AWKA JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERARY STUDIES (AJELLS)

Volume 10 Number 1
December, 2023

Violence in Gender Relationship in African Culture: A Study of Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of Gods*

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Abstract
The article interrogates African traditional practices that are discriminatory in nature and produce violence against the female gender within the episcope of the play, *Wedlock of the Gods* by Zulu Sofola. The research is a content study that relies on purposively selected extracts from the play for analysis. In order to achieve the objective of the research, African Feminism theory is used for the interpretation of selected extracts to show instances of discriminatory African traditional practices that occasion violence against the female gender. Findings from the study show that some of the traditional practices that produce violence are: the widowhood practice of seclusion; forced marriage and culture of bride price; male child preference; and, victim blaming. The authors contend that the identified practices are gender sensitive and constitute violence against the woman.

Key words: Violence, Gender, feminism, traditional, Seclusion

Introduction

In Africa, the female child shares a history of violence, both at home and in work places. At homes, women are beaten and forcefully given out in marriages by their beloved parents. And, in most cases their interest and social well being are sacrificed to meet the needs of a male sibling(s). While, in matrimony, their beloved husbands, in inexplicable circumstances, reduce them to punching bags in order to exert control and subject them to obedience. Closely related, are also questions of female sexual rights and associated violence at the home front. Furthermore, in workplaces and other socio-political settings, they suffer oppression and deprivations. For instance, women seeking employment or political positions are often confronted by problems defined by gender, such as sexual harassment and denial of opportunities. In Nigeria schools, instances of sexual violence against female students abound.

However, irrespective of the rising cases of violence against the womenfolks, the discourses of violence in gender relationship in Africa have not been given the necessary attention it deserves. It is important to stress that the problems of gender related violence remain recurrent issues that pose danger, not only to the wellbeing of the womenfolk, but also to the wider society. Undoubtedly, Africa is a patriarchal society characterized by acute gender discrimination that results in exclusion, unequal treatment and male impunity leading to situations where men control and use violence as a mode of subjection. Most people are unaware of the terrible repercussions of violence against women in the society. Apart from the pain and suffering that the women go through, they are forever afflicted and frustrated, often leading to distorted personality and psychological breakdown that have grave consequences on the society.

Before now, the subject of violation of the right of the girl child and women generally was treated with contempt or not treated at

all, but as gender issues continue to unfold with social changes characterised by advances in sciences and allied disciplines, the socio-cultural status of women and the underlying ideological assumptions that impact women's circumstances have been questioned to test their validity and reasonableness, especially by women rights campaigners and their sympathizers. Madubuike, Nkeiruka and Chukwuka (2019:142) contend that the asymmetrical relationship between sexes in the process of authoritative allocation of public resources, before 1958, stunted the process of sustainable human development in the continent, particularly as it affects the woman. However, in 1958, when women in southern Nigeria were granted the right to vote and to stand for election, the immediate society and the wider political space which were relatively stagnant and weighed down by primordial sentiments and out-dated cultural trait assumed a better form. Today, women, world over can contest and occupy political offices leading to enhanced performances and better governance. However, there remains a great disparity in the ratio of male to female occupying political positions. This is because in Africa the essence of the male is so high compared to that of the female.

African culture encourages female suppression, hence the female gender in Africa continues to face many forms of violence simply because they are female. Among the most extreme forms of violence that arise from patriarchal African society are sexual violence, sexual aggression, harmful widowhood practices, female disinheritance, male child preference, child marriage, rape, and domestic violence. For instance, sexual violence continues unabated in families, yet, it is not recognised as a problem in a gender-based cultural Africa. African cultures have no much regard for the interest of the female--her dreams, aspiration and ambition are subject to the whims and caprices of the man whom she strives to appeal. The devaluation of the desire of the female child makes child marriage flourish in Africa. Young female children, irrespective of their feelings and desires, are married off

to older men, simply, for bride price. Children who cannot take informed decisions are traded for money or gifted, all in the name of custom. This practice is quite prevalent, up till date in Africa, particularly Nigeria. However, there have been some changes, particularly in the southern part of Nigeria, while it remains largely unchanged in the northern part. It is important to note that customary practices reinforce gender inequality. Hence, to get female out of the shell of patriarchy in Nigeria requires constant and relentless efforts, not only by female right campaigners, but also by people of good conscience.

The play, *Wedlock of God's* by Zulu Sofola has attracted some attention in academic discourse in an attempt to explain the plight of women in the context of traditional African culture. Such works include Solanke (2013), Osita, (2014), Eze (2018) and Asen (2017). Though, some of these works have studied the play from the feminist perspective such as Asen (1917) and Ezenwamadu (2018), none has examined the violence that results from the unfair treatment of the woman in African Culture as espoused in the play. This study, by investigating violence in gender relationship in Africa culture as projected in the play, *Wedlock of Gods*, contributes to the understanding of the plight of women as presented in the play and in the wider context of African culture and beyond. Therefore, the study argues that the violence against the female child is a practice that does no one any good and advocate for urgent measures to reverse the development.

Synopsis of the Play

The play has its setting in Midwestern Nigeria of the 19th century. The play begins in media res where the audience is introduced to the development surrounding the death of Adigwu, the husband of Ogwoma, the protagonist of the play. The play presents the repercussions of a forced marriage in traditional African community. Through series of flashbacks, the playwright presents scenes that are inarguably, characterized by violence against

Ogwoma who is married off against her will to a man she never loves mainly because her preferred man could not meet the monetary demand of her parents. The man she is forcefully married to is Adigwu, while her preferred man is Uloko. In a twist of fate, her husband Adigwu dies, barely few years after their marriage. By tradition she is to mourn her husband for a time frame after which she is to be inherited by her husband's younger brother. However, in what appears to be a revolt against the injustice meted out to her, she sees the death of her husband as a liberation from bondage. To worsen situation, she becomes impregnated by Uloko during her mourning period. This is considered a taboo and a shameful act by the community. Moreover, Ogwoma's mother in-law sees this as an abomination that resulted to her son's death. This makes her to seek revenge. To achieve her objectives, she resorted to charm and incantations. She succeeds in killing Ogwoma. In anger, Uloko kills Adebeli, and kills himself thus leading to the tragic end of the characters.

Methodology

This work is a content analysis procedure which uses extracts from Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of God's* as its study data. The choice of the play is because it explicates the circumstances of women in Africa, particularly as it relates to violence.

Theoretical Framework

The holistic view of this study is anchored and explained from the perspective of African Feminist theory. To understand the theorem of African Feminism, it is important we understand the historical background that birthed the concept of feminism and its nuances. Charles Fourier, a Utopian socialist and French philosopher is credited with having coined the word 'feminism'. Feminism as a collection of movement and ideologies aims at defining, establishing, and defending equal political, economic and social rights for women. The development of feminist consciousness dates back to the late 1840's and early 1950's, when women rights

organisations began to form in Europe and America to challenge the legally entrenched inferior caste of women. The 'Declaration of sentiments' and 'Resolutions' by the first America women suffrage convention in 1848 summarised the outlines of women position in many countries of the world at that time, though slightly so, today. It stated the feminist grievance in no uncertain terms:

> The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpation on the part of the man towards woman, having indirect objective: the establishment of an absolute right to the elective franchise...He has made her if married, in the eye of the law civilly dead. He has taken from her all rights to property, even to the wages, she earns. . He has so framed the law of divorce, as to what shall be the proper cause, and in cases of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given, as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of the woman – the law, in all cases going upon a false supposition of the supremacy of man and giving all powers into his hands....He has endeavoured, in any way that he could, to destroy her confidence in her own powers, to lessen her self- respect, and to make her willing to lead a dependent and abject life" (qtd in Oakley; 20:1988).

The development of feminism has been plagued with controversies. This is, understandably so, considering the divergence of human thought and experience. This, notwithstanding, the concept has offered a rallying point for the articulation of opinions that expresses the socio-cultural and economic predicament in a male dominated society.

Gamble (2001: vii) offers the following definition:

> [Feminism] is the belief that women […] are treated inequitably within a society which is organized to prioritize male viewpoints and concerns. Within this patriarchal

> paradigm, women become everything men are not (or do not want to be seen to be): where men are regarded as strong, women are weak; where men are rational, they are emotional; where men are active, they are passive; and so on.

The opinion expressed by Gamble, to a large extent, gives a picture of the circumstantial positioning of women in the society without giving suggestions on how the status quo. could be reversed. This falls short of the revolutionary tendency that feminism is equated with. And, perhaps, the definition offered by Chukwuma (1994:ix) can be helpful in this regard. In her words, "feminism means 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 of women which deny them a positive identity." The two definitions provided by Gamble and Chukwuma represent feminism as a coin that has two sides. One shows awareness of the depressing circumstances of the female gender, while the other is an affirmative statement of action. (Freeman 1975:13), citing Wollstonecraft (1792) advocates for consciousness-raising in women through the mechanism education as a means of improving the conditions of women.

Feminist writers, such as; Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) (1792), Virginia Woolf (1929) helped to strengthen feminism. According to Chukwudi (2015:129) "Feminism as a social theory seeks to understand the nature of inequality and biases of gender politics, power relations and sexuality as well as issues on reproductive rights, maternity leave, equal pay, sexual harassments, discrimination and stereotyping, while 'feminism' as a politics, takes into consideration the historical and cultural subordination of women as a minority and a resolve to do something about it". Feminism has crossed several stages, and at every stage advocates for female liberation and equity.

Feminists across the globe have developed their different causes and goals, depending on historical movement, culture and environments, and with each seeking to encapsulate and define the female thought. In this regard, we have such categories asNorth American feminism, Arab feminism, European feminism and African feminism. In this study, we are concerned with African feminism. However, it is necessary we study the development of feminism to understand the circumstances that motivate the emergence of African feminism. Recall that feminism has Euro-American foundation (see works of Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) where white women expressed concerns about unfair treatment by their male folks and demanded for equality across both private and public spaces. Other important figures that played significant roles at the very beginning of the conception of feminist ideology are Sojourner Truth (1793-1883), Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) and Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815-1902).

African feminism, like the name implies is a shade of feminism that seeks to address the peculiarities of African women. It evolves as a result of the realisation that the existing framework does not adequately explain the conditions of African women. Among other things, it rejects aspects of Euro-American feminism such as anti-male, anti-culture and anti-religion posturing, and incorporate others that are African restricted. For instance, it rejects lesbianism and full autonomy for the female gender. In addition, it advocates for the inclusion of culture-specific practices that are native to Africa, but ignored by the Euro-American feminism. Such include, but not limited to the following: payment of bride price, preference of male children over female children and associated practices and discriminatory widowhood practices. Though African feminism is often perceived as one organic theoretical expression, this is not the case as there exists different persuasions and viewpoints. This is basically the result of community specific cultural practices and the ideological leaning of individual scholars.

It is important to note that the point of departure for the enunciation of African feminism is traceable to Alice Walker's theory of Womanism. Walker's Womanism came as a result of her rejection of mainstream Euro-American feminism which she describes as white woman centred having failed to address gender issues that affect black women. In advancing her view, she did not only address what were considered as genuine Afro-American women causes, but she also went overboard to call for full autonomy of the woman by promoting lesbianism that would ensure that the woman becomes self-sufficient. African traditional practices abhor lesbianism, so it was not difficult for African writers and critics of feminist persuasion to dissociate themselves from Womanism. Again, they argued that in spite of the overarching commitment of the mainstream Euro-American feminism to achieving better conditions for the women folks, they consider their position as bordering on extremism. Because of this disposition, some of them find it difficult to be addressed as feminists. Scholars in this school of thought are Mariama Ba, Bessie Head, FilomenaChioma Steady and BuchiEmechetta. Conceptualizing this position, Ogundipe-Leslie (:64) has this to say: "Male ridicule, aggression and backlash have resulted in making women apologetic and have given the term 'feminist' a bad name. Yet nothing could be more feminist than the writings of these women writers in their concern for and deep understanding of the experiences and fate of women in society." The idea expressed by Ogundipe-Leslie has made African writers and critics of feminist persuasion to seek better ways of theorizing the peculiar circumstances of African women in a critical undertaking. A careful study of the efforts to realize an African feminist theory shows that there is no consensus of opinion as what should be considered as African feminism or the appropriate theoretical label to adopt. This scenario has led to the emergence of quite a number of theories, particularly in nomenclatures. We shall take a cursory look of some of these.

Steady (1981) uses the term, African feminism, and seeks to locate the travails of African women in racial discrimination, class discrimination and economic deprivation (Steady 1981: 23-24). This position appears not to sit well with other researchers of feminist sentiments. Hudson-Weems, for instance, contends that the term, feminism, is alien to Africans and calls for its rejection. She argues that feminism is "a white woman's establishment instituted to protect their rights, and identifying with the movement is coterminous to subjecting blackness to white supremacy and sustained domination" (qtd in Amaefula 2021:291). In addition Hudson-Weems rejects Womanism, especially on its commitment to lesbian culture and male ridicule. She goes further to advocate what she terms Africana Womanism. Hudson-Weems conceptualizes her idea of Africana Womanism in the following words:

> African womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture and therefore, it necessarily focused on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and the conflict between the mainstream feminist, the feminist, the African feminist, and the Africana womanist. The conclusion is that Africana womanism and its agenda are unique and separate from both white feminism. (qtd in Megkwe 2021:20)

The main thrust of Africana Womanism is the rejection of extremism in the pursuit for better living conditions for African women as espoused in the mainstream feminism and Walker's Womanism. Both advocate extreme measures, such as male ridicule and total separation from men, including all forms of coital relations. Instead of confrontation with men, Africana Womanism seeks cooperation. Other notable scholars that have advocated one theory or the other that are aimed at improving the conditions of African women are Ogundipe-Leslie who proposes STIWA (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa); Chikwenye Ogunyemi's Black Womanism and African Womanism; Catherine Acholonu's Motherism; Chioma Nnaemeka's Nego-Feminism;

Chioma Opara's Femalim and Adimora-Ezeigbo's Snail Sense Feminism. No doubt, quite a number of scholarly works have been done by African female writers/critics and their sympathizers to advance the cause of African women. This has resulted in a multiplicity of female-centred theorems that have no much differences in substance, but theoretical labels. A key feature is that they agree that the conditions of African women need improvement and reject the term, feminism, for being Euro-America centric. It is, however, important to point out that the underling grain of feminism anywhere in the world is the campaign for the improvement of the conditions of women, therefore, the concept, feminism, is not bad in itself. Though there are features of Euro-American heritage (which we consider environmental) that are embedded in the concept, however the qualifier "African" can cure the perceived defects.

It is our opinion that African Feminism as espoused by Hudson-Weem is adequate for the explanation and campaign for better condition for African women and that they need to cooperate with the man, rather than attack him. African Feminism highlights environmental and socio-cultural prejudices that characterize the existence and survival of African female gender. In response to this development, there have been creative and critical undertakings (Mariama Ba and Buchi Emecheta Bessie Head and Aidoo; Ogundipe-Leslie, 1994 Oyewumi 1997, Mekgwe 2018) to signpost these peculiarities that tend to define African women and their existence. Some of these are the questions of bareness in marriage, forceful marriage and payment of bride price, influence of extended family, harmful widowhood rites and widow inheritance practices.

Review of Scholarly Works

The play, *Wedlock of Gods* has attracted some scholarly attention to show its socio-cultural significance in the African society. Some of the critical works conducted on the play are reviewed in order to create a gape for the present research. Solanke (2013) carries out a

study entitled Mytho-symbolic representation: Assessing Heroism. The aim is to examine the struggle between few ideological stand point of old and new, using characters in the play. The study observes the heroines character and believes that tradition has to change, especially in the condition of women in terms of the belief system of African traditional culture. Also, Eze and Obasi (2008) investigate the theme of forceful marriage in play from a cross-gender perspective. The study establishes that the forceful marriage of Ugwoma to somebody she never loves is an instance of human right abuse that has consequential effect on the society.

In addition, Rosemary Asen (2017) carries out a study entitled: "A Feminist Analysis of the Heroes of Bride price practice in Sutherland's *Marriage of Anasewa*andZuluSofola's*Wedlock of Gods.* The paper studies the practice of bride price as projected in Sutherland's *Marriage of Anasewaand*ZuluSofola's*Wedlock of Gods* and notes that the practice has been commercialized and advocates for change because it demeans the woman and brings pains. Also, from a feminist perspective, Ezenwamadu (2018) interrogates the relationship among women and argues that women are their own enemies. She contends that the playwright's portrayal of female characters in the play lacks feminist sentiments as they fight among themselves or behave in irrational manner. She cites the example of quarrel between Ogwoma and Odibei, her mother-in-law. She also cites the example of Ogwoma who behaves in most unacceptable manner. The author compares Sofola to Flora Nwapa, author of the novel, *Efuru* who she claims shows more sympathy in her writings. In conclusion the author avers that women are their own enemies. From the perspective of pragmatics, Oseafiana and Emenike (2020) examine the use of impoliteness in the play, *Wedlock of the Gods* to explain the types of impoliteness strategies that are used in the play. The study employs Culpeper's theory of impoliteness for the analysis of data. The study shows that notable impoliteness strategies are used in the play. Some of these are bald on record, bald on record combined with sarcasm,

positive impoliteness and sarcasm and negative impoliteness. The study further shows that the choice of the identified impoliteness strategies is motivated by the subject matters of discussions which are highly sensitive and emotional.

Eke and Obika (2014) study the use of folklore in the *Wedlock of the gods* to explain its significance in the functioning of the society. The authors define folk as a people, while lore refers to knowledge and information related to a particular people particularly when it is not written, and argue that the playwright uses it to explain the consciousness of the people and the belief system that underpins their conducts, The authors further state that through the use of folklore, the playwright is able to show that the people are bound by their culture, no matter how unjust it may seem to be. They contend that anyone that contravenes the custom of the people is crushed. This, the authors explain by making reference to the tragic end of the protagonist and Uloko.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The discussion of violence in *the wedlock of the gods* centres on Ogwoma, the female protagonist. The analysis illustrates with relevant excerpts to show how Ogwoma is subjected to violence by her parents and the community she belongs to. The study argues that the violence she suffers is a gendered one, that is, a peculiar violence suffered as a result of the sex of an individual. To do justice to the demands of this essay, we shall discuss the gendered violence as espoused in the play under the following subject areas.

Gendered Violence in the *Wedlock of the Gods:* Seclusion

Seclusion is one of the many widowhood rites that the female gender is subjected to after the demise of her husband, and this practice has been described as an act of violence. Again, the practice is also considered discriminatory as it is only the female gender that is expected to observe the rite at the death of a spouse

(Okoye, 2005; Shahin, 2022). The exchange below shows Ogwoma in seclusion.

Exchange 1
OGWOMA: (*apealing to him*) I want you to stay away from here until I find my way out of here.

ULOKO: Come to my house.
OGWOMA: I have one more month for these ashes. I am still mourning Adigwu. Please let me finish what I must do for a dead husband.

(Act 1 Scene 1)

Exchange 1 is an interaction between Ogwoma and Uloko, her lover before she got married to Adigwu who she mourns at present. Here, Uloko visits Ugwoma in seclusion. Ugwoma, however, reminds him that she was in seclusion. Seclusion is a restrictive practice that forms part of widowhood rites in African society. It solely involves the female gender. It is the disruption of interaction between widows and other members of the society. The woman is expected to be in seclusion for a period of time as a mark of respect for the deceased. The length of time varies from one culture to another, probably, between three months to one year or after the interment of the diseased. According to Ohale (2003)," in most Igbo [African] communities, it is compulsory for a widow to be placed in seclusion after her husband's death. "Commenting on the probable time line, Ohale (2003) notes further "This practice is maintained throughout the initial mourning period and ends with the interment of the deceased. In this condition, the widow is restricted from any interaction with people. "Still commenting on the seclusion experience of a bereaved wife, (Nzewi 1981:1-11) states "The first period of mourning is most severe and health-damaging. In her twenty-eight days of confinement, the cultural practice restricts the widow from any social contact. She is not allowed to go to the stream, farmland or

market." The period is made worse by such other dehumanizing practices such as non-bathing and rubbing of ashes.

No doubt, the culture of widowhood seclusion is the worst form of solitary confinement with its attendant psychological trauma. Normally, the woman is most vulnerable at this time because she is at pains having lost a companion and concerned about what the future holds for her and her children [for those that have children]. It is heart aching that it is at this material time that she needs the support of everyone that she is labelled impure and incapable of associating with other members of the society. Widowhood seclusion is discriminatory and a painful experience that the female gender is subjected to. It is argued in the paper that Ogwoma is subjected to psychological violence because of her gender. In the present context, Ogwoma's condition is worsened by the licentious conduct of Uloko, who, in spite of knowing the demands of the customs, seeks coital communion with Ogwoma in seclusion. This is also considered as violence as it further exposes Ogwuoma to societal umbrage and danger. A true lover, as professed by Uloko should always make his partner stronger and better in public perception .No doubt, Uloko's sacrilegious immoral conduct contributed to the tragic end of Ogwoma. It is important to note that Ogwoma shows consciousness of the duties that the custom imposes on her when she appeals to Uloko in the following words: "Please let me finish what I must do for a dead husband" Certainly, widowhood seclusion practice is an act of violence against the woman, and should be considered as an important area of engagement with traditional African institutions, community leaders and government agencies.

Gendered Violence in the *Wedlock of the Gods:* Forced Marriage and Culture of Bridewealth

This is a practice whereby a woman is married out to a man without her consent, probably for financial gains as it is with the culture of bridewealth prevalent in African societies. This is closely associated with the belief that the woman is a chattel, a

common property that can be dealt with in whatever manner for monetary gains**.** Articles 1 and 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery considers forced marriage as a form of slavery. Therefore, the incident of forced marriage for monetary gains presented in the play is considered as act of violence againstOgwoma. The exchange below illustrates the practice of forced marriage as presented in the play.

Exchange 2

OGWOMA: No, it is not that way. Others are given away to their husbands but you and father threw me away to Adigwu. No, mother. You and father were so hungry for money that you tied me like a goat and threw me away to a man I hated.

NNEKA: Your tongue is bad and your heart is a rock. Any good daughter with a dying brother would have told her parents to give her away to a husband and use her bridewealth to cure her brother. You did not do that. We did the best the poor parents of a dying son could have done.

(Act 1 Scene 2)

The excerpt is an exchange between Ogwoma and her mother, Nneka. The first speaker, Ogwoma shows the psychological violence she was subjected to in the course of giving her out in marriage without considering her preference and emotional wellbeing. She was literally sold to the highest bidder and tied like a goat. In response, however, the mother defends her action and that of her husband by blaming the victim. She justifies the action of the family by appealing to a deep socio-cultural belief that has preference for the male gender. Edozie's life can be saved, but not that of Ogwoma. At best, Ogwoma should be happy to be a voluntary sacrificial lamb for the life of her brother. The explanation provided above clearly shows a case of forced marriage that is motivated by monetary gains. */www.1800respect.org.au* observes that "forced marriage happens

when someone is made to get married even though they do not want to and forced marriage involved being pressured, bullied or tricked" This exemplifies a case of gender-based violence. The United Nations views **gender-based violence** as any act that "results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life." Research shows that the practice is not peculiar to Africa. International LabourOrganisation (ILO) in its 2017 report with the title: "Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labour and Forced Marriage" shows that in 2016, there were an estimated 15.4 million people in forced marriages and 88% of victims were women and girls. Commenting on the dangers of forced marriage, Elochukwu (2021: n.p) has this to say: "these girls want to leave the man they are forced to marry. They would not mind death coming to save them. They could even initiate the process of the death coming, committing murder in the process" The opinion expressed clearly shows that forced marriage is, not only violence against the woman, but also against the society at large. The tragic end of Ogwoma and others in the play is a pointer to this fact. The play, by highlighting the practice of forced marriage and its consequences as can be seen in the eventual death, of not only the victim, but also other members of the community, has succeeded in prioritizing the practice for the much needed socio-political interventions and remedies.

Gendered Violence in the *Wedlock of the Gods:* Preference of Male Children over Female Children

Male child or son preference is a practice prevalent in Africa and other parts of the world, and it finds expression in the emotional disposition of parents and families to give birth to male children. According to UN Fact Sheet, No. 23, Son preference refers to a whole range of values and attitudes which are manifested in many different practices, the common feature of which is a preference

for the male child, often with concomitant daughter neglect. It may mean that a female child is disadvantaged from birth;"

Exchange 3

IBEKWE: Death hears nothing. My son Edozie was nearly dead when the oracle stated clearly that a seven-year old ram had to be sacrificed to Ikenga our family god. In addition, he must be initiated immediately into manhood before he could recover. We had no money for these.

(Act 2 Scene 1)

OKOLIE: Edozie's sickness could only hear a sacrifice to our god…. the oracle stated clearly that he must be initiated into manhood even at his age of ten. Ibekwe had not enough money for all these – he decided to give his daughter away. It is true that a man's daughter is his source of wealth.

(Act 2 Scene 1)

Ibekwe is the father of Ogwoma. From the excepts uttered by Ibekwe, the audience is made to understand the challenge that confronts his family. The male sibling of Ogwoma, Edozie is sick and at the point of death. The oracle recommends certain actions that must be taken for Edozie to recover. These are a sacrifice of a seven-year-old ram and initiation into manhood. These costs money and the family of Ibekwehas no such money. The second speaker, Okolie, a member of Ogwoma extended family which Ibekwe belongs gives further detail. In his speech, we are made to understand that Ibekwe had to give away his daughter in marriage to raise the needed money. It is important to note that daughters are being treated as articles of trade as they represent source of money. As asserted by Okolie when he echoes the consciousness of the community in the following words: "It is true that a man's daughter is the source of his wealth" One striking significance of the above development is that the life of the male child is prioritised over and above that of the female child. Here, Ogwoma's life is sacrificed for the life of his brother. Her dreams and expectations are dashed for the sole crime of being a woman.

In the play, the sacrificial significance of Ogwoma comes to full realization when the marriageultimately leads to her death. Expressing the same sentiments. Clearly, the female child is disadvantaged right from birth. It is important that there is modification in attitude in order to create a fair condition for the positive development of the girl child

Victim Blaming as Violence against women

This is deeply rooted cultural practice that tends to blame the female gender for sexual offences committed against them by the male gender. This is prevalent in almost all the cultures of the world. Victim blaming occurs when the victim of a crime is told that they are responsible for the crime committed against them and often occurs in the context of rape (Maier, 2012; Perilloux, Duntley, & Buss, 2014). The exchange illustrates instance of victim blaming in the play.

Exchange 4

OGOLI: (bursting into the house unexpectedly) where is that stubborn goat who wants to
take all I have from me?
ANAWASIA: (to Ogoli) Nne, what is the matter?
OGOLI: I could not sell a grain of salt in the market because of this dog
OGWOMA: I am not a dog.
OGOLI: A girl from a good family, a child with proper home training does not receive men
while the spirit of her dead husband still wonders in the bush...
ANAWASIA: Nne, Ogwoma and Uloko are not babies
OGOLI: Uloko knows what every well trained son ought to know. She was given to a man
as a wife, that was not enough to put an end to her hunt for my son...
OGWOMA: I did not entice your son.

OGOLI: A man goes for a woman. It is the woman who opens the door

ANWASIA: But the man can force the door open if the woman refuses

(**Act1**, **Scene2**)

In the exchange Ogoli, the mother of Uloko blames Ogwoma for the shame and ridicule she was subjected to in the marketplace because of the sacrilegious conduct of her son. In addition, she accuses her of lacking in good home training as a properly trained woman does not welcome men while in mourning. She also accuses her of wanting to take the only thing she has—in this case her son, Uloko. It may be recalled that Uloko, ex-lover of Ogwoma, against the custom of his people visited and had coital relationship with Ogwoma while still in sackclothes. This is considered a taboo and attracts punishment on the offenders. It is the light of this awareness that Ogoli accuses Ogwoma of wanting to take the only thing she has (Uloko). This is a case of victim blaming. Victim blaming is one area of feminists' concerns as they argue that the practice is discriminatory as women are most times blamed in the case of sexual offences against them by men. It should be noted that Ogwoma is in mourning seclusion and customs forbid everyone, including family members from visiting her. It is in this particular circumstance that Uloko visits her and sexually abused her. It should be further noted that the times spent in restrictive seclusion are most traumatic, and often renders the person vulnerable to emotional exploitation. This is aptly captured by Nneka in the play when she states " No, it is not enough. Her stupid son who has not succeeded in capturing an unmarried girl has found a helpless woman in mourning ashes as easy catch."(Act 1,Scene 2). In the present circumstance, it is clear that the male subject, Uloko offends the culture of his society and violated a woman in mourning seclusion. For these infractions against the community and Ogwoma, he is not chastised, rather it is Ogwoma, the woman. Another significant observation from the exchange is the idea of feminine complexity in the patriarchal discrimination

against women. Ogoli is a woman who fails to see that another woman has been abused by her son. It is argued in the paper that the victim blaming of Ogwoma amounts to psychological violence, and she experiences this because of her gender.

Conclusion

The study presented shows that the woman is subjected to violence by no choice of hers. It is equally worthy of note that the play is not a new one, having been published in 1974, with bias for the documentation of African culture in the primordial times. It is, however, important to observe that most of the practices portrayed are still prevalent in our society today, not just in Africa, but also in other parts of the world such as Asia and Europe. In Africa, and with particular reference to Nigeria, much work has been done, especially at policy formulation level and legislative work. For instance, the *MatrimonialCausesAct* forbids the marriage of parties without consent. Also, some states in Nigeria such as Ekiti and Lagos have opened sexual offenders register to shame perpetrators. In addition, there is more vigour in the prosecution of sexual offenders and perpetrators of other discriminatory harmful practices against women and girl children. For instance, persons suspected to have violated the right of a widow by imposing an outlawed harmful widowhood practice of forcing the bereaved to drink the bath water of her dead husband was promptly arrested and prosecuted by the State (See *The Punch Newspapers* 11 May, 2023). No doubt, the above development are heart-warming, but much need to be done as incidents of discriminationagainst woman persists. Incidents of rape and sexual harassments are still common. No day passes without a report bordering on gender violence, such as rape, wife battery and murder, female disinheritance and many more. Therefore, it is the submission of the authors that greater awareness needs to be created. In this regard, there is need to engage the traditional institutions which are the custodians of female stereotypes and prejudices. At the epicentre is Ogwoma the protagonist who represents the female

gender. Through the portrayal of her experience, the playwright is able to bring to the fore the incontestable evidence of violence against the woman in African society.

Finally, violence against the woman takes different dimensions. In whatever dimension it takes, the attendant consequences on both the perpetrators and the victims is usually regrettable. From instances in the study, one observes that the violence against the female child invariably lead to avoidable consequences for both the immediate parties and the wider society as shown in the play. Therefore, it is the submission of the authors that much needs to done, especially at the implementation end of any policy targeted at addressing gender discrimination practices

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