



Sex Strike in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, J.P Clark's *Wives' Revolt* and Julie Okoh's *Edewede*

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Abstract

Issues of injustice, exploitation and dehumanisation on the domestic setting are usually downplayed. They become national points only and when women revolt against such indignities. The three plays chosen for this study centre on women's protests incessant wars, unjust sharing formula and circumcision. The women in the plays are fearless against a patriarchal system that tries to stifle their social, economic, personal, medical, and psychological rights. Thus, the paper interrogates female dynamism and bonding and the nature of their protest in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, J. P. Clark's *Wives' Revolt* and Julie Okoh's *Edewede*. Issues common to their protest are the critical identification of the root of the problem, democratically discussing it, taking of oaths to enforce compliance from weaker ones and most importantly, the refusal of sex to men. This denial is a sacrificial step needed to register their dissatisfaction and disenchantment with the status-quo. In the three plays, sex strike as a significant icon becomes the point of men's capitulation. Its viability or otherwise will be interrogated. Using such concepts as Radical and Cultural Feminism as theoretical orientation, the paper critically examines how women can transform their lives and situation without lifting physical weapon but by asserting their dignity and uniqueness using what they have and employing their differences as instruments of social re-ordering.

Keywords: patriarchal system, capitulation, Cultural Feminism, social re-ordering

Introduction

This paper examines sex strike as a major form of women's protests against incessant wars, unjust sharing formula and circumcision in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, J. P. Clark's *Wives' Revolt* and Julie Okoh's *Edewede*. The women in the plays are fearless against a patriarchal system that tries to stifle their social, economic, personal, medical and psychological rights. This female protest in the three plays takes the form of refusal of sex with men. The denial is a necessary step to register their dissatisfaction and disenchantment with the status-quo. In the three plays, sex strike as a significant icon becomes the point of men's capitulation.



Thus, this paper explores women's reactions to issues of injustice, especially the dehumanisation directed at them by the male folks. Patriarchy plays a huge role in dehumanising the female folk. In any patriarchal society, male dominance is the order of the day. The relation between male and female is organised around an imbalance that puts the male in a more advantageous position than the female. Women are defined primarily through their relation to men; they are either mothers, wives, lovers or daughters. In this way, they are subjected to men in whatever circumstance or situation in which they find themselves. Men and women are born equally but culture and society confer on them roles which become defining characteristics by which they are noted and regarded.

Methodology

The study is largely a qualitative one; it is based on interpretations of the central ideas in the selected play. Therefore, the study is basically interpretive. I seek to isolate the central idea of women's revolt and through rigorous textual analysis of the texts, establish my argument.

The work is a comparative study of a Greek playwright and two Nigerian dramatists; one a male who belong to the first-generation dramatists in Nigeria and the other a female playwright in contemporary time. My choice of the texts is informed by the centrality of the idea in the three texts. Aristophanes wrote in ancient Greece while the two Nigerians wrote in modern day postcolonial Nigeria. It is interesting to note the commonality in their topic and therefore, its universality. The uniqueness of the protest in each text will be highlighted as peculiarities of difference in culture.

Again, the authors are selected because of their choice of comedy to express their criticism of their societies. Through humour, they ridicule the existing system in both communities, without being overtly critical.

Theoretical Framework

Feminism has its different brands as many as the different shades and categories of women associating and imbibing it. According to Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, one of the earliest women to theorise and apply the theory in the Nigerian context, feminism can be right-wing, left-wing, centrist, left of the centre, right of the centre, reformist, separatist, liberal, socialist, Marxist, non-aligned and indigenous. As long as it is an ideology of women and its concerns are the female question, it is valid (232). Women of colour, because of their peculiar needs have coined their version of feminism as Womanism (coined by Alice Walker). Given the



different oppositions to feminism as an ideology from white women, many women writers in Nigeria have run away from the label. Being a feminist in Nigeria has been equated with “angry women” and being frustrated. It is in view of the aversion to the name, and given the culture of the people that Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie has advocated STIWANISM as a more acceptable form for Africans. STIWA is from STIWANISM which is an acronym for *Social Transformation Including Women in Africa*. It describes Ogundipe-Leslie’s view of feminism in Africa that suits all Africans without their being accused of Euro-centrism. It is a form that recognises the issue of women empowerment, her condition and oppression within the African context. To her, there are indigenous structures, sites and spaces in traditional African cultures that give voice to the women. She believes that with this ideology, women will be given more space as co-partners in order to transform the African society (229). This view is central to the argument in this paper that women should be included in the social and political transformation of the society. Men ought not to be assigned to the so-called public sphere and women assigned to the domestic aspect when both genders can work together to transform society.

Therefore, using Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie’s STIWANISM and the feminist concepts of female bonding and sisterhood as theoretical orientation, the paper critically examines how women can transform their lives and situation without lifting physical weapon but by asserting their dignity and uniqueness using what they have and employing their differences as instruments of social re-ordering.

Central to this discussion is the concept of gender as a study that examines the power relations between male and female. Patriarchy has helped to entrench male dominance. Men are seen as superior because the society and culture construed them as that while women play subordinate roles. Women’s sphere of influence is the domestic space and men feature prominently in the political, economic, social, cultural, religious and military spheres. Thus, a great deal of inequality exists between men and women. Studies dealing with this issue, for example, include Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1953) and Betty Friedman’s *Feminine Mystique* (1963). The birth of feminism in the 1960s helps to articulate all the issues relating to women’s oppression, condition and injustices against women. There were many women’s movements in history and in the media that instigated feminism as a cultural, political, social and economic drive to address women’s inequality in different societies. (see Ikpe Blankson Eno 7).



As a cultural feminist, Ogunidipe-Leslie believes in the difference between men and women either as physical or biological but she encourages women to emphasise their uniqueness. Women by their nature are gentle and kind. Their sense of “interdependence, cooperation, relationship, community, sharing, joy, trust and peace” (Blankson Ikpe 11-12) must be encouraged, rather than seen as drawbacks.

STIWANISM sees women as voiceless and docile in the public sphere where their husbands dominate. It preaches the involvement of women in the political and social issues of the state for the society to move forward. Ogunidipe-Leslie believes that this dichotomy must be challenged (11). She states that “women have to participate as co-partners in social transformation” (230). As will be shown, women form movements in all three plays in order to eradicate the oppression and injustice against them. They are activists, yet they celebrate their unique differences as capable of generating and commanding a change of attitude in their men. They reject the men and employ sex strike to insist on their viewpoints.

Female bonding or Sisterhood, a central issue in all forms of feminism is also germane to this discussion. According to Lois Tyson, sisterhood is “the psychological and political bonding among women based on the recognition of common experiences and goals” (96). Since all women according to feminists suffer patriarchal oppression, women need to come together in solidarity and fight against a common enemy who may be men or patriarchal structures and institutions that subjugate them. Oyeronke Oyewumi, also sees “sisterhood as a mantra which assumes the common victimhood of all women” (3). She sees the concept as a “dominant model for feminine intercommunity relations” (3). bell hooks refers to sisterhood as women partnering with one another to fight patriarchy. It is a “slogan, motto, rallying cry” (44). To her, sisterhood is the “spirit of power in unity An expression of political solidarity Solidarity strengthens resistance struggle. There can be no mass-based feminist movement to end sexist oppression without a united front – women must take the initiative and demonstrate the power of solidarity” (44). In spite of the laudable idea of women coming together to fight patriarchy, bell hooks is aware that there are so many cultural differences that may not make all women unite. She gives the example of the issue of women of colour and white women. However, sisterhood remains a central concept to the analysis of this paper since it appears to be a fundamental concept to both Western and African women. Women all over Greece (Western) and in Nigeria (African) as would be



revealed by the three plays of this study join forces through female solidarity and resist the male forces that put them “under.”

The issue dramatised in the plays bothers on domestic politics; the struggle between male and female at the private and marital level and not at the public sphere. This refers to the relations between a man and his wife in their home which is private and internal unlike issues of public concerns. The idea of sex is crucial to this discussion because of the gendered roles apparent in the societies depicted in the selected plays. Lois Tyson gives us a view of what this word means in *Critical Theory Today* as she tries to distinguish the words sex from gender. She states that “sex refers to our biological constitution as female or male and the word gender refers to our cultural programming as feminine or masculine, which are categories created by society rather than nature (83). Feminists do not query the biological differences. Rather, they celebrate them. In other words, certain biological differences exist between a male and a female. These differences should not be seen as reasons to denigrate one gender under the other. In fact, the unique difference should be celebrated rather than being seen as the points on which men must render women powerless (83).

Discussion

Lysistrata is a classical play that connects with modern women’s quest for the assertion of the primacy of their domestic role. Aristophanes constructed this play as a comedy but it holds great promise for feminist activism. Providing a background to the play, A. B. Worthen states that the play is

One of several plays critical of Athens’ war with Sparta. Produced in 411BCE, the play follows shortly on a disastrous phase of the war for Athens. Two years earlier, the Athenian raid on Sicily had failed and the navy was decimated, leaving Athens vulnerable to attack by Sparta. Although the navy was rebuilt before Sparta mounted its final assault, Athens fell to Sparta in 404BCE. (79)

It is this incessant war mongering of men that the women in Greece attempt to resist in *Lysistrata*. Hitherto, a woman’s place has been limited to the kitchen. Her significance is limited to her role as wife and mother. Whenever she tries to intervene in politics or activities other than domestic ones, she is remonstrated. In the society that produced *Lysistrata*, women were seen as significant only in their relation to men and not as individuals who are capable of sustained intellectual power. Against this backdrop, the play gives voice to the status of women in Greece at that time. Whenever the women ask their husbands of the



decisions made on the war; they are shunned, ignored or chastised. The men seem to say by their actions that women need not bother their pretty, little heads about issues beyond their status. Thus, these women are mere objects in the hands of their men; they should be toyed with and not be allowed to think.

Lysistrata sees the futility of wars and the much devastation the wars have caused. She sees the inability of men to put an end to the wars and she takes up the challenge to mobilise women to fight against men's reckless desire to wage wars. To achieve her aim, she invites women from all parts of Greece. They do not see themselves as opponents; rather, they are united by their sex and the commonality of their experience. Their husbands get killed in the war, yet the men persist in war mongering. Their aim is to unite "so no man in our time will raise a spear against another man" (81). It is significant that they are not fighting for themselves alone but for mankind. Lysistrata is aware that the survival of her country depends on the women because men have failed in ending the war. She encourages, prompts and convinces the women of the urgency of their action and the necessity of revolt.

Therefore, the women's grouse against their men is justified. They have every reason to be angry and their desire to intervene in the politics of Greece is timely. Their sons are sent to war, they have to spend lonely nights and their young girls grow old without husbands. Lysistrata captures this well: "Don't you all miss the fathers of your little ones, your husbands who are gone away to war? I'm sure you all have husbands in the armies far from home (82). Kalonike, Mrryhina and Lampito (women like Lysistrata in the play) express the loneliness they feel as a result of the continuous absence of their men. Lysistrata convinces them on the need for a concerted effort to end the war: "would you be willing then, if I thought out a scheme, to join with me to end the war?" (82). All the women agree to work with her in the face of the negative consequences of the actions of their male folk.

Lysistrata had to employ several tactics to get the women out of their homes so as to actively participate in the cause. These are women who are so attached to their homes and know nothing outside it. Even after they have assembled at the Acropolis, many of them gave flimsy excuses to go back to their homes. When the women move from their homes and occupy the Acropolis, they are making a statement, which is political. They call into question and undermine the belief that men only have access to the Acropolis; the political sphere. Men believe that the site (Acropolis) was meant for them alone while their wives and the mothers of their children should remain in the home and the kitchen; the domestic space. By



moving to the Acropolis and barricading themselves in, the women state clearly by their action that they are no longer ready to be subservient to men. Thus, they put themselves at the centre stage and overturn the gendered division of roles.

STIWANISM as the theoretical framework for this paper is crucial to what these women attempt to do. As Ogundipe-Leslie advocates, men and women are created equally. That there is division of roles according to sex and sexuality is a societal creation. While the women are not advocating the exclusion of men from the society, they are asking for equal treatment. They are saying that women's roles are as superior as male roles. As stated by Worthen, Lysistrata addresses the politics of its era in a variety of ways. It is, of course, a passionate plea for peace" (80). He argues further that "there is also an implication of an equality between men and women ... the women claim that the morality of their domestic sphere is superior to the military morality pursued by the men and to get the women back, the men are forced to compromise with them (80). This is the whole aim of the resistance - to transform the society and make it better by men recognising the role of women, not as subservient but equal partners.

As the central character, Lysistrata uses the power of rhetoric, reason and logic to get the women mobilised against men's oppression. She is certain that her scheme of withholding sex from men is capable of stopping the war. To ensure compliance from the women, Lysistrata makes them to take an oath. An oath becomes necessary in the face of weaknesses from some of the women. All of them decide to become battle axes to end the wars. The Acropolis becomes the centre of the revolt. Acropolis is a fortress where money is kept and to prevent the men from spending it as they liked on war, the women barricaded it and the originator of the idea becomes the spokesperson. They intend to transfer the skills with which they manage their homes to the management of the polity. But the chorus of men and the old men pitch their anger against the women's action. To them, the action is a daring one. They cannot imagine that the wives they "fed and looked upon as helpless liabilities, now dare to occupy the Parthenon, our whole Acropolis" (84). The men, therefore, try all means to quell the women's rebellion.

The exchange between the chorus of men and the chorus of women is like a debate on the age long battle of the sexes. The men, on one hand, want to do all to undermine the power the women have suddenly acquired while the women try to reinforce their position further by resisting the men. The arrival of the Commissioner with the four Police men to



force the women out enraged the women more and worsens the situation the more. The Commissioner is the voice of the men, the voice of brute force and authority as aptly encapsulated in the speech below. He ridicules them thus: “Has the extravagance of women broken out into fury with their banging tambourines” (85). He is furious at the action of the women and he considers it an extravagance. Thus, he calls on his assistance to force the women out of the place. He prefers brute force to dialoguing with the women. Lysistrata counters this show of force by making herself a sacrificial lamb and coming out to face the Commissioner and his men. To her, “brains are better than bolts and bars....No need to pry at all. I am coming out, of my own will. What use are bars? It isn’t bolts and bars we need so much as brains (86).

Lysistrata’s response to the police commissioner underlines the whole essence of the women’s revolt. The men can be physical in terms of physical strength and power while the women are seen as weak and not so strong and are therefore subordinated to men’s authority. Yet, in their weakness, they are strong because of their brains. Women are not depicted to be fighting wars in the play but they have brains to think things through.. The Commissioner cannot stomach the affront, so he resorts to name calling and abusive words such as “You dirty slut.” The conversation between him and Lysistrata expands the theme of the battle of the sexes. The chorus of men attests to the fact that women can have “daring heart, indeed, they have wits, a fine figure and boldness of heart, they are prudent and charming, efficient and smart, patriotic and brave” (87).

The Commissioner attempts to arrest Lysistrata. She does not cower in the presence of force but she remains strong, unflinching, determined and resolute. Seeing her resolve, the other women rally round her. She paints the picture and the culture of silence that men have forced on their wives:

Heretofore we women in time of war
Have endured very patiently through it,
Putting up with whatever you men might do,
For never a peep will you let us
Deliver on your unstatesmanly acts
No matter how much they upset us
But we know very well, while we sat at home
When you’ll handled a big issue poorly



And we'd ask you then with a pretty smile
 Though our hearts will be grieving us sorely
 And what were the terms for a truce, my dear,
 You drew up in assembly this morning?
 And what's it to you? says our husband, "Shut up!"
 So as ever, at this gentle warning
 I, of course would discreetly shut up. (87)

In the play, many women have kept quiet when their husbands force them to. This culture of silence has turned the women taciturn. Whatever idea they may have is killed before it is given life. Many of them have learnt to keep quiet or else the men may resort to beating them as is the case of Kalonike, one of the female protesters.

Lysistrata employs modern day notion of Sisterhood. Although the women are from Sparta and the other city-states but are united by their common oppression. They unite under the leadership of Lysistrata and organised themselves. Their weapons of war are baskets of vegetables and spindles from the market women with which they make a volley of vegetables. In spite of the ridicule the Commissioner puts them through, the women bonded in order to transform their lives, resist oppression and maintain their dignity.

Notwithstanding the superior argument of the women, men see the women's daring revolt as mere dictatorship in a that culture women are not in any position to dictate to men. In furtherance of their beliefs, both the chorus of men and of women tell a story to support their views on the revolt and to ascertain who is superior. While the men's story sees women as "hateful and disgusting" human beings, the women's story show women as "delightful and sound." Both stories reinforce the battle of the sexes that underlies and affirms the revolt.

Again, Aristophanes creates a scene in which Mrryhina's husband comes to the Acropolis to bring his wife home. As dramatized, he brings his son with him to blackmail her to abandon the cause. The baby is used as a cheap emotional blackmail to derail the women's cause and it would have worked but for the cunning and wisdom of Mrryhina. She uses delay tactics to delay him until he succumbs. Her ability to postpone the sexual act he demands is commendable. Her fall for his entreaties and the child's cries is a bait. In the end, a truce was called and the Spartans and Athenians reconcile their differences because of the women's strike.



J. P. Clark's *Wives' Revolt* like Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* is also built on women's revolt against an unjust and unequal treatment meted out to women by the men. In the play, the women like in *Lysistrata* come together to protest the way they are exploited by their male folk. Although Clark asserts that the play was informed by lines from Udje poetry, many critics such as Chinweizu *et al* have seen Clark's indebtedness to Greek plays and culture in his earliest plays such as *Song of a Goat*. Perhaps *Wives Revolt* may also be an adaptation of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, in the sense of women revolting against men. The play seems to have been transposed to the Niger-Delta region where the issue of compensation for damaged streams and polluted rivers is rife. The Niger-Delta in Nigeria is where majority of the crude oil comes from. It is also a place that is generally not so developed and the youth are continuously restive.

The crux of this play revolves around the women's protest when the compensation arrives. The money is divided into three: one for the elders, one for the men and the last for the women. Significantly, the elders are made up of men. In that case, the men have two-thirds while the women have one-third. The women consider this an insult. They see the distribution as unjust, unfair and exploitative. To them, it is a discrimination against their sex. Therefore, they revolt in their own way. The men see their action as reckless since the women are "fed up with doing simple duties for their husbands and children as befits good housewives." This much is garnered from Okoro, the town crier's proclamation. The men believe that the women who are asking for equal allocation are acting against ancient custom and laws. They support their position with tradition.

STIWANISM as a theoretical view is in line with the women agitation. Its aim is not the ostracising of the men but to make them see the reason for including women in the men's deliberations. To transform society, women need to assert themselves not in the radical removal of men from the equation but in harnessing the gains of sisterhood, uniting to fight for their rights. This is necessary for the inclusion of women in the debate for moving the society forward. The sexist ideology and debilitating effects of patriarchy need to be eradicated through the concerted effort of women. In this play, the women also employ sex strike as in Aristophanes' play.

The society under discourse is a patriarchal one where men dictate the system of things and women are only significant in their relations with men. Because of this, the activities and roles are divided along gender lines. The men provide for their family while the



women engage in domestic work and bear children. Men keep the more profitable animals while women keep goats. Goats are domestic animals that do not fetch as much money as swine. Owing to this reality, and in furtherance of men's exploitation and oppression of women in the play, goats must be eradicated because they are women's area of jurisdiction and more because women are now turning to goats through witchcraft and magic. The play is divided into six parts. Each part encompasses the gradual development of the play from its exposition to the denouement and are so aptly titled. Okoro, the town crier makes the proclamation that leads to the dissent and the protest. The walk-out is as a result of the disagreement and this leads to men performing women's job such as backing babies and singing lullaby. Generally, roles were inverted. The women return after being wooed back by the men but they have caught a disease. The men join the women in finding a cure for this disease and the play ends on the reclamation where the earlier proposal is revisited.

Juliana Okoh writing on "Redefining Cultural Traditions in Nigerian Feminist Drama" observes that "the need to liberate women from the repressive burden arising from the cultural structures of patriarchy and gender hierarchy inevitably becomes the ultimate aim of Clark in *The Wives' Revolt* (86). It must be noted that it was the revolt that led to men's awareness and recognition that women are a group worthy to be reckoned with in the sharing of compensation revenue. Like the Aba women riot, the Niger-Delta women embark on a revolt to assert their dignity and equality. They rebel against the way men have treated them. They boycott their homes, leaving husbands and children in order to press home their point. In the process, they move from town to town seeking sympathy, which they got. Unfortunately, they also got what they did not bargain for; they were infected with venereal disease. They did not get this from sexual relations but from the use of common convenience with a prostitute who hosted them. With this knowledge, the women rush back home. At first Okoro, Koko's husband is scandalised and he rains abuses on his wife. He assumes that she has been unfaithful. She is labelled as uncaring and inconsiderate leaving her husband and her children for so long to join the women's revolt. Interestingly, the older women in the village also join the strike by refusing to assist the fathers in taking care of the children and providing food for them. Ultimately, the men realise their folly and call a doctor to take care of the women while again capitulating to the women's demand. Their resolve to yield to the women's demands is based on the physical and emotional trauma they suffered during the women's absence. They realise the superiority of women in the domestic sphere. The money



that caused the dispute is to be used to build schools for the children and for the common good. The revolt makes the men realise that with women by their side, they can succeed. In the words of Okoro “husbands will continue to share with their wives whatever fortune comes their way” (62).

In Julie Okoh’s *Edewede*, the issue of the girl child circumcision is the major grouse that leads to the women’s revolt. In many African societies, men have always hidden under the cover of tradition and culture to oppress, exploit, and dehumanise women. The play examines the pros and cons of circumcision and submits that the odds are too much against the practice. The play is Okoh’s attempt to expose the social, emotional and medical effects of this age long tradition and advocate for its eradication. She sees the young girls as victims who are not only physically and emotional traumatised but can also die in the process of being circumcised. In the village of Otoedo land (the setting of the play), just like in any African society, young girls are initiated into adulthood and circumcised into taking up roles as wives and mothers. Great, grandmothers performed this ritual and they encourage younger ones to take part in it. It is their joy and Oseme’s grandmother, Ebikere, as the custodian of tradition conveys this sentiment: “Circumcision is part of our culture. My mother was circumcised. So also, were her grandmother, great grandmother, and great, great, great grandmothers. It is a rite that every woman in this land goes through”(2). Thus, it is unthinkable for anyone to abstain from this rite. Yet, because of the way it is carried out, many young women have died from infection and from excessive bleeding resulting from circumcision.

Edewede, Oseme’s mother stands against this age-long tradition. Her first daughter died from the effect of circumcision. She does not only query it, she does all within her power to resist it because she does not want to lose another daughter again. Edewede says:

What about those girls who do not return to the village and never become mourned, after bleeding to death? Regarded as sacrifice, they are left behind for the vultures to feed on. Tell her also about those girls who do not live long because of the infection contacted during the operation. Go on, tell her about all of them. (5)

The excerpt above is just the beginning of Edewede’s radical stance against circumcision. In the bid to encourage Oseme to perform the rituals, her grandmother paints the picture of the initiation ceremony and the circumcision which follows as a glorious thing without letting her also know about the side effects. Edewede’s crucial intervention at this



stage is met with the old woman's disgust and abuse. Edewede calls for a dialogue that will prepare Oseme for the rites. The old woman runs away from the discussion. Ebikere, the old woman, supports herself with tradition and views circumcision as "a thing of joy, prestige and cultural identity." She believes in history that must not change and follows the priest's and oracle's instructions without questioning them. To win her mother-in-law to her side, Edewede embarks on a serious campaign. The first of such campaign is with her husband. She prepares for him his favourite meal and tenderly argues her case for the eradication of circumcision without resorting to hysterics and anger. She arms herself with facts and knowledge. She is able to present the case of Mama Nurse and her daughters and granddaughters who are not circumcised but are living well as wives and mothers.

The play goes into a flashback and presents the traumatic experience of the death of Edewede's daughter, Ize, from bleeding (as a result of infection from circumcision). The playwright purposively makes Mama Nurse's orthodox medicine effective against the oracle and its priest's prescription. She believes that tradition, customs and the village priests have failed us and that the hope of survival for the young girls lie in orthodox medicine represented here by Mama Nurse.

At the stage of her daughter's death, Edewede becomes helpless. She is, however, encouraged by Mama Nurse, also called Eriala. Eriala's words help her to see her position not as a victim but one where she needs to work on herself and rise up to challenge the obstacles against her. Edewede sees her land as one "where men are born to dish out commands and women to carry them out and suffer in silence (20-21). Eriala enlightens Edewede that she can make a change if only she believes in herself and is bold and not "weakened by fear" (21). She is encouraged to rise above her state of victimhood and act. The first action she needs to embark on is talk, hold discussions with other women, and make them see that they have been blindfolded by ignorance and superstition. Edewede is emboldened by her personal loss. She does not care what may happen to her in the process of going against tradition. She becomes resolute even in the face of losing her husband.

Act 3 is aptly titled "Dilemma." It represents the stage of confusion for Edewede. Just as it is with Shakespeare's Hamlet, Edewede is caught between moving forward or remaining still. Her first speech in this Act is reminiscent of Hamlet's famous speech "To be or not to be." Edewede says:



To do or not to do, that is the question. Whichever I choose, I'm bound to lose one of the two dearest people in my life. One is urging me to act, the other restraining. Husband, daughter, me, marital love, maternal love: Both equally important; both deserving equal commitment... (26)

The above quote is reminiscent of Hamlet, in Shakespeare's play where he was faced with dilemma. Ebungbe, another character in the play faces expulsion from her husband's house because of infertility. According to Edewede, circumcision is the main cause of Vesico-Vaginal Fistula (VVF), which caused the death of Akalo, in the village.

Through the exchange between Edewede and Ebungbe, the playwright enlightens the reader of the danger of circumcision. The medical terms used in the dialogue above shows that Okoh is aware of the danger young women are exposed to when circumcision is not properly done.

Edewede becomes the beacon of hope for the women. Ebum rallies the market women towards Edewede's cause and their cause too. Through her strong rhetoric, she can convince the other women to join in the revolt. Female solidarity is employed against a common enemy, tradition. Eriala, the medical person among them, educates them on the negative effect of circumcision. They gather to discuss a common problem and to free themselves from the shackles of tradition, ignorance and superstition which have held them down. Juliana Okoh explains that "the play emphasises that female identity does not necessary reside in slavish adherence to culturally determined normative conduct, but on the ability and willingness to cultivate and sustain some vision of female authority" (85). The women's coming together as sisters and victims gave them the power to resist female circumcision.

There are attempts made to distract Edewede from her resolve. Her late mother appeared to her warning her of her dream of making her husband happy. A traditional object, to attack her and pronounce her banishment was sent to her; a ritual where her husband curses her and banishes her. However, the other women like sisters, bonded to resist the move to ostracise Edewede by taking an oath of solidarity. In a counter ritual, they remove their clothes, to add seriousness to the ritual. They agree to also refrain from sexual relations with their husbands. They also agree to stay away from their homes. Sisterhood is crucial to the women's agitation. The women found the common enemy in patriarchy, not just the men but, also in older women who insist on tradition at the expense of life and growth. The women are



commonly oppressed by men. To fight against the sense of common victimhood, they had to apply female solidarity and bonding. This unity is to fight patriarchy and transform their communities.

Conclusion

The paper has examined the status of women in two different societies; ancient and modern, and their revolt against patriarchal structures that limit their freedom and dehumanise them. The three plays show the women's revolt against men who believe that their roles are superior to women's roles. Women had to resort to their sexuality to assert their rights and dignity. *Lysistrata* organises the Greek women to refuse and withhold sex from their husbands in order to press home their peaceful view over men's war mongering attitude. Women in Clark's *Wives Revolt* rebel against their menfolk's unjust treatment in the unequal distribution of compensation fees by abandoning their roles. The men see that they cannot do it alone. So, they are forced to bring back their women. In *Edewede*, Julie Okoh uses women's revolt to drive home her view about the negative effects of female circumcision. The female gender that has been rated as inferior and second rated becomes a strong weapon on which they affirm their dignity. Women's sexuality becomes an instrument of social engineering. Their efforts pay off as the men realise that they need the women because in their absence, things did not go on well. In all three plays, women's actions open the eyes of men to the precarious realities of their lives without the women and a compromise is reached which transforms gender relations in the communities.

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