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Intragender Subjugation in Tosin Jobi Tume's *Blood on My Hands*

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Abstract

This study examines Tosin Jobi Tume's *Blood on My Hands* to determine whether the subjugation of women is solely inflicted by men. African female writers have over the years, portrayed men as the main source of female subjugation in their literary works. However, this study aims to challenge this perspective by examining the intra-gender relationships that exist amongst women in African cultural settings. This study employs a content analysis approach of qualitative research method to interrogate some oppressive forces that marginalize women. Feminist theory will inform our understanding of intragender subjugation and provide insights into strategies for addressing and preventing it. The study finds that women are often at the forefront of implementing cultural practices that debase the female gender. Ultimately, female marginalization is not only inter-gender, and that women need to look inwards and take responsibility for their roles in perpetuating power imbalances rather than solely blaming men.

Keywords: Intra-gender, Subjugation, Culture, Patriarchy and Feminism

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Introduction

Gender subjugation has long been a topic of discussion in feminist discourse, with a focus primarily on the ways in which men have been responsible for the oppression and subjugation of women. However, the concept of intragender subjugation, or the subjugation of individuals within their own gender, has been less explored. According to Ebekue (2017):

a more often less talked about and scantily addressed is the intra-gender politics that aid the subjugation of women in most social circles. In Africa, most of the injustices allegedly meted out on the women have women at the vanguard of its execution. Women discrimination on women is less discussed as opposed to patriarchy which most times is accused of subjecting women to the second fiddle while projecting the men (p.86).

In recent years, there has been growing recognition of the prevalence of intragender subjugation, particularly among women. Despite the strides made by feminist movements in recent years, women continue to face a range of challenges in their pursuit of gender equality. While patriarchal structures and male dominance

have been identified as major contributors to the subjugation of women, this overlooks the ways in which women themselves can perpetuate gender subjugation, including against their own gender. Widowhood rites, observed in numerous traditional African societies, are cultural customs associated with the death of a spouse, as indicated by Ajayi, Lady Adaina, Olanrenwaju, Faith, Olanrewaju Adekunle and Nwannebuife, Onwuli (2019):

In the Nigerian context which could be the case in other African countries, women whose spouses are deceased are subjected to numerous widowhood rites that expose their vulnerability. These rites include; consuming the water used to wash the corpse, sleeping in the same room where the corpse is laid, forced to marry her deceased husband's brother, confined to a room and forced to sit on ashes, served food on broken plates and in some cases, prohibited from gazing at the person who served the meal, and in some cases they are restricted to wearing certain colours, styles or tattered clothes for a period of time (p. 2).

It is very discouraging to learn that a majority of the violent cultural practices surrounding widowhood in the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria are established and carried out by females. According to



Ojukwu and Ezeajugh (2020) “The most pathetic situation in this widowed oppression and subjugation is the role played by the women in implementing these often shocking and distressing laws and in maintaining the traditional structures which supports the practices” (p.70). Furthermore, women also experience harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and conflicts arising from infertility or other marriage-related issues.

Intragender subjugation can manifest in various forms, including the reinforcement of gender stereotypes, the policing of other women's behaviors, and the promotion of exclusive groups or cliques. These behaviors can occur in various settings, including the workplace, social environments, and even within feminist movements. The effects of intragender subjugation can be far-reaching, leading to feelings of isolation, shame, and disempowerment among those who experience it. Moreover, the perpetuation of intragender subjugation can undermine the efforts of feminists and other advocates who seek to achieve gender equality.

Therefore, it is important to explore the concept of intragender subjugation in greater detail, including its causes, effects, and potential solutions. By understanding the ways in which women themselves can contribute to gender subjugation, we can better address the root causes of inequality and work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society. Using Tosin Jobi Tume's play, *Blood on My Hands*, this study examines the various ways in which intragender subjugation manifests, and explore the underlying social and cultural factors that contribute to its persistence. Additionally, this study examines potential strategies for addressing intragender subjugation and creating a more empowering environment for all individuals, regardless of their gender.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks are essential in guiding research and understanding phenomena. In this case, the feminist theory will be used in this study. This study is rooted in Kimberly Crenshaw's intersectional feminism, which originated in 1989. In essence, intersectionality serves as a theoretical framework for analysis and advocacy, examining various forms of discrimination and providing a nuanced understanding of how different identities shape a woman's access to specific rights and opportunities.

Within feminist theory, it is commonly asserted that women's lives are influenced by multiple, interconnected systems of oppression. Rather than viewing women's subjugation as a singular or binary process, the recognition that it results from the convergence of multiple intersecting systems, according to Crenshaw (1991) can be traced back to “antiracist feminist critiques of the claim that women's oppression could be captured through an analysis of gender alone” (p.304). Carastathis (2014) says that:

The metaphor of intersecting categories of discrimination was introduced and later elaborated by the Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, one of the founders of Critical Race Theory in the U.S. legal academy. Yet intersectionality has a long

history in Black feminism. Its antecedents include the notions of ‘double jeopardy’ or ‘multiple jeopardy’, and ‘interlocking oppressions’. As early as the 19th century in the United States, Black feminists confronted the simultaneity of a ‘woman question’ and a ‘race problem’ (p.305).

Black feminists generally assert that black women experience a dual oppression: first, due to their gender, and second, as a result of their skin color. Consequently, irrespective of the unique circumstances of individual black women, they collectively face the challenge of being subject to the ‘double jeopardy’ of categorization and group identifications. The essence of intersectional feminism lies in its effort to simplify often complex identities that do not adequately address the uniqueness of individuals within a particular group identity. The issue with identity politics is not solely its inability to transcend differences, but rather the opposite: it consistently consolidates or disregards the distinctions that exist among diverse members of a specific group. As Crenshaw (1991) explains:

this elision of difference is problematic, fundamentally because the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, such as race and class. Moreover, ignoring differences within groups frequently contributes to tension among groups, another problem of identity politics that frustrates efforts to politicize violence against women. Feminist efforts to politicize experiences of women and antiracist efforts to politicize experiences of people of color have frequently proceeded as though the issues and experiences they each detail occur on mutually exclusive terrains. Although racism and sexism readily intersect in the lives of real people, they seldom do in feminist and antiracist practices. And so, when the practices expound identity as “woman” or “person of color” as an either/or proposition, they relegate the identity of women of color to a location that resists telling (p.1241).

Crenshaw (1991) proceeds to articulate this perspective by investigating instances of gendered and racially motivated violence targeting black women, women of color, and other non-white women. Her fundamental argument is that “contemporary feminist and antiracist discourses have failed to consider the intersections of racism and patriarchy” (p.1241). Highlighting two dimensions of men's violence against women—physical abuse and sexual assault—Crenshaw (1991) explores Structural Intersectionality and Political Intersectionality. In her view, Structural Intersectionality elucidates that “the ways in which the location of women of color at the intersection of race and gender makes our actual experience of domestic violence, rape, and remedial reform qualitatively different from that of white women” (p.1242). She provides examples from the Los Angeles context where shelters for women of color in minority communities were demolished. Faced with the heavy burden of childcare responsibilities, unemployment, and poverty, these women often had no choice but to resort to the same shelters they lived in, only to find them destroyed. Any effort to address the issue of demolished housing for these women needs to focus on their specific circumstances, such as inadequate

education, unemployment, and poverty, to comprehensively tackle their challenges.

Rebuilding shelters without addressing the societal factors that pushed them into substandard housing in the first place would yield counterproductive results. This underscores the distinctive approach of intersectionality. Typically, contemporary feminist analyses tend to generalize these poor, unemployed women of color simply as "women," overlooking the specific situations they face. This fails to acknowledge that the category 'women' encompasses not only economically privileged white women but also affluent black women and educated women of color, among others. This, according to Ciarria (2020) justifies intersectional feminism as

an antidote to marginalizations and exclusions within feminist philosophy, seeks to integrate all of these concerns and to combat multiple forms of prejudice simultaneously. It recognizes that not all oppressions can be analyzed at once, but it aims to avoid single-factor analyses that neglect the evaluatively salient intersections between relevant axes of oppressions (p. 2).

In this study, intersectional feminism plays a crucial role by allowing the reader to grasp the impracticality of addressing all forms of oppression simultaneously. It also facilitates an understanding of the various biases and social structures that converge to hinder individuals or specific subsets of women, rejecting the approach of addressing women's challenges through a totalizing perspective. Crenshaw's theories revolve around challenging this singular approach to confronting women's oppression.

Socio-cultural factors that contribute to Intragender subjugation

Intragender subjugation is a complex phenomenon that has been underexplored in research. However, several studies have highlighted the causes, effects, and potential solutions to this pervasive social issue.

Several socio-cultural factors contribute to intragender subjugation, including the internalization of patriarchal values, gender socialization, and the perpetuation of gender stereotypes. Patriarchal values such as male dominance and female submission are often internalized by individuals, leading to the acceptance of intragender subjugation. Gender socialization, which refers to the learning of gender roles, can also perpetuate intragender subjugation by reinforcing gender stereotypes and expectations. Fwangyil (2012) says that:

Women are subjected to male oppression and suppression at various stages of life. Unfortunately, female oppression is deeply ingrained in the culture of the societies which ensures the continuation of patriarchal control. This situation makes it impossible for women to seek ways of liberating themselves because doing so will be tantamount to challenging the age-long tradition and customs of the people (p.15).

The perpetuation of gender stereotypes, such as the belief that women are emotional and weak, and many other biases against women can contribute to the marginalization of individuals within their own gender group. According to Nnolim (2009) various manifestations of African cultural practices have promoted the shaming of women who are unable to bear children, "forcing them to consult various medicine men, doctors, prophets or leave their marital homes in frustration" (p.140). Feminist scholars highlight the need to scrutinize the portrayal of women and considers the possibility of men being responsible for childlessness in marriages. This is demonstrated in the Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds* where the author depicts the conventional views on childlessness in African marriages and brings attention to its consequences.

Other female writers have also depicted the challenges faced by infertile women in Africa and the extreme measures they take to conceive and save their marriages in a society where having children is highly valued. Lewu (2015) says that:

due to the preference for boys in most cultures, a woman without a male child is almost regarded as barren. This is borne out of the belief in male physical, psychological, and social superiority. Only the male child is regarded as capable of perpetrating the lineage, while the female gets married into another family. Consequently, girls are treated as temporary members of their families, sometimes denied equal access to education, feeding, and inheritance (p. 564).

The effects of intragender subjugation can be profound, resulting in psychological and physical harm. Individuals who experience intragender subjugation may suffer from low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. Additionally, intragender subjugation can lead to physical harm, including domestic violence, sexual assault, and other forms of physical abuse.

Several potential solutions to intragender subjugation have been proposed, including education, activism, and policy changes. Education can help individuals unlearn patriarchal values and gender stereotypes, leading to a greater understanding of the harm caused by intragender subjugation. Activism can also play a crucial role in raising awareness of intragender subjugation and promoting change. Finally, policy changes, such as the implementation of gender-sensitive policies and laws, can help address the root causes of intragender subjugation. Intragender subjugation is a complex social issue that requires a multifaceted approach to address.

By understanding the socio-cultural causes, effects, and potential solutions of intragender subjugation, we can work towards creating a more just and equitable society for all individuals.

Issues of Intra-gender subjugation in Tosin Jobi Tume's *Blood on My Hands*

The story of the play revolves around the marital relationship between Kofo, a woman in her 30's, and her husband, Kunle Pedro. The opening of the play presents us with an insight into the background of the love relationship between Kofo and Kunle, her husband. Kunle's mother, Mrs. Pedro interferes in the selection of

a wife for her son. Here, Tosin Jobi Tume shows that this in itself is illegal and constitutes a major breach of a child rights and thus is subjugation in every sense. The hostile nature of the situation is made known to the reader through the conversation between Dapo and Kunle:

Dapo: I agree that it is strange, but you stop acting like you were helpless

Kunle: I was totally helpless! Those women ambushed me. My mother had everything planned out, and you know her, she doesn't take 'No' for an answer... I mean what could I have done?

Dapo: Well, you could said 'No'

Kunle: Say 'No uh? Say No' and break my mother's heart? Say No' and make her put on me the stamp of an ungrateful child? Say 'No' and spend the rest of my life listening to her sing me a dirge of how her only child has decided to make her unhappy? I don't think so (p.25).

The statement by Kunle simply explores the calamity which bedevils a marriage consummated by matchmaking. Kunle is unhappy because he has married Kofo, in accordance to the wishes of his mother.

Here, the playwright treats some of the issues that encourage and reinforce crime, subjugation, and domestic violence against women especially in this part of the world. Rather than discourage her friend, Mrs. Pedro from interfering in Kunle's choice of partner, Mrs. Smith, who is also Kofo's mother, prefers to relish the material accoutrement that would come from Kofo's ill-fated marriage.

As soon as the play starts, Kofo, who has been lying critically ill in the hospital is introduced to us. Mrs. Smith, her mother awaits the arrival of Barrister Laura, a Lawyer, whose services is being hired to defend Kofo in the court on the charges of manslaughter. At first, Kofo refuses to cooperate with Barrister Laura, as she ignores most of the questions that is being thrown at her. After several attempts by the legal practitioner, Kofo finally speaks up. In a flashback, she shares her traumatic marital experience. Right from the beginning of the marriage, Kofo has been basking in the false euphoria of a blissful marriage. She says:

Kofo: Mr. Pedro

Kunle: Mrs. Pedro

Kofo: (*Sighs happily*) Ahh... Today is the happiest day of my life (*Kofo hugs Kunle, but he tactically finds his way out of her embrace*)

Kunle: (*Dryly*) Well, it is amazing, isn't it? (p.21)

As seen from the stage direction above, Kunle is not happy being compelled to marry Kofo by his mother. He finds one excuse or the other to avoid Kofo and stay out of her numerous embraces. Even, at a point, Dapo, his best man and gay partner, advises him to go and spend time with his new bride, but he blatantly refused and

says to Kofo "you know what? You go inside, I will join you as soon as we have brought in all the gifts and luggage" (p.23).

He finds it very difficult to sleep with his new wife, Kofo. Even Kofo confesses to the consternation of Barrister Laura, how she had to drug her own husband so that he can sleep with her and impregnate her. Kunle refuses to forgive his wife when he finds out the truth. To the reader, this signal is not a very good one. Kofo is dehumanized and subjected to bestiality in the hands of her own husband.

Furthermore, in the play, marriage is utilized as a means to subjugate women. Wife abuse in Tosin Jobi Tume's play, *Blood on My Hands* moves to psychological trauma. Kunle also employs aggressive dialogue and verbal abuse. To Dapo, his friend, Kunle, has refused to face the reality but has continued to live in falsehood which is responsible for his callousness. Soon, we discover that Kunle has been having extra-marital affairs. Tosin condemns how Kunle publicly cheats on his wife. In a similar vein, the playwright downplays women that are also accomplices in the act of subjugation against their fellow women. Desire, his secretary, engages in an illicit relationship with Kunle, knowing fully well that he is a married man. She does not consider her fellow woman whose home she is disintegrating. The worst of it all is that Kofo's mother-in-law see nothing wrong with her son's waywardness: Mrs. Pedro, in an effort to silence Kofo, her daughter-in-law strongly reprimands her: "Will you keep quiet! I am speaking. (*Pause*) You are a woman, and he is a man. It is in the nature of men to be promiscuous and rascally. Your duty as a woman is to ensure that the home doesn't fall apart. Hold on tight to your home, no matter what. Do you understand me?" (p.50). According to Germaine Greer's book, *The Female Eunuch*, societal norms and upbringing lead women to view themselves as incomplete and inferior, causing them to lose confidence in their gender.

In contrast, men are taught to be strong, proud, and to view themselves as superior to women. Akachi-Adimora (2000) laments that: from childhood, the female is confronted with her insignificance and her subservient role in society. She internalizes these images that condemn her to a life of perpetual dependence and diffidence. Some of her —sisters—are confined in the home or if they ever venture out of the door, they are compelled to cover themselves like masquerades – apparitions that frighten innocent children in broad daylight. (p.74)

Women often remain silent and endure suffering. Society has always encouraged women to be quiet, reserved, compliant, patient, and gentle, promoting these qualities as the most important virtues of femininity. This creates an image of women that Virginia Woolf termed as "The Angel in the House" in her book, *A Room of One's Own*. According to Nwosu (2004), "socialization institutions also perpetuate gender stereotypes from one generation to the next. Socialization, therefore, influences sex-role stereotypes from early childhood when female children role-play nurses, while the males play hunters" (p.40). The society assigns matrimonial roles to women and leaves the more dominant roles of breadwinner and family head to men. In Africa, women are not allowed to be heads

of households, and their duty is restricted to bearing children, tending to the home, and supporting their husbands. This cultural role assigned to women is accepted by society. As Badua in Ama Ata Aido's *Anowa* defines, a woman's traditional role is to "marry a man, tend a farm, and be happy to see her peppers and her onions grow. A woman should bear children, many children so she can afford to have one or two die." This traditional role assigned to women is acceptable to society.

In a patriarchal system, the man holds the power and authority that organizes the social structure. The male child is taught to aspire to professionalism and superiority, while the female child is indoctrinated with the idea that she can never survive outside the kitchen. According to Daniel-Inim (2015) "Women are expected to do most of the household chores, while decisions that affect their happiness are considered only after those that concern the comfort of men" (p.224). The hostility of some mothers-in-law remains a nightmare to most daughters-in-law. Awua (2010) says that:

Mothers-in-law also contribute in making marriage a painful experience. Mothers regard wives of their sons as displacing them in affection and also everything to cause disaffection in the homes of their children. Many sons overlook the complaints by their wives of the humiliating manner their mothers treat them. This accords their mothers-in-law's absolute powers in the home. The mother-in-law can also pressurize her son into a second, third, or fourth marriage... (p.141).

Mrs. Pedro contributes immensely to the subjugation and marginalization of her daughter-in-law. Rather than sympathize with Kofo as a result of the difficulties she is going through in the hands of her son, she continues in a heated persecution against Kofo "Good. And please, always be careful with your choice of words. Kunle is your husband and the head of this family. You will respect him always. Is that clear?" (p.50).

The above statement represents power, subjugation, intimidation, persecution, and oppression. This presents Kofo as a second-class citizen. She is like a servant for all members of the family. Kofo's reaction to the violence of her mother-in-law is that of quiet reproach and escape.

Apart from Dapo, every other character in the play does not see anything wrong with Kunle's extramarital public relationship with his mistress. When he was confronted on this matter by his wife, Kunle refuses to show remorse for his actions. With a condescending and scornful expression of hatred directed at Kofo, he rubs in the rudeness with the punch line. Kofo's sudden, unwanted boldness evokes all the manly pride in Kunle who thunders "What is this nonsense for goodness sake? Hello! Am I not allowed to freely associate anymore?" (p.39).

For questioning the infidelity of her husband, Kofo is presented to us as a character, trampling social conventions right and left, in a society where the dominance of men is continually reaffirmed, and women are relegated time after time to their traditional roles. In traditional societies like that of Kofo, many married women face emotional abuse from their husbands.

While most women accept this as normal and believe their husbands have the right to discipline them, Kofo speaks out against spousal abuse and asserts that she is a wife, not a slave. However, many women in African societies do not report abuse and remain in these relationships due to cultural stigmas surrounding divorce. Intra-gender relationships among women can also be strained, with conflicts arising between stepmothers and daughters, and even between mothers and daughters. Women can both be oppressed by patriarchal structures and by other women, highlighting the need for women to unite and address factors that contribute to their subjugation. According to Ezenwanebe(2011):

It is still widely believed in Africa that the man of the house is under obligation to no one in the home while everyone is under his obligation. He is believed to be as free as air in movement and action. The claim is that the penis, by its dangling nature symbolizes freedom. Many Nigerian men, in particular, and African men, in general, are averse to tight pants (except for sports) or any form of an innerwear that holds their manhood tightly together. This notion is carried forward to gender relationship. A wife is not expected to question the movement of his husband while it is believed that by right, a man must know the where about of his wife and children and what she does at any time. Even in the face of the mobile telecom network (GSM), men see it as an avenue to monitor the movement and actions of their wives but never vice versa. The man believes he has the right to sexual freedom. He can sleep around with as many women as possible, holding claims to the traditional culture of polygamy. Male infidelity in marriage is no news but even suspected female infidelity makes a lot of news (p. 275).

The emotional distress women suffer in this type of matrimonial set-up is enough to rob them of their emotions, self-esteem and subdue their potentials. Kofo wants respect from Kunle as his wife. But Kunle would not respect her because in his opinion, Kofo is "equally culpable! When my mother took it upon herself to propose to Kofo on my behalf, why did she say "Yes?" I mean, what could be weirder than that? (p.24). Kofo's subjugation by her own mother becomes worse than that of her mother-in-law. She connives with Mrs. Pedro to denigrate, persecute, and subjugate Kofo. She is a woman motivated by power and wealth. Mrs. Smith sees her daughter, Kofo as a means to an end. In her search for economic power, she completely ruins her daughter's future. She does only force Kofo, her daughter into an enslaving marital union, but always advise her to stay and endure the difficulties and bitterness arising as a result of this. Mrs. Smith is portrayed in the play as being selfish, grasping, and abusive. Mrs. Smith's actions are selfish, as she follows her own inclinations and desires with little concern for the feelings of her daughter. In fact, she is the quintessential nemesis of the women struggle for self-emancipation.

Kofo says "So, I was a pawn in all of this? So, this is why you always advised me to stay and endure, whenever I told you how unhappy I was... So, this was all about money? It was all about wealth and status to you?" (p.62).

The play depicts total acceptance that a woman deserves to be punished by her husband. Mrs. Smith believes in a husband's right to discipline his wife. She believes it is part of marriage. Ideally, a mother is a symbol of succor. One begins to wonder the kind of mother, Mrs. Smith is. Kofo regrets when she becomes aware that she is being used as a sacrificial lamb to climb the social ladder by her callous mother. This is the height of insensitivity and it shows how women contribute immensely to the subjugation and marginalization of their fellow women. Given the extensive history of oppression, subordination, and intimidation that women have faced at the hands of patriarchal societies, one may think that the cult of womanhood would mean comradeship and group cohesion. However, the opposite is the case between the women in Tosin's *Blood on My Hands*. The writer through the characters of Mrs. Smith, Desire and Mrs. Pedro showcases the horrific oppression and subjugation women pass through in the hands of fellow women.

However, more trouble erupts when Kofo discovers that Kunle is a homosexual. The reality of the situation hits Kofo like a thunderbolt, while Kunle unapologetically insists that she has to leave their matrimonial home. However, Kofo expresses her desire to forgive him and start all over again with him, but Kunle refuses to accept her. He prefers to wallow in his illicit affair with Dapo. Tosin Jobi-Tume constructs Kunle's character to expose the insensitivity of men towards women, and to extol the big heart that women possess in forgiving and reconciling with their spouses.

The dehumanizing treatments continue to be meted out to Kofo, who all this while remains calm. Kofo concludes that no one can make her a slave or prisoner in her home. She therefore seeks an alternative way to escape from the prison yard. However, in a dramatic twist, Kofo fights back. When she is weary of bearing such oppressive acts any longer, Kofo picks up a knife and stabs Kunle to death.

To an extent, Tosin Jobi Tume's *Blood on My Hands* is a womanist play. Tosin Jobi Tume as a womanist places Kofo on the platform of a submissive woman who will not let her husband's callousness to make her go under. Kofo has the right attributes of a traditional mother and wife. She wants Kunle's well-being despite his wickedness to her. Kofo is imbued with womanist ideals. She is strongly convinced about the vital need to instigate mutual cooperation and tranquility between a man and a woman at all costs. Her sterling qualities are concretized in Dapo's speech when he says "...Kofo is a nice girl. I'd hate to see her hurt (p.24). Even her husband's infidelity does not make her to cheat on him.

Despite Kunle's violence and all forms of oppressive acts towards her, Kofo is ready to forgive him. However, Kunle insists that he wants to get rid of Kofo and goes after Dapo, his homosexual partner. Most marriages synonymous with brutality and oppression is compounded more by the mere fact that most of the women unfortunately still remain in the abusive relationship. According to Kolawole (1997), "divorce is almost a taboo in many African societies and this accounts for the high degree of tolerance by women. Usually, young men feel triumphant in the marriage but

the girls expect worst and this prepares their mind to tolerate abuse and violence in marriage" (p. 57).

A woman's ambition in African traditional society is marriage. Kofo, for instance, shows her belief in the institution of marriage and does all she can to keep it from breaking up. In Tosin Jobi Tume's *Blood on My Hands*, the tragedy of the African woman is highlighted. According to Shaka and Uchendu (2012), an ideal African woman is the "...docile, submissive, accepting, never protesting, never questioning and quiet model of a woman" (p.11). In fact, the unquestioning wife can be seen in Zulu Sofola's *Song of a Maiden* and Tess Onwueme's *The Broken Calabash and A Hen Too Soon*.

Given the ideological underpinning of womanism, Kofo, Desire, Mrs. Pedro, and Mrs. Smith became a kind of liability in the course of strenuous efforts to objectify women as good, amicable creatures. Kofo's aggressive or violent nature in the name of setting women free from their oppressive condition is undoubtedly, inconsistent with the ideological underpinning of African feminism, which aims at extolling the virtues of womanhood. An African audience is skeptical about this kind of freedom. Would violence or murder put an end to women oppression in the African context? She is guilty of committing the same atrocity men are being accused of. Her violent action suggests lack of patience, heartlessness, and intolerance. The African audience will never like to identify with her character. Ezenwanebe (2008) says that "Feminist theatre critics insist that creating strong female characters with whom the audience can identify with is one of the most important functions feminist theatre can perform in the hands of a feminist writer" (p.91). It is unfortunate that feminism in Africa has taken on a negative connotation. Many playwrights who sympathize with women's struggles use their plays to advocate for gender equality. This has led in some cases to distortions in works that address issues related to women.

From the play, it becomes clear that patriarchy has succeeded in convincing people that a woman who is strong and intelligent is a threat to the established social order rather. The case of Kofo seems to affirm all that is unacceptable in African feminism. Kofo murders her husband, an action which will definitely create more unending problems and challenges in the family and society than bring a solution to the already existing problems. This is because murder will never be the solution to female emancipation. Rather than murder, bloodshed, and wastage of human potentials, African feminists should develop a feminist strategy that seeks to peacefully address gender-related problems and interests.

Surely, Kofo is not a good example of the "new eve" envisaged by the womanists. However, an artist has the freedom to choose any method of representing reality and may not be concerned about whether their art aligns with a particular ideology. It is important that writers should note the argument of Balogun (1999) when he says that "The heroes of the literary works of any group of people are a reliable source of ascertaining the aesthetic preferences of such people... In the second place, the society reveals its biases by the way it reacts either approvingly or disapprovingly of the

characters and materials contained in a work of literature” (p.51). Drama, as Gurr (1974) observes has “a double function in ... society. It records the present holding a mirror up to society and it paints a picture of the future, it offers a possible vision of how the present can be improved” (p.6).

Therefore, drama not only explains the past and present but also maps out a path for the future of society. In her inaugural lecture, Akachi-Adimora-Ezeigbo (2008) boldly asserts that “literature is the most efficacious subject or discipline to provide the humanistic education this country needs to make progress... “(p.16).

Hence, an artist is visionary, charting the course for future development and equipping people with the right knowledge and aspiration. In the enactment of the scathing experiences of her female protagonist in *Blood on My Hands*, Tosin puts into bold relief the evil machinations of mistresses and mothers-in-law, a factor that extenuates the importance of female bonding and thus impedes the quest for emancipation.

Desire is unrepentant. She knows that the man she is going out with has a wife. She does not care what would be the outcome of her immoral behaviour. She does not put her fellow woman whose husband she is enjoying into consideration. Daba's question to Dame Belle-Mere, in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, was about the ways in which one woman can destroy the happiness of a fellow woman. This type of behavior often raises questions, and as well it constitutes inhumane treatment of other women. The behavior may be influenced by patriarchal values or cultural traditions, and it could be seen as a form of oppression that is even more severe than what women experience in the hands of men. It is unclear who should be held accountable for this behavior - whether it's men, patriarchal systems, or cultural traditions. However, according to the principles of Focus Feminism, women should take responsibility for supporting and caring for their fellow sisters. Unfortunately, those who engage in this behavior often go unpunished. This trend goes against the goals of womanism, which seeks to celebrate the positive aspects of femininity.

Tosin Jobi Tume's aim at showing the virtues of womanhood in this regard is not successful given the unrealistic depiction of the female characters in the play. Even the role of the female character, Mrs. Pedro, could have been better depicted given her cruel, ruthless attitude which itself represents women in a negative way. Even, Mrs. Smith is an epitome of all that is repulsive in women. These women impose old values that oppress other women.

Conclusion

This study discovers that although almost every female writer in the 21st century focuses on the issue of oppression, women in African society continue to be subjected to mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, and intimidation by men. This study also reveals how female characters can cause harm to other women. This highlights the often-overlooked form of oppression where women mistreat each other. Women, like men, can be violent, abusive, and harmful towards both men and women. By examining the roles and actions of female characters in the texts

analyzed, it becomes clear that women, to a large extent, contribute to perpetuating the factors that degrade the status of the female gender.

The research concludes that women's longstanding aspiration for emancipation and equity can only be realized if they authentically recognize themselves and attend to overlooked nuances. This entails eliminating or dismantling oppressive cultural and patriarchal structures, leading to freedom from social inequality. Additionally, achieving empowerment for women involves obtaining education and striving for financial independence.

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