

## **GENDER INEQUALITY AND FEMALE STRUGGLES FOR PROPERTY OWNERSHIP: AN EXAMINATION OF PAT OBI NWAGBO'S *WHEN WOMEN GO NAKED* AND JULIE OKOH'S *OUR WIFE FOREVER***

**Ifeoma O. Nnamah**

**&**

**Tracie C. Utoh-Ezeajugh**

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### ***Abstract***

*Nigeria women often encounter oppression, subjugation and disempowerment in their daily interactions. Drama being a veritable means for the propagation of societal values, developmental issues and socio-political concerns, has become an avenue for the propagation of women's rights and concerns. Nigerian playwrights have over the years, attempted to present critical issues of women's empowerment for societal reflections and possible re-assessment of values. However, much of the representations in drama have been centered on general issues of women empowerment, with little attention paid on women's disinheritance and struggles to own properties. The study adopts the content analysis approach of the qualitative research methodology in undertaking a critical assessment of two purposively selected plays that deal with issues of property rights and inheritance; for purposes of ascertaining the extent of exposure and the role of traditional and cultural structures in perpetuating inequality. The play texts are *When Women Go Naked* by Pat Obi Nwagbo, and *Our Wife Forever* by Julie Okoh. The theory used in the evaluation of this research is Stiwanism. The problem of women struggling to own property is seen in two different dimensions using the play texts, which includes female struggles to own property through Widowhood as seen in *Our Wife Forever*, and female struggle to own property in their family of origin, as seen in *When**

*Women Go Naked.. Findings based on an analysis of the scenario created in the plays, show that there are hardly any restrictive measures taken against the denial of women's inheritance rights in Nigeria. The study recommends that the existing laws that accord women certain rights to inherit the property that belongs to their fathers and husbands where no wills exist, should be publicized and made more functional and that avenues should be created for societal re-orientation.*

*Key words: Gender, Property rights, Female Struggles, Inequality, Women.*

## **Introduction**

The female struggle for equality or equity has remained a topical relevant discourse in critical domain across Africa and the world, since the female gender still suffer inequality and subjugation in the hands of men, not for their attitude or individual character, but because of the gender which nature gave them without the power to undo what nature has offered. In modern society, the superiority of the male gender is quite enormous that some women still find it very difficult to have their voices heard in some issues that concern humanity or societal development. In some societies, women are disinherited, downgraded, and subjected to all manners of domestic violence and utmost infringement on their fundamental human rights, making life boring and miserable to navigate through. However, some men see themselves as gods that should be worshipped by women who they regard as puppets that can be tossed around anyhow and be discarded anytime. Thus, it is as a result of these subsequent vices placed on women that feminist movements emerged. According to Nwagbo pat Obi;

Since the arrival of feminism and the acquisition of the tool of writing by African women, this protestant ideology which has acquired many nomenclatures had been and still being used by

them to protect their voice, which had been rendered voiceless or rather “silence” this war executed through feminist writings is obvious in all the genres of academic scholarship. (69)

It is with the intention to deconstruct the male ideological conception of women, that the likes of Zulu Sofola, Pat Obi Nwagbo, Flora Nwakpa, Buchi Emecheta, Julie Okoh, Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh, Chimamanda Adichie, Irene Salami, Mabel Evwierhoma, Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, Omolora Ogundipe-leslie, Chikwenye Okonjo and so many others began to advocate for women’s rights in their various capacities and capabilities. The aim is to effect change and make women to have visibility, equal platform and equal opportunity to excel and explore. Feminist ideology affects women’s centered decisions in African societies especially in Nigeria, thus, the female folks have used different dimension to advance the feminist ideology in the society where their suffering and subjection is long overdue, therefore, they demand for a change and ask to be incorporated into the framework of social structure without being intimidated by the men, but to be accepted as equal beings like the men. Nwagbo postulates that;

Feminist theory, feminist culture, feminist writing, feminist critics, feminist perspectives, feminist theatre, feminist novel, feminist aesthetics, all being the campaign for female inclusion in all fold of knowledge. The technologies and feminist scholarships are suggestive of warfare between two elements-men and women, males and females, masculine and feminine, boys and girls. It has indeed become a global war. (71)

The war between the male and female folks is nothing but gender recognition which simply implies that the male folks should accept women as humans with same capacity and potential to be in same position as the male gender. That is why the females have

continued to fight until their requests are granted. The quest for freedom which informs the women liberation movement in the early 1960's codified as feminism in literary circles is an ideology in art and life which exposes the oppression of women and proffers ways towards their freedom. "The aim is to achieve equality through feminism and bond together in sisterhood". (186)

Advocating for women's rights is the focal point of this study which however tilts towards women's empowerment; self-actualization and emancipation which is what propels Julie Okoh's, and Nwagbo Pat Obi's radical response to the mistreatment, negligence, subjugation, denial of inheritance and rights that Nigeria women face in their respective plays, *Our wife Forever* and *When Women go Naked*. The women portrayed in these plays are utterly too good for the men in the society of the plays, and all the women who are victims of their male oppressors are morally superior while the men are morally demeaning as seen in the plays. Looking at Okoh's take on Feminism,

It is first and foremost a collective term for systems of belief and theories that pay special attention to women's rights and women's position in culture and society. On personal level, it is a state of mind, a way of thinking, an alternate perceptive from which to understand the world. It means a woman becoming aware of a distortion. The woman moves in a new direction in search of autonomy, self assertion and empowerment. (7)

The movement is a protest against the institutionalized injustice perpetrated by men (7) The feminist ideology apparently promotes gender equality, human development, hence the primacy of this study is to expound the ill-treatment meted out on women, and how they are disinherited from husband's and father's properties because the society perceives them as illegitimate members of the family who are not qualified to inherit properties from their late

husbands and fathers. This norm however has become part and parcel of our society in which a good number of women are languishing in poverty with their children especially the widows, because they have no inheritance from their father nor husband. Society appears to be unmoved about this line of women's oppression and this is why feminism appears to be waxing stronger everyday as it provides avenues for combating female oppression.

The problem of this study states that Nigerian playwrights have over the years, attempted to present critical issues of women's empowerment for societal reflections and possible re-assessment of values, hence many playwrights have written plays that tackle issues of women subjugation and oppression. This study becomes critical in its quest to interrogate and analyse women's inheritance and property rights as presented in some Nigerian plays, since there is a high level of women's struggle for property ownership and denial of inheritance spotted in the Nigerian society because of its patriarchal nature.

The study is framed on Omolara Ogundipe Leslie's Stiwanism which focuses on social transformation of women, especially the African woman's aspirations in life for strategic partnering with men, and the structures that oppresses and subjugate women and the way women react vehemently to these institutionalized structures Ogundipe argues that the struggle for African women's empowerment, is a result of colonial and neo-colonial structures that often place African males at the apex of social stratification. Furthermore, the struggle faced by African women also impacts on the way they have internalized patriarchy and have come to endorse the system themselves. According to Muhammed, Roseli and Wan;

Stiwanism was discovered in 1994; STIWA for short is expressed in "Social Transformation including women in Africa". It hypes on the exclusion of the Africa woman from transforming the male in the world. This transformation agenda

is its dividing line with Womanism. It strives to contest for its inclusion in the world's social transformation by women. (242)

In this theory, the transformation of the world depends on the collaboration between both sexes. Ogunde Leslie calls for partnership and male's support of women and discusses African women's hankering for equal partnership with the male, Ogunde recognizes female struggles devoid of support from male. Equality here is hinged on commitment from both gender and not women's affairs alone.

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

The play *Our Wife Forever* written by Julie Okoh tells the story of Victoria whose husband Hector dies of kidney related issues, which brings about a negative turn for the entire family. Victoria, a thirty six year old woman becomes a victim of the various unimaginable treatments that many wives of deceased men go through in the name of tradition. She goes through terrible traditional mourning rites, which includes, wearing of sack cloth, sitting on a hard ground throughout the period of the funeral, drinking water that her dead husband's body has been washed with to prove that she didn't kill him, not making a sound unless she is required to cry, not being allowed to bath till the funeral is over, eating from unwashed dishes till the duration of the funeral period and so many others. However, after the funeral, Thomas and his family took it upon themselves to torment Victoria, leaving her to struggle with her four children and exposing the true nature of the Imodu's family. Thomas makes claims that as Hector's brother, every property belonging to his late brother automatically becomes his own by tradition, including his wife Victoria, hereby depriving Victoria access to Hector's property unless she agrees to marry him. Thomas does everything possible to take possession of Victoria including using voodoo and attempting to rape her. Thomas files for the right to all Hector's property under the false claim that Victoria has broken the family bond by having an affair with Felix, who

happens to be Hector's childhood friend who she recounts her funeral ordeal to from the beginning of the play. Victoria is thrown into series of legal battles with the Imodu's family which lasts for three years and fortunately, Victoria wins back the house with the help of Felix who she happily marries at the end.

### **Female Subjugation and Property Ownership in Okoh's *Our Wife Forever***

The play *Our Wife Forever* by Julie Okoh is set in a traditional Nigerian society, and tackles the issue of the dehumanization women face in traditional Urhobo society of Niger Delta, located in Southern Nigeria. The play demonizes the belief and practice that lead to gender role problem especially the belief that tradition demands that the passing of family inheritance goes to the male line, excluding the female folks and also exposes the widowhood practices meted on women. It looks at this issue of property ownership and struggles from the aspect of widowhood, which women who lose their husbands face upon their husband's demise.

Julie Okoh succeeds in exposing the different subjugation women face in the name of culture and tradition through Victoria's experience of widowhood rites from the moment her husband Hector dies of kidney related issues. Therefore, as stated in the synopsis of the play, Okoh reveals different widowhood rites Victoria goes through upon Hector's demise. This includes shaving of the head; drinking of the water that the dead husband's body has been washed in, for the purpose of proving that the dead man's widow is innocent; not making a sound unless they are required to cry; widows hands being tied and shouldn't be used for anything; sitting on a hard ground throughout the period of the funeral; prohibition from bathing till the funeral is over; eating off unwashed dishes till the duration of mourning; inheritance of widows by brother in-laws; and so many others. Thus;

Victoria: Horrible, horrible things! Any time I remember them, I feel anger inside me, I feel sick. I feel like going to crush the head of all those who subjected me to those inhuman ordeals. (20)

Victoria begins to remember the dehumanizing mourning rites she went through during the funeral of Hector. Women are subjected to different horrible practices during their period of mourning in most Nigerian communities as Victoria observed:

Victoria: I didn't really mind shaving my hair. Though I could hardly control the tears that were streaming down my face, some women made it their duty to see that I cried at dawn every day. (21)

In some Nigerian cultures, a woman is made to shave her head when her husband dies as a sign of bereavement. Just like Victoria, most women do not mind shaving their hair, but in some other cases, they are compelled by the demand from tradition to do so. However, one of the most demeaning and rather unhealthy traditional practices that Victoria faced in the play is the drinking of the water used to wash the dead body of her deceased husband, to prove she has no hand in his death. It is a common thing that when a man dies, the first murder suspect becomes the wife and as established by Victoria's experience in the play;

Victoria: On that day, in the middle of the night, two of his aunts came to me saying that I was wanted by the family. I followed them. When I entered the room, there was Hector, lying motionless on the funeral bed, fully naked. I was shocked because he was dressed in complete suit from the mortuary. They asked me to swear that I had no hand in his death.

Felix: And you did?



Victoria: Yes, I did. Then, after scrubbing his body with a wet towel, they squeezed out the water into a bowl and offered it to me to drink. (23)

Swearing, is the only way a woman can prove that she is innocent of her husband's demise. Even when the cause of the death is medically proven, tradition will still demand that a woman swears through some diabolical means to prove her innocence, which in Victoria's case she refuses, putting her health into consideration. In this case, Felix has this to say;

Felix: That is absolutely ridiculous! Who wouldn't be sick after drinking such filthy water? A corpse may harbor some bacteria that could be infectious.

Victoria: Do they care to know that? Oh no, there only interest is to find someone to blame for the death.

Felix: Superstition! Superstition! That has been our major problem. Any time someone dies, it is blamed on human maliciousness. The truth is that Hector died of Kidney failure. The doctors tried their best for him. It's nobody's fault he couldn't survive. God knows best. (24)

However, much demand is made of women in terms of mourning of their husbands and they see these subjugations as fair because the tradition demands it. Victoria is physically and psychologically subjected to traumatizing situation, Victoria further narrates:

Victoria: Just imagine that well at the end of the forty days, burial rites, in the middle of the night around 2am. I was accompanied by his paternal

uncles to evil forest. To throw away things I had used during the forty days funeral period (21)

Women are reduced to ‘Nothing’ and treated with disrespect in some traditional Nigerian society, seen as those, who are not worthy to interfere in matters of tradition as shown in the plays. Hector’s demise reveals the patriarchal nature of the society through Imodu’s family which includes the possession of Hector’s property as Victoria continues her ordeal;

Victoria: They came to remove everything from the house, car, furniture, cloths, kitchen appliances and utensils even broom and spade. (25)

Hector’s properties are taken away from Victoria leaving her to struggle with the children hence Hector did not leave any Will behind; in the preface Chidi Ikonne posits that; “Admittedly, the play demonstrates the importance of the writing of Wills by husbands before departure, *Our wife forever is* simply a piece of reality captured, laced with streaks of surrealism, as embodied in the use of dreams”. (7) During the conversation with Victoria, Felix further agrees;

Felix: you see! That is why it is very important for people to write will. Death comes without ringing a bell. And to die intestate is to create problems for surviving beloved ones. (26)

They buttress the importance of writing a Will and the implications of dying without a valid Will, which is seen in the case of Hector who leaves Victoria and the children to struggle to have access to the properties her husband left behind. The struggle of property ownership is the experience of most widows in Nigeria, in Victoria’s case it is as a result of her husband’s demise, but in some cases, it could also be the issue of female children being denied

access to their father's inheritance, which Victoria shows a great dissatisfaction towards. In Victoria's words;

Victoria: Absolutely wrong! Think of the inheritance Law for instance. When the father of family dies, his sons, brother and uncles share his property. His wife and daughters are kept empty handed, that means women cannot inherit anything neither from their father nor from their husband; is that fair? (56)

However the character Thomas Imodu argues in the play that directly or indirectly women still benefit from the inheritance saying that the property is used to cater for the women and children and this brings us to the fact that many women suffer abandonment once the property is all taken away. Victoria and her children face negligence and this is seen when Felix confronts her on why she is selling off the properties in the children's room and persuades her to open up and Victoria says "Okay! I've been having series of problems" (44) Victoria recounts that she has not been able to pay her children's school fees. Tradition has taken so much from female children; their rightful entitlements and inheritance are being denied. Victoria struggles for three years, going from one court battle to another to regain the remainder of Hector's property which Thomas tries to take away from her and the children.

Thomas attempts severally to inherit Victoria as if she is a property; hence tradition permits wives to be inherited by the brother of the deceased. This is a form of subjugation of women and it is one of the dominant issues in some Nigerian communities where women are regarded as men's properties. One hears some men referring to their wives in conversation as 'my own' (my property) suggesting they own every aspect and part of women once they are in a relationship or married to them. With the demise of Victoria's husband Hector, Victoria is subjected to the idea that she must be inherited by Thomas as part of Hector's property. According to the conversation between Thomas and Victoria;

Thomas: is she not part of that property? So what is wrong with my intention?

Victoria: how dare you? Who are you to reduce a whole human being to a piece of property? (60)

Thomas continues to stand on this by saying;

Thomas: I don't see the difference, we paid money on you before your parents gave you to us, is that not what we do when we go to the market to buy a car, fridge, sheep, goat or a piece of furniture (60)

Here, Victoria is reduced to nothing but a piece of property to be owned and discarded at any point in time, giving the impression that once women are married, they remain a man's property forever. However attempts are made by Thomas to prove that his widowed sister-in-law is part of her late husband's properties which he will inherit thus, "you are my wife already" (6) reminding her of their custom that says: "when a widow decides to remarry, she forfeits every entitlement to her late husband's property. (37)

Wife Inheritance can lead to forceful marriage. In the play *Our Wife Forever*, there's an evidence of forceful marriage, as Thomas tries to coerce Victoria into accepting him, in their conversation,

Thomas: As long as you continue to answer Imodu, you are our wife. (36)

Thomas's words suggest that he is ready to take Victoria by every means possible because she belongs to him as she still bears the name of the family and this leads to Thomas trying to

take Victoria without her consent through rape as seen in the play;

Victoria: don't touch me! Stay away from me!  
You hear! Go away.

Thomas: You belong to me

Victoria: what are you trying to do?

Thomas: Shshshsh! don't be afraid. I won't hurt you.

Victoria: stop it stop it. I say stop it or else I'll cry out for help (74)

Thomas uses charms on Victoria and she remains motionless as Thomas removes his trouser, spreads her legs in attempt to rape her, Faith, Victoria's house help intervenes.

### **Synopsis of Nwagbo's *When Women Go Naked***

*When Women Go Naked* is set in an Igbo community of Umundiagu and reflects the persistent cultural practices against women, which is mostly carried out by Oganaiwe, the wealthiest man in the community. The play focuses on Oganaiwe's life and that of the many women in his family, which Udenkwo, his late sister's child who appears to be a force to reckon with, is part of.. The play opens with a song in celebration of a new born baby being celebrated by the women. Oganaiwe, interrupts the joyous moment by firing gun shots into the air, and this frightens the women and they scatter. The beginning of the play shows Oganaiwe's dissatisfaction with the new born baby girl in his household, simply because he yearns for a male child. It is no new thing that in the Nigerian, albeit Igbo society, the arrival of a new born male child is more welcomed than that of the female. Oganaiwe shows detest on the arrival of another female child in his home, he deafens his ear to the advice of Ugoli to embrace the joyous moment in his home,

reminding him that God alone determines the gender of a baby. Oganaiwe's negative attitude towards women destroyed his family as he has the belief that without a male child, his family line will be wiped off from existence, and no one will inherit his property. He insists that it is problematic not to have a male child in Igbo culture because they do not believe that a woman can represent their family or take the place of a father. Oganaiwe's obsession with tradition and inheritance causes so much damage, not just to himself, but also to his daughters and Udenkwo.

Oganaiwe dissuades any man who comes to marry Udenkwo, with the excuse that his wife births only female children, therefore, his daughters will also produce same. Oganaiwe is irrational in his attitude towards women in general, describing them as misfortunes and worthless. His daughters die one after the other from the trauma they face from their father's patriarchal treatment. Oganaiwe never stops hammering on how both women and their wealth are an appendage to men, and only has value when attached to a man no matter the stature or status. Oganaiwe cannot trust his daughters with inheritance or rather has no intention of leaving his properties in their care, however in the cause of this misogynistic attitude, the 'Umuada' vows that whoever detest women shall never see them in his household, and this in turn causes Oganaiwe to beget five sons, that end up taking each other's lives because of inheritance.

In the cause of the play, Oganaiwe buys himself the Kingship position with wealth, and decides to take control of Udenkwo's red oil production site, stating that women do not have any rights to own land or landed property. While this is going on, Udenkwo fights off the masquerade that comes to steal from her oil production, and she eventually kills him. The now King Oganaiwe insists that Udenkwo goes naked in the market square and this calls the attention of the 'Umuada' as they threaten to go naked with Udenkwo stating that, the nakedness of one woman is the nakedness of all women, including the living and the dead. In their attempt to

fight their common enemy, the women go naked at the end of the play, which invokes catastrophe, including the killing of Akubuike, Oganaiwe's only surviving son by the Okija people when he wears masquerade paraphernalia to steal oil. Oganaiwe is in agony holding his sons head, he brings out a gun and shoots Udenkwo, however, after much positive dialogue with Ofodile, Oganaiwe bends his head in deep thought and soberness.

### **Women's Subjugation and Property Ownership in Nwagbo's *When Women go Naked***

*When women go Naked* written by Pat Obi Nwagbo reflects the cultural setting of the Igbo people of Nigeria and the traditional practices that are discriminatory to the female gender which include, female disinheritance, male child preference, women devaluation, excluding women from traditional affairs or running of the community, forced marriages from the demands of tradition and so many others.

Nwagbo, sets the play in Umundiagu, a community used as an avenue to consider women's struggles in Igbo societies. Hence women in Igbo land face a lot of marginalization as suggested in the play and also seen in the Igbo society. Looking at Ifemeje and Umejiaku's contributions towards women's struggles in Igbo land;

For decades, wives of Igbo customary law marriages and daughters of such union have contented with numerous oppressive, degrading and discriminatory cultural practices which grossly impede their constitutionally guaranteed rights, such discrimination under discourse are legion, they include inter alia, legalized wife battery, or chastisement: wife inheritance, harmful widowhood practice, payment and refund of bribe-price, marginalization of women's rights in the event of dissolution of customary law marriages; female disinheritance, female gender

mutilation, female trafficking and son-preference syndrome. (18)

The play started with one of the ordeals mentioned above, which is male-child preference which started in the compound of Oganaigwe who happens to be the villain in the play. Women gather in his compound singing and dancing for the arrival of his daughter, but Oganaigwe in turn is not contented and this shows that the birth of a female child is not appreciated as much as that of the male in Igbo land. In Ugoli's statement to Oganaigwe;

Ugoli: yes, Lizard whose wife gave birth and his folks were rejoicing; instead of rejoicing with them, he climbed an iroko tree and threatened to fall. (12)

The excerpt is noted in the meaning that female children are not as welcome as male children. In Igbo traditional society, when a child is born, it welcomed with joyous songs and dances; but in the case of Oganaigwe, he ignores his female child and rather goes after Onwuka who predicted falsely that he would bear a male child. In this conversation, we catch a glimpse of the issue;

Ugoli: What did Onwuka, an elderly dibia without teeth do?

Ogana: He lacks teeth, but has the tongue to forecast what is impossible (mimics) "Ogana, what is coming this time unlike others before is a male child, a chip off the old block". He has always relied on him. (18)

The preference for male children is so pervasive that the birth of female children are not welcomed with the required enthusiasm as expected because of the belief that a female child as regarded by the society is a transient human, who will eventually leave the family of origin to live with another family by marriage,



Ezebunwa recognizes this in his paper on *Male Child-Syndrome and the Agony of Motherhood among the Igbo of Nigeria*, that “Male-child preference has remained one of the most lasting cultural values of the Igbo of south eastern Nigeria (220).

This phenomenon is evident in societies where male children are accorded special recognition and/or higher status relative to their female counterparts.

Oganaigwe represents the mentality of many Igbo men who believe that without male children their lineage would end, because of the belief that male children should be the only ones to sustain the family line. As seen in this conversation;

Ogana: listen to yourself, perhaps you say, meaning you are not sure. I can tell you that the wife of the Lizard must have treated him to dozens of female lizards. (18)

Here the lizard is used to represent humans, they continue:

Ugoli: You think animals bother with the sex of children the way humans, especially men do?

Ogana: so, you think, that animals do not bother (Giggles) and why do you think men will not bother, who will succeed them? Will women do that?

Ugoli: what is wrong with that?

Ogana: I know you will ask what is wrong with that, why will the lizard in your tale want to commit suicide? (18)

In the excerpt, Oganaigwe insinuates that a man whose wife bears only female children is likely to commit suicide and this is in line with Akpan’s argument in his paper, *The Male Factor and family size in Rural Development*. He states that;

A man who died without a son lived a worthless life; he is inherited by his brother, and is soon forgotten since his branch of the family tree has ended...also, in traditional Igbo society, the status of a man is assessed in part by the number of his sons, a man with many sons is viewed as a wealthy or an accomplished man, his neighbors cautiously avoid confrontation or litigation with him and he is assured of a befitting burial at death. For a woman, the birth of a male child is of paramount importance as well, because it establishes her firmly in the family. She is said to have “taken root” or established a solid foundation when the first son arrives since the birth of a son ensures marital security, given prevailing high childhood mortality, just a son is not enough. The desire to ensure that at least one survives his father, encourages prolific childbearing. (6)

Oganaigwe as a wealthy man who does not believe that his female children can take his place, in both inheritance and sustenance of the family name declares in the play: “Chiokike knows that I am wealthy and as such will need a man to inherit my wealth, unless he has created me to live forever” (19). Despite having seven children , Oganaigwe still worries about who will inherit his wealth and this clearly suggests that he would value one male child over seven daughters in his household. This is probably because the society is patriarchally defined and not much has been done to change this systemic mistreatment. Ifemeje and Umejiaku also posit that;

The Igbo customary law is basically patriarchal in nature, and therefore the cardinal inheritance is by primogeniture. Land and landed property, devolve

under this system on the males, to the exclusion of daughters and wives. Igbo customary law denies the female genders the right to inherit their deceased husband or father's landed property, thus their inheritance rights are grossly marginalized and jeopardized. (21)

The above argument is visible throughout the play, and yet there are characters like Ofodile who believes that a female child is as important as a male child; but Oganaiwe still denounces this by saying that fathers are seen through their male children, stating that he cannot trust his daughters with inheritance, or his wealth. Ofodile argues that women are rich in Umundiagu, but for Oganaiwe; "the wealth of a woman is merely an appendage and its value is lies only in its attachment to a man (36). He equally states that Udunna who comes to marry Udenkwo is doing so because of his wealth. The wealth of a woman in Igbo land is usually attached to a man, and so, women who struggle to make wealth always have their husbands to provide covering to avoid criticism from the society. But Udenkwo makes it clear that her wealth should not be attached to a man (38). Udenkwo's stance brings up the argument that further exposes women's struggle for property ownership in traditional Igbo society. Below is the dialogue between Anagwanti, Oganaiwe's right hand man with Ugoli, a man who always speaks the truth irrespective of the person involved, thus;

Ogana: Our custom does not permit women to own land.

Anagwanti: Yes! The Igwe has spoken.

Ugoli: Spoken what?

Anagwanti: That our custom does not permit women own land.

Ogana: Now tell me, when a father is sharing his land to his children, does he give any to his daughters? Is it not only the sons?

Ugoli: Inheritance is different from buying. But in a family where they don't have enough land if a woman is wealthy, she can buy land for her children. (60)

Oganaigwe goes further to disagree on this;

Ogana: Yes! Male children, not female children, and where are the male children of Udenkwo to whom she's buying land? (60)

The argument goes on that a woman is not permitted to buy or own land especially when she does not have a male child, ownership of property to a great extent are influenced by the prevailing customs and norms of the people. From the above we see that, under customary law, women rarely inherit land and typically cannot obtain right to own one, hence Oganaigwe as the king, who represents the people has clearly stated it, and it's not far from the reality of women in Igbo land.

Furthermore, marriage is also used as a means of subjugation of female folks in the play. Oganaigwe insists on deciding who his daughters marry as observed by the character Nwamma;

Nwamma: Every couple prays to bless their children's marriage. But my husband's lot is to curse, that was what caused Akunnaya, my first daughter's death. All her mates got married, in her own case; it was not as if suitors were not coming; but her father walked out on them. She was heartbroken. One night, she slept and did not wake up again, the predicament of her other sister

Akuzulum, was worse. He was forcing her to marry a man he wanted, but she stood her ground. When the man she wanted came, he told the suitor and his people to wait so that he would bring his cup to drink their wine; he left through the back door and did not come back till the next day. (47)

Marriages are a matter of interest, but Oganaiwe makes choice of partners for his daughters; refusing Uduinna who comes to marry Udenkwo, her hand in marriage, perhaps as a means of punishment to his daughters for not being sons. He believes that the gender of the children that will come from his daughters will be the same as his wife's that produced them. The character Udenkwo comments on Oganaiwe's attitude to his wife thus;

Udenkwo: So what do you want me to see reason for? Was she not incessantly accused of being a plantain tree and producing same? She eventually died because her heart was always troubled. (48)

Udenkwo continues to narrate the mistreatment women in Oganaiwe's household face.

Udenkwo: You do not know him; he did not mourn my step mother before he ran to take a new wife. (51)

Marriage is another area that presents problems for women in Igbo culture, the Igbo ideology of male child dominance makes a man marry as many wives as he wants and on the demise of a man's wife, the society does not judge his decision on taking a new wife as Udenkwo states. In the same vein, Gregory Okorobia observes that;

The woman is regarded and used as a "spare tyre" this is a most unfortunate way of regarding a human being. Almost all reasons for polygamy are for the benefit of man, even though out of vanity some women opted for polygamy, the whole idea is for the pleasure of man. (443)

This clearly explains the disadvantage women face in marriages because thus, the Igbo customary laws are in favor of men, allowing them to be polygamous in nature. However the practice of ‘Nhachi’ is a cultural practice in Igbo land as spotted in the play, which turns out to be one of the ways to silence female children to do the bidding of male folks. And as seen in the characters' conversation;

Nnadozie: I have advised you before to do Nhachi. Let one of your daughters take in, you may be fortunate and she will have a son, that son becomes a member of your family.

Ogana: You are advising me that another man not married to my daughter should impregnate her and maybe a son will result from it, who will become mine.

Ofodile; Ogana, you know the traditional. The son becomes yours but your daughters will still marry.  
(35)

In some Igbo communities, daughters are made to remain in their families to have children, especially when there are no male children from their parents. During this process of ‘Nhachi’ the father arranges any man able to impregnate his daughter and make her endure any pain that comes with this process in silence, until she’s made a mother, and not just any mother, but the mother of a son. In some cases as observed by Evelyn Nwachukwu:

The childless wife or a wife who has no male child is given a legal right to marry another wife to produce a male child to make the woman achieve recognition in her husband’s home. This will make the wife a “female husband” An unmarried daughter of a man who does not have a male child also has the legal right to marry a wife

who will produce children to bear her father's name for the continuity of her father's lineage. (2)

This is evident in Oganaiwe's family. In Nnuona's words:  
Apart from his ill-treatment and refusing his daughters to get married, he has offended Umuada so much. He harasses us, threatening that he will finish us with gun each time we admonished him that he should leave our sisters to marry and be part of us. (53)

Disrespecting the Umuada (Association of daughters of the lineage) is the highest point of Oganaiwe's disrespect for women. Egodi Uchendu explains that the Umuada are a female group that operates at the extended family level. The Umuada are the ones that directly monitor the activities of women in their patrilineal homes to ensure that "they did not deviate from the societal norms". (6)

Nwagbo recognizes and values the potentiality of the Umuada when the 'Umuada' vows that whoever detests women shall never see them. This is a curse laid on Oganaiwe which brings him satisfaction and destruction at the same time; satisfaction because he finally bears five sons and destruction comes when the sons kill themselves fighting over inheritance. The premium the society places on male children manifests in different forms. Nwagbo also uses masquerade as a form of women's subjugation in the play. Women are forbidden from challenging masquerades and in some cases not even to watch them because it is believed in that they are representatives of the spirit world. In the play, a masquerade comes in and tries to steal containers of Udenkwo's oil, as women are expected to run into hiding at any sight of a masquerade, but in this case Udenkwo challenges Opiamkpala by screaming and grabbing the masquerade. The following ensues between them;

Udenkwo: Thief of oil! This is how you masquerade yourselves and come to steal oil.

Opiamkpala: (with a disguised voice) you call a masquerade a thief? (55)

Opiamkpala establishes that women do not have any right to question masquerades, no matter what they are doing, but Udenkwo did not hesitate to contend this, thus;

Opiamkpala: You still have the mouth to say that I have come to steal?

Udenkwo: Whoever has come to take forcefully what does not belong to him, what has he come to do?(Choruses with Nnuona)To steal!

Opiamkpala:You women are not afraid of a masquerade? (56)

Thus; the possibility of men disguising as masquerades to oppress women and take what belongs to them becomes clearer, and an altercation ensues that escalates into Udenkwo killing Opiamkpala the Masquerade. The now, King Oganaiwe sees this as a sacrilege, he makes it open that a masquerade is more important than a pregnant woman, and insists Udenkwo serves punishment by being stripped naked. The power of the 'Umuada' is shown when they all go naked in disagreement with the King's pronouncement stating that the nakedness of one woman is the nakedness of all women including the living and the dead and this suggests a strong female bonding.

### **Recommendations**

The research recommends that

- Women should first and foremost learn how to support each other, understand each other's struggle and work towards stopping the unequal treatment women face within themselves through women's associations and groups.



- Awareness should be created, especially amongst rural dwellers who are more vulnerable as it regards property ownership, hence many women are not aware of the repercussions of denial of inheritance and the need to have the confidence to obtain or fight for what they are legally entitled to. This awareness can be created through women's associations and groups and effective representatives should be set up in dealing with women's property ownership struggles, with strong legal back up free of bias and prejudice.
- The existing laws that accord women certain rights to inherit the properties that belong to their fathers and husbands where no wills exist, should be publicized and made more functional and avenues should be created for societal re-orientation.

## **Conclusion**

Women's struggle to own and inherit landed property appears not to be gaining much ground in the Nigerian society, causing so many concerned women to lose focus towards achieving their goals in life. Several discussions concerning the subjugation and mistreatment faced by women in the Nigerian albeit Igbo society, have been subjects for dramatic expositions over the years. Looking at the situations from the play texts *Our Wife Forever* and *When Women go Naked*, one could see that there are hardly any restrictive measures taken against the denial of women's inheritance rights in Nigeria, and therefore, this research is an analysis of the issues of women as it concerns property ownership and inheritance using the selected plays. The whole idea of women having an inheritance of landed property, which includes houses, lands and other related items that can be inherited from their deceased fathers and husbands, is still a lingering issue or problem in most

communities. This research shows there's a high level of women's struggle for property ownership in Nigeria, because traditionally it is believed that men are born to dominate while women are to be subordinates. Therefore in the arrangement regarding property ownership, women are excluded from partaking in sharing of landed properties in both their family of origin and marital family. The common assumption is that it is when a woman moves into her marital family that she owns property, but then we see during the analysis of the plays that lots of women struggle to inherit properties in both their marital and families of origin.

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## **AUTHORS' NAMES AND ADDRESSES**

**Ifeoma Onyinye Nnamah**

Department of Theatre and Film Studies  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria

**&**

**Prof. Tracie C. Utoh-Ezeajugh**

Department of Theatre and Film Studies  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria