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Literary Exploration of Forced Marriage: a Postcolonial Feminist Analysis of Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again*

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ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the portrayal of forced marriage in African society through a postcolonial feminist analysis of Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* (1972) and Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1977). Forced marriage, a pervasive socio-cultural practice and human rights violation, disproportionately restricts women's autonomy, perpetuating gender inequality in African contexts. Using Gayatri Spivak's concepts of subalternity, epistemic violence, and strategic essentialism, the paper explores how these plays critique the patriarchal and socio economic structures that enforce coerced unions. In *Wedlock of the Gods*, Sofola depicts the tragic consequences of Ogwoma's forced marriage, exploring how cultural taboos and parental dominance silence female agency, leading to her fatal resistance. Conversely, Rotimi's satirical *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* portrays women like Sikira and Liza transitioning from subaltern silence to feminist resistance, challenging patriarchal control through political awakening. The paper analyses literary devices symbolism, irony, satire, and dialogue to demonstrate how both plays amplify their critique of forced marriage. By integrating empirical research on socio-economic drivers like poverty and gender inequality, the paper bridges literary narratives with real world implications in Nigeria. It reveals how forced marriage, rooted in patriarchal traditions, undermines women's rights and societal cohesion, necessitating interventions like education and legal reforms. The findings contribute to gender studies and African literary discourse by highlighting literature's role in advocating for social change. The paper underscores the need for continued research into African drama's portrayal of gender based oppression and strategies for empowering women to resist forced marriage, fostering a reimagining of cultural norms to prioritize individual autonomy and equality.*

Keywords: Forced Marriage; Postcolonial Feminism; Subalternity; Epistemic Violence; Patriarchal Structures; African Drama; Gender Inequality; Women's Agency.



1.1 INTRODUCTION

Marriage is a powerful institution in the society; it is supposed to be a union that unites families and by extension communities. Even with its well intended purpose, contemporary marital challenges continue to attract individuals, groups, media, and literary writers. Marital lives seem interesting as captured by the media and reflected by poets, novelists, and playwrights. This paper aims at studying the reflection of family life with particular emphasis on families where the wives are presented as being unwillingly engaged to live with their partners (husband) for life. Literary works like *Pride and Prejudice* that addresses the plight of women, *Purple Hibiscus*, *Song of Lawino* (a poem) that presents intra-gender conflict, works such as *Wedlock of the Gods* (1972), and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1977), adopted as sources of data for this research, reveal the gender roles and challenges women face in society. Contemporary marriages raise questions about who to trust in love, as there are cases of partners losing their lives in the hands of 'loved ones.' If lovebirds can lose their lives, what about partners forced into the union? What does life have for them? Specifically, for her, as the work focuses more on the plight of women who are forced to live with

a husband other than their choice. Forced marriage remains a deeply entrenched socio-cultural phenomenon that violates fundamental human rights and disproportionately affects women and girls (Rele 48; United Nations 67). Unlike consensual unions, forced marriages occur when individuals are compelled into matrimony without their free will, often due to cultural, economic, or religious factors (Chantler et al. 14; Rauf et al. 20). This coercion leads to severe physical, emotional, and psychological consequences, limiting personal agency and restricting access to education, financial independence, and social mobility. The global recognition of forced marriage as a form of gender-based violence and a human rights violation underscores the urgency of addressing its root causes and mitigating its impact.

Historically, marriage has evolved from a strategic institution designed to preserve lineage and economic stability to a more individual-centered partnership based on mutual consent. However, cultural variations in marriage practices have persisted, with many societies continuing to uphold arranged and forced marriages under the pretext of tradition, family honour, or economic security. Despite the Universal Declaration of Human



Rights explicitly stating that marriage should be entered into with the “free and full consent” of both parties (United Nation 17), many communities disregard this principle, subjecting individuals, especially young girls, to coercion and subjugation. In African contexts, this practice is amplified by colonial legacies that intertwined with pre existing patriarchal systems, creating hybrid structures of oppression that continue to marginalize women. For instance, in postcolonial Nigeria, forced marriage often intersects with economic hardships, where families view daughters as commodities to alleviate poverty or secure alliances, thereby erasing their voices and perpetuating cycles of subalternity. Africa, a continent marked by rich cultural diversity, exhibits significant variations in marriage practices influenced by religious and traditional beliefs. While marriage is widely regarded as a cornerstone of social stability and continuity, the persistence of forced unions reflects deeply rooted patriarchal structures that prioritize familial obligations over individual autonomy. In African countries like Nigeria, forced marriage remains prevalent, particularly in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities where poverty, gender inequality, and lack of education intersect to perpetuate this practice. In Northern Nigeria, for instance, forced marriage is often justified

through religious and cultural interpretations that endorse early marriage, polygamy, and male dominance in marital decisions (Adediran; Molokwu et al. 32). Similarly, in Egypt, economic hardships and gender disparities exacerbate the vulnerability of young girls (Dlamini; Robic 44; Pourtaheri et al. 22), compelling families to arrange marriages as a survival strategy. These practices not only violate international human rights standards but also contribute to broader societal issues such as high dropout rates among girls, increased domestic violence, and intergenerational poverty.

The literary works of Zulu Sofola and Ola Rotimi provide critical insights into the oppressive nature of forced marriage and its consequences for women’s autonomy and well-being. Sofola’s *Wedlock of the Gods* portrays the struggles of a young woman resisting an imposed marriage, exposing the socio-cultural mechanisms that enforce female subjugation. Likewise, Rotimi’s *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* uses sharp wit and cultural collision to expose the fallout of an imposed marriage, showing how tradition-driven unions without consent fracture individual identity, breed emotional turmoil, and sow discord within the community. Through these narratives, both authors challenge the societal norms that



sustain forced marriage and emphasize the urgent need for reform. A multidimensional approach, including strengthening legal frameworks, education, economic empowerment, and public awareness campaigns, is essential to combat and prevent forced marriage. This study examined forced marriage using Spivak's approach to postcolonial literary theory, shedding light on the complex issue of forced marriage and how it factors into the socioeconomic realities of individuals in the African societal context.

Marriage, as a social institution, has been extensively explored in literary studies, particularly in the context of African societies where cultural, economic, domestic violence, and patriarchal structures shape marital dynamics. Existing scholarship has addressed various societal issues impacting women within marital and familial contexts, including infertility, gendered power imbalances, educational disparities, and domestic subjugation. For instance, studies have examined societal blame on women for infertility (Molokwu et al. 55; Pourtaheri et al. 67), the perception of women as men's possessions (Judith 25), and the denial of formal education for women (Delprato et al. 32; Judith 25; Kok et al. 87). Additionally, research has explored the domestication of women within patriarchal

frameworks (Walker et al. 50; Molokwu et al. 7) and their exclusion from political agency. These studies collectively corroborated the systemic gender inequalities embedded in societal expectations and marital practices. Despite the breadth of this scholarship, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning the specific exploration of forced marriage within African literary contexts. While literary works like Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* address marital pressures, comparative analyses of African drama focusing on forced marriage through a postcolonial feminist lens are limited. This study addresses this gap by analyzing Sofola's and Rotimi's plays, integrating socio-economic factors and highlighting literature's role in advocating for change. The aim is to explore the effects of forced marriage on women in the selected texts, with objectives to examine the concept in contemporary African society, analyse literary devices, apply postcolonial theory, and interrogate parental dominance.

1.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The feminist literary theory provides the springboard for the critical discourse on Okoye's selected text. Jonas Akung observes that feminist criticism identifies those areas of female oppression and exclusion and exposes them.



This takes place in the explication of literary texts to see how these vices are imposed on women. We equally see the efforts made at rectifying inequalities in domestic and circular relations, particularly in defining women's rights within and outside marriage by creating characters that become the speaking voices of women. According to Chizoba Akpan, the focal thrust of feminism generally is centered on the advocacy for the liberation and dismantling of toxic patriarchal machinations (222).

The choice of the feminist theory is basically to bring to the fore some of the basic concerns of women as they aspire towards a non-gendered society. Zainab Abdulkarim posits that: "what female writers desire is an avenue to use their fictional writings to review the plight of the African woman through disarming tradition, cultural and social structures that oppose women's development as well as providing alternatives" (335). It is our purpose here to dwell on feminism as the most eclectic means of advancing for positive change in the lives of women. The feminist theory is a guiding set of beliefs and principles that become the basis for action. The feminists therefore seek to change the position of women or ideas about women through different concepts such as Negofeminism and the like.

This paper employs a qualitative research design, which combines

literary and socio-cultural analysis to study forced marriage in the selected plays. Data collection involves close reading and thematic analysis of *Wedlock of the Gods* and *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* as primary sources, supplemented by secondary desk research on forced marriage in Nigeria. The analysis employs Spivak's postcolonial framework, focusing on concepts like subalternity, epistemic violence, and strategic essentialism to examine how patriarchal and colonial legacies silence women. Ethical considerations include cultural sensitivity, respect for subaltern agency, and academic integrity. The paper justifies the case study approach, noting the plays' complementary portrayals of forced marriage tragic in Sofola's work and satirical in Rotimi's allowing for a nuanced exploration of the theme.

1.2.1 POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM

In addition to this, I equally consider Obioma Nnaemeka's *Nego-Feminism*. Negofeminism is a subset of feminism. It is the feminism of negotiation. It aspires to change the world by regenerating humanity in an outstanding way; this can be achieved as it negotiates peace between warring parties. It usefully brings together analyses of key issues, events and arguments among the sexes that have been over heated and are resolved through dialogue and compromise.



Postcolonial feminism interrogates the dual oppression of gender and colonial legacies. Spivak's framework highlights how women in formerly colonized societies remain subaltern, their voices suppressed by intersecting patriarchies. In African drama, this lens exposes forced marriage as a continuation of epistemic violence, commodifying women while justifying it through tradition. Spivak's concepts of subalternity (the silencing of marginalized voices), epistemic violence (erasure of knowledge systems), and strategic essentialism (temporary unification for resistance) guide the analysis (Spivak 271-313). This framework examines how colonial and patriarchal legacies intersect to oppress women in forced marriages, yet it also uncovers moments of resistance where women reclaim agency through collective or individual acts of defiance. For instance, in postcolonial African contexts, forced marriage is not merely a cultural relic but a product of epistemic violence that erases women's knowledge and experiences, rendering them invisible in historical and social narratives. Strategic essentialism allows female characters to temporarily align as a group to challenge these structures, as seen in the plays' depictions of solidarity among oppressed women. This theoretical lens is particularly apt for African literature, where

colonial histories have amplified pre-existing gender hierarchies, creating layered oppressions that demand nuanced critique.

2.0 TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

2.1 Wedlock of the Gods: Tragedy and Subaltern Silencing

For *Wedlock of the Gods*, the analysis focuses on Ogwoma's subaltern status, silenced by patriarchal traditions and taboos that enforce her forced marriage. The play critiques the spiritual and cultural mechanisms that deny women agency, with male characters acting as enforcers of epistemic violence. Taboos are examined as tools of patriarchal control, culminating in Ogwoma's tragic resistance through suicide. In Sofola's play, Ogwoma is forced into marriage with Adigwu despite her love for Uloko. Cultural taboos and parental authority enforce silence, embodying epistemic violence. Ogwoma's defiance culminates in suicide, a tragic act of resistance against patriarchal entrapment. Symbolism (e.g., binding rituals) and irony underscore the destructive consequences of coerced unions, portraying women as victims yet highlighting their potential for fatal rebellion. The play adheres to a tragic structure, with forced marriage as the catalyst for conflict, leading to a cathartic resolution. The escalating tension between Ogwoma's defiance and societal pressure builds towards an



inevitable tragedy, reinforcing the destructive impact of forced unions. Characters are archetypes of traditional society Ogwoma as the rebellious woman, her parents as enforcers of custom, and Uloko as the passive beneficiary of patriarchy. This characterisation amplifies the critique of forced marriage by showing how it dehumanises individuals. Vivid imagery of rituals, such as funeral rites and marital ceremonies, evokes the weight of tradition. The recurring image of chains or binding reinforces the theme of entrapment in forced marriage. Allusions to Igbo mythology and religious practices underscore the cultural context of forced marriage, framing it as a divine mandate that characters struggle against. Sofola depicts the tragic consequences of Ogwoma's forced marriage, exploring how cultural taboos and parental dominance silence female agency, leading to her fatal resistance. The concept of forced marriage in the contemporary African society is vividly illustrated, where women are portrayed through a postcolonial feminist analysis as subaltern figures subjected to epistemic violence. Men act as patriarchal agents and custodians of silence, while taboos receive a postcolonial feminist reading as instruments of control.

2.2 Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again: Satire and Emerging Agency

In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, this analysis highlights the satirical critique of forced marriage through Lejoka-Brown's polygamous household, where women like Sikira and Liza transition from silence to agency. The play exposes economic and lineage pressures as drivers of coerced unions, with Liza's feminist resistance challenging patriarchal norms. Literary devices such as symbolism, irony, satire, and dialogue are analysed in both plays, enhancing their critique of forced marriage and gender dynamics. Rotimi's satire depicts Major Lejoka-Brown's polygamous forced marriages, where forced marital arrangements stem from economic and lineage pressures. Characters like Sikira and Liza evolve from subaltern silence to vocal resistance, employing strategic essentialism through solidarity and political engagement. Satire, dialogue, and farce expose patriarchal absurdity, offering hope for transformation in postcolonial modernity. The play's comedic structure, with its farcical situations and witty banter, lightens the critique of forced marriage but does not dilute it. The resolution, where Lejoka-Brown's plans are thwarted, offers a humorous yet pointed commentary on the need for gender equality. Lejoka-Brown is a caricature of patriarchal hubris,



while his wives, particularly Sikira, embody resistance and modernity. Through dynamic characterisation, Rotimi highlights the shifting gender dynamics that challenge forced marriage. Political imagery, such as campaign rallies and slogans, parallels the power struggles within marriage. The chaotic household is depicted through lively, cluttered stage imagery, reflecting the disorder caused by patriarchal overreach. Allusions to Nigerian politics and military culture critique the broader societal structures that perpetuate gender inequality, linking forced marriage to systemic power dynamics. Forced marriage in the contemporary African society receives a postcolonial feminist analysis, with patriarchal authority and marital arrangements scrutinized. Economic and lineage pressures on families are explored through a postcolonial feminist lens, while marriage as a social contract versus individual agency undergoes critique.

2.3 Literary Devices and Comparative Critique

Both plays employ a rich array of literary devices to critique the effects of forced marriage in African society. Sofola's tragic approach uses symbolism, irony, and imagery to establish the devastating consequences of patriarchal traditions, while Rotimi's comedic style leverages satire, dialogue, and metaphor to expose their absurdity

and advocate for change. Together, these devices not only enhance the aesthetic quality of the plays but also deepen their social commentary, making them powerful tools for examining gender dynamics and cultural practices. In *Wedlock of the Gods*: The play adheres to a tragic structure, with forced marriage as the catalyst for conflict, leading to a cathartic resolution. The escalating tension between Ogwoma's defiance and societal pressure builds towards an inevitable tragedy, reinforcing the destructive impact of forced unions. In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*: The play's comedic structure, with its farcical situations and witty banter, lightens the critique of forced marriage but does not dilute it. The resolution, where Lejoka-Brown's plans are thwarted, offers a humorous yet pointed commentary on the need for gender equality. Characterisation: In *Wedlock of the Gods*: Characters are archetypes of traditional society Ogwoma as the rebellious woman, her parents as enforcers of custom, and Uloko as the passive beneficiary of patriarchy. This characterisation amplifies the critique of forced marriage by showing how it dehumanises individuals. In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*: Lejoka-Brown is a caricature of patriarchal hubris, while his wives, particularly Sikira, embody resistance and modernity. Through dynamic characterisation,



Rotimi highlights the shifting gender dynamics that challenge forced marriage. Imagery: In *Wedlock of the Gods*: Vivid imagery of rituals, such as funeral rites and marital ceremonies, evokes the weight of tradition. The recurring image of chains or binding reinforces the theme of entrapment in forced marriage. In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*: Political imagery, such as campaign rallies and slogans, parallels the power struggles within marriage. The chaotic household is depicted through lively, cluttered stage imagery, reflecting the disorder caused by patriarchal overreach. Allusion: In *Wedlock of the Gods*: Allusions to Igbo mythology and religious practices underscore the cultural context of forced marriage, framing it as a divine mandate that characters struggle against. In *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*: Allusions to Nigerian politics and military culture critique the broader societal structures that perpetuate gender inequality, linking forced marriage to systemic power dynamics.

3.0 CONCLUSION

The paper examined the theme of forced marriage in African society, focusing on its portrayal in Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* (1972) and Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1977). Using a postcolonial feminist lens,

particularly Gayatri Spivak's concepts of subalternity and epistemic violence, the paper analyses how these literary works critique the socio-cultural and patriarchal structures that perpetuate forced marriage, emphasizing its impact on women's autonomy and agency. The aim is to explore the effects of forced marriage on women in the selected texts, with objectives to examine the concept in contemporary African society, analyse literary devices, apply postcolonial theory, and interrogate parental dominance.

The play exposes the epistemic violence embedded in cultural practices that prioritise communal honour over individual desires, rendering women like Ogwoma voiceless within their own communities. Conversely, Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* employs satire to critique forced marriage through the lens of postcolonial modernity, with characters like Sikira and Liza transitioning from silence to resistance. The play underscores how economic and lineage pressures commodify women, yet it also offers hope through the emergence of female solidarity and feminist consciousness, suggesting the potential for transformation within oppressive systems. The paper's findings contribute significantly to literary and gender studies by bridging empirical socio-economic research with literary



analysis, demonstrating how African drama serves as a medium for social critique and advocacy. The use of literary devices such as symbolism, irony, satire, and dialogue in both plays enhances their ability to challenge patriarchal norms and amplify subaltern voices. By examining parental dominance and its impact on marital decision-making, the paper presents the need to address forced marriage as a human rights violation, necessitating interventions that promote education, legal reforms, and cultural re-evaluation. In addition, this research affirms the enduring relevance of Sofola's and Rotimi's works in depicting the complexities of forced marriage in African contexts. It calls for continued scholarly engagement with African literature as a tool for understanding and combating gender-based oppression. Future research could explore additional literary works or incorporate comparative analyses across different African regions to further illuminate strategies for empowering women and dismantling the structures that sustain forced marriage.

The paper highlights the role of African drama as a tool for raising awareness and challenging cultural norms that perpetuate forced marriage. By examining the agency and resistance of female characters, it underscores literature's potential to influence public perception and

policy, advancing gender studies and human rights discourse.

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