Towards A Feminist Theatre in Nigeria: Julie Okoh's *Closed Doors* Examined

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Abstract

Okoh is a prolific playwright whose feminist inclination is not anyway in doubt. In her plays, especially Closed Doors, she addresses issues bordering on the woman question. Such issues include generally sexual injustices against women such as pedophilia, rape, female genital mutilation, forced abortion and unrequited love. Closed Doors focuses on the psychological crises of subaltern women whose lives have been vexed by a complex array of disturbing and thwarting personal relationships, particularly their relationships with their 'treacherous' lovers. The play is an expose on the vulnerability of women as a result of unbridled patriarchal arrogance. The main aim of this study is to situate Closed Doors as a feminist theatre. To achieve this, the salient characteristics of feminist theatre shall be teased out to serve as a tapestry against which this study shall posit whether Closed Doors is or is to become feminist theatre. The literary and sociological methodical approaches are adopted here; sociological because the point is established here that there is a dynamic and complex relationship between a work of art and the social realities under which it is produced.

Keywords: Close doors, Feminist, Theatre, Feminist theatre, Okoh,

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Introduction:

> Sexual domination obtains as the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides its most fundamental concepts of power.
> (Kate Millet)
> The human being is the masculine gender. The human being is a boy as a child and grown up he is a man. Everything on earth is for the human (Maria Irene Fornes, *Fefu and Her Friends*)

Feminist writing directs the attention of the readership to the inequalities and injustices girls and women experience in society. The challenge of the feminist scholar therefore is to find the ground to argue effectively for the end of oppression of all women. Nigeria has produced many feminist playwrights. Julie Okoh is arguably one of the most visible feminist playwrights in Nigeria. Her feminist plays among others include*: In the Fullness of Time*, *Edewede* which treat her condemnation of female circumcision; *Mannequins* which treats among other themes the gender issue of Vesico Vagina Fistula, *Our Wife Forever*, which centres on the social injustice and psychological trauma widows experience in society; *Aisha*, *Closed Doors*, the focus of this paper, *The Trials*, *Who Can Fight the Gods* and *Mask.* Her feminist inclination through her plays is not anyway in doubt. In her plays, she addresses such sensitive and vital issues bordering on sexual injustice against women such as rape, forced abortion and unrequited love among others. A close scrutiny of her plays reveals an ideological continuity in her approach to the woman question. The main aim of this paper is to analyze one of her magna opera, *Closed Doors* in order to situate it as feminist theatre. Various conceptual views of feminist theatre have

been collated in this paper. These views will be used as a backcloth to serve as a guide to make critical standpoints.

Mapping Out the Concepts: Feminism, Feminist Drama, Feminist Theatre

Feminism:

One of feminism's unique characteristics, strengths and weaknesses, is its persistent defiance of being constrained by definition. Charlotte Witt observes that this reflects the "contested nature of the "us" of contemporary feminism… and is a part of, on-going debates within feminism over its identity and self-image … in the final analysis, the result of debate within feminist philosophy over what feminism is, and what its theoretical commitments should be, and what its core values are." This constraint is the subject of one of the more lively debates in feminism, that which Nannerl Keohane has called the "perpetual oscillation between essentialism and nominalism (constructionism) in feminist theory." Briefly, "to essentialise is to reduce a complex idea or object to simplistic characteristics, thereby denying diversity, multiple meanings and alternative interpretations" in the words of Joan Marler an opponent of essentialism in feminism.

Bell hooks also notes in "Feminism; A Movement to End Sexist Oppression" that " a central problem within feminist discourse has been our inability to either arrive at a consensus of opinion about what feminism is or accept definition(s) that could serve as points of unification."(qtd in Kemp and Squires 22) This dissatisfaction is implicitly, angrily conveyed by Carmen Vasquez in her essay, "Towards A Revolutionary Ethics", when she says:

> We can't even agree on what 'Feminist' is, never mind what she would believe in and how she defines the principles that constitute honor among us. In consonance with the American capitalist obsession for individualism and

> anything goes so long as it gets your want, "feminism in America has come to mean anything you like, honey. There are as many definitions of feminism as there are feminists… (qtd in Kemp and Squires 23)

Despite their diversity, feminist critics largely agree on a threefold purpose of feminism:

1. to expose patriarchal premises and resulting prejudices
2. to promote discovery and reevaluation of literature by women
3. to examine social, cultural and psychosexual contexts of literature and criticism. (Guerin et al 184)

Hooks, however, defines feminism as:

> a struggle against sexist oppression. Its aim is not to benefit solely any specific group of women, any particular race or class of women. It does not privilege women over men. It has the power to transform in a meaningful way all our lives. Most importantly, feminism is neither a life style nor a ready-made identity or role one can step into. (51)

In Barbara Berg's "The Remembered Gate: Origins of American Feminism", she defines feminism as a 'broad movement embracing numerous phases of woman's emancipation'. Expanding on her definition, she adds:

> It is the freedom to decide her own destiny: freedom from sex determined role; freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. Feminism demands the

> acceptance of woman's right to individual's conscience and judgment. It postulates that women's essential worth, stems from her common humanity and does not depend on the other relationships of her life (qtd in Kemp and Squires 24).

Feminism comprises a number of social, cultural, political movements, theories and moral philosophies concerned with gender inequities and equal rights for women. The main aim of feminism therefore is not only to challenge as bell hooks suggests, but to dismantle the seeming insidious patriarchal institution. In all the various feminist ideologies we are familiar with, this goal is expressed subtly or with acerbity. Feminism, like Burkean methodology, has refused to separate art from life or literature from politics. Instead, by analyzing the sexual images and stereotypes in literature, by relating history and biography to literature, by examining the relation of literary structure to content, or by analyzing rhetorical strategies of the feminist movement itself, feminist criticism has always attempted to integrate art and life. (Burke, 9)

The undergird behind Burke's theory of literary form is the idea that a rhetorical or persuasive motive inspires the symbolic art which is literature. In his words, "Literature is purposeful response, a strategy for responding to some human situation. It is always purposely designed to meet this situation":

> Critical and imaginative works are answers to questions posed by the situations in which they arose. They are not merely answers, they are strategic answers, stylized answers. … So I should propose an initial working distinction between "strategies" and "situations" whereby we think of poetry (I here use the term to include any work of critical or imaginative cast) as the adopting of various strategies for the

> encompassing of situations. These strategies size up situations, name their structure and outstanding ingredients, and name them in a way that contains an attitude towards them. This naming is the work itself: a symbolic act. (2)

Feminist Play:

A feminist play in the opinion of Helen Michie in "Flesh" is "anything that foregrounds the inequities of representation, even if this is an admission of the impossibility of moving into a safe space beyond it, is feminist; anything that struggles against these inequities is essential (qtd in Brown 150). In Laurin Porter's "Contemporary Playwrights/Traditional Forms" a similar view is expressed: "any play which moves women to the center of the narrative, foregrounding women's experience and concerns, can be considered feminist" (196). In "Feminist Theory and Contemporary Drama" Janet Brown posits that "in the twentieth century, a drama that is feminist in intention has exhibited a commitment to telling the stories of silenced and marginalized women, celebrating women's community and sense of connection through group protagonists, and expressing the moral concerns and criticisms that arise from women's experience" (155).

Ann Taylor offers the following definition of a feminist, after Karen Offen: any person who recognizes

> The validity of women's own interpretation of their lived experience and needs, protests against the institutionalized injustice perpetrated by men as a group, and advocates the elimination of that injustice by challenging the various structures of authority or power that legitimate male prerogatives in a given society. Another way of expressing this concept is that a primary goal is to correct androcentric bias. (43)

According to Laurin Porter, a feminist play is one that exposes patriarchy as a controlling force and the culture as defined, determined and shaped by men, thus limiting women's development and range of life's choices, makes the case more forcefully and moves toward more radical conclusion (196). Such drama might, nevertheless, express feminist thinking in what Kenneth Burke would call its "rhetorical motive." In the view of Burke, the feminist impulse is expressed dramatically in woman's struggle for autonomy against an oppressive, sexist society. When woman's struggle for autonomy is a play's central rhetorical motive, that play can be considered a feminist drama. In evaluating a play with a feminist rhetorical motive, the critic considers whether the play's strategies are as rhetorically sophisticated as necessary to encompass the situation of woman in a sexist society. A play that shows this degree of rhetorical sophistication can be considered a successful feminist drama. (qtd. in Brown, 5)

The challenge of the feminist scholar therefore is to find the ground to argue effectively for the end of oppression of all women. This task is succinctly articulated by Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn:

> Feminist scholarship undertakes the dual task of deconstructing predominantly male cultural paradigms and reconstructing a female perspective and experience in an effort to change the tradition that has silenced and marginalized us. (1-2).

Feminist Theatre:

Lizbeth Goodman, in her entry in Microsoft Encarta Premium Suite 2004 defines feminist theatre as: "theatre written by women, about women and also primarily for women, which is politically aligned to the ideas of the post-1968 women's movement" (qtd. in Brown, 16). Goodman further posits that the term: "… usually refers to theatre written, directed and performed in the theatre since 1968. The term tends also to be restricted to use in discussion of English language theatres … the word and its range of

meanings are Western in origin and primary association. (16) Feminist theatres began to emerge in America from 1968, some of the earliest being "Caravan Theatre" in Boston (1968); (Omaha Magic Theatre" in Omaha (1968); "Women Inter-art Theatre" in New York (1969); "New Feminist Theatre" in New York (1969); "It's Alright to be Woman" in New York" in (1970); "Washington Area Feminist Theatre" in Washington D.C (1972) (Udengwu,2006,32)

Steps towards a completely feminist theatre were taken in 1972, when a group of women playwrights, Rosalyn Drexler, Maria Irene Fornes, Julie Bovasso, Megan Terry, Rochelle Owens and Adrianne Kennedy formed the Women's Theatre Council, which though initially not professing feminism, sought to create a professional theatre which would develop the talents of women in all areas of the theatre (Leavitt, qtd. in Okoh, 2012, 62)

Feminist theatre has created the enabling opportunity for women to reclaim their silenced voices. Throughout history, women had always struggled against male domination and suppression; be it political, religious, economic or social. The term feminist refers to the agents of feminism fighting against female subjugation and oppression. Feminist theatre therefore is an ideological campaign calling for the inclusion of women in all spheres of knowledge. To be a feminist is to accept that there is social injustice against women, identify these injustices and seek to reverse the situation in order to establish a gender balance. A feminist writer is expected to use his or her writing to correct the false image of women in order to affect a change of attitude towards the female gender. Feminist theatre is mainly aimed at addressing problems unique to women and which they may not, for some reasons, discuss before men.

The demand for woman's autonomy figures frequently in definitions of feminism. Aileen S. Kraditor, in her introduction to *Up from the Pedestal*, describes the "something" which the feminist writings she anthologized have in common: "This fundamental something can perhaps be designated by the term "autonomy." Whether a feminist's demand has been for all the rights men have had, or for some but not all of the rights men have had, the

grievance behind the demand has always seemed to be that women have been regarded not as people but as female relatives of people. And the feminists' desire has, consistently, been for women to be recognized, in the economic, political, and/or social realms, as individuals in their own right." (14)

Gerda Lerner, in *The Female Experience*, intones this commonality:

> This process of creating feminist consciousness has something, but by no means everything to do with the quest for women's rights, equality, and justice – it has a great deal to do with the search for autonomy …. Autonomy means moving out from a world in which one is born to marginality, to a past without meaning, and a future determined by others – into a world in which one acts and chooses, aware of a meaningful past and free to shape one's future." (14)

Lerner goes on, however, to outline phases or variations in the feminist ideology. The initial stage in attaining a feminist consciousness, Lerner says, is woman's coming to self-consciousness, becoming aware of a distortion or a wrong in her own societal status as woman. At this point she sees men as the enemy. The second step questions tradition, and tentatively moves in new directions. The third step is a reaching out for others, a search for sisterhood, often involving organized groups of women. Arising out of this quest for union is the fourth step, feminist consciousness, defined as the search for autonomy. (14)

The goal of feminist theatre was not merely to entertain, but to improve the quality of life in the society. Feminist theatre is based on the principles of feminism and refers to any dramatic work that centres on the struggle of women for equal opportunities with men, and to be accepted as human beings, instead of being cast into gender stereotypes. Feminist theatre examines the actual day to day experiences of women. It is persuasive and

basically excites an audience to act decisively and to transform their lives and the society that oppresses them.

This persuasiveness of feminist theatre is corroborated by Nathalie:

> Feminist drama is a persuasive message designed to influence the beliefs and convictions of both the members of the audience and the members of the theatre … By using the stage as a speaking platform, feminists argue against their own oppression, seeking a change in their identity as lesser human beings and their subordinate position in society. (50)

According to Keyssar, feminist theatre is firmly anchored on a:

> recognition of others and a concomitant transformation of the self and the world." (xiv) The purpose of transformation is a decipherable element in feminist theatre. It intends to transform existing cultural traditions and beliefs, with the vision of creating an equitable environment where men and women can enjoy equal rights. (qtd. in Okoh, 64)

Feminist theatre was influenced by the ideology of social transformation propounded by Bertolt Brecht and Paulo Freire. Conscientisation is a feminist methodology of subverting what Freire called a "culture of silence". The dramatic discourse in feminist theatre is centered on the problems women encounter in society and the decisions they make based on their personal values and beliefs. According to Okoh, "the action in feminist theatre circulates around female protagonists who generally, do not readily accept the traditional role of women as decided by society." (69) She goes on to copiously articulate the indices of feminist theatre thus:

- Be woman-centered, identify their problems
- Question gender roles and strategies
- Examine patriarchal traditions

- Question the status quo, hierarchies and power relations
- Challenge assumptions, and social norm
- Increase our knowledge, and raise consciousness
- Aim to improve the condition of women
- Talk about the experience of women in the present economic crisis and the coping strategies of women in relation to men in the household
- Bring about the transformation of women
- Aim at social transformation in the direction of greater gender equity
- Use innovative dramatic methods to convey central message
- Project invisible women playwrights (32)

Ngoz i Udengwu also enumerates the following as characteristics of feminist theatre:

- There is the element of collectivity. Women write feminist theatre, not individual women. Even when one person writes a feminist play, it represents collective experiences of real women contributed during an interview or at a workshop.
- It is a theatre about women. It is primarily aimed at representing women's peculiar experiences in society.
- Feminist theatres perform exclusively for women audiences. The main purpose of feminist theatre is to raise women's consciousness about themselves, about their rights in the society as well as encourage them to reclaim their voices, which have been silenced for ages.
- Feminist theatres reject existing theatre conventions. They strive instead to create an alternative theatre that is as opposed to the existing conventions as women are to men.(32)

Analysis of *Closed Doors* as Feminist Theatre

Abused and frustrated females
To all those females who

Have been frustrated and
Abused in one way or the other;
And to those who are trying to
Give them reason to live
Life is a continuous struggle

The dedicatory note is prognostic of the atmosphere of sobriety we are going to encounter in the play. The setting of the play is the Reception hall of Goodwill Nursing Home. The picture presented in the play is one of patched humanity, and psychically paralyzed voices of the female subaltern. *Closed Doors* x-rays the appalling experiences encountered by girls in contemporary Nigeria, the psychological trauma suffered by the victims, and how they could overcome their predicaments and assert themselves in life. Amina a thirteen year old girl was raped by an Imam. She was also sexually abused and abandoned by cattle herdsmen. According to her:

> **AMINA:** Before, I been dey help my mama sell *guoro and culli-culli* when I return from school. One day, de Imam dey alone for im house. E tell me to give am something from inside im room. Small time, e don come meet me. E put my back down for bed and e do something very bad to me. After, e take all my *guoro* and e give me plenty money. (28)

Amina's case is a very pathetic one. She was raped by a religious personage whom she trusted, who by his insidious action turns out to be a charlatan. She refused to disclose the rape incident to her father because the father was an employee of the Imam and she didn't want the father to be sacked. The pathetic case of Amina recalls a similar experience narrated in Fatima Dike's "The Sacrifice of Kreli" which addresses the brutal rape of a seven year old black girl by a migrant worker in 1974, in South Africa. Rape in this text and context is viewed as a patriarchal weapon to intimidate and rob women of their right to express their own sexual desires and so on.

Later Amina ran away from her parents' house to forestall the kind of injustice Bariya experienced:

> **EKI:** Oh, Bariya Ibrahim Magazu! She was a girl of thirteen found pregnant and brought before the Sharia Court in Zamfara State. Although she said that three men forced her to have sex with them on different occasions, she was sentenced to be publicly flogged 100 strokes of the cane for premarital sex. (28)

It is therefore this fear of the penalty she was likely to face from the Sharia penal code that led Amina to run far away from home to the Nursing home, an accommodation for bruised female subjectivities.

Tracy's problem of self-insulation is as a result of the fact that she was betrayed several times by those she trusted and loved dearly. Her dream was to become a medical doctor, married to a medical doctor, possibly Michael her secondary school lover but this dream was painfully shattered. She was also a victim of unjust admission policies in the country. The dialogue involving Tracy, Amina, Belema and Bola is revelatory of these policies:

> **TRACY**: You see, for three years I couldn't get an admission into any university. Not that his JAMB scores were better than mine. I had about 50 points above his. Even in the secondary school, I used to beat him quite often too. Yet this boy got an admission into the university before me. Do you know why?
>
> **AMINA**: Tell us now.
>
> **TRACY**: It is because of the unjust laws in this country.
>
> **BELEMA:** Which one exactly?
>
> **TRACY:** Laws which implant tribal sentiments in our mind right from childhood. I'm sure you all know that stuff about JAMB admission policy.
>
> **BOLA**: Certainly, they are discriminatory laws which exalt mediocrity over merit.

> **TRACY**: Although Mike and I were born and raised in the same town, attended the same school, experienced the same environmental conditions but because of my ancestral roots, I was discriminated against despite my personal merit. He was given preferential treatment because his parents and grandparents were once from an educationally disadvantaged area. So, for three good years I struggled to meet the JAMB cut off point recommended for candidates from my state of origin to study medicine. Once they seized my result, for no reason known to me. I have never cheated in any examination. The second time, my result was released, but biology was cancelled for the centre where I took the papers. (35-36)

Tracy, however, after a second attempt passed the University entrance examination and was admitted into pre-medicine basic studies. While in school, Tracy's problems became compounded when she followed her friends to a birthday party. There she fell in love with a man she didn't know was married. She got impregnated by him who abandoned her and her baby. On discovering that she was pregnant, her father drove her away from the house. She went back to her lover's office but was equally driven away by two hefty men who we are told were hired assassins asked to terminate her life. Tracy's encounter with the nymphs purges her fear of the society and after that she is able to tell her story which she refused to share ever since she arrived the Nursing home. The song of the nymphs serves as a care-giver and antidote to the depressed soul of Tracy:

> No matter how turbulent the sea may be
> No matter how weak your limb may be
> No matter how low your spirit may be
> Just hang on there and keep on trudging.
> Trudge; trudge to rise above the tide.
> For after rain comes sunshine… (42)

In the end Tracy herself attests to the therapeutic effect of this ritual cleansing. Like Osofisan's Altine in *Altine's Wrath*, the hitherto mute

Tracy regains her voice, imbued with consciousness and realizes and boldly declares that:

> **TRACY**: …Yes, I am born again! I am now a different person; a person fully in touch with her body, mind and soul; a person with a better grasp of the world around her and a keen insight of human behaviours; a person eager to start life all over again with a new consciousness and vision. Oh yes! I am born again! (48)

Tracy becomes a new woman who in the words of Judith Stephens is one who:

> does not consider herself merely as an appendage to man." Gail Cunningham sees her as a heroine, "who refused to conform to the traditional feminine role, challenging accepted ideals of marriage and maternity, chose to work for her living, or who in any way argued the feminist cause … (qtd. in Brown, 184)

Like Tracy, Belema's story is one of deceit and betrayal from her lover. Belema was a virgin who was deceitfully impregnated by her school teacher, a seemingly respectable man who is supposed to mould the lives of those under his care. Belema, for fear of the reaction of her parents had to run away from home, landing in the Nursing home, "an abode of whores and rejects." She is also confronted with the stigmatizing effect and public opinion of being the mother of a fatherless baby:

> It matters a lot. Imagine the humiliation and rejection! Just because of one silly mistake, one is treated like an outcast everywhere. Suddenly one is no longer a human being, but a butt of

> scorn. I can't see myself in that situation. Oh, I am tired. I feel like giving up. (26)

Bola is equally a victim of betrayal. She was raped by her boss in the bank where she was working. She got pregnant and when she told him about it he recommended abortion, reminding her that she would be sacked in line with the bank's policy which says: "For the first five years, get pregnant, get fired." Since she could not bear the thought of abortion she had to settle for adoption.

Eki was a victim of the patriarchy. The death of her father made them to lose all their properties to her father's relatives. In most West African societies that are rooted in patriarchal ideology, once the husband dies, the relatives acquire all their brother's properties, especially if the woman is opposed to marry a brother of the late husband. Eki narrates the gory experience she, her mother and her siblings encountered on the death of her father thus:

> **EKI:** … You need to understand that you are not the only one with ugly experiences. When my father died, my uncles took all his properties including our house. We moved into a one-room apartment. Life was hard on us. I am the first out of eight children. My mother couldn't cope with feeding and paying school fees. Worst of all, one of my brothers died because we couldn't buy for him the prescribed medicine. When the second one was sick, I had to look for a way to help my mother. I went to look for a part time cleaning job in a hotel but ended up sleeping with men. One day, I was arrested. While in the cell, I was raped several times by the policemen on duty. Whom should I tell? Who will listen to me? Is it the police or

> the magistrate? Hunh! Waste of time! Yet I have survived. Haven't I? (31)

Closed Doors is a feminist play in that it tells the stories of sexually oppressed women, psychologically and emotionally bruised women with broken dreams and unrequited love. As a feminist scholar, Okoh demonstrates through this play that she is an agent of feminism fighting against female subjugation and oppression. She identifies social injustice against women and seeks to reverse the situation in order to establish a gender balance.

Feminist theatre is mainly aimed at addressing problems unique to women and which they may not, for some reasons, discuss before men. *Closed Doors* depicts young women struggling against difficult circumstances, caused not only by their sex, but by their poverty and lack of education. It x-rays the appalling experiences encountered by vulnerable young women in Nigeria who share their experiences behind closed doors, solely for their edification. The male perpetrators of the crimes against these women are only mentioned in the individual narratives of the victims. The only possible male characters are the Policemen who come to arrest the proprietor of the Nursing home and their accomplice, Chioma in the Epilogue. *Closed Doors* is feminist theatre to the extent that it is woman-centred. Its primary aim is to represent women's peculiar experiences in society in order to raise their consciousness about themselves.

According to Janet Brown," feminist theatre is any theatre based on the "feminist impulse". In her words: "This feminist impulse is expressed dramatically in women's struggle for autonomy against an oppressive, sexist society. When woman's struggle for autonomy is a play's central rhetorical motive, that play can be considered a feminist drama." According to her, the feminist impulse could be radical, inspiring a rhetoric of confrontation against the domination of and denial of power to women.

In *Closed Doors*, there is a collective struggle for female autonomy, even if the feminist impulse is not radical, invoking a rhetoric of confrontation against the patriarchal ideologues. Tracy is used as the female agent to

realize this autonomy against the socio-sexual hierarchy represented in the world of the play. In the end, the female characters in the play are in agreement that men are the cause of the problems and are able to encompass their situations in the sexist society represented both in text and context. This collective awareness of the women coheres with the opinion of Myrna Lam that "there is no single correct way to present women in drama, but … that reaching a final awareness is mandatory for a protagonist in a feminist drama." (Leavitt, qtd. in Okoh, 64) The play shows, in the words of Brown, "an agent or agents, who represent woman seeking autonomy, often through unity with other women, in an unjust socio-sexual hierarchy." (109) The women are united by the anthem of solidarity:

> From restlessness and roaming
> From loneliness and longing
> In the wild wilderness
> Come united all those that
> Were once lost and scattered
> But brought together by fortune.

Two vital elements in the achievement of autonomy, sisterhood and self-realization, are symbolically united in the anthem of solidarity and the song of the nymphs. Autonomy is both physical – in the closure of the illegal home and the freeing of the inmates – and spiritual. The spirituality of the play's resolution is manifested in the ritual cleansing of the victims, represented by Tracy, by the nymphs, who, in the words of Mary Daly, are "agents who confront their 'non-being' in the fact of their 'non-existence' as persons in the unjust hierarchy.

It is this communal nature of the struggle that paves the way for a successful resolution to the search for autonomy. The play finds a solution in women's solidarity rather than following one individual's solitary struggle for autonomy. This is in line with a recent emphasis placed on group solidarity in the feminist movement, and the avoidance of movement "leaders."

Through Tracy and her fellow patriarchally manacled inmates, Government's attention is drawn to the illicit operations of the Nursing home and in the epilogue, the home is closed down and the operators arrested by the Police. These women are in the words of Leland Griffin:

> perversely goaded by the spirit of hierarchy, moved by the impious dream of mythic new Order … inspired with a new purpose, drawn anew by desire … they are moved to act … moved, ingenious men (human beings) ('inventors of the negative') to rise up and cry No to the existing order … and prophesy the coming of the new." (qtd. in Brown,5)

In the opinion of Lizbeth Goodman, reiterated by Udengwu, one of the key characteristics of feminist theatre is that it is usually the product of a workshop session organized by women to specifically discuss women's issues. It is a theatre written by women, about women and for women audiences alone. It is against this backdrop that Udengwu in her article, "In Search of a Feminist Theatre in Nigeria" posits unequivocally that there is no feminist theatre in Nigeria. In her view, only such plays as *Fefu and Her Friends*, by Maria Irene Fornes, *Top Girls* and *Cloud Nine*, by Caryl Churchill are classics of feminist theatre because they are products of collective experiences. However, it is my view that Julie Okoh's *Closed Doors* satisfies almost all the requirements of a feminist theatre. The only points against this claim are that it is not a product of collective experience, written by women and directed by women for women-only audiences. This lacuna notwithstanding, the play clearly is a theatre that is metamorphosing into a true feminist theatre in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Closed Doors lays bare a vortex of mistreatments of women in the hands of men. The play is a blueprint for a true feminist theatre. *Closed Doors* is in the process of becoming a feminist theatre if going by authorial viewpoints, it

has not become. The play depicts young women struggling against difficult circumstances caused not only by their sex, but by their poverty and lack of education. Julie Okoh has through this play demonstrated that the female victims are, in the words of Mary Daly, "agents who confront their non-being' in the fact of their non-existence' as persons in the unjust hierarchy." The female victims, represented by Tracy succeed in replacing the socio-sexual hierarchy represented by the male 'victimizers' like Imam, Michael and the politician among others.

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