

# **Gender Equality in the Dramaturgy of Irene Salami-Agunloye's *More than Dancing and Sweet Revenge***

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## **Abstract**

*This paper examines gender equality in the dramaturgy of Irene Salami-Agunloye's *More than dancing and Sweet revenge*. This paper also explores how the preaching of Irene Salami with respect to the African concept of feminism; is been projected through her characters, ideas, thoughts, and themes in the selected plays. The researcher adopts the textual analysis method to interrogate the selected plays. By analysis, the researcher would subject the selected texts to critical content analysis. Data obtained from this method provides our primary data while our secondary data are obtained from academic journals, monographs, text books, and internet sources. Our findings reveal that the emancipation and agitation of women for equality in a patriarchal society; as treated in the selected plays is not to derogate the authority of the male genders. But a way of giving women room to have equal participation in political activities towards the development of the Nigerian society. Again, the study also discovered that women's agitation to participate in socio-political programs is not to neglect their traditional roles in the family but to ensure equal rights for both sexes in the developmental process of the nation. This study recommends that Nigerians should boycott cultural, traditional, and religious dictates and give a trial to female politician either as the head of state, senate president and chief justice of the federation in order to enhance national transformation and development.*

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## **Introduction**

The consciousness of feminism has received various views from scholars around the world such as Ogundipe Leslie (1994), Acholonu (1995), Kolawole (1997), Hooks (2000), Binebai (2002), Evwierhoma (2001), Nwosu (2002), Lucas (2009), Brigitte and Brita (2010) and Jayachamdran (2015) among others. Their positions states clearly that female genders are victims of marginalization, mistreatment, gender imbalance and they also suffer patriarchal hegemony in their society.

In dramatic genre, Sofola was also a pioneer and was attacked for daring to write about women. Her works *King Emene: the Tragedy of Rebellion*, *The Sweet Trap*, *Wedlock of the Gods* etc. have variously pursued women agenda. Sofola embarked on the reconstruction of image of Nigerian women in male dominated society. Her presiding ideology is based on the premium that African women should study the traditional system and place of women as defined by it. Hence, the quest for the feminist consciousness was born to agitate for equality. Meanwhile, different ideologies of this theory have also influenced many playwrights to write plays that awake women's consciousness about the practice of feminism in the society. Among these playwrights is Irene Salami-Agunloye.

Feminism is the consciousness, ideology and theory that review the agitation of women for equality in a male dominated society. Feminist plays review the struggle of women to attain freedom from oppression and marginalization in a male dominated society. Lucas (2009:115) supports that "feminism, both in concept and practice attracts multi-dimensional considerations and emphasis... all concepts and postulations are geared towards the liberation of the woman by a deliberate struggle for socio-political fairness and justice devoid of gender bias. While commenting on the roles of women in the society, Ojediran (2012:171) affirms that "women should not be perceived only in relation to their biological or psychological role but as one that can make positive contributions to the society in which they are."

Invariably, the perception of this consciousness is glared towards gender equality in the society. In this regard, the agitation for gender equality is traced according to (Idegue, 2009:74) "France where it first appeared in 1880". Lucas (2009:117) stated that: "Christine de Pisa who seems to have been a French woman, wrote about the rights and duties of her sex". Idegue (2009:74) further reiterates that "it was in UK Daily News that first introduced the word 'feminist' to the English Language, importing it from France." Before it is widely known all over the world even the present day Nigerian society. The quest which gave rise to the agitation for gender equality in its earliest forms can still be found in the Nigerian society and the world at large even now. There are some factors responsible for the quest of gender equality.

One of the factors which shaped women view to the fact that they are marginalized is the traditional, cultural and religious beliefs or the Nigerian society. There is also a tradition that places the man as the head of the family. Thus; I Peter 3:1 posits that "likewise you wives be in subjection to your own husbands". Another example is when a child is born in a family in Yoruba belief, the news of a male child brings happiness and that of female brings depression. This is because the boy will be useful on the farm more than the girl. More so, when a mother gives birth to only female children, pressure will arise from either the husband or his family to get another wife who will bear him a male child. In a nutshell, significance is attached to the male gender. In this direction, Jayachandran (2014:17-18) submits that:

*Parents' favoritism toward boys encompasses both wanting to have sons more than daughters and choosing to invest more in sons than daughters. These two dimensions of favoritism often go hand-in-hand, but they are not identical.*  
(pp.17-18)

While explaining cultural factors that cause gender inequality in most developing society of the world, which is also dominant in Nigerian society, Jayachandran (2014:10-16) further reiterates six factors which give male sex dominance in the society. According to him these are:

- i. Patrilocality: many cultures practice patrilocality whereby a married couple lives near or with the husband's parents. When a woman gets married, she essentially ceases to be a member of her birth family,
- ii. Old-age support from sons: closely linked to patrilocality is the fact that sons traditionally provide old-age support for their parents,
- iii. Dowry system: dowry is thus a financial cost to parents of having daughters,
- iv. Patrilineality: In a patrilineal system, names and property pass to the next generation through male descendants,
- v. Role of sons in religious rituals.
- vi. Desire to protect female safety and "purity", Persistence of gender norms when economic conditions change.

There is also the segregation and marginalization of women in political issues. Even in democratic societies in which gender equality is legally mandated, gender discrimination occurs in politics. Both in regards to presumptions about political allegiances that fall along gender lines, and disparate gender representation within representative democracies. Historically, this is even truer when women were neither considered full citizens, nor could not vote. In view of this, Ekpe, Aloba and Egbe (2014:18) note that:

*Women were considered inferior and their participation at all levels of government, discouraged. In fact, some communities considered it a taboo for women to take active roles in governance. Many qualified women were forced to play minor roles in the margins or were frustrated out of governance. (p.18)*

This is caused by the perception of average Nigerian about women that women are properties after the dowries are paid to their families. Collins (2010:13) asserts that "with the emergence of highly stratified agrarian states, women according to the conflict theorists came to be defined as mere "property" to be disposed of at the pleasure of men.

This degradation of women's participation in socio-political and economic activities leads to the quest for gender equality in Nigeria. To this effect, scholars in the art of the theatre have been orienting Nigerian women by using their play text to awake women's consciousness emancipate themselves from patriarchal hegemony and stimulate their interest to participate and contest for major roles in politics. This is what constitutes the plight and the thematic preoccupation of Irene Salami-Agunloye in *MorethanDancing* and *SweetRevenge*.

### **The position of Nigerian Playwrights in the quest for gender equality**

Issues on the quest for gender equality in Nigeria focuses on advocacy for balance and agitation for equal representation of both sexes in socio-political structures and it has attracted consistent concentration from Nigerian Feminist Playwrights such as (Udengwu, 2012:10) "Sofola and Onwueme – and the emerging ones – Stella Oyedepo, OnyekaOnyekuba, Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh, Irene Salami-Agunloye and ChinyereOkafor." They have reflected in their works different ideas of feminism that is capable of making Nigerian women to rethink and take their stand in the struggle for equality. Similarly, Idegu (2009:146) asserts that "within the feminist elite, there are diversities of concepts and learning, with each group's justifying convincingly or

otherwise what makes their concept, better, more African, more accommodating, or sometimes more radical and acceptable than the other. "

Within the confine of Idegu's submission, two concept of feminism can be explored in which the Nigerian playwrights can be categorized. The first is the liberalists; they believe that both man and woman are equal and therefore should be represented equally while the other is the radical; those who believe that patriarchal hegemony are institutionalized. These two schools of thought shape this consciousness that seeks gender equality. In view of this, Rusli (2010:118) while explaining Liberal feminism, submits that:

*Liberal feminism mainly focuses on women's issues which are related to public realms (outside) rather than private issues (within). It is concerned with how to achieve equal position and treatment in society. Gender inequality and women's oppression according to liberal feminism; basically results from the fact that women lack opportunities to maintain equality with men in public realms. (p.118)*

Liberal feminism as explained by Rusli maintains that, women in this category believe they should be equally perceived like men in social, economic and political views. They believe that women should be able to do what men do as proclaimed that (the Equal Pay Act 1975) there should be "requirement of equal treatment for men and women in same employment, disputes as to, and enforcement of; requirement of equal treatment, collective agreements and pay structures." In the same vein, Samkange (2015:1175) writes that:

*Liberal feminists defend the equal rationality of the sexes and emphasize the importance of structuring social, familial, and sexual roles in ways that promote women's autonomous self-fulfillment. They emphasize the similarities between men and women rather than the average differences between them. (p.1175)*

On the other hand, radical feminism guarantees male supremacy and the subordination of women at work and in the home. In their view men inflict physical and sexual violence over women and commandeer the majority of material rewards (Rusli, 2010:118) "the idea that main rival of women is patriarchy." SimilarlyOssome (2015:8) asserts that:

*Radical feminism argues that patriarchy is very hard to eradicate because its root- the belief that women are different and inferior is deeply embedded in most men's consciousness. It can best be resisted, radical feminists argued, by forming nonhierarchical, supportive, woman-only spaces where women can think and act and create free of constant sexist put-downs, sexual harassment, and the threat of rape and violence. The important values, radical feminism argues, are intimacy, persuasion, warmth, caring, and sharing - the characteristics that women develop in their hands on everyday experiences with their own and their children's bodies and with the work of daily living. (p.8)*

Radical feminism is a consciousness that makes women view the society as the one dominated by men and seek reformation of the social structure that gives preference to men. Mackay (2015:16) notes that "Radical feminists tend to be more militant in their approach (radical as getting to the root) than other feminists are. A radical feminist aims to dismantle

patriarchy, rather than making adjustments to the system through legal changes." In this direction, Robert (2015) opined that:

*To radical feminists, women's oppression is the most fundamental form of oppression. It is the model for all other kinds of oppression. A prostitute, in their view, does not act out of free choice but is a victim of coercion in both its most subtle and direct forms. Because oppression is so entrenched in people's thinking, changes in the structuring of society alone are not sufficient to overcome it. The attitudes of men must be changed and a state of equality made manifest in the power dynamic between men and women.*

Basically, radical feminism can be said to have evolved from women oppression. It suggests that every condition women has encountered is as a result of frustration from opposite sex, this consciousness in women makes them seek social reformation for individual to be responsible for one's life. Likewise, these consciousness form the issues that draw the attention of playwrights in Nigeria. Feminist playwrights observe that women interests are not well represented. Idegue (2009:147) maintains that "most literature misrepresent women and impose a false limited notion of their roles... women are presented as being silly, inactive, flighty, shrill, illogical and concerned with child rearing recipes."

However, this misconception is what the feminist playwrights stand to correct and establish the capability and the strength of women towards the development of the state. Similarly, plays that establish that what a man can do a woman can do either. Playwrights such as Irene Salami-Agunloye, Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh and Chinyere Okafor belong to the category of such playwrights. Their position is to orientate and encourage Nigerian women to participate in the social reformation, construction and also participate in the major roles in the socio-political activities.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In this work, the researcher adopt Mary Wollstonecraft's (1700s) "Liberal feminist theory" to study the quest of gender equality in the Nigerian society as it is reflected in the dramaturgy of Irene Salami-Agunloye. Bryson (2003:139) notes that "Liberal feminism takes its point of departure in liberalism's principles" in this regard, there is need to know what liberalism is, to further establish the liberal feminist theory. In this direction, Jackson and Rensen (2012:179) submit that:

*Liberalism is based on the principles of individualism and equality. The theory takes its point of departure in the individual, proclaiming that every human being is fundamentally equal. As a result, everybody is entitled to the same human rights, and should be given equal opportunities to pursue life goals.(p.179)*

This is going to be our theoretical framework for this study:

Drawing from the above assertion, Liberalism places every human being (both sexes) on equal treatment in the face of law, social structure, academics, bureaucracy, and politics. This basis forms the premise of the liberal feminist theory. According to Hartman (2012:206), "liberal feminism accepts liberal rights theory as sufficient for creating woman's equality with man and therefore views women as an interest group within the pluralist society with specific problems

of mobilization and representation". We employ this theory in the dramaturgy of Irene Salami-Agunloye's play texts because it helps to identify the quest for gender equality and feminism aesthetics in the selected plays. The women's agitation for equality in socio-political and socio-economic structures in these plays gives us room for adopting the "liberal feminist theory".

In the same vein, Bryson, (2003:141) outlines three conditions that specify the presence of liberal feminist theory in a play. According to him they are:

*"A focus on individualism where he stated that men and women should receive equal opportunities and chances to pursue their individualistic goals. Since hard work and luck are the main determinants of one's position in society, class and race do not affect how gender equality should be achieved; Giving women a bigger representation at state level will automatically promote more policies leaning towards gender equality as well as more peaceful policies.*

*Liberal feminism believes that gender equality should be achieved through the state: The state should be relatively limited in interfering with the private sphere, but should engage in social engineering, promoting the notion that women can pursue their career goals while upholding the family structure, and thereby achieve gender equality within the nuclear family."*

This theory however summarizes that, women should not be viewed only with the traditional role as mothers in the family, but should be viewed with the social and political roles as their opposite sex such that men and women should receive equal opportunities and chances to pursue their individualistic goals. Therefore, this study addresses the quest of gender equality in the dramaturgy of Irene Salami-Agunloye, using the liberalist-feminist theory as our focus.

### **Biography of Irene Salami-Agunloye**

Irene Salami-Agunloye is a native of Edo State Nigeria. She was born on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 1958. She is a graduate of University of Jos (1976-1980), where she graduated in Theatre Arts (with emphasis in Film) with a second class upper division. She developed interest in Women & Gender Studies in which she did a one year Post Doc as a visiting lecturer at the University of California, Los Angeles (2004-2005). She is a professor of African Drama, Women and Film Studies. She is the first female Head of the Department of Theatre & Film Arts, University of Jos, Jos, (2006-2011), where she have lectured for the past thirty-five years (One year Youth Service inclusive). She is currently the pioneering Director of the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies, University of Jos, and also the pioneering Coordinator for University of Jos American Corner. She was a Fulbright Scholar at the University of California, Los Angeles and a fellow of the Prestigious IWF (International Women's Leadership Forum) Leadership Foundation (2011-2012). This fellowship afforded her the opportunity to be trained in women and leadership at the Harvard Business School, INSEAD (Institut Européend'Administration des Affaires) Business School, Singapore, and HERS (Higher Education Resource Services) Summer Institute at the University of Denver, Denver, USA. She holds a Diploma in Screen Writing from the prestigious New York Film Academy, New York. She is considered one of Nigeria's leading female Playwrights. Some of her plays include, *Plays for Juniors, Emotan, Queen Sisters, More than Dancing, Sweet Revenge* and *Queen Idia* which was shortlisted for the NLNG Literary Prize in 2010. She has recently published a Screen Play, *Naked Masquerade*. She has edited many anthologies which include *African Women: Drama and Performance, Women, Performance and*

Politics: Contemporary Perspectives and Retelling History, Restaging African Heroines in Drama and Film. She has at least 40 journal articles and chapters in books. She was a Project Director for the Carnegie Gender Project.

In addition, she is a member of the 100 Women National Consultative Group. For nearly 20 years, she has been a strong gender activist, particularly in the academy. She was the first National President of the National Association of Women Academics (NAWACS). She is a fellow of SONTA. She is also a member of Jos University Teaching Hospital Board and Covenant University Council (Board of Regent). She had several professional enrichment trainings some of which are: Gender & Higher Education, (in South Africa-2008 & Ghana-2003) Gender & Development (England 2009), Mentoring (Organised by Simmons College, USA 2010), Negotiation (Organised by Simmons College, USA 2011), Gender, Conflict and the Peace Building (UNIFEM San Diego USA 2004), Women Leading Global Change (Washington DC, USA 2011), Communication Strategies for Leaders, (Boston USA, 2012), Women in Leadership (Dubai 2009), Advance Course on Wholistic Development and Participatory Approaches (CRUDAN, Jos, 2000), Advance Course on Project Management (RUCON, 2002), Fund Raising Fundamentals (Carnegie, 2003, Jos) Strategic Planning: (CRUDAN 2000) etc. I have presented papers at many International Conferences and travelled widely nationally and internationally. Irene Salami is married with children and grandchildren.

### **Factors that Militate Against Women Participation in Politics in Nigeria**

Nigerian politics is capital intensive and most Nigerian women, even though could be interested in politics, lack the huge resources to execute their aspirations. This is because men who have for long controlled the affairs of the state have looted so much of the nation's wealth and usually use such loots to the detriment of women.

Some religious and doctrinal practices also limit the chances of women participation in Nigerian politics. In the northern part of the country, the purdah system of the Muslims does not allow women to appear in public. Sometimes women are even not allowed to come out to vote on account of this practice. They cannot therefore be allowed to freely participate in campaign activities Nigerian women themselves are their own worst enemies. They, by themselves, have constituted a very big road block to their political participation.

Many of them are simply not interested in politics for various personal reasons, ranging from petty jealousy, the weak nature of women and the dangers associated with the game of politics. It is not fair to say that formal education is still a hindrance to women's participation in politics in Nigeria for, a good number of women have now acquired the requisite qualification, which is the School Certificate, to contest in elections, what Nigerian women lack at this stage is political education which is mandatory for their effective participation in politics.

Nigerian politics is also time-consuming. It involves series of meetings, most of which are held deep into the night and last till the early hours of the next day. It is not every woman that can leave her house at such odd hours to attend such political meetings. Any woman who dares may incur the wrath of her husband. Generally, men do not tolerate this. In this circumstance, women end up abandoning politics to the men.

Another factor is the problem of citizenship and indigeneship. Where is a Nigerian woman qualified to contest for elections? In some Nigerian communities, women are not allowed to contest elections in their husband's places of origin and they equally face a lot of challenges where they come from. This may explain why Mrs. Daisy Danjuma could not contest

election into the Senate in her husband's state, Taraba, but had to do it in her home state of Edo. Similarly, Mrs. ItaGiwa won election to the National Assembly to represent Cross River State, her home state and not Edo, her late husband's State (Okpaga in Okpeh and Sha, 2007:264). Faced with this crisis, it becomes difficult for women to actively participate in politics.

### **Synopsis of Salami-Agunloye's *Sweet Revenge***

*Sweet Revenge* centres on women's struggle in the equal representation and participation in socio-political structure of the Nigerian society. It shows how women are used as vehicle of social engineering to mobilize people to vote for their party and later they are deprived of their rights. This play revolves around Aisosa, a woman whose husband; Sota leaves her with three kids and travels to London to advance his studies. After many years that he was done for his studies, he settles down with an American woman named Cheryl. On the long run, he receives a letter from Nigeria that he should come back home to take up the senatorial seat of his district in Benin. Sota takes up this offer and he changes his kindness attitude refusing to perform his responsibilities to his people.

Not minding that she is instrumental to the winning of the election, Sota files a divorce for Aisosa and her children and brings Cheryl the white woman to come and live with him in Abuja. However, Aisosa who has long resigned from her work as a medical doctor to play the traditional role of a mother who takes care of her children and does other domestic works, prior to the journey of her husband to London secures a job as a research consultant in the Nigerian Medical Laboratory. This new status earns her big money to send her children to school and does some other things for survival. After some time, Cheryl gets to know that Sota has been married to one Aisosa due to the misinterpretation of identity which makes people refer to her as Aisosa. She traces the Aisosa and sees that she is accommodating; she pleads for forgiveness with Aisosa and promises to return to London leaving her only son to Aisosa to look after him. Aisosa accepts her offer. Later, Aisosa was invited abroad for a medical interview which Cheryl was instrumental to Aisosa winning the job overseas. She becomes successful and everybody knows her for her great achievement.

Due to the behaviour that Sota puts on lately, he is obstructed by the women in the senatorial district in his state to pursue his second term in office. The women approach Aisosa to replace her husband position in the senate council. She not only wins the election as someone who is loved by the people, she also becomes the Speaker of the House of Assembly. Sota in his pride still blackmails Aisosa that she is instrumental to his downfall and also takes his seat in the senate. Sota later realizes his mistakes after he has lost everything he has and comes to seek forgiveness from Aisosa.

### **Issues and Quest of Gender Equality in Salami-Agunloye's *Sweet Revenge***

In the Nigerian society, women who are exposed to western culture got the consciousness that they are being oppressed, sidelined, marginalized and are given stereotyped roles in the society. This makes being looked down upon with regards to their domestic functions irrespective of their exposure. Some men even conclude that their wives should take the domestic roles of women which include child bearing and upkeep, cooking food and caring for the family wellbeing and doing some other domestic jobs, neglecting their exposure to western education. Like the popular saying; "a full housewife"! After these men have achieved in their pursuit for power and money they render these women useless. This similar practice is what



Salami-Agunloye questioned in *Sweet Revenge*. However, this play does not only question patriarchal hegemony in the Nigerian society, but also awakes women's consciousness to emancipate themselves from this mental slavery.

This play uses the family of Mr. and Mrs. Aisosa and SotaOjo in the Benin (Edo State) to establish a patriarchal society in Nigeria where the Men are portrayed as the father of the house and everybody under the roof of that house must be subject to them. Through this divine and/or traditional law and belief often render women powerless, objective and submissive to the whims and caprices as well as orders of their husbands. This is the case of Mrs. AisosaOjo, a Professor of Medicine. A person who is versed in the Medical profession becomes downgraded to the level of taking care of domestic works at home and being a full house wife and turned idle. For instance, some lines in the play shows this clearly:

**Aisosa:** How was I to perform that magic Mr. Fairy Godfather? You left here eight years ago for a PhD abroad, with the promise that you will send me money from your salary... instead of 40,000 naira monthly allowance you promised us, all you made available to us was 10,000 naira.

**Sota:** You should have been doing something to make up

**Aisosa:** Like what Dr. SotaOjo? When you asked me to resign my job as a consultant gynecologist so I could give your children the best care they needed, did you realize the implications. (*Sweet Revenge*, p. 16)

Basically, similar issue often arouses the dissatisfaction of feminists around the world. It triggers the reaction for gender equality in that as men are the breadwinners of the family, so also women could also provide family needs.

More so, in present day Nigeria, some men are found with the new culture of traveling abroad and getting married to white women all in the preference of getting stay and work permit in the foreign countries at the expense of their family here in Nigeria. In doing this, they set up another family oversea. This issue is capable of making women file for divorce in the present day Nigerian society. In another dimension, this is a form of oppression on the part of women which causes their action against such act.

Some men nowadays, when they have attained a powerful position or a top political post, they abandon their wife and marry another wife who they think is presentable and their former wife will be left to do the chores. While the latter enjoys the euphoria of top post, the former begins to suffer. This is also reviewed in *Sweet Revenge* as Senator SotaOjo abandones his wife Aisosa when he married Cheryl from London, the white woman he brought from Europe.

**Sota:** Sosa, I must be frank with you, you no longer excite me. You are too dull and drab. The spark that used to be in your life is no longer there... stop Aisosa, you drive me crazy, and you are a failure. You have failed as a wife you have failed too as a mother. You cannot even meet my sexual needs. Sexually, you are dumb. Of what use are you as a wife? Move out with the children.

All these acts of oppression and frustration make Aisosa stand her ground and return to her profession to the extent that she gains international recognition. However, the frustration, marginalization, inequality that women face makes them desire equality in a patriarchal society.

### **Synopsis of Irene Salami-Agunloye's *More Than Dancing***

The play is written by Salami-Agunloye to capture the political tradition and belief that place men at the forefront of political parties in Nigeria while women play minor and publicity roles. The situation of women in the play is that they are used as a tool for entertainment in the United People's Liberation party (UPLP). During every meeting session, women are always dancing to entertain party members and no key political posts are assigned to them. Although no one is conscious of that until this particular meeting when Madam Bisi Adigun, the woman leader of the party interrupts a dancing session and challenges the leadership of the party.

This act results into disagreement between the male and female members of the party and this split the party into two. This makes the women go ahead to have a secret meeting which culminates into nominating Prof. Nona Odaro, a top female member of the party as their presidential candidate as against the will of the party leaders. Meanwhile, the women are campaigning for their own presidential aspirant; Prof. Nona Odaro and are also carrying out different strategies towards their success in the election. However, the male folks in the party are not contented with how the party has been divided and also with the plans of the women and they decide to work-out how to make these moves women are making impossible. So they try to co-opt Amb. Uyi Odaro, who is the husband to Prof. Nona; the presidential aspirant for him to admonish his wife for a change mind.

This action of co-option leads to quarrel between Nona and Uyi in the home which almost gets Nona frustrated and determines to withdraw from the election. Nevertheless, when she sleeps, she frequently dreams and sees the past heroines that include, Emotan of Benin, Inikpi of Igala, Moremi of Ife, Madam Tinubu of Lagos, Queen Idia of Benin, Queen Aminat of Zazzau, Madam Nwanyeruwa, Queen Kambasa of Bonny and, Madam Mary all clamoring for a heroine like them in the contemporary Nigeria to emerge as the leader of the party. This dream motivates Nona and makes her determine that she will not relent in her effort to contest for the election.

On the long run, the leaders of the party have no option than to let go of Nona to contest for the presidential election due to the recognition she has had overtime and the strategies put in place by the women in the party. At the end of the play Nona emerges as the president of the country.

### **Issues and quest of gender equality in Salami-Agunloye's *More than dancing*.**

As the issue of women marginalization in on the increase in the Nigerian society, so the agitation for equality on the part of women is also on the increase through writing of plays and articles that project women capability to achieve goals beyond what the males can achieve . Irene Salami reviews the agitation and what inspires women's desire to participate in socio-political activities in the country as their opposite sex do. This is portrayed in this play using United People's Liberation Party (UPLP) where men dominate leadership roles and women perform more of entertainment roles. This shows extreme level of marginalization, oppression and ridicule. This further leads to frustration, which can compel the disgruntled member to agitate. The reaction of Madam Bisi, the woman lead shows that the women can no longer bear the degree of frustration they are facing in the party. Thus:

**Bisi:** Stop the drumming! Stop dancing!! Stop immediately. Stop I say!!! Year in, year out, primaries come and party elections go, all we do is dance. Is dancing

what we can do? Is that all we are meant for? Look at the entire dancing troupes, how many men do you see? The men have since stopped dancing... Look at the high table, how many women do you see up there? The seat are filled with men where are women? These are meant to perpetually to keep us in subordinate positions. United People's Liberation Party is a party for men... safeguard for men... Men are chairperson, vicechairperson... (More than dancing, p.2)

The courage of Bisi in this excerpt brings us to the first feature of our theory, which focuses on individualism, stating that men and women should receive equal opportunities and chances to pursue their individualistic goals. Since hard work and luck are the main determinants of your position in society, class and race do not affect how gender equality should be achieved; Giving women a bigger representation at state level will automatically promote more policies leaning towards gender equality as well as more peaceful policies.

This excerpt shows that women in this political milieu have been sidelined, and not recognised in the political exercise. This in turn has led to frustration thereby awakening their consciousness. In this regard, frustration experienced by women could inspire their desire to be liberated from patriarchal society. In the same vein, men's intimidation is usually the cause of this women's desire to agitate gender equality. Hence;

**Nona:** ... I wish I could bubble with joy like you have prescribed, I really wish I could. How can I be joyful when our male politicians are attacking us every day? My women are becoming intimidated and my home is threatened. (*More than dancing*, p.79)

Most Nigerian cultures and traditions place men in leadership roles while women are made subordinates. This similar culture is systematically questioned in this play where men alone are the leaders in UPLP. This situation attracts women's desire to be at par with their male counterpart. Nona in the play says:

**Nona:** Our women are discouraged... most of them lack confidence in themselves. They have imbibed the traditional belief that men are the "born" leaders and such they do not stand a chance against them at the polls so "why bother to contest" they ask? (p.86)

**Mama Nigeria:** then women should decamp and go to parties that encourage equal participation.

**Nona:** Mama, such parties do not exist. They are all the same. There is strong male political culture which intimidates against women. The electorate does not have confidence in women as leaders. They feel men are better performers. (p.87).

This perception is what women stand to correct in the age of modernity that both men and women are equal and what men can do, women can also do better. According to Alero:

**Alero:** left to me, I would suggest that we form an all-female party and leave UPLP for them (men)

**Nona:** (*Rises up suddenly*) God forbid, Nigeria is a country made up of men and women. Our reason for desiring to rule is not because we want to install a government that is anti-men. No! We believe in equality and equity. People will get what they deserve because they qualify for it not because of their sex. (p.9)

Women are clamoring for egalitarian society where equality will be given to both sexes in social and political participation. This view brings us to our theoretical framework in this work; the liberal feminist theory which stipulates that gender equality should be achieved through the state; The state should be relatively limited in interfering with the private sphere, but should engage in social engineering, promoting the notion that women can pursue their career goals while upholding the family structure, and thereby achieve gender equality within the nuclear family.

## **Conclusion**

This study has examined the factors responsible for the quest and desire for gender equality in the Nigerian society as reviewed in the selected plays of Irene Salami-Agunloye. It also looked at how women are being oppressed in a patriarchal society which is caused as a result of culture and tradition that place man at the height of respect in the Nigerian society. It also examines the levels of intimidation faced by women which makes them determine not to play slavish roles in the society but to participate in the significant public roles.

The researcher was able to achieve the aim and objectives of this study by adopting content analysis of the selected plays to study the issues and quest of gender equality in the Nigerian society. The study also adopts Mary Wollstonecraft's (1700s) 'Liberal Feminist Theory' examines the reason why women clamour for equality in the men dominated society. Thus, women want to go beyond performing their traditional roles as mere house wife, taking care of the kids and satisfying the sexual desire of their husband to participating in social reconnection and development of Nigerian economic and socio-political Interest. They should go beyond dancing and maneuver their ways, to take their ground and emancipate themselves from the environmental circumstances (cultures, traditions, religions, beliefs and norms etc.) that obstruct them from participating and taking major post in the political sector of the country.

Irene Salami also admonish the electorate to give female politicians a consideration to be elected as a leader in one of the top and functioning posts in the three tiers of government and see if they will not perform than how the male leaders have performed. This is what is shown through the character of Aisosa in *Sweet Revenge* and Prof. Nona in *More than dancing*.

After Nigerian's independence in 1960, Nigeria has been ruled by men of different orientation and Nigeria as a country still oscillates within the four-walls of irrational development. Nigeria as a country is still in a developing process. It is conspicuous that Nigeria is handicapped by cultural and traditional laws, religious and ethnic bigot which do not give preference to women in the society has promoted gender inequity in the Nigerian society and has shaped the perception and belief that an average Nigerian woman cannot take leadership roles in the society.

This study therefore concludes that Nigerians should boycott cultural, traditional, and religious dictates and give a trial to female politicians either as the head of state, senate president

or chief justice of the federation and see if Nigeria as a country will not receive a new turnaround.

### **Recommendations**

Nigeria is a country engulfed by series of vices perpetrated by past leaders which is limiting the growth and development of the country; Corruption, embezzlement, mal-administration, insecurity, high rate of unemployment, kidnapping among others. This study recommends that patriarchy in all its ramifications should be discouraged, and gender discrimination and inequalities should be dismantled for equity and equality to prevail. This will help the democratic process in Nigeria since it requires massive participation of all sexes.

However, Women should also be more interested in politics and elections than they have shown. They should also support rather than become jealous of their fellow women politicians. Political education should be included in the school curriculum from basic to secondary, so that Nigerian women will know their fundamental human rights and how to exercise such rights.

The following are recommended as practical solutions to the issues raised:

- i. Since male folks are unable to proffer solution to the problems militating against Nigerian society, educated women should also be given a chance to pilot the affairs of Nigerian society. Men should also learn to tolerate women in politics and leadership positions and rather encourage them to join (men) in the political affairs. This is reflected in Irene Salami's *More than Dancing* and *Sweet Revenge* where women are portrayed as solution to the nation's crisis.
- ii. The law makers should also pass law which will enable equal participation of both sexes in government. Laws should be passed that stipulates the number of years to be ruled by the male gender while the same number of years should be given to only women to contest for the post (presidency, speaker of the house of assembly and judiciary) this will enhance equal participation of both gender in the nation's transformation.
- iii. Irrespective of individual backgrounds and different beliefs, Nigerians should boycott cultural, traditional, and religious dictates and give a trial to female politician either as the head of state, senate president and chief justice of the federation in order to enhance national transformation and development.

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