Critiquing Patriarchal Representation of Women in Wole Soyinka’s

The Lion and the Jewel and The Trials of Brother Jero

By

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Abstract

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. This paper therefore examines how Soyinka represents female characters in two of his major plays: The Trials of Brother Jero and The Lion and Jewel. These plays are selected because they have become canonical among Soyinka’s major plays. Tenets of womanism which advocates sustainable complementary relationship and harmonious relationship between men and women are adopted in the critical analyses of the selected plays. The representation of Amope, the fish seller, the penitent woman, the prostitutes at the beach in The Trials of Brother Jero shows that Soyinka does not have positive disposition to women characters in the play. These female characters are not positively presented unlike their male counterparts. Similarly, Sidi and Sadiku are presented as characters with low intelligence and high level of gullibility. These characters easily fall victims of Baroka’s craftiness. Like other pioneer playwrights in Nigeria and Africa, Wole Soyinka has not favourably represented women in his major plays, perhaps because of the misplaced gender configuration of African societies which do not appreciate the socio-political and economic significance of women.

Keywords: Critiquing, Patriarchal, Representation of Women, Dramatic Literature, Complementarity.
Introduction

The three basic functions of literature: mimesis, representation and reflection have justified the essence of literary creativity across cultures of the world. Mimesis, as stated in Aristotelian ideology, is the oldest of the tenets of literature and literary criticism. In Aristotelian view, mimesis generates from the collective consciousness of individuals or community. The mimetic nature of literature offers various narratives about the dimensions and social structures in a society. The mimetic function of literature is classical with the philosophical statement of Aristotle that every form of literature is mimetic with the ability to evaluate and interrogate the realities of life. In his proposition of mimesis, Aristotle differs to Plato’s idea of diegesis because the former sees artists of all categories as mimetic being whose responsibility is to imitate action and life. In the course of imitating realities, creative artists and writers represent the ethos and overall world’s views of a people comprising their belief system, social structure and ideologies. It is this ideal of representation that upholds the imaginative and creative essence of literature as [re] interpretation of life. In the functional capacity of [re] interpreting life, literature reflects the overt and covert human activities within the orbit of complex and dynamic human relations.

Nigerian playwrights, like their counterparts across the globe, have subscribed to the mimetic and reflective functions of literature through the subject matter and themes of their plays. One of the critical issues that have occupied the centre stage of dramatic criticism in Nigeria and other parts of Africa is the representation of gender in male and female authored texts. In the context of this paper, gender representation is taken from the perspective of women’s representation in Wole Soyinka’s plays. This limitation is necessary in order not to make the paper’s argument awkward. Besides, the need for the holistic gender representation in Wole Soyinka’s plays requires another research. In the selected plays in this paper, The Trials of Brother Jero and The Lion and the Jewel, 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. This is evident in the tangible and intangible cultural artefacts such as language, literature and other performance arts. In this line of argument, Giddens’ (158) view is valid that “sex is biological or anatomical differences between men and women, whereas gender concerns the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females”. These cultural differences between males and females in the society have been
institutionalised with the male having dominance over their female counterparts in the social matrix.

The cultural configuration of gender relations has been reflected in the subject matter, themes and characterisation of plays written across the continent of Africa. There are always mixed reactions to gender representation particularly in the plays written by playwrights from the other gender (in this instance, the reference is to the sexual identity of individual playwrights). With the choice of Soyinka’s plays in this paper, the focus is on the representation of women. This focus is consistent with Sesan’s conceptualisation of “andro-dramatic texts” (a term used to describe plays written by male playwrights). The subject matter and themes of the plays written by male playwrights have generated a lot of polemics in the gender representation in African drama. This paper, therefore, acknowledges Sesan’s view that:

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).

The discourses on gender representation in African drama focus more on how women are represented within the patriarchal cultural norms. Most of the arguments are on the facts that women are not adequately represented because of the cultural limitations. The andro-dramatic texts have been critiqued much from the gender representation of their male and female characters even when the criticism is from other ideological perspectives. This criticism is usually informed by the gender ideological orientation of critics.

**Soyinka’s The Lion and the Jewel and Previous Researches**

Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel* has become a canon in the catalogue of dramatic texts in Nigeria and the whole of Africa. It is perhaps the only play by him that is written entirely in a comic spirit uncomplicated by a dark, brooding humor and satire” (Jeyifo, 106). This is also evident in the critical attention the play has received in theses, journals and critical source books. These previous researches were done at the comparative and non-comparative levels. In some of these researches, *The Lion and the Jewel* has been compared with other plays such as Soyinka’s *The Road, The Strong Breed* and *Death and the King’s Horseman*; Jane Ene Hensaw’s *This is Our Chance* and Ben Johnson’s *Volpone*. These researches focus on characterisation, language of the play, subject matter,
ideological orientation and thematic concern.

Naveen Kumar’s *Yoruba Tradition and Culture in Wole Soyinka’s The Lion and the Jewel* critiques the cultural and traditional ethos which are overtly and covertly presented in the play. Kumar emphasises the significant contributions of bride price, dance, music, marriage tradition and polygamous family structure. The scope of his work also covers the role of women in society. He places much emphasis on Soyinka’s presentation of the status of women in customary marriage arrangement by the patriarchal society of Ilujinle. The basis of his argument is the end of the play where Sidi is tricked into marriage with Baroka. Kumar complains:

The vision of Soyinka is not clearly present in this 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. By the marriage of the cunning Bale and ignorant and pride (sic) Sidi, the author emphasizes that chastity is only for female. All these show that the female society is highly marginalized by the males. The female characters like Sidi and Sadiku are the representation of the doubly oppressed in the society (94-95).

The kernel of Kumar’s argument is that women in the play suffer from both self-marginality and societal marginality. This is because the consciousness of these women has been greatly influenced by the patriarchal consciousness of their society that the will of women is subsumed in the needs and expectations of the society. The shortcoming in Kumar’s work is that it only focuses on the characterisation of only Sidi and how this has contributed to the plot and subject matter of the play. Besides, Kumar devotes a small portion (two or three paragraphs) to the treatment of Sidi’s characters in the play. These shortcomings are evident in the play, perhaps, he does not have women’s representation in the play as his primary focus of the research.

Nadia Maher Moawad’s *A Study of Wole Soyinka’s Play The Lion and the Jewel in the Light of Culture* discusses the play from the ideological perspective of conflicts. His focus is on generational conflicts between the young and the old, as represented by Lakunle and Baroka as well as Sidi and Sadiku; cultural conflicts between the traditional and modern culture. Like Kumar’s work, Moawad
(184) also offers a small space for the treatment of the status of women in polygamy and patriarchal societal structure.

Hence, Soyinka portrays the customs and traditions in his Yoruba country. It is new to the reader. The Polygamous society gives importance to the Bale, for example: It allows him to marry as many girls as he wants. He just uses them for his pleasure and after the arrival of the new favourite, he sends the last favourite to an outhouse (184).

In our society, we represent this as the society that never gives respect to woman as Lakunle says "they are used to pound the yam or bends all the day to plant the millet …to fetch and carry, to cook and scrub, to bring forth children by the gross" (The Lion and the Jewel, 7,9).

Like Kumar, Moawad is not comfortable with Soyinka’s treatment of polygamy and the triumph of Baroka in the struggle with Lakunle over the hands of Sidi in marriage. This is, perhaps, polygamous family structure is alien to his cultural experience. Kumar and Moawad’s reviews of polygamy in the play are consistent with Maclean’s critique of the convention of polygamy in the play with his view that it is a “Nigerian bedroom farce” (51). These critiques hold these views because polygamy is antithetical to their cultural ideology of marriage which emphasises monogamy.

Mekwanent Tilahun Desta’s ‘Pragmatics as Applied to Characters’ Relationships: Focus on Wole Soyinka’s Play, The Lion and the Jewel discusses the play from the perspectives of language with the specific reference to pragmatics and speech acts. Desta’s work critiques how language use (speech acts and pragmatics) has contributed to the characterization of the play. His inter-character relationship analysis discusses how turn-taking and how illocutionary act contributes to the advancement of the plot and conflicts of the play. Desta brings out the pragmatic and sociolinguistic features of the play – presupposition, assumptions, inference and cooperative principles and how all these have contributed to the plot, subject matter and themes of the play. In his argument, he writes:

The study of literature has indisputable role in the daily interface of human beings and accompanying matters that constitute intentions and recognitions. All these conditions need to be fulfilled so as to reach mutual understanding. Besides, poets, playwrights, and most of the time authors create their own world of imagination that they believe into reflect what they think are going on in the world they populate. To achieve this, it is a necessity to incorporate sociolinguistics in their productions.

Desta’s pragmatic and sociolinguistic investigation of the play is critical of the
underlined themes of the play – cultural conflicts, generational conflicts and ideological differences between the new and the old.

Sultana Yasmin’s A Critique of Cross-cultural Counter Discourse in Wole Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel* engages the play from the perspectives of comparative cultural studies. In her paper, she argues that cultural domination and displacement, colonial ramifications of indigenous native culture, clash between colonizer and colonized as well as subversions of intrusive alien culture all contribute to the plot and advancement of the conflicts of the play. She summarizes her argument as follow:

*The play, The Lion and the Jewel* moves from a colonial domination to a post-colonial resistance. The colonial rule has brought historical, social, political and cultural change or erosion to the indigenous people. The indigenous people like Sidi, Baroka and Sadiku, to restore their own freedom and cultural identity, relentlessly combat against Eurocentric cultural hegemonizing and hybridizing effort. This attempt can be taken as a form of counter resistance to the former colonizer(605). (Emphasis, as in the original).

Despite the comprehensiveness of Yasmin’s work, it does not critically engage the gender issues and representation of women in the play. This leaves some vacuum to be filled in further studies of the play. In her argument on the characterisation of Sidi in her paper, Yasmin groups her with the marginalized voices in the play. The failure of Yasmin’s paper to bring out the unique contributions of Sidi’s characterisation to gender issues of African drama prompts other researches in this direction. Yasmin, however, succeeds in her argument that Sidi’s naivety makes her a victim of circumstances at the end of the play.

Surbhi Malhotra’s *Resisting Patriarchy and Reformulating Matriarchy: an Analysis of Wole Soyinka’s the Lion and the Jewel* carries out a comparative study of gender roles and responsibilities in the play with specific reference to the characterisation of Baroka, Lakunle, Sadiku and Sidi. The shortcoming of the work is that Malhotra does not critically engage women’s representation in the play. Malhotra concludes his argument thus:

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. The same has been depicted through his women characters that have the capability and control to rule over men (6).

Malhotra’s argument is inadequate because Soyinka’s portrayal of women in the play does not reflect Alice Walker’s conception of womanism and womanhood. The status and gender identity of women, in the play, do not present them as people who “hold a special position in the society”. No woman in the play has “the capability and control to rule over men”. In the light of this opinion, this paper argues that Malhotra’s conclusion of gender roles and identity is not balance. It is an argument which upholds patriarchal ideology of gender relations.

Women as “Necessary Evil” in The Lion and the Jewel

The Lion and the Jewel is a satirical play which focuses on the complicated love relationship between Lakunle and Sidi, as well as between Sidi and Baroka. Lakunle’s love for Sidi is threatened because of the ideological difference between them. Lakunle refuses to pay the bride price while Sidi insists that the only condition for her marriage with Lakunle is the payment of bride price. Baroka’s interest in Sidi starts when copies of magazine which celebrate Sidi arrive from Lagos. With the manipulation of Sadiku, Baroka’s eldest wife, the Baale of Ilujinle (Baroka) is able to trick Sidi into having sexual relationship with him. With the sexual relationship between Baroka and Sidi, the latter decides to reject the marriage offer of Lakunle and resolves to marry Baroka, who according to her, is full of energy.

The plot, subject matter and theme of the play present women as necessary evil. All the women in the play are presented as property and possession whose essence is subjected to need of the moment. This paper’s argument focuses on representation of all the visible women characters in the play – Sadiku, Sidi and Ailat. The discourse, in this direction, engages language use to reflect gender identity of each of the characters in the play, gender relations between the male and female characters as well as the deployment of rhetorical tropes.

All the women in the play have been indoctrinated into the gender ideology of patriarchal society through institutionalised socialisation process. In this line of thought, this paper collaborates Emenyi’s view that:

In essence, the male and female children are socialised differently: the former is groomed to be a conqueror while the latter is trained to serve his needs. The prominence given to male traits as attributes that are positively valued has culminated in the institutionalisation of male
dominance. The female is planted in domestic space as a wife and mother... (38).

Emenyi’s view is consistent with Yoruba patriarchal ideology of male dominance. Sadiku, Sidi and Ailatu have been socialised into patriarchal ideology of male dominance from childhood till their present age of existence in the play. The argument is based on the language and attitude of the major male characters (Baroka and Lakunle) in the play. All the female characters in the play are presented to play second fiddle to the whims and caprices of their male counterparts. This observation negates Malhotra’s view that women in The Lion and the Jewel demonstrate absolute control over their male counterparts. Despite that the women in the play have major roles with particular reference to the roles of Sadiku and Sidi, they are marginally represented in consistent with the Yoruba cultural ideology of patriarchy that women are to be seen and not to be heard.

Soyinka makes the audience see the women in the play as individuals who are ignorant with low intelligence to evaluate the realities around them. With this representation of women, the playwright undermines the sociological and cultural significance of women in social arrangements. Sidi’s characterisation as the bait between Baroka and Lakunle is a pre-determined attempt of the playwright to project masculine ideology of feminine weakness to resist advances from male suitors. How Soyinka presents Sidi in the play has consonance with Yoruba’s description of wayward girls as kọmọkọ̀ (which literally translates as someone with no moral strength to decline request). This argument is validated with the overt and covert acceptance that Sidi gives to the love request from Baroka and Lakunle. The excerpt below shows Sidi’s acceptance of Lakunle’s proposal of marriage:

SIDI: Now there you go again. One little thing
And you must chirrup like a cockatoo.
You talk and talk and deafen me
With words which always sound the same
And make no meaning.
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.
(The Lion ... 7)

Sidi’s acceptance of the marriage proposal of Lakunle reveals that she is willing and ready to marry him only if a certain condition - the payment of bride price, is met. With the critical reading of the play, one can infer that Sidi agrees to Lakunle’s proposal because of the educational status of the latter. She is impressed with Lakunle’s command of English grammar. She also has the understanding that such ability will also increase her own status as the wife of the “brilliant village teacher.”
Though Sidi does not overtly accept Baroka’s marriage proposal, Soyinka presents the acceptance surreptitiously by making Sidi resolve to marry Baroka after the sexual encounter of both parties. This paper’s argument is guided by Sidi’s reaction after her sexual encounter with Baroka.

SIDI: [turns round in surprise.]
Marry who...? You thought...
Did you really think that you, and I ...
Why, did you think that after him, I could endure the touch of another man?
I who have felt the strength, the perpetual youthful zest of the panther of the trees?
And would I choose a watered-down?
A beardless version of unripened man?

(The Lion ... 63)

Sidi’s reaction after her sexual encounter with Baroka suggests that she has repressed admiration for Baroka. If not, she is expected to demonstrate her anger and sue for redress. Instead of suing for redress as offered by Lakunle, Sidi turns down the offer and proceeds to marry Baroka without the payment of bride price. The implication of Sidi’s action for women’s representation in the play is the revelation of Soyinka’s reflection of patriarchal cultural beliefs about the ways of women in love and marriage. It is a cultural belief that only God can catch a woman in love. This cultural belief has become generalised in the description of every woman in a patriarchal society.

Sidi’s action of packing to Baroka’s house without the payment of bride price is antithetical to her gender expectation. In Yoruba cultural episteme, it is abnormal of a woman to woo a man or to move to his house without any customary marriage rites. The argument here, therefore, is that Sidi is not consistent with her cultural expectation with how she ends her career in Baroka’s home. The scars of her sexual intercourse with Baroka are indelible on her psyche and communal psyche. This view is consistent with Egya’s that:

The body is such a peculiar material expression of human beings that it harbours memories of whether good or bad. That is, any physical contact with the body either forcefully as an assault or wilfully as, say, ritual marks, is hard to erase. Even when body scars get blurred they are not totally removed. The scars or marks thus remain a dwelling for discourses that continually assert themselves, that constantly haunt the owners of the bodies. In a broad sense, scarred bodies are memories that gnaw at the conscience of society (240).

The hurriedly arranged marriage of Sidi with Baroka cannot, in any way, removes the scars from the consciousness of the Ilujinle people. Sidi, through the end of the play, is presented as a victim of patriarchal social codes. With how the play is concluded, the playwright presents Sidi as a pawn in the hands of her two
suitors – Baroka and Lakunle. This is because if she (Sidi) even refuses to marry Baroka and opts for Lakunle, she will die in silence of mockery and blackmail of Lakunle who prepares to marry her out of pity. The excerpt from the play reveals the mindset of Lakunle about Sidi’s misfortune:

**LAKUNLE:** [Stands over Sidi.]

Dear Sidi, we shall forget the past.
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 ... 

* (The Lion ... 60) 

The above excerpt shows that Sidi will always be at the mercy of any of Baroka and Lakunle with the loss of her virginity without the payment of the coveted bride-price.

Virginity and bride-price are patriarchal mechanisms of manipulation of women’s rights and privileges in the process of marriage. Sidi sees herself as a bad market without her virginity based of the patriarchal marital codes. The basic question here is how do we measure the virginity of a man? Is it not compulsory for a man to remain virgin until his wedding night? The focus on virginity and bride-price is Soyinka’s attempt to extent of the frontiers of patriarchal cultural codes in the dramatic genre because “since men control the public space, tradition has empowered them to define and restrict women” (Emenyi, 28).

The culture does not have any penalty for a man who rapes a woman except in some exceptional cases. Often times, a rapist goes scot free without any form of punishment while the woman-victim is excommunicated as way-ward and indecent. If there is any penalty at all, the rapist is forced to marry his woman-victim even if there is no love between them. This case is similar to Baroka-Sidi sexual encounter. The culture of Ilujinle does not see anything bad in the “rape” of Sidi by Baroka. Instead, the culture sees Baroka as a hero who still retains his status as the Lion of Ilujinle. The whole town celebrates the “victory” of Baroka over Sidi and Lakunle.

Haste’s description of women as “need – meeter to others” (69), in an attempt of patriarchal society to privilege men aptly describes Lakunle and Baroka’s interest in Sidi. Though Lakunle’s interest in Sidi begins at the pre-magazine fame (the period before copies of the white man’s magazine arrives from Lagos), his interest in Sidi is for selfish social reasons – he wants a modern wife whose beauty can be shown to the world. The excerpt below reveals this:

**LAKUNLE:**

I want to walk beside you in the street, side by side and arm in arm
just like Lagos couples I have seen high-heel shoes for the lady, red paint on her lips. And her hair is stretched like a magazine photo. I will teach you the waltz and we’ll both learn the foxtrot and we’ll spend the week-end in night-clubs at Ibadan. Oh I must show you the grandeur of towns. We’ll live there if you like or merely pay visits.
So choose. Be a modern wife, look me in the eye and give me a little kiss –like this.
[Kisses her.]
(The Lion ... 8-9)

Lakunle is aware that Sidi is not educated and yet he wants to marry her. At a point, Lakunle has compared Sidi’s stubbornness with illiterate goat. This is an indication that he is interested in Sidi’s beauty to boost his own social image as a fortunate man who is able to marry the village belle – Sidi. It is this quest for this social image that makes him agree to marry Sidi despite the latter’s loss of her virginity to Baroka.

Baroka’s interest in Sidi begins at the post-magazine fame (immediately after copies of the white man’s magazine arrive from Lagos). Though he is aware of Sidi’s beauty, the extent of this beauty has never dawned on him until copies of the magazine return from Lagos. It is at this point that Baroka realises that it is due for him to marry a new wife. Baroka Says: “Yes, yes ... it is five full months since last. I took a wife ... five full months ...” (The Lion ... 18)

Baroka’s interest in Sidi is a calculated attempt by Baroka to sustain his social and cultural image. He is respected for his authority and prowess and now with the village belle as his wife, there will be more respect for him. In the light of this, this paper’s view is that Soyinka presents women as properties to be possessed at will at any point.

Soyinka’s presentation of polygamy in the play is in such a way that women intentionally make the choice as seen in the characterisation of Sadiku, Ailatu and Sidi. Soyinka, through the use of language and characterisation of Baroka, does not condemn the greed and covetousness of men who practice polygamy. Rather, Baroka is boastful of his exploit of changing wives at will. While Ailatu, Baroka’s latest favourite wife is pulling his (Baroka’s) armpit hair, Baroka boasts:

You have not time, my dear.
Tonight I hope to take another wife.
And the honour of this task, you know, belongs by right to my latest choice.
(The Lion ... 27)
The deduction from Baroka’s statement to Ailatu is that he is confident that Sidi will become his wife by all means. In the view of Baroka within patriarchal ideology of polygamy, women are like clothes that can be used, changed and discarded anytime.

As the playwright presents polygamy, women do not see themselves as victims but rather they see themselves as collaborators. Sadiku’s characterisation with willingness to persuade Sidi to marry Baroka expresses this. As Baroka’s most senior wife, Sadiku is saddled with the task to woo and to ensure that Sidi becomes Baroka’s wife. As expected of her in patriarchal arrangement of polygamy, Sadiku is delighted in her capacity as Baroka’s most senior wife. While trying to woo Sidi, on behalf of Baroka, Sadiku convincingly states:

Sidi, have you considered what a life of bliss awaits you? Baroka swears to take no other wife after you. Do you know what it is to be the Bale’s latest wife? I’ll tell you. When he dies – and that should not be long; even the Lion has to die sometime – well, when he does; it means that you will have the honour of being the senior wife of the new Bale. And just think, until Baroka dies, you shall be his favourite. No living in the outhouse for you, my girl. Your place will always be in the palace; first as the latest bride, and afterwards, as the head of the new harem ... It is a rich life, Sidi. I know. I have been in that position for forty – one years.

(The Lion ... 20-21)

The assumed royalty attached to Sadiku’s status is premeditated attempt of the patriarchal society to limit the thinking capacity of women about the harms attached to polygamy. In Yoruba cultural episteme, the motivation for polygamy is the promotion and sustenance of social and economic status of men. Baroka wants to sustain his status as the Lion of Ilujinle and the large number of wives he can marry and cater for is one of the indexes. Sadiku’s forty-one year experience in the palace has no economic value. She spends all her life in the palace to meet the needs and demands of Baroka and all his predecessors. Sadiku’s statement, therefore, suggests that Soyinka presents women as properties to be possessed in marriage.

Soyinka also presents women as reactive and not as proactive as men. The reactive nature of women (Sadiku and Sidi) makes them fall preys to Baroka’s mischievous plan to marry Sidi at all cost. Sincerely, Sidi is clever enough with her understanding of all the tricks of Baroka to get a woman she so much desires. The following dialogue between Sadiku and Sidi reveals that the latter understands Baroka’s tricks but unfortunately she still becomes a victim of these tricks.

SIDI: Ho ho! Do you think that I was only born Yesterday?
The tale of
Baroka’s little suppers,
I know all.
Tell your lord that
Sidi does not sup
with Married men.

SADIKU: They are lies, lies.
You must not believe
everything
you hear Sidi, would I
deceive you? I swear
to you ...

SIDI: Can you deny that
Every woman who has
supped with him one
night,
Becomes his wife or
concubine the next.
(The Lion... 23)

The excerpt above reveals that Sidi has
native intelligence which empowers her
to have a critical thinking about Baroka’s
invitation. Despite this and because of her
reactive nature, Sidi does not critically
evaluate the later information that Baroka
is impotent. Can an impotent man seek a
new wife? Ironically, Sidi does not sup
with Baroka in her first encounter with
him (Baroka). She ends up in Baroka’s
bed and thereby losing her virginity.

One of the basic features of women’s
reactivity that Soyinka presents in the
play is gossip. In Yoruba cultural
episteme, it is conceptualised that women
have no capability to hold information
and to keep secret. This is evident in the
statement that obinrin kò ní gogóngó (this
is literally translated that women do not
have guts to keep secret). Baroka
understands that gossip is one of Sadiku’s
weaknesses and quickly uses the
opportunity to get at Sidi. He (Baroka)
knows that Sadiku will surely expose the
secret of his impotence to the whole of
Ilujinle (if the information is actually
true) and feigns being impotent to Sadiku.
The playwright presents Sadiku as an
individual with low intelligence with her
inability to discern the underlined facts in
Baroka’s sudden change of interest in
Sidi. With the stage direction, Soyinka
reveals that Baroka intentionally informs
Sadiku of his feigns impotence knowing
that she has no capability to keep secret.
The following excerpt reveals this:

BAROKA: [as if suddenly aware
of her presence, starts
up.]
I have told this to no
one but you,
Who are my eldest,
my most faithful wife.
But if you dare parade
my shame before the
world ...
(The Lion ... 29-30)

Sadiku’s gossip of Baroka’s impotence is
at Sidi’s detriment but it makes Baroka
achieve his aim. Though the age
difference and a little exposure with
Lakunle makes Sidi suspicious of
mischief in the news of Baroka’s
impotence, she still falls victim of
Baroka’s plot. The following dialogue
between Sadiku and Sidi reveals the
latter’s ability to use her native
intelligence to critique the truth of
Baroka’s impotence:
SADIKU: Oh you are troublesome. Do you promise to tell no one?

SIDI: I swear it. Now tell me quickly. [As Sadiku whispers, her eyes widen.]
O-ho-o-o-o! But Sadiku, if he knew the truth, why did he ask me to ...
[Again Sadiku whispers.]
Ha ha! Some hope indeed. Oh Sadiku I suddenly am glad to be a woman.
[Leaps in the air.]
We won! We won! Hurray for womankind!
[Falls in behind Sadiku.]
Take warning, my masters We’ll scotch you in the end. [Lakunle enters unobserved]
(The Lion ... 33-34)

With the information about Baroka’s impotence and Sadiku’s vehemence about the truthfulness of the information, Sidi honours Baroka’s invitation for supper. The women in the The Lion and the Jewel, therefore, are presented as “the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential” (de Beauvoir, 16).

Soyinka’s The Trials of Brother Jero and Previous Researches
Since its publication, Wole Soyinka’s The Trials of Brother Jero has been widely read and performed on theatre stages across Africa and beyond. The testimony of this is found in the number of its reprints and the critical discourses it has enjoyed in journals, books, theses and dissertations.

Mireku-Gyimah’s Soyinka as satirist: A Study of The Trials of Brother Jero (2013), engages how the playwright has deployed the use of irony, exaggeration, sarcasm, invective and other rhetorical tropes to sustain the satiric tone of the play. Mireku-Gyimah’s argument is that the use of language in the play is expository and descriptive of the characters of Brother Jero, Chume and Amope. He concludes thus:

We conclude that if Soyinka effectively indulges in his criticism and successfully sends his message across as a satirist, it is because, in addition to other things, he is able to handle irony, exaggeration and invective so well that he can sustain audience interest throughout the play while urging correction (282).

Osae’s The Quest for Happiness in Wole Soyinka’s The Trials of Brother Jero critiques how individual characters in the play pursue happiness with varying degrees. Her argument is that Brother Jero yields to his emotional being rather than his rational being. She also argues that Chume always ends up unhappy despite his pursuit of happiness in Brother Jero’s
church. She, however, commends Amope as a woman who believes in justice and fairness. It is in the pursuit of this justice and fairness that she derives her happiness. She concludes thus:

An in-depth study of Soyinka’s the trials of Brother Jero proves that true happiness is elusive and unachievable. All the major characters analyzed display futile attempts to pursue happiness and how this pursuit makes them villainous since it tends to be selfish. Each of these characters have (sic) varied opinions concerning what brings happiness. To Jero, wealth, honor and sexual satisfaction are ends to happiness. Chume however feels that beating Amope and getting a good job will make him happy. Amope on the other hand seeks justice as a means to happiness. The barren woman seeks a child to make her happy but the Member of Parliament thinks political fame is the source of happiness. At the end of the day, they are all unhappy as they fail to attain these desires (19).

As critical as Osae’s work is, the gap is the lack of focus on the representation of women in the play. Her work does not overtly or covertly discuss the representation of women characters in the play.

Like Mireku-Gyimah’s work, Kammampoal’s *The Transformative Vision of Modern Society in Wole Soyinka’s The Trials of Brother Jero* also treats the playwright’s use of satire in the thematic construction of the play. He brings out how satirical elements have contributed to the conflicts and resolution of these conflicts in the play. The critic argues that, through the proper use of satire and language of the play, Wole Soyinka collapses the time frame of the past, the present and the future in consistence with Aristotelian conception of unity of time. In his work, Kammampoal establishes that:

Wole Soyinka ridicules traditions and norms of post-independence society where it is believed that religious beliefs regulate a believer’s actions by promise of reward or by the threat of punishment. But Wole Soyinka satirizes the hypocrisy of “pastors” and “brothers” who are skillful in grasping of contemporary man’s psychology who strongly believes that the “imported religion” is an important acumen which can protect them from “material want”, disease, accidents and many other earthly sorrows (11).
Osoba’s *A Linguistic Analysis of Wole Soyinka’s The Trials of Brother Jero* engages the play from the perspectives of language. The critic argues that Soyinka masterly uses language to convey the subject matter and themes of the play. As a dramatic discourse, Osoba observes how Wole Soyinka has deployed pragmatic/discourse tools to present the characterization, subject matter and themes of the play. He engages the play from pure linguistic corpus. His emphasis is on presuppositions to get the inherent ideology of the text. He, therefore, concludes as follows:

Our examination of presuppositions in the 29 utterances of the extract from Wole Soyinka’s *The Trials of Brother Jero* points to the fact that it is possible to explicate literary/dramatic discourses from a linguistic perspective. Just as in real life, presuppositions abound in the dramatic text that we examined. The initial utterances of the interlocutors trigger in the reader or audience positive presuppositions that are appropriate in light of their religious setting. Thus the social background of the characters helps in our understanding and interpretations of the presuppositions inherent in their utterances. For instance, the presuppositions of appreciation, meekness and prayerfulness are initially portrayed. But gradually, the presupposition that women are evil is expressed. Chume’s ignorance of the true relationship between Jero and his wife is offered to the audience for them to construct a presupposition. Jero’s ignorance that the woman he had had an encounter with earlier that is Chume’s wife is also presupposed (46).

Raimi’s *The Use of Dramatic Language in Wole Soyinka’s The Trials of Brother Jero* investigates the contributions of language to the overall success of the play. In his work, he considers the use and contribution of verbal and non-verbal language to the overall ethics and aesthetics of the play. In his argument, he concludes thus:

The study of dramatic language in *The Trials of Brother Jero* has helped to shed light on the distinctive features of Brother Jero. He is not a man of God he says he is. A true prophet increases the faith of worshippers and gets them closer to God. But he behaves as an obstacle between them and God. He is at the antipodes of religion. The verbal, as well as the non-verbal language used by Wole Soyinka in the play, converge to shed light on his true nature. His main flaw is hypocrisy defined as the contrivance of a false appearance of virtue or goodness, while concealing real character or inclinations, especially with respect to
religious and moral beliefs [xii]. All monotheist religions consider hypocrisy a sin, particularly a great sin if the hypocrite is a religious leader. He betrays when he is trusted. He lies when he speaks. He breaks promise when he makes some. (Emphasis as in the original 12).

The above previous researches and many others have not engaged the play from the viewpoints of women’s representation. This gap in knowledge justifies the significance of this paper to scholarship.

Women as Daughters of Discord in The Trials of Brother Jero
The Trials of Brother Jero is a religious satire which ridicules religious hypocrisy and bigotry in post-colonial African societies. Prophet Jeroboam (Brother Jero) runs a church on a particular beach and he makes his congregations believe that he does not have a home he sleeps in. To distinguish himself from other prophets, he buys velvet cape on credit from Amope, who happens to be a wife of Chume, one of Brother Jero’s gullible followers. Brother Jero’s knowledge of the real identity of Amope as the wife of Chume complicates the plot of the play because he (Brother Jero) allows Chume to beat his wife after so many years of waiting to do this. Eventually, Chume realises that he has been fooled by Brother Jero all this while.

The language, plot, subject matter and the rhetorical tropes used by Wole Soyinka presents women as daughters of discord. Brother Jero’s response to the Old Prophet hints at how women are perceived in society and context of the play. The women are presented as individuals that can be used to achieve men’s goals particularly in difficult situations. Brother Jero claims that he uses some French girls to assist the Old Prophet to acquire a piece of land on the beach. He (Brother Jero) sees nothing serious in the curse of Old Prophet because he knows his own weakness with women. The following excerpt reveals this:

JERO. Actually that was a very cheap curse. He knew very well that I had one weakness – women. Not my fault, mind you. You must admit that I am rather good looking … no, don’t be misled, I am not all vain. Nevertheless, I decided to be on my guard. The call of prophecy is in my blood and I would not risk my calling with the fickleness of women. So I kept away from them. I am still single and since that day when I came into my own, no scandal has ever touched my name. And it was a sad day indeed when I woke up one morning and the first thing to meet my eyes was a daughter of Eve. You may compare that feeling with waking up and finding a vulture crouched on your bedpost.

(The Trials … 11)

Soyinka’s description of women as daughters of evil is a biblical reference to
the idea of the original sin as narrated in the Bible as well as in the Quran. The narratives of the original sin accuse Evil as a temptress who implicates Adam. The inference from Brother Jero’s speech is that he does not live a saintly life. Brother Jero has no serious issue with pre-marital and adulterous sex. This argument is informed with the consideration for the social and cultural backgrounds of Brother Jero. This argument is consistent with Ogundipe’s (41) view that:

There was no serpent in a garden to give rise to a femininity that is the mother of all evil and, by that token, definitely not sacred anymore. The lack of the concept of original sin in most African autochthonous cultures provides Africans with a guilt-free psyche from which to perform in the world.

On several occasions in the play, Brother Jero falls into women’s temptation. This shows that he has no moral reservation for fornication and adultery. In the light of this argument, this paper maintains that Soyinka is not fair with women for calling them daughters of Evil and daughters of discord.

Amope, the fish seller and the penitent woman in the play are represented as trouble makers and daughters of discord. In the first encounter of readers/audience with Amope, Soyinka presents her as a nagging, disrespectful and unrepentant wife who is not satisfied with whatever Chume, her husband does. A critical character analysis of Amope will reveal her as a goal-getter and a woman with so much determination to pursue what she believes in. This attribute of Amope is placed at the background in the play because Soyinka overplays Brother Jero and Chume’s reactions to her determination to achieve her goal — collecting her debt and ensuring a better life for her husband. Chume retorts that “women are a plague, brother”. Chume’s description of women is a patriarchal representation of women. In a patriarchal society, efforts and actions of women are not always appreciated. Brother Jero has the same conception of women.

JERO. No, no. I was only thinking how little women have changed since Eve, since Delilah, since Jezebel. But we must be strong of heart. I have my own cross too, Brother Chume. This morning alone I have been thrice in conflict with the daughters of discord. First there was … no, never mind that. There is another who crosses my path every day. Goes to swim just over there and then waits for me to be in the midst of my meditation before she swings her hips across here, flaunting her near nakedness before my eyes …

(The Trials … 31)

Jero’s view about women still has biblical allusion to the destructive capabilities of women such as Eve, Delilah and Jezebel.
These women at different points in historical/mythical time have caused the fall of their respective husbands. Brother Jero’s statement is an excuse for shifting blames of his own weaknesses to women. He only interprets the Bible to his own favour by ignoring his own moral and spiritual weakness to resist women’s trials.

Soyinka’s representation of Amope reveals her as troublemaker and daughter of discord at home and in the church. The two men in her life, Chume (her husband) and Brother Jero (her debtor) do not appreciate all her positive attributes as someone with energy and business sense for economic empowerment. She has a problem with her husband because she wants him (Chume) to be proactive and determined for improved standard of living like others in Chume’s category. She insists on this because she knows that improvement in the social and economic status of her husband will also be improvement in her own social and economic status. She is in problem with Brother Jero because she lays siege to collect her debt from him. With this representation of Amope and the two men (Chume and Brother Jero), Soyinka sustains the patriarchal conception of women as object of possession and control by men.

With the representation of the penitent woman in the play, Soyinka upholds patriarchal ideology that child bearing is central to marriage in Yoruba cultural episteme. In this cultural episteme, a barren woman has no space in marriage and the entire society. Despite her problem, the penitent woman is sensitive to the situations around her in the church. On the penitent woman’s activity, Brother Jero retorts:

The next one to arrive is my most faithful penitent. She wants children, so she is quite a sad case. Or you would think so. But even in the midst of her most self-abasing convulsions, she manages to notice everything that goes on around her. In fact, I had better get back to the service. She is always the one to tell me that my mind is not on the service (The Trials …25).

Despite the minor role of the penitent woman in the play, she demonstrates a major control over Brother Jero’s excesses. Proactive people like the penitent woman are needed in contemporary churches and other worship centers such as mosques. This will reduce the rate of religious bigotry that most African societies currently face.

Unconsciously, Wole Soyinka has projected the tenets of womanism with the representation of women characters in The Lion and the Jewel and The Trials of Brother Jero. This view might be the intended literary ideology of the text. The playwright has presented the positive
qualities of the women characters while representing their vices. The core tenet of womanism is the emphasis on mutual coexistence between male and female in society. This negates the core tenets of Western feminism which is dialectical and utopian. The lives of the male characters in the plays will not be complete without their female counterparts. Baroka is able to promote his social status with his marriage with Sidi, the village belle. Similarly, Baroka succeeds in his plot to marry Sidi with the contributions of Sadiku. Amope and the penitent woman in *The Trials of Brother Jero* are catalysts of change and awareness in the play. They serve as checks to the hypocrisy and excesses of Brother Jero beyond the intellectual capabilities of male characters such as Chume. It is, therefore, argued that womanism as a black-centered theory is accommodationist and both males and females can adopt its tenets in their literary creativity. In this line of thought, this paper corroborates Ogunyemi’s view that:

Womanism is black-centred, it is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism. Unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black men and black children and will see to it that men change their sexist stand (63).

It can be said that Soyinka’s ‘rigidity’ with patriarchal ideology prompts him to present his female characters as appendages to their male counterparts. This rigidity, however, is faulted with the ideology of the text which re-reads the text from gynocritical (a theoretical reading of literary texts from the perspectives of women ideology) perspectives. The frontiers of women’s representation have been expanded beyond the limitations of patriarchal ideology of gender representation in male-authored texts.

**Conclusion**

The paper has examined women’s representation in Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel* and *The Trials of Brother Jero*. The two plays have become classics among Soyinka’s plays. The previous researches on the two plays did not cover categorically the areas of women’s representation. Soyinka’s representation of women in the two plays is ambivalent because the female characters in the two plays display some native intelligence which makes them perform better that their male counterparts especially in *The Trials of Brother Jero*. With the tenets of womanism, it is inferred that Soyinka surreptitiously submits that no person is indispensable in social matrix. It is to this end that individuals should play complementary roles. The characterisation of the two plays, therefore, contributes greatly to the development and advancement of their plot. At the same time, the plays’ characterisation contributes to the conflicts and their resolution. The ideology of the text, therefore, suggests that gender studies should be critical in the reading and discourse of the content and themes of literary texts. Female
characters in literary texts, therefore, should be studied beyond the stereotypic roles imposed on them by the patriarchal society.

**Works Cited**


