



# ASUU-UNILAG JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY ISSUES

**ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF UNIVERSITIES  
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS BRANCH**



**AU-JCI, VOL. 3, NO.1**

**JULY 2008**

ASUU-UNILAG JOURNAL OF CONTEMPORARY ISSUES



**ASUU-UNILAG  
JOURNAL  
OF  
CONTEMPORARY ISSUES**

*Osita C. Ezenwaneshe  
Creative Arts  
Unilag 2008*

**ACADEMIC STAFF UNION OF UNIVERSITIES  
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS BRANCH**

AU-JCI, VOL. 3, NO. 1  
JULY 2008

A journal established by the Academic Staff Union of Universities, University of  
Lagos Branch.

© 2008, Academic Staff Union of Universities, University of Lagos Branch

ISSN 1595-806X

Printed in Nigeria by  
University of Lagos Press

## THE FEMINIST AMBIVALENCE IN AFRICAN DRAMA: THE CASE OF THE EMPOWERED WOMEN IN TESS ONWUEME'S TWO PLAYS

Ezenwanebe Osita. C\*

### Abstract

*African women have relentlessly expressed their predicament within the framework of African traditional culture as oppressive and hence unacceptable. Literature has proved to be one of the forms through which their collective aspiration for equity and justice is being constructively expressed within a literary ideology commonly known as Feminism. Many Nigerian literary artists like – Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Zulu Sofola, Tess Onwueme, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Stella Oyedepo, etc have in various ways articulated the oppressive condition of women in the context of the Nigerian environment. In all, African feminist literary critics have identified some forms of representation that distort the African conception of feminist ideology.*

*This paper offers a critical examination of some of the distortions in the dramatization of feminist ideals in Nigerian theatre. How do Nigerian female playwrights envisage the issue of feminist oppression and liberation within the context of Nigerian traditional culture? To answer the above question, the role of the female protagonists in Tess Onwueme's two plays: Ona in *The Broken Calabash* and Wazobia in *The Reign of Wazobia*, are critically analysed. A close examination of the plays reveals Tess Onwueme's ambivalence to some key feminist principles, and this is deduced from the ambiguous relationship between concern and dramaturgy or theme and technique as well as intention and its realization.*

### 1. Introduction

Feminism is a 20<sup>th</sup> century literary criticism that examines the place of women in art and life. The history of feminism is that of female opposition to patriarchy as enshrined in the culture of the people. A feminist perspective in drama challenges dominant concepts about women and exposes the various ways in which women are oppressed, suppressed and marginalized, and their consequent quest for emancipation.

Eva Figs (1986) in her book *Patriarchal Attitude: Women in Society* asserts that "women have been largely man-made" since the cultural meanings

---

\* Dr. Ezenwanebe Osita.C. is of the Department of Creative Arts, University of Lagos, Nigeria



given to women are patriarchally determined (Figes: 15). Female oppression is therefore seen as the imposition of a patriarchally defined notion of a "female essence" on women, an essence to which all the sex's biological traits and functions are expected to adhere, with a consequent scorn and punishment for deviants. In her essay "Feminist, female, feminine" Triol Moi insists that "Feminine" (the female essence) is a "cultural construct" and hence does not exclude men (Belsey and Moore 1989: 117). According to Helene Keyssar (1984) "we are what we do and what we become and no one, neither woman nor man is restricted from becoming other." (Keyssar: XIV). Language has been identified as one of the powerful tools that have been used to legitimate the existing patriarchal domination of a "female essence" and this is evident in the binary oppositions that push women to the "otherness" of men. Dale Spender argues in her book *Man-Made Language* that linguistically, women are made to be seen, not to be heard. Hence they are completely silenced and become what D.H. Lawrence refers to as "an unutterable which man must for ever try to utter". According to D.H. Lawrence a woman achieves her womanhood at a point when she is silenced and enthroned within the sanctuary (Belsey and Moor: 53). Yet Freud's psychoanalysis claims that the "female essence" is natural: "It is well known", he says. "That women in general are prone to feelings of insecurity and jealousy; they have a reduced sense of justice, a less developed commitment to moral principles than men, and they are commonly motivated by feelings than by reason" (in Belsey and Moore: 5). Freud's assertion portrays women as thoughtless, cowards and talkative. These beliefs encourage the oppression and marginalization of women. For feminists therefore, literary practice is politics - there is no neutrality, for feminism is the history of female opposition to patriarchy.

A feminist writer tries to deconstruct the obnoxious "female essence", explores the "powers" of womanhood so as to encourage women's quest for liberation. "A feminist reader", according to Belsey and Moore in their book *The Feminist Reader*, "sets out to assess how the text invites its readers as members of a specific culture, to understand what it means to be a man or a woman, and so encourages them to reaffirm or challenge existing cultural norm" (Belsey and Moore 1986: 1)

Core Western feminism is separatist, trying to re-order the society and to destroy the prevailing arrangement in favour of women. This separatist attitude springs from the gut response of women to the pains of oppression, which they experience in the society. Michelene Wandor, a British radical feminist, wrote in her book *Carry on, Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics* that "active radical feminism encourages women to unite, to develop solidarity on the basis of their gender" (Wandor 1986: 133) Most Western feminist ideology champion a woman centered theories that have little or nothing to do with men and apt for a life of separate existence from that of men.

Black American women reject the separatist stance of Western feminism. They rather formulate a form of feminism known as "Womanism" which they believe is more representative of the African communal life. "Womanism" becomes an aspect of feminism which represents the black women's response to

gender discrimination. Mogu 1999 summarises it as a form of feminist ideology which seeks to mitigate the patriarchal structure of the society by actively initiating and encouraging dialogue between the sexes as a way of reconciling the two genders and encouraging cooperation among them. Nigerian feminists are mostly "womanists". Their approach is antiseparatist and atidisruptist - but radically argues against the closed doors that have made it impossible for women to realize their abilities. Nigerian womanists seek for the educational and economic empowerment of women as a way of encouraging them to rise above their oppressed and marginalized position in the society. Chikwenye Okenjo Ogunyemi (1996) states the difference between womanism and feminism in these terms:

Feminism appears more rhetorical, polemical, and individualist in its thrust, paling before womanism, which is communal in its orientation and is ideologically like a palaver in which the destiny of the distressed peoples can be urgently discussed in a meaningful context to avert disaster, not just to talk abstractly (Mogu, 1999: 72).

However, Akachi Ezeigbo sees womanists as feminists. She identifies two types of feminism -- radical and liberal -- and aligns womanism with liberal feminism. In her own words: "... Whether they are called feminists or womanists, women in this group (liberal feminists) associate with men and enjoy a close relationship with them. But it has to be a relationship of equals or partners: Not one between a master and a minion (Ezeigbo 1996: 2). However, both Feminism and *Womanism* are concerned with the issue of women in the society: their oppression and consequent quest for emancipation; unlike liberal humanists who are unaligned to any particular ideology except for the reformation of man and his world. The question is: What is the ideological thrust of Tess Onwueme? Is she a feminist, a *womanist* or a liberal humanist? An evaluation of the role of the heroines in the two plays under study show Onwueme shifting inconsistently from the feminist ideology to liberal humanistic concerns in *The Broken Calabash*, and from the *womanist* co-operative principle to the separatist stance of radical feminist in *The Reign of Wazobia*

## 2. The Role of the Empowered Women in the Broken Calabash and the Reign of Wazobia

*The Broken Calabash* and *The Reign of Wazobia*, are plays that examine the place of women in a changing modern Nigerian Society. Both Ogwashi-Ukwu and the town of Ilaa are post colonial towns where Western values have made an impact in the lives of the people. In Ogwashi-Ukwu, the setting of *The Broken Calabash*, both Western religion and education have been established. Ona, the protagonist of the play is being educationally empowered. She is an undergraduate in love with Diaku, a Youth Corper, whom she hopes to marry. Wazobia, the king surrogate of Ilaa in Anioma kingdom and the protagonist of



*The Reign of Wazobia* is also educated and has a wide experience in both traditional and Western culture. The plays are about educated Nigerian women whose place has shifted from the private (The kitchen) to the public.

*The Broken Calabash* is a realistic tragedy. It represents Ona's quest for freedom from an obnoxious, repressive, patriarchal culture. Ona, the only child of her parents, is a female and therefore an *Idegbe*. By the traditions of her people, she is not expected to marry out of her father's compound but has to remain there and bear children into her immediate family to propagate their lineage. Otherwise, she can marry another woman into her family to take up the role of procreation.

At the beginning of the play, Ona is ignorant of the demand which her people's tradition makes on her. She goes on with her personal vision and dream, the dream of marrying a young handsome and intelligent Youth Corper, Diaku, whom she loves most fervently. In this, her personal dream clashes with the life, which her people have for her as enshrined in their culture. Unknown to her, she has two opposing forms of life before her: her personal, idiosyncratic life and that imposed or demanded by the customs of the people.

Since she is unaware of the latter, she moves on with the former. But she has a strong obstacle in living her life. This obstacle is her father, Elope Jide Onwa Rapu, popularly known as Courtima, who has lost his faith in the Christian religion after the goddess, Onokwu, gave him Ona as an only child. Initially, Ona sees her father's interference in her relationship with Diaku, her finance, merely as a father's possessive, smoldering and protective love for an only child. Ona is not happy at all and she expresses the repressive and caging effect of Rapu's attitude in a conversation with Ugo, her friend and school mate, when she says "I receive more than my fair share of love. I feel smothered. Just to go out like now, I can't without a barrel of questions... Most times, to avoid conflict and embarrassment, I stay put in the house..." (Onwueme, 1992: 75). Ona does not know the reason behind her father's action.

Ona is a strong character. She is self-willed and is convinced of what she wants and the type of life she has designed for herself. Her education gives her the power of utterance and the knowledge makes her wise. Rapu, her father, is equally stubborn and strong-willed. He is a cantankerous residue of the tradition she hopes to enforce on her only child. But he knows that education and modern life have influenced Ona's view of life. Unlike his naïve wife, Oliaku, he knows that Ona may not willingly yield to the demands of the tradition. Conflict gradually builds up between them and reaches a crisis point when Rapu and his relatives refuse to accept the marriage proposal of Diaku's people and the reality of her being an *Idegbe* is made known to her. She resists it with all her life. Worse still, she is not even allowed to have Diaku to father her children should she agree to stay in her father's house. This is because Diaku is an outcast, an *Osu*, and her people will never allow their pure blood to be polluted with that of an *Osu*. For the first time, Ona says 'No' to her father, the symbol of the oppressive traditions, and does not hide her stand but asserts herself strongly when she says:

No father! Not easy now! I have always succumbed to you and that is why you have messed me up. My whole life has been messed up by you because I love you. All my life has been circumscribed by you because you own me. Now all those knots you tied into my life to ensure my perpetual bondage to you must be untied (Onwueme: 108).

Speaking to his father is speaking to the obsolete, wicked tradition. She challenges the patriarchal tradition and seeks to free herself from its enslavement. Nor does she succumb to marrying in another woman to take up the role for her. Her struggle for freedom is for all women, and not a selfish one. She stresses this point to her naïve, culturally enslaved mother, when she says to her:

I see. You people have a very ambitious murder plan. You will not only slaughter me on the altar of your decadent tradition, but would also want another female head. I say – to hell with your Tradition, Homestead! Norm! All! Let the wind blow – Let the shaky homestead be blown. Anything which cannot stand the force of change must be uprooted or be blown into oblivion by the storm heralding the new season! (Onwueme: 109).

Ona sees the life that the society is offering her as that of forced prostitution, which is a crime against womanhood. There is stasis as both the oppressor and the oppressed stick to their guns. The tension reaches climax when Rapu, out of anger, breaks the calabash of wine brought for the marriage proposal by Diaku's people, thus signifying the shattering of Ona's dream. When finally Diaku marries Ugo, Ona implicates her father in incest. Rapu, out of grief from Ona's blackmail takes his own life. *The Broken Calabash* is a simple, straight forward play with a triangular plot of a classical tragedy.

*The Reign of Wazobia* is more directly concerned with the female question. The play is set in the town of Ilaa in Anioma kingdom after the death of king Obi Ogisco and a surrogate king, Wazobia, is chosen to reign for three seasons before a new king is enthroned. The context is still modern Nigerian society, a society that has experienced changes in all facets of life. Tess Onwueme sets out to evaluate the place of women in the changing modern Nigeria. In the Introductory Notes to the first production of *The Broken Calabash* she asks, "Should women continue to be relegated even in a changing modern Nigerian society where their role has steadily graduated from the kitchen to offices, lecture rooms and even senatorial seats?" (Onwueme: 67)

*The Reign of Wazobia* evaluates the place of the new Nigerian woman, the empowered woman, in governance. It is a play about the problems of leadership. It represents the struggles of a woman king- sumogate, Wazobia, to free women from their repressed and marginalized position, and integrate them into the affairs of the state. Her fight is a fierce resistance to all the obnoxious, false notions and cultural practices about and against women as enshrined in Nigeria cultural traditions and propagated by men. The heroine of the play, Wazobia is not only educated but has wide experience both from within and



outside the country. When, by people's demand for a female king surrogate, she is chosen by the gods, she decides to change the status of women in her kingdom.

Wazobia's reign heralds a new dawn in the lives of the women of Ilaa. As opposed to the oppressive practices against women, which include wife beating, wicked widowhood rites and denial of certain privileges; she announces a new air of freedom to all women: "It is no time to kneel," she says, but a time to stand up and fight for women's rightful place in the society (Onwueme: 20). Her plan is to build a new egalitarian society based on love and understanding where men and women will be equal. She seeks for collaboration with men to achieve a revolution where women will be actively involved in governance. She summons all the sons and daughters of Ilaa to a meeting and presents her manifesto of co-operative, productive principle as follows:

Henceforth the symbol of our kingdom  
Shall be the palm- tree which from top to bottom  
Has all and produces all...  
Each part, its own value and yet interdependent on all parts...  
Henceforth, women shall have equal rights of inheritance  
In matters of land and property.  
Today we put a final seal on wife beating.  
Man and woman decreed as partners in progress, no antagonists  
(Onwueme: 34).

Wazobia's new leadership principles of equality and co-operation is based on the premise that the other regimes where women were oppressed, marginalized and excluded in matters of the state are not fruitful. she is convinced that progress depends on unity of all men and women.

But traditional practices have chained women to private, not public roles. The men, whose understanding and co-operation she seeks for hold on to tradition because it is to their favour. They insist that "A set tradition does not kill the bride" (Onwueme: 34), and particularly that "serious matters of state concern are too heavy for the brittle heads of women and children" (Onwueme: 27). They are fiercely opposed to Wazobia's manifesto and detest the air of freedom she is blowing for women. "That of youth is even better", said Idehen, one of the chiefs, "Can you imagine what foul air oozes from the mouths of our wives spreading such slogans as WOMEN LIBERATION? WOMEN EMANCIPATION!" (Onwueme: 28). The men back out of her programme of equality. Even Omu, the leader of the women of Ilaa, supports the men.

Wazobia is strong and resolute in what she wants to accomplish. She resorts to uniting the women, old and young, together, to make a living out of their lives with or without men. And as soon as she succeeds in winning Omu back to the women folk, a strong bond or tie develops among them.

It is time for battle since the collaborative principle fails. The men under the leadership and insinuations of Idehen and Iyase, plot to dethrone Wazobia traditionally by presenting her with a pot of steaming herbs which will force her to dance backwards into the evil forest or be exiled. While Wazobia is rummaging in her naivety concerning the men's wicked plot, Omu gathers the

women ready to counter the men's plot traditionally too. In the final mock-heroic revolutionary war- without blood- shed, the advance of the men with the pot of herbs is matched with the women's "naked dance" around Wazobia. The men retreat and the women have the stage.

*The Reign of Wazobia* is a straight forward simple play. The play starts at the end and gradually goes back to the beginning and the middle and back to the end. It ends in a climax, which is a physical confrontation of men and women in liberation and anti liberation war. It is mock heroic in the way it embarks on a direct political action in a traditional way. The conflicts are not tense but diffused. The dialogue especially at critical, tense moments lacks the vigour to match with the situation. In most cases, for example, in the scene where the whole town gathers to discuss state matters, the dialogue becomes a mere exchange of words. In all, the main weakness of the play is that of in appropriate language. The language does not match the volatile theme of liberation especially when the strategy shifts from a gradual process of conviction and to one of open confrontation.

### 3. The Feminist Ambivalence As Seen From the Two Plays

Tess Onwueme is interested in issues concerning women, especially, the place of women in the changing modern Nigeria. She will not like the new state to emerge with changes in every sphere without a corresponding change in the status and role of women in the new dawn. She is of the opinion that the changes should be total in order to be meaningful and progressive. However, her methodology casts doubt as to her real commitment to the "female question" as she calls it.

In the two plays Onwueme creates powerful female characters on stage for women to identify with. Ona in *The Broken Calabash*, and Wazobia in *The Reign of Wazobia* are educated, intelligent, strong willed, good natured and goal-oriented. They are women who are intelligent enough to know what they want and to walk steadfastly towards achieving it. They are strong enough to face and challenge oppositions on their way to accomplishing their goals in life. Feminist theatre critics insist that creating strong female characters with whom the audience can identify is one of the most important functions feminist theatre can perform in the hands of a feminist writer. Helene Keyssar wrote in her book *Feminist Theatre* that feminist drama has traditionally urged women to reveal to themselves and to others whom they really are; that is, the stuff they are made of, as opposed to the degrading notions about them. She concludes therefore that "the essential characteristics of feminist drama seemed to be the creation of significant stage roles for women" (Keyssar, 1984: XI). Does this tendency of creating significant stage roles for women make Tess Onwueme a feminist?

Though Tess Onwueme creates a strong female's resistance to cultural oppression, the focus of the play is not on feminist emancipation or female liberation, but on a tragic encounter of the force of modernity and change with that of retrogressive, conservative tradition. Though the play is given a feminist reading in this paper, it is not, in our view, a feminist play. In *The Broken Calabash*, Tess Onwueme is more interested in exposing the tragic effect of



obsolete traditional practices and beliefs in the face of modern, changing times. It is only incidental that the person in-between the two opposing forces, Ona, happens to be a woman. At the end of the play, after the news of her father's suicide, Ona is seen between the crucifix, the symbol of the new dawn, and the red cloth, the symbol of tradition. "She continues running in between the two as if torn between them until lights fade out on her" (Onwueme: 116).

Ona is therefore a symbol of modernity. Her revolt is less a feminist quest for liberation than that "of a radical modernity against a decadent traditional value system; the individual conviction of the insurmountability of genuine love for another person in spite of traditional and unholy attitude of discrimination" (Onwueme: 66). It is an individual affair, what may be called a bourgeois individualistic war against cultural oppression. The creation of individual heroism and commitment is against the basic principle of revolutionary change, be it socialist or feminist. According to Femi Osofisan, a revolutionary playwright, revolution is a social thing, because "if you are always thinking of individuals creating history, history will always look like a series of tragedies" (Awodidya 1993: 29). Hence in his play *Morountodun*, as Chris Dunton observes, Osofisan rejects the idea that heroism, wisdom and self-sacrifice have any validity so long as they refer to "the role of an individual working within the structures of an oppressive hierarchy" (Dunton 1992: 79). In the same vein, *The Broken calabash* ends up as a tragedy. Ona, like Chief Elesin in Soyinka's *Death and king's Horse Man*, kongi or even Oba Danlola in *Kongi's Harvest*, fails to create that history she longs for.

Though Tess Onwueme said that she is interested in the "female question", her strategy works against the basic principles of the ideology that is concerned with the interest of women: feminism. Apart from shifting the focus and the theme of *The Broken Calabash* from a feminist perspective to a general humanist concern, the final resolution of the play destroys the feminist aim of creating a strong female character. The fact is that at the end of all her struggles Ona fails to realize her dream of marrying Diaku and rather takes to lying in

audience will never like to identify with. Nor can the death of Courtuma be taken as the death of what he stands for, since neither him nor his likes in the play came to any realization that their ways are wrong.

Realizing that it may be futile for an individual woman to face the obnoxious and oppressive tradition, Onwueme in *The Reign of Wazobia*, tries a joint venture with men. At the early part of her reign, Wazobia tries to collaborate with men in establishing a just society where men and women co-exist in love and harmony; a society based on equality and fairness. But unfortunately, the men loved their patriarchal oppressive and retrogressive traditions. They back out of Wazobia's new political agenda of involving women in the affairs of the state.

In the face of men's opposition Onwueme quickly switches from the collaborative and co-existence principle of womanism or liberal feminism to a separatist ideology of radical feminism or Western feminism. The type of sisterhood bond formed by women in the play is one that separates them from and sets them against men. As the men plan to unseat Wazobia, Omu the leader and mother of women, gathers women together for the arc-shaped naked dance of war in a revolution against men's oppression and intimidation. She explains the plan to Wazobia in these words:

Our great king,

We, your people have come together, to form this arc around you.

That you may continue to reign for our own glory.

We form this arc to shield us from the stampede of the masquerades" (p.53).

This separatist stance where women fight alone and have little or nothing to do with men is celebrated in the ambiguous victory dance. The dance occurs during the town's meeting when the wife-beater, instead of apologizing to his wife as demanded by Queen Wazobia, divorces her and storms out of the gathering followed by other men. Immediately "The women break into a dance in celebration of their freedom" (Onwueme: 35) "We have taken over the stage!", (Onwueme: 35) says Bia in a note of finality.

But is this freedom? What type of freedom? An African audience is skeptical about this kind of freedom. Will the divorce put an end to women oppression in Nigerian context? It seems that Onwueme does not really believe that the collaboration with men can bring about the liberation needed by women. But the reality in Nigeria is that there is a strong belief in the sanctity and importance of the family and of matrimony. In an article "Setting the Prisoners Free" in *Journal of Cultural Studies*, (2000) the researcher denounces the same tendency; where Buchi Emecheta suggests the destruction of the traditional family as a way of freeing the women that are trapped as prisoners in it. Are marriage and the family the prize to be paid for women emancipation?

#### 4. Conclusion

African Womanists still believe in a gradual process of insinuation and in firmly



ersistently insisting and propagating what is right. They look forward to an  
tion where men and women work out a new, equitable and equal  
onship where everyone has equal opportunity to develop his or her  
tials. Education, enlightenment campaigns and economic empowerment  
divorce) are mere viable means of enthroning a meaningful and lasting  
om for women in Nigeria.

## References

- iyi, Muiyiwa (1993) (ed) *Excursions in Drama and Literature: Interviews with Femi Osofisan* Ibadan: Kraft books
- y, Catherine and Moore, Jane (1989) (eds), *The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism*, London: Macmillan.
- on, Chris (1992) *Make Man Talk True: Nigerian Drama in English Since 1970*, London: Hanszell.
- bo, Akachi (1996), *Gender Issues in Nigeria: A Feminine Perspective*, Lagos: Vista Books.
- vanebe, Osita (2000) "Setting the Prisoners Free: Buchi Emecheta's Strategy for the emancipation of Women in the Traditional African Family" *Journal Cultural Studies*\_Vol. 2 No 1, Ago – Iwoye: NIGSAC (pp. 341 –350).
- Eva (1986) *Patriarchal Attitudes: Women in Society*. London.
- ar, Helene, (1984) *Feminist Theatre: An Introduction to Plays by Contemporary British and American Women* London: Macmillan
- i, Francis (199) "The Problem of Representation of character in Black Male Authored Texts: Womanism as Antidote" *Journal of cultural Studies* vol. I No 1 Ago Iwoye: The Nigerian Group for the study of African culture.
- eme, Tess (1992), *The Reign of Wazobia and other plays*, Ibadan: Heinemann
- lor, Michelene (1986) *Carry on Understudies: Theatre and Sexual Politics*, New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

## THE MODEST COMMITMENTS OF STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENTS TO HOUSING PROVISION IN LAGOS METROPOLIS

Olugbenga I. Akinmoladun\*

### Abstract

*Fast growing cities like Lagos, Nigeria and others in most developing countries face acute housing problems especially shortages of quality and decent housing to match the exploding population growth experiences. Street sleeping, which is a growing phenomenon is an indication of homelessness and overcrowding is an indication of acute housing shortage. The problem of inadequate and affordable housing has been a recurring decimal in the country since the oil boom era (between early and late 1970s). There have been many mundane and stale goal statements such as 'housing for all by the year 2000' and many policy directives such as Shagari low cost housing; Jakande low cost housing; jubilee housing; alliance and millennium housing scheme. The paper explains why these laudable goals and policies have not been fully attained. How are the governments at the Federal and State levels responding to the growing housing problems in Lagos? What contributions or impacts are being made? What is the role of the private sector? What are the constraints? How can we solve these problems? Therefore, this study examines why the problems of housing shortages persist with a view to providing a basis for intervention.*

### 1. Introduction

Housing, universally accepted as the second most important human need after food, is more than a shelter (i.e. it is more than providing a roof over one's head). Housing fulfils several socio-economic objectives. It provides investment opportunities, offers shelter and privacy and enhances one's social and cultural status in the society. Mandelker et al (1973) gives a more comprehensive definition and significance of housing. "Housing is much more than physical structures; housing is/has become a subject of highly charged emotional content: a matter of strong feeling. It is the symbol of status, of achievement, of social acceptance. It seems to control, in large measure, the way in which the individual, the family perceives him/itself and is perceived by others".

\* Akinmoladun Olugbenga I. is of the Department of Urban and Regional Planning,