

**RESISTANCE OF ASSAIGNED DUTIES IN STELLA DIA OYEDEPO'S  
*THE REBELLION OF THE BUMPY-CHESTED AND BRAIN HAS NO  
GENDER***

**BY**

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**BENIN CITY**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND  
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**CERTIFICATION**

This is to certify that this project was carried out by **DANIEL ESOSA OKOJIE** with matriculation number **ART1712519** in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City.

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**PROF. O. OKWECHIME****(Project Supervisor)**

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**Date**

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to Almighty God who made it possible for me to finish well and to my family.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### 1.1 Purpose of Study

This study examines the challenges of women in Stella Dia Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of The Bumpy Chested* and *Brain Has No Gender* and how they are able to tackle them. The essay focuses on gender inequality and how women find the voice to resist it.

### 1.2 Scope of Study

This essay is limited to Stella Dia Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy Chested* and *Brain Has No Gender*. The two texts are captured the issues bothering women's challenges in society.

### 1.3 Methodology

The method of analysis employed in this essay is qualitative. The primary texts are thoroughly read before they are analysed in line with the purpose of this essay. Relevant materials like scholarly articles from textbooks, academic journals and the internet are used in this essay. In addition, the feminist approach to the study of literary texts forms the literary theory used in this essay.

### 1.4 Theoretical Background

This essay adopts the theory of feminism. Feminism is a literary theory that exposes ways in which women are subjugated with the view to finding an acceptable way out for

oppressed women. The academic documentation that birthed the women socialist movement and resistance to the perceived oppression can be dated to the late 1880s. The term feminism is used extensively and interchangeably as “gender” to advance the struggle for equality, between both sexes and its first appearance in literature is through Hunburtine Auclert in a fresh Journal entitled as “La Citoyenne la feminite” to criticize the male domination of the society and make claims for women right as promised by the then French revolution. The Merriam Webster Dictionary therefore defines feminism “to mean, the theory of the political, economic and social equality of the sexes and organized activity of women’s right and interest. While, “Mairi Robinson” and “George Davidson” define feminism as a belief or movement advocating the cause of women’s rights and opportunities particularly having equal rights with men by challenging the equalities between the sexes in the society (481), “Zava Huda” summarized it to mean a discuss of set of activities that represent the suffering, in addition to their dream for equal opportunities in societies controlled by men, which include the subjugated powers, rules, wishes and orders.

Larry Johnson observes that “feminist scholars have observed that much of what passes for knowledge of woman’s (or men) nature has historically been constructed from the point of view of the social group men who benefit most from women continued subordination “(16). There is no feminism without patriarchy because patriarchy gives men undue rights to subjugate women in society that pays less attention to women’s rights. John Ebimobwei Yeseibo therefore states that, “ patriarchy in its widest definition means the

manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of society and women are deprived of access to such power” (139). From Yeseibo’s comment, it is clear that society is structured to protect men and this gives room for women’ subjugation.

In a patriarchal society, the male dictates the socio-cultural, family, political and economic, as well as the religious space of a woman. As it is in most African societies, a woman is said to have truly gain recognition and societal respect only when she is legally married to a man and also, their access to education and family inheritance. It is still very sad to know that in some African communities today, a woman is celebrated and fully accepted by her husband’s family on the ground that she bears a male child for the family even when she has female children already. Also, as a result of different beliefs and opinions in reasoning, different school of thoughts have been established as a social or political movement that specifically describe the various subjection and humiliation experience of women. Political and sometimes radical advocates have worked tirelessly to seek justice for women. These are some of the branches of feminism: liberal feminism, social feminism, capitalist/Marxist feminism, and radical feminism.

Estelle Freedman defines feminism as “a belief that although women and men are inherently of equal worth, most societies privilege men as a group. As a result, social movements are necessary to achieve political equality between women and men, with the understanding that gender always intersects with other social hierarchies” (Web). Freedman’s position holds that

women are perceived as less equal to men consequently they treated with little or no respect. M.

H. Abrams defines feminism as:

a distinctive and concerted approach to literature, feminist criticism was not inaugurated until late in the 1960s. Behind it, however, lie two centuries of struggle for the recognition of women's cultural roles and achievements, and for women's social and political rights, marked by such books as Mary Wollstonecraft's *An Indication of Rights of Women* (1792), John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of women* (1869), and the American Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845). Much of feminist literary criticism continues in our time to be interrelated with the movement by political feminist for social, legal, and cultural freedom and equality. (93)

Abrams' assertion establishes the fact that women suppression and oppression have been on for a long time therefore his position is valid because it spells out the targets of feminism. Women are often at the fore front of feminism because it is a movement that concerns their welfare. Yetunde Olukemi Akorede in her own commentary states that, "women's resistance to perceived social, political and economic injustice led to the formation of women's groups which had the goal of fighting for women. Politically, in the early American society women were not involved in voting and decision-making. They could not be voted in as members of the congress, and, as such had no political position" (10). Similar to Akorede's assertion, Barbara Smith in her commentary on

feminism argues that, "feminism is the political theory and practice to free all women: women of color, working-class women, poor women, physically challenged women, lesbians, old women -- as well as white economically privileged heterosexual women. Anything less than this is not feminism, but merely female self-aggrandizement" (Web). Society is structured to favour men hence women are limited such that they barely expresses their God given rights in societies held sway by patriarchy. Education was used in the past to hinder women from measuring up with men . It is on this note that feminist writers advocate for a girl-child education. Stella N. Kpolugbo quotes Joy O. Odewumi's assertion on education thus, "for a nation to be well developed, the education of its women is paramount, for through this there will be equity, justice and balance in resource development" (62). This means that education has the power to liberate women from societal restrictions.

Charles E. Bressler in his work on feminism outlines three types of feminist persuasions. According to him, "three somewhat distinct, geographical strains of feminism have emerged. American feminism is essentially textual, stressing repression; British feminism is essentially Marxist, stressing oppression; and French feminism is essentially psychoanalytic, stressing repression. All groups, however, attempt to rescue women from being considered "the Other"(150). Men oppress women and this has been blamed on patriarchy. John Ebimobowei Yeseibo contends that, "patriarchy in its widest definition means the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of

society and that women are deprived of society and women are deprived of access to such power” (139). This definition is apt because it gives detailed information about feminism and its sole agenda. In other words, it gives a clear insight into the challenge of inequality that women endure and how some women have done to end the scourge of gender inequality.

The liberal feminist theory for example, agitate for equality between men and women in a society and also encourage the use of individual ability through legal means or democratic instruments as vividly portrayed in Stella Dia Oyedepo’s play *Brain Has No Gender* to help attain equal right for both sexes. The liberal feminist theory on the other hand have thus far been adjudge the most important and effective feminism movement because it concludes its activities within the law to promote women involvement in government and social matters. Some of these strategies include organizing women into larger group to speak up at top government levels, pushing for legislation, creating awareness and other legal advocacy tools to bring about the desired changes. This theory of feminism became famous in the year 1960 during the United State Civil Right Movement (USCRM) that led to the Washington march for women equality before the law in vital areas such as education and professional opportunities, marriage and property rights, equitable divorce, equal pay for equal work, and severe punishment for rape and other dehumanizing issues not to exclude wife battering in homes. This feminist ideology is further strengthened by the socialist ideology that calls for the abolition of capitalism through a socialist reform. This advocates also, that to attain an equitable society where women will have equal rights as the man, it is important

to replace capitalism with socialism. Notwithstanding, the view of the socialist feminism theory which is also referred to as Marxist feminism still remains the same as in equality between sexes in a class society.” It however believes that gender inequality is inherent in a capitalist system unlike the liberal and socialist system. Also, it is important to know that under the socialist ideology, the restoration of a woman’s dignity is possible.

Radical feminism is aimed at challenging and overthrowing the immunity of patriarchy principles by opposing gender roles and women oppression therefore calling for a radical reordering of the society. These ideologists believe that patriarchy system which have its roots in the family structure should be abolished as it is characterized by power, dominance, hierarchy and competition between both sexes due to their biological formation. Here, the feminists believe that the only cure is to radically demonstrate by any possible means so as to propagate the idea of promoting one gender above the other. An idea that began in the 1960’s with famous women leaders like Grace Atkinson and Shulamite Firestone who refuted the liberal claims that lack of political and civil participation of women causes women oppression in the society.

With the consistent struggles of feminists, few women now occupy prominent leadership positions in the society, play active roles in politics and take up political appointments with contributions leading to socio-economic advancement of nations including Nigeria. These all came to be as a result of years of struggle and unending women exclusion from societal participation. The robust privileges enjoyed by the male

counterparts have given them the opportunity to dominate women, especially in a typical African setting. This has been blamed in part on the traditional norms and customs, as well as the religious beliefs that form human societies. Many gender advocates perceive some of these practices to have intentionally subjugated the rights and privileges of the girl-child to equal access, in the area of education, social and political inclusion. Furthermore, the history of male dominance can be traceable to the biblical creation of man and how God took a rib from him to form the woman in the book of Genesis. This religious knowledge has naturally allowed men have a feeling of superiority over the women including their genetic composition, and have been used often as a basis for control. Feminism movement kicks against exploitation, oppression and suppression of women hence it is against patriarchy.

### **1.5 Review of Related Scholarship**

Iyabode Omolara Daniel looks at the use of language in Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy Chested*. From her linguistic study of the play, she states that:

Oyedepo succeeds in presenting a larger than life portrait of captain sharp. She also suggests that women can effectively organize themselves politically; the characters completely destabilize the status quo. Captain Ara sharp's tactics of achieving her political goal are presented as questionable. In relation to the male characters the characters become empowered, both psychologically and physically; but in relation to their

leader, this reality does not hold: they remain powerless. Captain sharp succeeded in exerting influence and power through language but achieves the state of affairs that she fought against; women without power. (99)

Human societies have evolved many times and language plays a prominent role in this. Language is an influential weapon with which most of Oyedepo's female characters bargain for their right and place in society. Oyedepo views language as a weapon for fighting without drawing blood. Captain Sharp is therefore depicted as fearless and eloquent. Women are heavily suppressed therefore the active ones among them see a need to fight against male domination in society. Oyedepo presents fire brand, that is, fearless women who dare men. John Yeseibo holds that "Sharp undertakes an indoctrination of the other female rebels in the play who effect the ideology of revolt in their homes" (2). Oyedepo's female characters see men as ruthless therefore they adopt a deadly approach in their fight for gender equality. Yeseibo further writes that:

the play addresses key gender issues such as bride wealth and basically challenge institutionalized male monopoly of leadership in political spheres and the need to reverse this trend. As an African feminist guided by its basic tenets, Stella Oyedepo believes that the liberation of men is a necessary condition in redressing the marginalization of women. She is of the unswerving view that rabid radical feminism in the Nigerian cultural context will not be able to ameliorate the denigrating status of women in

society. This view she has demonstrated in *The Rebellion of the Bumpy Chested*. She therefore advances complementarity as the panacea for socio-political economic transformation through the world of play. (4)

Women are seen as mere articles which men can trade for their selfish reasons. This is a strong reason that gears the women's rebellion. In a different essay, Yeseibo states that, "Clem and James tried to reduce a woman to a mere property. It is because of these perceived difference towards women that, according to sharp, the B.C.M "aims at the emancipation of women form the oppressive domination of the men" (p.73). She therefore vows to attack this patriarchal order that creates gender imbalance between the sexes" (142) . Ordinarily, African women are conservative but Oyedepo departs from this norm therefore she creates radical characters to check male dominance over women. Osita C. Ezenwanebe states that:

Stella Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-chested* (2002) is a farcial representation of that entire radical feminism stand for. Ms. Ara Sharp, who chooses to remain single, gathers women in a sisterhood spirit and forms a women liberation movement, Bumpy Chested Movement (BCM), aimed at the emancipation of women from the oppressive domination of men. The first enemy mapped out for attack and overthrow is the man, especially the husband of the members. (186)

Men are identified as a problem women confront they are the object of the B.C.M's attack. E.B. Adeleke asserts that:

the army of wives, led by Captain Sharp in *The Rebellion*, unanimously identify the enemy as man, specifically the husbands of member irrespective of whether the man is guilty or not. Jointly, they map out strategies not only to dethrone the man, but to take over his oppressive roles. These women entertain no alternative other than the total uprooting and reconstruction of social structures. Differences in cultural context, individual situations, and mitigating circumstances are not taken into consideration. The reader witnesses an unreasonable bandwagon effect which has given rise to unfavourable view of feminism in spite of the fact that history and literature provide ample evidence of the woman's oppression and subjugation, particularly in patriarchal social system. (129)

Benedict Binebia notes that many female writers to defend fellow women. She strongly holds that Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy –Chested* is a radical play fight against gender inequality. She identifies:

*The Wives Revolt* by J.P Clark; *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* by Ola Rotimi, *Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested* by Stella Oyedepo, *Mulkin Matta* by Harghar, *Beyond Nightmar* by Ben Binebaiand, *Dance on His Grace* by Barclars Ayakoroma. But in some play texts written by women,

women seem to be divided. Julie Okoh's *Edewede, Mask*, Zulu Sofolo's *Wedlock of the Gods*. This points to the fact that the women's house of feminism is divided one. (148)

What Binebia means is that African feminist writers do not agree on a common approach of feminism to adopt. Some are conservatives, some are liberal while others are radical.

Oyedepo's *Brain Has No Gender* is examined alongside *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested* and Elizabeth Natalie writes that, "plays such as *Brain Has No Gender* and *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested* by Stella Dia Oyedepo, among other written works are positive, militant, revolutionary and radical master piece to bring women to front light and overcome the subjugated nature of a woman. Therefore, several other gender plays were agreed upon at a point during the post-colonial era encouraging Nigerian women to exercise their full potentials whether in a male dominated society or female-marginalized field of play" (280). These plays correctly exemplify the frustration of women and their willingness to exercise their individual rights and enjoy societal privileges like the men. Kene Igwe also comments that Oyedepo, "preserves the sanctity of marriage, even while agitating for women's right and advocating respect and empowerment for them, for she believes that men and women are made to complement each other but that can only happen in an environment of mutual respect" (355).

Furthermore, according to Jeseibo John Ebimobowei in an essay entitled "Challenging Patriarchy: The Feminist Perspective in Stella Dia Oyedepo's *The*

*Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested* and *Brain Has No Gender*” Oyedepo uses her plays, “to see how these patriarchal paradigms are interrogated by the playwright with the aim of dismantling the seeming insidious patriarchal instincts” (138). In this light, Ebimobowei observes that major characters in both plays are skillfully put together by the playwright to achieve this aim.

Also, H. Oby Okolocha and Sophia I. Akhuemokhan in an article titled “The Violation of Women’s Human Right” state that the violation of women’s human rights has dominated dramatic discourse in Nigeria for decades now and at such Nigeria female dramatists have become established as activists for the rights of women in text and context. They also state further that these two plays highlights social, political and cultural rights abuses such as female circumcision, forced marriage, refusal to educate the girl child, and how these violations of basic right inhibit women from realizing their full potentials as human beings. The playwright, focus her attention on redressing cultural and social rights. The texts illustrate that drama is an effective tool in campaigning against the violation of women’s human rights and fostering social transformation. They argue that both plays question the subjection of women to traditional practices and rituals. In the opinion of Okolocha and Akhuemokan, *Brain Has No Gender* is a depiction of how female or women human right are violated by men.

Also, Jide Balogun, commenting on Oyedepo’s play *Brain Has No Gender* bothers on the theme of nationalism from a feminist perspective. Thus, he observes that

in *Brain Has No Gender*, the theme of nationalism is achieved through Alani's family... Alani's failure to give birth to male children is a conscious effort of the feminist protest against male domination. The title of the text itself is a metaphorical expression of that feminist philosophy (215). Oyedepo detests the ill treatment of women especially in marriage therefore she uses her plays under study to condemn all forms of patriarchy that demean women.

Indeed some of the comments the researcher found on *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested* and *Brain Has No Gender* look at the issues affecting women. This essay however attempts to offer a fresh investigation in order to enrich volumes of researches already made on these Oyedepo's plays.

## **1.6 Thesis Statement**

Stella Dia Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested* and *Brain Has No Gender* show that women's resistance of assigned duties is as a result of patriarchal subjugation they suffer.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PATRIARCHAL PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN SOCIETY

Society is constructed to favour men hence they are put in charge of assigning roles to women and children. In patriarchal societies, men take charge of everything that happens therefore women are seen as second class citizens. *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested* and *Brain Has No Gender* dramatise how women are perceived in society. For instance, men take the position of head on the ground that holy books say so. Women are considered to be weak therefore men give them domestic roles thereby putting them behind their will. The discrimination against women manifests in different degrees but this essay focuses on the one that has to do with duties and place in homes and society.

#### 2.1 POOR DEPICTION OF THE FEMALE GENDER

Most societies culturally celebrate male children over female children. The relevance of one sex over the other has distorted the place of women in society. This is illustrated in this conversation:

SHARP: “Do you even wish that you were a woman? Or do you even wish that all your children were female?” (78)

OYE: “God forbid! If it were possible to come into the world twice, next time, I want to come as a male of course even as Jolomi nods in support of the statement.” (79)

The response Oye gives is spontaneous and this emphasises this rejection of female gender. The society has unnecessary placement for women hence a woman is incomplete or somewhat respected only when she is married to a man. This means to achieve fulfillment in life, she must become a wife first, which has become subjective as demonstrated in this study.

The idea of patriarchy holds that men are in charge of every authority in society therefore they lord it over women in virtually all aspects of society. According to Abram, a patriarchal society is centered on the male gender in the society and therefore controlled by men. The structure of a patriarchal system, which is largely practiced in most Asian and African countries exemplify the superiority of the male dominance over the female, believing that women are best to be seen and not heard. The aforementioned fact forms the basis of the Rebellious Movement in Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy Chested*. The society dramatized in the play is as an androcentric one meaning a society centered on men, where women accord respect to the opposite sex for just being a man and not for the role they lead in the society.

In the play, James and Clem are teenagers, and of course Ashake's brothers-in-law. In their reasoning, no matter how young a male is, he is superior and has authority over the woman including older sisters-in-law. To this end, they want their elder brother's wife to honour them on the ground of their gender and ego are superior. This illustrated thus:

CLEM: No James! Count me out of that humiliating show. I cannot prostrate for a cow just because of a pound of its beef. I would rather die than say please me to my brother's wife. (21)

Obviously, Ashake deserves some level of respect from Clem and James yet they choose to portray her as a cow on the ground that she is a wife to their brother. When Ashake responds in protest, by calling them "twerps", James is shocked at her effrontery. He cannot believe that the mere woman he has always known to be weak has realized the need to set free from male domination which is merely based on gender. His bewildered response is captured thus:

JAMES: Lakuli! This is coming from a woman and least of all my  
brother's wife! (22)

The playwright tries to explain the wide gap that exists between male and female especially in a patriarchal society when she quoted James to say:

JAMES: When brother comes back, I will tell him everything. Maybe he will have to make a choice between this belligerent termagant and his own blood.(23)

Ashake is referred to as a "belligerent termagant" which means an unacceptable hostile behavior in string terms. They charge on suggesting that a choice between themselves and their brother's wife be made. The aforementioned simply shows that the societal view of women in a male dominated society is baseless. Some of the attitudes of men

towards women in a male dominated society thus births women revolution. Women generally face this stereotypical behavior towards them either from the men or the society at large.

Furthermore, it can be deduced that patriarchy calls women into a life of servitude. According to Clem in the play, the duty of a woman is to serve. In their reaction to Ashake's effrontery, they explain the duty of a woman to her:

JAMES:        You are a woman, of course. What is the duty of a woman anyway?

CLEM:         To serve the man in whatever way imaginable. (23)

The playwright makes us see how the society treats the woman who is seen as a "sub-man", an attachment whose duty is to serve the male, according to Clem, "whatever way imaginable". The woman's respectability is also attached to the man, since she is not respected if she is unmarried. In some circles, a woman is asked "where is your husband?", just the way we ask a missing child "where is your mother?". The level of respect she gets depends on what a man (her husband) accords her.

Falilat, one of Ashake's friends is not left out in this ill-treatment and perceived inequality controlled by biased men. In an argument, Jolomi, Falilat's husband is overheard telling his wife this:

JOLOMI:       Look Falilat, I would like to know who wears the trousers in this house?

FALILAT: You can see near objectives clearly, I presume. Both of us are in trousers.

JOLOMI: (*Clapping his hands above Falilat's shoulder rather roughly*) and said

“that is against the order of nature” and waiting by saying “Now I am telling you that only one person can wear trouser in this house and that is me.(36)

Wearing of trousers now defines the head of the family. Men have defined culture and dressing for their women to further portray the depth of humiliation and slave treatment a married woman is subjected to in a male dominated society. As the argument continues, Jolomi threatens to send her packing. This means that the woman has no equal right to the marriage so stay in the marriage can only be determined by the man. When she pushes further, her husband remarks thus:

JOLOMI: “Your insubordination will spark off hurricane” which will also sweep you off.

I am going to show you that I am a man...

FALILAT: Why don't you go and prove your masculinity with taller men?

JOLOMI: After all, my shortness does not reduce my manness, you can go and check with taller men to be fully convinced of my vividly, it is

no way diminished by the factor of my height” imagine the man suggesting to the woman in small provocation to have sex with taller men (another man) to compare and/or prove his strength, a word a woman dare not say herself. (29-30)

This means that in a male dominated society, the men are at liberty to make use of certain words but never should the woman. Men generally believe that women are inferior and mere help meets.

LOMI: ... women are better seen than heard. Just like a rope does not befit a fowl’s neck, a position of authority does not befit a woman,(36)

*Brain Has No Gender* also indicts fathers who know nothing next to giving out their daughters’ hands in marriage in exchange for huge bride price. The play begins with Alani’s quest and desire for a male child. Oyedepo captures this social imbalance, the preference of male children and disregard for the opposite sex through the use of dialogue:

IFALANI: Now that you have offered all the sacrifices, the only thing left to be done is for you to dance around the town.

ALANI: (*Excitedly*) dance round the town? That is a simple matter.

IFALAMI: Yes, dance round the town in your best garment and Orunmila will clear your way for a male child to be born.

ALANI: Baba Ifalani, I say that is a simple thing. What have I not done to shake off this curse? What have I not done?" (9).

The extent to which a male child is preferred over the female child is alarming. The degree at which Alani's experience in pursuit for a male child makes one laugh and is directly proportional to the desire, love and preference for a male child.

In this scene, Oyedepo frowns at the way Alani's wife gets pregnant eventually with triplet, which steered up a great celebration for him. However, when it turned out to be all female children, Alani's ego is automatically grounded and he becomes sad, to the extent of abandoning his wife and kids at the hospital. This places Alani's wife in danger. This represents the ill-treatment women face in the society where male children are held in high reverence above female. This perception has driven several feminist movements both peaceful and violent movements to call for equality between sexes in the society. That notwithstanding, the situation of Alani becomes worse when he begins to nurture marital plan, by betrothing his sixteen years old daughter, Osomo to an old friend by name Kelani, a man Oyedepo describes as an (Octogenarian leaning more on a walking stick than his legs, and with incomplete dentition as a result of his age) (28)

Osomo's father appears to be undisturbed by the age difference between Kelani and his daughter, as well as, his health condition but goes ahead to conclude a marriage plan without the consent of his female child. This is a true reflection of the society that believe that women will not amount to any good in life if given formal education.

KELANI: You have heardo. I can't hide my feelings. Osono is my choice. The girl is beautiful. I am not going to choose any other of your daughter

ALANI: No problem, am I not on your side? She can't decide for me. She can't dictate things for me.

KELANI: (He laughs showing Alani his toothless gum) You are my good friend.(29)

Rather than give her a sound education and guide her in her choice of life partner, her father readily gives her hands out in marriage to a man his age. This is another flaw of patriarchy. It gives men total freedom to determine the educational and matrimonial destiny of their girl-children.

To say the least, patriarchal society in every sense is oppressive and unfair to womanhood thereby silencing the voice and the potentials of the girl child both consciously and unconsciously.

## **2.2 SUPERIORITY OF MALE GENDER IN SOCIETY**

As earlier noted men are considered to be the major stalk holders in society therefore they decide the place and fate of different gender. Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of*

*the Bumpy-Chested* and *Brain Has No Gender* clearly demonstrate the social discrimination of women in the area of education. In Africa, it is believed that female sex requires little or no education therefore any man that sends his daughter school is seen as man that is wetting his neighbour's flower. Girl children are considered to future house wives whose education serves no useful purpose. This concept is borne out of the tradition which holds that the male is the symbol of authority in society.

Men know that education is important to human development but it is evident that the education of girl-children is considered less important for patriarchal reason. To many, the girl-child has need of little or no education. On the contrary, the education of boys is considered very important because they are male, the future men and patriachs. In *Brian Has No Gender*, Oyedepo portrays the level of educational neglect of a female child. This is depicted in the challenge that surrounds the life of the central character, Osomo. Her father, Alani does not think about her education and he opposes it when its issue is raised. The first instance of Alani's patriarchal attitude towards his daughter's education is seen after the his wife's delivery girls. His pregnant wife delivers a set of triplets (female) which gets him upset. Upon further enquiry, he is told that his eldest daughter (Osomo) must carry a sacrifice for the "curse of female children" to be lifted from him. Osomo does not believe in this, and so she objects. Consequently, her father gives the command that her education should discontinue. Tradition teaches that the woman must obey and respect the man at all time. Osomo's refusal has flanked this rule, and Alani cannot help

but to link her emancipatory reasoning to her education. This is dramatised in this dialogue involving Osomo and one of her friends:

OSOMO:     *(Tearfully)*...My father is extremely ignorant of modern trends. He does not believe that female children can come to nothing. When you tell him that the world is moving ahead and women can become great scientist, lawyer, doctors, he is not just convinced.

LERE:        I don't know what is wrong with your father. He is simply unyielding. Out of sixteen children, he sends only me to school and now he has stopped me .I do not know what to say again *(tearfully)*.

(25)

Oyedepo shows that oppression of female sex in the area of education in society and this is as a result of wrong customs and belief usually held by men. Thus, in her effort to sensitize the female sex as well as male on the illogicality of most customs, she entitles this play as *Brian Has No Gender* suggesting that the female sex can equally do what the male can do education wise.

Alani sees the education of a girl-child as a waste of resources and time consequently he prefers to force them into early marriage. For example, we see him forceful pushing his 16 year old daughter to marry Baba Kelani, an 80 year old man whose teeth have completely gone off supported by a walking stick. However, the plan

eventually failed through the elaborate help of one of the village teachers and eventually she became a renowned medical doctor against the doubt of Alabi who deliberately stopped Osomo from going to school by throwing her out of the house. Oyedepo, in her story dramatically narrates the pains and ordeal that Osomo was faced with in the play. Oyedepo, further demonstrates this through the central character, Osomo who despite her persecution, toil and hardship continues to pursue education until she becomes a doctor. Osomo's educational triumph amidst her father's opposition sends a message to those who promote female oppression. Thus, towards the end of the play, when Alani realizes that his run-away daughter is now a doctor, his perception of the female sex changes immediately. He is now sensitized, thus he says, "Osomo, a child in a million. A daughter who has done what a thousand sons cannot do. I hope you have forgiven me. When you ran away, I thought you had run away with a man. Osomo! God has been with you. What a male child cannot do you have done. (53). Oyedepo's *Brain Has No Gender*, therefore, portrays the deprivation of women in the area of education and women's reaction towards such. *Brain Has No Gender* highlights some of the many challenges faced by the girl-child in the society, in relations to marriage and other societal oppression as well as the preference placed on male children that guarantee their access to education.

### **CHAPTER THREE**

#### **RESISTANCE OF PATRIARCHY IN SOCIETY**

Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested* and *Brain has No Gender* are revolutionary plays that quest for the emancipation of women. Oyedepo's women in *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested* feel marriage has been used in patriarchal societies to subdue women therefore they frown at it with the view to challenging husbands' domination of wives. To this end, they pose these questions to all patriarchs: How many women are governors? How many of us are statesmen or are we permitted to use the word stateswomen? How many of us are great scientists and inventors? While in *The Rebellion of the Bumpy Chested* fight against inequality in marriage, those in *Brain Has No Gender* choose to force the door of knowledge through education to get liberated from oppression.

### **3.1 RESISTANCE OF ASSAIGNED DUTIES IN HOMES**

Anderson asserts that women status in the society is somehow natural for the fact that they bear children. In other words, the place and roles of women are based on biological factor which only breeds stereotype. Imogie and Evaikhueme further buttress this belief further by saying "women are traditionally seen as home makers and this has in some way limited the potentials and natural competence beyond the home." The growing belief that the biological role of the female child is to bear children and nurse men have affected the effectiveness of the woman outside the home. For instance, in *The Rebellion of the Bumpy Chested*, the playwright portrays this point through the character

of Imokwa, who is a member of the BUMPY CHESTED MOVEMENT (BCM). She acts thus:

IMOKWA: *(with one hand Akimbo and her protruding stomach prominently shot forward)* said “Captain, permission to fall out and permission not to attend the next parade.”

CAPTAIN SHARP: Why Imokwa? The exercise is rendering you weak, you said?

IMOKWA: *(with a tight face and stroking light)*. The baby has been kicking so hard, making me feel uncomfortable. At this time, the kicking is so rigorous that I entertain the fear that it might burst out of me tummy in protest. (11)

This last statement by Imokwa clearly explains the pain associated with the biological formation, thus the responsibility of a woman to bear children goes with pain which should be pitied by men. Another biological task for women is breast feeding. The passion and love of a woman towards her child are displayed in the character of Rade, who is also a part of the BCM and feels the parade is getting too long and her baby at home is crying for breast milk (food):

RADE: (when the ripple of laughter has settled, raised up her stick “please excuse me, captain sharp... cups her breast in her hand and rises up wearing a scarf)“excuse me captain sharp... if we may hurry up”(6).

CAPTAIN SHARP: Why?

RADE: “... it is most likely my baby wants to suck. He must be crying for food at home now” (7)

Rade, unlike some of the other women (except Imokwa), who does not have babies and a need to rush home, will miss out from that meeting and become unproductive to the movement while her husband does not even bother about such distractions. To bring in the issue of oppression here, Oyedepo asserts that some male characters’ attitude towards their wives is violent. For participating in BCM MEETING, some women express their husbands’ possible reactions thus:

*“(Others react...*

A: My hubby will be mad with me

B: My husband will chase me with a machete

C: He will throw my things out

D: He will almost strangle me... (8)

These reactions limit the rights of women. The above statements show the depth of oppression and pains some women endure while living with their husbands, beside the challenges of child bearing and grooming children in the African society.

Betiku is of the opinion that women are also culturally and socially expected to “take care of domestic chores...” These responsibilities among others have been a woman’s daily routine and known activities, yet they are seen as weaker and emotionally dependent on their male counterparts. The light of this wrong belief which have been widely accepted but no more, is also reflected in the play through Captain Sharp’s reaction towards gender imbalance:

CAPTAIN SHARP: “I am very surprised. Haven’t we resolved that the word “weak” shall henceforth be pulled out of our vocabulary? We have said this for the umpteenth time...” (11).

CAPTAIN SHARP: “... that supposed feminine weakness in only in the imagination. It is super imposed on the psychological consciousness of a woman.” (14-15).

Captain Sharp believes that “feminine weakness” is more of imagination work deploy by men to weaken and relegate women psychologically. She feels that a woman’s ego has

been brainwashed, and imprisoned by society and completely or totally relegated to the kitchen and the bedroom while the men are considered to be strong, adventurous, and rational and as such fit to lead in any sector of society. Unfortunately, most women have accepted this status quo also seeing them as weak and not capable of handling responsibilities outside the home. This on its own has led to the lesser involvement and participation in activities outside the home.

CAPTAIN SHARP: “our activities must be of volcanic impact on the status quo of men. This existing order must be blown into billions of infinitesimal fragments. A new order must emerge. The life of drudgery to which women have been sentenced throughout the ages must alter for a better one. (16)

This above statement explains the frustration of most women. The need to be seen and heard in society has compelled Captain Sharp to reject psychological burdens men place on women as a result of their biological, that God-given roles as mothers.

### **3.2 RESISTANCE OF ASSIGNED DUTIES IN SOCIETY**

In most African societies, women have certain roles or duties that are thrusts at them and any attempt to do otherwise earn such a woman an odd name in society. Oyedepo’s *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-chested* rejects domestic roles societies often give women. BUMPY-CHESTED MOVEMENT (BCM) championed by Captain Sharp

revolts those cultural roles and tasks attributed or assigned to women. Captain Sharp proposes that men should take up other laughable responsibilities like breastfeeding, pregnancy for a while. In an argument with Jolomi, Captain Sharp argues thus:

CAPTAIN SHARP: Women alone can't be sentenced to a lifelong domestic imprisonment. This is what we are crying against. A domestic life of servitude and slavery. There should be equal sharing of domestic work. In actual fact, the men should have a greater share of domestic chores at least to compensate for the ordeal of pregnancy and labour pain which are not naturally transferable. Child rearing should be shared and should not be solely seen as a woman's responsibility along. Husbands and wives should take turns in feeding, caring for baby and washing of nappies and baby clothes and for on.(74-75)

Captain Sharp is very firm about her call to rescue women from social restriction that has placed behind men for too long. She says that "women should be rescued from husbands and in-laws who dehumanized them." To her, women have suffered enough and the mission of the movement is to put an end to that suffering. According to Sharp, it is time for women to be allowed to occupy highly exalted societal offices. For example, a woman becoming a head of state, governor, vice chancellor and take spiritual offices like that of the Pope or Sheik. she states;

CAPTAIN SHARP: Now the synopsis of women demand is this, we want equal opportunity with men. This means for example that societies should remove prejudices which prevent women from getting into the highest position... (73).

Women are capable of sound reasoning therefore they are entitled to have places in offices that are reserved for men. Intellectually, women have the ability to figure things out without men therefore they seek reordering of society. For example, Captain Sharp explains that when a woman occupies a high office, which is rare anyway, the society considers her an oddity. She therefore draws special attention. The fact that she draws special attention makes her situation appear not normal. In other words, the society feels that woman holding a high office or position does not possess the capacity or right to be there at all. This among other things forms the agitation of women in society presented in the play. Jolomi tries to persuade Sharp to see and take society the it has been constructed by men:

JOLOMI: But 'M'am', oh Gosh! Please pardon the slip...Now should women really vie for high offices? Don't they have enough to cope with at home without taking on the cumbrous burden of high offices?

CAPTAIN SHARP: This is the type of mental attitude we are out to challenge that women alone cannot be sentence to a long life of

domestic imprisonment. This is what we are crying against... (74)

Captain Sharp symbolises radicalism therefore men see her as a threat to the sustenance of patriarchy which they hold dearly. The women understand that emancipation from their husbands requires force so they rebel against subjugation occasioned by patriarchy. To this end, Oye, a diehard patriarch further pushes to wane Sharp of her reasoning:

OYE: And I must say you are going to have a tough time... (77)

CAPTAIN SHARP: Well, Mr. Oye, I must say we are armed to the teeth for this type of reaction from you men. In doing this, we have dotted our 'I's and crossed out 't's' and crossed out 't's'. we know all the complications and implications involved. We have done a lot of homework. We know we cannot snatch power easily from those who held it for several centuries (77)

The rational reason and willingness to fight to the end is also seen in an argument between Oye, Jolomi and Captain Sharp. This is the reason Captain Sharp calls for a change in roles:

CAPTAIN SHARP: But for a change, we want the men to take on the traditional women's roles and vice versa. I am throwing the challenge to you

men, if there is nothing wrong with the traditional feminine roles, and then take them up. Take them up! (77)

The Radicalist feminist also calls for a change in the social conditioning of women. Salwa takes over her husband's role and becomes a taxi driver, she returns home one day and sarcastically tells her husband:

SALWA: ...Thank God driving is done with the limbs and not with the sex organs...(85)

The assignment of duties is the cause of confusion in society. Salwa is angry in that society makes it look as if sex organs decide how much a person can do in society. Upon her discovery that sex organs are not used for the role a person performs in society, Salwa goes into commercial driving and she smokes as most men do. This shocks her husband but she does not care as long as she is happy with her life. She rejects the domestic roles associated with housewives and she goes into professions that men covet as theirs. This is her way of fighting patriarchy in society that slights women.

## CHAPTER FOUR

## CONCLUSION

The society presented in Oyedepo's plays *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested and Brain Has No Gender* dramatize the gender and roles allocation. Over the years, women have come to discover that they are being marginalized by the shabby roles they are given by men who champion societal affairs.

The first discourse of this essay looks at patriarchal portrayal of women in society. In other words, women are poorly depicted on account of their God-given gender. The plays studied revealed that patriarchal society see women as extension of men therefore they are given less roles to play. Consequently, the male children are given preferential treatment wherever they appear. The superior placement of male children over their female counterparts is the reason society is biased towards women and the roles they play. Ara Sharp in Oyedepo's plays *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested* decolonizes women whose reasoning has been forced to accept lower place in society. She forcefully eject the ideals of patriarchy which make them inferior therefore she systematically set the stage for revolt against social order in society.

The second discourse dwells on resistance of patriarchy in society. This entails resistance of assigned duties in homes and society at large. Women kick against patriarchy by entering into the professions earlier dominated by men. This occasions the resistance in the plays under study.

The issue of gender inequality that places women beneath men is tackled and this leads to a radical breakthrough for women who see themselves in the shackles of marriage

Finally, Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Chested* and *Brain Has No Gender* dramatise the need for women to be free from social restrictions. The plays conscientise women the need to fight against whatever could their personal happiness away. The playwright is often criticised for setting a radical stage for women but feminists also see her effort as an attempt to dismantle the rock that patriarchy places before women in society. For instance Salwa and Ahaake break into taxi driving and palm wine tapping. These are profession that men saw as their main domains in society. Women believe nothing makes them less capable to do what men can do thereby breaking the order that hinders their freedom in society. In the end, one sees that all genders are entitled to fundamental human rights that should not be determined by genders.

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