

Women's Quest for Leadership and Empowerment in Nigerian Drama: Comments on Eziwho Emenike Azunwo's *Apogee*

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Abstract: The discussion on women, the challenges they face and their quest for leadership and empowerment in a patriarchal society has gained a lot of attention over the years. Drama as a medium of expression has always been a veritable avenue for communicating the prevalent issues per time in the society in order to create an environment for peace, change and progress. Playwrights of different origins have used it tremendously in time past and are still using it to address issues especially as it concerns women in the society. This paper examines women's quest for leadership and empowerment in Eziwho Emenike Azunwo's *Apogee*. In using the qualitative method of research, the study observed that women are confronted with challenges in a patriarchal society on their journey to the leadership ladder. The study also observed that if there is unity of purpose for women they can capture space in different spheres of human endeavour and contribute more to the development of the society as seen in the play under study. The researcher recommends the need for women to work together irrespective of their class or socio-economic achievements in tackling issues affecting their wellbeing as human beings with equal rights and opportunities with the men. The study also recommends the need for government agencies to implement policies that will engage more women in elective and political positions, as well as the need for men and women to work together in unity for the transformation of the society.

Keywords: Drama, Women, Quest, Empowerment, Leadership.

INTRODUCTION

Man has always been charged with the responsibility of organizing things as seen for example, in the management of smaller animals in farmlands through their rearing and grazing for both economic and sustenance needs. This requires some form of coordination in order to raise these animals and achieve the intended outcome over time, which places him in a leadership position. From the account of the Bible on creation, the man Adam and the woman Eve were given the mandate to be fruitful, multiply, replenish, subdue and have dominion over everything that God has created. This gives us a picture that men and women have been equipped with the leadership quality and capacity of some sort to excel by way of piloting the affairs or activities in different sphere of human endeavour. The implication is that if men are functioning in positions of authority and decision making, women can also do same or even function better irrespective of their gender. Sadly, the reality is far different, with men occupying more leadership roles now as a result of society's patriarchal framework, which favours men over women.

This kind of circumstance may probably be the reason why the playwright has over the years, served as a creative artist, advisor, prophet, communicator, and solution provider employing theatre and drama to address contemporary negative situations that affect women in the society so as to promote growth and development. The playwright as an important personality in the society has always been relevant both in the past and in the present. They imaginatively create scenarios that reflect societal events through their own experiences or observations of their surroundings, drawing attention to detrimental aspects and encouraging readers and the audience to accept the necessary adjustment that will help in transforming the society. The playwright through this medium known as drama is not just a creative writer but a seer, critic and an inner eye or third eye of the society from which he emerges from. He watches, observes keenly or keeps a record of that which is observed and experienced consciously and unconsciously using his/her work as a tool to affect and effect change in the society (Ojukwu & Utoh-Ezeajugh, 2021, p.116). Playwrights of all ages like Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Lope de Vega, Niccolo

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Machiavelli, William Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen, Jean Paul Sartre, Arthur Miller, James Ene Henshaw, Wole Soyinka, J.P Clark etc., have contributed uncountable creative pieces which are most appropriate for social structuring and restructuring (Azunwo, & Odoyi, 2021, p.157). Drawing from the comments of Ojukwu & Utoh-Ezeajugh (2021) and Azunwo & Odoyi (2021), it is clear that the focus of the playwright is to draw the attention of the people to embrace change that will foster development in addition to highlighting the issues in the society.

The desire for more influence in terms of leadership and empowerment among women have been a recurrent issue in Nigerian drama, reflecting the shifting status of women as well as the intricate social structure of the nation. Nigerian playwrights have depicted the hardships, tenacity, and drive of women pursuing leadership and agency in their works. In order to effect change and promote sustainable development, playwrights like 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 elicit dialogue, debunk myths, and inspire critical thinking. To highlight issues like violence against women, gender discrimination, patriarchy, and the marginalization of women in Nigerian society, they have used theater as a powerful platform. They have been able to withstand societal expectations and promote gender equality via their writings (Obire & Ejeke, 2024, p. 909). These accounts demonstrate women's tenacity and resistance in addition to the cultural and traditional constraints imposed on them. The examination of such themes in Nigerian drama offers us insights into the country's gender and socio-political dynamics. This study focuses on women's quest for leadership and empowerment using Eziwho Emenike Azunwo's *Apogee* to explicate the need for women's collective action in agitating and securing their inclusion in leadership positions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK/LITERATURE REVIEW

The theoretical framework of this study is focused on the Transformational Leadership Theory and Feminist Leadership theory. The term "transformational leadership" was first used by James V. Downton in a book titled *Rebel Leadership: Commitment and Charisma in the Revolutionary Process*. Bernard M. Bass and James MacGregor Burns were two influential persons in the development of this leadership style who later took notice of the concept. The idea was first presented by Burns to explain how leaders encourage and inspire followers to accomplish remarkable goals while simultaneously promoting both professional and personal development. Subsequently, Bernard M. Bass developed and put the idea into practice in his 1985 study. According to transformational leadership theory, creating an inclusive atmosphere, inspiring and

encouraging people to reach their greatest potential are crucial. This idea is especially pertinent to women's leadership as it supports the collaborative, empathetic, and community-building leadership philosophies that are inherent in many women. By using transformational leadership techniques, women may empower both themselves and others, opening doors for more representation in positions of leadership. Transformational leadership is one of the most effective at bringing about lasting change (Baker, 2023).

Feminist Leadership Theory was created collaboratively by various academics, activists, and feminist thinkers. The theory developed from the broader feminist movement and principles of feminist theory, which oppose patriarchal systems, advance equity, and support inclusive, team-based leadership. Feminist Leadership Theory challenges traditional leadership paradigms that frequently minimize the perspectives and experiences of women. It clamours for a leadership style that is more inclusive and it supports social justice, equity, diversity, and teamwork. This ideology promotes women's empowerment by urging them to use their distinct viewpoints and life experiences as assets in leadership positions. The works of people like; Bell Hooks, Joan Acker, Vandana Shiva, Gloria Anzaldúa, Adrienne Maree Brown, Judith Butler, Zulu Sofola, Tess Onwueme, Irene Salami, Julie Okoh, Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh, Mabel Evhiehroma, Osita Ezenwanebe, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, amongst others have been helpful in one way or the other to Feminist Leadership discourse. Feminists acknowledge that power is at the heart of leadership. Thus, feminist leadership seeks to move away from this oppressive use of power towards forms that are empowering, enabling, inclusive, and collective (Batliwala, 2022, p.6).

THE ISSUE OF FEMINISM

The issue of women as it concerns their wellbeing is still apt in this contemporary time because most societies of the world are adopting strategies that will help foster change and development of which women are part of (Obire & Anyanwu, 2024). The discussion on feminism has become increasingly popular, and its definition has changed over time to accommodate changing societal expectations. It describes any movement, or particular collection of movements, that seeks to uphold and enhance women's many social, political, economic, and cultural rights as well as to provide them with equal opportunities for advancement. Feminism is the principle of equal rights for women and men, seeking to eliminate both the historical domination of men and the violence of men against women (Johnson, 2024). It seeks to challenge and end the systemic prejudice and discrimination that women and other oppressed groups experience in various spheres of life, including but not limited to politics, the economy, education, healthcare, and social standards. The fundamental goal of feminism is to address the gender disparities that have permeated throughout

history and continue to this day in all civilizations. 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, *et al.*, 2022, p.97). In a similar manner, Okoh (2012), documents that:

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 alternate perspective from which to understand the world. It means a woman becoming aware of a distortion in her social status as a woman (pp.7-8).

Drawing from Okoh's comment, it is obvious that feminism focuses on women's rights and position in the structure of the society. Evhierarchy (2002) in discussing feminism asserts 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 (p.77).

The idea of feminism is intended to be culturally unique and to examine issues that impact women in various countries. Feminism may be broadly divided into two; the conservative and the radical or separatist. Again, the African society does not align with the separatist concept of feminism because of our communal way of life. The goal of feminist research is to "deconstruct" the prevailing male paradigms and create a feminine perspective that prioritizes the experiences of women (Sotunsa, 2009, p.228). One element of feminism is the necessity for women to express themselves as distinct individuals with the power to alter their society.

THE CONCEPT OF LEADERSHIP: A BRIEF STATEMENT

There are many definitions of leadership, but they all usually agree that great leaders are able to make visionary, strategic decisions and persuade others to

follow them. It is widely accepted that leaders can effectively inspire others to strive toward accomplishing their vision. They accomplish this by establishing guidelines and motivating others to strive for success in reaching the desired outcome. Additionally, they have the ability to inspire and encourage others to strive toward the goal (Pratt, 2017). Leadership is the ability of an individual or group of individuals to direct and influence followers or other members of an organization. It involves making smart and at times tough decisions, defining and communicating a clear vision, establishing attainable goals, and providing followers with the knowledge and resources they need to achieve those goals. Leadership is taking charge of a team or an organization. Being a leader means taking chances and questioning the status quo. Leaders inspire people to do something better and innovative. Interestingly, leaders do not do what they do out of duty; they do it to pursue innovation. By examining the group's accomplishments and lessons learned, they gauge success (Pandey, 2024). Leaders are needed and found in most facets of the society. According to Webber (2002) an effective leader "possesses a blend of three special elements: vision, character and competencies" (p.9). A successful leader should be self-aware, courageous, respectful, compassionate, resilient, and have integrity. They should also be learning how to be nimble and flex their influence while effectively articulating the vision, expressing gratitude, and working with others (Leis & Wormington, 2024). There are various leadership styles available to leaders, and their impact differs according to the group they are leading and the sector they work in. These leadership theories describe how a successful leadership style contributes to an organization's success. Leadership theories describe the ways in which certain people assume positions of power. They place emphasis on the traits and behaviours that people might adopt to enhance their leadership abilities. Various leadership theories have been developed over time, offering suggestions on how leaders might better mentor their followers. Among the most prominent theories of leadership are: Great Man Theory, Situational/Contingency Leadership, Transformational, Servant leadership, Transactional, Authentic, Path-Goal, Leader-Member Theory, Behavioural theory, Trait Theory, Emotional Intelligence (EI) Leadership and so on. All these theories or styles of leadership require that irrespective of gender, men and women must take responsibility in discharging their duties in order to transform their sphere of influence.

WOMEN'S QUEST FOR LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT IN NIGERIAN DRAMA

The perception that women belong to the home has placed majority of Nigerian women in the position of constantly requesting inclusion rather than taking the required actions to position themselves in key positions (Ogechi, 2023, p.58). The Nigerian society has traditionally been patriarchal, with men typically holding leadership positions. Women were frequently confined

to household roles, and any departure was treated with suspicion. The patriarchal framework which empowers men over women in various sector of human endeavour has made women over the years to strive in order to increase their representation in the society especially in the area of leadership. This move for gender parity in the society led to the idea of feminism. However, irrespective of the patriarchal structure of the society with men handling more positions of authority, in history, some women have also asserted themselves by taking leadership positions where they contributed their quota to the development of the society even within the patriarchal society. For instance, women dominated long-distance trade among the Yoruba, offering great prospects for gaining titles and fortune. The most prosperous of them attained the esteemed chieftaincy title of Iyalode, an extremely powerful and privileged status. The queen mother chaired meetings in her own palace, backed by lower-ranking title holders. Legends from the Yoruba and Hausa people tell of times when women were either real queens or heroic figures. Legendary figures include the strong queens from the histories of Ondo and Daura, as well as women like Moremi of Ile-Ife and Amina of Zaria (Falola, 2023). These women displayed remarkable leadership skills. According to historical accounts by Smith (1969), Van Allen (1972), Mba (1982, 1996), Awe (1992), Uchendu (1993), Alagoa (2003), and Chuku (2009), Nigerian women had a crucial role in the political structure of their communities prior to colonization. Women performed significant political roles in numerous places, despite the fact that men dominated authority in general (Okoh, 2022, p.2). According to Kashiri (2022),

Throughout the history of Christianity, power has been associated with men. Women played major roles in their families but rarely on national levels. However, a few women shifted the paradigm. In a patriarchal society, some women rose above the patriarch. A handful of women in the history of Christianity surpassed all societal expectations of biblical times. Women in history had their own spheres of influence despite male dominance. To rise above a culture where their sexuality was not acknowledged was miraculous (p.1).

The Bible, for instance, has accounts of women who demonstrated their leadership skills by managing and directing the affairs of their communities. According to Exodus 15:20-21, 2:3-8 and Hebrews 11:23, Miriam, the first female prophetess in Christian history, assisted her mother Jochebed in concealing Moses for three months; Deborah, a prophetess, fearless, and obedient to God, who became the fourth judge of Israel and led the Israelites to victory and out of slavery Judges 4:4-9; Queen Esther, a Jewish queen of the Persian king Ahasuerus, who used her position of power for good by bravely risking her life to save her people who were about to perish (Esther, Chapter 5-6); and others. Doki (2010), documents that historically, “the study of

women has shown that, women occupied positions of varying importance in various societies, especially within acceptable cultural provisions” (p.399). To corroborate Doki’s view, Ewrierhoma (2002), aptly asserts that in most African societies, “women were, always involved in systems of rulership and decision making, especially outside the home” (p.83). Mabel’s statement explains the fact that in the past, there are a few women out of a large number of marginalized women in the rural/urban areas, who made themselves useful by contributing to the development of their families and the society at large. In discussing possible reasons that may have affected women’s involvement in politics based on the available literature, Okoh (2022) is of the opinion that there is probably:

Two opposing explanations for the invisibility of women in Nigerian politics. The first holds that women had enormous political power in their various societies until the imposition of European colonial rule and their Victorian gender ethos, when such power was undermined or entirely eroded. The second attributes the current marginal involvement of Nigerian women in politics to the lingering inhibitive cultural and patriarchal elements (p.1-2).

It is clear that in the Nigerian society today, there are structures that limit women's leadership roles, especially in politics, business, and religion, despite the reverence for these historical figures. The ways in which women resist, negotiate, and change these systems are often depicted in Nigerian drama, which regularly addresses these traditional attitudes. In the words of Azunwo (2023).

From the classical dramas of Euripedes, Sophocles and Aristophanes, the issue of feminism has been a visible subject in drama... Interestingly, Aristophanes’ play has inspired a handful of plays with similar plot. One of such plays is J.P. Clark’s *The Wives Revolt* and later, Barclays Ayakoroma’s *Dance on His Grave*. Drawing from the Aristophanes’ model, these plays portray the agitation and struggle by the women for equal or fair treatment by their male counterparts who function as their husbands and (p.188).

In this era of female awakening and feminist consciousness, creative writers are responding to these shifts by building important women's culture and worldview. These changes are affecting both men and women in different ways. Nigerian women writers are becoming more and more deeply committed to the mistreatment of women in their country. The mistreatment of women in Nigeria is an issue that Nigerian women writers are increasingly passionate about. The authors, especially the female playwrights, address the issue of political estrangement among Nigerian women through their works. In order to

promote democratic values and good governance in Nigeria, their writings illuminate several sociopolitical issues (Eziechine & Esene, 2024).

SYNOPSIS AND DISCUSSION ON WOMEN'S QUEST FOR LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERMENT IN AZUNWO'S *APOGEE*

Eziwho Emenike Azunwo's *Apogee* is divided into four parts namely; drama one (subterfuge); drama two (women are sand); drama three (men are confused) and drama four (apogee). With activities taking place in the offices of the market president and secretary, respectively, the play examines the dynamics of women's pursuit of leadership and empowerment in a patriarchal Nigerian marketplace. The play begins with an emergency meeting of Dumbaria market women discussing and planning on how they will install women during their forthcoming elections into leadership positions after several years of male dominated leadership system in the ultra-modern market. An agreement was reached by the women in their first secret meeting without the knowledge of Chief Onukwuari - the chairman of the ultra-modern market. In another meeting, he informs the people of Dumbaria market that his tenure as the chairman of the market and that of his executive is about to elapse, hence the need to hand over power to the next set of officers that will pilot the affairs of the market. He also informs them that he is also expecting an appointment from the Executive Governor and that he is stepping down upon the completion of his tenure as chairman. The vice chairman's nomination is rejected by the female folks because the manner of nomination is perceived as gender oppression. The rejection of the nominations from the vice chairman and the derogatory comments from the chairman to the women folk results in a slap from two women leaders (Eshishi and Cheari) to (Onukwuari and Kinisooome) as the meeting ends in a chaotic state. The play takes another turn as Chief Onukwuari denies being slapped by a woman in front of everyone on the day of the election for selfish political reasons to sway the women to his side. On the long run Mrs. Merit Okosimiema - the former Secretary General emerge as president, with women winning almost all the positions except that of the Vice President and Assistant Secretary General. In the spirit of jubilation of the victory for the women, Merit informs everyone that Chief Onukwuari's appointment in the government has been withdrawn for an alleged crime of violence against a woman in a meeting during his tenure.

Eziwho Emenike Azunwo's *Apogee*, critically examines women's leadership roles in Nigerian society, with a special emphasis on the dynamics of gender and power in business or commercial settings. The play takes place in a marketplace, which is a complicated social setting where conventional gender roles are questioned in addition to being a location for business dealings. Using the Dumbaria ultramodern market as a platform to illustrate the need for women's voices to be heard in the

political arena, particularly in a patriarchal society, as exemplified by Chief Onukwuari, the chairman of the ultramodern market, the play explores the hardships and tenacity of women's pursuit of leadership. The dramatist developed the female character Cheari to stand in for the protection of women. She encourages other women to lead, challenging the status quo that is dominated by men. The market, which is representative of larger political arenas, turns into a battlefield for women's empowerment and equality. From the opening of the play the playwright presents a picture of women who are tired of the status quo of male dominance in the leadership sphere of Dumbaria market. In an emergency meeting, Cheari, Eshishi, Okosimiema, Mrs Ashley, Peace and Ms. Orubebe decides to come together to plan how to capture the political space in the ultra modern market as seen in their conversation below:

Okosimiema: My dear friends and compatriots, welcome to this secret emergency meeting of the meeting that will redefine our position as women in this our market of ours. It is a redefining moment and I would love us to forge ahead as an indivisible unit (p.1)

Cheari: Thank you, our leader and most politically conscious woman. Our future is here and we must strategize properly so that it will not sleep off from us (p.2).

The market place represents both oppression and opportunity. In addition to reflecting the historical marginalization of women in public settings, it provides an environment for them to hone their leadership abilities and business savvy. The playwright highlights that resiliency, community organizing, and purposeful action are more important for achievement in these settings than conventional education alone. The emergency meeting came as a result of the women's desire to change the political situation that has been unfavourable to them in the market. They decided to take drastic steps that will guarantee them a favourable future in the Dumbaria ultra modern market by coming out to contest for vacant positions. They believed that as women they have the capacity to cause a change in the society if they go into leadership positions starting from their primary environment which is the market.

Ashley: The time has come for us to prove to the nation that the women have the best leadership materials which the nation is in dire need of and we must start showcasing it from the market (p.3).

Okosimiema: Our task is a godly one (4).

All: To restore hope, dignity and pride to womanhood starting from the market (p.4).

The playwright projects the voice of women in the play as people with the capacity to develop the nation in a male dominated society by drawing our attention to their conscious effort in taking over leadership positions and piloting the affairs of men and women in the market place.

Peace: This is the opportunity we've long looked for and the world must hear our voices, yes, the voices of the women, even in the ultra modern market (p.5).

Okosimiema: Now to the reason why we've gathered together here. Our common goal which is....

All: To take over the leadership of the market from the men folks who over the years have wrongly forced themselves on the women by the help of tradition and culture (p.5-6).

Okosimiema: As educated women, we must work very hard in order to shift the paradigm for the betterment of the society. The paradigm shift must start with the forthcoming market elections (p.6).

The women believed that if a shift must occur in terms of leadership they must be involved in the process. From the above conversation, it is clear that for women to capture space politically, they must make concerted effort by getting involved in the electioneering process, mobilizing and supporting one another if they must achieve this task of proper representation of women in the political space. The playwright uses the narrator to expand the state of women's quest for leadership in the play.

Narrator ...well to say by and large, the women have had it to their necks. They are tired of being pushed behind the fore by the men; they are tired of being placed in the background by dint of social stereotypes and patriarchy. Thus, they seek a change, they desire equality of both sexes in both domestic and social concerns...ladies and gentlemen, this is a huge task and I'm pretty sure none of us will be thinking otherwise...as gigantic as this task seem to be, the women have decided to activate their insurrection from the market...this is a good fight... (p.10).

Kinisoome-the vice chairman of the market represents the patriarchal order which places women in a relegated position in the society as seen in his nomination of men for all the key positions of the executives for the next election without consideration for women.

Kinisoome: Okay sir, I am nominating the following persons. Chf. Kinisoome for

the position of the Ultra Modern Market of Dumbaria President, Agog Ame gets General Sec, Johnson gets Financial Sec... (p.23).

Eshishi: (Cuts in). You must stop all these blabbing and allow a reasonable fellow to say something (p.23).

The nominations from Cheari and Eshishi representing the female folks is rejected by Onukwuari because of his selfish interest and patriarchal mentality. He believes that women cannot hold positions of authority in the market place .Whereas, business activities in that environment involve both men and women. It therefore means that if women can do business in the market, pay for shops, as well as other dues accrued to them in the market, like men, they also have the right to contest for elections in the same market. In the real sense when population census is been carried out in different societies of the world, the statistics usually captures men, women and children as part of the population. If the above statement is true, there is the need for women to be involved in the decision making process of the community or society where they belong as anything short of that is gender discrimination.

Onukwuari : My decisions must bind on you all. No woman would hold any position in this market and that is final (p.31).

Cheari : That is not possible! (p.31).

Onukwuari : Nothing dey happen, women are not just dust alone, women are sand. Sand which we hoof upon. Women are sand, I say they're mere sand! They are sand. In fact, they are sandy soil in this market.(p.32-33).

Eshishi : God punish you a million times. Fool (p.33).

This statement describing women as dust and not been fit to take over leadership positions stirs up conflict in the play. The opposition that women encounter from men who are adamant about preserving the status quo of oppression is personified by Onukwuari. This issue is pertinent to the socio-political environments of Nigeria today because it strikes a chord with current debates around women's rights and gender equality. Onukwuari stands for the patriarchal traditional system that is resistant to positive change especially when it is coming from women. Their resistance to female empowerment highlights the obstacles that women face in the society. The narrative is propelled forward by the dynamic tension created by this contrast between masculine resistance and female aspiration. Cheari is the playwright's way of speaking for or standing up for women. She is an important figure who inspires other women to take action against structural

inequality. Her position emphasizes how crucial it is for women to work together to challenge the status quo of power. She is an embodiment of the notion that deliberate planning and unity can bring about change

Cheari: Good day fellow comrades and people of courage (p.37).

All: Good day wise one and the defender of womanhood (p.37).

The fact that the nominations from Cheari and Eshishi were disregarded by Onukwuari and his fellow men is a pointer that we live in a male dominated society and that women must not relent in their quest to capture space in different areas of human endeavour until they attain more positions of influence in the society.

Eshishi : Women should make themselves to be respected by men, lest their place be denied by the men of this market and society at large (p.45).

All : Supported! (p.45).

The women's collective decision to endorse Okosimiema as the next president of the Dumbaria market is an indication that women can achieve their quest for leadership and empowerment when they come together in unity. The playwright through the character of Eshishi poses some questions about the identity or status of women in the society.

Eshishi: Thank you very much! Please can someone tell them why a woman's place in the public has been restricted? Is a woman an inferior creation of God destined for subordination in her family, market place, community and world at large? (*No reply*) (p.52).

Cheari highlights the role of a woman in the life of a man in her statement "a man without a woman is a paralyzed spirit in dirt walking on two legs" (p.53). This comment gives us a picture of the connectivity of the man and the woman living together as one in piloting the affairs of the society according to God's original design for mankind. In other words when it come to different issues of life including leadership men and women can actually work together if they remove the concept of male dominance and competition by employing the concept of team spirit and unity in achieving results in different facets of life The playwright concludes by creating a balance in his discussion of the women's quest for leadership and empowerment by using the character of Peace to correct Eshishi's unacceptable attitude if the issue of gender must be put in the right perspective. The playwright uses the women to resist Eshishi's misbehaviour on their journey to leadership emphasizing caution. The narrator captures this vital point in this manner.

Peace: Yes! We must tread with caution. (p.72).

Narrator: Yes!!! Dethrone Eshishi (Brief pause). Irrespective of the fact that she earns herself and the women such tremendous victory, that is not how to win. Such shady antics of bribery, corruption, blackmail and all sorts of foul play can never be the best tool for any genus of revolution and development. Yes, at the conclusion of Apogee, the women win, but if such victory is applauded then, we encourage the tool of social vices in facing our ordeals and if that be the case, in little or no time the decay of our society would have decayed beyond the state of Apogee (p.72).

The playwright in *Apogee* presented female characters that project resistance, resilience, sacrifice, in their quest for leadership and empowerment with the sole aim of contributing their quota in transforming the society.

CONCLUSION

In addition to expressing personal struggles, Nigerian drama's portrayal of women's quest for leadership also offers a reflection on national issues. Nigeria's ongoing struggles with governance, corruption, and human rights make the fight for gender equality increasingly crucial to the country's progress. Women's quest for leadership in Nigerian drama is also significant since it has the potential to spur social change. Strong female characters that transcend conventional gender norms are portrayed by the playwright. Even though Nigerian society is patriarchal and has denied women more elective positions, women can still function in leadership roles when they come together. Azunwo's *Apogee* highlights women's collective struggle against patriarchal dominance in the marketplace, where they organize to assert their authority and independence. This illustrates how African women challenge male-dominated systems and navigate cultural norms to promote political and economic equality, which aligns with African feminist principles that prioritize both individual and collective empowerment. Azunwo Eziwo Emenike's *Apogee* challenges social constraints on female leadership by highlighting the significance of group action in helping women achieve the "apogee" of their power. *Apogee* is a strong critique of women's empowerment and leadership in patriarchal systems. The play encourages women to take collective action to accomplish their goals and challenge the audience to reevaluate established gender dynamics through its rich thematic thrust, well-developed characters, and captivating narrative style. It is both an artistic expression and a call for social change. Based on the discussions, the following recommendations are made: there is the need for women to have unity of purpose irrespective of their socio-economic status in achieving their leadership quest; the creation of government

agencies to implement policies that will engage more women in elective and political positions; as well as developing platforms, mentorship initiatives, and support systems that elevate the accomplishments and voices of women.

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