

**Unsexing the Woman in the 1st Wife of Ikpemaba in the performance of *Ikpemaba* by
Bigway Theatre Company written by Ikponwosa Osunbor**

By

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Abstract

Most women in history have always loved the life of opulence, fame and power. The good things of life, most of them will not refuse, even if they are proceeds of ill-gotten wealth. Thus, it becomes compulsory for them to encourage their husbands to not only maintain, retain and sustain that which they already possess but to even become over ambitious in the face of imminent danger. The focus of this paper is to show that; like Lady Macbeth who negatively encouraged her husband until he was destroyed, Ikpemaba's wife is seen wearing the same garment that led to her husband's execution. The paper employs the qualitative research methodology using the content analysis instrument and the participant observer approach to illuminate Motherhood and other related gender based theory in *Ikpemaba*. Findings reveal that most unsexed women, whose husbands are in power end up becoming greedier than the men and this usually contributes to the catastrophic end of such tragic plays. The paper recommends that men should be very conscious of the kind of advice they take from their wives, especially when it comes to issues that may truncate their destiny. It also enjoins women to remain the voice of reason in their traditional role of truly helping the men to engage in positive actions that will engender family survival and genuine societal development.

Introduction

Women that have hastened the death of their husbands, cutting short their destiny because of their greed or personal ambition, shrouded in supposed fearlessness, boldness and bravery continue to show up in plays. It is from Lady Macbeth's famous soliloquy that this paper's topic is birthed:

Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts,
unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood,
Stop up th' access and passage to remorse; (35)

In Shakespeare's story of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth felt her husband was not doing enough to take over the kingship which has been bequeathed to him by prophecy, so she wanted the spirits to strip her of her femininity, so she can dare what her husband is probably afraid to do or convinced is not right. Similarly, in the bible story where Haman was angry at the entire Jewish people because Mordecai refused to bow to him, it was Zeresh, his wife and his friends that advised him to construct the gallows on which he was eventually hanged as recorded in Esther 5:14:

Then said Zeresh his wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and tomorrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon: then go thou in merrily with the king unto the banquet. And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made (632).

Perhaps, if Lady Macbeth had chosen to remain feminine like in Ola Rotimi's *The gods Are Not to Blame*, where King Odewale tells one of his guards (Akilapa) to go learn the coolness of heart of a woman instead of doing "everything: gira,gira,gira...power,power, force, force...action,action!" (40) Because this kind of masculinity sometimes is counterproductive. The

bible again, to buttress this point further, describes the woman as “the weaker vessel” 1Pet 3:7 (1509) and that she should carry herself with “shamefacedness and sobriety” 1Tim 2:9 (1475). What this portends is the fact that violence, empty pride and over ambition are mostly the domain of the male. But Lady Macbeth felt her husband was displaying cowardly qualities, so she pleads for the spirits to “unsex her” so the tiger could proclaim her tigritude; trying to give credence to that popular feminist saying, “what a man can do, a woman can do better”. The scope of this paper however is the wife of Ikpemaba, the drummer to the Oba, who refused to drum until he is given a prestigious chieftaincy title (Iguobahi) inspite of the heinous activities: rape, kidnapping, plundering and senseless killings being perpetrated by the enemies of the Benin Kingdom. If he does not drum, the Oba cannot call out the warriors and declare war. Ikpemaba held the entire kingdom to ransom and his first wife was not innocent in this ploy. She unsexed the woman in her and fearlessly advised Ikpemaba to fight with the Oba who is a wizard according to Ikpemaba as observed during the performance in Scene 2:

I refuse to quarrel with the Oba, it is too high a risk to take. Nobody wrestles with the Oba and lives to see the light of another day. He is a wizard; he was given birth to in the midst of them (17).

This statement is enough to stop the Ist Wife, but because she had her own dreams, like Lady Macbeth, she too had unsexed the woman in her, she pressed on, until the Ikpemaba became convinced that he would succeed if he enters the ring with a wizard – the Oba.

Methodology, Conceptual and Theoretical framework

This paper employs the Participant Observer approach which is a field study method and it is qualitative; the emphasis is on observations made, not on numerical data, especially as one who has acted, directed and produced *Ikpemaba* severally. The researcher has been involved in the production of *Ikpemaba*, from when it was first conceived by the playwright and performed by the

1991 set of the FCT Corps Members as their entry for the NYSC – National Youth Service Corps Director General’s annual Drama Competition. He has acted in the play and directed the play severally and has also participated in the recent upload of the last production of the play by Bigway Theatre Company on YouTube in 2023, for easy access by other researchers of Edo/Benin traditional plays. He has also watched the recorded video documents severally to carefully observe the activities of the case under study – the 1st Wife of the Ikpemaba. The Case Study Methodology also assisted in narrowing down the study to Mama Osaheni - the 1st Wife and a mother, making a case for especially the African Mother, who is perceived as a woman of authority and influence. The content of the unpublished script was also very relevant to the analysis in this paper.

Conceptual and Theoretical framework

The uniqueness of the African woman has positioned her for continuous study especially when theories propounding the ideology of women are irradiated. But a brief evaluation of the basic trappings of the African Woman and the concept of Motherhood while glossing over Womanism, and Stiwanism and deliberately avoiding a detailed application of the almighty “feminism” positions this paper for clarity.

Womanism: Regardless of the achievements of feminist movements in their fight for the rights of women especially as regards their relationship with their male counterparts, a lot of African-American women have observed the short comings of feminism to cater for the challenges of African-American women. Their attempt to separate themselves from radical feminists, led the African-American women writers in search of a more convenient label for their own struggle. Feminism has obviously given them some advantage, yet, they do not want to take on the constriction of the feminist point of view. They then tried to conceptualise a new vision that they see as holistic rather than narrowly monolithic. This brought “black feminist” to the fore, as an

attempt to distinguish their philosophy from radical feminists. Some African-American women however did not accept this nomenclature of “black feminist” and they chose the term “womanist” a word coined by Alice Walker” according to Mohammed Shaaban Deyab. Before now, feminist movements assumed that all women had the same experience. But to African-American women, race and class were as much a problem as was their relationship with men. This means that, the African-American women, have bigger problems than sex and gender. They were saddled with the problems of race, class, and poverty which was endemic to women all over the world. Because of these problems, many black women did not consider the Feminist movement as relevant to black women. To them, the Feminist movement was interested only in confronting the issues and concerns of white, middle-class women. According to Mohammed Deyab:

Walker emphasizes that the differences between womanism and feminism are, at root, ideological, and that each has a distinct point of departure for engaging African-American women’s realities. The fact that Walker refers to the African-American folk expression as the root of the term refers to the spirit and uniqueness of womanism itself as an expression to exalt African-American traditions and roots. As she claims:

I choose [womanism] because I prefer the sound, the feel, the fit of it; because I cherish the spirit of the women the word calls to mind, and because I share the old ethnic American habit of offering society a new word when the old word it is using fails to describe behavior and change that only a new word can help it more fully see (304).

The African woman does not fit in with Womanism as enunciated above, even though it is sympathetic to their course as black women. African women are not African-Americans.

STIWANISM: Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie coined STIWANISM from STIWA an acronym for Social Transformation Including Women in Africa and it was propounded in 1994. Stiwanism is a branch of Feminism, seen as a form of African feminism that illuminates the oppression of women as a result of Colonial and Neo-colonial history and also women’s reaction towards those institutionalized structures. It is a theory established to examine women in an African context. The

theory is not independent but reflects on womanism and its importance in the African context.

According to Omolara

Women may differ about the strategies and methods, but they do not differ on basic assumptions that women are oppressed as women and they are oppressed as the majority members of subordinate classes which are also in the majority (546).

While analyzing a poem by her Malawian poet friend entitled, “Letter to a Feminist Friend (an excerpt)” (546), Omolara defines Feminism by its etymological roots: Femina which means “woman” in latin. She adds that, “Feminism, (is) an ideology of woman; any body of social philosophy about women.” She believes the definition: “Gives enough leeway to encompass various types of feminism: right wing, left wing, centrist, left of centre, reformist, separatist, liberal, socialist, Marxist, non-aligned, Islamic, Indigenous, etc. believe me, all these feminisms exist” (547).

But a lot of women, especially of African descent do not identify with Feminism. According to Omolara, “some quite outstanding women like Buchi Emecheta, say they are not feminists without saying why. Others like the Nigerian writer Flora Nwapa, say that they are not feminists, but they are “womanists” and according to her, Bessie Head, a South African writer says, “Feminism is not necessary because the world of the intellect is neither male nor female” (548). In order to describe the situation of the African woman, Omolara propounded “Stiwanism” in order to “bypass the combative discourses that ensue whenever one raises the issue of feminism in Africa”. She states:

The word “feminism” itself seems to be a kind of red rag to the bull of African men. Some say the word is by its very nature hegemonic, or implicitly so. Others find the focus on women in themselves somehow threatening. Still others say it is limiting to their perspectives. Some who are genuinely concerned with ameliorating women’s lives sometimes feel embarrassed to be described as “feminist (549).

She then said, “I am a Stiwanist”. Thus, Stiwa for Omolara:

Describes my agenda for women in Africa without having to answer charges of imitateness or having to constantly define our agenda on the African continent in

relation to other feminisms... STIWA allows me to discuss the needs of African women today in the tradition of the spaces and strategies provided in our indigenous cultures for the social being of women (550).

The African Woman and Motherhood: In her paper “Women and Creative writing in Africa,” Flora Nwapa avers that the African woman is not European neither is she American and that even the African women that have been exposed to Western education, still manifest their Africanness in their daily lives. She states that:

Majority of the women in Africa live in the rural area. Many are uneducated, and there are not too many alternatives to being married and having children. The most natural thing for the rural woman is to marry and procreate. Even for us, the educated urbanites, the time has not come. We still have our roots in the rural areas where we were brought up, our umbilical cord is still buried in the rural environment. We are the very few that are exposed to Western education. We have travelled in Europe and America, yet we are not Europeans and Americans. We are Africans. We have our ways of doing things; like marriage, divorce, and motherhood (530).

Lauretta Ngcobo buttresses the point about marrying and procreating further:

African motherhood is about children” and that “marriage among Africans is mainly an institution for the control of procreation. Every woman is encouraged to marry and get children in order to express her womanhood to the full. The basis of marriage among Africans implies the transfer of a woman’s fertility to the husband’s family group. There is a high premium placed on children and the continuity of a lineage (533).

Ngcobo adds:

A girl child is born to fulfil this role. She is made aware of the destiny awaiting her development and is prepared from the earliest age possible for the role of motherhood that she will play elsewhere, away from her family home. She is well loved but her rights within the family are limited compared to those of her brother. (534).

She then concludes, that;

Her position of motherhood entails hard labour to provide food for the family. Nothing will change this until in old age, if she is a powerful woman or a senior wife, she will be empowered to move centrally, to exercise authority and train the younger women in the practiced art of walking the tight-rope, which is exercising

her immense power from the outside – the paradox of a position of centrality which is exercised from the periphery. For, let us make no mistake – motherhood as an institution is very powerful in our societies (535).

This paper reveals that motherhood is best represented in most African women and they are content with filling that position honourably. Ikpemaba's wives in the play, are there to play their roles as mothers and obedient wives, ready to do anything to support the success of their husband, especially the first wife, who has risen in rank to a position of motherhood and decided to use her powers maximally. She believes her husband's elevation to the post of a high ranking chief (Iguobahi), will increase her own powers, as the Eson – first wife and supreme mother of that lineage of the Ikemaba. In addition to the fact that, the economic and financial standing of the family will be upgraded. To the Womanist, the success of the black man is the success of the black woman and Stiwanists believe the African woman still suffers the same fate as the American or European woman; that colour is not a barrier to some of the odiferous positions of some patriarchal societies globally. In the production, the wives in the play are seen as submissive and obedient to the course of their husband; which helps to engender peace and progress in the African society and also, the society of the Jews in the Bible (Jewish and Christian) and even those of the Arabs in the Koran (Islamic). This researcher believes it is not different from what is obtainable in China and Russia. Even in Britain and America, cases abound of women, who have proclaimed their motherhood and have decided to be stay-home mothers instead of working class feminist who seem all out to tear down the walls of creation (God). They (African mothers) openly dissociate themselves from the activities of especially the radical feminists.

Short Biography of the Playwright

Born into the family of late Chief S.D. Osunbor, Ikponmwosa (IK) as he is fondly called grew up in Benin City and attended Arinze Primary school, Benin Technical College and the then Bendel

State University Ekpoma where he graduated with a degree in English and Literature. He developed interest in literary writing at a young age. Ikpemaba is his first stage drama and he has written several movie scripts for Nollywood movies. He works presently with Okomu Oil Palm Co PLC as head of Human Resource. He is married with three children and a proud member of the Ibiwe society in the palace of the Oba of Benin. He is a new voice on the Nigerian stage that should be encouraged to continue.

Synopsis of the play *Ikpemaba*

The neighbouring communities, villages and towns continue to stealthily penetrate the Benin Kingdom, kidnapping and killing the people, raping the girls and women, looting and pillaging their farms and claiming and occupying their land. The Oba (King) needs to sacrifice to the gods and his ancestors in order to stem this ugly tide and declare war on these invading and marauding nations. According to tradition, the Oba's only drummer, must drum for the Oba to declare war. This Ikpemaba (King's Drummer), however commits sacrilege by demanding to be given a vacant prestigious Chieftaincy title (Iguobahi), before he would drum. The Oba and his Chiefs are miffed by the idea because according to Chief Iyase in Scene 5 "You don't command a chieftaincy title here, you earn it" (28). The first wife of the Ikpemaba continues to boldly encourage her husband on this journey making the Ikpemaba believe he is indispensable. Some Chiefs and some townspeople believe the Oba should yield to the demands of the Ikpemaba. But Oba sends messengers out, searching in vain for another Ikpemaba. Meanwhile, he decides to inquire from the Chief Priest, if he could proceed to war without the Ikpemaba but the Chief Priest (Aigbogun) insists, the Ikpemaba must drum, as tradition demands, for victory to be assured in the war. The Ikpemaba continues to refuse with the support of his first wife, unless he is granted the title. The

Oba decides to personally report his Ikpemaba to his ancestors in his shrine in order to resolve the impasse. Thereafter, he accedes to the Ikpemaba's demands, tells him to go home and prepare for the ceremony where he would be given the prestigious Chieftaincy title but the gods intervene by sending another drummer to the rescue. The Oba decides to use the Ikpemaba as the sacrifice to the gods, as a lesson that nobody is indispensable. This signals the beginning of war. The new drummer drums, the Oba declares war, the axe falls on the Ikpemaba's neck and the play ends.

Character Evaluation

Ikpemaba

The Ikpemaba from the beginning is portrayed as a trusted, humble, loyal, obedient and very talented man whose potentials, like David in the Bible, catapulted him to fame very early in life and endeared him to royalty. The Chiefs sing his praise, the Oba gave him his daughter Uvbi as his fourth wife; all in appreciation from the King and the people of the kingdom for his dexterity and service to the people. Excerpts from the dialogue (scene1) below corroborates this:

Ikpemaba: My lord, this is his third year with me. It didn't take me this long, to defeat all comers to become the Ikpemaba.

Iyase: There is no need to remind us because we were all there when you performed that feat at a very tender age, and your reputation has not dwindled since then. You are the Ikpemaba, the drummer for the Oba. When you drum, the Oba moves, the Oba moves. Because it is only you that slaps the royal drum and slap it well. Friend of the Oba and of ordinary people, how is the royal drum? The palm that befriends the royal drums...who else beats the royal drums but you, keeper and drummer of the death drum. You who drum good and evil, how is the royal drum? Ikpemaba that drums for the living and the dead, the drummer that drums to wake up the living and the dead, and also put them to sleep. Who does not stop and shake to the rhythm of your beats or why were you made the Oba's drummer? You drum to the delight of the living and the amazement of the dead. Ikpemaba that drums the monkey down from the tree top, greatness is yours.

Ikpemaba: The palace has done well.

Iyase: The Chiefs here greet you

Ikpemaba: May you all live long to serve the king and the people, and may we not become the enemies of the Oba. (He moves slowly to the drums, test them a little and then, swings into full melodious drumming which propels the Chiefs to their feet, dancing in majestic splendour).

Iyase: Who is he that drums during igue festival?

Ikpemaba and Chiefs: Ikpema'ba

Iyase: Who drums signaling peace or war?

Ikpemaba and Chiefs: Ikpema'ba

Iyase: The thing that drums for the Idu bird they say, is beneath the ground, but ours is alive and on top for everybody to see. The strong palm that touches the drum to evoke the spirit in us. May your palm never get swollen?

Ikpemaba: I thank you all good subjects of the Oba, and elders of our land. When the leadership of a community gets to a man, he does not need to consult the oracle.

Ezomo: May you not serve the Oba and smear your palm on the ground. It is what you sow, that you shall reap. You have sown well and you will reap well. (The royal bard's voice is heard from back stage, heralding the arrival of the Oba. He is accompanied by a messenger and a sword bearer) (6-7).

The last prayer by Chief Ezomo seems to capture the life and times of the Ikpemaba, when he was sowing well, he reaped well but when he eventually turned a bad influence, he harvested the ultimate prize of death. The Ikpemaba was not just loyal and talented, he was a typical Edo polygamous man with four wives and his dealings with his wives reveal him to be very firm; a man that had total control over his household as revealed below:

1ST Wife: Ha Uvbi, abuse me, go on. I will beat the hell out of you today. You think this is the palace eh... as far as we are in this house, you will have to learn the rules and that goes for all of you, none of you can abuse me as you like. You ... I will deal with you today, leave me alone let me separate her flesh from her bones (the struggle is intensifying when the Ikpemaba enters).

Ikpemaba: Will you stop this nonsense? What is this? What are you turning my house into?

1ST Wife: It is your princess; she has been abusing me.

Ikpemaba: Shut up your bad mouth, did she prevent you from being a princess?

Uvbi: She called me a witch.

Ikpemaba: Keep quite! (Mimicking) she called me a witch. Who amongst you here is not a witch or does not have witches and wizards in her family...everybody, go inside and do you chores (15).

He was loyal until ambition crept into his thoughts through the venomous manipulation of his first wife – Iye-Osaheni (Mama Osaheni). Ikpemaba knew the powers of the Oba and was not ready to tango with the Oba but his 1st Wife, like Lady Macbeth prevailed on him and this led to his downfall. What other people say, what a character does and what the character says are channels through which a character is understood. The dialogue below, between the Ikpemaba and his 1st wife confirms the fact that the Ikpemaba may have survived but for his 1st wife's convincing advice, it reveals the fact that the Ikpemaba is aware that he would not survive a fight with the Oba:

Ikpemaba: "It gets to the time of the cock before it starts to crow" he said.

1ST Wife: So why don't you wait, wait and drum for them. You hit the drums like nobody else that is what they always say. But remember that those that wait for the white yam before they eat pounded yam, never taste the water yam. Maybe you will be honoured with it in your grave.

Ikpemaba: (Soliloquizing) If only he had granted this for me.

1ST Wife: (Scornfully) He can't, how can he? You are too young. You must wait for your turn, but you are not too young to drum for them. Go ahead, and peel your palms for them, I am always here to take care of it. As if, if you don't they will kill you.

Ikpemaba: Woman, beware of what you say nobody refuses to drum for the Oba.

1ST Wife: From when Osanobua created man, he has always fought for what he wants. Empires fight to expand and kings fight to retain their throne, the commoners fight to live from day to day. Take the fight out of a of a man and he is but a boy and he no longer sits with the elders, his respect is taken by another, if you don't fight for it another will, and get it. If the Oba wants his wish to be carried out all the time, then he should also honour other people's wishes.

Ikpemaba: Woman, I say beware of what you say nobody refuses to drum for the Oba.

1ST Wife: That is what you always say. “Nobody talks about the Oba like that” you can’t even talk to his daughter, look at you, what is wrong with you. Are you not man enough to be the Iguobahi? No it cannot be you; it must be someone else better than you are. Have you ever heard where the Ikpemaba was killed because he refuses to drum, tell me?

Ikpemaba: Watch your words woman, no Ikpemaba has ever refused to drum for the Oba. (15-16).

The Ikpemaba like most great men (Macbeth and Haman in the Bible) could not resist the allure of power, he had to act against his own beliefs and position; being loyal and firm, his wife got to him and he capitulated and decided to wrest the title from the Oba. He has crossed the line of no-return, even when the Oba was advising him to change his mind:

Oba: Why do you hold my people to ransom?

Ikpemaba: I am not holding them

Oba: They are suffering

Ikpemaba: That is why you are the Oba my lord, to solve the people’s problem in doing mine.

Oba: You are not drumming then, until your request is granted.

Ikpemaba: My lord what I demand is within your possibilities but you deny me. The biggest cow does not necessarily mean the biggest meat. I am an adult, a man married with wives and children. Look at my palm, my lord; I beat the drums for you and what you do in return is to deny me my one and only desire. I plead, and passionately too, the title will fire me more respect in the kingdom, I am your humble and obedient servant grant this request for me.

Oba: You choose the right time to make your request.

Ikpemaba: I am your subject my lord, your friend and your drummer grant this request for me.

Oba: I trusted you Ikpemaba and you fight me with that trust.

Ikpemaba: I do not fight you my lord, nobody fights you.

Oba: You choose the best time to make this request, if I may say the least.

Ikpemaba: My lord, your words make it look bad. We all have our desires to pursue in this life and I am not an exception. The ancestors know, I do not intend to fight you, they also know how much I need this title (38-40).

One could conclude that the Ikpemaba, may have harboured these thoughts before his wife honed them into fruition. He became unstable like the bible says, “A double minded man is unstable in all his ways” (1502) James1:8. Ikpemaba was no longer speaking only his mind, he was speaking both his mind and that of his Ist Wife. For his betrayal of the trust of the people, Ikpemaba was stabilized and beheaded and his head used as sacrifice to the gods to herald the war against their enemies.

The Ist Wife or Mama Osaheni

The Ist Wife of the Ikpemaba like most first wives is portrayed as possessive. She tries to hold on to the husband like he is her personal property and may release him to the other wives occasionally. She tries very hard to paint the other wives in bad light so as to curry favour from her husband. Mama Osaheni, as she is called by her husband, was also very cantankerous but always blames the other wives for causing the trouble in the house. Her first appearance in the play at the beginning of Scene 2, reveals her quarrelsome character:

Ist Wife: Aaah! There is nothing they won't do in this house, so it is common melon that they have decided to vent their anger on, the witches my husband has for wives. Mama Osaro, (shouting) Mama Osaro (Mama Osaro – 2nd wife comes in). So you are deaf that you no longer hear when you are called or were you praying for the tearing of my throat before you answer? (12)

She describes her fellow wives as ‘witches’ and calls the second wife ‘deaf’ in a bid to correcting the wrong they have done to her. Stamping her authority immediately for the audience to know that she is in charge. As the first wife, she is seen as the mother of the house, it is her responsibility

to make sure there is order and discipline in the house, if she carries herself well, the children of the other wives see her as queen mother, sometimes referred to as big-mama or mother of the house in Benin. Mama Osaheni was not just quarrelsome, she was ready to fight and beat the other wives to register her authority as the eldest (1st among equals) as seen in the same Scene 2:

1ST Wife: Ha Uvbi, abuse me, go on. I will beat the hell out of you today. You think this is the palace eh... as far as we are in this house, you will have to learn the rules and that goes for all of you, none of you can abuse me as you like. You ... I will deal with you today, leave me alone let me separate her flesh from her bones (the struggle is intensifying when the Ikpemaba enters) (15).

Imagine a woman threatening to 'separate' "flesh from bones". She is also a jealous woman as is expected from most women in a polygamy as expressed by the Princess, the fourth wife during one of their many fights:

1ST Wife: What other proof do I need? The witch flies in the night, and the child dies by the break of day you don't need to go to the oracle to know who did it, you cannot be talked to by me, I was not born of a man too.

Uvbi: You are just being jealous. I did not throw away your melon. I am not a liar, and I do not know if you have witches and wizards in your family (14).

It seems Uvbi (the Princess) is the biggest threat to her in that house. But the Ikpemaba also knows that his first wife is a trouble maker and he told her in clear terms at the opening of Scene 6: "I know you will never start any quarrel, but you are always in the thick of it" (45). Her response to the Oba's messenger speaks more about her character as the exchange at the opening of Scene 4 reveals:

Ukor: Peace be unto the occupants of this house (he knocks) I say peace be unto the occupants of this house?

1ST Wife: (coming out from the inside) Who is knocking down the door?

Ukor: I thought there is nobody in this house. I have been knocking.

1ST Wife: Maybe there are no people from where you are coming.

Ukor: Woman, you are talking to the Oba's messenger.

1ST Wife: And am I supposed to lose my head about that, or is that how the Oba's messenger goes about knocking down doors? (22).

This confirms the belligerent nature of the first wife and why she was not afraid to suggest to the Ikpemaba to fight the Oba, even though he told her he may not see the light of another day, if he ventures in that direction. In virtually every culture in Nigeria, the Ist wives have special roles to play in the lives of their husband's family, they are given special recognition and Mama Osaheni knows that if her husband is given the chieftaincy title of Iguobahi, more feathers will be added to her cap of authority. Mama Osaheni in this play is not a Feminist, Womanist or Stiwanist, she is an African Mother and they are content with getting married, having children and supporting the success of the home and family. According to Laurretta Ngocobo: "African motherhood is about children" and that "marriage among Africans is mainly an institution for the control of procreation. Every woman is encouraged to marry and get children in order to express her womanhood to the full" (533).

Ngcobo adds: "A girl child is born to fulfil this role. She is made aware of the destiny awaiting her development and is prepared from the earliest age possible for the role of motherhood" (534). She then concludes: "The position of motherhood entails hard labour to provide food for the family. ...motherhood as an institution is very powerful in our societies" (535). Most African women like Mama Osaheni are content with just being mothers, if there is an opportunity to go up the ladder financially, they would cease it. The chieftaincy title was the opportunity for Mama Osaheni to rise higher in rank, in the powerful institution of motherhood in Africa. She portrays herself as

neat but she is full of curses, she wants the world to know that she wants the best for her husband but betrays the fact that it will also elevate her to become the Eson (eldest wife) in Ikpemaba's household. The 1st wife is always scheming and quarrelling, ready to fight and a goal-getter. She knows what she wants and how to get what she wants. The playwright did not tell us anywhere, that the Ikpemaba discussed his decision to request for that title from the Oba as observed in Scene one:

Oba: What is it you seek my audience for ...speak on.

Ikpemaba: My lord, I know I have demanded things from you, and I have been given. My fourth wife is your daughter that is one good I cannot forget. I have also been given the gift of beads, which I have received with thanks and happiness. You have allocated plots of land to me which is an asset to any man, I am not saying these things are not what a man should not be grateful for or contended with. My heart gladdens with joy. A gift from the Oba is a thing of joy it makes a man proud and feels recognized. My lord...

Oba: Ikpema'ba, what is it that you seek?

Ikpemaba: I seek that which is not impossible to grant my lord, it is the vacant title of Iguobahi (11).

But one could infer from Ikpemaba's complain to his first wife that they must have discussed the subject as seen in Scene 2:

Ikpemaba: You know he rejected my demands today.

1ST Wife: I couldn't have expected more. To think that the one thing you desire so much, he denied you. Anyway, he gave you a wife probably, he thinks that should be enough good for you (15).

This revelation further strengthens the position of the mother of the house, or motherhood as a strong institution. Ikpemaba did not discuss with the Princess or any other wife of his but chose the 1st Wife. All she needs is the right moment to unsex the woman in her in order for her husband

to fight for what she considers his right. She did not need to ask the spirits to unsex her, because she had it all planned before now and needed the appropriate prompting to tune Ikpemaba to be a man and fight for the betterment of their family. And the Ikpemaba played into her hands as observed in the second part of scene 2 that began in page 12 and 13 above under the evaluation of Ikpemaba's character page 15 & 16 of the script:

Ikpemaba: Watch your words woman, no Ikpemaba has ever refused to drum for the Oba.

1ST Wife: That is because they have never had serious reasons to refuse. My lord, you are man enough to be made the Iguobahi, you should fight for it. You will only be fighting for it like any other man in the community. They all do. You even have an advantage over the others. Think my lord, think about it. The Iguobahi, the respected one. Anybody will do anything to have it. You stand a chance more than the rest.

Ikpemaba: I do not deny that I need the title, if not for anything... for the respect. A man is no man in the eyes of the world unless he has respect. The title is all I have dreamt of all my life... what will you have me do woman... what is this advantage I have over others.

1ST Wife: My lord, I am not advising you to do the impossible. I am advising you as your wife, the wife you married. My advice is for you to be a man and face the Oba. You are the Ikpemaba, without you nothing is done. Tell him you refuse to drum unless he grants you the title.

Ikpemaba: I refuse to quarrel with the Oba, it is too high a risk to take. Nobody wrestles with the Oba and lives to see the light of another day. He is a wizard; he was given birth to in the midst of them.

1ST Wife: My lord, you are not wrestling with the Oba, by your act. You will only be fighting for the chieftaincy title with what you have, your added advantage.

Ikpemaba: He has confidence in me

1ST Wife: What is confidence without respect, my Lord? Refuse to drum for just this once and you will get what you want. After all, you are the only drummer around. Narrow down his options. He will have no choice other than to agree with your request.

Ikpemaba: I cannot say I disapprove of your idea woman, but your strategy is what I do not see as suiting.

1ST Wife: It is not the strategy that should be talked about now, think of the end result. It does not matter how you fight your enemy; what matters is for him to die.

Ikpemaba: The Oba is a powerful person...

1ST Wife: It is people like you who make him powerful. He has his own weak points and you are one. The fowl sweats my lord, only the feather covers it. And what time is most suitable than tomorrow. My lord, enormous power resides inside you, use it. Come to think of what will happen tomorrow without you (15-18).

In this scene, the Ikpemaba has capitulated, he has been won over by the wife, and he does not want to be termed a boy. The first wife with her superior fire power has overwhelmed the boy in Ikpemaba and turned him into a man, a risk taker.

As a Master of Ceremony (MC) and a marriage counselor, this researcher has listened to a lot of African women talk about how to control the power in their home. Rev. Ibukun Odusote of Foursquare Bible Church, Asokoro branch, Abuja, who contracted the MC, during one of their 'Couple's Dinner' said, "What a man can do, a woman should not bother" as against "what a man can do, a woman can do better" which is the common saying. Another lady at the same event said, the best way to control your husband is to submit to him totally; and when you have done that successfully, he will entrust you with the control of the entire house. Mama Osaheni may not have succeeded but it does not stop other women from trying; a popular saying says, no venture, no success and no man ever gets a thing without taking risks. But one of the audience members (Mrs. Lilian Anele – the General Manager (GM)), Love Fm, Abuja, who was invited by this researcher to watch the production, after seeing the play, said Mama Osaheni should have been punished alongside her husband for instigating him to rebel against constituted authority. In her own words,

“when the Ikpemaba asked that he be granted one last wish, I was hoping he would request that his wife be sacrificed with him because she was the one that misled him”.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The existence of womanism, stiwanism and even feminism in Africa may not be as obvious as what is obtainable in the Western World but suffice it to say that motherhood is a respected institution and most African women are proud to be mothers. Some say they are appendages to the men as seen in Ikpemaba’s first wife or Mama Osaheni. She expressed her authority as an African Woman, a senior wife who understands that she is there to support her husband. She took a very bold risk that she believed her husband wanted to shy away from. Perhaps, if women were allowed in certain circles at that time, she would have gone to advocate for that title for her husband or even for herself. Even the NIV bible describes the woman in Genesis as “help suitable for him (the man)” (3). God created the woman to help. It follows therefore, that the Jewish women and Christian women should be proud to be associated with motherhood. They are here, in the world, to help their husbands survive and enjoy family life. Unfortunately, most husbands will not survive the exploits of unsexed women, who are mostly overambitious as findings in this paper have revealed.

The paper however recommends that the men, especially men at the corridors of power should be weary of the kind of help they receive from their wives because unsexed women are only recognized after the impact of their extreme exploits; usually a one-off, well calculated and properly executed scheme. Eve helped Adam to be driven out of the garden, Lady Macbeth assisted her husband to commit murder and eventually be killed and Mama Osaheni has played a major role in assisting the Ikpemaba to be sacrificed to the gods of Benin Kingdom. If Ikpemaba was not drumming for the Oba, one wonders if Mama Osaheni would have meddled into his affairs. Every

man should evaluate every help he is receiving, no matter how well meaning and make sure, it will not lead to his untimely death. Then women with such tendencies should truly weigh the consequences of their actions, they should learn to think it through, do not bring out the man in you or unsex the woman that you are unless, you are completely certain of the outcome of that display of bravery, adventure, fearlessness and braggadocio.

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