



NIGER DELTA UNIVERSITY
WILBERFORCE ISLAND, BAYELSA STATE.

52nd Inaugural Lecture

Children of the Motherists are Here...

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NIGER DELTA UNIVERSITY

Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

Motto

Creativity, Excellence, Service

Vision

To be a centre of excellence defined by well articulated programme that will produce creative and innovative minds

Mission

To strive to maintain an international reputation for high quality scholarship, research and academic excellence for the promotion of the socio-cultural and economic well-being of mankind

NIGER DELTA UNIVERSITY ANTHEM (THE BRIGHTEST STAR)

Like the brightest star we are, to lead the way
To good education that is all our due,
The dream of our fathers like the seed has grown;
Niger Delta University if here to stay.

In all that we do, let us bring to mind
Our duty as staff and students of N.D.U
Ev'rywhere to promote peace towards mankind.
Creativity, Excellence and Service

Let us build on this noble foundation
And with love, let our dedication increase,
To rise and uphold this noble vision
Ev'ry passing moment let our zeal never decrease.

CHORUS
Rejoice, great people old and new, rejoice
For the good fruit through us is shown;
Be glad in our worthy contribution
To the growth of humanity (x2)

Dedication

To God our Father, Nengimote, The Nigerian Youth and all
Motherists

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Protocol

The Vice-Chancellor

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The Registrar

The Bursar

University Librarian

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Dean of Faculty of Arts

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Head of Departments

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Great Students of Niger Delta University

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Members of the Press

Ladies and Gentlemen

Preamble

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, this inaugural lecture will be the third to emanate from the Faculty of Arts and the second from the Department of Theatre Arts. The first from the Department was presented by Professor Savior Nathan A. Agoro. Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, as I was compiling materials for this lecture, some of my non-theatre colleagues met me with comments like: “I hope you will act drama for us” some others “I hope your students will come and dance for us” and several other similar queries. In the wake of such lay presumptions of what Theatre Arts is all about, I remembered Professor Emeritus Femi Osofisan telling us then as graduate students in the Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan, that when he was to deliver his Inaugural Lecture a colleague asked him in surprise “do you people also do research?” So I was not surprised when my colleagues asked me similar questions. The answer that Osofisan gave then, was in the presentation of his eye-opening lecture titled: *Playing Dangerously: Drama at the Frontiers of Terror in a “Postcolonial” State* (1998).

The general presumption is that Theatre Arts is an unserious programme and that students' main preoccupation is shouting, jumping up and down, singing and dancing. That is true enough. But it would be truer

still, If those who presume that would spare a brief moment to think that the Theatre Arts students like they correctly observed, how be it erroneously do shout, jump sing and dance when scenes require such movements, expressions, and reactions during rehearsals and productions. Of a truth, the Theatre Arts students routinely attend rehearsals through the day, evening and often through the night as well. It is a critical part of the learning process.

I would that the lay person could spare a moment to reflect on the fact that think that in spite of all the shouting and jumping; the singing and dancing, the Theatre Arts students will still be in an 8am class and other classes through the weeks like other 'regular' students; if such persons could then go on to wonder that the Theatre Arts students who is always shouting, jumping up and down, singing and dancing is still found in the library reading and sitting for Examinations like other students, then they would begin to realise that it takes a lot of discipline, stamina creativity and intellect to study Theatre Arts. From that point of consciousness, the lay people can then begin to understand that the field of Theatre Arts as the study of humanity and the universe, is our research scope and laboratory.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, in the course of my academic journey, I took two different paths to get to where I am today. I majored in Playwriting for my first degree and wrote a play titled “Destined to Be” (1995) for my final project. The play centered on the antics of corrupt self serving politicians during elections and the struggle embarked upon by students to stop such politicians from succeeding. It is worthy to note that 28 years down the line, Nigeria is still grappling with the same challenges as when the play was written. For my masters degree I veered into Community Theatre and came out with a final project titled Community Theatre in the Slums: The Ayota Experiment (2000).

The case study for my dissertation was a youth theatre in the slums of Ajegunle in Lagos State. You would have noticed that even though the final projects of both degrees were in different areas in the Arts of the Theatre, there is a common denominator in both works and that is, the youth in society. Interestingly, for my third and final degree, while I stayed the course on participatory theatre, I moved on to Theatre and Gender Studies with a final Thesis titled: Theatre-for-Development and the Empowerment of the Rural Women of Bayelsa State of Nigeria (2008). Then as I embarked on the career path of lecturing, some of my critical essays dwelt on the African concept of

motherhood not knowing that it would culminate in the reason for which I am standing here this day before this august gathering.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, when I decided to commence the writing of this lecture, it was only natural I focus on women issues in the Nigerian society. After all, I am a Professor of Theatre and Gender Studies. But as I started writing, the happenings in Nigeria in our recent history up to the present kept gnawing at me. If you consider that in Africa children are the future and hope of every society, and if you consider also that, the theatre is nothing if not a slice of life, you will understand the need to also talk about the youth in the Nigerian society today. It is therefore with a sense of humility Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, that I stand before you and this august gathering today to present this inaugural lecture titled **“Children of the Motherists are Here...”**

Introduction

Theatre Arts and Society

“To understand a people, it were better we study their Arts” - William Shakespeare

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, the Arts of a people is closely bound to their physical environment, cultures, traditions, religious and social values because, it is a direct reflection of that culture thereby making the resultant artistic product an embodiment of the people's culture. To reiterate the importance of a people's culture, the Cultural Policy of Nigeria defines culture as:

the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempts to meet the challenges of living in their environment, which gives order and meaning to their social, political, economic, aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organization thus distinguishing a people from their neighbours (3)

The above definition captures the essence of what culture ought to be as every culture is people specific. No two cultures are the same. By virtue of geography, religion or ethnic proximity, two cultures can be similar but there will be elements uniquely peculiar to each and every society.

The totality of the endeavours of a people revolves around their cultural institutions and dynamics. Barclays Ayakoroma corroborates the people driven nature of culture when he asserts that “culture is a phenomenon that is transmitted from one generation to another” (13) often via oral communication, cuisines, dress, signs and symbols. Culture is the bedrock of a people's socialization process. To that extent, people are known, recognized and identified by their cultural heritages.

The Arts of a people symbolize their cultural heritage and play major roles in documenting the lives and times of people in a society. The claim that a people's art forms chronicle events and times in the lives of a people throws a spanner in the opinion of scholars who believe in the “Art for Art's sake” theory. For such scholars Art must reach beyond its perfunctory aesthetic value to make an impact on the society from which it originates. G.V Plekhanov cited in Foluke Ogunleye (72) is one such scholar. He believes strongly that “Art, in addition to its aesthetic value, should contribute to the development of human consciousness and seek to improve the social order of people. Supporting Plekhanov's view, Chervishkey further punctures the Art for Art's sake theory when he insists that “any work of art that does not serve a useful purpose in society would remain a useless and idle

occupation (Ogunleye 72)”. Conversely, scholars in the school of Art-for-Art's sake will not agree with either Chervishkey or Plekhanov as they hold on to their position that the creation of a work of art is complete in itself and should be appreciated for what it is, an aesthetic piece created by an artist within his cultural reality as inspired by his creative muse.

The art forms of a people could be either Fine Arts or Theatre Arts. The Visual or Fine artists have the responsibility of creating and exhibiting their Art form to the world to draw attention to their cultural heritage. As a Theatre Arts Scholar, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, my assignment today is to discuss the thrust of my research work over the years in the field of Theatre Arts. The Arts of the Theatre is a living Art form that emanates from people's responses to the cultural realities of their society.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, it is not possible to ascribe to theatre the toga of “Art for Art's sake” because even at its most mundane, the theatre has performed the function of entertainment which in itself is therapeutic. The theatre opens our eyes to see events in perspectives different from our own; it reminds us that we are not alone; the theatre is immediate and always evolving; always different; it promotes education and literacy; it also helps in

promoting social discourse, dialogues and a potent tool for social change (<https://www.actingstudiochicago.com>). The Arts of the theatre as an academic discipline that has both practical and theoretical components affords scholars and practitioners a unique medium with which to study human behaviour and human relationships with one another in society.

In the course of my journey as a Theatre Arts scholar, I have engaged in various independent and collective researches in some areas of the discipline. But the majority of my research works have revolved around Theatre and Gender studies with specific focus on the female gender. Within the domain of women studies I have severally interrogated the plight of women and their relegation to the fringes of the societies they belong to. I have also scrutinised the development and progression of the female emancipation movements that have sprung up in the field of gender discourse across the world. Some of those conversations will be given a cursory overview to give us a basis for the direction which this lecture will take.

Conversations on Gender Issues in the Global Space

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, the field of Gender Studies as an academic concern has been around for a long time

evolving as societies also evolve in sophistication. Gender refers to the biological differentiation of homo-sapiens firstly into the clear distinctions of males and females. At the same time, gender has become a socio-cultural construct of expectations placed on both men and women on account of their sex. In as much as this differentiation is a reality of biology, for most societies across the world, the common denominator of gender is female subordination to male supremacy (Mackenzie, Ostergaard and Connor cited in Odi 147). The cankerworm of gender inequality or inequity has sparked global movements in the bid to address and eradicate all forms of biases against the female gender; to replace patriarchy with a gender balanced society to ensure a truly egalitarian global society.

The modern take-off point for the women liberation movements is the era of Mary Wallstonecraft's eighteenth century agitations for the *Rights of the Woman* and other essays which centered on the emancipation of women and their right to suffrage. These movements were championed by western women who vigorously pursued such ideals as equality of the sexes; access to education; female reproductive rights; freedom of association; right to work and fair wages for work done and other such rights and freedoms within their societies. A milestone dividend

of the women's struggle was when women were granted suffrage in the late 1920s. With this the foundation was laid for the first wave of the feminist movement.

The second wave of the feminist struggle began in the 1960s and this time the movement spread from the West to many other parts of the world especially Africa, gaining momentum as it did. Scholars from across the developed and developing world identified with the struggle. Over time the umbrella of feminism splintered into different strands best suited to the needs of the different groups of feminist agitators. Some of the more prominent strands of the second wave feminism according to Catherine Simpson cited in Mabel Ekwierhoma (41) included: **Radical Feminism; Bourgeois Feminism; Marxist Feminism** and **Liberal Feminism**. Regardless of the plethora of nomenclatures, the underlying ambition for all of these strands, was the liberation of women from the fringes of society where they had been relegated to for centuries.

As the movement grew, issues of race and culture became two important variables that had to be addressed. As Mabel Ekwierhoma espoused in her *Female Empowerment and Dramatic Creativity in Nigeria* (46) scholars and feminist thinkers like Jeanne-Marie Miller,

Carole Boyce Davies and Chioma Filomena Steady introduced issues of race and culture into the body of feminist theories.

These feminist scholars held the view that because the second wave of feminism championed by western women, were concerned with issues peculiar to women of their race within the context of their unique cultures, issues which concerned these new thinkers and women like them were not therefore being properly addressed. Cyprian Chuduo Obadiegwu (82) made a case for black feminism when he clearly stated that “at a time when the white feminists were immersed in agitations for the rights of women to work, the 'black' women's agitation was not for the right to work but rather the right to acceptable working conditions and an equitable salary for work duly done”.

Obadiegwu's statement threw light on the fact that long before white women had the need to work to earn a living, black women had been working as slaves and freed women in white households” Obadiegwu's assertion was hinged on the premise that the experiences and needs of women from all across the world had never been the same, which then meant that their demands could not also be the same even as they are all fighting a common battle for the emancipation of women globally (Odi 14-15).

The racial and cultural colorations to the struggle further splintered the feminist movement into two distinct variants namely: white feminism and black feminism. With this distinction of the movement into Black and White Feminism, Feminist scholars emerged to propagate this new angle in the body of feminist conversations. Black feminism is that branch of feminism that was specifically advanced to address the issues of women of African-American ancestry and other minority coloured women. Prominent strands of Black Feminism included “**Womanism**” as expounded by Alice Walker (1983), Angela Davies and Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi (1996), and Mary Kolawole (1997), while Clenora Hudson-Weems came up with “**Africana Womanism**” in 1993.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, the evolution of the human society meant constant changes and sophistication hence, over time, even the break-away Black Feminism encountered new challenges thrown up by the cultural realities of their various societies. Alice Walker, to whom the concept of Womanism was first credited, defined her brand of Womanism to be “A woman who loves another woman sexually and or non-sexually”. Walker's definition was the first red flag for African feminists and feminists of African-American descent. Whilst African

feminists were trying to come to terms with Walker's brand of feminism, Nancy Chadrow threw another spanner in the wheel when she claimed that: “the biological (f)act of childbearing is a key source of women oppression” (Scott and Marshal 2005: 428-9). To advance the cause of Black feminism, African Womanists were ready to accommodate the peculiarities of coloured women of African ancestry, but when that solidarity impinged on their cultural values as Africans, African feminists drew the line.

It is a known fact that the root and mainstay of the African society are their cultures and moral values upon which they have been evolving from the beginning of time. Therefore, it seemed inconceivable to imagine lesbianism as having a place within their cultural orientation. For this reason, the African feminists were hard-put to accept Walker's Womanism. Africans place premium value on children. They practically exist for their children and for posterity. So for Chadrow, to say that the act of child bearing is a source of oppression was not also acceptable to African feminists. Given the irreconcilable differences in ideology there was need for a further splintering of the newly adopted Black feminism.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, with the further splintering of the black feminist movement into the different groups among the coloured feminists, Nigerian academics, also added their voices to the discourse and introduced new nomenclatures into the already existing body of feminist nomenclatures. Scholars like Angela Davies and Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi, Mary Kolawole and Stella Oyedepo chose to continue their feminist movement with the nomenclature Wmanism, howbeit it was a Womanism devoid of the lesbian underpinning of Alice Walker. Leslie Ogundipe came up with “**Stiwanism**”, Chioma Okpara had “**Formalism and Gynism**” while scholars like Oyeronke Opewumi and Catherine Obianuju Acholonu decided on “**Motherism**” (Evwhieroma 2002, Obadiogwu 2009).

For the purpose of this study, Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, Acholonu's theory of “Motherism.” best resonates with the issues being addressed in this lecture, therefore I will be using her theory as the framework for this engagement.

The Nature of Catherine Acholonu's Motherism and the Nigerian Woman:

Nigerian feminism for the most part is accomodationist in the sense that it is not overtly confrontational. It realizes

that in every human society, both sexes need and complement each other to ensure a balanced and stable society. In as much as they accept that they need each other, Nigerian feminists will continue to demand for a level playing field where they can in all fairness contribute their quota to the development and growth of their society at both the private and public spaces. It is within this context that Acholonu's Motherism finds legitimacy.

The African society reveres motherhood. Motherhood in Africa confers prestige on women in society. Traditionally, in African societies, mothers are held in high esteem, loved and protected as bringers of life into the world and nurturers of the family and society. Acholonu defines her Motherism as: *a multidimensional theory which involves the dynamics of ordering, reordering, creating structures, building and rebuilding in cooperation with nature at all levels of human endeavour.*” She went on to add that a Motherist is that person who: *Defends and protects family values; seeks truth and true knowledge; is courageous yet humble; loving; tolerant; powerful yet down-to-earth; ... one who is willing to protect the natural and cohesive essence of the family, the child, the society and the environment (Odi: 64).*

Elvira Cordono's also described the “Motherist” as that man or woman committed to the survival of mother earth as a hologramatic entity.” She is particularly concerned about the importance Africans attach to the cohesion of everyone in the society and by extension the environment (<http://www.postcolonialweb.org>.)

From the above definitions it is clear that Motherism and by extension the Motherist is a body of theory that is concerned with the well being of the human beings and the natural environment of any given people. The definition obliterates all gender based divisions with its numerous conundrums that have for decades, ensnared scholars in an unending gender debate. From the definition, Acholonu is not looking at the concept of Motherism from the narrow prism of biology. Acholonu looks at it from the African ethos of mother-earth being the goddess who gives life, who is caring, supportive, forgiving and protective of every living being, flora and fauna alike (www.https://veganfeministnetwork.com).

The marginalisation of majority of Nigerian women as in deed women across the African continent is an incontrovertible fact. The African woman is encumbered by cultural and traditional practices that impede her development. Over the years, women have been

indoctrinated into a state that Paulo Freire describes as the “culture of silence” where she is to be seen but not heard; where she cannot participate even in matters that directly affect her life and wellbeing. In the private and public spaces, the Nigerian woman has had to endure indignity in silent resignation owing to the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society. Some of the challenges which led to women's subordinate position include: boy-child preference; early or teenage marriages; female genital mutilation; obnoxious widowhood practices; lack of access to education; economic or financial dependence on male members of her family; lack of access to financial resources to engage in entrepreneurship; negative stereotyping; unequal inheritance laws and many other such lopsided cultural and traditional practices which consigned her to the fringes of her society making her irrelevant in the decision making processes of her home and society

If the domestic front is restrictive for female participation in decision making, the public space is more treacherous to navigate. Without having to dig deep into history, a cursory look at public offices held at the national level would reveal that Nigeria has never had a female president or Vice President; a woman has never been a governor in Nigeria; the National Assembly which has a

total of 469 members in both the Senate and House of Representatives has a total of 19 females (<https://www.senate.gov>). The representation of women in decision making bodies in both the public and private sectors is still abysmally low in spite of the efforts being put into the struggle for equity among the sexes. One of the Action Points of the 1995 Beijing Conference was the famous 35% affirmative action for women in government. 27 years after the Beijing Conference, it is still a mirage in Nigeria.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, Nigerian women have been part of the struggle for gender balancing and equity like their counterparts across the world. There are visible successes as there are more women in the public spaces in society now than before. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, one time Minister of Finance of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is currently the Director General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). That is a major achievement for African women. With the many successes recorded by the feminist agitations over the years, the shackles are visibly loosening as more women are participating in the political processes of the country; they are also engaging in formal and informal economic activities thus leading to eventual economic independence.

The feminist movement has over the years, focused attention particularly on the plight of women and the girl-child in the global society. Much effort has been deployed to securing and improving the lives of the Nigerian woman and girl-child. So focused has the struggle been that several Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) nationally and internationally are dedicated to addressing issues revolving around women and the girl child. The United Nations under various organs is also championing interventions aimed at improving the lives of women and the girl-child across the world. Successes are being recorded as public spaces are grudgingly shifting to accommodate women.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor sir, much effort has been put to ensure the girl child grows up to be a good person, a good wife and a good mother in time. While these attentions have been focused on women and the girl-child, the boy child has been ignored. If the girl child needed grooming to become a good wife and mother, it stands to reason too that the boy child also needs to be properly groomed to equally be a good husband and father.

The reason why the boy child as well as the girl child needs to be properly trained to be responsible well educated, well adjusted adults is so engender a society

peopled by decent citizens in the present and in the future. Did we forget that if we succeeded in giving our daughters good decent up-bringing but do not give same training to our sons, our well trained daughters will eventually end up being friends with or even end up marrying these ill trained young men that the entire society has ignored? In the larger society, it will be these same ill trained boy children that will grow up to be at the helms of affairs of the state tomorrow? Obviously, we did forget and now the children are here with a generational gap so wide it is consuming us all.

Children of the Motherists: the Millennials and Generation Z

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, the globalization and digitization of the world has impacted on the global society to the extent that a particular group of human beings are called “digital natives”. For this group of people, life revolves around the virtual space to the exclusion of almost any activity that is not digitized. They are known as “Millennials”, “Generation Z or Gen-Zians” and “Digital Natives”. These groups of people are born between 1981-1996 (the Millennials) and 1997-2012 (Generation Z abbreviated to Gen-Zian). Collectively, they form the bulk of people that make up the age bracket of between 11-42 years old. This age bracket of 11-42

years is the active youth population of all societies across the world.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, it is getting interesting. The codes these groups of youths live by and work with are antithetical to the ones their parents understand and work with. Any parent or family that does not realize this stands the risk of perpetual head-on collisions with these members of their households. These youth especially the Millennials are focused on making a difference on every level professionally, socially, politically and economically; they refuse to accept that “things have always been done this way”; they are committed to finding solutions that fit their present problems even when those solutions sometimes conflict with established traditional cultural norms. And at the same time the millennials try to honour and salute the past which is their parents' generation (<https://fowmedia.com>&).

Globally, Millennials are confident, team oriented, conventional and under pressure to succeed. This group of people will do everything possible to have their way. If the Millennials are born into a world different from their parents owing to the emergence of Information Communication Technology, the Gen-Zians on the other hand are born into the digital world, a world that has never

felt safe for them or for their parents; they grew up and are growing up with technology: sophisticated electronic gadgets, internet, social media and the speed-of-light cyberspace. Gen-Zians are accepting of anything so long as it makes them “happy” and does not impact negatively on them; they are health conscious; they value and, do not negotiate their privacy; they are entrepreneurial in nature and are mostly worried about their future prospects. These Gen-Zians are not as grounded as the Millennials to traditional values and cultural norms which leads to them changing the dynamics of childhood and adulthood (<https://www.oxford-royale.com>).

Millennials and Gen-Zians for the most part are politically conscious; impatient; highly sexualized; narcissistic; desirous of the luxurious life; intolerant of dissenting voices; and technology addicts. In the world of the Millennials and Gen-Zians they can navigate their way across any cyber space with ease. Schools at all levels, industry in all sectors, their homes, everything is digitized. They live a smart life in a smart world. Simply put, it is their world and we their analogue parents are struggling to survive in their world. Living smart is the reality in developed countries across the world. While some relatively developed African countries are fast catching up with western nations in smart living, some

other African countries are not on the speed dial (www.leritude.com; <https://entrepreneursource.com/contact.html>).

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, in a globalised world driven by ICT, the case of the Nigerian society is a bundle of complicated contradictions. The condition of the Nigerian state defies logic and all known development models. Nigeria is richly endowed with human and natural resources but paradoxically plagued by a myriad of development challenges that have plunged the country into the current crises that is threatening its very survival. The perennial existential challenges the Nigerian nation faces makes one ponder on Chinua Achebe's *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1983).

In *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Achebe posits that “The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership...the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal examples which are the hallmark of true leadership” is what is lacking among the leaders of the country. No one wants to sacrifice for the other, or to go the extra mile for the common good of the collective. For a book that was written four decades ago, it captures the enormity of Nigeria's predicament in an uncanny way as if the book was written yesterday.

Looking at Achebe's submission, I have to add that from a broader perspective, leadership within the Nigerian context cannot be reposed only in the ambit of political elites. Anyone in places of authority is a leader and has roles to play in the governance of those under his or her chain of command. Therefore if there is a failure of leadership in Nigeria as asserted by Achebe, it means that the failure trickles down to other holders of leadership positions in the country. This is not to say that all leaders in Nigeria are failures, far from it, but the facts on ground show that the country is in dire traits on account of leadership failure.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, it is this failure of leadership that has plunged the nation into the crises the country is presently facing. Nigeria has well crafted policies concerning the development of the country and its citizens. The challenge rather lies in the absence of the political will and capacity to implement policies for the benefit of the people of the nation. The Nigerian Constitution of 1999 makes clear provisions of the State's responsibilities to the Nigerian citizens with specific references to the Nigerian child. For instance, Chapter IV (section 33-46) of the 1999 Constitution of the federal Republic of Nigeria provides for the protection and implementation of the fundamental rights of every person

including children. In addition to the rights provided by the Nigerian Constitution, the Child's Rights Act of 2003 is specifically designed to ensure the protection of the rights of every Nigerian child.

These rights include, but are not limited to: i) survival and development of the Nigerian child; ii) right to a name; iii) freedom of association and peaceful assembly; iv) freedom of thought and religion; v) right to private and family life; vi) right to freedom of movement; vii) right to freedom from discrimination; viii) right to dignity of a child; ix) right to health and health services; x) right to parental care, protection and maintenance; xi) right to free compulsory and universal primary education.

The Child's Rights Act also prescribes punishment for child marriages and betrothal; child trafficking; use of children in criminal activities, education, exploitative labour forms of sexual abuse and exploitation, tattoo and skin marks, harmful publication, exposition to narcotic drugs and psycho-tropic substance, recruitment of children into the armed forces among other exploitations and unlawful engagements of children. The Act also provides for immediate provision of safe foster care and shelter for a child endangered in his or her immediate environment (Unini Chioma <https://www.nigerialawyer.com>).

With such provisions in the country's Constitution, the children of the state and its citizens should have been assured of the fact that as far as their country is concerned, they will be safe and well-cared for. Unfortunately, that is not the case in Nigeria. The glaring: leadership failure; institutional failure; infrastructural failure; religious intolerance; ethnic bigotry; insecurity; unemployment; run-away inflation; collapse of the economy; grand scale corruption; nepotism; military/police harassments and brutality is the bleak Nigerian reality. It is in a situation such as this that the Nigerian Millennials and Gen-Zians have been born into. From birth they were handed the short end of the stick.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, the situation the Nigerian Millennials and Gen-Zians have found themselves in does not make them less millennial and Gen-Zian than their peers in developed societies. Because they are not exempted from their generation, all the qualities and characteristics that apply to their counterparts in other continents of the world also apply to the Nigerian Millennials and Gen-Zians. Regardless of the state of the Nigerian nation, the characteristics of the generation are in their DNA and they are who they are, they may be confused and not comprehending, but it is who they are and they have to be themselves.

The inherent characteristics of the Millennials and Gen-Zians strike discordant tunes with the African culture and traditions which teach modesty and moderation; courtesy and decorum; patience and dignity in labour; unquestioned respect and obedience for elders and those in positions of authority. These generation of youth neither understands nor care for such “archaic” (in their view) cultural and traditional norms and values that makes no sense to them. The traditional “analogue” (in the view of Gen-Zians) African parents are perplexed. Molded as they are in the traditional cultures and norms most parents do not know what to make of this generation. The challenge of parents and even the government of not understanding these youth; of not being able to raise them up according to the dictates of their age; of not being able to provide an enabling environment for them to thrive in their world is a major part of the Nigerian problem.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, the ideals of older generations are not theirs. They are not interested in what their parents generation hold sacred. Many of them are as a matter of fact angry with their parents' generation because they feel their parents' who ought to have prepared an enabling environment for the generation that will succeed them have instead destroyed the country and are handing down the rubbles of destruction to them. Chambers Umezulike

captures the feelings and frustrations of the Millennials and Gen-Zians in his essay titled “*My Father's Generation Failed My Generation*”

Excerpts of the essay blame his father's generation who/according to him:

...saw our value system die. They saw our set of morals die. They saw integrity got deleted from our polity. They saw the facilities they enjoyed in the universities depreciating, never to be sustained. While they went to the universities with scholarships in their days, today, we have nothing like that anymore. They saw everything got worse. They are the ones EFCC chases today. They are the ones that instituted corruption; practically taught us corruption; and saw most of our institutions die. They fuelled the decay of a lot of social services. They saw the military got corrupted. They saw the police got corrupted. They have been managing the affairs of the country for decades now. They rig elections, and ask my generation to help them carry ballot boxes. They are the ones that give my generation moneys that we share to voters at polling booths. They are the

governors that do not perform today. They are the ones that now send their children who are part of my generation abroad to enjoy education of global quality, because education institutions here are pretty dead. They are the ones that boast of how many of their children they have sent abroad for quality education. They are the ones that widened the inequality gap in the country to a large degree. They are the ones that have fuelled the establishment of private universities as they watched the public ones die. Today, these public schools are so dead, that they are basically for the poor people, and one cannot rely on the low quality of education that Nigerians get in most of them. Even with the enormous school fees paid in those private schools, the quality of education delivered there cannot be compared to what my father's generation obtained at the public schools of their days (<https://newswirengr.com/2015/04/29>).

While Umezulike feels strongly that his own generation may be worse than his father's, he traces the root of his

generation's problems to the failure of his father's generation. However, the millennial spirit which still honours elders prompts Umezulike to first apologise to his father for what he was about to write and the title of the essay, which for him is generic for those Nigerians under whose leadership the country collapsed. The above excerpt from his essay typifies the frustration and anger of the ordinary Nigerian youth who believes that their fathers' generation has not been able to put a successor plan in place for their generation to work from and build upon.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, it is pertinent at this point to stratify the Nigerian Millennials and Gen-Zians into three distinct sub groups: a) children of the political elites; b) children of the fading Middle Class and c) children of the downtrodden:

- A Children of the Political Elites in Nigeria: this group of youth have access to quality education usually international, they have the best of everything money can buy, they have jobs waiting for them while still in the university, they marry into the families of their parents' friends to perpetuate their elitist hegemony;

- B Children of the Fading Middle Class in Nigeria: this group of youth is so termed because the disparity in wealth distribution has practically eroded that class of citizens to the point where there is only the rich and the poor. Notwithstanding the shrinking of the working class, there are still a few families who can still afford food on the table; education at all levels for their children and moderately provide for the needs of their children. These youth graduate from the university to the Nigerian reality of either unemployment or underemployment and the fact that they cannot go into private business owing to paucity of funds or opportunities for start-up capital.
- C Children of the Nigerian Poor: youth in this category are children of the downtrodden population who are unable to provide for the needs of their children. These children end up in the streets, they learn the ways of the street and live by the street codes. They form the critical mass that succumb easily to the vices in society.

Generically every Nigerian youth fits into one of these three categories. Factually however, there are exceptions to the norm and there are also overlaps in-between. But

basically, Nigerian Millennials and Gen-Zians of today belong in any one of these groups and they are “disrupting norms in the best and worst possible ways and our future rests on their frighteningly fickle shoulders” (<https://www.workboard.com>).

“The children of the poor you failed to train will never let your children live in peace—Chief Obafemi Awolowo
Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, the Nigerian Millennials and Gen-Zians are a different breed. They are not like their counterparts from other continents. They did not earn for themselves sobriquets like “Coconut Heads” and “Soro Soke” for nothing. They are breaking boundaries for good and for bad. This is where the prediction of Chief Obafemi Awolowo begins to haunt Nigerians and the Nigerian society.

The chronic hardship and palpable fear in the country owing to the failure of the government to secure the lives and properties of its citizens and its inability to provide an enabling environment for the development of its citizens and the society at large, has made the country a hotbed for every form of evil imaginable. As an off-shoot of the current crises in the country, a twin *deja-vu* occurrences have re-surfaced: “Sapa” and “Japa”

Sapa: is associated with poverty, hunger and the overall hardship in the land. The varying degrees of sapa has pushed many under- privileged youth who cannot make ends meet otherwise, into a life of criminality, drug use and abuse, and many other nefarious activities all in a bid to survive in a society that has failed them.

Japa on the other hand refers to the mass exodus of Nigerians especially the youths out of the country by any means possible in search of greener pastures and relative safety. This exodus also, is a direct result of the hardship, insecurity and other challenges the country is grappling with, with no seeming end in the near future.

Japa and Sapa are regarded as déjà-vu here because they are not nouvelle phenomena. In the mid-1980s a similar occurrence was the trend then. The hardship in the land led to citizens leaving the country in droves. At that time, in a bid to stop the migration of its citizens, the federal government commissioned a campaign where the arts were used to try to convince citizens not to leave the country. In the campaign Onyeka Owenu the popular

Mass Communicator cum Musician cum Actress was commissioned to do the “Nigeria Go Better” Song and actor Enebeli Elebuwa became Andrew who wanted to “check out”. Incidentally, these two stars of the “Nigeria Go Better” Campaign were youths then too. And now Nigeria has once again been plunged into the deja-vu of severe hardship. And this time, not just the youth, professionals in their prime are also leaving the country in droves with a resultant monumental brain drain being experienced in the country.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, the children of the political elites who japa, abroad acquire quality education. When they graduate, some of them come back to the country where they are given employment letters for the few lucrative jobs that have been held down for them even when they were still in the university. Some of them do not come back home again. They take up citizenship in whatever country they get their education from and build a life for themselves there. The children of the fading middle class citizens who found ways to japa also refuse to come back to the country knowing the situation back home.

In the above scenarios we find two classes of Nigerian youth who believe that the best cause of action to take to the prevailing hardship in the land is to leave the country.

On the flip side of the youth coin, there are the children of the poor who do not have the privilege, opportunity or means to leave the country. These are the ones who have taken to a life of criminality; they are the ones Chief Awolowo predicted will not allow society live in peace.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor sir, as I stated earlier, there are exceptions to the established pattern of behavior of the youth. Even with the mass exodus, there are children of the political elites who remain in the country, living off the affluence of their parents; then again there are the children of the fading middle class who were able to access education, but could not get paying jobs. These millennials and Gen-Zians are seen using their knowledge in ICT and other skill sets to overcome the hardship and prosper in their preferred economic endeavours. These youth are the embodiment of the real Coconut Head Generation. They are a group of Nigerian youth who have refused to be frustrated by the system into running away from their country; they have also refused to debase their humanity by sinking into a life of criminality; they are the Soro Soke generation; and they are saying: “enough is enough we are taking back our country”.

Youth revolution is not a strange phenomenon across the world. There have been many instances of youth protests

that quickly turned into full blown revolutions. The French revolution of 1789 was spearheaded by the youth. The 2011 Arab spring which started in Libya with a fruit seller who set himself ablaze to protest harsh living conditions that swept through the Arab world were all spear headed by the youth. In recent times, young Srilankans successfully toppled their government; in the 2022 presidential election young kenyans massively voted in the presidential candidate (William Ruto) who they believed would offer better governance. In Iran the youth are protesting against the wearing of hijab, again in France, youth are on the streets protesting against untold hardship and difficult living conditions.

All of these protests and riots across the world have two common driving force – first, the desire for a better society for all citizens secondly and more potently, the protests are driven by the youth demography who have the numbers and capacity to demand good governance from their leaders.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, Africa as a whole has been reeling under the effects of bad leadership. Chukwuemeka Ike's *Our Children are Coming*, Ngugi Wa Thiongo's *Wizard of the Crow*, Lanrele Bamidele's "Cultural Constructs, Elites and Leadership Ethics: Our Future

Leaders are Coming” are a few works that have been drawing our attention to the possibility of a revolution on the African continent if the elites in leadership positions do not make conscious effort to prioritise the welfare of the African citizens a priority.

Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come - Victor Hugo

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, the situation in Nigeria had steadily been going from bad to worse with pent-up anger and frustration. There was discontent, indignation and fear in most people but they remained silent, that is, until the #ENDSARS protests began in 2020. The Soro Soke ideology of the Nigerian youth was born in 2020, when completely fed up with the hardship in the land, police brutality and extra judicial killings, and more so of a nation that seemed bent on destroying them, the Millennials and Gen-Zians organically decided that enough was enough as they took to the streets across Nigeria in a seemingly leaderless but well-coordinated peaceful protests.

The protesters had a five point demand known as their “5-for-5 demands”. The demands were:

- I. The immediate release of all previously arrested protesters;

- ii. Justice for all victims of police brutality living and dead alike, and adequate compensation to their families;
- iii. Setting up an independent body to oversee the investigation and prosecution of all reported police misconduct within a period of 10 days;
- iv Carrying out psychological evaluation and retraining of all disbanded Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS) Operatives before they be re-deployed. And lastly
- v The government should increase police salary and should also be adequately incentivised for protecting lives and property of the citizens (www.TheCable.ng).

The #ENDSARS protests went on unrelentingly for days across the length and breadth of the country. During one such protest, the video tweet of a youth @P_Oruche from Edo State went viral. In the video clip she could be seen marching on the street saying:

Armed men everywhere ... because we want to protest. We can't be scared. If they shut up Protesters like they shut up the National

*Assembly Members then Nigeria is finished.
We can't (sic) be scared of our
president in our own country. We are not
refugees, we are citizens... we'd rather die
than keep shut. I'd rather be a rebel than a
slave.*

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, these protests across the country went on for two weeks until it all came to an abrupt end on the 20th day of October 2020.

Point of Convergence in this Conversation

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, I have spent time talking about some of my research on feminism especially in the tracing of the origins of feminist theories across the globe and at the same time narrowing it down specifically to Acholonu's theory of Motherism which forms the theoretical basis of this lecture. I have also spent quite some time discussing the circumstances and predicament of the Nigerian youth inflicted on them by the hardships the country is presently experiencing. However, the question to ask at this juncture can as well be “what is the relationship between my review of feminism, Acholonu's Motherism and the Nigerian youth in relation to the Arts of the Theatre and in particular with my field of profession?”

The Arts of the Theatre is a living art form that mimics the realities and experiences of man in the service of mankind. The discipline of Theatre Arts has many sub-disciplines that a Theatre Arts scholar can specialize in. In my case, I intentionally inclined towards the area of Theatre and Gender Studies which then meant that my primary research concentrates mainly on the search for theatrical scholarship and practices that will improve and empower the lives of the female gender.

The patriarchal stranglehold on women in Africa still exists hence the struggle for women liberation and empowerment is still an issue on the front burner of national and international discourse. In addition to all the theories, concerted practical efforts are channeled towards closing the gaps of inequality between the sexes. The women in Africa are becoming more and more aware that whilst such global effort is being made towards their liberation, they as both victims and culprits in the perpetuation of patriarchy are also realizing that they themselves have to collectively resist being used as enforcers of traditional and cultural practices that are inimical to their individual and collective growth as human beings and citizens of their countries.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, steady progress is being made. It is already being seen and felt in the increasing visibility of women in decision making positions in the public space. But as Mathew B. Seiyefamni, the Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of the 5th Governing Council of the Niger Delta University would say “in solving one problem, you inadvertently create a new one” The visibility that the women folks are getting in the public space is creating a shrinking in varying degrees, of their presence in the private space. However it is a challenge that could easily be overcome when the men-folk become an active part in the raising and nurturing of the children at home.

African ways of training children are traditionally communal. Children in African communities do not belong to the biological parents alone but to the entire community, hence adults in the community were at liberty to render unsolicited advice; chastise, praise or even reward children publicly for good or bad behaviour. All of that have gradually changed with the advent of globalization and ICT which have made the world a global village. African families in African societies are jettisoning traditional methods of raising children and are in its stead, embracing foreign nuclear concept of family. The resultant effect of that alienation is that people in

communities hardly look out for each other and are learning to not 'interfere' in other people's affairs when not invited. Thus in Nigeria today, where everybody in most families has to 'hustle' to make ends meet, children are left to themselves without adult supervision and the much needed communal 'up-bringing,' trapped in an ICT driven globalised village

Being the mirror of society, the Arts of the Theatre mimics the pulse of society and holds up the mirror for people to see their reflections objectively in order to inspire the people to search for new ways to improve their conditions in the real world. In this case my Theatre is holding up the mirror of the collapsing Nigerian society, the activities of the youth in society and the relevance of Acholonu's theory of Motherism in the current Nigerian reality and how it can if at all, actualise positive social change.

The Re-enacted Reality of the Motherist and her Children

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, the Nigerian society did not degenerate to the point it now is overnight. It had gradually but steadily been transiting from bad to worse without any conscious effort on the part of the government or the citizens to halt the decay in the society. In pre-colonial times ensuring the security, peaceful co-

existence, wellbeing of citizens and provision of social amenities was the responsibility of traditional rulers, their council of chiefs and elders of kingdoms and communities. Pre-colonial kings like Nana Olomu of Itsekiri kingdom, Oba Ovonramwen Nogbaisi of old Benin kingdom, King Jaja of Opobo, King Koko of Nembe and brave women and queens also contributed to ensuring the social cohesion of their societies. Stories of Moremi of Ife, Idia and Emotan of Bini Kingdom, Queen Amina of Zauzzau are examples of legendary leaders who have been immortalised in the pages of history books for their valour.

The Theatre Arts scholars and practitioners are students of society. They draw their muse and materials from the society and whatever happens in society is potential material for the creativity of a theatre artist. Many play-texts have been written capturing times and events in the evolution of the country for good and for bad. These events have been frozen in time and will be there to bear witness to events that transpired at given periods in the history of the society it originated from.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, the heroic pre-colonial characters mentioned earlier have all been dramatically

recreated and immortalised in the annals of Nigerian history by way of plays-texts and they have been brought to life whenever these plays are staged. Issues arising from women's liberation struggles and patterns of youth behaviours in reaction to prevailing situations of their times have also formed themes in dramatic works of art. This lecture at this juncture will look at some creative works that drew materials from the lives of youth in the society.

Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* was published in 1989 but it captures the tone and mood of the Nigerian youth of today. In the preface to *Hangmen Also Die* Esiaba Irobi drew attention to the dire warning Chinua Achebe gave in his *Arrow of God* published in 1964, concerning the Nigerian youth, a warning that no one gave any heed. Achebe remembered a time...:

...our fathers have told us that it may even happen to an unfortunate generation that they are pushed beyond the end of things and their back is broken and hung over the fire. When this happens, they may sacrifice their own blood (ix)

A time such as that came in Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die*. In *Hangmen...* the first scene opens in the hanging

yard of a Nigerian prison wherein are seven young men, much like today's Millennials, who have been sentenced to death for the murder of a prominent community chieftain. What led to the murder, one may ask? It all started when “the federal government gave people of the state three million naira (N3,000,000) Oil spill compensation money for the oil spillage which has ruined the people's farms, their homes and their lives” (*Hangmen...*12). “The man they killed Chief Isokipiri Erekosima, Commissioner for Local Government, Rural Development and Chieftaincy Affairs had connived with his councilors and Local Government Chairmen to confiscate the money” (12-13) which they shared among themselves without giving the citizens a single kobo.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, the seven young men killed Chief Isokipiri Erekosima because he diverted money meant for the people for himself and his cronies. They called themselves the Suicide Squad. They had all graduated from the university into joblessness. After graduation, their dreams of contributing to making their country great were dashed when they could not get jobs. Initially, they persevered as they continued in search for jobs that were not there. After many years of writing and submitting Application Letters for non-existent jobs, going from one

interview to the next without success, frustration and anger set in. The membership of the Suicide Squad is made up of:

- i Waritimi Tamuno alias Mortuary: a first class graduate of Statistics;
- ii Atemie Waribo alias Moshe Dayan: is a Masters' Degree holder in Political Science;
- iii Labomie Alagoa alias Ayatolla Khomeini: a Law School graduate called to Bar;
- iv Tekena Tamuna alias Acid: has a Masters' degree in Microbiology;
- v Konji Amakarama alias Tetanus Tetanus: a graduate Mechanical Engineering;
- vi Fubara Igonikon alias Accidental Discharge: an ex-policeman who was fired on the grounds of over qualification because he got a Masters' degree while in Service; and lastly,
- vii Tarila Igonima alias R.I.P: has a Ph.D in Criminology.

The inability of the young graduates to secure jobs or even engage in the informal sector that the government of their country had no plans for the future of its children. In showed, disillusionment and frustration, the seven young men succumbed to a life of criminality to survive the harsh

reality of their society. The frustration of the suicide Squad is palpable in their refrain:

*Every dream we have, you have taken from us
Every hope we had, you have taken from us
Everything we have, you have taken from us
Even that which we do not have,
You have also taken from us (38)*

The anguish and hopelessness of the suicide squad can be felt in the following lines:

*We do what we do, because we know we
have no future
Because we know that no matter how high
we aspire
There is something waiting in the
atmosphere to destroy us (38).*

The seven young men in *Hangmen Also Die* by their actions are revolting against a system that failed to plan for them. To be clear, the actions of the Suicide Squad are not derived from any noble intention. Their actions are acts of criminality in their bid to survive. They know they are engaging in acts of criminality and they take full responsibilities for their actions and they stated as much:

*We are no revolutionaries neither are we
guerillas. We are not even Freedom Fighters,*

fighting for any such stupid thing as our nation's Independence. We are professional burglars, degenerates and small time Thieves graduating into armed robbers, desperadoes, the wretched of the Earth (24)

In their hopelessness, the seven in *Hangmen Also Die* debased their humanity to the level of a group of human beings Frantz Fanon describes as the "wretched of the earth".

The above excerpt from *Hangmen also Die* resonates with the reality of today's Millennials And Gen-Zians.

Nigeria will know no peace until the child of a nobody can become a somebody without knowing anybody
-Mallam Aminu Kano

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, when I was discussing the Children of the Motherists, I categorized the Nigerian youth into three sub-groups: children of the political elites; children of the fading middle class and children of the downtrodden. Generally, every society in the world is made up of these three categories of citizenry. The difference between developed, developing and undeveloped societies is the gap between the groups. If the

gap between any two is not overly wide, that society can be said to be balanced and developing proportionately. But when the gap between any two categories of citizens is so wide to the extent where a whole category (the middle class) is almost non-existent, then such a country can be termed to be an under-developed nation.

While Nigeria has never entered the global committee of developed nations, there were times when it was projected to be the fastest growing economy in Africa. Then the average Nigerian family could put food on the table; afford to send their children to the university and be sure that as they graduate, they will get jobs in government agencies with even an opportunity of accommodation and car loans into the bargain; there was the possibility of government scholarships for indigent students; functional craft-centres for youths who do not aspire to university degrees to acquire skills with which to earn a decent living. But presently Nigeria has degenerated to attain the status of poverty capital of the world with well over 130 million Nigerians living in extreme poverty. There is a pervasive hopelessness in the country.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, the members of the Suicide Squad did not take to a life of criminality by choice. Prevailing hardship in the land pushed seven bright young

men much like today's Millennials to a life of criminality, just as prevailing economic hardship today has pushed many Nigerian youth to crime. While the seven confessed that they were “professional burglars, degenerates and small-time thieves fast graduating into armed robbers”, some Nigerian youth today who have chosen a life of crime have gone over and beyond what the seven could imagine within the realm of criminality. The young Nigerian criminal today robs in broad daylight; abduct people for ransom; abduct people for organ harvesting; abduct people for ritual killing; engage in cyber fraud and many other vices. There is no peace in the land. Just like Chinua Achebe, Mallam Aminu Kano also warned Nigerians that peace will continue to elude the country until such a time that “the child of a nobody can become a somebody without knowing anybody”. That time is not here yet. **But Children of the Motherists are Here...**

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, in the unfolding macabre drama that is Nigeria today there are a group of Millennials and Gen-Zians who could facilitate the ways and means to japa if they feel strongly about it or they could, like the Suicide Squad seven, turn to a life of criminality to survive. But these young Nigerians believe that to japa is not the solution to the sapa in the land. They have individually, but intentionally decided not to leave the country but to stay

and take back their country from a ruling class that have consistently failed the nation and its citizens.

The idea to take back the country from the insensitive ruling class is firmly engrained in the minds of the real coconut head Millennials and Gen-Zians. For them, there is no going back until their goal is achieved. Two years after the Lekki Toll Gate massacre, the Soro Soke generation has not forgotten their compatriots who were killed or maimed during the 2020 protests. They are bidding their time and strategizing for an auspicious time to make their point. These millennials and Gen-Zians are not the dregs of society they are the Sandas in Femi Osofisan's *A Restless Run of Locusts* (1975) and the Chidis in Christine Odi's *Destined To Be* (1995). These are young men and women who, rather than back down in the face of tyranny, or cringe in the face of bribery and corruption have taken a stand to challenge those elected or appointed into positions of authority to ensure good governance.

As there are play-texts treating themes of youth in society, so also are there a multitude of texts on the struggles of the Nigerian woman to break the culture of silence and find her voice. The rich historical accounts of female heroines in pre-colonial Nigeria are sources for dramatic re-

creations of works like: Akinwumi Isola's *Madam Tinubu: The Terror of Lagos* (1998), Wale Ogunyemi's *Queen Amina of Zazzau* (1999), Irene Isoken Salami-Agunloye's *Emotan: A Benin Heroine* (2001), *The Queen Sisters: Ubi and Ewere* (2002) and (2008).

Salami-Agunloye's 2001 re-enactment of the Emotan legend of old Bini kingdom portrays the eponymous heroine of the play, Emotan, as a motherist. She is gentle, kind, compassionate, homely, caring, a seeker of truth and justice for all. She is as brave and firm as she is humble. She is the mother of all the children at Ekioba, the unsolicited but dearly loved adviser of the young women of Ekioba. Emotan saved the Bini kingdom by ensuring the rightful heir to the throne is installed as Oba of Benin with the title: Oba Ewuare.

Femi Osofisan's *Tegonni: An African Antigone* (2007) though an adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone*, is another brave heroine. She is a young princess who was born before her time. She was born at a time when girl children were seen but not heard; a time when the girl-child was expected to be in the kitchen engaged in domestic chores and generally being groomed to be a good and proper wife to her future husband and an exemplary mother to her children. Tegonni was a young strong willed princess who

chose duty to state and family above her life. As a princess she knew the consequences of Prince Oyekunle being unburied portend great calamity for the community. The governor had proclaimed that Prince Oyekune should not be buried, with dire consequences on whoever dared to bury him. Tegonni's commitment to ensuring equilibrium in her society and love for her brother was stronger than the penalty of death for whoever buried the slain prince. She buried her brother Prince Oyekunle and in doing that, she restored peace to the land, but paid the supreme price for disobeying the governor.

Emotan and Tegonni are as different as can be imagined. While Emotan is a woman advanced in age, a market woman, Tegonni is a teenage princess. The play *Emotan* is written by a female playwright, while *Tegonni: An African Antigone* on the other hand is written by a male playwright. Emotan would be a generation X to Tegonni's Gen-Z. They are two very different characters in every way but their love for humanity and their kingdoms. They both loved their people and society to the extent that they gave their lives to restore peace and equilibrium. The character portraiture of Emotan and Tegonni makes them outstanding motherists within the Nigerian context of the term. It is of people in the mould of these two women and the many others like them that are burdened with the arrival of the Soro Soke Generation.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, the concept of Nigerian Motherism is hinged on the bond between a mother and her children; her ability to go to any length to ensure their safety and provide the needs of her children; she nurtures them in the right moral and social values. In this case I am stretching the concept of Motherism to also apply to the state because while at the nuclear level the parents primarily meet the needs of the family, but as the children grow older, the state assumes some responsibilities towards its citizens especially the children and other vulnerable groups of people. A state that is responsive to the yearnings of its citizens and has functional structures in place that adequately addresses the needs of the people, will have mentally and emotionally balanced well-adjusted productive citizens who will drive the development of the society and themselves. When the reverse is the case, the result is anarchy.

Because the state has failed in its responsibilities to its citizens, heads of families in the society are under pressure to perform the functions of the state for themselves. In the Nigerian society of today the people in addition to meeting their personal family needs, also provide amenities that the state should provide. For example citizens across Nigeria provide basic amenities like electricity, water, accommodation, roads, healthcare and security for

themselves. All these functions that the government has failed in, the people now bear upon themselves with a resultant anarchic situation in the land. Majority of the people cannot meet all these basic needs and are consequently falling below the poverty line making Nigeria the poverty capital of the world with more than 130 million people living in multi-dimensional poverty.

And now, Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, the Children of the Motherist are here... born in a globally digitized world but living in analogue conditions, divided by the class of their parents and their ability or inability to survive in the cyberspace that is their reality. The children of the political elite do not have the problems of their counterparts from the other categories because their needs are being met by their parents. If it is their desire to, they can school anywhere in the world; they can get any job they want; eat or wear whatever fashion trend that catches their fancy; travel to any destination, or even japa completely without a thought for the economics involved.

The children of the fading middle-class will eventually face the challenge of getting good jobs after graduation. With some effort they can also japa to escape the hardship in the land. But the children of the downtrodden, are the ones Obafemi Awolowo warned Nigerians about. They are

the ones Aminu Kano was referring to and they are the ones that are making life unbearable for Nigerians today as no one is exempted from the security challenges that have engulfed the country.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, the topic of this lecture is: “**Children of the Motherist are Here...**” Ordinarily the ellipsis is a punctuation mark that shows an omission of words, or rather, it suggests that there is something left unsaid. The question then is: What is the ellipsis concealing? What are those missing words which if added would eliminate the use of the ellipsis in the topic? The unsaid words in the topic would be: “**and we are losing them**” if we care to string the whole sentence together it would read something like “Children of the motherists are here and we are losing them. It would indeed sound drab and undramatic.

Beyond the linguistic significance of the ellipsis, the unsaid words are the heart and soul of this lecture; “**and we are losing them**”. A research work is expected to be scientifically objective and empirically verifiable. Thank God I am not a scientist so I can afford to tell it as I feel it. Those unsaid words are the crux of why I deviated from presenting a lecture that would strictly address Gender related issues. But from the African worldview, the

substance of this lecture is the premise for the existence of the African woman - her children. When the children of the African woman are endangered, all her maternal instincts are awakened to the fact that she might lose them if she does not take pro-active measures to prevent such from happening. Beyond the mother losing her children, the nation as a whole would be losing the majority of its productive population.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, when Chambers Umezulike wrote “My Fathers Generation Failed my Generation” he wrote it from a place of deep pain as he observed that everything his father's generation met and benefitted from, were being wasted or destroyed without a thought for the coming generation, the ones they colloquially call “the future of the nation” and “leaders of tomorrow”. There will not be any leaders tomorrow if they are lost today. The nation is losing its children at different levels to sapa, japa and every other phenomenon in-between.

For me the scenario is segmented thus:

Scenario i the children of the political elites japa to study abroad; upon graduation, they get jobs there and settle down there, get married and raise a family abroad... we will lose them to the new lands they are migrating to;

- Scenario ii the unbearable hardship in the land propel the children of the poor masses to a life of criminality which by the way is high risk venture. Depending on the gravity of the crime, if caught, they could be jailed or killed... whichever the case, we will lose them, and
- Scenario iii some of the children of the fading middle class, some children of the political elites and some children of the downtrodden poor masses, who refuse to succumb to sapa or engage in criminality, have decided to “take back their country”. They deploy their professionalism, their wit, their intellect and their creativity to soro soke the face of an existential threat to their being. They seamlessly orchestrated the 2020 #ENDSARS protest; they are all over the social media calling out the authority on acts of injustice perpetrated against their compatriots and citizens of the country, they are demanding a better country... and for all they are doing some of them are paying the ultimate price and we are losing them

At this point it is clear that the prophecy of *Achebe*, The prophecy of Awolowo and the prophecy of Aminu Kano

Have all come to fruition. The Nigerian coconut head generation has endured as much as they can. The revolution that has been brewing in the country for years started with the Soro Soke generation and since “Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come”, the coconut heads are not relenting in this struggle until the country of their dreams is realized or until they are all killed

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, to understand and feel the pain, frustration and anger of the “the unfortunate generation that has been pushed beyond the end of things, the generation whose backs have been broken and hung over the fire”, it will take person(s) and/or government with the qualities and attributes of a Motherist to stand up for the children and the environment, to save them from obvious annihilation. Emotan fought the brave fight, Queen Idia played her part as did Tegonni and many other brave men and women created and portrayed by Nigerian playwrights to ensure social cohesion, equity and justice in the society for it to thrive.

When the world as they knew it was existentially threatened, Iyaloja in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* had a crucial conversation with Elesin Oba:

Iyaloja: But first tell me, you who were once Elesin Oba, tell me, you who know so well the cycle of the plantain. Is it the parent shoot which withers to give sap to the younger or does your wisdom see it running the other way? (70)

When Elesin Oba appeared dumbfounded, she put the question to him again bluntly this time:

Iyaloja: whose trunk withers to give sap to the other? The parent shoot or the other?

Knowing he could not remain silent any longer, Elesin Oba replied “the parent”

A response to which she exclaimed:

Ah! So you know that? There are sights in this world which say different Elesin. There are some who choose to reverse the cycle of our being. Oh you emptied bark that the world once saluted for a pith-laden being. (70).

Iyaloja in *Death and the Kings Horseman* did not stand idly by when Elesin Oba almost threw the old Yoruba kingdom into anarchy; Emotan did not stay in her stall at Ekioba unconcerned when the rights of Prince Ogun were usurped, neither did young Tegonni look the other way when the body of her slain brother lay on the ground under the sun. These women rose to the occasion and took actions which saved their communities ultimately from anarchy and doom.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, there is no doubt here that the Nigerian state has failed her children. The parents, the elders, the kings, the chiefs, the laws of the land that were established to protect and nurture children; to create for them an environment that will allow them dream dreams and have visions of a greater society; that the society would support them to achieve their greatest potentials, have all failed the children. Rather than encouraging the children to grow; rather than putting successor plans in place for the children to build on, the country has exposed its citizens to hardship, insecurity, poverty and death.

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, Every human being, family and society has challenges. How such challenges are resolved is the determinant factor to the success of the individual or group. It is inherent in human nature to want to develop

themselves and the society they belong to. Development is a key component of human evolution and sophistication. Consequently, every society aspires to and work towards a better well developed society that will ensure the safety, security, prosperity and peaceful co-existence of citizens of that society.

With regards to the development of a society, David Ogunyemi opines that: “Man's continuous inventive and creative search for a better living is the ingredient that galvanises social change. He posited that the only way development either individual or corporate can be achieved is through conscious hard-work, justice and equity. It is these principles that drive the development of a society and its people. Ogunyemi went on to give an existential definition of development as: “a process by which people become conscious of the need to come together to create a society for themselves in order to live fearlessly without experiencing hunger, misery, cruelty or coercion of any sort” (18).

Over the years Nigeria has been beset with myriads of development challenges that have prevented the nation from attaining the status of a developed and united nation. The common catchphrase of “Unity in diversity” which eulogises the pluralistic configuration of the country has

not been effectively harnessed for the growth and common good of the Nigerian people.

The inability to unite the country led to the Nigerian civil war in 1967. In its history of nationhood, the country has never been as divided as it is under the current administration. The leadership of the country has been incapable of bringing the people together to create that society where the citizens can live fearlessly without experiencing hunger or misery, or cruelty. Without these basic provisions any attempt at development will be tantamount to an effort in futility. The indices of development in Ogunbiyi's definition are glaringly lacking in Nigeria more now than at any other time in post-Civil War Nigeria.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, this period in the history of Nigeria's existence should ordinarily have been the beginning of the “golden age” of Nigeria. It is an age that should have been driven by digitally savvy millennials and Gen-Zians. The reasons for this submission are staring us in the face, glaring at us, as a matter of fact. Let us take a moment to reflect on these few examples of the exploits of some Nigerians: Ngozi Okonjo Iweala is the first Nigerian, first African and indeed the first woman ever to become the Director General of the World Trade

Organisation (2021 – to date); Tobi Amusan just recently broke many world records in international athletic tournaments to emerge the current world, Common Wealth and African Champion in the 100m hurdles (2022); Akinwumi Adesina is the first Nigerian to be president of the African Development Bank (2015 – to date); Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche is a world renown novelist celebrated globally; on the entertainment scene Nigerian musicians are blazing a trail on the global stage.

Three Nigerian musicians Burna Boy, Wizkid and Tems have won the coveted Grammy Awards; Wizkid is also the first African to perform at one of the biggest hip-hop festivals in the world just as Davido is the first African musician to have featured in the FIFA World Cup Theme Song alongside Trinidad Cardona and Qatari musical act Aisha (2022). Other Nigerian musical Acts like Teni, Tiwa Savage, Tekno, Kizz Daniel and many others are excelling on the global musical arena. From all around the world people are fascinated by Nigerian cultures as you witness foreigners learning Nigerian Afro-beat dance steps and move to the rhythm of Nigerian songs; they emulate Nigerian fashion trends; eat Nigerian cuisines; Millennials and Gen-Zians are literally breaking into industries and dominating them in intercontinental spaces.

Contributions to knowledge

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, Gender Studies is an area of universal concern to scholars and development agencies and I have come to discover over time that it cannot be wished away. It is a fundamental component to peaceful human coexistence and a well-rounded development in any society.

A society that condemns their female folks to a sub-human form of existence under whatever guise they ascribe to it is like a man that tries to run with one leg. I have discovered that countries that relegate women to the fringes of society are the least developed as is evident all around us. Cast your minds to what is happening in Afghanistan, Iran and other societies that muffle the visibility and voices of their women-folk under religious and cultural covers.

In Nigeria the implementation of the 35% affirmation action for women participation in decision making processes has become an albatross that has added to the development challenges the country is facing. The same applies to many other African countries where male supremacy holds sway to the detriment of national development.

The crux of my research over the years has been to promote first and foremost the humanity of the female gender in both private and public realms of life. This primary focus has influenced most of my works that advocate for the sanctity of the fundamental human rights of women; the necessity of a paradigm shift that will take women from the margins into the mainstream of policy making; gender equity from the lens of the complementarist parameters of african feminism which advocates that all working together in harmony are better than a one gender supremacist ideology.

In growing from the ranks of academic scholarship, publications are a critical part of the process. The substance and evidence of growth can be gleaned by the researches a scholar carries out on the journey and how they have contributed to the growth of the body of knowledge in that specific area and also how they have impacted society for the better. On that premise outlined below are some researches I have carried out over the years on the subject of gender mainstreaming, equity and balancing. They have added voice to the woman issue in Nigeria and in the intercontinental space:

Odi, Christine. “Mounting the Voice of the African Woman on the Continental Stage: Interrogating J.P. Clark's *The Wives' Revolt* and Ben Binebai's *Karena's Cross*. *LALIGENS An International Journal of Language Literature and Gender Studies*, Bahir Dar-Ethiopia. Vol. 8 (1) Serial No 17, February 2019, Pp 118-126.

This essay investigates the patriarchal structures in African societies which place women at disadvantageous and voiceless positions which lead to the quest for the recognition of the female voice. The paper x-rays J. P. Clark's *The Wives' Revolt* and Ben Binebai' *Karena's Cross* to mount the voice of the African woman in the public space. The paper concludes that for women to enshrine their voices in the public space and have their humanity recognized and respected, more effort needs to be added in the quest to break away from their disadvantaged positions

Odi, Christine. “Women Empowerment in Nigerian Drama: A Contextual Study of Irene salami-Agunloye's Heroines” *LALIGENS An International Journal of Language Literature and Gender Studies*, Bahir Dar-Ethiopia. Vol. 7 (1) Serial No 15, February 2018, Pp 13-23

This essay against the backdrop of prevailing issues of

female subjugation, subordination, marginalisation and oppression in the Nigerian society, investigates the dramatic works of Irene Salami-Agunloye as she uses her Art form to positively over-haul the image of her female characters. The essay discusses some of the issues thrown up in contemporary feminist conversations which bring to the fore questions of distinctions between western brands of feminisim as opposed to the complementarist and sometimes accomodationist brands of African feminism. The essay espouses how Salami-Agunloye through her works celebrate women's strengths, valour and capacity to excel when they are given the space, respect and recognition that will spur them to positive actions in their societies. The essay concludes with the position that Salami-Agunloye's powering of her female characters is a clarion call to women all over the world to arise and renegotiate their place and reclaim their space in society.

Odi, Christine. “Humanism of the African Womanist: A Critical Appraisal of Femi Osofisan's Tegonni: An African Ategonne” *International Journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH)* Vol & (1), S/N24, January, 2018, pp 62-70.

The evolution of global societies in this age is taking alarmingly negative turns that seem to be catapulting the

world into inevitable self destruction. The incessant violence, terror, horror, disease and deprivation that have enveloped most societies in the world bear testimony to that. Within the Cultural context of the Nigerian worldview human life used to be greatly valued above all else. In contemporary times, human life is fast becoming worthless and cultural values meaningless. Against this bleak global reality, this essay attempts to examine Femi Osofisan's portraiture of Tegoni and the humanist ideals that he imbues her with. The essay investigates the motivational force behind the actions she takes, the consequences of her actions in the throes of the cultural clash prevalent in her society at the time, and her inordinately firm resolve to take full responsibility for her decisions and actions in the face of certain death. The essay's conclusions reveal that the true Nigerian Womanist as exemplified by Tegoni and a host of other Womanist heroines, will against all odds, strive to nurture and preserve human life and accord it, at all times, the respect, esteem and dignity it deserves in a world where the worth of the human life has become inconsequential

Odi, Christine. "Drama and Social Protest: A Gendered Appraisal of Development Issues in Select Play Texts. *Haitian Research Journal on Development Studies*. A Publication of the International Centre for

Negro Studies and Development, Universidade Federal De Santa Maria, Brazil, Vol. 14, No 1, Feb. 2016, pp 228-237.

This essay discusses the use of drama by women in the Nigerian society to call the attention of relevant authorities to the plight of the generality of the masses of the society and to call on such authorities to address their developmental challenges. In adopting the medium of organised social protest as their empowering tool, the essay explores Effiong Johnson's *Not Without Bones* (2000), Irene Salami's *More Than Dancing* (2003), J. P. Clark's *The Wives' Revolt* (2003) and Barclays Ayakoroma's *Dance on His Grave* (2010 edition). In the four plays, the women are seen mobilising themselves and embarking on mass social protests that had far reaching consequences on the women, their families and their societies. Findings of the essay revealed that when women rise above their petty bickerings and organise themselves they could achieve the goals they set for them as was evidenced by the victories of the women in the plays in spite of some collateral damages they incurred in the struggle.

Odi, Christine. “Nollywood Mothering: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of the Concept of Motherhood in Select Nigerian Films” *An International Journal of Arts and Humanities* (IAH). A publication of the International Association of African Researchers and Reviewers, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia, Vol. 5 (1), S/No 16, Jan. 2016, pp 194-208

This essay critically analyses the concept of motherhood as portrayed by the Nollywood Movie Industry. The essay discusses the advent, trends and giant strides made by the movie industry in the Nigerian entertainment scene. After the introductory discourse of the genre, the essay using five select films: *Enslaved* (2005), *Soul of a Maiden* (2008), *Christ in Me* (2002), *Definition of Love* (2009) and *Strength to Strength* (2009), delved into the discourse of the African concept of motherhood from the 'motherist' perspective, drawing from the theories of feminists like Nancy Chadow's extreme western feminist views, to the gender complementarist theories of African feminists like Catherine Obianuju Acholonu. Given that background, the essay then went on to discuss the filmic representation of the concept of motherhood from the socio-cultural construct of the Nigerian society. The essay revealed that while the themes of motherhood has been given much attention in Nollywood film productions, it poignantly captures the socio-cultural strangulations of mothers in a

patriarchal society, and concludes that before Nollywood's portrayal of motherhood can be positive, the society must first have a complete over-haul in their perception and treatment of women by giving them the respect, dignity and space that are their fundamental human rights.

Odi, Christine. “Pushing the Womanist Agenda to the Frontiers: A Cultural Backflip in Nollywood Films” *Repositioning Nollywood for the Promotion of Nigeria's Cultural Diplomacy and National Security*. Proceedings of the 28th Annual International Conference of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA), from 3rd – 6th August 2015 at the Shehu Musa Yar'Adua Centre, Abuja. Pp 575-583.

This essay examines womanist issues x-rayed in a paradoxical manner in a specific Nollywood film that turns culture on its head. In a patriarchal society that has clear divisions of labour according to gender lines, the essay uses the Nollywood film *Family Man* to poignantly essay the struggles of a mother singlehandedly raising her three daughters. The cultural paradox is not in a widowed mother raising her children but in the eldest of four orphaned children being raised by the eldest sibling, a male child. Jekwu, the eldest sibling is portrayed in the character mould of a loving but stern “mother” who would do all in “her” power to ensure the good upbringing of

“her” children. Using the film *Family Man* directed by Anyaji Theodore, Mike Ezuruonye plays the part of Jekwu, the oldest of four orphaned children whose lot it became to care for his three younger sisters. *Family Man* portrays women positively and will contribute greatly to changing the mindset of people in making them realise that indeed women can contribute meaningfully to the development of their societies if they are given the opportunity.

Odi, Christine. “Drama and the Niger Delta Struggle: A Study of Select Nigerian Plays” *Niger Delta Research Digest* (NDRD) *Journal of the Centre for Niger Delta Studies, Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State*, Vol.8, No 2, December 2014, pp 99-115.

This essay from a literary perspective, examines the dramatic enactments of the origins and progression of the rise of militancy in the region, the struggle for resource control, self-determination and liberation of the people from oppressive forces. The essay focussed on dramatists representations of the struggle in the in the following plays: Esiaba Irobi's *Hangmen Also Die* (1989), Ahmed Yerima's *Hard Ground* (2005) and Uwemidimo Atakpo's *Watering the Hard Ground* (2008). The essay gave a brief history of the Niger Delta Struggle which can be traced back to the 17th and 18th centuries when trading in human

cargo was a trans-Atlantic economic enterprise. The struggles continued up to the present where it has crystalised into the struggle for resource control and self determination. The essay locates *Hangmen Also Dies* as the dramatic take-off point of the contemporary Niger Delta Struggle, *Hard Ground* to represent that period in the struggle where the activities of the fighters were at its peak when neither the agitators nor the opposing federal forces were willing to shift ground. And the last play, *Watering the Hard Ground* representing the Amnesty and post-Amnesty era when peace was brokered and an uneasy truce was reached. Even at the end of the essay a myriad of questions are still being asked because it is only a foolhardy character that will believe that the Niger Delta struggle has been rested.

Odi, Christine. “NUC BMAS in Theatre Arts Curriculum: The Ideal, the Reality, The Way Forward” *Quality Assurance: Theatre, Media and the Creative Enterprises*. Proceedings of the 26th Annual Convention and International Conference of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA), August 2013 at the Benue State University, Makurdi, Nigeria, pp. 278-284.

University education is one of the major instruments or mechanisms that propel socio-economic development and

advancement of the society. For such an important social institution there has to be constituted organs that will ensure the effective and smooth running of universities. The Nigerian Universities Commission NUC is the organ mandated by law to oversee activities of all universities existing in Nigeria against the above backdrop this essay examines the Curriculum of Theatre Arts Programmes in Nigerian Universities as provided for in the NUC Benchmark Minimum Academic Standard.

The essay in its findings revealed that while the NUC BMAS provision for the Theatre Arts curriculum is the barest decently acceptable standard, many Nigerian universities still cannot meet it, hence most institutions offering the programme resort to alternative measures to secure Accreditation for the programmes, strategy which in the long run, affect the intellectual output of the graduates.

In the face of this Nigerian reality of a bastardised university system, the essay concludes by recommending that: government should adequately fund universities; respect universities' autonomy; provide adequate infrastructural facilities; maintain and expand existing facilities to accommodate increasing population and most importantly, the essay advocates that children of Nigerian

public office holders should be statutorily compelled to attend public Nigerian schools to ensure and assure the quality of public universities.

Odi, Christine. “Concept of Witchcraft in African Drama and Negative Female Stereotyping in Select Nigerian Plays.” *Wilberforce Island Review*. A Publication of the Faculty of Arts, Niger Delta University, Bayelsa State. Vol. 11, 2013, pp 71-82.

This essay is an exploration of the concept of witchcraft as it is appropriated by Playwrights in their dramatic creations. The thrust of the essay is the portrayal of female characters as witches in African drama. To further its purpose, the essay thematically examines J.P. Clarks *The Wives Revolt*, Irene Salami's *Emotan*, and Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods*. The Essay gives key definitions of Witchcraft and Negative Female Stereotyping as oppressive instruments used to perpetually subjugate the women folk in patriarchal society. The essay reveals that while such negative attitudes towards women in society still persists, the trends in discourses on Gender issues are changing as more and more and more pro-feminist writers of both sexes are through their works, lending their voices in the move towards a more balanced egalitarian society.

Odi, Christine. “Portrayal of Women in Writings of New Generation Niger Delta Dramatists” *Performative Inter-Actions in African Theatre 3: Making Space, Rethinking Drama and Theatre in Africa*. (Eds.) Kene Igweonu and Osita Okagbue. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013, pp 131-143.

Portrayal of Women in the Writings of New Generation Delta Dramatists looks at the women issue from within the context of dramatic works of Niger Delta Playwrights with emphasis on the new voices rising out of the region. To set the pace, the essay gave a brief into the make-up of the region, the Niger Delta woman in her society in relation to her environment and male counterparts.

To lay the foundation for the core discourse of the essay, “womanism”, the African alternative to western feminism is given some attention after which the essay x-rays the Niger Delta woman's struggles for recognition in her society. The essay then went on to discuss some prominent Niger Delta dramatists, culminating in the introduction of the new voices in Niger Delta Drama. Before analysing the female characters in the select Play texts, the essay gave brief synopses of the texts. the texts analysed, include: Akpos Adesi's *Ebidein-Ere* (2008), Uwemidimo Atakpo's *Ken Saro wiwa-N- the Niger Delta Trial* (2006), Barclays Ayakoroma's *Dance on His Grave* (2005), Ben binebai's

Beyond Nightmare (2007), and Bassy Ubong's *Zero Sum Game* (2006).

The essay revealed that majority of the new voices still cling tenaciously to traditional patriarchal subordination of the women folk of their societies. This, the essay adduced arises from the fact there are still more men within the region who are writing on behalf of and for the women, hence they consciously or unconsciously exhibit the age long patriarchal tendencies of males towards women not only in the Niger Delta region but in most parts of the African continent. In conclusion, new generation Niger Delta playwrights are encouraged to look beyond the myopic lens of patriarchy to realise that the only way to a truly egalitarian society is when everyone can freely aspire to be the best they can, without prejudice to sex.

Odi, Christine. “Gender and Power Relations in Nigerian Drama: A Study of Irene salami's *Emotan* and Akinwumi Ishola's *Madam Tinubu*” *Anyigba Journal of Theatre, Film and Communication Arts. A Journal of the Department of Theatre Arts, Kogi State University, Anyigba*. 2012, pp 79-92

This essay attempts a juxtaposition of how male and female dramatists present female characters in their dramatic works. It goes further, using Irene Salami's

Emotan and Akinwumi Ishola's *Madam Tinubu* to critically analyse how each gender powers their female characters vis-a-vis their roles in society. Using the model of 'power-from-within' which stems from self-acceptance, and self-respect, the essay Salami empowers *Emotan* the eponymous heroine of the play to mobilise and achieve her set goal of enthroning Prince Ogun as the Oba of Benin. Ishola's *Madam Tinubu* on the other hand is empowered with the 'power-over' model which portrays *Madam Tinubu* as a woman as strong and tough as or even stronger than most men as is evidenced in Oba Dosumu's shadowlike frail mien as opposed to *Tinubu's* aggressively assertive character in achieving her desired goals.

The essay reveals that because men and women are biologically, physiologically and psychologically wired differently, their presentation of female heroines are determined by their natures. In conclusion, the essay submits that both male and female dramatists in their writings should create a balanced realistic portraiture of their female heroines to make such characters credible and believable.

Odi, Christine. "Wedlock of Nightmares: Narrating Motherhood in Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and Binebai's *Beyond Nightmare*." *Journal of the Literary*

Society of Nigeria (JLSN). Issue 4, June 2012, pp 42-53.

Wedlock of Nightmare: Narrating Motherhood in Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and Ben Binebai's *Beyond Nightmare* is a critical thematic analysis of the concept of motherhood in the Nigerian setting. Interrogating these two plays, the essay examines how these two writers, given their generational gap, interrogate the concept of motherhood. To achieve its purpose, the essay links various feminist ideologies revolving round the concept of motherhood, introductory to an extensive reading of Catherine Obianuju Acholonu's construct of "Motherism" an alternative to western feminism which more and more African feminist writers are keying into, in their contributions to discourses on the woman issue. With Acholonu's Motherism as the basis of comparison, the essay analyses the theme of motherhood in both plays. The essay reveals that the contemporary African construct of motherhood is one that imbues men, women, young and old with the sterling capacities to be loving, peace-makers, home builders, community and environmental developers. The essay submits in conclusion that, while there are bad mothers in society as represented by some mothers in the two plays, the Nigerian mother will do all in her power to provide for, protect, nurture and safe-guard her children whatever the circumstance they find themselves and their families in.

Binebai, Ben and Christine Odi “Gender War in African Drama: Silencing Voices from the Margin in Barclays Ayakoroma's *Dance on His Grave*” *The Crab Journal of Theatre and Media Studies*. No 5/June 2009, pp 79-88.

This essay examines feminism in African drama particularly the question of gender war in Nigerian drama. It also probes the deployment of patriarchy by most dramatists to silence women's voices in society. With the study of *Dance on His Grave*, which advocates the perpetual subjugation of the female folk, the essay reveals that the dramatist in the play succinctly depicts how women are compellingly circumvented from participation in issues that matter in society and which affects them directly. There essay concludes that there is urgent need for post colonial African dramatists to construct plays with aesthetic values that will redefine and reconsider the functions of women in society with a view to instituting gender balance.

Odi, Christine. “Theatre and Economic Empowerment of Rural Women in Bayelsa State: The Adagbabiri Experiment.” *The Creative Artist*. A Journal of Theatre and Media Studies. Department of Theatre Arts Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Vol. 3 No. 1, March 2009 Pp. 145-160.

This essay highlights the plight of rural women in Bayelsa State, the developmental challenges they face daily and the factors militating against their development. The essay discusses the viability of the medium of theatre as an instrument of development communication. Using the experiment of a TfD workshop that was carried out in Adagbabiri community in Bayelsa State, the step by step process of executing a TfD Workshop was discussed. On the spot assessment of the impact of the workshop on the women participant and the community revealed that TfD's interpersonal interactive nature encouraged full participation of audience and participants in the process. The follow-up activities which spanned over 12 months as highlighted in the essay it was discovered that the core participants of the experiment in addition to other collective successes, had over time formed a cooperative society which they had registered with the state government, and membership of the society also grew. The essay concludes that the horizontal interpersonal and interactive problem solving approach can realistically engender economic and social change in grassroots communities as was the case with the Adagbabiri community in Bayelsa State.

Recommendations

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, the Motherists is that person who cares for the wellbeing of the people and the environment; it is an attribute that can be ascribed to a woman, a man, or even the state in this case. The state is made up of the people in the society. It is the people that form the government. Consequently when the people who are keepers of the homes and holders of public offices have the altruistic attributes of the motherist, the family and the larger Nigerian society would have succeeded in transiting from just a country to a healthy nation where the quality and standard of living is high and at the same time affordable to all irrespective of class.

Being a motherist is being human. It is putting humanity first. It is giving equal attention to the boy-child as well as the girl-child. It is giving equal opportunity to both men and women in all spheres of human engagements. It is to know that both gender depend on each other to thrive in a society that will be healthy because each person is given their fundamental human rights and the respect they deserve because they each person is first human before they are either male or female.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, this is the golden opportunity for Nigeria to be the hub of scientific and technological

advancement; entertainment and tourism development. But the reverse is the reality. Every single Nigerian excelling in the global space does it in their personal capacity and not as a representative of the country. The way forward therefore would be to re-position Nigeria on a trajectory of development within the African cultural context in a digital cyber age. Nigerians need to adorn the garment of Motherism starting from the nucleus of every society, the family. A society is as healthy as its families. every family has the responsibility to:

- I. ensure a clean, healthy, emotionally stable happy home, environment and neighbour-hood for children to grow up in, with the confidence of their safety and well being;
- ii inculcate positive cultural values that will entrench morally and socially acceptable character traits and behaviours in the children from infancy; adults should learn to teach by example;
- iii As the first responsibility of the state is national security, the state has the responsibility of securing the lives and property of its citizens from internal and external aggression. Once that is done, it creates room for peaceful coexistence of all citizens' the state also has the responsibility of providing adequate functional social amenities, and the job of management of state economy, a task

- that should be done effectively and responsibly.
- iv the implementation of free and compulsory primary and secondary education policy should be obeyed strictly; at the point where the children have to acquire formal education, they should be put in well run schools, public or private, where proprietors and staff understand that they are responsible for the molding of young minds outside their home environment, and they necessarily have to impart sound and current knowledge in their pupils and students at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education; life skills should form part of school curriculum to better position children for responsible adulthood;
 - v to stabilize the education system, it is imperative that families of government officials should be prohibited from medical and academic tourism outside the country. The implementation of such a policy will ensure appropriate funding, maintenance of facilities and appointment of qualified staff into schools;
 - vi to foster unity among citizens, the state has to abrogate ethnicity and tribalism among citizens and work towards adopting national identity rather than ethnic nationality;
 - vii school curriculum should re-introduce the teaching

- of Moral Instructions and History in primary and secondary schools across the nation
- viii infrastructural development and provision of adequate social amenities should be vigorously pursued.

Conclusion

Mr. Vice Chancellor Sir, everything that can go wrong in Nigeria has already gone wrong. Territorial integrity of the country has been dangerously compromised. Citizens are living in fear in most parts of the country. Infrastructural facilities and social amenities have been left to decay; the economy has collapsed and the nation is on the verge of attaining the status of a failed state. The entire citizenry is feeling the weight of the shambolic state of the country. The demography most impacted by the present crises in the country is the youth population. For a generation that is not given to the virtue of patience, they are reacting to the stimuli emitted by the society.

From the broad categorisation of the Nigerian youth population, they are reacting differently to the current crises situation in the country. The hardship in the land has re-invented the sapa and japa phenomena with a rippling effect of increased criminality in the land and mass exodus of people, not just the youth but also skilled professionals

in their prime in search of greener pastures outside the shores of Nigeria.. This is as a result of the real and present fear that the country is on the precipice of an implosion. It is these very trying times that has thrown up a rare breed of Nigerian youth who have set out on a mission to save their country from the precipice on which it is tottering.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, the conundrum that this lecture set out to unravel is: now that the children of the motherists are here how do we as motherists (each and every one of us who cares for the Nigerian youth) ensure we do not lose them to a life of criminality; to foreign countries and to the cold hands of death when they have decided to stand up to take back their country from their father's generation who they believe have failed them.

To reverse a dangerous situation, Nigerians, men, women and government functionaries have to become Motherists out of necessity if not by inclination. We need to come together as a matter of urgency, begin to plan and implement policies that will secure the lives and property of all citizens; provide adequate functional infrastructures and social amenities; create conducive environment for job opportunities and job creations for the teeming Millennial and Generation Z population to thrive in their country so they can actualize the lofty dreams they have of developing their country.

The situation in Nigeria is doubly challenging for the Nigerian woman because it has gone beyond the realm of gender power relations in society to an existential one of securing the lives and wellbeing of our children which include both the boy-child and the girl-child. Not ensuring their protection and well-being will amount to the possibility of losing them. I have used select play texts to reflect the Nigerian condition which the youth have found themselves. The hopelessness which has pushed many to a life of criminality as portrayed by the seven youth in Esiaba Irobi's *Hangem also Die*. The sapa that has led to the jopa of many Nigerians and yet those who rather than succumb to a life of criminality or leave the country, have taken a stand like Chidi in *Destined to be*, Sanda in the *Restless Run of Locusts* and Olunde in *Death and the King's Horseman* to stay in the country and rescue it from destruction.

We also see the motherist roles Emotan, Tegonni and Iyaloja played to prevent calamity from befalling their communities. To save their people, Olunde, Emotan and Tegonni paid the supreme sacrifice as would any African mother to protect her children and society.

The youth movement in Nigeria is unfolding, the growth or otherwise of the Nigerian state is also unfolding. Will the Soro Soke generation take back their country from the

corrupt spendthrift generation of their fathers or will the crises raging in the country consume its citizens? Only time can tell.

A good place to end this lecture would have been to remind us of the injunction in Proverbs 22:6 which admonishes us to: “train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it” I implore us to ponder on that scripture and as we do that let the words of Pope Francis as he sued for peace in Juba, capital city of South Sudan resonate in our consciousness:

Women are the keys to transforming the country. If they receive the Proper opportunities through their industriousness and their natural gift of Protecting lives they will have the ability to change the face of South Sudan to give it a peaceful and cohesive development. I ask you, I ask all The people of this land to ensure that women are protected, respected, Valued and honoured. Please protect, respect, appreciate, and honour Ewoman, every girl, young woman, mother, and grandmother otherwise, There will be no future” (Arise World News Sunday Feb 5, 2023)

Acknowledgments

For this day to be a reality is on account of so many people divinely and strategically positioned to make it happen by God. Therefore it will be an unforgivable remission on my part if I do not appreciate them even though I know that whatever I say will be grossly inadequate to express my appreciation.

I am grateful to God Almighty, my creator, who, from before I was born knew me and knew His purpose for my life. I am also grateful to my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Adobuyoukeme Martins Odi of blessed memories, who brought me forth, and my aunt Mrs Esountonghan Aduo who continued the job of raising my siblings and I. Thank you Chris, Owele, Tolums, Yeilayefa and Bobra for being there. Thank you Emy my ogbonge wife, you have all been great.

I cannot but be grateful to my Lecturers who nurtured me and stoked flames of my burning quest for knowledge – Prof H. L Bell-Gam my undergraduate Head of Department, Prof. Benjamin Ejiofor my undergraduate Project Supervisor, Prof. John Yesiebo, I am eternally grateful to Prof. Dapo Adelugba who was Lecturer, Mentor, father and champion all rolled into one- I miss you Baba. I am grateful to Dr. Sunbo Marinho who would

correct me even as he laughs affectionately at me for my incorrigible blunders- I miss you Goddaddy of my son. I am grateful to Dr. Femi Femi Fatoba, my Lecturer who bailed me, my pregnancy, and my new refrigerator from the hands of Bodija Police Station officers - I will never forget the drama at the Police Station that year.

Oga mi, you have always been there. You are one of those strategically positioned by God to lift me up. While on Sabbatical in University of Port Harcourt, you taught me Sociology of Drama. I knew from then that you are not to be joked with when you refused to collect my Term Paper because I submitted it late. I struggled and narrowly passed your course with an E grade. With that singular act you jolted me out of my academic comfort zone. I got to the University of Ibadan and there you became the Potter to my academic clay. You were both my Masters' and Ph.D Thesis Supervisor. For six solid years, I was under your tutelage as you guided me through both Programmes. Prof. Olanrele Bamidele, I believed I was one of your dullest postgraduate students when I had the likes of Inegbe, Asigbo, Akoh and Adeoye to contend with. But, Oga mi, you did not give up on me, therefore I lost the right to give up on myself. Thank you, Oga mi.

In this thirty odd years academic journey, amazing friends

have also been strategically positioned to encourage, support, inspire and motivate me the many times I would have caved in. Anthonia Ezeanya nee Ezeadum, you doubled as sister and friend. You led me to God even when I was not interested. I remember Ada, when I came back after two months into final year second Semester because of financial constraints, you left everything and travelled to Lagos to request categorically that your brothers give you money because I did not have any to survive on. You shared everything your brothers gave you between the two of us and that was how I managed to graduate. The memories are many. I cannot recount them here but I will never forget, you are my rock solid best friend, thank you.

I miss you Kester Jaja and Biodun Adedeji, you guys should have been here today. We all embarked on the journey but you got called back to the heavenly realm. Sleep on my good friends. I am grateful to all my U90 Classy Mates, you guys are the best.

I will not be standing here today if not for the following friends, academic advisers and mentors- the L.O.Boys - Prof. Akoh, Ameh Dennis, Prof Alex Asogbo, Prof Abiodun Adeoye and Prof. Steve Inegbe – you were always there for me, offering good and wise counsel, pushing me, reading me and making sure I get published

because you simply would not allow me to perish, because to not publish, is to perish. So, if you did not give up on me, what moral justification would I have to give up on myself? Prof Gowon Ama Doki, my SONTA President, you came in a bit later but when you did, you never left again. Between you, Akoh and Alex you ensured that I stayed the course. Biodun, I remember the countless times you would call to say bring a paper for The Performer. I would give one reason or the other - not because I was too lazy to write, I am not published in The Performer because UNILORIN was at the core of the ASUU struggle at that time and as the unrepentant “Margaret Thatcher” of ASUU-NDU, I could not go against the principles of my Union. Forgive me. Thank you my friends I am humbled by the privilege of knowing you.

There is a group of Academics I have deliberately not mentioned till now, those that have been behind my eyes who have been my inspiration in as many years as I can remember: the soft spoken beautiful Prof. Irene Isoken Agunloye - my Ph.D External Examiner who in addition to examining my Thesis ended up defending me to the Internal-External Examiner. It seems like many years ago, but I remember vividly. Thank you ma. Prof. Mabel Evwierhoma, from the moment I veered into Gender Studies, your *Female Empowerment and Dramatic*

Creativity in Nigeria (2002) has been my constant companion. Even now it still is. Thank you ma. Prof. Julie Umukoro, Prof Julie Okoh, Prof. Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh, I was inspired by you all, I still am. I am grateful for your positive influence on me.

I am grateful to all the female Niger Delta University Professors. I always look up to you- Prof. Osa Tawari, Prof Comfort Zuofa, Prof Biodun Adeyemo, Prof Oyanye Kunle-Olowu, Prof. Agness Maliki, Prof Daisy Dimkpa, Prof. Izibeloko Jack-Ide, Prof. Blessing Igwesi, Prof. Comfort Mbachu, Prof. Nnena Benwari, thank you for showing us the way.

I am grateful to the Vice Chancellor, Prof. Samuel Edoumiekumo, our digital VC, the Chairman of the Committee of Vice Chancellors of all Nigerian Universities, the head of all Principalities and Powers in NDU, thank you sir for the support, privilege and opportunities. I am also grateful to the Deputy Vice Chancellor Administration Prof. Allen Agih the perfect gentleman of NDU, the Registrar, Mr. Benjamin Joffa, the University Librarian Dr. Bio Fyneman, the Bursar Mr. Boloumbele Yalah, my good neighbor Dr. Seth Tueridei and the University Management Committee for being great friends, colleagues and for creating an enabling

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I am grateful to Profs. S.N.A. Agoro, Ben Binebai, Kenneth Eni, Dr. Sunday Abraye, Dr. Kansese and Dr. Tam Azorbo for their contributions during this journey. My story cannot be told without you, thank you sirs.

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NDU 52ND INAUGURAL LECTURER



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Biodata of Professor Christine Oyaibugha Odi

Christine Oyaibugha Odi is an indigene of Isampou in Ekeremor Local Government Area of Bayelsa State and Kpakama in Bomadi Local Government Area of Delta State. She was born in Ajegunle, Lagos State to the family Mr Martins Adobuyokeme, Odi and Mrs Poun-ere Rosemary Odi. In her early years she discovered that education was not only an arsenal of knowledge generation but also an agency of transformation of human dreams. She attended Anglican Primary School, Marine Beach, Apapa, Lagos. She attended Muslim Teachers' Training College, Ikotun, Lagos. Christine Odi' sun-chained educational and academic craving further propelled her to obtain a university education. She attended University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, for B.A.(Theatre Arts) 1990-to-1995 and proceeded to the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, for her M.A. (Theatre Arts) 1999-to-2000 and Ph.D (Theatre Arts) 2002-to-2008.

Christine Odi started her working life from the Nigerian Ports Authority, Port Harcourt where she was posted for her compulsory National Youth Service from 1995-to-1996. While still serving, she was offered an appointment with the Rivers State Council for Arts and Culture, Port Harcourt in August 1996. In October of that same year Bayelsa State was created and staff of the Council with

Bayelsan ancestry, were laterally transferred to the new state's Council for Arts and Culture Yenagoa from 1996-to-2002. In 2002 she was employed as a career academic staff as an **Assistant Lecturer** in Niger Delta University as a foundation staff of the Department of Theatre Arts. Three years after, she was promoted to the rank of lecturer 11 in 2006. Between 2007 and 2019 Christine Odi advanced inch by inch all the way through the ranks of Lecturer 1, Senior Lecturer, and Associate Professor to a substantive Professor of Theatre and Gender Studies, Niger Delta University.

Christine Oyaibugha Odi has numerous publications in local, national and international journals and creative works to her credit. She has taught and still teaches several courses in the department of Theatre Arts both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Some of these are Theatre History, Community Theatre, Research Methods, Theatre and Tourism Studies, Costume and Make-Up Arts, Theatre and Gender studies. She has researched extensively in Community Theatre/Theatre-for-Development, Dramatic Literature, Drama, Theatre and Gender Studies and Cultural Studies. Christine Odi has also attended numerous national and international conferences within and outside the country.

She is **Chairman: A&GRC, March 8, 2021, Chairman: SSDC March 8, 2021, Chairman: PUTME Committee, March 8, 2021** University Governing Council (Ex-Officio) **March 8, 2021 Director:** Academic and Strategic Planning Unit 2019-to-2021, **Member:** University Governing Council, 2019-to-2021 (Senate Representative to Council) **Member:** University Appointments and Promotions Committee (Congregational Representative: Academic) 2017-to-2019, **Member:** Central TETFund Manuscript Editorial Board, 2017-to Date, **Member:** University Calendar Review Committee, 2017-to-Date, **Member:** College of Education Affiliation Committee 2017-to-Date **Ag. Director:** Academic and Strategic Planning Unit, 2016-to-2019, **Member:** University Management Committee 2016-to-Date, **Member:** University Accreditation Committee, 2016-to-Date, **Deputy Director:** Academic and Strategic Planning Unit 2016, **Member:** University Appointments and Promotions Committee, **Ag. Head:** Department of Theatre Arts, Faculty of Arts 2014-to-2016, **Coordinator:** Theatre Arts Unit, Department of Fine, Industrial, and Theatre Arts, Faculty of Arts. 2012-to-2014, **Chairperson:** Students' Disciplinary Committee, Department of Theatre Arts, 2014-to-2016, **Faculty Time Table Officer:** University Time Table Committee 2010-to-2016, **Time-Table Officer:**

Department of Theatre Arts 2006-to-2014, **Academic Adviser:** 300 Level Students, Department of Theatre Arts 2006-to-2014, **Registration Officer:** 300 Level Students, Department of Theatre Arts 2006-to-2014. This eminent daughter of Ijaw is a committed member of several Associations and professional bodies, including: Society of Nigerian Theatre Artistes, Nigerian Institute of Public Relations, Association of Nigerian Authors African Theatre Association and Literary Society of Nigeria.

Ladies and Gentlemen, On behalf of my Vice- Chancellor, Professor Samuel Gowon Edoumiekumo, the African Educationist Award winner, the Chairman of the Committee of Vice Chancellors in the Largest African Country, South of the Sahara, the digital and tech-centric Vice- Chancellor, I present to you, a young woman, a scholar of substance who dares to be powerful, who gained strength to service her vision as a university scholar and administrator. A woman who has strength for the legendary journey and who became strong in the journey. A woman whose vision of survival creates legacy that inspires and lights up the dream of others. A scholar whom history favours as not only one of the first generation Theatre Arts professors of Ijaw stock in Nigeria but unarguable the first female professor of Theatre Arts in Ijaw nation in Nigeria. A passionate

Mother, a woman who takes command from the inclination of her nature, who drives purpose to prevail, an exponent of genderism, the university accreditation maharishi, a woman who is also flying in the wings and winds of history as first female scholar to climb to the administrative rank of a Deputy Vice- Chancellor in our own Niger Delta University. The Niger Delta University 51st Inaugural Lecturer, Professor Christine Oyaibugha Odi.

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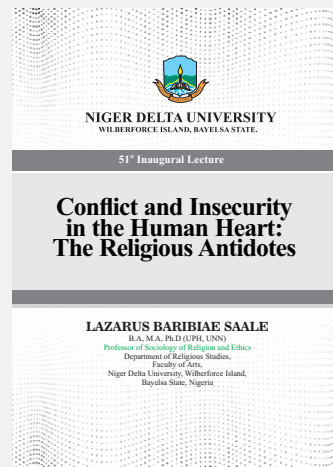
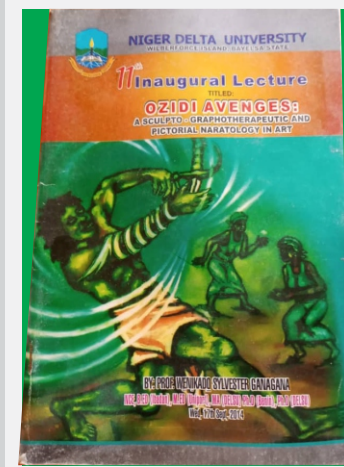
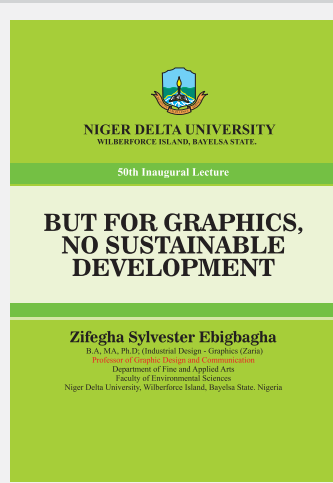
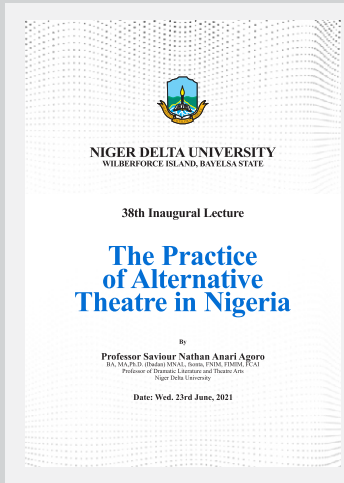
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