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Representation of Yoruba Gender in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*

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Abstract

The paper analyses an African drama entitled The Lion and the Jewel by African postcolonial dramatist and a playwright, Wole Soyinka, and argues that his representation of women characters disrobes his patriarchal position towards women as practiced in the cultural ethos of the pre-colonial Nigerian society. It further explores his failure of resistance towards colonial principles of the contemporary patriarchal culture of the Nigerian community. The researcher compares the characterization between male characters such as Baroka, Lakunle and female characters such as Sidi and Sadiku. While the male characters are portrayed as intelligent, powerful- both socially and intellectually, the female characters are presented as beings with low intelligence, high level of gullibility and powerless. Soyinka conforms to the patriarchal tradition of polygamy by stripping women of their potential power of resistance against the masculine exploitation of female characters like Sidi who gets raped by Baroka and finally subjects herself to the marriage with him. To further consolidate the argument, the researcher borrows the theoretical insights from the postcolonial feminism. Postcolonial feminists such as Gayatri Spivak, Sara Zargar and Antonia Navarro Tejero not only question the universalizing narrative of western feminism but also draw criticism upon some postcolonial male writers for their silence regarding the colonial nature of patriarchal attitude towards women. The researcher concludes with the findings that the postcolonial literature falls short in its representation of post-independent societies if it fails to inquire upon the ideology of gender construct.

Key Words: Post-colonialism, Postcolonial Feminism, Gender Inequality, Patriarchy, Tradition

The present paper makes literary investigation upon an African drama entitled *The Lion and the Jewel* by Wole Soyinka. The researcher argues that Soyinka's representation of women characters discloses his patriarchal inclination towards women as practiced in the cultural landscape of the pre-colonial Nigerian society, which depicts his failure of postcolonial and feminist resistance towards colonial principles of the contemporary patriarchal culture of the Nigerian community. The researcher draws a contrast in the characterization between male characters such as Baroka, Lakunle and female characters such as Sidi and Sadiku. Comparatively speaking, the male characters are represented as intelligent, educated, courageous, powerful- both socially and intellectually whereas the female characters are portrayed as beings with low intelligence, high level of gullibility, powerless, subservient and submissive. Centered on the Nigerian cultural practice of polygamous tradition of marriage, Soyinka conforms to the patriarchal tradition of polygamy by stripping women of their potential power of resistance against the masculine exploitation of female characters like Sidi who gets raped by Baroka and finally subjects herself to the marriage with him.

On the other hand, western-educated school teacher Lakunle proposes to marry Sidi but refuses to pay bride-price as a part of Nigerian patriarchal tradition. As an educated person, he opposes the custom of bride-price and encourages her to marry him without such custom. She adamantly demands bride-price before she agrees to wed him. The patriarchal psyche stops her from breaking the norm. She lacks courage to fight possible social criticism and embarrassment if she weds Lakunle boycotting bride-price tradition. She remains submissive to the patriarchal expectation from her while her individual happiness gets sidelined. Similarly, Lakunle shows interest to marry her not because of his modern education to rebel against the traditional practice

but because he intends to increase his social image by marrying a beautiful lady like Sidi. His treatment towards her reflects the patriarchal attitude towards women gender as a commodity. The conflict between Baroka and Lakunle arises when both male characters display an intense desire to own Sidi. Sidi falls the victim of male's masculine use of her being as a commodity. As the first wife, Sadiku coordinates Baroka in wooing Sidi so that he can exploit her both physically and socially. Baroka is the head of the village. He has social and political power in his hand. That's the reason why he has freedom to practice polygamy.

However, Soyinka chooses to keep the women characters more conformist and submissive instead of empowering them to resist against the quasi-colonial patriarchal attitude as represented by Baroka and Lakunle. Thus, the researcher intends to probe into Soyinka's patriarchal inclination as his representation of women in the play under study indicates.

Wole Soyinka's works have been cherished as the postcolonial masterpiece for its topicality and relevance to the socio-political situations in Africa. Most of his works have been reviewed from the perspective of colonial rule and its impact upon the native cultures of Yoruba community. They focus only on his native characters' cultural struggle against the colonial characters for the preservation of native cultural identity. Literary critics have consistently critiqued his plays from ideological perspectives but there has hardly been any attention or discussion for the gender issues and relations in most of his major plays. The researcher intends to fill this gap by literary investigation into Soyinka's representation of gender issues, mostly from feminist perspectives. Upon reading the drama, some questions raise critical attention such as: why does the writer put his male characters in position of power and intelligence while its counterparts possess none of them? Why does Sidi, a female

character, refuse to marry an educated Lakunle due to his ordinary rejection of bride-price pay? Why does she value bride-price tradition more than her potential happy life with Lakunle? How does Baroka trick Sidi to marry him though he has already married twice? Why does Sadiku cooperate her husband, Baroka to marry another woman? Answers to these questions lead one into the possibility of the writer's patriarchal psyche that he grew up with.

The portrayal of male characters with the intelligence, education, dominant power and freedom whereas the attributes of female characters as low intelligence, submissiveness, subservience and highly gullible indicate the possibility of Soyinka's implicit endorsement towards colonial practice of patriarchy in Nigerian culture and society. The text under study will be its primary method of analysis. Likewise, the researcher will borrow substantial theoretical insights from the theoretical project of postcolonial feminism in order to strengthen the major argument. Theoretical information and reviews from various postcolonial critics and feminists will be applied for further analysis of the text and advance the argument. While the western feminist, especially first wave and second wave exclusively focused its attention into the gender issues of western women while falsely establishing them as universal gender issues of the women. In its opposition, the theory of postcolonial feminism launched its fresh critical discussion upon the gender issues of the women in non-European societies like African societies. So, these postcolonial feminists and critics such as Gayatri Spivak, and including other prominent figures will be cited because the text under study deals with the issues of gender representation in non-European societies like Nigerian society. Besides, the library materials coupled with the guidance from T.U professors will be the backbone in the process of research analysis. The primary objective of the project is to study Soyinka's representation of

gender in the light of patriarchal culture and tradition as prevalent in post-independence Nigerian society. In doing so, it delimits itself by analyzing the text alone. Unlike traditional format, the paper develops its argument and explanation through the paragraphs without headings and subheadings. Likewise, it may apply images and pictures if necessary and relevant.

After being independent from the colonial rule, post-colonial African writings exclusively began to cover the sufferings and pains of cultural encroachment from the colonial culture. Most of them represented the binary between the colonized and colonizer while defending and glorifying African cultural values, practices and traditions, which the colonial rulers always undermined as primitive, barbaric and uncivilized. In an aim to criticizing how colonial period assaulted African cultural fabric and the constant struggle of the native Africans for the preservation of their cultural identity, classical African writers became singularly obsessed in idealizing the history of traditional and communal rituals without any consideration into the possible drawbacks in those cultural customs. As Soyinka himself criticized them saying that colonialist African writer has an unhealthy habit “to turn his eyes backwards in time and prospect in archaic fields for forgotten gems which would dazzle and distract the present. But never inwards, never truly into the present, never into the obvious symptoms of the niggling, warning, predictable present, from which alone lay the salvation of ideals” (Art 18). Unlike such an obsession with local problems, Soyinka introduced a point of departure to expand the horizon of Africa writing by bringing the universal issues such as the freedom, equality, social justice, law and other modern values.

His literary writings modernized the African literature by broadening its themes into the universal issues such as justice, humanity, social law, individual

freedom and so forth as another architect of African literature history, Chinua Achebe observes that the critics praise Soyinka “for not writing about an African problem but a universal one...not writing a local but a universal audience” (qtd. in Laurence 12). As suggested by these lines, Soyinka’s literary writings applied political implication of the literature in evoking and advocating for the social change. The fact that he himself admitted his inclination towards socialism influenced his way of using literature to view the reality of the post-colonial African states and the changing scenario of the society.

Soyinka belongs to a tradition which recognizes the third-world writer as a promoter of explicit social, political, and moral values crucial to the survival of his or her society and a champion of freedom, dignity, and justice for the majority of his people and yet, Soyinka has reanimated this tradition by resolutely marrying his political activism to the aspiration of his literary craft. He published an essay entitled “The Writer in a Modern African State”, which sparked considerable controversy through its daring political commentary. On the eve of his own three-year prison sentence, Soyinka opened this essay by complaining of the lack of vital relevancy between the literary concerns of writers and the pattern of reality that has overwhelmed even the writers themselves in the majority of modern African states. He concluded the essay with condemning and revealing words:

When the writer in his own society can no longer function as conscience, he must recognize that his choice lies between denying himself totally or withdrawing to the position of chronicler and post-mortem surgeon... The artist has always functioned in African society as the record of the mores and experience of his society and as the voice of vision in his own time. It is time for him to respond to this essence of himself. (15-16)

In the light of these revealing lines, Soyinka has permanently disassociated himself from any camp that creates art that lacks direct relevance to the contemporary social realities. His literary motivation largely sounds to be political where he views literature as an instrument to not only record the values, practices and rituals but also responding to the ills and defects that are prevalent in changing atmosphere of post-independent Nigerian society as A. Graham White observes, “Soyinka grapples directly with the social conditions and political events of modern Africa...Soyinka’s condemnation of cruel and narrow traditional life” (125-26). In these lines, White’s observation clearly rewards Soyinka’s literary productions as the realistic representation of the Nigerian society. Likewise, he acknowledges the fact that Soyinka’s literary inquiry into the underlying defects and malpractices within the culture of his society marks the key trademark of his writings. However, the text under study operates into his ideological position in regards to the gender reality of the newly-born post-independent Nigerian society.

Dramaturgy is the application of creative analysis and research for the purpose of enhancing the production and performance of a dramatic work. The intellectual process must be grounded within the world of the play in order for the dramaturgical analysis to produce the most beneficial effect. The goal of the dramaturgy is to unify into a cohesive whole the artistic genius, talent, and effort of all participants, so that the work flows before the audience in a seamless continuum of imagery and meaning.

Dramaturgy must always have the bond between the actor and the audience at the forefront of its discipline. As the actor develops a character in the play, the dramaturgy must develop the character of the play. He or she must examine the dynamic force and drive of the dramatic work along with its presentation to the audience in external form. The critic often concerns himself or herself with the nature

of meaning and how it is created. The dramaturgy must provide the production with the best possible scenario for meaning to be created with clarity and power. This necessity sheds light on the penchant of many dramaturges for examining the evolution of the performance space. Talking about the dramaturgy in Soyinka's plays, Oby Okolocha and E. B. Adeleke identifies:

Despite these differences in their creative landscapes, Soyinka and Osofisan have a number of things in common. Both have their creative origins in Yoruba culture. They are skilled craftsmen, perceptive members of their immediate humanity and both recourse constantly to Yoruba culture in their dramaturgy. Both have contributed immensely to making the theatre relevant to the Nigerian society. They have used the theatre as an avenue for the education and enlightenment of the society. (80)

In the light of the lines above, it is evidential enough to argue that Soyinka's dramaturgy revolves around the narrative of Yoruba culture. He employs culture in his dramaturgy through the use of elements such as songs, stage directions, humor, satire and other elements so that the theatre provides a platform to appeal for educating and enlightening the society. In the same vein, Oby Okolocha and E. B. Adeleke further explore, "There is ample evidence showing that elements such as songs, God-characters, dance, poetry and mime which abound in Osofisan's works are testimony to his longstanding apprenticeship to Soyinka's dramaturgy. Even names, humour, stage directions, structure are in some cases echoes of Soyinka's plays" (86). In these critical lines, the duo illustrates elements that Soyinka's dramaturgy applies in the production of craft and the meaning attached to it.

In the light of White's observation and others as discussed above, Soyinka's literary representation echoes the postcolonial socio-political and economic realities

of the African, in particular Nigerian society where he shows his disapproval towards the negative and ugly aspects of Nigerian community. However, literary critics and intellectual community have almost failed to investigate into the possible contradiction between Soyinka's literary mission for socio-political change and his backward representation of women characters. Soyinka's reputation as a playwright rests on the topicality and relevance of his plays to the socio-political situations in Africa. Literary critics have consistently critiqued his plays from these ideological perspectives with little or no consideration for the gender issues and relations in most of his major plays. Most of the famous African playwrights are male. Many of these male playwrights have represented women in the negative light. Emphasizing the necessity of the critical and intellectual discussion upon these texts in relation to their representation of gender issues, Azeez Akinwumi Sesan claims:

The incidental or intentional treatment of women and feminine issues in the andro-dramatic texts has prompted, promoted, and sustained the polemics of gender in the Nigerian dramatic texts in particular and the global dramatic discourses in general. The criticism of African drama and Nigerian drama in particular cannot overlook the gender prejudices that are overtly or covertly presented in these texts. Characterization and the topicality of the sociological and socio-political experiences underscore the overt and/or covert gender dialogic in a dramatic text. (185)

In this argument, Sesan's mention of the criticism upon African dramatic texts sounds very relevant given the sexual identity of the playwrights and their representation of women characters in traditional light. As Sesan further contends, these literary representations of women in the traditional frame validate gender prejudices as inherited from the pre-colonial Nigerian patriarchal tradition. Thus, the researcher

focuses its critical attention upon the African text, *The Lion and the Jewel* to probe into the Playwright's reaffirmation of the polemics of gender and his patriarchal inclination despite being known for his progressive narrative.

Soyinka has widely been celebrated as a postcolonial African writer for his depiction of colonized Nigeria. But, not enough has been discussed as far as his treatment towards women gender is concerned. In their research article, African researchers namely Dele Maxwell Ugwanyi and Azeez akinwumi Sesan identify Soyinka's affiliation towards patriarchal principles as existed even in the aftermath of Independence. The contradiction zooms out at the fact that Soyinka advocates for socio-political reformations within Nigerian culture but conforms to the patriarchal ideals that restrict the women. Dele and Sesan exposes Soyinka's representation of women in the spirit of patriarchal assumptions:

Soyinka's representation of women is consistent with the overall Yoruba gender ideologies of male 'perfection' and female 'imperfection'. The Yoruba gender ideologies are premised on the anatomy of male and female bodies in relation to the visible biological attributes which reveal the maleness and femaleness of individuals in the society. The misconception of the biological attributes is that they offer some freedom and limitation to the socio-economic and political potential of individuals in the society. The cultural configuration of Yoruba society, like some other patriarchal societies, reveals some preference for male in the society. (229)

In the light of these observations, it can be argued that Soyinka's treatment towards his women characters reflects his patriarchal position regardless of his advocacy for change and progress through the vehicles of his male protagonists in other aspects of Nigerian society. As commonly prevalent in most of the patriarchal societies, the

gender hierarchy between male and female that stereotypes women as incapable beings for socio-political and economic dimension of life. As the above lines illustrate, Nigerian societies like Yoruba cherish these patriarchal ideals that limit and restrict the women based on their biological differences from men. The play under study reveals Soyinka's validation of these patriarchal ideals which constrain women's socio-economic and political potential:

Soyinka, consciously or unconsciously has represented male characters as strong, powerful and metaphorically as a lion, a symbol of irresistible power. They are also portrayed as initiator, doer of something, and commander in chief, the king while their female counterparts (Sidi, Sadiku) are represented as goals and/or beneficiaries of men's actions and associated with processes of sensing and of emotion. (Patrice and Albert 26)

In the light of the above-mentioned critical review, it can be clearly argued that Soyinka constructs the dichotomy between male and female in terms of power relations. His patriarchal attitude towards socio-economic and political abilities between the two sexes displays when he assigns male characters as a strong, powerful in the metaphorical form of lion whereas women are portrayed as goals or objects of male's actions. Such dichotomy in his gender construct can be evidenced by the following dialogue by Lakunle who compares women with men in terms of the size of brain. His material comparison through the size of brain reflects Soyinka's subscription to the long-held patriarchal idea of anatomical differences between male and female.

In his attempt to win the heart of Sidi, a celebrated beauty in the village of Ilujinle, Lakunle uses masculine language to show that he is more privileged than Sidi and Sadiku, other female counterparts. While positioning himself as an illuminated

and educated modern man, he takes a terrible stance towards Sidi, Sadiku and other villagers. Evidence of this can be seen through the attributes he employs to describe them:

LAKUNLE: A natural feeling, arising out of envy; for, as a woman you have a smaller brain than mine.

The scientists have proved it. It is in my books. Women have a smaller brain than men.

That's why they are called the weaker sex. (7)

The given dialogue extracted from the text under study evidently unpacks Soyinka's underlying perception about gender through the mouthpiece of Lakunle. Tagging women as a being with smaller brain and a 'weaker sex' highlights the core of patriarchal gender design where women are stereotyped as weaker than men. Women's intelligence gets invalidated in the masculine eyes of patriarchal men like Lakunle.

To further expose male's dehumanizing and degrading attitude towards female beings in the play, another male character Baroka supplies vital evidence. His attitude towards Sidi corresponds with that of Lakunle. While the latter downplays women subjects as weaker sex in terms of anatomical differences, Baroka objectifies female counterparts as an object of beauty for male gaze. It can be seen at his following utterances:

Baroka: Not even Ailatou, my favorite? Was she not at her usual place?

Baroka: Sidi is the eye's delight, but she is vain, and her head is feather-light and always giddy with a trival thought. (49)

In this extracted lines, Baroka evidently displays an erotic expression where he considers women, Sidi in this case, as an object of pleasure and beauty. His treatment

is stereotypical because it regards female subject as subordinate compared to male counterparts. Words like ‘eye’s delight’, ‘vain’, ‘feather-light’, and ‘trivial thought’ unveil his masculine characterization of Sidi as an object. Besides, his dominating and hegemonic power is revealed at his comparison between his youngest wife, Ailatou and Sidi. He assumes his position of authority by flirting Sidi for her beauty against his young wife. It shows his treatment of women as animated object for pleasure. Pointing out Soyinka’s such ambiguous representation of Yoruba culture, traditions and customs while implicitly portraying women in lower position, Sara Zargar in his critical review on the drama observes:

In *The Lion and the Jewel*, women are really considered the second sex, essentially created for serving men. On the other hand, when women appear in Soyinka’s works they appear in a dramatized womanhood, because they are manifestations of the Yoruba goddesses Oya, Yemoja, and Oshun, which represent beauty, love, sensual power etc. (85)

In the light of Zargar’s observation, it is safe to argue that Soyinka, in the course of reasserting the culture, identity and tradition of colonized Nigeria, inclined to the pre-colonial Nigerian pattern of patriarchal thought that looked down upon the women as a weaker being whose existence gets validated at their service to men. Baroka’s objectification of Sidi as an object of beauty and Lakunle’s generalization of women as unintelligent confirm Soyinka’s silent submission to the hierarchical patriarchal values and thoughts towards gender. The colonial nature of patriarchal misrepresentation and hegemonic interpretation of female subjectivity has not received any resistance from Soyinka as evidenced by the above-discussed textual references regardless of his literary persona as a postcolonial voice in African literature.

Post-colonial literature is an enterprise writing back to challenge the sovereignty and the superiority of British tastes and values. Obviously, it nurtures the interest of the margin relegating the centre, the dominant, and the hegemonic. The works by various thinkers such as Edward Said, Salman Rushdie, Homi K. Bhabha, Spivak and R.K Narayan among other postcolonial critics demonstrates such as consciousness that goes beyond the textual limitation and colonial illusion. That might be the cause Lois Tyson synthesizes post-colonial theorists who describes, “the colonial subject as having a double consciousness or double vision, in other words, a consciousness or a way of perceiving the world that is divided between two antagonistic cultures: that of the colonizer and that of the indigenous community” (421). They also attempt to produce a more comprehensive perception of the colonial tricks and treatments underlining the post-colonial urgency to revert to the cultural past and glory. Further characterizing the fundamental essence of postcolonial project, Uchendu E. Uchechukwu identifies:

Postcolonialism offers a framework for challenging and contesting the fixity of gender, race, and culture. It directs attention to intersectional factors as socially produced through historical, socio-economic and political processes of colonialism and imperialism. It challenges the unitary notion of culture and contests images and representations of the essentialized cultural ‘Other’. (7)

In the light of this observation, it can be understood that the theoretical project of Postcolonialism primarily aims to dismantle or deconstruct the established concept of fixed identity. It tends to challenge and contest the idea of unified sense of representation. The acts of othering subjects by the celebration of the centered entities are subverted by the postcolonial writings and representation. In particular reference to gender construct, males are traditionally treated as the centre in contrast with the

female counterparts. Female gender gets essentialized as weaker sex, unintelligent, object of beauty and commodity in her contrast with males as intelligent, strong, action doer and dominant as exemplified by Baroka and Lakunle's attitude above. It shows the failure of Soyinka to challenge and contest the gender perspective in its postcolonial form.

Similarly, the works of Wole Soyinka are re-evaluated within the background of own culture, history, politics and religion. Cultural aspects are overtly manifested in his writings especially *The Lion and the Jewel* as a pioneering effort to set up post-colonial perspective through the nationalist resistance against hegemonic culture in Nigeria. While presenting post-colonial issues Soyinka undermines the females of his culture as feministic issues are vibrant and emerging in Third world countries. Even though his literary resistance against colonialism and colonial mindset invites wide adoration in the African setting, his marginalization of female issues drags him under critical inquiry.

From the postcolonial feminist perspective, Soyinka fails to empower women with postcolonial resistance towards the colonial domination of patriarchy. Emerged in a response to the Eurocentric feminist movement from the west, postcolonial feminist questions the universalizing tendency of western feminism that treat all women's issues as white women's issue and define feminism as a universal movement: "clearly Western feminist discourse and political practice is neither singular nor homogenous in its goals, interests or analyses" (Mohanty 334). Postcolonial feminism argues about the diversity of women's issues ranging from different cultural, ethnic and racial backgrounds. While most of the postcolonial feminists question the singularity of western feminism to include non-western feminist voices and concerns, some of the postcolonial feminists raise finger at

postcolonial male writers whose representation of women reflects dominant patriarchal ethos. The common goal of disciplines, Postcolonialism and feminism is to resist against the othering of colonized and women gender respectively as A. L. M.

Riyal clarifies:

Since the 1980s, feminism and post-colonialism began to exchange and dialogue, forming a new interpretation space, that is, post-colonial feminist cultural theory. There is a very complicated relationship between post-colonialism and feminism, both in practice and theory. It was obvious that they have always been consistent as both cultural theories focus on the marginalization of the 'other' that is marginalized by the ruling structure, consciously defending their interests. (83)

In the light of these lines, feminism and post-colonialism perform as cultural theories that focus its critical attention upon the representation of the other. The mode of binary thinking such as self/other, colonized/colonizer, male/female etc. promote the interests of those in power. The ruling structure, the male in the case of patriarchal ideology and the colonized people in the case of colonialism, creates the system of binary where others are misrepresented, misinterpreted and misjudged in order to reinforce their interests. Riyal's observation confirms that feminism and post-colonialism meet the middle ground when it comes down to countering the binary mode of thinking by rewriting the identity of the marginalized ones.

Both of them raise voice to rewrite the history of colonized and women respectively. However, some postcolonial writers have failed to authenticate the subjectivity of the women in their representation. Defining the role of postcolonial feminism, Antonia Navarro Tejero exposes some postcolonial writers who, despite claiming to challenge a culture of oppression, stereotype the women as patriarchal

structure prescribes:

Postcolonial feminist criticism examines how women are represented in colonial and postcolonial literature, and challenges assumptions which are made about women in both literature and society. Colonialism and patriarchy have been closely entwined historically, but an end to formal empire has not meant an end to the oppression of women in the former colonies. Postcolonial feminists point out the ways in which women continue to be stereotyped and marginalized, ironically sometimes by postcolonial authors who might claim to be challenging a culture of oppression. (194)

As pointed out in the given lines, postcolonial feminist not only depart from western feminism for its Eurocentric approach to the study of women's issues but also investigate those postcolonial writers whose inclination towards colonial form of patriarchy serves to promote gender stereotypes and marginality of women. Antonio questions the ethics of some postcolonial writers who, in the boast of countering colonial oppression, ignores or promotes the colonial mindset of patriarchy as seen in Soyinka's gender representation in the drama.

The play revolves around the Nigerian custom of bride-price on the occasion of marriage. Set in the backdrop of the patriarchal society of Ilujinle, the play reveals the status of women in the traditional society where women are treated as a commodity. Sidi, a female character, represents the societal marginality of the women in the Nigerian society. Her consciousness is influenced by the patriarchal consciousness of the society. A pretty girl that she is, two male members of the society desire to marry her. It's been the customary tradition of the society to allow the polygamy system. Baroka is the head of the society who has powerful position. He is already married. Still the patriarchal structure of the society permits him to marry

more as per his desire. Likewise, Lakunle is western-educated member of the society. His thoughts and behaviors are far modern in contrast to that of Baroka. Lakunle teaches in the local school. He is shown as an intelligent fellow. While he advocates for justice, equality, freedom and social transformation, Baroka promotes conservative and traditional practices of the society. Baroka is trickster and cunning. He abuses his position to fulfill his personal interest.

Upon his proposal for marriage, Sidi refuses to wed with Lakunle until he consents to pay bride-price, a customary tradition as prevalent in the Nigerian culture. As an educated person, Lakunle denies to pay any bride because he regards it as a superstitious custom. He encourages her to bypass the bride-price tradition and marry him. Lakunle shows an intense desire to possess Sidi because of her ideal beauty. His approach towards his desire for her appears more materialistic in nature. As a western educated modern man that he claims to be, he constantly condemns African tradition and encourages Sidi to marry him without the custom of bride-price. Nigerian society has the tradition of bride-price in the ritual process of marriage. The men are allowed to get married to a girl only after they pay the bride-price. It is lawful in the tradition of Nigerian society.

However, Lakunle vehemently opposes the custom as an uncivilized and barbaric traditional practice, “A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated, rejected, denounced, accursed, excommunicated, archaic, degrading, retrogressive, remarkable, unpalatable.[with a sudden shout] an ignoble custom, infamous, ignominious shaming our heritage before the world” (7). In these lines, Lakunle’s strong condemnation towards the tradition of bride-price sounds explicit. He refuses to pay bride-price but intends to marry Sidi. To him, paying ‘bride-price’ is equal to buying a heifer from market place. He, therefore, tries to convince Sidi to bypass the custom and marry

him. Yet, a close inspection in his infatuation towards Sidi reveals his materialistic intention driven by the patriarchal psyche. The truth is, he desires to marry her as a commodity to raise his social standard. Her ideal beauty is treated as his commodity to create his social value. His commodification of Sidi's beauty for his patriarchal interest gets crystal clear in his voice, "Just the one woman for me [...] Alone I stand/ For progress, with Sidi my chosen soul-mate" (26). Here, he associates his subjectivity with progressive being whereas he projects Sidi as a materialistic entity for his social image. However, she fears the social criticism following it. The patriarchal consciousness prevents her from transgressing the tradition despite her individual desire as her response indicates, "A way you mean, to avoid. Payment of lawful brideprice. A cheating way, mean and miserly" (9). Deeply rooted in African tradition as shaped by patriarchal values, Sidi is powerless to go against the established custom of bride-price. Her lack of authoritative position to challenge the custom and marry Lakunle shows the patriarchal control over women in Nigerian society. The material conditions of the postcolonial context determine the identities and political positions of the postcolonial subjects like women from colonized country. Sidi's helplessness and inability to rebel against the tradition of bride-price restricts her power and voice due to the patriarchal structure of material conditions in male-dominated Nigerian society. In the same line, Lewis and Mills contend:

Identities and political positions of these indigenous women are embedded within the postcolonial context. In this sense, postcolonial feminists, in their various analyses, bring to understanding the issue of the representation of women in the postcolonial context, the cultural expression and its relationship with diversity of postcolonial subjects' experiences as well as material conditions under which they live. (44)

Here, the material conditions that female characters such as Sidi and Sadiku live are more patriarchal. In the patriarchal tradition of Africa, it is considered to be an honor to the bride who received a good price. If a girl marries without the price, it is assumed that she is not a virgin or she is not worthy of marriage. It follows that Sidi fears the social criticism and question over her dignity and chastity. Her fear triggers when Lakunle proposes to marry by condemning the bride-price as “A savage custom, barbaric, out-dated” (8). Such material condition of patriarchal Nigerian society makes women powerless and voiceless. Sidi’s innermost fear of being questioned upon her dignity and character can be sensed in her following lines:

I have told you, and I say it again I shall marry you today, next week or any day you name. But my bride-price must first be paid. But I tell you, Lakunle, I must have the full bride-price. Will you make me a laughing-stock? Well, do as you please. But Sidi will not make herself a cheap bowl for the village pit...They will say I was no virgin that I was forced to sell my shame and marry you without a price. (8)

Despite independence from colonial culture, the pre-colonial gender norms continue to influence the lives of the women as seen in the example of Sidi. The line ‘They will say I was no virgin that I was forced to sell my shame and marry you without a price’ evidently confirms how material conditions of patriarchal society restrict women’s power for freedom and progress. Instead of empowering Sidi with an authoritative and resisting power to confront Baroka and Lakunle, which follows the spirit of postcolonial project in its objective to rupture the hegemonic idea of centering and othering, Soyinka makes her a victim of Baroka’s toxic masculinity and dominating patriarchal power.

On the other hand, Baroka seduces Sidi and longs for wedding her. He has

freedom to marry any girl for his pleasure. Baroka uses his first wife, Sadiku to woo Sidi on his behalf so that he can marry her. As submissively as she is expected, Sadiku attempts to attract Sidi towards him. With no power in her hand, she dedicates herself to serve Baroka for his attempts to marry Sidi. He already has two wives. Being 63 Bale or head of the village, Baroka abuses his authority and dominates the women for his pleasure. The polygamy has been the traditional custom of the pre-colonial Nigerian society. It has continued even after the post-colonial society.

While the post-colonial Nigerian society accepted the modernity in terms of technology, it refuses to modernize its practices in regards to gender. Polygamy continued to exist because it serves the interests of men. Pointing out such historical scenario in the wake of independence, Robert Young contends: “Cultural nationalists tended to define themselves not against modernity in terms of technology, but against its implications for women... Women and modernity came to be regarded as antithetical entities, with the result that the goal of national emancipation involved a betrayal of all prospect of progressive change for women” (97). In the language of Robert, the women are used as the national symbols in the struggle against the colonial rule but they get degraded and marginalized in the post-independence period. Sidi’s refusal to fall under the Lakunle’s western-driven idea of breaking tradition of bride-price shows Soyinka’s use of women in the nationalist movement against the colonial hegemony towards native culture. However, his decision to allow polygamy and legitimize Baroka’s rape by his forceful marriage with Sidi exposes the betrayal of prospect of progress for women.

Due to its patriarchal structure, Baroka is privileged with the absolute power to marry any woman he finds beautiful. His current wives have no power to resist it but conform to the male-oriented customs. Baroka uses his wife to seduce Sidi for his

pleasure. He treats women as an object of his sensual desire. He uses them as a commodity for his erotic satisfaction. He is a representative of a typical patriarchal male mindset as Tyson observes, “That is, patriarchy treats women, whatever their role, like the objects: like objects, women exist, according to patriarchy, to be used without consideration of their own perspectives, feelings or opinions” (91). Baroka uses his current wife, Sadiku, in order to buy Sidi as a commodity. He trains her to persuade Sidi with the trick of his material property. In the following lines, Sadiku is seen alluring Sidi to marry Baroka for the property after his death:

Sadiku: Sidi, have you consider what a life of bliss awaits you? Do you know what it is to be the Bale’s last wife? I’ll tell you. When he dies- and that should not be too long; even the lion has to die sometime- well, when he does, it means that you will have the honor of being the senior wife of the new Bale. And just think, until Baroka dies, you shall be his favorite. (20)

In this statement, a woman is used to degrade another woman. Sidi is being convinced for a polygamous husband. Polygamy is highly practiced in Nigerian community. Sidi is being tempted. Sadiku clearly accepts Baroka as the lion, the king of Jungle- a figure of higher authority and power that she cannot oppose to. Soyinka presents Sadiku as those women are ready for another wife when their husbands are tired of them. Baroka uses Sadiku’s powerless status for his cunning interest. Sadiku cannot speak against her husband because “For the ‘figure’ of woman, the relationship between woman and silence can be plotted by women themselves; race and class are subdued under that charge” (Spivak 525). Here, Baroka’s easy exploitation of Sadiku projects her as powerless as well as unintelligent. Regardless of her efforts, Sidi refuses to marry Baroka. But Soyinka degrades her as an unintelligent being that falls into the trap of Baroka’s conspiracy despite knowing that he can do anything.

Sidi learns that Baroka is impotent and he cannot do anything. Baroka, on the other hand, feels insulted in Sidi's rejection of matrimonial proposal and designs a diabolic trick to sleep with her at his bed-chamber. He pretends that he has lost his manhood and he explains why he wants to marry Sidi, "My manhood ended near a week ago...I wanted Sidi because I still hoped, my failing strength would rise and save my pride" (29). Sadiku employs new trick to push Sidi into Baroka's bed. She reports that it is time for women to rejoice and mock at Baroka's loss of virility and invites Sidi to attend ritual party where only women are allowed. Her curiosity is aroused to make fun of Baroka's sexual impotency. She visits him at his bed-chamber. Baroka takes the advantage of the occasion and rapes her. After being raped, Sidi finds no option but marry Baroka because the patriarchal tradition of the society compels her to wed him. She falls victim to Baroka's cunningness and power. She is portrayed as unintelligent who cannot even sense Baroka's strategy. In this societal scenario of the play, Ramesh Prasad Adhikary contends that the play depicts the post-colonial Nigeria as dominated by the colonial nature of patriarchy:

The analysis of the text, *The Lion and the Jewel* presents traditional dependence of female figure, Sidi, a young beautiful girl (the jewel) , on the other hand. It also presents Lakunle, a follower of colonial principles; and Baroka, an icon of patriarchy. Baroka, the Bale of 63 of Ilujinle society, even after his unjust and unlawful seduction of Sidi boastfully presents himself as respected personality in the society. Both of them show their consent to the tradition of Ilujinle society by keeping mum against Baroka's forceful seduction. The whole society too authenticates the patriarchal normativity by holding a ceremony in favor of Baroka. It shows how the females were exploited in post-colonial Nigeria as a colonial refuse to patriarchy. (94)

In the light of above critical reviews, it can be said that post-colonial Nigerian society was still patriarchal despite the socio-political and economic changes in the aftermath of its independence from the British rule. Soyinka's literary works include the socio-economic and political realities but they lack his address into the gender reality of the time. It is not by chance that Soyinka's plays have not represented gender issue of the women but that Soyinka has subscribed to the patriarchal normativity of the gender norms. Adhikary's reviews align with the researcher's skepticism that Soyinka authenticates the patriarchal hierarchy of femaleness and maleness as categorized based on their anatomical differences leading the societal marginality of the women as depicted in the play. It is further proven by Soyinka's ending of the play where the Baroka becomes victorious. The subjectivity of women being is overshadowed by the celebration of patriarchy.

In this context of the play, Surbhi Malhotra in his journal entitled *Resisting Patriarchy and Reformulating Matriarchy: an Analysis of Wole Soyinka's the Lion and the Jewel* concludes that Soyinka's women characters like Sidi and Sadiku enjoy womanhood. He argues:

In order to conclude it can be said that Soyinka portrays both Sidi and Sadiku as women who enjoy their womanhood. The idea that women were simply beings to be kept and used was not acceptable. The women had particular sensibilities and needed to be wooed not just claimed. Women are described as important as men and Soyinka equates his women characters with men, in fact, elevates them above men. They make men work at their whims, being powerful and bold. Soyinka depicts his women characters not only as beings but as the ones who hold a special position in the society. (6)

In his observation, Malhotra inadequately claims the womanhood in Soyinka's

women characters in the play. No woman in the play has control to rule over men nor do they hold any special position. Being tricked into marriage through physical rape and refusal to marry Lakunle without bride-price due to societal criticism shows Sidi's characterization as unintelligent, powerless, gullible whereas being assigned to woo Sidi on the behalf of her own husband due to societal freedom to men for polygamy shows Sadiku's characterization as submissive and powerless. In such circumstance, it's immature to claim that the play promotes womanhood. It is even more visible at the fact that the playwright does not condemn or dislike what Baroka does. The playwright's silence confirms his conformation towards patriarchal tradition of the Nigerian society as Naveen Kumar in his journal *Yoruba Tradition and Culture in Wole Soyinka's The Lion an the Jewel* complains:

The vision of Soyinka is not clearly present in the play. Till the end it is ambiguous that whether he exalts the customs and tradition of his people or not...the custom of dead Bale's last wife becomes the senior wife to the successor, i.e. son. The custom is very awkward and surprise to almost all the readers, particularly to the Indian readers. However, the playwright does not make any condemn, dislike or rejection of it. Instead, by ending the play with the marriage ceremony of the Bale and the girl seems to show that Soyinka nods approval to this custom. All these show that the female society is highly marginalized by the males. The female characters like Sidi and Sadiku are the representation of doubly oppressed in the society. (94-95)

In the light of these lines, Kumar's argument fully aligns with the researcher that Soyinka implicitly inclines to the patriarchal classification of gender roles and stereotypes the women as defined traditionally. Women's double victimization is brought to light when they suffer from the dichotomy between maleness as superior

category and femaleness as inferior. Secondly, the cultural customs and traditions like marriage and bride-pay victimize them the way Sidi get victimized. Soyinka ends the play with the marriage between Baroka and Sidi despite Baroka's abuse of position and immoral act of rape. It testifies the playwright's inclination towards the system that is controlled by the ideology of patriarchy. Kumar's charge that Soyinka deliberately shows no dislike or condemnation against the tradition which victimizes the women can be further corroborated by the following dialogue by Lakunle. After learning that Sidi was raped and deflowered by Baroka's cunning game, Lakunle hates Baroka as an uncivilized barbaric being as his lines go "Baroka is a creature of the wilds, untutored, mannerless, devoid of grace" (58). The conflict between Lakunle and Baroka is symbolic in its representation of the clash between the tradition and modern values. However, the traditional practice of polygamy and bride-price reflects the ugliness of some traditional custom. But, Soyinka chooses to side with this hegemonic tradition by rejecting Lakunle's proposal for marriage with Sidi despite her rape. It is seen in his utterances below:

Lakunle: This great misfortune touches not The treasury of my love. But you will agree, it is only fair That we forget the bride-price totally Since you no longer can be called a maid. Here is my hand; if on these terms, You'll be my cherished wife. We'll take an oath, between us three That this shall stay A secret to our dying days. (60)

These lines by Lakunle show that he desires to move on with Sidi despite the fact that she got deflowered or raped by Baroka. But, Soyinka ends the play with the marriage between Baroka and Sidi. The system of patriarchy conditions Sidi to marry with her rapist. Soyinka fails to make authorial intervention to correct it. It proves his implicit inclination towards the hegemonic tradition of patriarchy. Any tradition is good as

long as they serve to advance the lives of the people and progress the society into the path of betterment. Clearly, the tradition of bride-price and polygamy deserves to be condemned and reformed. Given the victimization of Sidi and the victory of Baroka at the end shows Soyinka's validation of polygamy and bride-price. These traditions legitimize the stereotyping of the women and discourage the formation of their progressive subjectivity.

In this way, the research concludes that the African drama *The Lion and the Jewel* anchors the author's position towards the colonial operation of patriarchy and represent the female characters in non-progressive terms. Despite known as the postcolonial voice for rewriting the history, culture and identity with the language of resistance against the hegemonic representation of the native culture by the colonial rulers, Soyinka's failure to apply the same language of resistance to rewrite the gender perspective in the post-colonial Nigerian society brings the sense of discomfort and skepticism towards his image as a progressive writer. While the postcolonial writers engage their creative works to resist and rewrite the culture as distorted by colonial history, some of them demonstrated an inability to have self-reflective mode of inquiry to look into the ugly and evil sides of the native culture. The pre-colonial tradition of patriarchal ruling in the society continued to exist in the post-independent Nigeria. Some postcolonial writers like Soyinka ignored the issue of gender construct under the ideology of patriarchy in the native cultural environment.

The play under study evidently proved that Nigerian society strongly practiced the patriarchal system of society where women are framed in traditional form such as weaker sex, low intelligent, gullible, emotional and commodity. The characterization of Sidi and Sadiku conforms to the patriarchal formation of women's subjectivity as weaker beings in the contrast with male. While male characters like Baroka and

Lakunle are attributed the identities as powerful, educated, intelligent, dominant and strong, their female counterparts are presented in negative light. The practice of polygamy and bride-price are promoted by the writer, which hegemonize female characters as Sidi is forced to marry her own rapist. She lacks courage to rebel because she is materially conditioned by the traditional belief of the Nigerian patriarchy that a girl is a disgrace if she marries without bride-price. The pre-colonial patriarchal structure of Nigerian society remains unquestioned by Soyinka's silence in modernizing the women's subjectivity. It, therefore, marks the failure of the writer to empower his female characters with the feminist attitude to resist. The findings of the research will contribute to the intellectual community in its critical studies upon the postcolonial literature and its limitation by pointing out the void in the postcolonial literature in relation to its inadequate inquiry upon the colonial nature of patriarchy in post-independent societies.

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