

**Interrogating Misconceptions of Feminism in Tracy
Chima Utoh's *Our Wives Have Gone
Mad Again* and Stella 'Dia Oyedepo's
*The Rebellion of the
Bumpy-chested***

by

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Abstract

This essay examines the attitudes and actions of the female characters in Tracy Utoh's *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* and Stella 'Dia Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-chested*. It establishes that these women are deployed as parodies of male chauvinism and misinterpretations of feminism. Thus, the female characters enact extreme and violent chauvinistic male attitudes. Ironically, the irrational and militant acts of the women depicted by the playwrights are the same attitudes that men have always been criticized for and women have always protested against in feminism(s). The essay demonstrates that while the two plays confirm the reality of the women's subjection and the need for feminism; however, the plays also emphasize the ironies embedded in irrational application of feminist concepts. It illustrates that Utoh and Oyedepo deploy a reverse of male chauvinism, codified as radical feminism, to warn their readers about the dangers of extreme attitudes. The essay concludes the farcical irrationality of the women in these plays diminishes the reality of the woman's oppression, detracts from and trivializes the seriousness of feminist ideals and enables negative misconceptions about feminism. It also highlights an interesting message skillfully underlying both plays; that "Feminism is for Every Body" because human nature is essentially the same in men and women in positions of power and without the restraints of deeply inscribed cultural constructs.

Introduction

Tracy Utoh's *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again (Our Wives)*, and Stella Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-chested (The Rebellion)* present female characters who employ negatively spectacular methods of dethroning male oppression and supremacy in society. The women in *Our Wives*, Irene, Ene, Funmi, Mairo and Ifeoma, regard men – their husbands in particular – as “different grades and degrees of imbeciles,” “necessary evils” (23), and “good for nothing piece of liability” (32) over whom the women seek to exercise complete authority. They form an informal interest group seeking to re-arrange society to give women dominance by all means possible, including acts of physical violence.

Similarly, *The Rebellion* features women whose tough feminist agenda is clearly stated by Captain Sharp, the leader of a women's liberation movement -The Bumpy-chested Movement (B.C.M):

Our activities henceforth must have a volcanic impact on the status quo of men vis a vis women. This existing order must be blown into infinitesimal fragments! A new order must emerge. This life of drudgery to which women have been sentenced throughout the ages must alter for a better one. Men must be asked to descend from Olympic heights in which they have carved an exclusive niche and shake hands with women on the platform of equality. Women must emerge from the state of submissiveness to that of parity if not of dominance. (*The Rebellion*, 16 -17)

Sharp's forceful statement indicates a consciousness of socio-cultural oppression of the woman, and a determination to bring about 'volcanic' changes to this situation, and if possible, a reversal of the situation. Capt. Sharp gathers women in a more defined activist group. The essay aligns itself with Osita Ezenwanebe's assertion in reference to *The Rebellion*: “The brand of feminism illustrated in Oyedepo [and Utoh's plays] ...is taken erroneously as the goal of feminism” (187), Ezenwanebe explains that attitudes such as those displayed in *Our Wives* and *The Rebellion* give feminism a negative undertone and cause many scholars to dissociate themselves from feminist struggles despite the fact that the oppression and marginalization of women are real (187). Indeed, feminism in any variation should not be a threat to societal peace.

This essay, therefore, gives a critical evaluation of the methods the women employ to achieve liberation from male domination, the nature of feminism implicit in the methods they apply and the implications of the brand of feminism they utilize in dismantling oppressive practices. The conduct of women and the manner in which Utoh and Oyedepo have presented them are analyzed in detail to decipher the underlying messages about feminism in the plays.

Evaluating feminism, Marilyn French avers:

Feminism is the only serious, coherent and universal philosophy that offers an alternative to patriarchal thinking and structures.... Feminists believe that women are human beings, that the two sexes are (at least) equal in all significant ways, and that this equality must be publicly recognized. They believe that qualities traditionally associated with women - the feminine principle - are (at least) equal in value to that associated with men - masculine principle - and that this equality must be publicly recognized. (442)

Similarly, bell hooks describes feminism as:

... a struggle against sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. Most importantly, feminism is neither a life style nor a readymade identity or role one can step into. (51)

French emphasizes a publicly recognized position of equality between the sexes and hooks specifically points out that while feminism opposes sexist oppression, it “does not privilege women over men.” Thus hooks title her book: *Feminism is for Every Body*.

In line with French and hooks, Christine Odi describes feminists: “all proactive feminist thinkers concur that feminism is an ideological construct which seeks to achieve equality between men and women” (43). Thus feminism, in its various styles and stances, seeks to eradicate all forms of women’s oppression and correct the imbalance in the relationship between men and women. Although there is a consensus among feminists about liberating women from the shackles of oppression and marginalization, achieving equal rights and privileges with the men, there is no consensus as to how this is to be achieved. This lack of coherence in terms of methodology is responsible for the different styles of feminism depicted in contemporary African drama. Radical feminism, the variant of feminism deployed by Utoh and Oyedepo’s female characters, is presented in the plays as extreme, irrational and even destructive.

Paul Goring, Jeremy Hawthorn and Domhnall Mitchell maintain that radical feminism usually consists of “a rejection of most or all forms of collaboration with men or with organizations containing men. ...Radical feminism tends to be universalizing rather than to focus upon the socially, culturally, and historically specific characteristics of *patriarchy* [it fights against]” (195). Thus, it regards the male-controlled capitalist hierarchy as sexist and the defining feature of women’s oppression.

Radical feminists believe that women can free themselves only when they have done away with what they consider as inherently oppressive and dominating patriarchal system. The “universalizing” quality of radical feminism, pointed out by Goring et al, aptly describes the activities of the women in the plays studied in this essay. Hence members of the informal sisterhood in *Our Wives* and the army of women led by Capt. Sharp in *The Rebellion*, unanimously identify the enemy as man, specifically the husbands of members 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 role. These women entertain no alternatives 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 unfavorable views 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 systems.

Nigerian drama is relentlessly deployed to record the Nigerian woman’s oppression and simultaneously offer methods of resistance and liberation. Martha Hagan in Kweku Wartemberg’s *The Corpse’s Comedy* has just “lost” her husband, but rather than sympathize with her, all her husband’s relatives are interested in is his property. Essien, the husband’s cousin states: “Now, friend Martha, your husband is dead and I’m your husband’s cousin ... I’m therefore *entitled by custom to take a portion of his estate ...*” (42 Emphasis added). Another relative, Andoh, lets her know:

I’m Mr Hagan’s brother and he’s dead, *custom allows me to take his house as my portion of his total estate...I’m asking you to move from the house within two days. You know the custom.* (45 Emphasis added)

Of course, she knows the tradition of the people allows his brothers to inherit his wealth, leaving her and her children in penury. She accepts this as the way of the world in which she lives, and so does not put up resistance. Notably, Martha’s is ignorant of choices or alternatives, so she accepts and cooperates meekly with the forces of her oppression.

This lack of awareness also characterizes the situation in the early part of Ola Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. Rotimi’s protagonist, Rahman Lekoja-Brown is a powerful, unquestionable master in his home. Completely in control of his two wives, Mama Rashida and Sikira, who respond to all his orders with “Yes, my Lord” until Liza, his third wife - an American-trained medical doctor, arrives to usher in awareness and options. Under the influence of Lisa, Lekoja-Brown’s first and second wife understand that that “men and women are created equal” (*Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*57), and there is no justifiable reason for them to remain Lekoja-Brown’s “crickets” or “sacrificial slaves” (39). Their attitudes change and Lekoja- Brown adamantly resists any change in status quo.

In his opinion, “It is too much indulgence that makes the she-goat grow a long beard like her husband. I am no longer going to lie down ...while you wipe your feet on all the moral standards I have set in this house!” (58), but the women persist in charting a new path, and at the end of this play, Lejoka-Brown’s authority over his wives crumbles. He laments: “Are you there, the world has come to an end” (77). The world has really come to an end, at least for him, because his wives have ‘stepped out of line.’

Wartemberg and Rotimi’s plays present patriarchy is the basis of the woman’s oppression. Kate Millet affirms that patriarchy is the root of the woman’s oppression. She insists that patriarchy “is the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concept of power” (25/118).Millet explains that “patriarchy’s chief institution is the family...a patriarchal unit within a patriarchal whole” (33). In patriarchal social structures, both men and women are similarly socialized into the mindset that men must maintain dominance over women culturally, economically and politically. This situation has given rise to the feminist struggle for liberation and equality.

The aim of feminism is to create a consciousness that practices like those depicted in Wartemberg’s *The Corpse’s Comedy*, among others and relationships such as Lekoja-Brown would prefer to have with his women are oppressive, and must be resisted and eradicated. While most African women writers agree that feminism is relevant to and necessary for African women, they recognize the need to pursue the emancipation of the African woman based on African ideals and through programs/actions that do not alienate her from African cultural and social realities (Ezenwanebe187), hence the variants of African feminism; womanism, motherisms, snail sense feminism and STIWA (Social transformation including women in Africa).

However, women in Utoh and Oyedepo’s plays do not demonstrate any consideration for the complementarity or equality prescribed in French and hook’s descriptions of feminism and more deeply enshrined in African alternatives for feminism. Ezenwa-Ohaeto maintains that the women in *Our Wives*“ break all the rules of decent political behavior and turn political activities into oppressive and dehumanizing affairs” (11).Agatha Nwanya’s description of the women in *Our Wives* apply aptly to the women in *The Rebellion*. She opines: “From Irene, Ene, Ifeoma to Funmi, the playwright paints a gloomy picture of a “bunch of charlatans and sadists in their frenzy. The whole picture is that of female gender at variance with their male counterparts” (59). But Nwanya is quite practical; she realizes that this role inversion irks most dramatic critics who argue that the play(s) are not realistic because subverting gender roles to reverse gender stereotyping in favor of women is not in line with any known human culture, let alone African custom and tradition (59). Thus, the depictions in the two plays go beyond the context and basic tenets of feminism. However, the essay illustrates that these extremist attitudes are carefully orchestrated to achieve the playwright’s purpose.

Beyond Rebellion and Feminism

In *Our Wives*, Utoh transfers grossly exaggerated forms of patriarchal attitudes to her female characters. Ene is married to Inyang Mpang, a much younger man and treats him worse than most people would treat their hired help. Inyang is solely in charge of cooking and house work, yet Ene abuses him at will. For example, Ene and her friends enter their house to find Inyang sweeping and dusting:

Ene: (waves her hand expansively.) Inyang! What is the meaning of this?

Inyang: (straightens up.) What? Madam Ene, you have come.
Welcome. Madam Funmi and Madam Mairo, welcome.

Ene: (standoffish.) Welcome yourself, foolish man. (pointing) look at the clock, is this the time your mates clean the house? Lazy Idiot! (22)

To Ene, her husband is a “lazy idiot.” Funmi in support of Ene’s opinion and treatment of her husband generalizes: “Ene my sister, we all have different grades and degrees of imbeciles in our homes but what shall we do? Men are necessary evils or so they say” (23). Ene gives us reasons why her husband is worthless.

Ene: ...What have I not done for this useless Inyang? I took him to the village and gave him money to pay my dowry. I sponsored the traditional marriage and the church wedding. I feed this man, I clothe him and I put comfortable shelter over his head. Now what do I get in return? Ingratitude! He is lazy, insubordinate and good for nothing. He cannot even impregnate me. Three years since our wedding and nothing has happened. What am I supposed to do with a eunuch?

Inyang is “useless” because he is economically dependent on his wife and is unable to perform the much valued function of giving her a child.

Ene’s attitude to Inyang’s economic dependence is extreme enough to be objectionable and goes beyond the realms of feminism. The reader realizes that the playwright presents a grotesque parody of patriarchal attitudes to her audience, and enabling them to view and evaluate the harm caused by the woman’s economic dependence on the man, a major reason why men have been able to subjugate women in patriarchal social structures. Thus, Utoh uses her female characters to give the men ironical caricatures of the injustices they have subjected women to previously. By this inversion of fortunes, Utoh implies that economic dependence is a major platform for oppression in gender relations.

Utoh deliberately makes all the men in her play economically dependent on their wives to make her point. Zeus, Ifeoma's husband, neither pays rent, children's school fees, nor contributes to housekeeping in any way, yet he beats up his wife at will, womanizes, does not expect to be accountable to his wife, takes her car out when he pleases and leaves her to use taxis until she decides to "teach him a bitter lesson" (31) when next he attempts to beat her up. She feels justified in hitting him on the head with a pestle as he advances to beat her. Unfortunately he dies. Odera, Mairo's husband is also dependent on her. He steals from her. He keeps the fifty thousand naira Mairo asked him to pay into her bank and claims that he was attacked by thieves. Comically, he dramatizes his faked encounter with 'rogues': "I swear, they took everything. They said they saw a vision that my wife is a witch..." (48). Felix, Irene's husband, cannot even afford to pay Rosandra, the prostitute he hires, so he attempts to sneak away after sleeping with the girl, causing her to insult and disgrace him (52). This is particularly ludicrous considering that Chief Irene, Felix's wife is aspiring to become the next Head of State.

Thus, economic independence is a tool of liberation. She makes the subtle point that oppression is not restricted to men against women, that women will also be oppressive in equivalent situations of unrestrained power such as is often accorded to men in patriarchal social systems. As in seen in Utoh's text, the men too can easily become victims of economic power, needing liberation from mistreatment by women if they are, as women have been in the past, trapped in situations of economic dependence. In the circumstances presented in *Our Wives*, feminism is, as hooks argues, also for men in equivalent situations.

The characterization of Inyang as impotent and therefore "useless" is a parody of the agonizing fate of the childless woman in patriarchal society. In addition, Ene attributes their childlessness to Inyang without verification or reason, a parody of the norm in African fiction. In Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnuego is worthless to her first husband -Amatokwu- because she is unable to bear him a child. Amatokwu is vicious when he tells Nnuego: "I cannot waste my precious male seeds on a woman who is infertile. I have to raise children for my line" (32). In the same novel, Ubani summarizes the roles of men and women in that traditional society. He states: "You are to give her children; she is to bear the children and look after you and them" (31). The idea that a woman must serve some use to a man is seen when Amatokwu tells Nnuego: "But now, if you can't produce sons, at least, you can help harvest yams" (32). The irony of Nnuego's suffering as a childless woman is that as soon as she remarries, she begins to produce children without difficulty, indicating that Nnuego was responsible for her earlier state of childlessness. Similarly, Inyang is assumed to be the infertile party without reason or evidence, simply because he is helpless. The situation in *Our Wives* is a parody of this attitude meted out to women. Utoh reverses the norm by making a man the recipient of injustices women have suffered in the past. This reversal of the norm is akin to holding up a mirror to society, that it might evaluate itself effectively to instigate transformation.

In *The Rebellion*, Oyedepo places the premium for liberation on self-assertion, physical strength to rival the man and the abolition of fear and efforts to please the man irrespective of the consequences. Members of B. C.M. remind themselves: “Haven’t we resolved that the word ‘weak’ will henceforth be pulled out of our vocabulary? We’ve said this for the umpteenth time. Haven’t we?” (11). The women are determined to suffer physical discomfort, go through rigorous physical exercises so as to have as much physical strength as men do, thereby debunking the claim that men have more physical stamina. They resolve to entertain no impediments or excuses in the course of the struggle. Sharp declares:

... have vowed to myself, if it is my breasts that will be an impediment in the course of this struggle, I shall not think twice about slashing them off. No sacrifice is too much. No sacrifice is too little. Learn to suppress those things for which the rival sex has stamped you ‘the weaker’.(13)

Sharp educates the women that the idea of feminine weakness is only psychological, so the women go to extreme lengths to deny physical weakness, such that a pregnant woman forces herself to jump up three times just to prove that she is not weak.

Ashake refuses to cook for her husband and brothers in-law. She is preoccupied with applying makeup from a collection in a quantity that suggests she sells make up. She also dresses in hot pants, halt-neck blouses, large sunglasses as is befitting of “a woman of sophistication” (27), irrespective of her husband’s wishes and at the risk of creating wrong impressions of herself. Oyedepo provides a contrast between the feminist Ashake and her conduct before she joined B.C.M. Her brother-in-law inform us:

Clem: Here was a woman who earned herself very high commendations as a good housewife in the village. She fetched firewood for my mother. She helped the elderly housewives to fetch water from the brook.

James: ... she was the ideal housewife and my mother loved her for it. (26)

In patriarchal structures, the woman is ideal as a wife if she is subservient, useful and serviceable to her husband and his relatives. It is remarkable that Clem and James, who are still teenagers, have already acquired deeply rooted patriarchal attitudes. They feel that their brother’s wife should be available to fetch them food and water at their command.

The boys demand food and water but feel that it is condescension to “say please ma to my brother’s wife for a glass of icy cold water” (20). Clem would rather die than say please to Ashake (21). Clem and James are used to confirm the woman’s subjugation in Nigerian patriarchal society. Their attitudes illustrate the male attitudes that feminists seek to dismantle.

Also implied in Ashake’s earlier compliance highlighted here, is the lack of awareness of alternatives visible in *The Corpse’s Comedy* and in the early part of *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. Awareness and options come through the Bumpy-chested Movement. Thus Ashake is resolute: “This is my own domain and I am the despot here! I am no more the Ashake who used to placate you at the expense of my self-esteem” (24). In a slight argument, Ashake does not hesitate to use her artificial finger nails to rake tribal marks into her husband’s face. Her attitude is now such that Saka, her husband looks like he had an encounter with a tigress in the zoo and he corrects the impression: “I didn’t go to the zoo... My house is the zoo and Ashake my wife is the tigress” (35).

The conversation between Falilat and her husband, Jolomi, confirms both the need for feminism and that the members of B.C.M. in their bid for emancipation have indeed turned into tigresses.

Jolomi: A helper, a subordinate, because you were created from the spare rib of Adam...

Falilat: (*suddenly looking thunders*) Now, I am not ready to listen to that trash....Who wrote the Holy Book? Weren’t they men? It should be expected then that the stories and injunctions there would be pro-male and anti-female.

Jolomi: This is pure heresy! ...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. It mars her femininity. No way! You are mere helpers.

Falilat: Look, I am not ready to listen to any more filthy talks. You can go and sing your encomium of the man’s unique place in the universe to your great, great grandmother. ...But I think your story has become stale and absolutely obsolete for this century and age...(springing to her feet) Now, don’t delay me. I am set for a crucial meeting! ...A meeting in which strategies and logistics to puncture the over-blown male ego will be thought and decided upon.... (32-33)

Ezenwanebe summarizes the conduct of the women in *The Rebellion*: “Fiercely arrogant and stubborn, the women use not only physical violence but also verbal abuse and name calling to champion their cause as they declare ‘bed and kitchen strike’ in order to force men to yield to their demand of equality in all things” (187). While Utoh and Oyedepo provide ample examples to show that the emancipation of the woman from patriarchal attitudes is essential, they also let us see that the methods the women in the plays apply to achieve equality is objectionable and do not provide solutions. For instance, Oye in *The Rebellion* dominates his wife and expects her to be at his beck and call:

Oye: (*In an imperious tone*) Isn’t the food ready?

Sarah: It is my Lord.

Oye: What are you waiting for? Bring it. (*with a rather sarcastic look*) Or have you joined the association of belligerent wives? (50)

Oye accuses members of the B.C.M of coming to disrupt “the blissful peace of our happy home” (57) and the women give him a picture of the woman’s life, and request him to step into it to see if he will like it. Their conversation between Oye and the women is illuminating. The women ask if Mr Oye would still have the same definition of a happy home if he did all the house chores, the cooking, the laundering and let his wife go out when and where she likes (57-58). They request him to try out his wife’s role to see how it feels. The reader does not doubt that Ashake, Falilat, Sarah and the other women need to be liberated from certain male attitudes such as Jolomi, Oye, Clem and James exhibit, thus it does not come as a surprise that as soon as awareness comes, the women revolt against subservience and patriarchal attitudes. They, therefore, demand equality. Thus, the women in Utoh and Oyedepo’s plays rebelliously insist that men too must participate in all domestic work for equality to prevail, as they venture into male domains such as taxi driving and politics, but their extreme methods of liberating themselves from patriarchal structures cause havoc to their homes and society. Underneath the parodies of attitudes, Utoh and Oyedepo imply that feminism is about gaining equality and advantages for women, not destruction as women embark on in *Our Wives* and *The Rebellion*. The plays show that while feminism is more commonly applicable to women, it is, in some circumstances, also applicable to men. The playwrights subtly advise that it is not advantageous to replace one wrong with another. They particularly question the women’s application of militant violence in their struggle for emancipation.

Military Tactics

The actions of the feminist women in *Our Wives* and *The Rebellion* imply that violence is an inevitable tool in the fight for freedom from male oppression and dominance. They women have become aggressive, uncompromising and are notably quick to resort to violence when simple dialogue would suffice. Earlier, we witnessed that Falilat in *The Rebellion* brooks no nonsense from her husband - Jolomi. We also see that she capitalizes on his diminutive nature to beat him up. Jolomi bans Falilat from attending meetings of the B.C.M. In an attempt to enforce his order, he threatens to “make her taste bile, by giving her a good thrashing...” (33). Jolomi has not finished reeling off his threats of teaching her a lesson and she is enraged:

Falilat: Me Fali! (*pounces on Jolomi suddenly with incredible agility sending him sprawling on the floor. She descends on him, raining down pellets of slaps and punches especially around the lower region. Jolomi lets out yells and struggles rather desperately.* As quick as lightning, Falilat jumps up, snatches her hand-bag from the settee and hurries out of the room. (*The Rebellion*33)

Wife-battering used to be the man's domain but feminist Nigerian women in these plays reverse the norm to become husband beaters. Most husbands in *The Rebellion* – Jolomi, Saka, Oye and Akanbi suffer the same affliction. Akanbi claims to have acquired expertise at dodging his wife's “thunderstorm of physical attack” (45). It is important to note here that Falilat concentrates her blows on the husband's ‘lower region’ where his cultural symbol of masculinity resides. If she incapacitates him there, then he becomes a ‘useless man’ and a man devoid of ‘manhood’ is the subject of scorn and derision in patriarchal society. It is from this perspective that the reader understands the girls' disdain for Amusa in Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* whose “weapon” has been metaphorically cut off by the white man. The girls in Soyinka's play deride Amusa's threat to return with a gun because his ‘real weapon’ has been cut off by the white man (*Death and the King's Horseman* 35). The man's penis, the basis of the cultural construct of manliness, strength, and man's superiority is a metaphorical weapon of oppression, as well as other uses. Clearly, Falilat aims her blows to incapacitate her husband so he will be in no position to oppress her again physically and culturally.

In *Our Wives*, the nameless Man in Inyang's story is not only rendered powerless, he has his weapon cut off. The cutting off of the Man's ‘instrument of enjoyment’ (37) is instructive. The man's penis is not only his biological indication of manhood, it is also the archetypal symbol of male power, authority and simultaneously the woman's chief instrument of torment as well as enjoyment. Thus, Felix in *Our Wives* would rather die than face life “without the main instrument of enjoyment” (37). Thus, by cutting off this instrument, the woman has brought anarchy and chaos into a man's life. In the light of this, Falilat's attempt to damage her husband's manhood comes across as somewhat irrational because it amounts to a paradoxical damage of the good side along with the bad.

The implication is that the woman gains liberation at some cost to herself too. The playwrights create the impression that this destruction of 'weapon/instrument' is women's ultimate rebellion against men's domination. Without doubt, the use of force or violence to achieve their objective is extreme even for radical feminist attitudes.

The playwright also showcases the violent attitudes of these feminist women in the Nigerian political terrain. Chief Irene Gambo is in politics with the strong support of the 'sisterhood.' Ene and Mairo, Irene's friends and political disciples assure people:

Ene: Our friends and supporters, I want you to know that we, women, have come to solve all your problems with feminist dispatch. We learnt politics from men but we promise you that we will do politics better than men...

Mairo: (*Shouting*) Yes! ... what a man can do, a woman can do it better! (83-84).

Indeed, Irene and her army of insurgent women do a number of things much "better" than men have been known to do them. The fact that the things they do "better" and with feminist dispatch are negative and violent makes feminism quite questionable as well as objectionable.

The reader sees Chief Irene Gambo, a political aspirant, use a variety of negative tactics to eliminate her opposition. She pays off opponents, callously sets people up, uses blackmail, maims and kills political opponents. Chief Irene and her political followers strategize:

Ene: How to eliminate opposition is another crucial issue. Naturally, we will pay off the opposition. But one never knows. Some might prove stubborn. It is this group that we should direct our attention to. I suggest we use blackmail. Send pretty girls to seduce such men. Then we will then organize for photographs, video clips and other incriminating and damaging evidence and use these to put the squeeze on them. Where blackmail fails, we will send hired assassins to eliminate them. After all, dead men tell no tales. (44-45)

These are not merely threats. The women carry out all their plans to defeat the opposition.

8th Man: Excuse me Madam Irene, there has been talk of a Syndicate of call-girls, led by one retired prostitute, who has been going around the country, blackmailing many men in high positions. (*Our Wives* 80)

Not only has she been blackmailing men in high positions, she has some of them assassinated:

5th Man: Rumours are rife that some of your former opponents,
in fact four of them died within the space of two weeks
Under very mysterious circumstances ... [and] people are
saying that you are behind those mysterious deaths. (*Our Wives* 78)

She does not deny the charge, instead she curtly replies: “Well, accidents can happen at any time to anybody” (*Our Wives*, 78) but she is confronted by a direct accusation:

7th Man: (*Shouting*) It is a lie! Bitch, you killed my brother! (*the thugs descend on him, beat and drag him out.*)
Boy: You blackmailed my father!
Old Man: I will expose you! You assassinated my son (*The thugs are busy, beating and dragging people away. Confusion reigns in the gathering. Our Wives, 78-79.*)

In politics, the women appear to have learnt the art of blackmail and violence much better than the men but the result is chaos. It is instructive that all the opponents that Irene blackmails and assassinates are men. Even the instrument she uses to unleash violence on these men, Chief Gambo, is also a man. The use of violence to destroy the men and enthrone women’s authority contrasts greatly with the tenets of feminism as proposed by French and hooks, which we adopt in this study. Notably, violence and extreme attitudes do more harm than good to the women. If feminism is to gain advantages, *Our Wives* and *The Rebellion* show that erratic and violent behavior cannot in any circumstance result in advantage. Therefore, none of the women in the plays enjoys liberation without tribulation. None also finds fulfillment.

In contrast to the women in Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* who succeed, the women in the *Our Wives* and *The Rebellion* fail because their tools of warfare are wrong. Rotimi’s Mama Rashida’s business begins to flourish beyond her imagination. Her high financial status liberates and fulfills her; she is now self-sustaining, and in a position to achieve both needs and wants. She voluntarily moves to the family house where she is free from the dominating and dehumanizing influence of Lekoja-Brown. The little education that Sikira acquires from Liza liberates her and equips her to participate in public politics and even take over her husband’s position as the party’s candidate for the elections. She achieves happiness. Liza is happy to put her education at the disposal of the less advantaged women.

She preserves her marriage and derives happiness from what the other women achieve through her tutelage. “Women bonding” is in evidence here. Akachi Ezeigbo states that “women bonding which is an expression used extensively today by women scholars, activists and writers to describe ties of friendship and love that exist between individual women or groups which enable them to support one another or work together for the common good” (57).

The commitment to the survival of women through sisterhood is evident in *Our Wives* and *The Rebellion* but Utoh’s women choose violence. Irene destroys her home and remarries a much younger man who is virtually her thug – a very ludicrous scenario. Ifeoma kills her husband, Mairo is perpetually fighting with her spouse. The erratic acts of these women delete affection from their relationships. The men are subdued but the women have become enemies whose husbands work against them instead of with them. The militant members of B.C.M deploy bed and kitchen strike action; they are in perennial opposition to their husbands. When the husbands decide to reverse the roles as the women demand, the women suffer significant embarrassment. Tara is very agitated that her husband now wears “buba and wrapper” (Nigerian women’s clothes) hawking rice around town (93). Salwa’s is morose because her husband has gone out wearing all kinds of feminine accessories (93). Soon all the women conclude that their husbands are infected with insanity. Ironically, the reversal of roles is not acceptable to the women. The women get what they seek and they do not like it. Thus, violence or erratic behavior will not yield acceptable solutions. The depictions show that the feminist quest is justified but the methods applied are wrong. Underlying these caricatures is Utoh’s message; that men and women need each other to work harmoniously and in equality to create a just society.

Conclusion

This essay interrogated the implications of the extremely radical attitudes and actions deployed by women in *Our Wives* and *The Rebellion* in the struggle to liberate themselves from patriarchal oppression and marginalization. It finds that Utoh and Oyedepo provide exaggerated and ironical parodies of both patriarchal conduct and extremist feminist attitudes to provide the audience – male and female – with the opportunity to view itself on stage, much like looking at oneself in the mirror, to enable a balanced evaluation of the situation women rebel against. Their depictions suggest that women must begin the process of emancipation by putting certain measures in place: Utoh places the premium for liberation on economic independence among other factors, while Oyedepo advocates self-awareness/consciousness and self-assertion. Thus, the women in the plays are economically independent and have acquired the awareness to begin to recognize themselves as individuals who deserve equal advantages with the man. However, both playwrights sound warnings about the methods applied to achieve emancipation. Utoh and Oyedepo also utilize the conducts of these women to sound warnings about acting irrationally under the guise of feminism.

Inherent in the warnings emanating from the authorial voices in *Our Wives* and *The Rebellion* is that feminist activities applied to wreak havoc on spouses, homes and instigate confusion in society negates the ideals of feminism. Feminism as French and hooks state is about equality and advantages to promote a just society; it is not male chauvinism or oppression in reverse. Readers are exposed to the dangers of extreme attitudes to encourage avoidance of such.

Significantly, readers witness that women are quite capable of behaving exactly like, and much worse than men in equivalent situations. The essay interprets this as a philosophical statement about human nature; the playwrights demonstrate that human nature is basically the same in men and women in situations of power, and without the checks, balances, and restrictions of cultural or social laws. This leads to the realization that the lot of the helpless, economically dependent individual, whether male or female, is more or less the same. As hooks rightly posits, feminism is indeed for everyone in need of liberation from oppressive conditions.

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