness needed thus suggest facilitating communication in a new sense whereby all stakeholders will look at the mirror of the realities on ground. It thus positioned drama and theatre as a pedagogical and developmental tool to cultivate the re-humanization of the oppressed and even the ignorant oppressors. Drama and theatre offer a platform for varied conversations to take place. Given that conversation is imbued with multivalent voices, the visualization and participatory nature works in tandem with theatre for development (TfD) to sharpen the focus of any discourse, especially studies that involve women and children.

However, the study focuses on violation of the equality rights of Nigerian women and children. The concept of equality rights sociologically, legally and philosophically is the "faith in fundamental human rights in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women" (CEDAW 1981, p. 1). It should be understood that in a given society, within the field of human

rights, no woman or child should suffer discrimination. However, from community reports, events in the homes, the media and in the work place indicate the violation of women and children leading to inequities and unfair distribution do occur frequently. The opposite of equity seems to dominate this thinking, making it a vital issue for intervention. This being the case, working towards the possibility of a practical and rational action becomes imperative. The equality right discourse is intrinsically linked to the binaries of power and marginality which often culminate in a crisis of vulnerability for the other (the marginalized). Hence, the necessity for a conversational space involving all gatekeepers – the oppressed and the oppressors working towards a correction of anomalies. Central to this approach is the use of appropriate language and discourse to underscore the binaries of power and marginality on the one hand and to interrogate these binaries towards achieving social rectification and equity on the other hand.

What could be seen as the marginalization of Nigerian women by patriarchal structures dates back to ages. From biblical times through the Judeo-Christian to colonial and postcolonial Africa, the woman and the child as victims, have become, to borrow from Franz Fanon's (1963) expression, *The Wretched of the Earth*, a reproach to humanity. An evidence of marginalization and subjugation of women would be seen in the chosen text for this study. Some of the practices that give rise to these situations are cultural. In indigenous African cultures, these practices were not meant to be inimical to women, especially when they were seen as daughters and sisters to the patriarchs widely presumed to perpetrate these injustices (Okam, 2015). However, it was with the wind of social transformation blowing across the world as the famous wind of change of the 1950s that some of these practices are perceived as subjugating and inhibiting womanhood. The promoters believed that urgent action was required to correct the situation. These patriarchal practices were not only perceived as encroaching on women's rights, but even more devastatingly, as robbing the child (especially the girl child) of his/her rights. It is in this context, that the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) states that "all rights are indivisible and interrelated, each and all of them being inherent to the human dignity of the child. The implementation of each right set forth in the convention should therefore take into account the implementation of and respect for, many other rights of the child" (CRC, 2005, p. 4).

In Nigeria, for example, this becomes a turning socio-cultural and socio-economic issue in marriage, employment, amongst others.

More recently, abuse of children (male and female) and women sexually and otherwise, is on the increase in Nigeria. They seem helpless because of the complex issues that revolve around this matter. The correct orientation does not seem to be there; there is even what seems to be cultural collusion whereby older traditions of societies seem to encourage the aberrant and damaging behaviour. To further complicate matters, insiders in the family become involved in the abuse and denial syndrome. For instance, children are defiled/mutilated by their parents especially through circumcision, relatives as well as outsiders. This is fully revealed in Julie Okoh's play, *Edewede* (2000; 2006) in which the eponymous character is almost subjected to female genital mutilation. One may ask why parents seem to acquiesce on this matter. Several reasons could be adduced to justify what looks like silence. First, there is "that strong family bond which is mostly described by the saying, *blood is thicker than water and fuelled by strong societal norms*. Also, parents feel they should rather protect the right of the child in silent non-action than in legal pursuit. Moreover, people are weakened by the ineffectual actions of the law when abusers are released from custody without adequate justification. Such porosity of the legal and political system in Nigeria destroys confidence. Sometimes also, abuse of children can be related to issues of adaptive parentification which is "a situation whereby the child undertakes the function of the adults that can actually have positive influence on the child's upbringing and development" or destructive parentification "which is imposed on a child due to helplessness" (Chojnacka, 2018, p. 34), especially when parents are poor and sources of help are expensive.

As the issues of the subjugations and decentring of the woman are complex, the need to employ variant methodologies to expose and tackle them which no one institution or agency alone can handle, arises. In this particular case, an eclectic methodology can be used to engender more results. This paper draws upon the cases from content analysis of Tess Onwueme's *The Reign of Wazobia* and *The Broken Calabash* to anchor its argument. This is with emphasis on equality discourse towards dismantling the socio-cultural assumptions that perpetuate marginalization, abuse, neglect and violation of the woman and the child in Nigeria.

Analytical and Methodological Framework

This study is anchored on the theory of cultural discourse analysis (CDA). According to Donal Cabaugh (2007), "cultural discourse

analysis discusses how communication is shaped as a cultural practice. Specific questions may focus upon acts, events, and styles of communication that people use when conducting their everyday lives, including their practical rhetorical arts. It focuses on the significance and meaning communication has for people when they are engaged in it" (p. 168). Supporting Cabaugh's view, Teun van Dijk's perspective of Language and Cultural Discourse Analysis, this study analyzes how equality discourse is used to dismantle the socio-cultural assumptions that perpetuate marginalization, abuse, neglect, and violation of the woman and the girl child in Nigeria. van Dijk (2015) is of the view that cultural discourse "primarily studies the way social power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated and resisted". In addition, references are made to language of power, oppression and liberation in Tess Onwueme's *The Reign of Wazobia* and *The Broken Calabash*.

The need for the integration of the basic and unpopular logical operation of discourse helps us place discourse as social action – a language situated in performance. In other words, language as a vehicle that is tied to social relations, the binaries of power and marginality, inequality and social struggle made active by the communicating subject. This is mostly the case with that Paulo Freire's critical thought resonates through the instrumentality of cultural action for freedom. The essence of cultural action for freedom is humanistic oriented. It is geared to attack and level the anomalies stemming from non-humanistic conditions that negatively impacts on the absolute existence of some individuals especially those perceived in the society as lesser beings. This is because there is no level ground on which they can speak and act meaningfully concerning the extreme cases in their society, which affects them adversely. One would not hesitate to say that the ideology of humanization is central to Freire's cultural action for freedom. Based on the ideology, it gives voice to the voiceless in the society, thus helping them subvert the culture of silence which attacks their freedom. Freire (1970) defines cultural action for freedom "as the act of learning in which the learner assumes the role of the knowledge subject in dialogue with the educator" (p. 29).

What this means is that cultural action encourages 'new actors' opportunities and spaces to mutate as they address the issues of their concern. It is this shifting role which enables them to take action for themselves that make them 'new actors', with agency, social capital and decentralizes discourse culture which addresses the equality conflicts. Cultural action creates democratic spaces for

women and children and those who feel their plight to participate in a range of dialogue, be it conservatively or liberally to advance thoughts and actions on why people take part in collective action against social and cultural impunities. Going by this, theatre and drama especially the theatre for development (TfD) genre creates the participation opportunity for the pursuance of equality through their conversation with a plethora of methodologies. Exponents of social equality and equity have advanced different explanations on the importance of cultural action to engage in such struggle for the liberation of the oppressed. Abah (2005) in his use of TfD has further advanced this cause by promoting dialogue and participation through synergistic approach involving participatory learning and action (PLA), drama and theatre. The dynamics of this practice is to create what Tarrow (1994) calls “opportunity structures” for the construction of strategies for action.

Can we find the drama of critical consciousness to the rescue of inequality situation? According to Mabel Evwierhoma (2015), “drama can mitigate challenges. Play can be a very useful part of treatment of both adult and children issues” (p. 4). She states further that “this is done through songs, music and dance” (p. 4). Consequently, I would put forward the argument that engaging with cultural issues like the foregoing, one needs an objective consciousness. This means that objectivity is a consideration of communal harmony that emphasizes value without outright resolve, but which cannot ignore a subtle reinforcement of the effective mundane values we have on others through such unfolding acts of ills without neglecting relevant variables. What this means is the need for a methodical or dynamic methodological approach that simply lightens the unfolding of realities through a subtle yet a major didactic trajectory between mundane tradition, the contextual challenges they bring about and the resolution needed. Therefore, to address the issue of inequality, unrestrained means in ensuring an equitable ground that eliminates self-censorship, enables practical expression of issues and promotes a situation of symmetric power balance is pertinent. With this, one can say that TfD can deliver the discourse of change.

Theatre for Development in the Conversational Space

Theatre for development (TfD), a participatory performance model is aimed at facilitating methods through which issues could be proffer solutions with the application of visual and non-visual aesthetics. “Visualization encourages participation and avoids the problem of

adults taking additional notes and adding their own analysis” (Kafewo, 2008, p. 7). Tfd functions in empowering participants in handling significant issues of their lives in entirety and in their capacities as rational beings that are affected by their environment and seek the restoration of their rights. It serves as the anchor of conversation on the discourse of women and children rights. The commanding force of Tfd is depersonalized, not supporting any group. It is not founded in the paradoxes of class. Even in asymmetric situation of power imbalance Tfd holds the forte of neutrality.

Humanity relies on theatre to pass across messages for the society. Tfd has the capacity to stir the consciousness of the people to comprehend vital issues of their lives. It gives room to the practical expression of matters affecting human beings and their environment. Participation, action, ownership, coverage, conscientization and transformation of the environment based on cultural action are some of the ingredients that make up Tfd (Omoera, 2010). It facilitates social advancement. It covers the path where people set up a process to control their own development, having the right to choose their own goals and the manner of achieving them (Okam, 2019). Theatre for development (Tfd) has an intrinsic importance aimed at creating an environment that erases arrogance and marginalization. A major goal of this non-conventional theatre is its heuristic credibility that provides the opportunity to generate, investigate and interrogate as well as explore ways to proffer lasting solutions to societal challenges. Okam (2019) affirms that the emergence of Tfd is a response to the urge to speak of social realities and human relationship. This is an urge that emerged in line with the dissatisfaction of the alienation in packaging the content of the conventional theatre.

Tfd is a practice methodology that is an amalgam of complementary tools that have the capacity to engender positive change. Participation, partnership (with stakeholders and interest groups) and accountability can be engendered within the construct of these conversations. This is because, while it is the function of drama to present realities through action, the structure and content of the presentation broadly passes the message across to those involved. Thus, it is the responsibility of the people to deliberate on the pervasive issues presented, and to seek immediate action which involves the oppressed and the oppressor as well as those who serve as intermediaries to strike a balance. In this case, agencies, local groups, delegated individuals, and victims become actors in ensuring that the actions are planned, executed and monitored.

Foucault (1980) corroborates that “discourse can transmit, produce and reinforce power. Also, it can undermine and expose power, render it unstable and also possible to thwart (p. 25). Discursive practices are engagements that a subject lives, embodies and experience as they interact with discourses. For instance, “the discourse of femininity informs, influences and shapes women identity to an extent where women act and behave according to how females have been labeled” (Foucault, 1980, p. 25). This is the situation that theatre plays out in tacit and dialogical perfectness to the environment it is linked.

Patriarchy and the Nigerian Society in the 21st Century

Patriarchy which simply means a situation where men control greater power over all human persons - women and children in the society has been an existential issue. The intricate nature of the Nigerian society, as in some other African societies, is linked to the patriarchal culture of male dominance which paints a very negative picture and asymmetric reality that connotes power imbalance among men, women and children. “It is a system of social stratification and differentiation on the basis of sex, which provides material advantages to males while simultaneously placing severe constraints on the roles and activities of females” (Makama, 2013, p. 116). Nigerian scholars of cultural studies and advocates of gender equality from the late 20th century have stood up to refute the tradition of male dominance of the woman and the child. Also, politics of patriarchy in Nigeria is fully captured in post-colonial Nigerian drama. Playwrights such as Emmy Unuja Idegbe, Julie Okoh, Oludolapo Ojediran, Irene Salami-Agunloye and Tess Onwueme have explored the attendant effects of male dominance of the female gender and children in their creative works. Onwueme’s *The Broken Calabash* is set in rapidly developing Nigerian society, Isah village in which the Idegbe tradition holds sway. Idegbe is a practice whereby when a single female child is born in a family, she is expected to stay behind in her fathers’ house to bear children for him.

The Nigerian society in the 21st century still stands on the firewall of traditional cultures and religion. Thus, patriarchy remains a cultural construct which exists with the imperative to repudiate the other(s) by producing acts which escalate a measured irrationality. Julie Okoh (2008) posits that the existence of gender inequality in Nigeria is evident in the imbalance in the distribution of posts between men and women or on unequal opportunities that have

constituted grave obstacles to women's progress in all spheres of endeavour" (p. 93). In Nigeria, like other African countries, the woman's interest is to be seen as equal with the other. This has attracted the involvement and activism of the various stakeholders on the affairs of women and children. Women leading the process are given support by their male counterparts who see women's subjugation as a baseless perpetuation of primitive culture to produce inequity. Femi Osofisan (2001) further claims that "in various places and on various platforms, our women have repeatedly voiced their bitterness against men, have economic exploitation to cultural misrepresentation to political abuse. Drawing on this, all men by virtue of being male stand condemned" (p. 6). Osofisan's claim reflects Omolara Leslie-Ogundipe's (1994) search for a balanced ground for the African woman's restored dignity and humility.

The Reign of Wazobia and The Broken Calabash

The Reign of Wazobia is a play that focuses on the tussle for power between the male and female gender. A young woman, Wazobia, is appointed regent after the death of a male king. This appointment was made by the cultural avatars and gods of the land. Wazobia has to operate within the role of her regency until a new king is chosen and installed. This is the first time a woman is chosen for such position and since it is the will of the gods, the men are incapacitated. During her regency, the men of the community are preparing to choose another king. However, with the fact that she has tasted power, she refuses to relinquish it as she gears up to resist the "patriarchal edifices" (Omoera, 2020). She questions why women should be treated like second class citizens and marginalized. The men refuse to allow the due process because she is a woman. She agitates for a reform through revolution.

The Broken Calabash is a story of a girl - Ona - who is the only child of her parents. Tradition has it that she would be married out to a chosen man in order to bear children into her family to keep her family line from going into extinction. Alternatively, though prejudicial in the light of modern knowledge, she is required to marry another female into her immediate family to bear children in her stead. Caught in the trajectory of modern life with all awareness of rights to be respected and to be heard; freedom of will, Ona sees the *Idegbe* tradition which allows such act as dehumanizing. She prefers to marry a man of her choice. With the force of tradition prevailing over her, Ona decides to blackmail her father as

responsible for her feigned pregnancy. Ona's act staged an impugned situation involving sacrilege and the will of two different traditions (modern independence and pristine traditions) to clash. It is a dawn of revolution, what prevails? This would be best appreciated through reading the text.

Case Presentation and Analysis

Issues of marginalization, revolution, resistance, communication practices, and emotions, among other tenets, as captured in the dialogue of the selected texts constitute the fulcrum of discussion here. First, we enumerate the tenets produced by Donal Cabaugh on cultural discourse analysis and relation ideas of van Dijk on same as analytic guide. The tenet of cultural discourse analysis is used to foreground the analysis on meaning as regards personhood and identity. Feeling, emotion and affect: how do people feel about what is going on? As people engage in communication practices, they are involved in an affective performance. Dwellings, place and environment: as people engage in communication, they spin a cultural discourse that is located somewhere, and thus locates them there in a particular set of ways. Cultural discourse analysis (CDA) primarily studies the way social power abuse and inequalities are enacted, reproduced, legitimated and resisted. This is fully expressed in Omu's statement in *The Reign of Wazobia*.

Wazobia: (Arrogantly) I see, Omu. My women will not dance naked in public to appease the eyes or wrathful populace. This is no era for dancing to entertain lustful eyes (p. 21).

Omu: But an era of what? This is no matter for testing out your imported values and all nonsense about equality. Tradition as we met it. Tradition passed down to us from the time when the world's eyes were still closed. Tradition handed down from generation to generation (p. 22).

Omu's statement is a validation of the enactment and legitimatization of the hazardous ideology of patriarchy. Her statement aligns with the patriarchal ideals that condition how people live their lives. Not only that she sees liberation (feminism) as a foreign ideology, she is encrusted in the traditional pattern for no reason than the very fact that it exists. Challenging this is to generate undue revolt against tradition. Thus her language of expression consolidates, reproduces as well as perpetuates the domain with which the woman felt dominated. On the contrary, Wazobia is different. Wazobia exhibits a critical consciousness of

the apparent state of women in a male-controlled world which foots relegation of women. While Omu, still accepting her male induced cultural values does not want any “negative encroachment towards that.

Wazobia operated within the framework of reversing a demeaning socio-cultural order of her people with her privilege. Thus she creates a springboard for liberation with her call for action.

Wazobia: Arise women! Wake up women
Three seasons just THREE SEASONS
And men are sweating in their anus.
Three seasons, that is their maximum for any female
regent (p. 3).
The face of the sun changes, so does the moon.
Seasons too change
So does the face of the clock
The clock ticks ... (p. 22)

This is a revolutionary call towards the greater consciousness in women. It depicts the strength and capability articulated with words of action. Going by this dialogue, it functions by logic of resistance. It is an evidence of pursuing social justice towards non-humanistic laws and attitude against the order. It is an enactment fundamentally conditioned to revolt against social power abuse and inequality among men and women. This is a depiction of the culturally embedded social precepts and behavioral norms that do not recognize the humanity of women. The change consequence of this is the resistance given to it by Wazobia, who started a revolutionary call towards the consciousness of women, strengthening their capabilities with a language of action. She is only in “the process of co-production of knowledge that builds awareness and the need to be channeled into “an enabling environment that supports the participants’ (women) ability to put new knowledge and improved strategies into action” (Tanner and Seballos, 2012, p. 69) to eliminate the patriarchal dominance of women in the face of obvious evidence that the time for change is now which made it possible for the regency to fall on a woman, something only the gods can reckon with. Where such is obtained, one must accord the status of change as Wazobia did. But this absolutely estrange them in the balance of tradition as Cabaugh (2007) notes: As people engage in communication, they spin a cultural discourse that is located somewhere (here could be where the ideology of female liberation is evolving from) and thus locates them in a particular set of ways (the revolutionary tide) which is antithetical to their immediate traditional experience. The ease of

accepting such differentiation will defy any power ease. Men are sweating in their anus is a mockery of the male gender. This portends that men are afraid of Wazobia's reign that has lasted only three years. Wazobia's ability to make the men sweat reveals the latter's weakness. Men see power as exclusively the right of an adult male. They feel uncomfortable when women wield power. Wazobia, the king surrogate of Ilaa in Anioma Kingdom encourages the women to stand firm

Wazobia: Arise women!

Wazobia: Arise women!

They say your feet are feeble...

Show them those hands have claws...

Wake up women...

Arise women!

With your claws hook them

But spill no blood for these are sons of our womb (p. 2).

The above dialogue shows some kind of subservience that seems to impress on the strength of the woman. Her aim is to dismantle bias against women. We should be reminded that the woman's tenderness and love is not weakness even though it could communicate that to those who want to take their meaning from subjugation. It is a natural interjection which embodies the will to protect everyone's dignity. Affective as the fate of their communication and /or performance shows: receiving a phenomenon, responding to it, valuing, organizing it and characterizing it. Wazobia's words depict the strength and capabilities of the woman. The king is assertive. Her aim is to dismantle the gender bias against women. It is imperative to reverse the images of weakness in the woman. This is an essential element of a "human rights based approach to programming for women and children. Here, good governance comes to play. This must be perceived in terms of realizing all human rights norms" (Sekere & Alwis, 2005, p. 9).

Wazobia resorts to communicating in proverbs. Although a woman, as long as she is king, she is considered powerful. Every king is a man. "Traditional programming tends to perceive women merely as limited to their role as mothers and as conduits to improving the situation of children. However, a more dynamic approach to programming for women and children advances the notion of women "equality in the private and public spheres" (Sekere and Alwis, 2005, p. 8), which *The Reign of Wazobia* does. This is within the space of cultural discourse analysis which, according to

Hammersley (2003) is that “which captures something important about the social world, but also plays a key ethical and political role in showing how things come to be, as they are and they could be different, and thereby they could be changed (as cited in Williamson & Scifleet, 2018, np).

Wazobia: ... for three seasons, just three seasons. Wazobia
has reigned
And men are sweating in their anus
Three season!!!
That is their maximum for any female regent (p. 3)

Wazobia’s capacity to make the men sweat shows the flaw of the men who claim they should be served by women. Men see power as exclusively the right of an adult male. They feel uncomfortable when women wield power. In this regards children are also marginalized in the political space.

Wazobia: Women carry pulp-heads
They administer power to them
In infantile aliquots...
Women ... infants?
I Wazobia will show them that women bear elephant
tusks (p. 4)

The out-group is successfully depicted in negative light, thereby heightening the quest for power-equality between men and women. By manipulating pronouns, Wazobia conveys subtle social meanings that relate to women’s depersonalization as well as their pressing desire to liberate themselves from the strangling grip of men’s domination. Showing the men that women bear elephant tusk is a call for war. This war is a gendered one where every woman must stand to refute the tradition of patriarchy. The first line articulates an image of weakness in women before now. Here, women are seen as infants but Wazobia states that women are not soft. She uses the term elephant to describe women. The women should seize to “dance”. Wazobia uses the term dance to refer to conforming to the will of the man. She refutes the men, Iyase and Idehe who are poised to wrestle power from her just after three years.

Wazobia: I Wazobia, know everything at my finger tips
They of their volition threw the throne on
My lap and lap it, I must! (p. 7)

This is the woman’s determination to wield power in the political space. Women have resolved to be radical. To be radical is to take

things by the root. The above lines by Wazobia “advocates radical social change” (Adeyemi, 2013, p. 21). In Ilaa community in which the woman is seen as a weakling, nobody wants to be associated with the term “woman”. The concept in the context of most African cultural spaces connotes weakness. This is the reason Omu refuses to be called woman by Priest of Ani. The conversation below fully captures this position.

Priest of Ani: I know the direction of your accusing finger
Haa Woman,
No matter how much you try to elevate them
Never rise above petty squabbles.

Omu: And you call me a woman?
I the Omu, surpassed all women,
King among women? (pp. 9-10)

The priest of Ani articulates that no matter how well placed a woman is in the society, she remains a woman. Omu refutes this. To her, the narrative must change. The belief in the woman as a weakling and a never do well must be contested. She realizes that the priest smell the woman in her despite the fact that she is the Royal Highness, King of Women of Ilaa. Festivals, especially the Ifejoku festival is exclusively a male affair. The king of women is critical of this; she expects that women are active participants of this festival as men are. But her position calls for attention. She must understand that the agitation for women and children has its limitation, but must find harmony in co-existence even if that emerges in a caustic context. The zenith of the war against patriarchy comes to bear in the scene where Wazobia is made king. She is a woman who Ohen priest adorns with the king’s regalia and crown. While everyone is on their knees, Iyase refuses to do same.

Wazobia: (Authoritatively) You will kneel, Iyase!
Kneel Iyase!!!(Iyase, as if shaken by an earthquake,
begins to tremble, bending his knees until he finally
succumbs, knees down, face down hands tucked behind
him (p. 13)

The above statement is replete with the triumph of the marginalized woman. This victory is not for only the woman and children of Ilaa, but it is for all women and children that are subjugated globally. Iyase a metaphor for the male gender gives in to Wazobia’s order. There is change of powers as Iyase does not only kneel, but also tucks his hands behind. This symbolizes absolute

surrender to the new social order where gender balance and respect for the right of everyone is imperative. "This justifies the fact that as people engage in communication practices, they are being related one to another." As the Igbo-Africans would say, Njikoka Amaka-to integrate is better than to disintegrate!" This is an integration of humanism- a philosophical orientation that harmonizes (Ozumba, 2019, p. 27).

The Idegbe tradition makes Cortuma's only child, Ona confined to the house. At the beginning of the play, one would think that Cortuma's love for Ona is unconditional. However, it is not. He is just aware of the benefit he would derive from such performance of display of love. Ona's act lends credence to Cabaugh's assertion that people engage in communication practices acting as if they are doing one sort of thing, rather than other sort of things. Reaching this level of closeness is certainly helpful for Ona to gain his confidence while the actuality is to develop practical solution to the process of maintaining a family lineage through her. Religion and culture are the prime movers of this belief of patriarchy. Recall the dominant role the Biblical Abraham played over his wife, Sarah and Isaac, Sarah's only son. In Islam, the man is considered to lead the home. He is the one who must lead Salat (prayers). In fact, women are only allowed to stay behind the men during prayers. According to Offiong (2019) "in the late 1930s women education was not considered relevant" (p. 45). Even in the present day Nigeria in some cultures "women education are not considered relevant, resulting in majority of women not being empowered to be active participants in the language and discourse of the society" (p.45). In *The Broken Calabash*, Cortuma's aim is to protect Ona and use her as a tool that tradition dictates. The conversation below captures this statement.

Diaku: (very relaxed) Big Papa, you are never tired staying up so late after the day's hard work in the farm (p. 93)

Cortuma: Not when I still have much in me and when wolves pry around my chick.

African worldview sees the woman as someone who should be protected with the assumption that she is weak. The protection sometimes leads to oppression. This is the case with Ona whose father stays with her whenever she is with her male friends. Diaku, Ona's boyfriend is the wolf while Ona is the chick. Cortuma sees his daughter as his chick that he must protect from men since she must stay at home to bear children for him. His love for her is selfish. He

showers Ona with whatever she wants with the fact that he is aware of what he will get in return. The above conversations reveal that Cortuma is able to state all of these because he sees Ona as a child who does not have the capacity to refute what he says. This obviously defies the tenets of child's right to respect and thus could be seen as marginalization. Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie is a foremost advocate of gender equality; Stella Dia-Oyedepo joined the movement with her play *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested*, which is constructed in the Lysistrata paradigm. Playwrights of the feminist tradition have been able to use language and communication to deconstruct patriarchal dominance. Onwueme contends that cultures that relegate the women and children should be eroded. In the case of Ona, fathers should not have the final say in their children's choice of marriage. Ona refuses to adhere to the Idegbe practice. In her words: Ona: Over my dead body, Never! Not while my eyes can see the light of the day. Never! (pp. 102-103). Ona is firm with her decision not to adhere to any male centered tradition that hampers the development of the woman child. She refuses her father's decision. Cortuma on his part thinks he can cajole his daughter but he faces brick wall with Ona's attempt to commit suicide.

Ona: To prevent me from marrying or forcing me to marry a wife cannot solve the problem. All must come down with, the storm. If the tree's root is not firm, let it show its face to the sky. (pp.110-111)

There is a transmission of power from Cortuma to Ona. This is with the use of elegant proverbs. In Ibo society in which the play is set, Ona refutes her father's decision with proverbs. The bracketing produced by this system is visible in cultural discourse, as the arbitrary use of language creates an overbearing situation of relevance to the humanity of women and children. Such instances are the attribution of a man that is seen as not strong or economically capable, who cries, worries or helps a female partner to do house chores. Also, on the negative reverse side, a barren woman is seen as a man (not in the sense that men are unproductive, but the level that men do not possess the reproductive structure of being pregnant). A woman with a transcendental ability is referred to as a man, since such is basically seen in the patriarchal domain as not constitutive of what a woman should possess. Worse is the likening of women to children even in the event of protecting them. Women are seen as children "... small, insubstantial, there is less of it (Korczak, 2017, p. 8). This statement therefore reveals men's

predisposition towards the humanity of the child. Rationality sees languages as unreasonable and amounting to an unfair marginal stereotyping of women and children.

Conclusion

This article has examined a range of issues contained in the two dramas of Tess Onwueme – *The Reign of Wazobia* and *The Broken Calabash*. This was done through the use of Donal Cabaugh's cultural discourse analysis to examine the culture-reflexive language that determined the cause of study. The issues generated reflected the revolutionary struggle of women against continued patriarchal dominance and the driving vulnerability of the girl child in cultural issues instituted by the patriarchs and overlooked by community (both men and women). Based on the issues discussed, the article draws upon the strength of TFD as the methodological imperative to understand, challenge, address and resolve the cultural realities that dehumanizes the woman and children. However, the research took cognizance of the female child without recourse to justice. It states that the male child is still a child who faces respect issue and some form of guidance predicated on the world built by patriarchs who see the boy child as a patriarch. The reason is due to the choice of text used. The study suggests a deployment of a revolutionary space to address the issues of discrimination and marginalization through conversation.

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