

## FEMALE 'WEIGHT' IN THE NIGERIAN FICTION: IYAYI'S VIOLENCE AND IBEZUTE'S DANCE OF HORROR

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### Abstract

This article is a masculinist examination of Festus Iyayi's *Violence* and Chukwuma Ibezute's *Dance of Horror*. The article despises the ideological stance of some feminists – that women are unfairly treated in society and in literature by men. It explores women's relationship with men and contends that every woman is in control of her man and society around her. The article shows how women use marriage, love, sex, their body, social status, kitchen and cradle influence to hold men to ransom. The article, however, recommends that men should not act on their women's unverifiable and manipulative claims. In all, the article concludes that women are oppressive and exploitative to men.

**Keywords:** female weight, feminist, 'masculinist', men, women, oppression.

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Before now, the focus of African literature has only been on the socio-political conditions of the African people. Attention was not paid to the fact that male writers and critics took centre stage in literary creativity and criticism until a group of activists in feminist movement began to accuse the male creative writers and the male critics of improper representation of women in literature (Awuzie, 2015, p. 2). In her article entitled "Women and Nigerian Literature", Ogunyemi (1988, p. 60) asserts that "the literature is phallic, dominated as it is by male writers and male critics who deal almost exclusively with male characters and male concerns, naturally aimed at a predominantly male audience". Okereke (2000, p. 80) affirms that "the male has been the producer of literary meaning and the female has been more of passive consumer of this male-constructed meaning". Okereke maintains that "male writers assigned the multiple spaces in transformation to the men, while the women, even when highly educated, served to rest and revitalize the tired men for greater performance and achievement" (p. 81).

Feminist ideology in literature started in Europe and America. While some feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) believe in women's equality with men, they condemn distinguished sex roles as an oppressive man-made structure. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Wollstonecraft despises sex differences. In this book, as Adams (1992) observes, Wollstonecraft is of the view that "the mind does not know sex". Adams buttresses this point with Claire Tomalin's remark that "society is wasting its assets if it retains women in the role of convenient domestic slaves and alluring mistresses, denies them economic independence and encourages them to be docile and attentive to their looks to the exclusion of all else" (Adams, 1992, p. 394).

This feminist ideology in literature which has earlier been practiced in Europe and America was brought to limelight in Africa by the Africa's first female writer, Flora Nwapa, through her novel, *Efuru* (1966), and her essay, "Women and Creative Writing in Africa", which was first published in 1998 as Awuzie (2015) rightly observes. This essay expounds that *Efuru* is a reaction to the misrepresentation of women in the earlier works of Nigerian writers such as Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Wole Soyinka, J. P. Clark, and Elechi Amadi. Through her work Nwapa advocates the recognition of what she calls 'woman-being' in literature and in society. In her words: "I try to project a more balanced image of African womanhood. Male authors undoubtedly neglect to point out the positive side of womanhood" (Nwapa, 2007, p. 527). Nwapa enhances the

image of the African woman in *One is Enough* (1981). This novel is a representation of the African woman and her strive for self-actualization. Within this trend in African literature emerged other activists in feminist movement such as Buchi Emecheta (*The Joys of Motherhood* – 1977) and Mariama Ba (*So Long A Letter* – 1980), to mention only two. In their works they attack patriarchal society for enslaving and oppressing women and make a case for the liberation of women. Of course, they argue that women should have equal rights and recognition with men. In this connection, Chukwuma (1994, p. ix) defines feminism as “a rejection of inferiority and a striving for recognition. It seeks to give the woman a sense of self as a worthy, effectual and contributing human being. Feminism is a reaction to such stereotypes which deny them a positive identity”. Female critics such as Virginia Ola, Helen Chukwuma, Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, Juliet Okonkwo, Emilia Oki, Ebele Eko, and Nana Wilson Tagoe, to name only a few, are supporting voices to the feminist movement and ideology in Africa.

However, this feminist ideology is despised by Masculinists. The stance of masculinists is that there are impenetrable sex differences, and these differences are God-ordained or natural. Therefore, feminists who try to oppose these differences by legislation and social arrangement are dragging development through a false misleading observation. Going by this, masculinism is seen as men’s rights movement and ideology that studies the sexes complementary and independent by exigency. According to Itulua-Abumere (2013), “the critical writings of men and masculinity which constitute the sociology of masculinity seek to highlight the ways in which men’s powers come to be differentiated, naturalized and embedded across all cultures, political borders and organizational networks” (p. 42).

Warren Farrell, a former ardent feminist, is one of the masculinists in America who does not believe in women’s equality with men. He says that “nobody believes in equality anyway” (Svoboda, 1997, p. 7), because there are male roles as well as female roles. He maintains that “men don’t oppress women any more than women oppress men. The whole concept of men and women oppressing each other is ridiculous. That’s a fabrication of the feminist movement. What is true is *“that both sexes have roles that can legitimately be considered oppressive, but those roles are not roles designed by men or women, they were designed by biological necessity and the necessity of survival”* (Svoboda, 1997, p. 5) (Italics mine). He further states that many researchers have shown that

“women batter men and men batter women equally” (Svoboda, 1997, 6). The import of this is that both feminism and masculinism are struggles to correct disbenefits caused by gender roles.

In Africa, masculinist ideology commenced with the publication of Chinweizu’s *Anatomy of Female Power: A Masculinist Dissection of Matriarchy* (1990). In this book Chinweizu opposes feminist ideology. He contends that “feminist propaganda and conventional knowledge notwithstanding, it seems prima facie odd to claim that women are powerless in society and in particular, over men”. He maintains that “women do get, and always did get, what they want – be it riches, or thrones, or the head of John the Baptist, or routine exemption from hardships and risks which their men folk are obliged to endure” (p. 11). He adds that women do achieve their wants from men by means of any of the following: “women’s control of the womb; women’s control of the kitchen; women’s control of the cradle; the psychological immaturity of man relative to woman; and man’s tendency to be deranged by his own excited penis” (p. 14). Thus, it is certainly incorrect to claim that women are unfairly treated in society and in literature, because from creation woman has been in control of everything, including man (her head) whom she considers to be her oppressor.

However powerful a man maybe, his power is used to serve the women in his life, that would make dubious the notion that men are masters over women. Because every man has as boss his wife, or his mother, or some other woman in his life, men may rule the world but women rule the men who rule the world (Chinweizu, 1990, p. 12).

This assertion of Chinweizu echoes Sigmund Freud’s contribution to the Masculinist ideology. Freud, in his study of the human psyche, posits that “in the greater number of ambitious day-dreams, too, we can discover a woman in some corner, for whom the dreamer performs all his heroic deeds and at whose feet all his triumphs are to be laid” (1993, pp. 37–38).

This Masculinists’ view of the relationship between men and women has been reflected in fictional works of most African writers, as exemplified by Festus Iyayi and Chukwuma Ibezute. These writers are Nigerians who have gained recognition across Africa and the globe through their imaginative works. While Iyayi’s *Violence* (1979) has

attracted a lot of criticisms, Ibezute's *Dance of Horror* (2004) is beginning to receive critical attention also from critics of African literature. In "Literature as a Moral Thermometer: A Humanistic Approach to Festus Iyayi's *Violence* and Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*", Mbanefo S. Ogene contends that Iyayi's *Violence* and Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* are tools for "moral stability and development of individual, national and political life" (p. 65). He states that *Violence* is a novel which depicts class struggles in the Nigerian society. Maintaining that the novel also exposes the faces of corruption and exploitation, he adds that the text "is reformative" because the "Biblical example of Jesus Christ sermons on the mountain to his disciples" are used "to condemn and satirize the poor, obnoxious and uncivilized aspects of the Nigerian culture" (p. 59). Ushie and Nta (2012) dwell on 'descriptive focus as semiotic markers, that is the signs and symbols or the 'distinct features of the text (the novel, *Violence*)' are literary ingredients for producing meaning 'within the novel' (p. 46). While Ushie and Nta also point out that the novel draws attention to a society consisting of two classes: the poor and the affluence, they maintain that 'a coalescence of pictorial language (literary semiotics) and the semiotics of symbolic characterization corresponding to physical descriptive focus and the abstract description, respectively, effectively construct the mock reality in the novel' (p.48).

Two other critics who have commented on Iyayi's *Violence* are Abubakar Mohammed Sani and Manimangai Mani. Sani and Mani, while looking at the portrayal of working class people in Iyayi's *Violence*, assert that "Iyayi in *Violence* portrays the working class not as passive but as individuals who believe in struggling for their freedom, who are conscious and are prepared to face their problems courageously" (p. 39). They further state that 'in the novel, Festus Iyayi, presents a balanced picture of both the working class and their exploiters'; and that both classes 'show a degree of human weaknesses and strength, although it is abundantly clear that the author is on the side of the working class" (p. 39). On his own part, Yakubu (2015) observes that the author of *Violence* (1979) uses "foregrounding in the novel to create his characters with emotional attachment so that as we read, we sympathize with them in their plight" (p. 3). Yakubu maintains that "in the novel there are words that are associated with exploitation, oppression, violence, death, suffering, disease, neglect, suffocation, class struggle, deprivation, etc., suggesting unpleasant experience and dehumanizing

condition and hence, the need for change” (p. 2). This call for a change makes Ujowundu (2013) to argue that *Violence* is a “Marxist-oriented novel that advocates force against all the forms of exploitation, deprivation and unpatriotism in our society” (p. 307). Ujowundu upholds the fact that “in *Violence*, we are constantly made aware of the political, social and economic forces which determine individual life, men and women relationships, love and family ties” (p. 309).

Coming to Ibezute’s *Dance of Horror* (2004), on the blurb of the Cel-Bez and Company edition of *Dance of Horror* (2004), Angie Izuagba observes that “in this literary work [...] the author vividly exposes the horrors and humiliation women undergo and the utter disregard men have for the supposedly weaker sex”. This observation by Izuagba is feministic. It is what this paper tends to oppose. While Awuzie (2015) comments that “in *Dance of Horror* there are good and bad wife characters” (p. 8), Okereke (2017) points out that the novel “shows the conflicts of birth details, wife characters, son characters, behavior, will, culture and choice of wife that emerge as a consequence of running a polygynous family” (p. 71). Apart from Awuzie who has investigated Ibezute’s *Dance of Horror* and other two novels from the masculinist point of view, others have either looked at it from the feminist standpoint or from the angle of the place or function of literature in society. And when it comes to the study of Iyayi’s *Violence*, the few critics mentioned here have examined the novel either from the humanistic approach or from the Marxist ideological viewpoint or from the literary stylistic standpoint. There does not seem to be any fully-detailed comparative study of female ‘weight’ in Iyayi’s *Violence* and Ibezute’s *Dance of Horror*. Therefore, this essay will explore the delineation of women’s relationship with men in Iyayi’s *Violence* (1979) and Ibezute’s *Dance of Horror* (2004). The discussion will be that men are under the weight or control of women.

### **Female ‘Weight’ in Iyayi’s *Violence***

Festus Iyayi of Nigeria is among the second generation of Nigerian novelists. What this means is that Iyayi is among those Nigerian novelists whose works do not treat themes of colonial rule culture conflict, but treat topical issues in post-independent Nigeria. Apart from *Violence* which he published in 1979, his other two novels are *The Contract* (1982) and *Heroes* (1986). *Iyayi’s Violence* is set in Benin City,

Nigeria. This novel (like Ibezute's *Dance of Horror*) presents a picture of men who are under the weight of their women folk, which conforms to Masculinist ideology. *Violence* is used to show how influential and how much power a woman has over her man. In other words, in the novel, woman is represented as being in control of her man and society around her. Iyayi (like Ibezute) puts into use some of the novelistic tools such as archetypes and symbols that have become constituents of the masculinist ideology, especially those raised in Chinweizu's book. In the novel for instance, wife characters, Adisa and Queen represent women who show that they are in control of their husbands – Idemudia and Obofun. Adisa, Idemudia's wife, considers herself a house wife who must be catered for by Idemudia, her husband, and as such, Idemudia must provide money for food if they are to eat in the house. It is indicated in the novel that there is no odd service Idemudia has not done in order to please his wife, Adisa.

He had even sold his blood to make money. Yes, given out pints of his blood for as little as fifteen naira a pint. Sold his blood so that he and Adisa would not starve, so that they would survive. And this he has not done once nor twice but many times (p.154).

It is revealed that Adisa is not concerned about how her husband makes money but her interest is in the money itself. Ogene (2017, p. 58) comments that "Adisa who is Idemudia's wife" contributes "to the burden of the poor man, Idemudia".

When it comes to clothing, Idemudia goes extra miles to ensure that Adisa clothes better than himself. Of course, "for the past year or more, he hadn't bought a single shirt for himself. All the money he got he had spent on buying her a few clothes, so she wouldn't go naked as he went naked" (p. 256). Even though Idemudia and his wife represent the underprivileged in the Nigerian society, Idemudia's activity shows that a man thinks more of how to satisfy her woman than himself. In other words, his activity suggests that a man's actions are controlled by the woman in his life.

As regards Queen, her weight over her husband, Obofun, is disclosed in the story of how Obofun's love for her leads him into establishing "all his businesses in her name" (p. 192). Queen is in charge of the husband's Supermarket, Freedom Motel and Samson and Delilah Hotel. She is also in charge of her own "two modern storey buildings in New Benin". Out of the two houses, she rents one "to the university at nine thousand naira a

year” and the university pays “for two years in advance. The things a woman could do!” (p. 23). All this points to the fact that Obofun’s wife (Queen) is in control of everything (her husband’s pocket inclusive) – as she negotiates business and perhaps determines how much money would enter Obofun’s pocket. It is important to point out that as their marriage grows sore, Obofun does not divorce Queen, because his property is held in the name of Queen, his wife. The novel’s narrator says that: “He didn’t really realize how concerned he was until he had consulted lawyers about what would happen if he divorced his wife. He was cornered. He knew it, and he had to live with it” (p. 197). This shows how love can blind a man to the point of not knowing when he goes against himself. This apart, the existence of their growing children also helps to keep him bound to his wife. An illustration of this is seen in the following short passage:

They could never leave each other now. At least, he couldn’t afford to. They were no longer husband and wife in the true sense of the word. They were strangers to each other in many respects [...] Now there was nothing but the bitterness, the hatred, the anger, the frustrating knowledge that he couldn’t divorce her. Even apart from his property which was held in the name of his wife, there were the children growing up. No, he told himself, there could be no question of separation (p. 197).

What is deduced from here is that in a society the passiveness of some men makes them become accommodationists. The Obofuns of this world will conditionally live under the same house roof but will always mind themselves and do their things differently.

Another way by which a woman shows that she is in control of her man is by borrowing money and leaving the repay of the money for her man. For example, in the novel, Adisa who is still owing Mama Jimoh (one of the poor female characters) the sum of twenty-three naira, borrows additional five naira from her and states that when Idemudia becomes well, he will “find a job and pay off their debts” (pp.134–135). As long as Adisa is concerned all her burdens must be cast on the shoulders of Idemudia and he (Idemudia) must take care of all. This echoes the words of Chinweizu- that:

When a woman tells a man ‘I love you’ she means ‘I want you to feed me, clothe me, fuck me, get me great with child, and take me as your burden until I catch a better slave’[...]

In contrast, when a man tells a woman 'I love you', he means 'I am eager to be your slave, and ready to do everything I can to make you satisfied and happy' (1990, pp. 42–43).

In *Violence* (1979) some of the female characters are depicted in a way that shows that their male folks are ever ready to give their all to them for sexual gratification. In the novel, Obofun, the husband of Queen, is portrayed as a passive husband, because he borders not about his wife's (Queen's) activities. "It is rumoured that Obofun doesn't care" (p. 27). His wife, Queen, is that archetypal woman in literature that uses her body to obtain what she does not have. It is indicated in the novel that "she uses her body to get what she wants but doesn't give herself until she has got whatever it is firmly in her grasp. No wonder she is richer than Obofun" (p. 32). Her body serves as a means of exploiting men economically. Thus, Queen represents women who cheat on their husbands. However, Obofun who is initially ignorant of his wife's philandering habit goes about celebrating and boasting about his wife's faithfulness, honesty and loyalty to him (p. 33). This boasting of Obofun makes Iriso (another male character who belongs to the ruling class) to laugh in his (Obofun's) face – suggesting that Obofun is nothing but a man under the weight of his wife, Queen.

There is inducement of man by woman's body in the novel. For instance, Queen uses her body to manipulate and induce Iriso, an agent of government, to supply her tins of milk and eggs worth five hundred naira for free. After receiving the supplied items, she begins to think that men are "so foolish [...] and so cheap!" (p. 89). Iriso narrates his experience with Queen thus:

I am in trouble, he complained. We went into her bedroom and she started telling me that she would want a regular supply of peak milk, beef, eggs and other things. I told her there was nothing wrong with that except that she had to pay for it. She said nothing for a long time [...] As I was saying, instead of telling me exactly how much she would be prepared to pay, she came out with it and said that there were different kinds of payments. Then she said she liked me, stood up from the bed on which she had been sitting and invited me to help her undo the zip of her dress. 'She was going to change her dress, she said'. She expected some important visitors. You can trust me of course. I helped her get off her dress and that was the beginning of the end. I couldn't help it. Very soon I was on top of her, and promising her to bring all the things she wanted for nothing. Then she pushed me away (Iyayi, 1979, pp. 31–32).

From what transpires between Iriso and Queen, it can be said that as far as love is concerned men are slaves in the hands of women – as evoked in Chinweizu’s book. By portraying the character, Iriso, as Queen’s love-slave in his work, Iyayi seems to agree with, and draw his ideological position from Chinweizu’s theory of love. In this theory Chinweizu (1990, p. 42) avers that “love is a disease of the heart terrible for man’s liberty, but an excellent pep pill for a woman hunting for a slave: When love smites a man, it turns him into a dazed prey; when it possesses a woman, she becomes a clear-eyed, calculating huntress coolly stalking her befuddled prey”. This is reflected in *Violence* as demonstrated in the preceding quotation. Besides, it is demonstrated in the novel that soon after Iriso realizes that he has fallen prey and has played foul, he exclaims: “Five hundred naira! Three thousand eggs, two thousand tins of milk! Christ! What have I done? Given away for nothing? (p. 102). Despite the fact that Iriso regrets his deeds momentarily, yet he is induced again by Queen’s body. He longs for another meeting with Queen in symbolic Samson and Delilah Hotel at the Airport Road. He assures himself that Queen will contact him when she wants the milk – indicating how much a woman can control a man, using her body. This Samson and Delilah Hotel indicates a place of promiscuity. According to Ushie and Nta (2012):

The names “Samson” and “Delilah” conjure up the allusion to the biblical story of the love affair between Samson (a super powerful Israelite Nazarite) and Delilah (a Philistine woman). Israel and Palestine were arch enemies and Samson was a judge, a deliverer sent to deliver Israel from the oppression of former (Judges, pp. 14-16). But Samson became a lecherous man flirting with Philistine women who became instrumental to his destruction (p. 47).

Without doubt, the hotel’s name “Samson and Delilah” also epitomizes a place of prodigality, which is apt to drain Iriso’s economy.

Another instance of inducement by woman’s body is seen in the business transaction between a male cement dealer and Queen. It is important to note that Queen is also portrayed as a seeker of a better slave, and that better slave for her is the cement dealer. She exploits the cement dealer of his means of livelihood: “She had been with the man only twice and the cement had come. And to think that the man had come to her many times before she had finally agreed! She had no doubt that he would come again. They always come” (p. 89). The implication of these statements is that a woman’s

control over her man is not contestable. The statements also echo Chinweizu's words – that “an addiction which makes a man desperate for sex increases woman's power over him” (1990, p. 34).

In the world of the novel economic exploitation is highlighted. A wife character, Queen, is portrayed as an employer of labour. Unlike Adisa who epitomizes the underprivileged women, Queen stands for women exploiters in the Nigerian society. According to Ogene (2017, p. 58), “Queen resembled corruption and oppression in the novel, *Violence*”. She uses her social position and her physique to get connection with men in authority, the rich, and exploits them. She is as conservative as every other member of the ruling class in Nigeria. As an employer of labour, she exerts her control over her workers – Idemudia, Patrick, Osaro, Omoifo and Bernard – who are all men, by underpaying them and not allowing them to demand a wage increase, or to protest against social injustice meted out to them (men). However, where anyone is caught discussing higher pays, that one is sacked. At her new construction site where the labourers work, “you will be here if you keep quiet” (p. 241). That is why Sani and Mani (2014) comment that “Idemudia and his colleagues are grossly exploited as workers with building contractors” (p. 39). This kind of situation in which these men see themselves is in itself dehumanizing. It is of course regarded in this novel as violence. For the male character, Idemudia, this form of violence consists “not of physical, brutal assault but of a slow and gradual debasement of himself, his pride as a man” (p. 243). The implication of this is that even though women do not mete out physical violence on men, they perpetrate psychological oppression against men. In other words, whereas male weight manifests itself in physical aggression, female weight is demonstrated in subtlety. That is why the male character, Iriso, describes Queen as “a cunning devil” (p. 30).

As Chinweizu (1990) posits that in society men are assigned tough tasks, in the novel this is also depicted. All the male characters are portrayed as tools used by the female characters to carry out difficult assignments. For instance, the poor man, Idemudia, and his friends, Osaro, Omoifo, Patrick and Bernard, are hired by Queen to offload one thousand five hundred bags of cement in the rain. The tough task of offloading cement in the rain coupled with starvation and exhaustion causes Idemudia to collapse and subsequently he is hospitalized. In addition, Queen sends her husband, Obofun, to go and confront Idemudia whom she allegedly accuses of stealing one

hundred and fifty bags of cement while offloading a three-trailer load of cement for her. Unfortunately, instead of meeting Idemudia, he meets Idemudia's wife, Adisa, who just returned from Ogbe hospital where Idemudia is receiving treatment over pneumonia. He finds it hard to accept her pleas of her husband's innocence over the accusation of stealing some bags of cement. In fact, he does not shamefully leave Idemudia's house until she provides him with the true picture of her husband's ill-health condition. It is revealed that: "the futility of his mission struck home to him and he began abusing himself for following his wife's words without properly checking to see if they were actually true" (Iyayi, 1979, p. 65). The lesson here is that, to avoid being ridiculed, men should not act on women's allegations. Rather, men should liberate themselves from women's unverifiable and manipulative claims.

Another example of assigning arduous work to men is seen in the case between Idemudia's parents. Idemudia's mother threatens that her husband who has no money 'must' buy a goat while she 'can' provide the cock and the tortoise (Iyayi 1979, p. 4) that will be used for the ritual that will unlock the door of job favour for Idemudia who has been jobless. From the foregoing, the use and attribution of the modal verbs 'can' to Idemudia's mother and 'must' to Idemudia's father shows that, while Idemudia's mother is not under compulsion to carry out even the easiest tasks, Idemudia's father is under obligation to perform the hardest tasks in their family. Even though his wife's order to him results to and ends in a fight, her power over him is shown through the reaction of her son, Idemudia. It is demonstrated that as Idemudia's parents engage themselves in a fight, Idemudia rushes up to his father and stands between him and his mother. He grips "the hands of the father", which he (the father) cannot loosen. And finally, he warns the father never to "strike her again" (p. 8). As a consequence of this enactment, Idemudia's father sends Idemudia's mother and her children away. This is a mark of men's resistance against women's cradle influence and antagonism.

### **Female Weight in Ibezute's *Dance of Horror***

*Dance of Horror* is a novel by Ibezute which examines some "familial issues in modern Nigeria" (Okereke, 2017, p. 67). It is set in the fictional Okuroda community of Odigan State, a symbolic delineation of the eastern region of Nigeria, particularly the Igbo nation. The story is about a man, Okonem, the idolater, whose polygamous family is

in disarray as a result of the wives he marries and his special recognition of his biological son, Ahamefuna, over his adopted son, Amaechina.

Ibezute's *Dance of Horror* (like Iyayi's *Violence*) is used to demonstrate how much weight or power women exercise over their men counterparts. In the novel marriage announces a man's acceptance of a woman who will own him for life. For instance, a husband character like Amaechina suffers in the hands of his unnamed wife in the name of marriage. Regardless of the fact that his wife receives the approval of his father and his kinsmen before their marriage, she is portrayed as an oppressive wife. Her overpowering makes Amaechina to disagree with his people's idea of interfering in a man's choice of wife. He laments over his condition thus:

My own wife is a native. You and other elders agreed and approved of her before our marriage. But today, what is happening? Is everybody not in sympathy with me? All our people know her to be a hard woman (p. 67).

Okonem also experiences oppression from his second wife, Victoria. Of course, in the novel, the kind of woman a man marries as wife or keeps as mistress determines the extent of his peace, growth, and agitation. Both Amaechina and Okonem are portrayed as passive husbands who seem to believe that marriage is to be endured rather than to be enjoyed.

Another example of marriage serving as a means of enslaving a man is shown in the post-wedding experience of Ahamefuna, the husband of Emylia. It is illustrated that "since he got wedded to Emylia Ndiok and was now more religious he had been as cold as ice water as far as extra-marital affairs was concerned (p. 113). In other words, through church wedding, Ahamefuna is entitled and bound to only one wife, Emylia, and hence he cannot have any sexual intercourse with another woman throughout his life:

He considered himself living on social isolation to have been excessively loyal to his solemn promise at the altar in the presence of the officiating priest and numerous guests on their wedding day that he would be sharing his love only with Emylia (p. 104).

Ahamefuna wonders how other prominent men "have lovers and concubines here and there" (p. 104) but he has none, because Emylia has tied him with what he cannot tell (p. 104). The inference of this is that the exchange of vows between husband and wife at the church altar before the church congregation serves as a trap set to hold a

man unto a woman called his wife. To show how influential a wedded wife can be, Ahamefuna points out that when a man works in the same establishment with his wife, there is every tendency that the man will be caged by his wife. This is illustrated in his refusal of taking a job at Odingan State University where Emylia (his wife) works as a lecturer. In the words of the narrator:

he could not accept working with his wife in the same establishment where the woman could at every second or minute of the day bump into his office and cage him into not being free or having any privacy (p. 79).

In *Dance of Horror* (2004), there is the use of the woman body to control man and exploit him of his earnings. The novel portrays man as a captive to his woman, whether she is his wife or his mistress. Like in Iyayis *Violence* (1979, p. 89) where men are described as being foolish and cheap because of how they are easily manipulated and fooled by women, in Ibezute's *Dance of Horror* (2004), the husband character, the Director-General (DG) in the civil service, Jonah Johnson, is a personification of foolishness. He happily lavishes all the money he makes on his woman-friend, Lady Isabela, at Dokinab Bubbles Restaurant. In this novel Lady Isabela is an archetypal Jezebel who seduces and lures men, especially big men, into having sex and paying dearly for it. "Any man in a position of responsibility who entered into her grip never left her in his right senses, unless there is spiritual intervention" (p. 105). The likes of the former military administrator of the state and DG Jonah Johnson are, at different times, under her influence. It is indicated that her life story seems to announce that she is "created to rule men" who come "across her way" (p. 108). She is portrayed as a divorcee who had lived with two husbands respectively. It is demonstrated that "she got married at a tender age of nineteen to one of her secondary school teachers" (p. 108). But her control over her first husband is unbearable. Her husband accuses her of "disregard for, and let down on his person" (p.108). Hence he sends her away after eight years of marriage --- suggesting men's resistance against women oppression. Again, her second and final marriage crashes when she is caught making love with his husband's close friend in their matrimonial home. To show how powerful and how much influence she has over any man that comes her way, it is indicated that her sons (she had two sons each for her former two husbands) are sponsored overseas on different occasions" by her male friends. In addition, her sons send her "parcels, letters and money" (p. 109).

This shows that it is women who enjoy the wealth of their men, or even that of their sons.

In the novel, the male character, DG Jonah Johnson, represents husbands that try to revolt against being under the weight or influence of their wives. As a husband, Jonah (like every other husband character in the novel) considers his marriage with Monica as a means of being in bondage. As a consequence, he sneaks out from his wife and switches to his new-found woman-friend, Isabela, who describes him as “a consumable meat” (p. 105). This metaphoric description marks how a woman uses sex to hold her man to ransom. What Ibezute seems to be saying in this context is that when it comes to sexual urge, it is male creatures that run after their female counterparts. He writes that “women are not only great in the game, but highly enduring, more tactical and wiser in pretence when they are hungry for sex” (p. 116). He maintains that:

Such women’s wits have brought many great men—great generals in battle, those in the academia and men of thoughts, great men in politics and government—down from their high positions, on their knees begging a woman for love, notwithstanding her class. It is also true that in this process, many great men have been betrayed, humiliated and fooled. Others have been messed up and delivered into the hands of their enemies (Ibezute 2004, p. 116).

The experience of Jonah speaks volume of a husband who runs into a bigger trouble of a woman as he tries to escape from his wife’s grip. What is seen in this scene is a fight between a woman-friend character (Isabela) and a wife character (Monica). Both female characters battle over who should be in charge of a husband character (Jonah). It is illustrated that through Operation Trace Schema (Ibezute, 2004, p. 138) Monica (the wife of Jonah) together with her “hired troopers” (p. 155) is able to confront Isabela to release her husband. Later her husband returns home.

There is the use of kitchen by woman to rule her man in the world of the novel. For instance, despite the fact that Monica discovers her husband’s extra-marital affair with Isabela, she does not keep malice for him for too long. Instead, she tries to remain in charge of him by taking care of his stomach. Before he leaves for work in the morning she makes sure that he takes his breakfast (p. 171). It is after his breakfast, while driving slowly towards his office, that Jonah intones soberly, thus: “Women are experts

in caging a man. My wife Monica won't allow me to have free movement any longer. Well, it is always like that" (p.172). Soon after that breakfast Jonah turns a new man who cannot be controlled by another woman. In this instance Monica uses the food she prepares and serves her husband – as evoked in Chinweizu's theory of kitchen-power – to get her husband to his senses. He turns "to be a good and caring husband and father after the incident" (p. 172), at least for a while.

However, later, Isabela's style of making love with Jonah serves as a remote control used to keep Jonah to herself. To ensure that Isabela loses her grip on her husband, Monica visits her husband's elder brother in the village and complains to him how Jonah allows himself to be ruled by Isabela. Through the medicine given by a native doctor, and administered by Jonah's elder brother when he visited Jonah in the city, Isabela's relationship with Jonah is dissolved with a bad fight. After the fight, Jonah exclaims thus:

Haba! If it is medicine, I have spoilt it. It is over. This whore has held me to ransom for so long, deceiving me that I am the only one in her life. Bastard prostitute. She calls me Dearest and the Only One. All na wayo (p. 190).

In *Dance of Horror* (2004) a woman exhibits her rule over her man through her cradle influence, which is in line with the masculinist ideology. In this novel, wife characters are created and each of them is depicted as being mindful and in control of her own son. Examples of these wife characters are Okonem's unnamed senior wife and Victoria, his second wife. In this novel, Victoria who is married with 'unwanted' pregnancy bears a son named Amaechina who becomes Okonem's adopted son. However, seven years after Amaechina's birth, the barren senior wife of Okonem gives birth to Okonem's biological son named Ahamefuna. In the novel conflict arises immediately "the senior wife is delivered of a baby boy. The arrival of this boy is seen as a danger to Victoria's son's position in Okonem's family" (Okereke, 2017, p. 67). Because Victoria envisages that Okonem's biological son, Ahamefuna, will have recognition in the family of Okonem than her son, Amaechina, she uses her womb and cradle influence to tell him to undo his half-brother by all means and he succumbs to it. Throughout the episode, Amaechina is portrayed as a man who goes by her mother's dictates. For instance, his mother (Victoria) instructs him to consult a native doctor at Okonofa (his maternal village) who will help to make his half-brother Ahamefuna, go insane and he

obliges to it. Again, after his return from the native doctor's place, it is his mother (Victoria) who tells him to carry out the assignment given to him by the native doctor in the night, to avoid being seen by his adoptive father, Okonem, and he also follows it. Even at the point of his mother's death, he does not doubt his mother's order, which reads thus: "You must get rid of him in any possible way that won't implicate you, if ever you and your children will live in this village and possess your right of heritage" (p. 55).

### Conclusion

This discussion has demonstrated that the works of Iyayi and Ibezute, though written at different times, are reflections of the masculinist view of the relationship between men and women. The study has despised the ideological stance of some feminist – that men are oppressive and exploitative to women. It has contended and shown that a woman is control of her man and society around her. Specifically, it demonstrated that it is women who oppress and exploit men, and not the contrary.

The study of *Violence* (1979) and Ibezute's *Dance of Horror* (2004) revealed that men in Nigerian families think more of how to satisfy their women. It brought to light that there are apathetic men or what Awuzie calls "passive husbands" (p. 9) in Nigerian families. These apathetic men or passive husbands live as ceremonial heads and remain as accommodationists. They prefer to live with their oppressive and insolent wife without co-operation. In *Violence* (1979) the husband character, Obofun, is a typical example of an 'accommodationist', while in *Dance of Horror* (2004), Okonem and Amaechina are examples. It is revealed that love is a strong weapon with which a woman gets hold of her man and his property. The study of both novels showed that women use their body to exploit men economically; and that marriage is used to proclaim a man's acceptance of becoming a slave to his wife. This apart, it is also demonstrated and shown in the study of both novels that men are left with hard tasks in the society; that men's desperation for sex increased women's power over them; and that women perpetrate psychological oppression against men. While these are revealed in both novels, in *Dance of Horror* particularly, it is illustrated that a woman rules her man through her control of the kitchen. The wife character, Monica, for instance, uses her kitchen office to lure her husband, Jonah, into submissiveness. By serving her husband good food, Monica is able to win her husband's heart. In addition, the study of *Dance of Horror* showed how

the character, Victoria, uses her cradle influence to control her son, Amaechina, and consequently denies her husband, Okonem, his peace in their polygamous family. In all, the discussion concludes that men are under the weight of women. In other words, women are oppressive and exploitative to men.

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