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### The Issue of Women beyond the Kitchen in Julie Okoh's *The Trials*

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#### Abstract

Irrespective of the culture in which it is practiced, theatre is an expressive, innovative, engaging, educational, and distinctive art form that offers a wealth of indisputable advantages or rewards. Through the playwrights' imaginative works, which are inspired by social developments, theatre, which is a dynamic art form, also functions as a change mechanism in moulding peoples' lives. Some male and female playwrights in Nigeria, such as Barclays Ayakoroma, Ahmed Yerima, Ola Rotimi, J.P Clark, Zulu Sofola, Tess Onwueme, Irene Salami, Stella Oyedepo, Julie Okoh, Tracie Utoh, Osita Ezenwanebe, among others, through their plays have examined the plight of women in the society and the need for them to be empowered. The study examined the issue of women beyond the kitchen in Julie Okoh's *The Trials*. In employing the qualitative method of research with emphasis on the literary/analytical and historical method of research, the study observed that Julie Okoh is a female playwright who

has contributed to gender studies through her plays. The study found that the patriarchal structure of society, which places women in a subordinate position, marginalization, wife beating, oppression, among other issues, as x-rayed in Julie Okoh's *The Trials* stand as a barrier to the growth of the Nigerian woman, particularly in this era where the yearning for positive change and development in our society is of paramount importance. The study also found that men need to modify their perspective on women in order to see them as collaborators or co-partners in the transformation process if there is to be sustained progress in the family institution and the nation as a whole. Considering that both men and women make up society, the research recommends that women be given more influence. The researcher also urges the government to properly adopt additional policies for the women who are eager to fill their quota in support of the advancement of the Nigerian society.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Patriarchy, Gender, Kitchen, Women

#### Introduction

Based on historical evidence, women have experienced various forms of marginalization due to the patriarchal structure of the society. Patriarchy, a societal structure centered on male dominance, privilege, and control, is based on this power disparity. It is institutionalized in political, legal, and economic systems and procedures. The foundation of patriarchy is the presumption that men are more deserving of authority or superior than women. The subordination of women and younger males is implied by patriarchy (Eborka & Gbigbidje, 2022, p. 216) <sup>[8]</sup>. Originating from the Greek word patriarchkhia, the word patriarchy refers to the system that places men over women and dates back to the 16th century. It has evolved and assumed a variety of forms in various social structures and cultural contexts over time. Patriarchy has existed in society for as long as there has been organized civilization. Men have created societal customs and conventions that are detrimental to women. In a patriarchal set up, the man wields the power and the authority that organizes the social structure. He is the authorizing force behind the social, political, economic and religious decisions in the society. Thus, while the man from childhood is indoctrinated with a superiority complex, the woman is merely treated as inferior to the man (Chidinma, 2015, pp. 223-224).

Patriarchal oppression can take many different forms; these include language, marriage, cultural norms and traditions, and stereotypes. It is a systematic prejudice that keeps men at the top in terms of class, power, and gender inequity. Whether it takes the shape of violence or non-violence, patriarchy is to blame for gender-based oppression (Agunloye, 2017, p. 134) <sup>[2]</sup>. Patriarchy in its wider 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 access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence and resource (Lerner, as cited in Okoh, 2012, p. 6) <sup>[19]</sup>. The dominance of men over women is said to be ensured by the social arrangement known as patriarchy. Presently, it carries a clear stigma: Patriarchal rule is oppressive against women in patriarchal societies (Dibia, 2020, p. 5) <sup>[7]</sup>. Women have long lamented the presence of a gender war in which men oppress, repress, or take advantage of them. The emergence of feminism was prompted by the patriarchal structure of society, as women realized they had to break free from the repressive patterns that males in many cultures were fostering. This realization prompted them to speak out against things that affect their fundamental human rights as human beings. Communication, whether verbal or nonverbal, is an essential tool for changing society because it helps with relationship development, idea or opinion expression, dispute resolution, fostering peace, and many other things. It is instrumental when we use it, as we do as tool to control our environment and to affect or influence other people (Adeseye & Ibagere, 1999, p. 5) <sup>[1]</sup>. People have avoided or averted crises in a large number of nations, cities, and communities around the world by merely employing interaction as a technique to settle disagreements. Playwrights take on the roles of creative artists, communicators, moral ambassadors, and change-catalysts by highlighting pressing societal challenges and drawing people's attention to viable solutions. Their plays help create a peaceful environment that promotes growth and development in families, communities, and the society. The art of writing plays which serve as a medium of communicating ideas and issues in the society has spanned several centuries. This art has become invigorated since the epoch of ancient Greek theatre after dialogue found its way into the dithyrambic choruses. This subsequently gave rise to formal drama, which incorporated the elements of conflict and suspense (Emasealu, 2010, p.13) <sup>[9]</sup>. For so many years, playwrights from different extraction, have taken advantage of their creative ingenuity through the writing of plays to conscientize, advise, entertain, teach, inform, and educate the people in any given society in order to bring about attitudinal change that will transform the lives of the people. Drama as a medium of communication has been explored by different playwrights to communicate their ideologies or beliefs as seen in the history of the different eras of drama and theatre; classical, medieval, renaissance and the modern era. Drama as a resume of a people's culture touches every aspects of human endeavour. It helps man to understand himself, formulate a self-concept, understand and be able to engage his immediate environment. It also mobilizes orients and re-orient citizens, builds their emotional and psychological power and above all teaches them how to solve their problem by themselves (Yakubu & Odeh, 2020, p. 165) <sup>[23]</sup>. Through their plays, Nigerian playwrights such as Femi Osofisan, Barclays Ayakoroma, Tess Onwueme, Ola Rotimi, Ahmed Yerima, Zulu Sofola, Tracie Utoh, J. P. Clark, Stella Oyedepo, Julie Okoh, Irene Salami, Osita Ezenwanebe, Ifeoma Fafuna, and others have been able to stir up conversations, dispel myths, and motivate people to think critically in order to bring about change and sustainable development. They have employed theater as a potent medium to address issues like patriarchy, gender discrimination, violence against women, and the

marginalization of women in Nigerian society. Through their works, they have challenged societal norms and advocated for gender equality.

Women have traditionally been allocated tasks that are primarily centered on domestic concerns in Nigeria, as they are in many other parts of the world. Nevertheless, by giving women a voice and highlighting their experiences outside of the home, Nigerian drama has played a significant role in questioning and defying these established gender stereotypes. Nigerian theater addresses the issue of women outside the kitchen by presenting female characters that violate social constraints and engage in activities that will allow them to contribute fairly to the growth of society. These characters, who represent empowerment and resistance, question patriarchal norms that limit women's roles to the kitchen. This paper attempts to discuss the issue of women beyond the kitchen affairs in Nigerian drama using Julie Okoh's *The Trials* to highlight the fact that women can be co-partners with men in developing the society.

## Literature Review

### The Concept of Feminism: A Concise Statement

Since societal expectations have evolved over time, the definition of feminism has also evolved to reflect this growing popularity of the ideology. Basically, it refers to any movement, or specific group of movements that aims to protect and advance women's numerous social, political, economic, and cultural rights as well as give them equal opportunity for advancement. The goal of feminism as a social, intellectual, and cultural movement is to examine and address the differences in civil rights, economic status, and ideologies between men, women, and non-binary individuals. Feminism and a call for gender equality arose as a result of women not getting the respect they deserve and not being recognized for their roles. (Gbigbidje, etal, 2023) <sup>[12]</sup>. The word "feminism" can refer to an ideology, philosophy, or mentality that is primarily focused on women's subordinate status in society, the prejudice they face due to their gender, and ways in which they can gain power. Feminism, defined as the liberation of women from male dominance in all spheres of life, has multiple meanings since it has been understood by numerous scholars from different points of view.

Feminism as a broad discourse has over the years gained more popularity as many scholars, theorists, critics, (men and women) have emerged or come out with different interpretations or perspectives with each having its own focus and approach to addressing gender inequality. Simpson identifies the various forms of feminism as radical feminism, bourgeois feminism, cultural feminism, Marxist, black feminism and lesbian feminism (Simpson as cited in Ewvierhoma, 2002, p. 41) <sup>[10]</sup>. Since its inception, feminism has undergone numerous definitions. These definitions are derived from various perspectives, including political, economic, and cultural ones. Of all the definitions of feminism, the one that most closely links "feminism" to struggle is the most prevalent. Beyond the word "struggle," feminism is a collective phrase, a set of beliefs, and theoretical framework that emphasizes women's rights and their place in society and culture (Ogbonnaya, Shaka, & Godspresence, 2022, p. 97) <sup>[16]</sup>.

Feminism is a social and political movement that clamours for equal rights and opportunities for women in the society.

It is geared towards challenging and dismantling the systematic oppression and discrimination that women encounter in various aspects of life as a result of their gender. It is an ideology, philosophy, or an attitude of mind mainly concerned with women's inferior position in the society, the discrimination they encounter as a result of their gender and how their fundamental human rights can be given utmost attention. Feminism as a broad concept with vast meanings has been x-rayed by different scholars from different dimensions. In the words of Mabel, the idea of feminism, which has taken up various names, shapes and variants, has over the years gained more popularity (Evwierhoma, 2002, p. 77) <sup>[10]</sup>. Feminism, since its emergence has been subjected to a wide range of definitions, these definitions are drawn from a perspective be it political, economic or cultural, of all definitions of feminism, the commonest is that which associate "feminism" with struggle. Feminism transcends the term struggle, it is a collective term or system of belief and theories that pay attention to women's right and women's position in culture and society (Ogbonnaya, Shaka & Godspresence, 2022, p. 97) <sup>[16]</sup>.

Feminism means different things to different people depending on race, culture and historical experience. In Nigeria for example, many people understand feminism to simply mean women's struggle to gain equality with men, or to obtain access to positions of power. Feminism is more than that. It is first and foremost a collective term for systems of belief and theories that pay special attention to women's rights and women's position in culture and society. On personal level, it is a state of mind, a way of thinking, and an alternative perspective from which to understand the world. It means a woman becoming aware of a distortion in her social status as a woman. Seeking to correct this distortion, the woman moves in a new direction in search of autonomy, self-assertion and empowerment. As a social movement, feminism aims at effecting changes in the prevailing social structures. It incorporates political activism and ideological stance. From ideological perspective, feminism aims at examining and analyzing the situation of women in societies by exposing the complexity of male domination and female subordination with the hope of liberating women from masculine vision of life which has, in various dimensions in different historical periods deified male values to the detriment of women's ethos (Okoh, 2012, pp.7-8) <sup>[19]</sup>. Feminism, as an ideology that connotes the total liberation of women from male dominance and the need for women empowerment has become and will continue to be a critical discourse in Africa as well as the Nigerian literature and drama scene. African Feminism has become an important aspect of African critical discourse. The mountain of courses on women studies at the tertiary level of education and the publication of full length books by African feminist critics testify to the growing importance of African feminist discourse as part of the education in Africa. Apart from the works by female critics, the African male critics have not despaired of commenting on the works by women (Udumukwu, 2006, p. 139) <sup>[21]</sup>. The current downgraded situation of women in most countries, especially in Africa should have been tackled by the efforts of some female scholars and their likes who have claimed in the past and still claiming to have fought and still fighting for the betterment of the female folks. Feminism is one of the self-claimed processes. Feminism therefore is an

ideology or theory backed up by social movement that women should be equal politically, economically, and socially with the men (Azunwo & Nwobu, 2017, pp. 247-248) <sup>[4]</sup>. Evwierhoma is of the view that feminism indicates the activities of compassionate men and women, whose intention is to resist all manner of discrimination that women suffer because of their sex. It begins with an intense consciousness of ostracizing female from male cultural, social, sexual, political, economic, literary, legal and intellectual discourse (2002, p. 77). Drawing from Mabel's comment above, the issue of feminism involves men and women working together to address women marginalization. Many feminists or female activist today argue that feminism is a grass root movement that seeks to cut across boundaries in terms of social class, race, culture, politics, economy and religion. In addition, feminism as a concept is meant to be culturally specific and also look at issues that affect women in different societies. Some of these issues include; patriarchal structure, marginalization, wife battering, oppression, detrimental cultural practices as evident in African societies especially Nigeria, rape, incest, amongst other issues. It is pertinent to note here that all brands of feminism, aims at opposing the various ways women are excluded, suppressed and exploited by men through patriarchal norms which have been viewed as natural.

### Julie Okoh: A Biographical Sketch

Julie Okoh, a contemporary female playwright in Nigeria, whose play constitute the main focus of this study, has been consistent over the years, in writing plays that deal with the ugly experiences women encounter in our society, the struggle to rise above the oppressive tendencies of the male counterpart and the need for them to gain a voice in the affairs of the society. Juliana Omonukpon Omoifo Okoh was born in 1947 in Ubiaja, Esan North East Local Government Area of Edo State. She attended St. Benedict Catholic Primary School, Ubiaja (1955-1961), and Our Lady of Lourdes Secondary School, Uromi (1962-1966). She obtained a certificate in Secretariat Studies from the Federal Training Centre (FCT), Lagos (1970-1972) and worked briefly with the Ministry of External Affairs. From there, she left the shores of Nigeria for further studies abroad. She did an Associate of Arts programme (AA) from Montreat-Anderson College, Montreat, N.C., U.S.A (1972-1974) and obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree from Loyola University, Chicago, Illinois (1974-1976). After her first degree, she made a swift move to the University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada (1976-1980) for Master of Arts (M.A), and Universte De Bordeaux III, Bordeaux, France (1988-1992) for DEA, PhD. She obtained a Fulbright Certificate from Smith College, Northampton, Massachusetts, U.S.A (2000-2001).

In her youthful days, Julie Okoh always wished to be a writer. To confirm her writing prowess, a poem she wrote while studying in the U.S, won an award. She also wrote a short play titled "Cynthia" which won another award. It is pertinent to state here that her encounter with late Professor Ola Rotimi also triggered her writing potentials. Julie Omoifo Okoh has published over twenty plays which include: *The Mask* (1988), *The Mannequins* (1997), *In the Fullness of Time* (2000), *Who Can Fight the gods?* (2002), *Aisha* (2005), *Edewede* (2006), *Closed Doors* (2007), *The Trials* (2008), *Who is Afraid of Job Interview* (2009), *A Haunting Past* (2009), *Our Wife Forever* (2010), *A Man of*

*the world* (2012), *Tiny Little things* (2013), *A Cry for Democracy* (2014), *We are Rivers* (2015), *In Our Own Voices* (2021), *Itohan* (2023), amongst others. In addition to her plays, she has published over twenty five (25) journal articles, written four (4) books, five (5) Chapter in Books, and three (3) Colloquium Paper Presentations. She worked in the University of Port Harcourt from 1981-2017 where she retired as a Professor. She also served in various capacities both within and outside the University community. She has supervised more than fifty (50) Bachelor of Arts projects in French studies (1981-1995); more than one hundred (100) Bachelor of Arts projects in Theatre Arts Studies, ten (10) in English Studies, fifteen (15) Master of Arts degree Dissertations in Theatre Studies and five (5) PhD Theses in Theatre Arts Studies. Julie Okoh is a female critic, literary critic and playwright who have made tremendous contributions to gender discourse through her works.

### **The concept of women beyond the kitchen**

The discourse on gender, patriarchy, women liberation or feminism has been on for a very long time as various critics, writers, analysts; amongst others have all thrown their weight on the subject matter. In all of these discussions one thing that is crucial is the need for women to have their fundamental human rights in expressing themselves as human beings. According to a *Vanguard Newspaper* report (2016), Muhammadu Buhari has laughed off his wife Aisha's comment that she may not support him if he runs for election come 2019. President Muhammadu Buhari, laughing off the comment, said, his wife the first lady, belongs to his kitchen and that he knows not which party she belongs to. This comment from the former president of Nigeria sparked off reactions from different sections of the society because women in our contemporary society no longer want to be tied to the domestic space but are coming out to contribute their quota to the development of the society. The perception that women belong to the home has placed majority of Nigerian women in the position of always asking to be included rather than taking necessary steps to place themselves in key positions (Ogechi, 2023, p.58) <sup>[17]</sup>. As women continue to alter this narrative in Nigeria and throughout the world, the idea that women should only be seen in the kitchen is starting to disappear. Over the years, Nigerian women have stood out as firebrands, leading the frontline of global impact and inciting change beyond the coasts of Nigeria's system. While it is not an argument that Nigeria is so blessed with women whose relevance will be imprinted in the hearts of many, a large number of these women have demonstrated their value, impact, exploits and consequently changed the society presumptions about the female gender (Daramola, 2022, p.2) <sup>[6]</sup>.

The concept of women beyond the kitchen simply has to do with the need for more women in various societies especially in Nigeria to go outside the domestic or family sphere to occupy the social, economic, political, educational, and cultural space so as to make more impact in the global world. The feminist struggles have radically revolutionized the way people in general think. Hitherto tendencies of regarding women as being unfit for anything other than spending their lives in the kitchen is gone. Today, people are gradually appreciating the reality of women and their place in society. This awareness is what has continued to manifest in literature and drama too (Iyav & Idakwo,

2017, pp. 44-45) <sup>[14]</sup>. In Africa and Nigeria specifically, there has been traces or evidences of women contributing to the development of the society (Obire, 2017, p. 76) <sup>[15]</sup>. Going by past records, in most African societies, women were always involved in systems of rulership and decision making especially outside the home. Some women were more influential at home and did control much material wealth, which in turn affected the way the family was run, and further affected the turn of events in the larger society (Evwierhoma, 2002, p. 83) <sup>[10]</sup>. In Africa for example, women like YaaAsantewa of Ghana, Nawal El-Saadawi of Egypt, Queen Amina of Zaria, Kathilili of Kenya, Funmilayo Ransom Kuti, Dora Akunyili amongst others aptly captures the above statement. This however, does not mean that women of our time are completely free from the patriarchal system of male subjugation.

The fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of the United Nations (UN) is to achieve gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls. According to the UN's SDG report for 2022, at the current pace, it will take 40 years for women and men to be represented equally in national political leadership positions, global employment and job loss, and ability to make informed decisions on sex and reproduction. Prior to this report, statistics show that Nigeria's Gross Domestic product could grow higher if women participate in the labour force at the same rate as men. The above are indicators that feminism should be a priority for any nation that intends to attain sustainable growth and development (Onuama, 2022, pp. 157-158) <sup>[20]</sup>. Going by the above report from UN's SDG report for 2022, if Nigerian women are to get to that level, there is the need for them to continue to strive to capture space by going beyond the kitchen limitation in order to contribute to the development of the society. The right to sustainable development exists for human beings. It is important to underline that women's rights are human rights and that human rights are women's rights because of the ways in which patriarchal structures have oppressed women and denied them equal access to the advantages of social development. Because of this, it is now necessary to reiterate that women have a right to sustainable development (Ikeke, 2023, p.1) <sup>[13]</sup>.

### **Synopsis and issue of women beyond the kitchen in Julie Okoh's *The Trials***

Julie Okoh's *The Trials* is a play that was published in 2008 but it was first performed on 12<sup>th</sup> August, 2000 as a command performance for the inauguration of the National Association of Women Academics (NAWACS) University of Port Harcourt chapter. The play is divided into five situations with the actions taking place in Tamuno's office and Sotonye's house respectively. The play opens with Tamuno - a business magnate, in his office trying to settle down to attend to his schedule for the day. His secretary informs him on phone that a visitor is waiting to see him and he tells her that he is not interested in seeing any visitor. As Tamuno tries to attend to his official duties, Sotonye - Tamuno's friend and a retired civil servant enters his office. In the course of their interaction, Sotonye informs him (Tamuno) of the non-payment of his pension and gratuity by the government, as well as his inability to get a job having submitted numerous applications in search of a job. He gives Tamuno an application letter for him to be employed in his company. Tamuno informs him that there is

no vacancy but assists him with some money for transport. Sotonye returns home hungry, and prefers to lie on the couch waiting to be served by his wife Ibisio when she returns from work instead of going to the kitchen to get food. Ibisio returns from work, and notices that her husband did not eat the food already served in the food flask for him. In the process of trying to explain to him that the kitchen is not meant for the woman alone, she discovers that her children are not in the house. Sotonye informs her that they are with their grandmother since she is too busy to take care of them. The story takes another turn as Sotonye vents his frustration on Ibisio by slapping her for insulting him in the course of their heated argument. Ibisio, who could no longer tolerate her husband's behaviour, decides to leave the house. As Tamuno visits Sotonye that night, he noticed that Ibisio is not in the house. Sotonye informs him of their dispute few minutes before his arrival. As they continue with their discussion, Tamuno informs him (Sotonye) of how he helps his wife with domestic chores, as well as his past experiences in life. He also offers Sotonye a job in one of his hotels as an assistant cook. Sotonye who rejects the offer initially due to pride, eventually accepts it when he notices that there is no other option for him. The story ends on a happy note as Tamuno reunites them (Sotonye and Ibisio) with Sotonye promising to be a good husband to his wife. The issue of women beyond the kitchen, as demonstrated in Julie Okoh's *The Trials*, can be approached from the perspective of the professional woman who ventures outside household duties in order to utilize her abilities and fulfill her share of societal obligations to her family and society at large. The playwright explicates the male syndrome in a patriarchal society using the character of Sotonye, to represent the male dominated figure in a patriarchal society. Sotonye who returns home hungry after job hunting prefers to lie on the couch instead of going to the kitchen to serve food prepared by his wife before leaving the house. This can be seen in their dialogue:

**Sotonye:** How was I supposed to know that there was food in the kitchen?

**Ibisio:** How would you have known if you didn't care to find out? I even left a note for you on the kitchen table. In fact, I intended bringing it to the living-room table. But since I hurried out of the house I forgot to do so. Wait, let me go and bring it... All I am asking you to do is to fetch the food and serve yourself when I am not at home.

**Sotonye:** Hear that! The woman I paid bride prize on is telling me to go to the kitchen. Me? The son of Preybiyie! All right, we shall see. (Pp.23–24).

The male syndrome orientation in our society today has created a mindset for so many men making it look difficult for them to enter the kitchen to see how things are done but eats what comes out from the kitchen. In the play, Ibisio, in defense of women advance reasons why her husband should go to the kitchen.

**Ibisio:** If a man can go to the living room, bedroom, toilet and bathroom, why can't he go to the kitchen?

**Sotonye:** The kitchen is for women.

The issue of wife beating as captured in the play is part of what women are trying to address in our society today. Wife beating in the Nigerian society is an issue that has led to the death of some women. It is a form of domestic violence where one partner, usually the husband, physically, emotionally, or sexually abuses the other partner. When a man is unable to provide for his family, he may feel emasculated and take out his frustration on his wife. This is not to say that some women do not abuse their husbands but the issue is more common with men than women. Wife beating is an extreme expression of power and authority that seriously inhibits women's ability, to enjoy rights and freedom on the basis of equality with men in marriage. It is an exposure of a married woman to a serious physical force or repeated injuries by her husband (Alokan, 2013) [3]. It is tied to the patriarchal system of unequal power relationship between men and women in marriage which is reinforced by social learning and gender norms. In Africa, wife beating is still a serious gender issue constraining women's developmental process (Friday, Odio & Chika, 2019) [11]. In Nigeria, wife beating transcends region, religion and ethnicity, with physical abuse affecting as many as 35.1% of Igbo women and 34.3% of Hausa-Fulani women (Oladepo, Yusuf & Arulogun, as cited in Friday *et al.*, 2019) [11]. In the play, Sotonye, who beats up his wife, represents the domineering and arrogant man in a patriarchal society who believes that a woman's position is tied to the kitchen irrespective of her person in the society. Such men do not assist their wives to attend to domestic needs of the home even when the need arise.

**Sotonye:** No matter how high the position a woman occupies in her office, once she arrives home she runs into the kitchen... (p. 25).

Apart from not going to the kitchen to get food, Sotonye refuses to take care of his own children before his wife returns from work. Instead, he sends them to their grandmother's place and this infuriates Ibisio. This is captured in their dialogue:

**Ibisio:** Where are the Children? I thought they were in their room.

**Sotonye:** They are with their grand-mother

**Ibisio:** Why?

**Sotonye:** You were not here to take care of them (p.17).

This is not supposed to generate argument but since the society is structured to suit patriarchy, people tend to see it from the male perspective. The training or upbringing of a child is a collaborative process from both parents (father and mother) that requires co-operation and understanding. The negligence of parents in training their children has led so many children into the hands of dangerous people within and around the neighbourhood like housemaids especially male servants who take advantage of these children by molesting them sexually, without the knowledge of their parents. Ibisio, who is supposed to get support from her husband, is left to contend with his patriarchal philosophy. The playwright decided to make the man unemployed and

the woman employed in order to project female empowerment and gender equality as it affects women in our society today. The issue projected in the play is that now that the man is unemployed; can he at least help the woman, who is now the bread winner, in domestic affairs when she is not at home? Sotonye who is supposed to help his wife in domestic affairs, refuses to face reality but prefers to be adamant about the whole thing stressing that the kitchen is meant for the women. This is evident in their discussion:

**Sotonye:** But since women decided to work outside the home, you now want men to take over your domestic work. Isn't it?

**Ibiso:** Is it a crime for a woman to work outside the house, earn some money to support the family? (p. 17).

Ibiso is quick to remind her husband about historical record of successful women in the society.

**Ibiso:** Didn't our grand-mothers and great grand-mothers do so? They went to farms and to markets far away from their homes only to come back, sometimes, very late at night. Some of them even went fishing in the high sea only to return after many days of absence. Our history book tells us about Queen Kambassa of Bonny. She was a great warrior and she had a formidable army which she led personally into war against her opponent... How did she acquire all that wealth? Is it by babysitting her husband and children at home? (p. 18).

For there to be a mutual relationship and understanding in the family and the society at large, the man should co-operate with the woman in domestic work instead of leaving everything for the woman. Both parties (man and woman) need each other to survive. The playwright presents the possibility of a collaborative scenario between the man and the woman in our society.

**Ibiso:** How can they do that successfully without the co-operation and encouragement of their men? Absolutely impossible! (19)

Ibiso, who was formerly a teacher before joining the sewing institute in order to take care of the family's financial needs, believes that she can contribute to the economic development of the country if the enabling environment is provided.

**Sotonye:** How do you intend to do that?

**Ibiso:** With good machines, we will be able to make sophisticated dresses. So, instead of going abroad to waste our foreign currency on shopping for wedding clothes, people will buy wedding clothes made here in Nigeria, by Nigerians for Nigerians. All we need now is some money for expansion (p. 14).

Ibiso is used by the playwright in the play to show that the woman's role in the society is not confined to the kitchen or domestic affairs only. Instead, the woman can go as far as

playing a vital role in the growth and development of the society. Thus, the playwright decides to make the man (Sotonye) jobless in order to underscore the dilemma of a career woman faced with the challenges of attending to her home and office. Ibiso represents those women in our society today who believes that what a man can do, a woman can do even better. If women are empowered in all aspects of their life, they will no doubt bring about change in our society. The playwright uses Ibiso in the play, to advance her point that there is the need to break the barrier between men and women in our society. This can be drawn from Ibiso's discussion with her husband, Sotonye:

**Ibiso:** My dear, open your eyes and look around you. The barrier between the place for men and for women is crumbling down. More and more women now work outside their homes. They earn good salary equal to that of men... You would have heard about Dora Akunyili... (p. 24).

Tamuno is used by the playwright to present a picture of an ideal society where the man and the woman can live together in unity by helping one another when the need arises. Tamuno, who settles the dispute between Sotonye and Ibiso, is an indication that it is possible for the man to assist the woman in domestic chores whenever the need arises.

**Tamuno:** Do you know that the best cooks in this world are men?

**Sotonye:** I don't know about that

**Tamuno:** Once in a while, when I want to give my wife a treat. If I don't feel like going out to eat, I return home early, put on an apron and enter the kitchen. Before she comes back from work, the food is ready.

### Conclusion

Julie Okoh, a well-known Nigerian female dramatist, has contributed significantly to changing societal norms and combating gender-based discrimination in Nigeria, Africa, and other parts of the world through her plays. She has chosen the path of theatre as a potent tool for exploring feminist beliefs and promoting the image of women. Her plays have aided in the advancement of feminist theory in Nigerian theatre and drama. As a dedicated playwright, she has earned recognition for her thought-provoking plays that address issues related to gender, identity, human right and social justice. Her works speak volume of her commitment in highlighting the struggles, achievements, and aspirations of women in Nigerian society. Julie Okoh's *The Trials* examined the need for women to go beyond the kitchen environment and strive to capture space by engaging in rewarding ventures that can help in contributing not just to the family, but to the society at large. Julie Okoh's line of thought as explicated in the play under study is that men should modify their perspectives on women by seeing them as collaborators or co-partners in the change and development process of the society, as well as the adoption of policies for women by the government to help them contribute their quota to the development of the society.

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