

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

### WILL YOU ALLOW HIM DO THAT TO YOU, OH! WOMAN! : A READING OF IDEGU'S *NIKE*

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#### **Introduction:**

#### **When Things Fall Apart ...**

All drama originates from the attitudes, emotions and values of real life; this can be call “actuality” as postulate by Aristotle. Hence, the objective of this paper is to establish the struggle of the women within the content of the play in relation to Idegu's *Nike*. The study employs patriarchy as a theoretical frame work. The paper discourses the outburst of many women movement like that of “bring back our girls” movement, the “You too movement “ and a host of other happenings in the home front to denote and answer the open question of Hajara a character in the play who posed the question to the audience “will you allow him do that to you”? This open ended question can be likened to the Brechtian alienation technique which is the attribute and limitation that causes people to empathize with characters from a distance, however, the link to many social happenings in the home front where men continually subjugate and exploit the women because of the ideology and social structure are now challenge on the streets by way of many protest and in many movement online. This study finds out that the media propaganda goes a long way to answer the question of Hajara to the negative yet the woman question in struggle against patriarchy continues, this is suggestive of the play.

Okonkwo was provoked to justifiable anger by his younger wife, who went to plait her hair at a friend's house and did not return early enough to cook the afternoon meal... and when she returned he beat her heavily. In his anger he had forgotten that it was the week of peace... yam stood for manliness and he who could feed on yams from on harvest to another was a great man... it was clear from the way the crowd stood or sat clear from the ceremony, it was for men. There were many women, but they looked on from the fringe like outsiders ... no single day passed in the sky without his beating the wife, he beat her until she miscarried... no

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matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women he was not really a man, he was like the man in the song who had ten and one wives and not enough soap for his foo-foo...so Oknokwo encourage is boys (Achebe pp 23,24,26,42,70&73 )

The epigram explores codes in historiography in every day struggle of women in a patriarchal world, occupied and dominated by power drunk and for the survival of those that control and exercise the power. But what form of power exists in the domestic space? Keyssar observed that the struggle of women can be viewed as “women as individuals on the other hand, and on the other hand, interest in women as social and political force ...” (4). In posing this hypothesis, “we are reminded again that the issues involved are not concluded, they are not settled. Rather, the question is an open wound festering to choreography of flies!” (Illah.6)

Idegu in *NIKE* posed the women question in everyday struggle in the domestic space, against the power that perpetual exploit –patriarchy! Contributing to a host of other literature that question the question, and placed dramatic arts in a place of a mediator, a reflector and a catalyst for reevaluation. The plays like Agunloye's *More Than Dancing*, *Sweet Revenge*, *The Queen Sisters*, *Idia the warrior Queen*, Jallo's *Onion Makes us Cry*, Sofola's *Wedlock of the gods*, Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood*, among many are mediating and challenging many narratives in the space for many years and a host of new writers are also emerging but, as, Illah posed the question: “Can literature continue to bear this burden? Increasingly, literature is trapped in the paradox of its arts:

- a. it is written to be read
- b. it is written to be performed
- c. it is written In foreign language
- d. it is only available to be bought” (6)

The problematic questions poses its limitation in a number of ways. Over the years, as women continue the struggle in the master's world, even within the world of performance, the signature of the masters still remains a bane for librating women theatre. Illah sees this when he raised the question that question the question when he says that “can literature as a curricular event, unscented away from the streets... can it be the site arena of a rebirth, or a new historiography, in the period of declining literacy! (6). The proposition attempts to question the space of arts in its quest to administer instant justice for the oppressed, the play under study is not isolated from the contradictions as raised by Illah, because the publication in itself, was a product of a grant by the Mac Arthur foundation to Jenkeri Okwori from 1994 to 1997 with the focus on women reproductive rights. The play is product of a community experience through the instrumentality of the Theatre for Development in the Benue communities of Okalegwu-igwu (Igwu-Akor), Orokam in Idoma west on February

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18, 1962. The project “Instances” tries to overcome the contradictions as raised by Illah in a number of ways yet its caught over by some standards but that is the standard of life, nothing is absolutely clear without limitation.

As the preface to the play *NIKE* suggest, “this collection of plays on women reproductive rights, drawing from real life stories of women, therefore critically but subtly challenges traditions, laws, practices, attitudes that militate against women's right in the society” (VIII) this comes with a charge, hence, the starting point that mark the theory of discourse, because in theory, the discourse is connected to its umbilical cord. For the purpose of analysis the paper interrogates the place of and struggle of women in Idegu's *Nike* through the theory of patriarchy, content analysis is employed making the paper “qualitative” in method.

### **Theoretical explication**

There is a need to appreciate a problem from its fundamental roots, the roots answers critical question, relevant to the issue and holds the contradictions over time. The starting point of this paper is seen with the vintage lenses of patriarchy as an established theory in literary criticism.

Patriarchy is a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property. Some patriarchal societies are also patrilineal, meaning that property and title are inherited by the male lineage. Patriarchy is associated with a set of ideas, a patriarchal ideology that acts to explain and justify this dominance and attributes it to inherent natural differences between men and women. Sociologists tend to see patriarchy as a social product and not as an outcome of innate differences between the sexes and they focus attention on the way that gender roles in a society affect power differentials between men and women. (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patriarchy>)

Historically, patriarchy has manifested itself in the social, legal, political, religious, and economic organization of a range of different cultures. Even if not explicitly defined to be by their own constitutions and laws, most contemporary societies are, in practice, patriarchal. Idegu argued that “where humans are not directly involved, laws (ancient and modern). Customs, tradition, and societal regulatory organs, most often than not, are guilty of enacting such laws that only wear male faces” (74) this means that the structures for women oppression in the society is coded and legislated upon, giving the women no space to speak. On the issue of space and speaking, the question of Spivak's “*can the subaltern speak*” remains critical to the space of women in the patriarchal world. Citing spivak in Nayer ( 28) “spivak argues that the subaltern wrote her body, because there is no other way of speaking. The subaltern

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woman has no position of enunciation: she remains within the discourse of patriarchy and colonialism as the object of somebody else's discourse" who is that somebody? Of course men!. The relationship of the question of "the woman" is linked to colonialism which invariably connotes that the men are the colonialist (dominant) and the women as the colonized (subservient & weak) without a voice or power, Spivak's position is that, women cannot speak in the structures of patriarchy and colonialism of their body and thoughts.

**Critical Reading Of Idegu's *Nike***

From the point of identifying the problem: Hajara's husband is dead, she mourns her husband not only because he was her husband but a master provider of her daily bread:

- Hajara:** tell me, mama Abibu, why should this happen to me now?  
**Nike:** (silence) Why should Ahmed die now? Why now when I need him most? (She sobs) how does he expect me to take care of the children? How?  
**Nike:** it is alright. We all sympathize sincerely with your plight. God knows we do.  
**Hajara:** our first child is already in the college. So how do I pay his school fees now? How?  
**Hajara:** I will starve and die of frustration. .. the only person I had the one who made life worth living is gone... (p. 107, 108)

The lamentation of Hajara is not so much about love but of the means of survival on account of dependence on the master provider- "the man", who provides for both her economic and emotional wellbeing. From her psychological state of mind, underscored in the lines above, it will be deduced that for Hajara and like many other women who lost their husbands without the economic power at the domestic front, life becomes a battle, not ready to confront but a shock that might take away happiness and joy from their entire life. This is an everyday struggle, sometimes death is just another chapter in the struggle of women, while Hajara thinks she will become in the words of Achebe "the greatest sufferer in the world", the person close to her, might be a mirror to see another angle of living in pains yet forced to acceptance because the master is always right. To acknowledge the dependence of women, the play adopts a flash back technique to focus on the problem of today and its historiography, where Nike is the past full of experience and Hajara is in the threshold of another phase :

- Nike:** I know how painful it is to lose such a husband. But, mama Adamu, you seem to forget that there are many women whose experiences are more piteous and tragic than yours.

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- Hajara:** There can be no worse case than mine.  
**Nike:** what you see here is a classic example of such a woman  
**Hajara:** how do you mean?  
**Nike:** take a look at this. (She removes her head tie to expose a complete bald head. Hajara is astonished beyond words. She gazes at the head with disbelief and awe. Her mouth open. After a while, Nike ties her head tie. **Hajara** is still in surprise)  
**Hajara :** unbelievable ! How, how..hh- how, I mean, what is the meaning of this?  
**Nike:** it is a long story. ... (PP 109,110)

Why should Hajara be awe? Baldness! The struggle of Hajara and Nike is the same but in different degree of pains, Nike recount her story of suffering, endurance and force love. Nike is married for about twenty eight years to Baba Abibu who deserted her with the children for many years, Nike took up to her petty trade to make a living and to pay her children's school fees when the husband was away, from mobile canteen to constructions sites to selling of crops she says:

Nike: all that long, Baba Abibu kept away from home. Every time I traveled home for business, I visited my in-laws (113)

The woman must not only be obedient to her husband even in his absence she maintained the relationship of respect and loyalty to her in-laws, Nike respected her in laws knowing fully well that the society she belongs is that which gives you respect only when your in-laws accord you one, and because of the children, the cord must not be shaken. This is the exactitude of the relationship that exist between a colonial nation and its colonialist even after independence, the colonial state still depends on the dominant (colonialist) for direction and guide. However, the struggle of Nike, the in-laws never appreciated her suffering instead they accuse her of misappropriation of their sons money.

Ojo : ... most impotently, I don't like the way you play around with my son's money... for a woman my daughter , that is rather very dangerous...(114)

Hajara is in total disbelief and out of respect remain mute but can only talk to her partner in the struggle, hence, their conversation continued without anybody to hear them out again pointing to Spivak's argument that the Subaltern cannot speak no because she cannot speak but because nobody listens to her but herself as seen in the lines below:

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- Nike:** I came here seriously aggrieved. A cocoa farm I inherited from my family, to them, belonged to their son. All gifts I presented during my visits were not in the least appreciated. Worst still, I was accused of playing around with their son's money.
- Hajara:** their son's money indeed.
- Nike:** in his parent's home, they believed I put a spell on their son. Here his own children knew him not as father.
- Hajara:** Really?

Only through the conversation can the two express their frustration, they are united through the pains caused by men in their respective life, after marriage, the pains of child bearing and taking care of the man, when the man was away, the woman takes role of providing for the family, from children's food to their health- all on the woman who had little resources at hand. Even when Nike tries to respect the institution by being a loyal wife she get nothing in return rather more difficult attempt to break her. Nike's husband after long years of exile decided to come back but took a new wife:

- Tunde:** there can't be definitely two masters in one house. Whatever is the case, a man is a man and a woman remains a woman. Are you hearing me?
- Nike:** yes, Baba Abibu
- Tunde:** it is not enough to have used your money in building a house. As long as you remain here, I own you as wife and invariably everything you have.
- Nike:** did I ever complain?
- Tunde:** as the man in charge of this house, owe mankind the duty to cut you to size. To rescue your overgrown feathers, I have taken Mariam as my second wife (*Nike can hardly believe her ears. She opens her mouth wide in utter dismay. She collapses*)

With the actions of Tunde to take a new wife to tame what he called “rescue your overgrown feathers” Nike is still mute but she can't hold her muteness forced by the power of the moment she collapses, the play is deliberate maintaining consistency by making the character of Nike with its flash back technique to address the future in Hajara, but what could stand to justify the depth of psychological trauma that women as exemplified by the two face in marriage? The marriage of another wife remains a strategy to exercise power by Tunde, Mariam the second wife careless about the

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situation of her sister hence she thinks of herself as being more better, as her lines suggest:

**Mariam:** if you were good enough as a wife, he would not have married me. So why use your plates for as cover for failing out of his favour. (120)

The co-wives method is a strategy embedded in patriarchy, where fellow women are schooled to look upon the man and to fight for his attention always and every time, the principle of cat and rat race is instructive here, a co wife sees her fellow sister as enemy because of the man, such was the relationship that exist between Mariam and Nike, while the man continue to take side with Mariam to oppress and frustrate Nike, however, that action did not break Nike who patriarchy taught to be silent in all times. But can the silence ever produce any result for libration of women? The play reaches its climax with a contradiction between the father in law and the widow (Nike)

*Tunde's house. Nike is seated in deep sober mood; she is dressed in black costume. It is a period of mourning for her. With her is Ojo, her Father in law.*

**Ojo:** well, my journey will be very brief. My people have a saying that he who was once beaten by a snake has every cause to fear a lizard.

**Nike:** ( taken by surprise)

**OJO:** I have all the causes in this world to fear whoever was behind the premature death of my son.

**NIKE:** (Silence)

**OJO:** I know those who are behind my son's death and they must pay for it (silence) if you think this fake sense of innocence will save you, then you must be joking.

**NIKE:** Ah ah baba. I hope you are not thinking that.....

**OJO:** Of course, why not. After bewitching my son, you have finally eaten him up.

**NIKE:** (Speaks down in tears) How, how, how can you say that about me, baba? How?

**OJO:** Shedding crocodile tears will not solve the problem. You ate my son, but I will not watch and see you eat whatever he left behind.

**NIKE:** God, God, God, are you hearing?

**OJO:** God or no God, I have concluded plans to take over my son's big cocoa farm in the village.

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**NIKE:** What?

**OJO:** I came here to pack all his property home.(Nike continues to sob) Never mind that you did not allow him build even a hut in the village, ( admiring the house) by the time this beautiful house is sold with his other property, Aduke my wife, and I will live happily till we die(Nike looks at him, the house, the sky, and raising her hands, still facing the sky she opens her mouth as if to talk. She collapses and faints) HAJARA and NIKE.

**HAJARA:** Will you allow him do that to you? (Nike looks at her as if to answer) (pp.123,124)

The style of the play is deliberate in a number of ways, the scene painted as Tuned's house is instructive, even though a woman can build a house but she can't claim the property from the description of the scene to the action of the father-in law, the woman remains silent! Forcing the question again "can the subaltern speak"? At best she is described as "surprise" after several acts of exploitation, the woman, is surprise.

The contradiction in the play is the use of an open-ended method, leaving the audience who are the principal actors in the real life situation to reflection but how can we quantify the success of the audience? When will the women and the audiences of this play text answer Hajara? The next chapter attempts to postulate that the question is now answered not to claim that it is as a result of the text but to pointer and underscore that for long many crave for independence and the text is interpreted within a new movement towards deconstruction.

**TEXT TO STREET PROTEST; REBIRTH OF A NEW HISTORIOGRAPHY**

One of the most important instruments for tackling violence against women and securing women's human right is CEDAW (convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women) entered into on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of September 1981. The Convention defines discrimination against women as "...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field." By implication, the play "Nike" typified that which all the female characters are discriminated upon, interestingly beyond treaties women are responding to the question of "will you allow him do that to you?" as posed by Hajara on the streets.

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Nigeria's Bring Back Our Girls (BBOG) movement is an example to cite. From a one-day march in 2014, the BBOG movement erupted in April 2014 following the abduction of over 200 schoolgirls from Chibok Secondary School, Northeast Nigeria, by the Boko Haram Islamist insurgency group. The group organized a public protest on 30 April in Nigeria's capital, Abuja. It was meant to be a one off, but then something happened. The BBOG has met every day at the Unity Fountain in Abuja. It has also staged some 200 protests within and outside Nigeria.

The Me Too movement (or #MeToo movement), with a large variety of local and international alternative names, is a movement against sexual harassment and sexual assault. The movement began to spread virally in October 2017 as a hashtag on social media in an attempt to demonstrate the widespread prevalence of sexual assault and harassment, especially in the workplace assigns, Mahdawi analysis shows that:

#MeToo has made men afraid of interacting with women at work, according to new research by LeanIn.Org and SurveyMonkey. Sixty percent of male managers said they were uncomfortable mentoring, socializing, and having one-on-one meetings with women, up 14% from last year. Almost half of male managers said they were uncomfortable socializing with female colleagues outside the office, and more than a third actively took steps to avoid such interactions. ( 1)

The position above, suggest the success of the movement in achieving results and justice against the system of domination existing. Again, Mahdawi point to a fact that “Women were at the forefront of the mass protests that recently ended Omar al-Bashir's decades-long rule over Sudan, accounting for 70% of demonstrators according to some estimates.” CNN has a chilling piece on how the Bashir regime tried to use rape to silence these women. “Break the girls, because if you break the girls, you break the men,” soldiers were told. The women did not break.

Another, set of women answering Hajara is the The #YouKnowMe campaign as started by the actor and talk show host Busy Philipps, with the intent of getting rid of the shame that still surrounds abortion, “#MeToo has demonstrated, online discussion can catalyze real world change. The #YouKnowMe stories people are sharing make the political deeply personal. They paint a powerful picture of the different reasons people get abortions – some are traumatic, some are mundane, but none is more valid than another.” (4)

In Kano state, Nigeria the news of Waila Tasiu of Ungwar Yansaro certainly is not the first according to <https://www.voanews.com/> reports that the 13 year old Wasila was married to a 35 year old husband but was alleged to kill him using rat poison. What might have been the inner motif to such an act? Again, in April 2017, another

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14 year old bride kills her 40 year old husband Isiaka Usman of Lifari village in Mashegu LGA of Niger state ,Nigeria. She is the third wife. As reported by pulse Nigeria , Aisha isah the 14 year third wife was quoted as “He had been starving me for four days and when I confronted him, he slapped me and out of anger, I hit him on the forehead with a pestle and he collapsed and died.” She added that she did not kill Usman deliberately as it was out of anger and frustration and pleaded for forgiveness. One of the many cases is that Mr. Idoko of Ayetero in lagos, Nigeria who was stabbed to death by his wife on August 20, 2017, after his wife discovered a text message from his girlfriend. (<http://saharareporters.com>)

The instances above point to the many women seeking answers and space within the domination of men just like the character Hajara the play. The Women struggle against patriarchy is taking a turn new, out on the streets, women continue to demand for equality and justice, the drama is justified as the voice of reasoning which over the years projected the ills that might befall an oppressive system.

### **Conclusion**

The discourses of women under the oppressive rule of the men for a long time have been a discourse of the oppressor and the oppressed. However, recent media propaganda and street protest by women deliberately calls for a deconstruction of the relationship that exists for long. The woman must not only be seen but also to be heard because the instruments of oppression used by the men is now in the hands of the women and the sexes are in a cold war

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