

International Journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH)  
Ethiopia

Vol. 8 (2), S/No 29, APRIL, 2019: 60-70

ISSN: 2225-8590 (Print) ISSN 2227-5452 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/ijah.v8i2.7>

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**Widowhood Levirate Rites and The Politics of Choice in Julie Okoh's  
*Our Wife Forever***

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**Abstract**

The problem in the relationship between man and woman as free beings, has been that of understanding the place of other, the desirability of being in objective terms, and the value of reconciling gender differences in the politics of necessary interaction. Further to the above thrust in Simone de Beauvoir's *The second sex*, this paper also indulges the radical theoretical position in Barbara Johnson's "Nothing fails like success" which anchors thought on the function of the disruption in the interpretation of the identity of the sexes, especially as this inclination avails a complementary theoretical threshold to Beauvoir's aforementioned approach. Based on the foregoing framework, this paper has analytically examined the intricate contradictions inherent in the practice of levirate system among the Etsako people of Nigeria, re-enacted in Julie Okoh's *Our Wife Forever*, exposing the fact that blinded by tradition, the people of this community derive values from their cultural mindset which regards human right in relation to patriarchal order, at the expense of the female gender. Regarding such a cultural backdrop, this paper revealed that failure to reciprocate the recognition of gender differences between the sexes is a function of contending contradictions; the failure on the part of people to experience their ignorance concerning the otherness of the sexes, by their individual actions, explain the lack of consciousness to recognize the need for the complementarity of the sexes based, on the failure to apprehend the differences of the sexes as aspects of identical classification.

**Key Words:** Patriarchy, feminism, levirate rites, contradictions, otherness, marginal characterization

### Introduction

Feminism is one of those postmodern ideological positions in the deconstructive agenda. It re-evaluates the identity roles of the female cornered by patriarchal traditions in society, raising questions about gender inequalities in racial, ethnic, class and sexual configurations (Jane Flax, 1990, 42, 43). In the mold of Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin's (1792) revolutionary outcry in *A vindication of the rights of women*, the aggression of the women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York (1848), Elizabeth Candy Stanton's (1895) *The woman's Bible*, the ideologically piercing arguments in Simone de Beauvoir's (1949), *The Second Sex*, the cumulative receptions of feminist consciousness in Europe and the United States, all add up to the sustained controversial pursuit of female self-determination in the society, the influence of which has obviously possessed global scholarship in several directions, driven by sex and gender. The emphasis on sex and gender assumes topicality in the prevailing patriarchal subjugation of women, giving rise to feminism as a minority discourse. In line with this growing restive positions, Margaret Matlin (2004,3) has observed that sex and gender are crucial to the psychology of women. What we have is a gender minority heritage of self-determination revivals in social history, rising against the Kantian philosophy of enlightenment which in the words of Flax, (1990, p. 42) 'did not intend to include women within the population of those capable of attaining freedom from traditional forms of authority'.

In a related vein, African traditional societies have for generations been subject to patriarchy (Evwierhoma 2002, 3). Within this historical backdrop, African women like Queen Amina of Zaria, Moremi of Ile-Ife, Emotan of Benin, Mme Kathilili of Kenya, Yaa Asantewa of Ghana and Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti among many others, have reacted, to several extents outside the box of patriarchy when; faced with the challenge each time of driving the vision of 'female emancipation'. It can be argued that the exploits of these women in African history stand to be compared with those of Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Candy Stanton and Simone de Beauvoir, to mention but few. Furthermore, suffice it to mention that such activities covered by Women in Nigeria (WIN) which has been described by Nnolim (2010, 113) as, the 'adventitious daughter of the National Organization for Women in the US (NOW)', can be regarded as a dividend of global influences and trends in women emancipation struggles.

As far as this study is concerned, Julie Okoh's (2010) *Our wife forever* may be described as a feminist campaign in dramatic form. Such an inference comes to the fore when one contemplates the gender differences, inequalities and oppositions constituting the dramatic in the play. Thus, the postulations of the playwright in *Our wife forever*, hardly come as a surprise. Julie Okoh's creative poise seeks a vindication of Evwierhoma's (2002, 2) theoretical prescription that 'the female dramatist is a member of society, then has the choice of portraying her women to suit her authorial goals. She has also the prerogative of making her woman to conform to the active radical groups'. The topicality of Julie Okoh's *Our wife forever* in contemporary Nigerian drama assumes emphasis particularly because, it is a very radical follow-up to Felicia Onyewadume's (2001, 135) *Clutches of widowhood* where, the widow Lilian protests to Isichei (her brother-in-law) thus: 'And you don't see anything wrong in the practice of torturing widows?' Both plays address related themes concerning the subjugation and torture of widows by patriarchal societies with particular reference to the practice of levirate rites.

### Synopsis of Julie Okoh's *Our Wife Forever*

The demise of Hector signals a harrowing turning point for his surviving wife, Victoria and their daughters, orchestrating inevitable dramatic conflicts. The line of dramatic conflict is drawn between two angry/feuding parties representing the traditional patriarchal and the urban radical feminist consciousness identified in the dramatic personages of Thomas and Victoria respectively. The bones of contention include the traditional funeral and levirate rites. Perhaps the most contentious issue is the right to inheritance of late Hector's estate. Unfortunately, Victoria is regarded by Thomas as the nucleus of the late brother's properties. Both parties are thrown into series of battles. The consequence is a violent swagger of change.

### Theoretical Framework

A framework relevant to the on-going discourse contemplates inter-relationships between phallogocentric and feminist ratios, and the role of the individual human will in the organized functions of power in society. The reality of minority discourses warrants the renegotiation of receptions of gender relations in postmodern societies. Margaret Matlin (2004, 36), Gibbons, Hamby and Dennis (*Psychology of women's quarterly* 21) seem to agree after several isolated experiments and statistical results that gender issues are socially constructed. Fortunately, Simone de Beauvoir (2007, 300) believed in society and espoused the doctrine of equality of the sexes as an understanding which eludes the 'patriarchate', traditionally. The very term 'history' is afflicted with this malady. At least this is the feminist position. As far as Beauvoir is concerned in *The second sex*, man is self-seeking and ego-centric in relation to the alterity/otherness of society. Most importantly, Beauvoir (2007, p. 300) holds that,

There can be no presence of another unless the other is also present in and for himself which is to say that true alterity-otherness- is that of a consciousness separate from mine and substantially identical with mine.

Based on the above logic of binary opposition of the sexes, the reference to consciousness that is 'separate from mine' remains key to both contexts of contradictions and difference. The latter remain critical to the primary agenda of post-modernism which according to Garuba (n.d. p. 2), the entire family of minorities achieved the inscriptions of their own unique forms of difference 'on the uncharted space of minority discourses'. Feminism is part of that family and the issue of contradictions cuts apparently across the sexes. This trait which even Beauvoir (2007, pp. 301-305) concedes in relation to the male and female genders constitutes the cutting edge of the theoretical framework of this paper. Attention shall be drawn to the catalytic protocol in the deconstruction of gender relations in Okoh's *Our wife forever*.

In the optics of Beauvoir, the context of woman is an unfathomable myth of contradictions whose true essence often eludes the human consciousness of man. Whereas man has lost himself in the delusion of possessing woman since the patriarchate; he remains ignorant of the presence of an otherness which is supposed to complement him if, the alternate identity of woman as otherness were recognized by man. The foregoing protocol has given birth to two maxims stated here:

1. A woman is only meant to be seen, not heard.
2. What a man can do, a woman can do better.

A certain level of ignorance is noticeable either way. It is this face-off rooted in ignorance between the sexes that precipitates social conflict, and by extension, dramatic conflict. It is this kind of difference-based ignorance that Barbara Johnson defines as ‘a gap in knowledge’. Barbara Johnson’s (1980 cited in Barbara Johnson, 1987, xi) reception of ‘otherness’ as difference explains the foregoing thus:

If I perceive my ignorance as a gap in knowledge instead of an imperative that changes the very nature of what I think I know, then I do not truly experience my ignorance. The surprise of otherness is that moment when a new form of ignorance is suddenly activated as an imperative.

A vital index of deconstruction is the discovery of the disruption of tradition. Thus, Johnson’s contribution above, activated in the last sentence, proclaims what happens in the event of such discovery. The only way to experience the ignorance of the sexes as an imperative for change is in the recognition or discovery of the differences of ‘otherness’; and for the specific purpose of this framework, is actually in the discovery of the disruption of patriarchal tradition. That which precipitates dramatic conflict in Okoh’s (2010) *Our wife forever* is the failure to recognize the difference of otherness. Such a recognition marks the truthful experience of ignorance which paves the way for reconciliations and trust. It is crystal clear that the structures of power stand in positions relative to ideology in society. Based on this framework, an examination of Julie Okoh’s (2010) *Our wife forever* proceeds.

#### **Dramatic Location and Cultural Setting in *Our wife forever***

As far as setting in the drama is concerned, the focus rests, on unity of action for the physical location of the drama (Castelvetto, 1974, 149) and the cultural ambience represented, both of which are suggested by the playwright’s printed words (Huberman, Ludwig and Pope, 1997, 341). Okoh’s (2010, 14) *Our wife forever* opens in phase I with specific stage directions which state in part that, ‘all the actions in this play take place in a moderately furnished living room in VICTORIA IMODU’S family house’. Based on ethnic classifications, the name ‘Imodu’ which Okoh invokes in this play, sources to the Etsako people of Edo State in Nigeria. There may be no specific mention of a city in the play, but the urban/cosmopolitan bearing of the play in the terms of physical location of the drama is remarkable.

#### **Ideological Structures of Influence in the Play**

The dominant ideology in the society of this play is patriarchal. Patriarchy holds sway from the references to the characteristic traditional Etsako phallogocentric communal system, to the relative ideologically liberal urban/cosmopolitan setting of the play. Overtaken by modernity and postmodern inclinations, the urban setting of this play indulges gender discretions. However, the common factor in the setting of this play is a society where the father is the head of the family, and descent is derived from the male line. Based on Etsako culture, Hector Imodu, the deceased husband of Victoria remained head of his family while he lived and descent is reckoned in the male line. With the demise of her husband, Victoria is subjected to distressing phases of widowhood rites as stipulated by the male dominated society. At the demise of her husband, Thomas the younger brother of Hector is poised to inherit Victoria as a right. It is this discovery/apprehension on the part of Victoria Imodu that, jolts her combative will to disrupt tradition. In the city where Victoria resides (Hector’s family house), the situation is not different. Professor Tanka (late Hector’s friend) acknowledges the dominion of the male gender, over the female (Okoh, 2010, 26). The difference between the Etsako traditional culture

and the city is that, the city is more liberal and human right is not subject to gender discriminations.

The liberal inclination of the city on the contrary, has given room to the infiltration of exotic ideologies and values. One such ideology prominently featured in Julie Okoh's (2010, 60) *Our wife forever* is feminism. In the entire play, feminism clearly stands in ideological contention with patriarchy. The dramatic opposition in terms of characterization between the characters of Thomas and Victoria illustrated here says so much:

Thomas:                   Is she not part of that property?  
                                   So what's wrong with my intention?

Victoria:                 How dare you? Your senior brother never regarded me as a piece of property.

It is apparent in the above excerpt that Victoria as a character strikes a chord for feminism. Ekwierhoma (2002) posited that the female dramatist in a patriarchal society needed to 'portray her authorial voice/character to conform to the active radical group'. Victoria as a character in this play may be described as a non-conforming marginal character who has one leg in two different worlds, thus, creating contradictions in both worlds (Kramer, 2005, p. 4). She is at once part of the Etsako traditional society and has also been lured out of the latter, by secular education and exposure in the city where the tradition does not have as much fervor. This appears to be the logic Julie Okoh patronizes to create Victoria in the mould of an 'active radical' character. The only male character in sympathy with Victoria in the entire play is a feminist of sorts. He is Professor Felix Tanka who, is apparently planted or programmed by the author, to fall inevitably in love with Victoria Imodu. It is obvious also that, Victoria Imodu is a deviation from the norm. She is protected by human rights.

**Dramatic conflict and social contradictions (focus on 'otherness').**

In *Our wife forever*, Julie Okoh (2010) succeeds in dramatizing the social contradictions leading to the experience of the raw apprehensions of the 'otherness' of the sexes in a patriarchal system at a point when, such an experience suddenly activates a combative imperative in the character of a widow named Victoria Imodu. A chain of complications/conflicts are sequel to the demise of Hector Imodu in this play. These complications which assume graphic accelerated points of disenchantment for Victoria Imodu include the rude shock of the sudden death of Hector (Okoh, 2010, 16-17), her experience of the horrible phases of widowhood rites at the behest of the Imodu extended family (pp. 20-26), and the emotional, psychological, physical and material abuses, all in the name of levirate rites (pp. 30-38). In fact the following excerpts give insights of the above:

Victoria:                 I was made to sit on a mat on the hard ground throughout the period.... Moreover my hands were crossed, tied in front of me. That means I couldn't use them for anything. If I had an itch in any part of my body, I called on someone to help me scratch the itching spot (Okoh, 2010, p. 21).

And then Victoria goes on to catalogue her woes in the following words:

Victoria:                 Oh, what a life! Suddenly, I have become a prisoner. An outcast! I shouldn't go here or there. I shouldn't do this or

that. No one should come near me. No one should reach out to me. All types of laws are heaped on me. Just because I am widow (p. 33).

On top of the foregoing traumatizing situations Victoria is invited by her in-laws, to swear that she did not kill her husband. Beyond getting her to swear, they go further: ‘.....then, after scrubbing his body with a wet towel, they squeezed the water into a bowl and offered it to me to drink (p. 23).

All the above-mentioned dehumanizing experiences suffered by Victoria at the instance of the Etsako patriarchal system corroborate Beauvior’s position that ‘true alterity-otherness-is that of a consciousness separate from mine and substantially identical with mine’. In other words, the Etsako patriarchal system fails to pass the test of true alterity. Victoria Imodu’s refusal to submit to some of the levirate rites actually triggers a new consciousness which sparks a war of the sexes (p. 53) hitherto unprecedented. As far as Victoria Imodu is concerned, the new consciousness is the sudden recognition that in the Etsako patriarchal system, the male in his separate gender classification fails to acknowledge the substantially identical and complementary heritage he shares with the female qua classification. This sudden realization on the part of Victoria Imodu precipitates a combative will, as an imperative. The latter development brings to the fore in violent dimensions; the problem of social contradictions, anticipate a disruption of the patriarchal narrative.

Social history remains a vital index of change in society. In their individual and separate writings, Beauvior (2007) and Johnson (1987) recognized the critical functions of social contradictions to the development of society. Some of the indices of social history in Okoh’s *Our wife forever* include tradition and urban culture. Migrations from the village to the city in the society of the play easily explain details of deviations to the norm, culminating in culture flux. As a character in this play, Mrs. Victoria Imodu has been described in marginal context because of her global post-modern exposures and disposition. Her late husband was a university professor who built his own house in the city where he resided with his family. With the demise of Hector Imodu, comes a dramatic clash between the world views of tradition and urbanization and by extension, patriarchy and feminism. The two characters in this play representing the above-mentioned world views are Mr. Thomas Imodu and Mrs. Victoria Imodu, respectively. It is instructive to note that, urban/post-modern exposures have watered down patriarchal values to minimal levels in the city where, human rights are enthroned. Whereas Thomas Imodu is operating from a phallogocentric system, Victoria Imodu is set in the secular, minority sensitive urban world. The structures of power as defined by the constitutions of the two social systems are not the same. It means therefore that Mrs. Victoria Imodu is a hybrid character in this play.

It is apparent that hitherto the demise of Hector Imodu, no one raised eye brow about the gender inequalities inherent in the patriarchal policy of widowhood levirate rites in the cultural back drop of the play. In deference to the dynamic nature of society, no policy can be described as sacrosanct and final. Thus, Victoria Imodu emerges in relative terms as the arrow head of social contradictions in Okoh’s *Our wife forever*. The sudden consciousness of the gender inequalities manifest in patriarchal system of the Etsako precipitates a combative will in Victoria Imodu who now engages a somewhat deconstructive debate on the subjugation of women in Etsako patriarchal tradition, with Thomas Imodu. She affirmed for instance that the traditional Council of Elders is made of men who are all biased against women (Okoh, 2010, 52). Victoria Imodu pursued her point when she confronts Thomas Imodu with the question;

‘why is it that our women cannot enjoy their basic human rights’ (54). Victoria Imodu dismantles Thomas Imodu’s claim that, traditional women with reference to priestesses and warriors enjoyed power, by advancing the following argument:

Victoria: ..... they may have enjoyed certain rights. That’s because of their privileged class. Infact, they had privileges without power! Yes, that’s what they had, mere privileges without power!

.....By the way, were they exempted from all those cultural practices, which violate basic human rights and constitute major lifelong risks to women’s health? (Okoh, 2010, pp. 54-55).

Pursuant to her argument against the violation of basic human rights of women by patriarchy, Victoria queries whether priestesses etc were exempted from the abuses involving widowhood rites including inheritance laws, female circumcision, bride price and choice of marriage partners. For Victoria Imodu, the failure on the part of Etsako men to acknowledge the identical classification of the sexes in complementary relations is condemnable.

Further to the contemplation of social contradictions in the play, it is rather unfortunate that Victoria Imodu who has been protesting the violation of women’s human rights by the patriarchal system of the Etsako, is the same person approximating male roles in dimensions of dressing/personal packaging and recouring to surrealistic invocations of male violence, all of which run contrary to the feminist campaign initiative of the play *Our wife forever*. Okoh (2010, p. 14) opens the play, showing Victoria Imodu dressed in ‘masculine attire’ which, Felix Tanka identifies when he says:

Felix: Wait a minute! You are wearing Hector’s Clothes? (p. 15).

In answer to Felix, Victoria Imodu makes the following confession:

Victoria: Yes, I am. By his death, I stepped into his shoes as the head of this family. So also, I’ve stepped into his clothes for comfort and support.

Victoria Imodu’s self-confidence needs a propping from the beginning of the play because of the demise of her husband. That propping finds expression in Victoria’s disposition to wear her husband’s clothes. She even acknowledges to Thomas Imodu (her younger brother-in-law) that: “I am wearing them” (p. 32). It is instructive to note that for about half way through the play, Victoria Imodu is seen putting on her late husband’s clothes. In Phase III of the play Victoria Imodu has changed clothes. She is spotting her late husband’s sportswear with the photograph of the late husband engraved on his T-shirt.

There is no doubt that despite his hybrid personality, Hector Imodu is fundamentally an offspring of Etsako patriarchal society. Thus, by spotting the clothes of the deceased, Victoria is by omission endorsing the values of patriarchy. Hector’s clothes constitute metonymic signs of the male sex. If we regard the foregoing initiative as an omission, it raises critical questions. An instance is the following question. By such initiative, is the playwright trying to highlight any form of insecurity on the part of the female sex? On the other hand, if the initiative to put on the late man’s clothes is an act of commission, it means that the playwright is indulging deception. Either way, there is an issue. Victoria Imodu’s inclination to disrupt patriarchal

tradition can still be established without getting her to put on male clothes. These irregular situations constitute serious contradictions both to patriarchy and feminism. If we say that the motivation for Victoria in wearing her deceased husband's clothes is to prove the point of a maxim that says 'what a man can do, a woman can do even better', then we have a very serious problem. What is it? If Victoria Imodu struts around in her husband's clothes the way the audience/reader sees her in this play, would it also be okay on the part of the audience to imagine that she sprouts a penis? Can she? This kind of contradiction assaults at once both ideological oppositions and gender differential sensibilities. The question arises. Is Victoria Imodu a hermaphrodite?

In the light of the analysis on social contradictions in this section an emerging inference is noteworthy. In wearing her late husband's clothes, it means that Victoria herself fails to experience the full cycle of the consciousness of otherness, as difference between the sexes. The consequence is that the advantage of complementary relations between the sexes is aborted. The emerging inference therefore is that by some wanton flight of ego, the playwright has defeated the feminist objectives of this play. This also implies that Victoria Imodu's characterization lacks the dispassionate attitude and discernment required to guide individual will and discretion in the midst of piling social contradictions.

#### **The Politics of Choice in the Play**

The reception of politics relevant to this study is that espoused by Ekekwe (2015, p. 24) who held that:

Political power therefore, is that particular gradation of this natural power which enables man to organize his society and to act in concert with others the better for each person to fulfill herself or himself.

The word which Ekekwe does not mention but implies in the above excerpt is, influence. Influence is a function of political power in social groups and organizations. Influence is the exercise of power in society which Ekekwe has described as political power. Without invoking Psalm 62:11 which states that 'power belongeth unto God', Ekekwe associated power with spirit and creation. He summarizes the foregoing conviction when he says: 'from its source above, power streams into creation as a uniform, neutral current, and it has what may be described as magnetic – attraction quality about it (p. 23). It is this same power from creation that God has given unto man to exercise as a free willing agent. It is this same power that Victoria Imodu attempts to exercise in *Our wife forever*.

Power is exercised in social groups or communities. Minute as it seems, the context of family is taken to be fabric of society. Kramer (2005, p. 78), on one hand and Mappes and Zembaty (2002, p. 157) on the other, uphold the notion of family respectively as, the smallest social unit, and the institution which entrenches marriage as the conventional platform for ethical/moral sex for the end of social utility. It is noteworthy however that, individual human beings are thus expected to be identified with family within which, the stream of power issues. Further, it is also important to note that family patterns and trends are usually determined by the ideology governing each social group. Similarly, the political structures of a family is usually ideologically determined. Thus, the Imodu family in Julie Okoh's *Our wife forever* derives their traditional family pattern from the patriarchal system of the Etsako. Based on this foundation, compliance to patriarchy is obligatory.

Suffice it to mention here that, the hybrid exposures and experiences of the Hector Imodu family make their deviations from the Etsako family traditions inevitable. Their engagements with modern and post-modern rationalizations in the city constitute distractions from their patriarchal foundation. Such deviations also account for the diversions of loyalty/commitment, and their individual discretions to political choice, will and power.

Thus, it is Victoria Imodu's romance with the exotic rationalizations in the city that deflates her compliance to patriarchal stipulations with reference to widowhood levirate rites. Such is the orientation which accounts for Victoria Imodu's refusal to submit to the widowhood levirate rites of the Etsako people. Conscious of her human rights to personal priorities Victoria Imodu protests to Felix Tanka that 'marriage is not one of my major priorities right now' (Okoh, 2010, p. 19). She kicks completely against the traditional *Widowhood levirate rites* of the Etsako people. In answer to Felix Tanka, Victoria Imodu's reaction is sequel to an earlier observation with so much resentment concerning Thomas Imodu thus: 'He claims that it is his birthright to inherit me' (p. 26). Victoria does not hide her aversion to patriarchal gender discrimination she confronts her brother-in-law subsequently, with the question: 'what gave you the privilege to have control over me?' (p. 36). This question elicits a retort from Thomas Imodu when he asserts: 'As long as you continue to answer Imodu, you are our wife'. The body language of Victoria Imodu clearly subverts patriarchal ideals. If she had been grounded in the village, the story would not be the same. This particular narrative leads to Thomas Imodu's attempt to rape Victoria Imodu (pp. 73-75).

In his bid to inherit his elder brother's estate, Thomas Imodu goes to court (p. 64). For him, it is his patriarchal prerogative to consolidate that level of possession over Victoria as a person; a female who should only be seen, not heard. He is inclined to inherit Victoria as his wife based on traditional widowhood levirate rites. Unknown to Thomas Imodu, the court of law is the bastion of protection for human rights. This development brings Victoria Imodu and Felix Tanka together especially because Thomas Imodu joins them in his suit. From this point on, the stage seems set for the development of closer relationship between Victoria Imodu and Felix Tanka, because of their mutual pursuits to win a court case. By the beginning of phase V in the play, both Victoria Imodu and Felix Tanka get court ruling in their favor. By the ruling, she is freed from the shackles of Thomas Imodu, the helmsman of traditional widowhood levirate rites. It is a victory for human rights which clears the coast for the exercise of choice by Victoria Imodu. At this juncture, the court ruling has restored to Victoria Imodu both the moral presence of mind to contemplate remarriage, and the persuasion to exercise her free will in terms of choice between Thomas Imodu and Felix Tanka. She settles for the latter.

### Conclusion

Certain readings and findings have come to the fore concerning Julie Okoh's purposive direction in *Our wife forever*. The very first and apparently primary reading is to expose the excesses of patriarchy as far as gender discrimination is concerned. The more pungent in the foregoing regard is to examine distressing abuses to women's human rights when deceased husbands of widows are buried in the Etsako patriarchal society, and the practice of widowhood levirate rites following after the burial. It is obvious in the play that Julie Okoh succeeds in drumming up reasons why such traditional patriarchal practices should be discontinued. Furthermore, a re-reading of texts by a female author surrounded by 'phallogocentric' views is required to facilitate 'an assessment of women's worlds in their concepts and symbols' (Evwierhoma 2002, p. 3). As it stands, it may be observed that in *Our wife forever*, Julie Okoh

attempts a re-reading of prevalent predominant phallogocentric texts besetting her in contemporary Nigerian and African literatures. The latter is critically relevant to the context of African traditional women's widowhood levirate practice.

The second reading has to do with the reception of the play as a radical piece of feminist drama. Here, the informed reader is bound to query the methodology adopted by Julie Okoh who allows Victoria Imodu to wear her late husband's clothes in the play. Such a method detracts from the ideals of feminism, and places on the front burner, the confounding dramatization of the contradictions characteristic of woman which, Simone de Beauvoire would fain describe as myth. This confounding methodology detracts from radical classification.

Finally, Victoria Imodu's resolve and strength of will as a dramatic personage in this play is commendable. However, the playwright fails to establish certain details required to protect this character. For instance, Victoria Imodu ought to have pursued the processing of the letter of administration for late Hector's Estate, as soon as the husband passed on. She could even have hired a lawyer to process it. Felix Tanka is in a position to avail the counsel and service. Such a legal document would have checked some of Thomas Imodu's patriarchal excesses. Rather than do this, the playwright invested so much time and space making Felix Tanka and Victoria Imodu. This latter inclination of the playwright can only be described as an in-built deus ex-machine in the plot of the play.

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