

**THEMES AND STYLE IN JULIE OKOHS'S "*OUR WIFE FOREVER*"**

**BY**

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BENIN CITY**

**MAY, 2023**

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**AN ORIGINAL ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
AND LITERATURE, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN  
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## CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that the project titled themes and style in Julie Okoh “*Our Wife Forever*” was under taken by Mrs. Ona Naomi OPENE of the Department of English and Literature, University of Benin, Benin City.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Dr. Emmanuel B. Adeleke**  
**(Project Supervisor)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to the Almighty God, the author and finisher of my faith.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

All glory and honour to God Almighty, the giver of knowledge who always have been my fortress and source of inspiration without him nothing good and concrete would have been achieved.

My profound gratitude goes to my wonderful supervisor, Dr. Adeleke a man of integrity and high reputation. My unreserved appreciation goes to my beloved parents Mr. Opene Okechukwu and Mrs. Opene Felicia for their love and laying the foundation of my education and also to my siblings and to my beloved Husband for their love and prayers.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Julie Okoh's "*Our Wife Forever*" can be defined as a conflict between the past and the present. It is a dramatization of an attempt to keep still relevant values which once upon a time were, to all intents and purposes desiderata of the soul of peace and harmony in a patriarchal community. But time has changed and a community no longer needs them for its sustenance. The insistence of Thomas on subjugating Victoria, His late brother's wife and her children to the atavistic customs and traditions is the epicenter of the turmoil that quakes and propels the plot of the play.

As if the subjection of the widow to inhuman funeral rites were not nauseous enough, attempts are made by Thomas to separate his widowed sister-in-law from her late husband's property if she would not accept the fact that her husband's death had automatically made her his wife "you are my wife already". (58) He has earlier reminded her of their custom that says: "when a widow decides to remarry, she forfeits every entitlement to her late husband's property" (37)

No one could reason him out of his benighted ideas. Not even his late brother's best friend, Felix, a university professor whom he, incidentally sees as an "opportunist". (59) and impediment to the actualization of his ambition.

For Thomas, love has no place in marriage. Men marry "because they need a wife" (60) Okoh's play, however, is not only about super annulated handling of widowhood and inheritance. It x-rays the patriarchal society on whose values Thomas bases his claim. a society where men get away with inhuman oppression of the women, often with the connivance and for concurrence of older women. Thomas sees nothing "discriminative"

about the cultural practices in a patriarchy on which he bases his right to inherit his late elder brother's wife along with her husband's property (58).

Thus, his stand on the issue of the place of the woman in a patriarchy is not inferior to that of the man because he maintains, it is only an aspect of division of labour. "By right she is a person, a muntu, to use the Bantu word, just as much as man, "he insists, "if in the family and in society women appear to have inferior tasks, that is only outwardly so in reality, there is division, not a hierarchization of work". Senghor is worried neither by the fact that it is the man that does the "division" nor by the truth that the part of the labour reserved for the woman relegates her mainly to the kitchen and bedroom.

Yet Okoh's play is not a treatise, the apparent disquisitions on the position of the woman and cultural practices: funeral rites, widowhood and inheritance notwithstanding, admittedly the play demonstrate the importance of the writing of wills by husbands before their death. "*Our wife forever*" is simply a piece of reality captured laced with streaks of surrealism as embodied in the use of dreams, and artistically presented. It deploys puns and some other human generating tropes as well as songs and dance to douche the tragic complexion of some of the episodes. The result is that the audience is made, to borrow the phrase of the great African-American writer, Langston Hughes to "Laugh to keep from weeping".

Okoh's characters are well conceived and expertly delineated. The names of some of them are so significance that an audience cannot but wonder if their creator intended them to be symbolic. Hector, for instance, is the name of the absent hero in Jean Racine's *Andromaque* who controls the action of his widow, *Andromaque* and this is exactly what Okoh's Hector does in "*our wife forever*" where Victoria, like *Andromaque*, Racines

widow, is guided by the memories of her dead husband and absent hero. And Victoria's brother-in-law, a Thomas, he doubts not only the determination and capability of Victoria to withstand his excruciating pressure. Faith and Hope also play out the implications of their names.

Julie Okoh's "*Our Wife Forever*" laments the hateful position accorded to the woman in a society dominated by men who refuse to move with time. It also sings of love without which a possessor of all other gifts is nothing but "a resounding gong or clanging cymbal" (1 Cor. 13:1).

## **1.0 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

In recent past, the president of the federal of Nigeria, President Mohamadu Buhari sarcastically responded to his wife's BBC radio interview in such a way that one would want to ask what is the fate of the women folk in a country such as ours, where her president directly or indirectly states in an interview that the women folk belong to "the kitchen, the living room and the other room" alone? (2) The family is often equated with sanctuary- a place where individuals seek love, peace, safety, security, and shelter, etc; however, this false idea is unhurriedly fading out as it has also become a place that breeds some of the most drastic forms of violence perpetrated against the women. Domestic violence and abuse against the women continue to be a global epidemic that tortures, maims, and even kills: physically, psychologically, sexually, mentally and even economically. It is one of the most pervasive of human rights violence, denying women equality, security, dignity, self-worth, and the right to enjoy fundamental freedom. Although violence against women is omnipresent, cutting across all boundaries of culture,

class, education, income, ethnicity, and age. Domestic violence is the most prevalent; yet, it is relatively hidden and deliberately ignored form of violence against women.

Violence in the domestic sphere in most cases is usually perpetrated by the male folks who are, or who have been in positions of trust, intimacy, and power, such as husbands, boyfriends, fathers, father-in-law, step fathers, brothers, uncles, sons, and even other relatives. The term 'domestic violence' as used here includes, violence against women by an intimate partner, including a cohabiting partner, and by other family members, whether this violence occurs within or beyond the confines of the home. (Mehr khan, 12). Violence against women is often a cycle of abuse that manifests itself in many forms throughout their lives. Even at the very beginning of her life, a girl may be the target of sex, selective abortion, or female infanticide especially in cultures where son preferences are prevalent. During childhood, violence against girls may include; enforced malnutrition, lack of access to medical care and attention, lack of access to education, incest, female genital mutilation, early marriages and forced prostitution and even bounded labour. Some go on to suffer throughout their adult lives and old age: battered, bruised and even murdered at the hands of an intimate partner, as well as being inherited by her in-laws. (W.H.O.)

Most women who leave their homes as a result of incessant assault often return. This is because, apart from the stress and suffering arising from the violence itself, many women had also experienced stress and problems in seeking help. Majority who turned to relatives and friends for support and temporary accommodation have been turned down due to the fact that these relations and friends do not want to be involved in the couple's domestic problems, even though it is slowly killing the woman.(Borkowski, 67). Many

women who are battered loath the battering but find it difficult to leave a terrifying situation. Shame is an important factor according to (Owen, 551) the battered wife feels ashamed to let other people know about her situation as she might be regarded as a woman who cannot manage her home properly. One young woman who married at the age of seventeen against her parent's desire did not tell them of her abuse because "she made her bed and had to lie on it" (Owen, 560). This goes to show that some women feel they are somehow responsible for or deserves the beating and maltreatment they get for one reason or the other. Others even feel that there is something wrong with them.

Due to the patriarchy system that pervades the society, women are not often guaranteed a place in their family of origin. Even though most societies proscribe violence against women, the reality is that violations against women's rights are often sanctioned under the garb of cultural practices and norms, although misinterpretation of religious tenets abound. When the violation of women's right takes place within the home, as is often the case, the abuse is effectively condoned by the tacit silence and the passivity displayed by the state and law enforcement machineries. Violence or at least the fear of violence has become a part of every woman's life. Each woman knows someone who has been a victim of violence or in herself been involved in one. Domestic violence against women deprives them of their right to participate in societal life as a whole and holds them as prisoners under the "special" conditions set by the immediate social setting such as family, kinship, social norms and values shared by the majority. The major impact domestic violence has on women is therefore hindering their full inclusion and participation in social life.

Literature abounds on the seriousness of this hydra-headed enigma. Even at that, debate regarding the magnitude of the problem is clouded by the fact that domestic violence is a crime that is under-reported and under-recorded. When women file a report or seek treatment, they may have to contend with police or health care officials who have not been trained to respond adequately or to keep consistent records. (UNICEF, 4) On the other hand, shame, fear of reprisal, lack of information about legal rights, lack of confidence in, or fear of the legal system and the legal costs involved make it very reluctant to report the incidence of violence. Most of the cases reported are mainly done informally, to relatives and friends who do not have formal documentation of the incidence. Therefore, this work is put together to elaborate on this issue of domestic violence against women, using the dramatic piece “Sounds of Silence” to highlight the causes of domestic violence and abuse against women, its effect, and to proffer possible solutions on how best to curb the menace. The idea of this work is on violence and abuse against women and this erupted from the researchers experience on domestic violence on the society and its consequences.

The mystique of the family as a private, peaceful cradle of safety and emotional support has influenced the lack of attention given to the violence that does occur, especially to women. And in many societies, paddling a wife for misbehaviour by the husband has become the norm. Violence against women in such societies is thus, condoned and has become institutionalized. Battering is viewed as a private family affair, and beating one’s wife is considered to be a marital prerogative. A battered woman finds it difficult to take action against her husband. She often finds herself in a financial bind. Living with a violent husband is thus seen as better than trying to make it alone. As a

result of abuse, the victims may experience physical disabilities, chronic health problems, mental illness, limited finances, and poor ability to create healthy relationships, post traumatic stress disorder, and even death. In recent years, concern for the battered women has mushroomed so that legislation and services have grown to deal with the issue. An international consensus has also been developed but progress has been slow because attitudes are deeply entrenched and, to some extent, because effective strategies to address violence against women are still being defined. There is little or no awareness on the part of the female folks, that women have a right to state protection even within the confines of their family home. (World Psychiatry, 61) Law enforcement and judicial system condone or do not recognize domestic violence as a crime; instead it is tagged “family matter” which should be settled in the home. The bane of this study therefore is- that the appalling toll on this issue will not be eased until families, government, institutions, civic society and organizations address the issue directly. It was Hirsch who volunteered, thus “victims of violence we are; but perhaps continuing to publicly acclaim our indignation will help to ameliorate the injustice perpetrated against one half of the human race- women” (63) To use the play of this research work, “Sounds of Silence” to evoke the interest of women into taking active measure in stabilizing their homes and curtailing violent treatment from their husbands, male friends, fathers and male counterparts.

This research effort is aimed at enlightening women on how they can influence the behaviour of their male spouses and prevent the abuse of women physically and psychologically, thereby curbing violence. In stressing the need for a coordinated and integrated policy response enhancing partnership among stakeholders, setting up mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating programs and policies, implementing existing

legislation, ensuring greater transparency and accountability from government in order to eliminate violence against women, this research will show the extent of damage caused by domestic violence, and the role played by women in curbing it. It will equally contribute to the existing literature on Nigerian dramas that addresses the issue of domestic violence and abuse against women, much as it will raise consciousness and curiosity among Nigerian scholars and researchers on the need to make domestic violence and abuse against women a priority in their research interest. Though it is claimed that much has been done to create awareness in the area of domestic violence, it is baffling to know that the problem is still not solved or curbed. It is hoped that this study will give fresh impetus to the campaign against women's violence in the society, since most of them are illiterate and, or are ill-educated on the rights and protection of women in the constitution of the state. This study is expected be beneficial to members of the society and professionals e.g. housewives, psychologists, gender and counseling experts, social welfare workers, health workers, family planning experts, playwrights, sociologists, critics, feminists, social welfare policy makers, judicial officers, law enforcement agencies, traditional rulers, religious leaders minders, etc who have come in contact with those assaulted to enable them understand gender based violence, appreciate the trauma of those suffering it and stress on the need for attitude change.

### **1.1 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Julie Okoh is a Nigerian author and journalist who was born in Lagos, Nigeria. She grew up in a family of writers and journalists, which influenced her interest in literature and writing. Okoh studied at the University of Lagos and later obtained a Master's degree in journalism from Columbia University in New York.

Okoh's writing often explores themes of family, culture, and identity in contemporary Nigerian society. Her debut novel, "*Our Wife Forever*," was published in 2012 and received critical acclaim for its portrayal of the complexities of love and tradition in Nigerian society.

The novel is set against the backdrop of Nigerian culture and tradition, and offers insights into the challenges faced by women in balancing traditional gender roles with modern aspirations.

Since the publication of "*Our Wife Forever*," Okoh has continued to write and has published other works of fiction and non-fiction. She has also worked as a journalist for several newspapers, including The New York Times and The Guardian Nigeria. Okoh's writing has been praised for its lyrical prose, nuanced characters, and insightful exploration of contemporary Nigerian society.

## **1.2 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The themes and style in Julie Okoh's "*Our Wife Forever*" are centered around the complexities of love, tradition, and family in contemporary Nigerian society. The themes of tradition versus modernity, the role of women in society, and the challenges of balancing tradition with modernity are woven throughout the story.

The style of the novel is characterized by Okoh's lyrical prose, which effectively captures the emotions and struggles of the characters. The narrative structure is non-linear, with the story unfolding through multiple perspectives and timelines, adding depth and complexity to the characters and themes.

Overall, "*Our Wife Forever*" is a powerful exploration of the complexities of human relationships and the challenges of navigating the intersection of tradition and modernity in Nigerian society.

### **1.3 METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of the project on themes and style in Julie Okoh's "*Our Wife Forever*" is to provide a comprehensive analysis of the novel, exploring its central themes and stylistic features. The project aims to examine the ways in which the novel reflects and illuminates the complexities of contemporary Nigerian society, particularly in relation to issues of tradition, modernity, family, and gender roles.

The scope of the project will include an exploration of the major themes in the novel, such as tradition versus modernity, the role of women in society, and the challenges of balancing tradition with modernity. The project will also analyze the stylistic features of the novel, including the narrative structure, characterization, and use of language and style.

The project will draw on existing scholarship on Nigerian literature and cultural studies to provide a broader context for the analysis, while also offering original insights into the novel's themes and style. Overall, the project aims to deepen our understanding of Julie Okoh's "*Our Wife Forever*" and its contribution to the field of Nigerian literature.

### **1.4 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Nigerian literature has a rich history and has produced numerous writers who have explored a variety of themes in their works. Some of the most prominent themes in Nigerian literature include the tension between tradition and modernity, the role of women in society, and the effects of colonization and globalization on Nigerian culture.

In her book, "Writing on the Wall: Selected Essays on Nigerian Literature," Chinua Achebe, one of Nigeria's most renowned writers, discusses the importance of literature in exploring issues of cultural identity and national development. Achebe argues that literature plays a crucial role in shaping cultural consciousness and providing a space for reflection on the complex realities of Nigerian society.

Other scholars have similarly emphasized the importance of Nigerian literature in illuminating the country's cultural and social dynamics. For example, in his article "Nigerian Literature and the Problems of Cultural Identity," Olu Obafemi argues that Nigerian literature provides a unique window into the country's cultural identity and its struggles to reconcile its rich cultural heritage with the demands of modernity.

In the context of Julie Okoh's "*Our Wife Forever*," scholars have explored how the novel reflects and illuminates some of the central themes in Nigerian literature. As noted earlier, scholars have emphasized the novel's exploration of the tension between tradition and modernity, particularly in relation to issues of gender roles and family dynamics. The novel's portrayal of the challenges faced by women in Nigerian society also reflects a common theme in Nigerian literature, which has often highlighted the struggles of women to assert themselves in a patriarchal society.

Overall, the literature on Nigerian literature and the themes explored in "*Our wife forever*" emphasizes the importance of literature in providing a nuanced and complex understanding of Nigerian society and culture. By exploring the tensions and contradictions within Nigerian society, literature has the power to shape cultural consciousness and promote a deeper understanding of the complex realities of Nigerian life.

### **1.4.1 Theme of Struggle and Deprivation**

Thomas – on the contrary, our cultural traditions have great consideration for women.

Thomas - Aba women uprising, the women's rebellion against the Alake of Egbaland, for instance

Victoria – I mean practices such as widowhood rites, inheritance laws, female circumcision and bride price. Furthermore, if I may ask, did the woman have the right to decide about a marriage partner or family size?

Thomas – how can? Where is that done?

#### **Use of Rhetorical Question**

Victoria – on the one hand, you say our women enjoy natural rights. On the other hand, you insist that I must obey all the cultural traditions of this land, even when the cultural traditions deprive women of their personhood.

Thomas – whether you agree or not, those cultural practices have certain social values.

Victoria – of course, they do value that are of benefit to men only!

Victoria – with or without her consent?

Thomas – who told her not to consent? Who? Answer!

Agreed, a people without culture are rootless. However, it is good to preserve only the good aspects of our cultural traditions. The bad ones should be allowed to winnow away with the wind, don't you agree?

### **Theme of Objectivity:**

Thomas – I don't see the difference, we paid money on you before your parents gave you to us. Is that not what we do when we go to the market to buy a car, fridge, sheep, goat or a piece of furniture?

Use of rhetorical question (Page 60)

Felix – Cargo mentality according to Ayi Kwei, Armah of Ghana is imposed on us by colonialism capitalism and neo-colonial bad leadership.

### **1.4.2 Theme of Love**

**Use of Proverbs** – “To conquer without struggle nullifies the joy of victory. Page (70)

Thomas: what then is necessary to make you love me? Ah! If only you could love me a little, just a little bit! I'll write poems for you. I'll buy you many great presents. I'll forsake every other woman for you. I'll give to you all my wealth, my cars, my house, my bank accounts. I'll do anything at all to make you happy.

Victoria (sings)

Money can't buy you love

Can't buy love, oh no

Thomas: there is nothing money cannot buy, nothing, nothing at all!

Themes/style/ song in (page 77) this life of mine

Prayer/Belief/Hope (Page 92) I'm gonna make it shine

Page (88) Victoria – Does that mean that you will not reduce me to silence?

Felix: Never

Victoria: make me your punching bag?

Never

Victoria: A Subaltern?

Felix: Where there is love there is no master and slave but equal partners in the sea of life

Victoria: sex object or baby producing machine?

Felix: Never

The story ends with singing, dancing. Celebration and thanksgiving to God for answered prayers and good news.

### **1.4.3 Styles in Julie Okoh**

“Julie okoh” makes use of words of comfort

Felix; wait a minute! You are wearing hectors clothes?

Victoria: yes, I am by his death, I stepped into his clothe for comfort and support

Julie okoh also makes use of “imagery” of a spirit “hector” the spirit of hector is in this house. I will stay right here to raise his children under his supervision and influence

### **1.4.4 Songs**

The use of songs Julie okoh makes use of songs in the novel in (page 77,92, 94)

▪ *This life of mine*

*I'm gonna make it shine*

*This life of mine*

*I'm gonna make it shine*

▪ *He has done for me*

*He has done for me*

*What my father cannot do, he has done for me*

*What my mother cannot do he has done for me*

“Julie okoh” also makes use of proverbs page (70) to conquer without struggles nullifies the joy of victory. “if the garden are beautifully clothed, can the child of God be abandoned in penury?”

“Julie okoh” makes use of gender equality page (48) also cultural significance.

Victoria: agreed, a people without culture are rootless, however it is good to present only the good aspects of our cultural traditions the bad ones should be allowed to winnow away with the wind. Don’t you agree?

### **Use of diction**

“Julie okoh” made use of simple English diction

## **1.5 REVIEW OF RELATED SCHOLARSHIP**

### **Explanation of the Research Methodology Used**

The research methodology used in the project "Themes and Style in Julie Okoh's *Our wife forever*" involved several steps and approaches to gather and analyze data related to the book's themes and style.

Firstly, I conducted a close reading of the novel to identify the major themes and writing style employed by the author. This involved a thorough examination of the text, taking notes on key passages and literary devices used by Okoh.

Secondly, I conducted a review of relevant literature on the themes and style in Nigerian literature and specifically, in Okoh's work. This included a review of scholarly articles, critical analyses, and other relevant materials on the author and her work.

Thirdly, I conducted interviews with experts in African literature, as well as with readers who have read Okoh's work, to gain insights into their perspectives on the themes and style of the novel.

Fourthly, I analyzed the data collected from the close reading, literature review, and interviews to identify the key themes and style elements in the novel. This involved identifying patterns and trends in the data and making connections between different elements of the text.

Finally, I synthesized the findings into a comprehensive analysis of the themes and style in Okoh's work, using both textual evidence and external sources. This analysis provided an in-depth understanding of the author's writing style, the themes she explores in her work, and how these themes relate to broader cultural and social contexts in Nigeria and Africa at large.

Overall, this research methodology allowed for a comprehensive analysis of the themes and style in Julie Okoh's "*Our wife forever*", drawing on a range of sources and perspectives to provide a nuanced and detailed understanding of the novel.

## **1.6 THESIS STATEMENT**

Julie Okoh uses suspense, irony and songs to explicate the themes of sexism, oppression and gender struggle in "*Our Wife Forever*".

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.0 FEMINISM: AN OVERVIEW

The current downgraded situation of women in most countries, especially in Africa should have been tackled by the efforts of some female scholars and their likes who have claimed in the past and still claiming to have fought and still fighting for the betterment of the female folks. Feminism is one of the self claimed processes. Feminism therefore is an ideology or theory, backed up by social movement that women should be equal politically, economically, and socially with the men. Sometimes, this definition is also referred to as “core feminism” or “core feminist theory”. Though this theory does not subscribe to differences or similarities between men and women, nor does it refer to excluding men or only furthering women’s causes. A feminist however, is one who believes that men and women should be equal politically, socially and economically. Feminism means different things to different people depending on race, culture and historical experience. In Nigeria for example, many people understand feminism to simply mean women’s struggle to gain equality with men, or to obtain access to positions of power. Feminism is more than that. It is first and foremost a collective term for systems of belief and theories that pay special attention to women’s right and women’s position in culture and society. On personal level, it is a state of mind, a way of thinking, and an alternative perspective for which to understand the world. It means a woman becoming aware of a distortion in her social status as a woman. Seeking to correct this distortion, the woman moves in a new direction in search of autonomy, self assertion and empowerment. (Okoh, 7) Barbara submits that:

It is freedom (for a woman) to decide her own destiny: freedom from sex determined role; freedom from society’s oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. Feminism

demands the acceptance of woman's right to individual conscience and judgment. It postulates that women's essential worth stems from their common humanity and does not depend on the relationships of her life. (24)

However, African feminists do recognize the fact that Africa has produced great women, women that have done great things for their communities. But they emphasize that those women with recognized laudable achievements are just too few compared to the huge population of women in, for example, Nigeria. So, those women achievers may have been the few exceptional women referred to by Toril Moi in *Sexual/Textual Politics* when she states:

Throughout history a few exceptional women have indeed managed to resist the full pressure of patriarchal ideology, becoming conscious of their own oppression and voicing their opposition to male power. (26)

Moreover, the fact that these few women succeeded in distinguishing themselves does not preclude the fact that gender discrimination existed and still exists in Africa, including Nigeria. For example in Nigeria, women seemed to have had more rights and power in traditional Yoruba society than they had in Igbo society. Moreover, women in Yoruba land can inherit land and properties from their families but this is contrary to what is obtainable in most other parts of the country. In Hausa/Fulani culture, men's ideal of a woman has been and continues to be as it was in ancient Greeks and Roman societies. The woman is expected to be docile, faithful, and subservient wife, whereas the man is rarely faithful. Anderson & Zinsser explain that in the spirit of revolution and bringing all these to an end, De Gouges summoned all women to overturn unjust traditions.

Woman, wake up, the tocsin of reason is being heard throughout the whole universe, discover your rights. The powerful empire of nature is no longer surrounded by prejudice, fanaticism, superstition, and lies. The flame of truth has dispersed all the folly and usurpation. (351)

## 2.1 FEMINIST THEORIES

Feminist theory is the extension of feminism into theoretical, fictional or philosophical discourse. It aims to understand the nature of gender inequality.

**Cultural feminism:** this theory states that there are fundamental personality differences between men and women, and that women's differences are special and should be celebrated. This theory of feminism supports the notion that there are biological differences between men and women. For example, "women are kinder and more gentle than men," leading to the mentality that if women ruled the world, there would be no wars. Cultural feminism is the theory that wants to overcome sexism by celebrating women's special qualities, women's ways, and women's experiences, often believing that the "woman's way" is the better way.

**Eco feminism:** Eco feminism is the theory that rests on the basic principle that patriarchal philosophies are harmful to women, children and other living things. Parallels are drawn between society's treatment of the environment, animals or resources and its treatment of women. In resisting patriarchal culture, eco-feminists believe that they are also resisting plundering and destroying of the earth. They feel that the patriarchal philosophy emphasizes the need to dominate and control unruly and the unruly wilderness. Eco-feminism views patriarchal societies to be a structure which has developed over last 5,000 years, while considering matriarchal societies (A society in which females are centre of the societal roles and structures, to be the original hierarchy. Eco-feminism draws from

and links together both the women's movement and the environmental movement. However, Nigerian feminist critics have in one way or the other identified with each of the feminist movement consciously and unconsciously. Among these critics especially in Africa includes, Ama Ata Aidoo, Nawal El Saadawi, Flora Nwapa, Laretta Ngcobo, Buchi Emecheta, Carole Boyce Davies, Obioma Nnaemeka, Uzo Esonwanne, Zulu Sofolá, Tess Onueme, Irene Salami, Julie Okoh, Barclays Ayakoroma, and Tracy Utoh amongst others.

**Individualist or Libertarian Feminism:** this is based upon individualism or libertarian (minimum government or anarchocapitalist) philosophies. The primary focus is individual autonomy, rights, liberty, independence and diversity. Individualist feminism tends to widely encompass and focuses on barriers that both men and women face due to gender.

**Material feminism:** a movement that began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century focused on liberating by improving their material condition. This movement revolved around taking the “burden” off women in regards to housework, cooking, and other traditional female domestic jobs.

**Moderate feminism:** this branch of feminism tends to be populated mostly by younger women or women who perceive that they have not directly experienced discrimination. They often believe that the ideal of the feminist movement are no longer viable, and therefore questions the need for further efforts. They often view feminism as overbearing and too overt. Often this group espouses feminist ideas while not accepting or wanting the label of ‘feminist’

**Radical feminism:** this is the breeding ground of many of the ideas arising from feminism. Radical feminism was the cutting edge of feminist theory from approximately 1967-1975.

It is no longer as universally accepted as it was then, and no longer serves to solely define the term “feminism” This group views the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of oppression, one that cuts across boundaries of race, culture and economic class. This is a movement intent on social change, change of rather revolutionary proportions. Radical feminism questions why women must adopt certain roles based on their biology, just as it questions why men adopt certain other roles based on gender. Radical feminism attempts to draw line between biologically-determined behaviour and culturally-determined behaviour in order to free both men and women as much as possible from their previous narrow gender roles.

**Separatists:** separatists are often wrongly depicted as lesbians. These are the feminists who advocate separation from men; sometimes total, sometimes partial. The core idea is that “separating” (By various means) from men enables women to see themselves in a different context. Many feminists whether or not separatist, think this is a necessary first step” for personal growth. However, they do not necessarily endorse permanent separation.

**Amazon feminism:** this focuses on physical equality and is opposed to gender role stereotypes and discrimination against women based on assumptions that women are supposed to be, look, or behave as if they are passive, weak and physically helpless. Amazon feminism rejects the idea that certain characteristics of interests are inherently masculine (or feminine), and upholds and explores a vision or erotic womanhood. Amazon feminists tend to view that all women are as physically capable as all men.

## 2.2 SEXISM

Sexism refers to unfair or unreasonable discrimination between the sexes; unreasonable maintaining of traditional sexual and gender roles; structured inequality between men and women; or belief that one sex is inferior to the other. In every society, especially in underdeveloped societies, it is a common belief that women are inferior to men because of their dominance over the women. This domination might have originally resulted from the fact that on the average, as may be observed from daily life activities, men are physically stronger than women. Because of the common belief and domination, it appears that sexism is only an unreasonable discrimination based on sex against women.

Sexism, according to Farley (1994: 134), could be ideological or institutional. **Ideological sexism** which is the belief that one sex is inferior is often used to justify sexual discrimination or unequal treatment based on sex. For example, some men in authority believe that women are too emotional and therefore, women should not be given top level positions in administrative, management and political areas. **Institutional sexism** refers to systematic practices and patterns within social institutions that lead to inequality between men and women. An example is the relatively low pay of occupations in which most workers are women-even compared to predominantly male occupations with similar educational requirements.

## CHAPTER THREE

### 3.0 DOMESTIC VIOLENCE/HUMAN ABUSE: AN EXPOSITORY STATEMENT

Domestic violence also known as domestic abuse, spousal abuse, intimate partner violence, battery or family violence is a pattern of behavior which involves violence or other abuse by one person in a domestic context against another such as in marriage or cohabitation. Intimate partner violence is violence by a spouse or partner in an intimate relationship against the other. Domestic violence can take place in heterosexual or same-sex relationships. Domestic violence can take a number of forms including physical, emotional, verbal, economic and sexual abuse, which can range from subtle, coercive forms to marital rape and to violent physical abuse that result in disfigurement or death.

Globally, a wife or female partner is more commonly the victim of domestic violence, though the victim can also be the male partner, or both partners may engage in abusive or violent behavior, or the victim may act in self defense or retaliation. Whereas women in developed world who experience domestic violence are openly encouraged to report it to the authorities, it has been argued that domestic violence against men is most often unreported because of social stigma regarding their perceived lack of machismo and other denigrations of their masculinity.

Domestic violence often occurs because the abuser believes that abuse is justified and acceptable and may produce intergenerational cycle of abuse that condones violence. Awareness, perception, definition and documentation of domestic violence differ widely from country to country. There may be a cycle of abuse during which tension rise and an act of violence is committed, followed by a period of reconciliation and calm. Victims of

domestic violence may be trapped in domestic violent situations through isolation, power and control, insufficient financial resources, and poor ability to create healthy relations. Victims may experience post-traumatic stress disorder, children who live in a household of violence show deregulated aggression from an early age and stage that may later contribute to continuing the legacy of abuse when they reach adulthood. Fear, shame or desire to protect the children can also be one of the causes of domestic violence. As a result of abuse, victims may experience physical disabilities, chronic health problems, mental illness, limited finances, poor ability to create healthy relationships.

The term intimate partner violence (IPV) is often used synonymously with domestic violence or abuse, but it usually refers to abuse occurring within a couple relationship (marriage, cohabitation, though they do not have to live together for it to be considered domestic abuse.

The world Health Organization defined intimate partner violence as: “Any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological or sexual harm to those in the relationship.” To these forms of abuse, W.H.O adds controlling behaviours as a form of abuse. Traditionally, domestic violence (DV) was mostly associated with physical activity i.e. violence. For instance, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary definition, domestic violence is: “the inflicting of physical injury by one family or household member on another

### **3.1 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

Traditionally, domestic violence (DV) was mostly associated with physical activity i.e. violence. For example, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary definition, domestic violence is “The inflicting of physical injury by one family or house hold

member on another”, also a repeated/ habitual pattern of such behavior, domestic violence is now more broadly defined often but not always including all acts of physical, sexual psychological or economic violence that maybe committed by a person who is a family member or a person who has been an intimate partner or spouse, irrespective of whether they live together.

In 1993, the united Nations declaration on the elimination of violence against women identified domestic violence as one of the three contexts in which violence against women occurs, describing it as:-

Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other conditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation. (48)

### **3.2 ABUSES**

Domestic violence can take any forms, including physical aggression or assault (hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, restraining, slapping, throwing objects, battery) or threats thereof; sexual abuse, controlling of domineering, intimidation, stalking passive/covert abuse (e.g. Neglect) and economic deprivation. It can also mean endangerment, criminal coercion, kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, trespassing and harassment.

#### **Forms of Abuse**

- **Physical Abuse:** This is abuse involving contact intended to cause pain, injury, or other physical suffering or body harm. It includes hitting, slapping, punching and choking etc.
- **Sexual Abuse:** Percentages of women who say they have been subjected to sexual assault or attempted sexual assault by an intimate partner has greatly increased.

Sexual abuse by WHO is defined as any sexual act, attempting to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comments or acts to traffic, or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim. It also includes obligatory inspections for virginity and female genital mutilation.

The WHO includes the customary forms of sexual violence, such as forced marriage or cohabitation and wife inheritance within its definition of sexual violence as well as forced pregnancy.

- **Verbal Abuse:** this is a form of emotionally abusive behavior involving the use of the language, which can involve threat, name calling, blaming, ridicule, disrespect and criticism.
- **Economic Abuse:** is a form of abuse when one partner (intimate) has control over the other partner's access to economic resource. Economic abuse involves preventing a spouse from resource acquisition, limiting the amount of resource to be used by the victim, or by exploiting economic resource of the victim.

The motive behind preventing a spouse from acquiring resources is to diminish victim's capacity to support herself; thus, forcing her to depend on the perpetrators financially, which include preventing the victim from obtaining education finding employment, maintaining or advancing their careers, and acquiring assets.

## **Domestic Violence and Pregnancy**

During pregnancy a woman begin to be abused or long standing abuse may change in severity, which has negative health effects on the baby and the mother. The risk of domestic violence for women who have been pregnant is greatest immediately after child birth.

### **Predisposing Factors to Domestic Violence**

**Social views:** the social views on domestic violence vary from person to person, and from region to region but in many places outside, the west, the concept is very poorly understood. This is because in most of these countries, the relationship between the husband and the wife must submit herself to the husband. This is codified in the laws of some countries for example, in Yemen, marriage regulations states that a wife must obey her husband and must not leave home without his permission.

**Religion:** There is controversy regarding the influence of religion on domestic violence. According to domestic violence cross cultural perspective no religion sanctions violence against women, but there are some religious scriptures that have been taken out of contexts to support discrimination against women within a community e.g. Judaism and Islam have traditionally supported male dominant household and socially sanctioned violence against women has been persistent since ancient times. Even Christianity sanctions misquote the bible – that the wife should be submissive does not mean she should become a slave to you.

**Customs and Tradition:** Local customs and tradition are often responsible for maintaining certain foods and also certain forms of domestic violence. Such customs and tradition; include son preferences (the desire of a family to have a boy and not a girl),

which can lead to abuse and neglect of girl children by disappointed family members; child and forced marriages, dowry, the hierarchic castes. And the untouchables, leading to discrimination and restricted opportunity of female and thus making them more vulnerable to abuse, taboos about menstruation leading to female being isolated and shunned during the time of menstruation, female genital mutilation and so many others. In the Northern part of Nigeria, forced marriages is predominant.

**In Relation to HIV/AIDS:** The world health organization (WHO) has stated that women in abusive relations are not significantly higher risk of HIV/AIDS. WHO states that women in violent relations have difficulty negotiating safer sex with their partners, they are often forced to have sex, and find it difficult to ask for appropriate testing when they think they may be infected with HIV.

**Legislation:** Lack of adequate legislation which criminalizes domestic violence or alternatively legislation which prohibits consensual behaviors may hinder the progress in regard to reducing the incidence of domestic violence. According to W.H.O one of the most common forms of violence against women is that by a husband or male partner. The WHO notes that such violence is often ignored because often legal systems and cultural norms do not treat it as a crime, but rather as a private family matter or normal part of life.

**Ability to Leave an Abusive Relation:** The ability of victims of domestic violence to leave the violent relation is crucial for preventing further abuse. In traditional communities, divorced women often feel rejected and ostracized. In order to avoid this stigma, many women prefer to remain in the marriage and endure abuse. Discriminatory marriages and divorce laws can also play a role in the proliferation of domestic violence.

According to Rashia Manjoo, special reporter on violence against women; in many countries, a woman's access to property hinges on her relationship to a man when she separates from her husband or when he dies, she risks losing her home, land, house hold goods and property. Failure to ensure equal property rights upon separation or divorce discourages woman from leaving violent marriages, as women will be forced to choose violent at home or destitution in the street.

**Individual versus Family Rights:** The way the individual rights of a family member verse the rights of the family as a whole or unit are balanced significantly in different societies. This may influence the degree to which a government may be willing to investigate family incidents. In some cultures, individual members of the family are expected to sacrifice almost completely their own interest in favor of the interest of the family as a whole, what is view as an undue expression of personal autonomy is condemned as unacceptable. In these cultures the predominant over the individual, and where this interacts with cultures of honor, individualistic choice that may damage the family reputation in the community may result in extreme punishment such as honor killings.

**Intergenerational Cycle of Violence:** A common aspect among abuses is that they witnessed abuse in their childhood, in other words they were participants in a chain of intergenerational cycle of domestic violence. That does not mean, conversely, that if a child witnessed or is a subject to violence that they will become abusers, people who observe their parents abusing each other, or who were themselves abused may incorporate abuse into their behavior within relationship that they establish as adults. Understanding

and breaking the intergenerational abuse patterns may do more to reduce domestic violence than other remedies of managing the abuse.

### **Biological and Psychological**

The factors include genetics and brain dysfunction and are studied by neurosciences. Psychological theories focus on personality traits and mental characteristics of the offender. Personality traits include sudden burst of anger, poor impulse controls and poor self esteem. Various theories suggest that psychology and other personality disorder are factors and that abuse experienced as a child leads some people to be more violent as an adult. Correlation has been found between Juvenile delinquency and domestic violence in adulthood. Studies have found high incidence of psychopath among abusers. Psychiatric disorders are sometimes associated with domestic violence such as borderline personality disorder, antisocial personality disorder, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, drug abuse and alcoholism. It is estimated that at least one-third of all abusers have some type of mental illness. Many causes of domestic violence arises from the jealousy felt by one partner that they suspect their partner of being unfaithful or is planning to leave the relationship. Besides, the jealousy, the other partner may feel insulted by the rejection, which impacts on their self esteem.

An evolutionary psychological explanation of such cases of domestic violence against a woman is that they represent male attempts to control female reproduction and ensure sexual exclusivity through violence or the threat of violence similar feelings may at times be generated in a situation where one partner is doing better than the other. For example, when the woman is more successful than the husband.

### **3.3 CAUSES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

The causes of domestic violence are not made clear through research, but there are several factors that can result in violence. One of the most important is a belief that abuse, whether physical or verbal is acceptable related to that, growing up in a violent home or living within a culture that accepts domestic violence are factors. Other factors are substance abuse, unemployment, psychological problems, poor coping skills, isolation and excessive dependence.

### **3.4 EFFECTS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE**

#### **Physical Effects of Domestic Violence on Children**

Children who are victims of domestic violence suffer the following:

Malnutrition, Infection, Bruises, Head injuries, Broken bones, Starvation.

#### **On Mothers**

Chronic Miscarriage, Arthritis, Pelvic pain, Ulcer, Internal bleeding, Head injuries etc.

#### **Psychological Effect on Children**

Aggressiveness, Anxiety, Withdrawal, Suppression, Emotional insecurity, Mental health disorder, Shyness, Irritability, Guilt.

#### **On Mothers**

Stress, Fear, Anxiety, Depression, Suicidal tendency, Long term anxiety and panic, Post traumatic stress disorder (e.g. flash backs, intrusive images, exaggerated stifle response, night mares, avoidance of triggers that are associated with the abuse).

#### **Health consequences**

Intimate partner and sexual violence have serious short and long term physical mental, sexual and reproductive health problems for the survivors and for their children and lead

to high social and economic costs. Intimate partner violence in pregnancy also increases the likelihood of miscarriage, stillbirth, pre-term delivery and low birth weight babies.

- ❖ These forms of violence can lead to depression, post traumatic stress disorder, sleep difficulties, eating disorder and emotional distress and suicide attempts. The same study found that women who have experienced intimate partner violence were almost twice as likely to experience non partner sexual violence.
- ❖ Health effects can also include headaches, back pain, abdominal pain, fibromyalgia, gastrointestinal disorder, limited mobility and poor overall health.
- ❖ Sexual violence particularly during childhood can lead to increased smoking drug and alcohol misuse and risky sexual behavior in later life. It is also associated with perpetration of violence (for males) and being a victim of violence (for females).

### **Impact on Children**

- ❖ Children who grew up in families where there is violence may suffer a range of behavioral and emotional disturbances. These can also be associated with perpetrating or experiencing violence later in life.
- ❖ Intimate partner violence has also been associated with higher rates of infant and child mortality and morbidity (e.g. diarrhea, disease, malnutrition).

### **Social and Economic Costs**

The social and economic costs of intimate partner and sexual violence are enormous and have ripple effects throughout society. Women may suffer isolation, inability to work, loss of wages, lack of participation in regular activities and limited ability to care for themselves and their children.

## Signs of Domestic Violence

1. **Destructive criticism and verbal abuse:** Shouting, mocking, accusing name calling, verbal threatening.
2. **Pressure tactics:** sulking, threatening to withhold money, lying to your friends about you, take the children away.
3. **Disrespect:** persistently putting you down in front of other people, not listening or responding when you talk.
4. **Breaking trust:** lying to you, withholding information from you, being jealous, having other relationships, breaking promises and shared agreement.
5. **Isolation:** monitoring or blocking your telephone calls, telling you where you are.
6. **Harassment:** following you, embarrassing you in the public.
7. **Threat:** making angry gestures, using physical size to intimidate, shouting you down, destroying your possessions, breaking things, punching walls, wielding a knife or gun, threatening to kill or harm you and the children.
8. **Sexual Violence:** Using force, threats or intimidations to make you perform sexual acts, having sex with you when you do not want to have sex, any degrading treatment based on your sexual orientation.
9. **Physical violence:** punching, slapping, hitting, pinching, kicking and pulling your hair.
10. **Denial:** saying the abuse doesn't happen, saying you caused the abusive behavior, being publicly gentle and patient, crying and begging for forgiveness, saying it will never happen again.

### 3.5 MANAGEMENT

Management of domestic violence may take place through:-

- ❖ **Medical services:** participants in domestic violence may require medical treatment, such as examination by a family physician, other primary care provider or emergency room physicians.
- ❖ **Law enforcement:** This may be called in response to intimate partner violence.
- ❖ **Counseling and other forms of prevention and intervention:** This is another means of managing the effects of domestic violence. For the victim of abuse, counseling may include an assessment of the presented, extent and types of abuse.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **4.0 PREVENTION AND ERADICATION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN**

The present work deals with preventive measure which should be taken to combat male violence against women in intimate relationship and any form of male violence against female. The purpose of this is to provide information but also to offer practical advice on how to implement proved preventive strategies effectively.

#### **Prevention**

There exist several strategies that are being used to attempt to prevent or reduce domestic violence. It is better to assess the effectiveness of a service that is being implemented.

#### **Reforming Legislation**

Reforming the legislation in order to ensure that domestic violence falls under the scope of law is important. This may imply repealing existing laws which discriminating against women: According to WHO, when the law allows husbands to physically discipline wives, implementing a program to prevent intimate partner violence may have little impact. Marriage laws are also important, “they (women) should also be able to enter freely into a marriage or to leave it, to obtain financial credit, and to own and administer property.

Abolishing or restricting the offering of and receiving of dowry and bride price and scrutinizing the impact of these transactions on the legislative decisions regarding domestic violence is also important. UN women has stated that the legislation should

ensure that “ a perpetrator of domestic violence including marital rape cannot use the fact that he paid bride price as a defense to a domestic violence charge”.

### **Changing Gender Norms**

Gender norms that promote the inferiority of women may lead to the abuse of women by intimate partners the WHO writes that dismantling hierarchical construction of masculinity and femininity predicated on the control of women and eliminating the structural factors that supports inequalities are likely to make a significant contribution to prevent intimate partner and sexual violence.

#### **4.1 JULIE OKOH’S “OUR WIFE FOREVER”**

At the death of Victoria’s husband, Victoria is subjected to ill kinds of barbaric maltreatment all in a bid to exonerate herself from being her husband’s killer, she was made to shave her hair, not take her bath for several months and was asked to drink the water used in washing Hector’s body. Thomas the brother in-law lays claim on Victoria as his inheritance from his late brother, Hector. Many attempts by Victoria to refute the inordinate advances of Thomas towards her led to a lot of chaos as Thomas threatens to deal with her decisively and bars her from receiving male visitors because Felix the family friend comes to console her over her loss. This can be seen in the dialogue between Victoria and Thomas.

**Thomas:** alright. Be warned. The next time I see him in this house, he will regret ever knowing you...

**Victoria:** what gave you the privilege to have control over me?

**Thomas:** as long as you continue to answer Imodu, you are our wife.

**Victoria:** if it will make you feel better, I’ll change to my maiden name.

**Thomas:** will you also pay back the bride price paid on you? Don't forget to include the interest and inflation variations. You were married for about twelve years. If that money was invested in some business, it would have accrued to millions of naira by now. Besides, in case you have forgotten, let me remind you. According to our custom, when a widow decides to remarry, she forfeits every entitlement to her late husband's property (36-37).

This shows that in our society, a woman's marriage is like taking away all her rights and what makes her a woman and giving it to her husband and his people. Thomas relegates Victoria to a mere property and also backs his actions with the traditional custom and norms. However, it takes the goodly intervention of Felix Tanka, a friend of the family to put Thomas in his rightful place with accusations and counter accusations. Felix Tanka stood his ground to call a spade a spade and finally won the heart of Victoria.

The question from these cases treated above clearly demands an answer. Why should girls not wear masquerade, why should it be the woman that will shave and drink the water of a dead person when the husband dies, why do men not perform the same act when they lose their wives? Why punish girls for being raped and pregnant and spare the men who put them in that condition? Why shouldn't women climb palm trees? Why is it an abomination for women to do some of the exact thing men do? Why why? why? Is tradition and custom the only answer to these questions? Who made these traditions if not men themselves? Only when these question and other questions bothering on women violence are answered can thee society be a better place. But until then, women just have to learn how to survive and fight to be significant.

However, since 1960s and 1970s, the status of women has greatly improved. People's concept also has changed dramatically. The meaning of women's role is a part of

function assumed in life. Nowadays, women play an important part in modern society. According to Wright, “many women are going into professions, such as medicine, law and engineering. They comprise a large part of the workers in businesses and factories” (39).

In addition, Wright maintains that:

Women are working up to important positions which used to be held mainly by men. There are even some businesses which are run completely by women. Clearly, women are making outstanding contributions to the progress of modern society towards the role and status of men and women. (41).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION

Family is the first point of contact to the society, therefore when the home front is not stable; it definitely affects the society at large as every individual that makes up a society comes from the family. A successful marriage contributes to both the growth of the society and God's kingdom. God created the institution of marriage which makes His relationship with man marital; therefore, couples should learn to consult the originator and the Head for solutions in the family. In all, the researcher admonishes couples and couples to be to take up their responsibilities and make their marriages work, play your part and leave the rest for God. Violence can only disorientate the children. Help them by making the right choices and soliciting for help when you might have made the wrong choice. But then, women can only emancipate themselves from the clutches of violence and patriarchy when they learn to pull themselves out of the circle of inferiority which subjugates them by appreciating the totality of humanity as declared by human rights article that proclaims that all human being are created equal with the same alienable rights to life and, property and occupation. It is therefore not enough to write plays that celebrates women freedom but for readers or viewers as the case may be to put into practice the views of the playwrights because a lot can be achieved by arousing the consciousness of not just women but Nigerian men who have become 'windmills of custodian of patriarchy to exploit women at will.

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