



CHALLENGING PATRIARCHY: THE FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE IN STELLA OYEDEPO'S
THE REBELLION OF THE BUMPY-CHESTED AND BRAIN HAS NO GENDER

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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluates two plays of Stella Oyedepo, explicating how patriarchy and its institutions privilege men to the disadvantage of women in society, using the interpretative and deductive methodology. Stella Oyedepo is a feminist playwright who creates strong-willed, stubborn and self-assertive women who rise to challenge patriarchal beliefs and values which hemline them. She does not believe in the superiority of either of the sexes and is in strong opposition to sexual injustice meted out to women in society. Oyedepo has therefore, through her plays undertaken the challenge of the feminist scholar to find the ground to argue effectively for the end of cultural/sexist oppression of all women. All deleterious traditional cultural practices affecting women should be discarded as most of these were carried out in the pristine past. As a feminist, she is guided by the tenets of African feminism. Man is not the measure of humanity but men and women are. It is therefore imperative for a life of complementarity to exist between the sexes for a more harmonious existence and societal development.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Feminist response, Stella Oyedepo

1. INTRODUCTION

The feminist goal is to usher in an integrated human society, one that is free of gender imbalance. The primary aim of feminism is to expunge from society all forms of male dominance, oppression, subjugation and marginalization of women in all aspects of human existence — social, political, religious, economic, intellectual and cultural, on the basis of sex.

There are a large number of women whose brains are closer in size to those of gorillas than to the most developed male brains. This inferiority is so obvious that no one can resist it for a moment...all psychologists who have studied the intelligence of women... recognize today that they represent the most inferior forms of human evolution and that they are closer to children and savages than to an adult, civilized man (LeBon cited in Gould p.45)

It must be stated that conceptual thought is exclusive to the masculine intellect. Her skull is also smaller than man's; and so, of course, is her brain. (Lang cited in Tavis p.336)

The epigraphic views of Gustave Lebon and T.Lang respectively tend to present inequality between males and females to biology. A gleaning of the above quotes also betrays the fact that antithetical biological observations have been used to justify the same conclusion--- women are inferior to men. Throughout history, women have always struggled to gain equality, respect, and the same rights as men. This has been difficult because of patriarchy, an ideology in which men are superior to women and have the right to rule women. This ideology has permeated the social structures of society throughout the world, particularly in Nigeria, and as a result, even in the present century, women are still struggling for rights that most men take for granted. In his *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel argues vehemently against political authority for women on the flimsy reason that “ when women hold the helm of government, the state is at once in jeopardy, because women regulate their actions not by the demands of universality but arbitrary inclinations” (p.166).

The atavistic views emanating from the aforementioned male chauvinists point to a common conclusion: women have been perpetually sentenced to life under a phallogentric universe. It is an extraordinary fact of women's lives that for centuries, across space and time and from culture to culture, women have been consistently treated with ambivalence, misogyny and subordination. They have suffered denigration and subjugation in the hands of their male counterparts in virtually all societies, particularly in Nigeria. Eva Figs in her book, *Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Nigeria* posits that women have been largely man made since the cultural meanings given to them are patriarchally determined (p.84).

Julie Okoh is supportive of Figs' assertion: “Based on patriarchal paradigms, a woman's personhood is conceptualized in her relationship with others, and not as a person with her own identity and fundamental rights. She is a man's daughter, wife and mother” (p.42). It is therefore in response to these patriarchal norms which denigrate women that feminists seek to redress. Feminism values women as important and worthwhile human beings. It recognizes the need for social change if women are to lead secure and satisfying lives. Stella Oyedepo is one astute Nigerian feminist playwright who has been silenced by literary criticism. This paper is aimed at documenting her contributions towards the feminist discourse and the basic aim is to foreground the patriarchal premises and resulting prejudices underlying two of her plays—*The Rebellion of the Bumpy-chested* and *Brain Has No Gender*. The essence is to see how these patriarchal paradigms are interrogated by the playwright with the aim of dismantling the seeming insidious patriarchal institution. The basic methodology used is content analyses, deducing there from, our critical positions.

2. THE CONCEPT OF PATRIARCHY

The word patriarchy comes from two Greek words ---*pater* (father) and *archie* (rule). In Greek, the genitive form of pater is patr-os which shows the root form, part explaining why the word is spelled patriarchy. According to Elizabeth Meehan, patriarchy is rule or dominance by the father (p.191). Melissa Butler, defines patriarchy as the rule of women by men, and of younger men by older men” (p.135).

Patriarchy in its widest definition means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply

that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and resources. One of the most challenging tasks of women's history is to trace with precision the various forms and modes in which patriarchy appears historically, the shifts and changes in its structure and function, and the adaptations it makes to female pressure and demands (Barnett p.239)

In its narrow meaning, patriarchy refers to the system, historically derived from Greek and Roman law, in which the male head of the household had absolute legal and economic power over his dependent male and female family members (pp.238-239). This view implies a limited historicity for patriarchy. It implies that patriarchy began in classical antiquity and ended in the nineteenth century with the granting of civil rights to women and married women in particular. The patriarchal dominance of male family heads over their kin is much older than classical antiquity; it begins at the time of the writing of the Hebrew Bible (p.239). Patriarchy has established male dominance not only in the home especially in terms of inheritance but in all facets of human existence. In the words of Alix Kates Shulman, "men through laws, customs and other institutions of patriarchy have appropriated the control of women's body and sexuality". (Cited in Barnett p.22).

Sylvia Walby in her book, *Theorizing Patriarchy*, opines that the concept of patriarchy must remain central to a feminist understanding of society. She says patriarchy is indispensable for an analysis of gender inequality. Sylvia distinguishes between two main forms of patriarchy, private and public. According to her, private patriarchy is based upon household production as the main site of women's oppression. Public patriarchy is based principally in public sites such as employment and the State. The household does not cease to be a patriarchal structure in the public form, but it is no longer the chief site. In private patriarchy the expropriation of women's labor takes place primarily by individual patriarchs within the household, while in the public form it is a more collective appropriation. In private patriarchy the principal patriarchal strategy is exclusionary; in the public it is segregationist and subordinating (p.24). Sylvia Walby defines patriarchy "as a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women" (p.20).

3. NARRATIVES

In her book *Sexual Politics*, Kate Millett argues that politics is not just an activity confined to political parties and parliaments, but one which exists in any 'power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of person is controlled by another'. Such relationships of domination and subordination can exist at work, where a man instructs his female secretary to make a cup of tea, or in the family, when a husband's meal is cooked by his wife. Political relationships between men and women exist in all aspects of everyday life. According to Millett, such relationships are organized on the basis of patriarchy, a system in which 'male shall dominate female'. She believes that patriarchy is the most pervasive ideology of our culture, its most fundamental concept of power'. It is 'more rigorous than class stratification, more uniform, certainly more enduring'.

In his book, *Sex and Repression in Savage Society*, Bradislow Malinowski maintains that in the few societies that are matriarchal "the question of property management – and thus power – remains in male hands, for property management is vested not in the female head of the family, but in her male kin" (p.123). In her article, "African Motherhood – Myth or Reality", Lauretta Ngcobo is in total agreement with Malinowski when she opines that "under matriarchy women have more rights than under patriarchy. Although matriarchy in itself does not imply real social power on the part of the women, they certainly have more say in the community and within the family structure" (p.536). Maria Rosa Cutrufelli also agrees with the above views: "matriliny has never implied by itself a real social power of the woman, even though it has bestowed upon her a distinctly better status than patriliney has ever done" (p.57).

Andrea Dworkin's view is in tandem with almost all the views expressed above about patriarchy. He sees patriarchy as consisting of metaphysical self assertion and concept which expresses intrinsic authority. Subsumed within this assertion of authority is the denial of women's power; the right to physical strength; the power—through that physical strength—to subordinate by forms of fear—symbols of terror—individual men and women as a class (Cited in Barnett p.123). In furthering his view, Dworkin posits that men also assume the power of naming, that is to say, the power to define thought, experience and language, to the exclusion of women. Dworkin also identifies the power of ownership. Men, traditionally and contemporarily have appropriated the power to own women, to deny them the right to own property in their own name, deny them the right to refuse intercourse in marriage (p.124). Dworkin also locates the power to control women through financial control, relegating women to less remunerative positions. Finally, for Dworkin, the seventh tenet of male power is the power of sex. Women from this point of view are defined as sexual objects in the stereotypical definition given to female sexuality by male power. In Dworkin's words, "sexual power illuminates his very nature" (p.124). Dworkin's position seems to dampen the zeal of advocates of true gender equality.

Through participation in patriarchy, men learn how to hold other human beings in contempt, to see them as non human, and to control them. Within patriarchy men see and women learn what subordination looks like. Patriarchy creates guilt and repression, sadism and masochism, manipulation and deception, all of which drive men and women to other forms of tyranny. Patriarchy is a historic creation formed by men and women in a process which took nearly 2500 years to its completion.

In Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, he describes "the world historic defeat of the female sex" as an event deriving from the development of private property. Engels, basing his generalizations on the work of nineteenth-century ethnographers and theoreticians such as J.J.Bachofen and L.H.Morgan, postulated the existence of classless communist societies prior to the formation of private property (p.21). Such societies may or may not have been matriarchal, but they were egalitarian. Engels assumed a "primitive" division of labour between the sexes. "The man fights in the wars, goes hunting and fishing, procures the raw materials of food and the tools necessary for doing so. The woman looks after the house and the preparation of the food and clothing, cooks, weaves, sews. They are each master in their own sphere: the man in the forest, the woman in the house. Each is owner of the instruments which he or she makes and uses.... What is made and used in common is common property---the house, the garden, the long boat (p.21).

With the development of state, the monogamous family changed into the patriarchal family, in which the wife's household labour "became a private service; the wife became the head servant, excluded from all participation in social production". Engels concluded:

The overthrow of the mother right was the world historic defeat of the female sex. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children (p.22).

Engels used the term "Mutterrecht" referred to as "mother right" to describe matrilineal kinship relations, in which the property of men did not pass to their children but to their sister's children. From the above views on the subject of patriarchy, some commonalities can be established: patriarchy confers on man hegemony over woman; in patriarchy, man has certain privileges over woman and man is the locus of culture in society; in patriarchy, a woman is viewed from a misogynist angle of vision. She is viewed as 'the other' and her status and

dignity is in relation to man. In the same line of work as the Patriarchy and the Feminist Response in Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested and Brain Has No Gender*;

Feminist scholars have observed that much of what passes for knowledge of women's (or men's) nature has historically been constructed from the point of view of the social group men, who benefit most from women's continued subordination (Johnston p.16).

Feminists view the current social relations as they exist in contemporary times as expressions of patriarchy, a structure of domination of women by men. The main aim of feminism therefore is not only to challenge as bell hooks suggests, but to dismantle the seeming insidious patriarchal institution. In all the various feminized ideologies we are familiar with, this goal is expressed subtly or with acerbity.

A feminist play in the opinion of Helen Michie in "Flesh" is "anything that foregrounds the inequities of representation, even if this is an admission of the impossibility of moving into a safe space beyond it, is feminist; anything that struggles against these inequities is essential (Cited in Brown p.150). In "Contemporary Playwrights/Traditional Forms," a similar view is expressed: "any play which moves women to the center of the narrative, foregrounding women's experience and concerns, can be considered feminist" (p.196). In "Feminist Theory and Contemporary Drama," Janet Brown posits that "in the twentieth century, a drama that is feminist in intention has exhibited a commitment to telling the stories of silenced and marginalized women, celebrating women's community and sense of connection through group protagonists, and expressing the moral concerns and criticisms that arise from women's experience" (p.155).

A feminist play is one that exposes patriarchy as a controlling force and the culture as defined, determined and shaped by men, thus limiting women's development and range of life's choices, makes the case more forcefully and moves toward more radical conclusion (Porter p.196). The challenge of the feminist scholar therefore is to find the ground to argue effectively for the end of oppression of all women. This task is succinctly articulated by Gay Greene and Coppelia Kahn: "feminist scholarship undertakes the dual task of deconstructing predominantly male cultural paradigms and reconstructing a female perspective and experience in an effort to change the tradition that has silenced and marginalized us" (pp.1-2). In their close reading of Isak Dinesin's "The Black Page", Greene and Kahn demonstrate that by attending to the "omissions, gaps, partial truths and contradictions which ideology masks", feminist criticism can both deconstruct "dominant male patterns of thought and social practice" and reconstruct "female experience previously hidden or overlooked" (p.208).

Marylyn French, in her book, *Beyond Power: On Women, Men, and Morals*, also agree with the role feminism has to play in uprooting the problem of patriarchy: she submits that "feminism is the only serious coherent, and universal philosophy that offers an alternative to patriarchal thinking and structures (p.442). The challenge of the feminist scholar therefore is to find the ground to argue effectively for the end of oppression of all women. This task is what Oyedepo sets out to accomplish in the selected plays for this study—*The Rebellion of the Bumpy-chested and Brain Has No Gender*.

The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested is a play that is founded on the idea of revolt. It is a rebellion by women in solidarity against male domination. Rebellion is adopted by the women in addressing the perceived sexual injustices and rapacity in the society. The women refused to be ensconced in the maelstrom of patriarchy. In this respect, the play resonates Marsha Norman's *Getting Out*: "not only does it focus on woman's struggle for self-determination in the face of powerful patriarchal forces; it documents the social construction of gender" or a dramatization of a woman's tragedy such as we find in Jessie's in *Night Mother* by Marsha Norman, in a culture accustomed to valorizing male action as a bold move."

Under the aegis of the Bumpy-Chested Movement (B.C.M) led by Captain Sharp who is “beefy, with a stentorian voice and a grim visage” (p.2), the women rebel against perceived injustices against them. Other vibrant members of the group who demonstrate extreme case of revolt include: Falilat, Ashake, Salwa, Sabina, Tara, among others. In their rebellion, they embark on kitchen and bed strike against their husbands who are the custodians of patriarchy. In this vein, *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested* shares thematic affinity with plays such as Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*, J.P.Clark’s *The Wives Revolt* among others.

The main gender issues addressed in the play are: The basis of bride wealth or bride price; the respect accorded a woman whether married or unmarried and the domestic roles of a woman defined by men. These issues are succinctly articulated by Captain Sharp, the feminist voice of the playwright. In her articulation of the feminist manifesto which appears in part five of the play, she posits that:

Now, the synopsis of the women’s demand is this. We want equal opportunity with men. This means for example that the society should remove the prejudices which prevent women from getting into the highest positions like Heads of State, Governors, Vice-Chancellors and a lot of other top ranking positions including high spiritual offices like that of the Pope or the Sheik (pp.73-74).

This view is supported by Alexandra Kollontai when she says that “women can become truly free and equal only in a world organized along new social and productive lines...” (p.176). The thrust of the women’s rebellion therefore is to extricate women from a life-long domestic imprisonment. They also want to assert themselves as humans capable of aspiring to any social position. The women also debunk long-held patriarchal beliefs of the woman as intoned by Akanbi who believes that “power is not a property to be found in a woman” (p.40). This debased state of women in the play forcefully recalls John Winkler’s observation that “Women in a male-prominent society are thus like a linguistic minority in a culture whose public actions are all conducted in the majority language” (p.585). Jolomi, the husband of Falilat, one of the vociferous members of the B.C.M, also believes that: “Women are better than heard just like a rope does not befit a fowl’s neck, a position of authority does not befit a woman. It mars her femininity.” (p.32) They are as Luce Irigaray attests to “physical containers which have their value as exchange within patriarchal economic and symbolic structures”.

Jolomi’s view of women echoes the atavistic views of Hegel and Aristotle of ancient memory who prescribe the confinement of women to a life of domesticity. Another scene where patriarchal arrogance is unveiled in the play is in the dialogue between Ashake and her brothers-in-law, Clem and James who are in their teens.

Clem: (Sorely) Ashake, I say you have no right...no authority whatsoever to lock that fridge up! It was bought by my brother’s hard earned money.

Ashake: (jeeringly) For how much?

Clem: (Taken aback) Whatever that implies?

Clem: That we got you cheaper than the fridge and for that simple reason, you can’t wield your power over what has a higher price than you.

Clem and James tried to reduce a woman to a mere property. It is because of these perceived indifference towards women that, according to Sharp, the B.C.M “aims at the emancipation of women from the oppressive domination of the men” (p.73). She therefore vows to attack this patriarchal order that creates gender imbalance between the sexes. In her words,

This existing order must be blown into billions of infinitesimal fragments. A new order must emerge. This life of drudgery to which women have been sentenced throughout the ages must alter for a better one. Men should be asked to descend from the Olympian heights in which they have carved an exclusive niche and shake hands with women on the platform of equality. Women must emerge from a state of submissiveness to that of parity if not dominance (pp.16-17).

In order to actualize her goal, Sharp undertakes an indoctrination of the other female rebels in the play, who effect the ideology of revolt in their homes. For instance, Falilat and Tara batter their husbands in their respective homes. Ashake starves her brothers-in-law of food. This feeling of indoctrination also spurs women to assert themselves and to believe that roles are not defined either for the man or the woman. Sabina and Salwa engage in transvestism, they veer into male dominated professions of palm-wine tapping and taxi-driving respectively. The vibrancy of the B.C.M, which hitherto had recorded victories for women, becomes dampened with the role-reversal acts of Akanbi and Jolomi who dress like women, the latter with a baby swaddled on his back, hawking rice. The effectiveness of this act is graphically captured by Chris Dunton:

Most effective of all is the last scene, in which two of the husbands enter into role-reversal, the first borrowing his wife's clothes, making himself as pretty as possible, the second entering with a child strapped to his back, revealing he is making a successful living as a rice-seller...what makes this startling and theatrically daring is the sense that these men are not involved in travesty, that they are not putting on some kind of retributive parody; rather, as they enthusiastically discuss child-raising and prospects in the food-selling business, they are genuinely undergoing some change in their allotted roles (p.106).

This act mesmerizes Salwa and Tara who become pessimistic of the potency of the rebellion in achieving equality with men. In Salwa's words, "How best can a woman fight a man? How best can the war of the sexes be waged without the woman being the sufferer?" (p.94). The answer seems to lie in true love between the sexes. A critical analysis of the last moments of the play makes one to agree, in the main, with Chris Dunton when he says:

The final moments of the play remain open-ended as two of the women, Salwa and Tara, discuss the struggle, first agreeing that equality is perhaps an unrealistic goal and that the confidence of the B.C.M is hubristic; then recognizing the primacy of true love in human relations, finally, however, agreeing that, if not the struggle precisely as defined by the B.C.M., then the struggle to identify new and far more just ways of organizing relations between men and women must continue (p.107).

His disposition is supported by Simone de Beauvoir:

It is for man to establish the reign of liberty in the midst of the world of the given. To gain supreme victory, it is necessary, for one thing, that by and through their natural differentiation, men and women unequivocally affirm their brotherhood (Cited in Achufusi p.105).

It is however necessary to posit that the confidence displayed by the B.C.M in the words of Dunton is not hubristic. It is confidence arising from the pain of subordination by existing patriarchal paradigms in society. Despite the perceived setbacks in the play, the women rebels under the able leadership of Captain Sharp have succeeded in exteriorizing the patriarchal values and beliefs which conspire to emasculate women in their efforts at self-determination and self-fulfillment. They have also risen up boldly to attack the male embodiments of this belief as deducible from our analysis of the play. The probable reasons why the rebellion crumbled were two-fold; the uncertain and unreliable leadership of Captain Sharp and the fact that the rebellion did not receive the support of men in the task of building a new invigorated society.

Oyedepo does not seem to support the rabid radical feminism espoused by her feminist character—Captain Sharp. She obviously does not see the need to break down the social structure before women can exercise their right to contribute in the society. She is rather favourably inclined to the tenets of African feminism which advocates complementarity between the sexes for a more harmonious existence and for social development. To her, feminism is not the reversal of roles. Her view is supported by Nnaemeka who articulates the basic ingredients of African feminism to be “power sharing, complementarity, accommodation, compromise, negotiation, and inclusiveness”. This view coheres with Filomina Steady’s view expressed in her article, “African Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective”. In it, she opines that sexual differences and similarities should be appreciated because the male is not seen by the woman as the “other” rather as part of the human same; thus each gender constitutes the critical half that makes the human whole (p.12) African feminism, according to Steady, fosters parallel autonomy, communalism and cooperation for the preservation of life rather than the frameworks of dichotomy, individualism, competition and opposition, identifiable with Western feminism (p.97). African feminist literary criticism is pro-nationalist and pro-socialist. It affirms the value of women’s status as mothers and even as polygynous co-wives.

African feminism does not intend to replace male hegemony with female domination. It advocates complementarity, as we have already mentioned, between the sexes. The primary objective of African feminism according to Catherine Acholonu is that it enlists the support of men in eradicating retrogressive cultural practices that affect women. It is a feminism which advocates “love, tolerance, service and mutual cooperation for the sexes, not antagonism, aggression, militancy or critical confrontation” plus protection and defense of family values” (Cited in Nnolim, p.218) It therefore does not surprise us that the feminist ideals espoused by Captain Sharp are nipped in the bud in line with Oyedepo’s African feminist leaning.

Brain Has No Gender, is a story about Osomo, the daughter of Alani who is a patriarch in all senses. Osomo defies traditional values, beliefs and negative prejudices against her female gender and with the support of her teacher, runs away from the grips of her parents, furthers her education and emerges as an icon of intellectual excellence. In this regard, Osomo shares the same aspirations with Mercy and Monique in Onyeka Onyekaba’s *Into the World*. In this play, we find Mercy and Monique struggling to achieve academic excellence against the traditional belief that women have no brains and therefore need only as much education as is necessary for their kitchen tasks. In the end, Mercy and Monique become independent self-reliant individuals on their own merit.

In the prelude to the play, the beliefs militating against the progress of women are aptly articulated by the seven feminine voices. According to the 3rd VOICE, these beliefs are “... in particular, beliefs that are negatively prejudicial to women; beliefs that tend to keep women

perpetually relegated to the background” (p.3). It is because of these beliefs, that Alani who does not have a male child, considers the education of his female children a waste of money. Alani’s quest for a male child is best conveyed by him:

Baba, is it not a bitter irony that I , the same one whose masculine power is stronger than that of a horse should father sixteen female children with no male child, no single male child, not even a premature one as evidence of my potency? (p.10).

To have a male child, he goes to the gory extent of feasting “on the faeces of a pig for seven days...had to endure the creepy sensation of a toad in my pants” (p.10). Alani’s longing for a male child is a traditional patriarchal preference that is succinctly conveyed by Firdaus in El-Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero*, on the reaction of her father to female children: “When one of his female children died, my father would eat his supper, my mother would wash his legs and then he would go to sleep, just as he did every night. When the child that died was a boy, he would beat my mother, then have his supper and lie down to sleep” (Cited in Popoola, p.299).

The above view is strengthened by Ayo Kehinde who opines that preference for male pre-dispose the girl-child to danger (physically and psychologically), from birth to childhood. She is seen as a burden, not an asset, to the paterfamilias. A boy child is seen as a person who can enlarge the family. On the other hand, a girl child is seen as one who will reduce the household, because she can be acquired by another family as a wife (Cited in Popoola, pp.299-300)

To Alani, his female children are supposed to be married “off as soon as they see their first period” (p.32). On the other hand, the male offspring has the exclusive right to inherit his father’s wealth though there are other female children in the family who may even be older than the male one. This mental orientation of Alani echoes Sarah Grimke’s view:

Both from experience and observation, that their education is miserably deficient; that they are taught to regard marriage as the one thing needful, the only avenue to distinction; hence to attract the notice and win the attentions of men, by their external charms, is the chief business of fashionable girls (p.48).

The basic gender issue that Oyedepo addresses in this play therefore is patriarchal superciliousness toward the education of the girl-child. The playwright is unequivocally making a dramatic statement that nature does not create a difference in the human brain and that a woman’s brain functions the same way as a man’s. Therefore, like the man, the only way to acquire knowledge is through education. The essence of education for a woman is best captured in the following dialogue:

2nd VOICE: Yes, we need to gain more dignity. How do we do it?

3rd VOICE: (Rises up) I think I have an answer. Let us force open the door of knowledge. Education shall liberate us from suppression. Education shall lift the veil of ignorance from the eyes of all women. Women must go through life with greater visibility.

4th VOICE: Yes, we agree. Education shall rescue us. We too shall join the men in exploring the depths of knowledge. We shall not accept to be mere fetchers of water and hewers of wood. We can do more than housekeepers or glorified slaves.

5th VOICE: (Rises up) But the question is, can we do it? Can a woman’s brain cope with scientific knowledge and investigations, for example?

6th VOICE: Women, yes, we have the grey matter to cope. The human brain does not have gender differentiation. Nature is impartial in this regard. A woman’s brain

does not function less than a man's. No gender difference in the human brain, I repeat. The female has equal brain power as the male.

The female voices above, who are the feminist personae of the playwright give a foretaste of the struggle to come. It is this awareness of the importance of education as articulated by the allegorical characters that drives Osomo to rebel against her eighty-six year old husband and seek education. Against her will, her father Alani, had married her off to Kelani but on her wedding night, she refuses to perform her marital obligation. According to Ejide, "she behaved like a horse which refuses his master a ride" (p.36). Kelani also attests to the battering he received from Osomo, when he admits that "my testicles are badly smashed. Osomo gave me a violent kick on my private part. I am dying" (p.36).

This rebellion by Osomo demonstrates her will power, her doggedness not to acquiesce to early marriage, which would have punctured her dream of an education. Her defiance is one against the traditional practice of early marriage. Her action portrays her as a woman with self-determination in the face of powerful patriarchal forces. She defies oppression which in the words of Marilyn Frye is "constraints and limitations of life's options because of one's identity as a member of a subordinate group" (Cited in McCann and Kim, p.14). She triumphs over long-held traditional beliefs which see no use for the girl-child to be educated. Osomo's action of revolt, forcefully recalls the actions of similar strong-willed female characters in Nigeria who like Ona, who in "her refusal to be an *idegbe* or to have another woman play that in her place are signs of her revolt against obnoxious, obsolete traditions that predispose women to oppression, exploitation, slavery and dehumanization" (Okoh, p.35). Osomo is fired by the renaissance spirit of self-discovery and individual self-assertiveness. She shares the same dream, the same vision like Yemoja in Tess Onwueme's *Tell it to Women*, who epitomizes the regenerative qualities of tradition:

Yemoja: I too want to be a hunter of values with my brother! I too seek to bring back new treasures. How can I always remain here to receive from the hands of my brother? I too have my hands and can fetch the world out there (pp.63-64).

In the end she succeeds in fetching "the world out there" as she excels in her academic pursuits. With the connivance of her teacher, Osomo escapes from home, was able to get a scholarship and furthered her education up to the university level. She graduated in Medicine with the best result ever in the country, and carted away sixteen prizes. She is also currently researching into the cure for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome, possibly with the intention to help humanity in her professional career. The rare academic feat achieved by Osomo in a male dominated profession—medicine—underscores the point that 'what a man can do, a woman can equally do, if not better.' It goes on to validate the play's title that "Brain Has No Gender". Osomo's intellectual accomplishment is a validation of Francois Poullain de la Barre's position that "social custom, not inherent capacity, stunted women's intellectual growth. Since the mind "has no sex," women as well as men have a right to knowledge and to pursue scientific and literary studies." (p.10) Alani himself comes to this point of realization when he says, at the end of the play that "Osomo is a daughter who has done what a thousand sons cannot do". He goes further to say:

I am going to feast in this house for twenty-one days to compensate for my years of mourning. I have mourned and mourned that God didn't give me a male child. Is Osomo not greater than one hundred men? A doctor... a doctor. Now I am a

most happy man. I thank my creator. I thank *Tisha*. I thank *Tisha*. (p.53)

If not for her resistance against patriarchal dictates, Osomo's life would have been a wasted one as she herself attests to: "I think fate was on my side too. Fate smiled on me. You all know my story. If I hadn't escaped from home, I would have led a wasted life as a grand papa's wife. I would have gone into the debris of the times without realizing what I have become." (p.48) The message of Oyedepo is explicit as conveyed by Osomo:

That all female children should be given the benefit of education like male children. Have confidence in the ability of female children. They have brains like male children. So they can distinguish themselves in any field. They can be scientists, they can be doctors, they can excel in any field (p.54)

Oyedepo's ideology of complementarity between the sexes is further driven home in this play through Funmi, whom Jide says has been "branded a feminist advocate on campus":

No! it's surprising that men find it difficult to accept that they aren't superior to women. Now... look at the human anatomy. Nature teaches a simple lesson through it. You will observe that what exists in pairs have equal status in nature's scheme. Our two eyes or two ears, legs, etc. convey the symbolic message of parity. So in essence, the two sexes male and female should therefore be conceived as equal, and partners (p.43).

Like Funmi this need for complementarity is equally expressed by Etusi in Julie Okoh's *In The Fullness of Time*:

Etusi: ...Is there any society made up of men alone? The answer is no. Every society needs healthy men and women in order to survive. Women can only assert themselves if given equal opportunity with men, not as opposite but as equals, working side by side through life... (p.66)

Through the example of the heroine in *Brain Has No Gender*, Oyedepo has shown that with educational empowerment and proper training, women can compete favourably with their male counterparts in any sphere of life. Education makes one more critical about his environment, aware of what his rights are and the courage to fight for those rights. It gives one a sense of self worth and the desire for independence and freedom of expression.

Unlike in *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-chested*, Osomo's revolt receives the support of her male teacher otherwise her rebellion would have been dismantled. Her revolt helps in the realization of the academic potentials in her. In character, she is imbued with the kind of feminist traits we find in the female characters in *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested*. They are strong-willed, highly determined, rebellious and desirous to change the status quo which they fearlessly challenge. They forcefully challenge the patriarchal structure of society, which undermines women and impedes their aspirations and ambitions. In *Brain Has No Gender*, and in *The Wife's Fury*, the patriarchal-ideologues represented by Alani and Sebi respectively, become repentant and are ready to be forgiven of the ignorance they were steeped in. In the realization of his folly, Alani posits that:

We have learned our lessons. All of us. I personally will withdraw all my daughters from their husbands' houses. I shall send them back to school. Let all of them emulate Osomo. Now I do realize the folly of my past actions. Orunmila, forgive me: for I knew not what I was doing. It is ignorance... (p.54).

In *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested*, the private patriarchs do not see any justification for the women's rebellion. They remain dogged in their belief in patriarchy and the privileges it confers on them.

4. CONCLUSION

Stella Oyedepo is one of the most prolific female playwrights in Africa. As a feminist playwright, Oyedepo has effectively used the medium of her plays to foreground the suppression, oppression and marginalization of women in society. She has attributed all these to patriarchal culture which hegemonizes the man over the woman. This researcher analyzed two of her plays where she rejects the phallogocentric perspectives by which men traditionally have justified the subjugation of women. These two plays include: *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested* and *Brain Has No Gender*. The feminist thrust of *Brain Has No Gender* is on girl-child education. A major weakness in *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested* however, is the climate of irresolution which betrays lack of a clear feminist stance. The play appears to be only tangentially informed by a feminist agenda. The dramatic form seems to reinforce the status quo. The world of the play, however depicts the culture as supercilious to the condition of women.

Feminism is not opposed to African culture and heritage, but argues that culture is dynamically evolving and certainly not static, that culture should not be immobilized in time to the advantage of men as most men in Africa want it to be. Culture should not be a tool for oppression and marginalization in the hands of men, but a tool to improve our existential conditions as suggested by Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie:

Should culture be placed in a museum of minds or should we take authority over culture as a product of human intelligence and consciousness to be used to improve our existential conditions? Should we preach cultural fidelity only when it does not affect us negatively, which is usually the position of African men who wish to keep only those aspects of culture which keep them dominant? (p.548)

Certain cultural practices tested over generations in Nigeria which subordinate women need to be pulverized. In the words of Oduyoye, "the transformation of negative attitudes towards women would come only as the community of women and men became open to re-examining faith-based discrimination against women and cultural provisions for downgrading the humanity of women"(p.1). Men and women are in fact, biologically different but complementary. It is only when this complementarity is broken that the complexes of inferiority and superiority will emerge. The concept of complementarity between the sexes is stressed in such classical works as Ovid's *The Art of Love* and *Metamorphoses*. Simone de Beauvoir supports this position; "it is for man to establish the reign of liberty in the midst of the world of the given. To gain supreme victory, it is necessary, for one thing, that by and through their natural differentiation, men and women unequivocally affirm their brotherhood (p.105).

Stella Oyedepo is an unswerving advocate of this position. She believes strongly that society will develop immensely only when men and women con-join in the development process. This view, she vividly expresses through her plays, especially in the ones we have analyzed in this work. As a feminist playwright, Stella Oyedepo's objective is to disprove the view that "to be born female in this culture means that you are born 'tainted', that there is something intrinsically wrong with you that you can never change, that your birthright is one of innate inferiority" (O'Beirne p.xvi). Her drama seeks a transformation of the structures of a primarily male power which presently orders the Nigerian society Oyedepo is an African feminist who has undoubtedly, through her plays, raised her objection to the dehumanizing treatment of women. She has also strongly condemned cultural adherence to pristine traditional practices which adversely affect women. She has created vibrant educated, assertive and radical women who fearlessly questioned patriarchal paradigms and privileges. She is of the view that patriarchy which is structured in a hierarchy is due for revision.

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