



Edward E. Imo

University of Port Harcourt (Nigeria)

The Discourse of Girl-Child Abuse from the Prism of Nigerian Drama: Julie Okoh's *Edewede* and *The Mannequins* as Paradigms

ABSTRACT. The study examines the engaging and topical discourse of girl-child human rights abuse and violations from the lenses of contemporary Nigerian drama. It utilizes drama as a tool for advocacy in the global fight against the infringements on the fundamental human rights of girl-children in such developing countries as Nigeria. The primary source materials are drawn from Julie Okoh's plays namely: *Edewede* and *The Mannequins*. The study adopts the qualitative approach to research whereby the two plays under study are used to represent other contemporary Nigerian plays that address the same subject. Among others, the study observes that women (whether as adults or girl-children) are endangered species in Nigeria when it comes to exercising their fundamental human rights. The study also notes, regrettably that girl-children in Nigeria, suffer incessant and severe sexual abuses, violations and domestic violence by the hands of their parents, extended relatives and acquaintances yet the perpetrators of these crimes hardly face justice. The study is significant to the extent that it serves as a clarion call for the protection of the fundamental human rights of girl-children in Nigeria. The study also recommends capital punishment for perpetrators of girl-child's sexual molestation and domestic abuse. The study beckons on the Nigerian government, at all levels, to implement laws and decrees that protect girl-children from serial abusers.

KEYWORDS: discourse, girl-child, human rights abuse and drama

Introduction

The discourse of girl-child human rights has attracted global scholarship since the institutionalization of gender studies in most institutes of learning around the world. Propelled by the communiqué of the Beijing Conference in 1995, there has been a rekindled interest in the advocacy for the protection of the human rights of girl-children. Such rights include indivisible, interdependent and interrelated human rights: i.e., the human rights to freedom from discrimination based on gender, age, race, colour,

language, religion, ethnicity or any other status or on the status of child's parent. Other manifestations of human rights of the girl-child include the rights to a healthy and safe environment as well as the rights to protection from all forms of physical and mental abuse.

Scholarly enquiries as well as direct observational experiences reveal that there are various shades of abuses, violations and violence against the girl-child in Nigeria. These include being denied the right to inherit her father's or family properties; being denied the right to education; being forced into early marriage and many more. In Nigeria, the girl child is considered a second-class citizen and is mostly relegated to the background in the family and society when serious decisions are about to be taken. Largely due to the preponderance of patriarchal ideologies in most African societies, women are conceived as men's properties as well as objects of men's sexual gratification. From the bizarre experiences of widowhood practices where women are subjected to wear rags without having their bath all through the period of mourning their late husbands, to the quell idea of widow inheritance whereby women are being passed on to the younger brothers of their late husbands, women in Nigeria and by extension, Africa, suffer a reasonable degree of molestation, abuse, violation and violence. In Africa, education is assumed to be the prerogative of the male because the girl-child will be given out in marriage, hence, she is meant to contribute to the training of the male (Okoli, 2011).

Ironically, Nigeria is a signatory to the *United Nations Declaration of Human Rights* and other world's major treaties on the protection of women's human rights, yet issues of girl-child rape, girl-child labour, girl-child domestic violence and girl child-molestation continue to rise on a daily basis even as the perpetrators are treated with kid gloves. Although the demonstration of harmful practices against girl-children in Nigeria is more pronounced in the rural societies, there are footprints of same practices among urban settlers. While such harmful practices as female genital mutilation, clitoridectomy, excision, infibulations, widowhood rites and teenage pregnancy are predominant in rural environments, girl-child labour, rape, girl-child domestic violence and girl child trafficking are more pronounced in urban societies. The fact is that both the urban and rural societies in Nigeria make collaborators in the act of infringing on the fundamental human rights of girl-children. It also shows that the abuse and molestation of girl-children in Nigeria are entrenched in the cultural practices of the people.

The discourse of girl-child education and abuse in Nigeria is highly intertwined with the cultural practices and traditions of the pocket cultures

in Nigeria. Discussing gender issues of any society implies discussing the cultural institutions of such society. On this premise, the study finds theatre and drama as not just vehicles for the transportation of cultures but also as veritable tools for social interventions, advocacy, and re-engineering. Since its early manifestations in ancient Greece down to its multi-functional dispositions in contemporary times, drama has remained an aggressive weapon deployed by playwrights to interrogate developments and experiences in human society. Drama serves various purposes depending on the vision of the playwright. It can be used to document history, to express a worldview, to disseminate crucial information, to canvass an opinion, to educate the society and to create social consciousness among others. It is for the foregoing that the paper interrogates the thorny issues of girl-child rights abuse and domestic violence in contemporary Nigerian drama with particular focus on Julie Okoh's dramatic pieces namely, *Edewede* and *The Mannequins*.

The Concept of Human Rights

The term human rights have been conceptualized over time to have different connotations. What is, however, permanent across all the concepts, is the position that it is strictly tied inalienably to the individual i.e. human right is what belongs to an individual. It is the right of an individual to become who and what they want to be. It is also the privilege human beings enjoy in a given society or gathering on account of their humanness. According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:

Human rights are norms that aspire to protect all people everywhere from severe political, legal, and social abuses. Examples of human rights are the rights to freedom of religion, the right to a fair trial when charged with a crime, the right not to be tortured, and the right to education (Nikel, 2019, p. 1).

The philosophy of human rights, as enshrined in the *Sanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* above, addresses questions about the existence, content, nature, universality, justification, and legal status of human rights. When we state that human rights are universal, we mean to express that all living humans or perhaps, all living persons have human rights. One does not have to be a particular kind of person or a member of a specific nation or religion to have human rights. "People have human rights inde-

pendently of whether they are found in the practices, morality, or law of their country or culture” (Nikel, 2019).

History has it that the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, was the first legal document to set out the fundamental human rights to be universally protected. This document which has spanned seventy-two (UDHR, p. 72) years, continues to be the foundation of all international human rights law. Its 30 articles provide the foundation and principles of current and future human rights conventions, treaties and other legal documents. According to the UDHR:

Human rights are rights we have simply because we exist as human beings—they are not granted by any state. These universal rights are inherent to us all, regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or any other status. They range from the most fundamental—the right to life—to those that make life worth living, such as the rights to food, education, work, health and liberty (UDHR, p. 2).

The true precursor to the human rights discourse was the concept of natural rights which appeared as part of the medieval natural law tradition that became prominent during the European Enlightenment with such philosophers as John Locke, Francis Hutcheson and Jean-Jacques Burlamaqui and which featured prominently in the political discourse of the American Revolution and the French Revolution (Moyn, 2010). From this foundation, the modern human rights arguments emerged over the latter half of the 20th century, possibly as a reaction to slavery, torture, genocide, and war crimes as well as a realization of inherent human vulnerability and as being a precondition for the possibility of a just society (Weston, 2014).

Children’s Rights in Nigeria: Overview

Available records indicate that in Nigeria, children’s rights are protected by law and held sacred. Not only does the law protect the child, it also stipulates punishment for adults who take advantage of children or seek to negatively influence them. The law seeks to prevent cruelty against children while stating the rights and obligations of the Nigerian child (Onibokun, 2014). Onibokun informs further that prior to the 2003 Child Rights Act, Nigerian child protection was defined by the Children and Young Peo-

ple's Act (CYPA), a law relating primarily to juvenile justice. The cardinal principle behind Nigeria's adoption of the Child Rights Act in 2003 was to domesticate the Convention on the Rights of the child as stipulated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which culminated in an international treaty that grants all children and young people (aged 17 and under) a comprehensive set of rights. Apart from the stipulation that no Nigerian child shall enter into any contract, except as provided by the provisions of the Act, the Child Rights Act enshrined some rights of the Nigerian child, namely:

Right to survival and development; right to name, right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly, right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, right to private and family life, right to freedom of movement, right to freedom from discrimination, right to dignity of the child, right to leisure, recreation and cultural activities, right to health and health services, right to parental care, protection and maintenance, right of a child to free, compulsory and universal primary education, etc, right of a child in need of special protection measure, right of the unborn child protection against harm, etc. (Onibokun, 2014, p. 2).

The Act prohibits child marriage as no person under the age of 18 can contract a valid marriage. In addition, parents and guardians are precluded from arranging or facilitating child betrothals and any person who marries a child. It is also unlawful under the Nigerian Child Act to have sexual intercourse with a child. Any person who contrives this provision commits an offence of rape and is liable on conviction to life imprisonment.

Ironically, the full enforcement of the Child Rights Act in Nigeria still suffers series of setbacks occasioned by obnoxious cultural practices within the pocket cultures and the obvious lack of leadership will on the part of government to enforce the provisions therein. Akolokwu and Nwauzi (2019) observe that the rights of the girl-child in Nigeria continues to be violated despite the very many provisions of the law guaranteeing such rights in domestic and international instruments. Akolokwu and Nwauzi's argument in this paper is that the violations of the rights of the girl-child in Nigeria persist largely as a result of several militating factors namely:

The obnoxious nature of the patriarchal social system in Nigeria; the very high illiteracy rate of the Nigerian public especially in the rural areas; customary laws that treat the girl-child and in fact women generally as subservient to the

man and with limited opportunities under the custom to maximize potentials; the various religious beliefs that insist that a woman's individuality should be subject to the man who is superior (Akolokwu & Nwauzi, 2019, p. 1)

The culture of silence on the part of girl-children for fear of stigmatization and the obvious lack of enforcement of justice is also cardinal reasons why the violation of girl-child rights is on the increase in Nigeria. For the foregoing, Akolokwu and Nwauzi (2019) beckon on the judiciary to be proactive in insisting that perpetrators of violations of the human rights of women, especially girl-children, are brought to book in order to serve as deterrence to others. The study also canvasses regular human rights education and sensitization of Nigerian girl-children especially for purposes of counseling them out of the culture of silence.

Similarly, Eguagie (2015) in her article titled "Human Rights for the Nigerian Woman and Girl-Child", expresses her detest for the negative portrayal of women especially girl children in the entertainment industry especially in music videos. Like Onibokun, Akolokwu and Nwauzi, Eguagie acknowledges that there has been one form of violence or the other against women and girl-children in Nigeria. She identifies such violence to include sexual harassment, female genital mutilation, child marriage, child trafficking, physical assault, acid attack, wife battering, molestation and other negative cultural practices. According to Eguagie:

It is now a common trend in our entertainment industry, to see women and girls dancing half-naked for the entertainment of their audience. The Nigerian society is gradually degrading the dignity of women and widening the gap of gender inequality indirectly. In an attempt to make more money and fame, you see even educated artists encouraging and featuring young girls to dance half-naked while their male counterparts cover their bodies. It is disgusting and disheartening, and this is modern day abuse against women. The most annoying part is the so-called Home video (Nollywood); the Nigerian movie is indirectly encouraging some forms of violence against women and this includes physical, sexual, psychological and other forms of abuse. You can watch five Nigerian movies and four will feature one form of violence against women such as women or the girl-child being raped, having witchcraft, possessed of evil spirits, physically assaulted in the community or school, subjected to psychological torture and degraded as second-class citizens, not allowed to speak and all these are seen as normal in a typical Nigerian society as portrayed by the movie producers and directors (Eguagie, 2015, p. 1).

Eguagie's outburst in this article seem to be an outright condemnation of the entertainment industry without taking cognizance that the movies are sincere reflections of the day-to-day happenings in society, hence, the catchphrase that arts mirror society either in the present, past or future.

The thrust of the review has been to underscore the fact that even though Nigeria is a signatory to major world treaties and declarations on fundamental human rights, there is a high rise in the violations, molestations and sexual violence of women especially girl-children.

Bio-Data of Julie Okoh

Julie Okoh is a native of Esan Ethnic Nationality in Edo State, Nigeria. Born at Ubiaja town on August 5, 1947, Okoh had a humble beginning. Julie Okoh is a retired professor in the Department of Theatre and Film Studies, University of Port Harcourt with specialization in playwriting, gender studies and dramatic theory and criticism. She is one of the few prominent voices in Nigeria in feminist dramaturgy and literature. Most of her works advocate for women liberation from the clutches of patriarchy. Some of her plays include: *Edewede*, *The Mannequins*, *In the Fullness of Time*, *Who Can Fight the Gods?*, *Mask*, *The Trials*, *A Cry for Democracy*, *Closed Doors*, *Aisha*, *Our Wife Forever*, *We Are Rivers* and *A Haunting Past* among others.

Synopses of Selected Plays

As earlier mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the two plays under study are Julie Okoh's *Edewede* and *The Mannequins*. The play *Edewede* is set in a fictitious community known as Otoedo—a remote village of the Esan speaking people of the Niger Delta Region in Nigeria. It x-rays the issue of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) which is termed as cultural practice in the society of the play. The heroine of the play, Edewede champions the struggle against women oppression and subjugation through the machination of female circumcision. Contrary to the tradition of the community, Edewede refuses to surrender her daughter, Oseme for circumcision because she sees in the act an inhuman treatment meted on the girl-children to demonstrate men's domination of the female folk. To make

matters worse, Edewede inherits a husband, Ordia, who does not have a mind of his own relies on the decisions of his highly traditional mother, Ebikere. Edewede also inherits a mother-in-law. Ebikere, who pitches tent with the men on insisting that Edewede provides her grand-daughter Os-eme for the circumcision.

The tension in the play heightens when Edewede mobilizes her fellow women of like-minds in the community and together they stage a protest by going on exile to a far away land, leaving the men (their husbands) to take care of domestic chores and the children. At first, the men see the women's gimmick as mere child's play but when the pangs of family errands hit them hard, they run to the King for intervention. In the end, the men unanimously agree to jettison the idea of female circumcision so they can be at peace with their wives. On their part, the women become assuaged by the men's decision and so return to the community to continue their domestic and complimentary role in the family. The play ends on the note of celebration and reconciliation as the men and women engage in a dance of agreement to live at peace with each other.

The Mannequins is set in a more urban society where industrialization has occasioned the engagement in white collar job. The play portrays the patriarchal drunkenness of Mr. Adudu, a prosperous entrepreneur who runs a contracting company and takes advantage of his exalted position as the manager to molest and defile young girls in his neighborhood. In his randy disposition, Adudu encounters Iyere, a teenager of 13, who has come to seek financial assistance in his office. Rather than assist Iyere genuinely, Adudu decides to take undue advantage of her by promising to give her plenty of money if only she can meet him up in a hotel room. Iyere obliges innocently in desperation because she needs the money to save her brother who is gasping for breath in the hospital as a result of a deep cut in his throat. There in the hotel room, Adudu cunningly forces his way in Iyere and in the process forcefully breaks her virgin knob. Some days later, Iyere in the company of her mother, Mrs Odibei, storms Adudu's office to show her mother the man behind the forceful breaking of her virginity as well as the man behind her contracting the deadly Vagina Vesico Fistula (VVF). Upon seeing Adudu, Mrs Odibei resigns to fate and weeps as she introduces Mr. Adudu to Iyere as her biological father. The drama takes a different twist as Adudu breaks down in tears and regret for being the architect of his own daughter's irremediable health condition.

Girl-Child Rights in *Edewede* and *The Mannequins*

Our analysis so far reveals the preponderance of the abuse of girl-child rights in the plays under study. In *Edewede*, the issue of girl-child rights abuse is portrayed through the means of forced circumcision on Oseme, a teenager. By virtue of being part of the human community, Oseme is imbued with some inalienable rights. Such rights include the right to be protected from harm or torture. Ironically, her rights are flagrantly abused at the altar of primordial cultural values that insist on female circumcision. As a teenager who is capable of making choices, Oseme is opposed to the idea of female circumcision just like her mother, but rather than respect her views, her father, Ordia, propelled by her grand-mother, Ebikere, persuades her to present herself for circumcision regardless of the risk involved in it.

The imperativeness of girl-child rights in the play lies in the fact that, as a teenager, Oseme is expected to enjoy socio-cultural protection from her parents. One would expect that her family, which is her first constituency, should be responsible for the protection of her human rights. Ironically, her entire family except her mother, deny her such protection. It is actually her grand-mother, Ebikere that instigates the entire process of subjecting her to circumcision. Quite early in the play, Ebikere reminds her of the need for her to submit herself to be circumcised, thus:

EBIKERE :Circumcision is part of our culture. My mother was circumcised. So also were her grand-mothers, great grand-mothers and great, great, great grand-mothers. It is a rite that every woman in this land goes through (Okoh, 2015, p. 2).

Ebikere's trail of thought above clearly indicates that culture and tradition remain weapons deployed by men in most African societies to consistently cage and suppress women. She does not advance any reasonable logic or benefits of circumcision to drive her point but only begs the question that her forbears did it and so it is justified.

Whereas Ebikere's insistence on circumcision can be understood against the background that she represents age long tradition, Ordia's position appears quite absurd considering that he has had a fair taste of modern life on account of education and exposure. Besides, as Oseme's father, he is naturally bound to protect his daughter from any form of harm be it cultural or religious. Ordinarily, Ordia is expected to be proactive in

the protection of his only surviving daughter, Oseme given that he had lost his first daughter, Ize to health complications occasioned by circumcision. Edewede recounts the horrible experience of circumcision, thus:

I was seized with fear, and my fear increased as I matured in age. Then came over turn to face the evil blade we all walked to the initiation camp but some never walked back from there. Akalo died to death; Denowe died few weeks later. As season rolled by, many more maidens passed away for the same cause, others remain destroyed for life” (Okoh, 2015, p. 18).

Ironically, Ordia prefers to sing the circumcision song along with his aged mother as he beckons on Oseme to surrender herself to be circumcised. Overwhelmed by the gory imageries she has of circumcision, Edewede rises to the occasion and stops Oseme from being circumcised. Characteristic of most African men, Ordia deems it proper to intimidate His wife, Edewede by reminding her of the patriarchal cliché that he is her superior by virtue of being her husband. As he puts it:

ORDIA: Wede! I am your husband. It is my duty to protect you too. So, listen to my advice. Do not allow that painful experience to becloud your reason. Give up this suicidal idea of yours (Okoh, 2015, p. 23).

Ordia’s patriarchal boast as the man of the house above smacks of infringements on the fundamental human rights of Edewede since he thinks that he is the only one capable of thinking and therefore must be listened to against all odds. The abuse of women’s human rights in the play trickles down to the point where Edewede engages Ebikere, her mother in law in a slug fest. Amidst their heated verbal exchange, Ebikere reminds Edewede that her place in society is in the kitchen. “You don’t even know that you are only a wife in this house. And as such, your place is in the kitchen (Okoh, 2015, p. 7).

In the play *Edewede*, circumcision is used as way of checkmating women since it is believed that if a woman is not circumcised, she stands the risk of being flirtatious. Without any form of medical examination, the traditional society also conjectures that uncircumcised women would experience difficulties in childbirth. Some extremist novices in traditional African reproductive health claim that the protruded clitoris is capable of compressing a baby’s head during delivery. The playwright presents circumcision as one of the means through which men unleash violence and trample upon the pride of womanhood. An uncircumcised woman is ad-

judged impure and imperfect. Ebikere reminds Oseme that “The peanut is very delicate. It is the source of confusion, impurity and imperfection” (Okoh, 2015, p. 5). Another argument put forward by the advocates of female circumcision is that the removal of the clitoris is meant for the sexual enjoyment of men and not women. Meaning women have no right to enjoy sex. This, again, is another manifestation of the abuse of the girl-child who is also a potential woman. Through the character of Edewede, Okoh educates the society on the health risks and complications associated with female circumcision. This is expressed in her monologue below:

EDEWEDE: Vesico-Vaginal Fistula. According to Mama Nurse during circumcision, when the clitoris is being removed, the labia and the surrounding tissues are damaged. The girl suffers from stenosis that is healing with narrowing of birth canal. This process makes the muscles surrounding the vagina and the urethra to become very tight. Later in life, during labour the narrowed birth canal makes it difficult for the baby to come out easily. The baby’s head is forced to create an opening between the walls of the bladder, urethra and the vagina. If the woman survives, she begins to leak urine because the damaged bladder, urethra or vagina outlet can no longer control. the urine (Okoh, 2015, p. 29).

The play also portrays the desecration and defilement of the girl-child. The pain inflicted on the girl-child during circumcision is the type that hurts her so deeply that she undergoes torture and sometimes, death just as we find in the case of Ize, Edewede’s first daughter. Eriala (Mama Nurse) makes conscious effort, out of her medical expertise, to expose the adverse effects of circumcision on the girl child, thus:

ERIALA: You all already know what circumcision is. You have all gone through it. In this society, many young girls have lost their lives because of circumcision. Many women are suffering from different types of diseases because of circumcision. Tetanus, urinary infections, V.V.F, HIV/AIDS are all dangerous afflictions contacted through circumcision. Yet they see nothing wrong with it... (Okoh, 2015, p. 36).

Eriala sensitizes the women further by charging them up to see themselves as equals of men. As she puts it:

ERIALA: ...First of all you must know that God created man and woman in his own image. If the image of God is one then man and woman were created equals. But society made one master and the other slave. Circumcision is a form of slavery imposed on woman to dominate her (Okoh, 1997, p. 37).

It is Eriala's charge above that spurs the women into action as they abandon their homes and go on a compulsory exile as a way of protest against female circumcision in the Otoedo Community. At first, the men feel undaunted but when the pangs and paroxysms of marital companionship stare them in the face they begin to get agitated over their wives' absence. It is the desperation to have their wives back that propels them to succumb to the women's demand for the abolition of female circumcision. Okoh's *Edewede* is more of protest literature in the dramatic mode of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* and J. P. Clark's *Wives Revolt*.

Human Right Issues in *The Mannequins*

The predominant human rights issue in *The Mannequins* is that of sexual molestation and abuse. This is seen in the conduct of Adudu who goes about sleeping with any women that comes his way including his own thirteen-year-old biological daughter, Iyere. Iyere is portrayed in the play as a victim of girl-child rights abuse by her own biological father. In a bid to survive as well as attend to her brother's health challenge, Iyere looks in the direction of Adudu for assistance unknown to her that Adudu is her father. Quite characteristic of Adudu, he accepts to help her on the condition that he would have carnal knowledge of her. On their first meeting, Iyere exposes her poor background to him, thus: "Sir, we don't have money to pay the bill. We are poor and fatherless" (Okoh, 1997, p. 50).

Iyere's revelation of her poor background above tells a great deal of Adudu's recklessness and irresponsible disposition as her father. Iyere has parents but because she lacks parental protection and love, she is quick to admit that she is fatherless. Ironically, it is her own biological father that she confesses of her fatherlessness to. Iyere's resort to begging, in the first instance, is as a result her poor background. It is the desperation to survive that compels her mother to send her begging. She bemoans their fate, thus:

IYERE: She doesn't know where I am right now. You see, yesterday, she sent me to many people in our village. They could only contribute fifty naira. This morning, she sent me to another person in this city. He only gave me five naira. So instead of going to the hospital, I decided to come to you because people say you are very kind (Okoh, 1997, p. 51).

The lines of Iyere above raise serious indictment on her mother, Mrs Odebo for parental negligence and irresponsibility. The lines also portray her mother as a morally-bankrupt character who is heartless and inconsiderate to the point of sending her thirteen-year-old daughter into street begging. The action of the mother raises serious breach of the fundamental human rights of Iyere. By sending her into street begging, Iyere's mother has inadvertently exposed her to sexual abuse, violence and molestation. Little wonder, she plays into the hands of Adudu, the agent of sexual abuse. It can be argued therefore that Iyere did not bump into Adudu's office by intuition but by her versatility and dexterity in begging which she has perfected over time from her series of begging adventure initiated by her mother.

Another round of girl-child abuse can be found in Iyere's encounter with Adudu. It is a crime to humanity for anyone to engage in sexual intercourse with a minor be it on consent or not. Adudu is fully aware of Iyere's age bracket but he throws caution to the wind and goes ahead to make highly irresistible advances on her. He takes undue advantage of the poor little girl who confesses that she is ready to do anything for money because of her brother's critical health condition. Adudu capitalizes on her desperation and asks her again, thus: "And you are ready to do anything to save his life? (Okoh, 1997, p. 51). This question from Adudu has high malicious undertones because he desires to extract Iyere's commitment and acceptance to sleep with him.

Iyere is a product of an informal union with Adudu and Mrs Odebo. Adudu had impregnated Mrs Odebo and abandoned her in the process and so Mrs Odebo is constrained to giving birth to the baby and raising her as a jobless single lady. It is Adudu's earlier decline in taking care of Iyere from birth that translates into the tragedy of abusing her sexually and making her to contract the dreaded Vagina Vesico Fistula (VVF). The logic therefore is that if Adudu has taken full responsibility of Iyere from her conception to delivery and upbringing, the latter wouldn't have been exposed to the point of being desperate to raise money for her brother's treatment i.e., she wouldn't have encountered Adudu in such a helpless situation.

It can therefore be submitted that Iyere, like most Nigerian girl-children are exposed to sexual abuse and molestation as a result of parental negligence and broken family structures. It can be argued that Iyere would have had a better upbringing if only her parents were cohabiting, and her welfare made the concern of both of them. Mrs Odebo recounts the episodes surrounding the birth of Iyere, thus:

MRS ODEBO: (*Falling on her knees*): Good heavens! Wretched woman! What have you done to merit this? I was fifteen, he defiled and abandoned me. As if that was not enough. Now again, my own daughter...She is hardly thirteen, a mere baby. (*Pointing at Adudu*) You have destroyed her beyond repair. Do I blame you? It is our society that gave you the whip to flog every woman you come across...I curse you! May the anger I've borne against you all these years turn into fire to consume you hopelessly should you ever look at another immature woman again. You deserter of women! Assassin of womanhood! A woman brought you into this world. Through the hands of a woman shall you depart from it...Ferocious kite that devours his own young (Okoh, 1997, p. 85).

Mrs Odebo's lamentation above sounds more like the proverbial "medicine after death" since she had every opportunity to protect her daughter Iyere from Adudu (men) which she refers to as "Ferocious Kite". She sucks in her poor status and allows her condition to override her sense of reason such that she sends her "adorable" daughter of barely thirteen years to go beg money from men even when, out of the experience, she knows the ways of men when it comes to sexual drives and libido. However, Adudu's recklessness with women especially young girls are called to question by Ebiaye, his new secretary who turns down his several advances and rebukes him to desist from his promiscuous lifestyle. Ebiaye confronts Adudu and charges him to show some respect to womanhood rather than treat young girls as his sex toys, thus:

EBIAYE: Sir, I am neither a pet nor a toy, but a person. A person with flesh and blood. A person with a soul searching for growth and fulfillment. I can't let you tie me down with your wealth (Okoh, 1997, p. 43).

The two plays under study have portrayed the conscious and flagrant abuse of girl-child human rights even though they differ in techniques, characterization, and thematic engagements. In *Edewede*, Okoh uses the anomaly of female circumcision as a tool for the interrogation of human rights issues. Here, the heroine, Edewede is portrayed as the amazon and defender of the inalienable rights of the girl child. She stands firm against primordial and outmoded patriarchal traditions that insist on female circumcision and, in the end, she emerges victorious as the King of the Otoedo community proudly pronounces the abolition of female circumcision in the land. Generically, *Edewede* can be seen as a tragicomedy as good seems to triumph over evil in the end.

The Mannequins also follows the tragi-comic dramatic structure as Adudu, the perpetrator and harbinger of corruption and sex abuse is brought to book and subjected to public pillory. However, the play subjects us into some form of mixed feelings. While we rejoice over the humiliation of Adudu, we cannot help but feel the tragic fate of Iyere who is not only abused by her biological father but contracts the dreaded VVF in the process. Okoh's *The Mannequins* raises critical concerns bothering on the thorny issue of girl-child abuse, molestation and violence. Iyere suffers terrible consequences largely due to irresponsible parenting. She is a product of a broken family and union and so she is denied the right to quality education and social welfare. The porous upbringing bequeathed Iyere is a clear infringement on the portion of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* that stipulates that every human person, regardless of sex, age, race, religion, and social status is imbued with the right to quality education and right to improved social welfare.

Conclusion

The major finding of the study is that parental negligence and weak family structure are key factors in the rampant cases of girl-child rights abuse in Nigeria and many other developing nations. The study has observed that most girl-children who are victims of human rights abuse are either products of parental negligence or broken home just as we find in the character of Iyere in Okoh's *The Mannequins*. It has also been observed that most Nigerian societies hide under the umbrella of patriarchal cultures and traditions to unleash terror on the women. Most of the ill treatment meted on women in the name of upholding culture and tradition are largely vague as there has not been any medical proof to buttress their claim. For instance, the claim by patriarchal traditions that uncircumcised females are impure and are bound to be promiscuous does not have any medical backing. The deduction here is that circumcision is one way through which men maintain their domination and subjugation of women. It has also been observed that there is a dearth of research materials on the issue of girl-child human rights in Nigerian drama. The Nigerian drama industry cannot boast of a harvest of plays that address the issue of girl-child human rights. Most gender sensitive play's dwell more on such other harmful practices against women as widowhood practice, wife inheritance, wife battering and so on.

The study, therefore, strongly recommends the activation of an effective judiciary in Nigeria. This judiciary can bring to justice perpetrators of violence and abuse on girl-children and women in general. The need for consistent social awareness programmers on the need to protect the rights of Nigerian girl-children is highly canvassed. Traditional governments in Nigeria are also urged to be dynamic by checkmating obnoxious patriarchal traditions that humiliate and dehumanize the women folk beginning with the girl-child. Nigerian writers (male and female) are encouraged to devote more creative ink in the direction of crafting works that address the abuse of girl-child human rights just as Julie Okoh has done in *Edewede* and *The Mannequins*.

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