

“Womanpressionism” in Zulu Sofola’s Wedlock of the Gods

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Abstract

The argument that “women are their own worst enemies” has become a cliché in social and political gathering where the issue of gender balance is in discussion, especially in Africa. In this paper I look at the import of the statement against the backdrop of Zulu Sofola’s popular play *Wedlock of the Gods*. For clarity of purpose, I adopt the concept of “Womanpressionism” - a term developed by Julius-Adeoye ‘Rantimi Jays in relation to intra-gender repression - as a working theory to interrogate the behavioural pattern of the female characters in the chosen play against spousal aspiration of one their kind. In the paper, I conclude that the female characters in the world of the play are reflection of most women in Africa’s socio-political and economic space. It is my opinion that in *Wedlock of the Gods*, Sofola reflects the social reality of women as commodity that are exchange based on the value placed on them by external factors like parents and community they come from in the Igbo society of Southeast Nigeria, and that the hegemony is being sustained by the womenfolk rather than the men.

Introduction

The idea of the masculine oppressive nature towards the feminine gender in many

African societies is desirable and of significance to pursue, however, the oppressive disposition of the female gender to its “vaginitic” kind takes an overriding concern. This because, woman who oppress other women are entrenching patriarchal hegemony against her kind whom she ought to protect with her newly found position of authority. Therefore, the concept of “womanpressionism” which looks at the oppression of women with modest means of existence by women with influence (both in literary texts and in the larger human society) and authority lends itself as a vehicle in the analysis of chosen text¹. If I follow the position of Hudson-Weems (1997: 79) that, “we are at a critical juncture in life regarding our destiny as an oppressed people”, then, as a woman, it is important to beam the searchlight on ourselves (womenfolk), in order to see how we are perpetrating the same oppression on our kinds, when our strengths actually in the bond of togetherness and number. This lends credence to the Yoruba philosophy “Osusu owo, ni ngba ile mo, kinse ni eyoeyo” (It is the bunch of broom that sweeps the earth clean and not by the single strand). Shelley Zalis (2019) opines:

I always say a woman alone has power; collectively we have impact. Traditionally we have been taught to be competitive with one another, because there was such a scarcity of jobs at the top. It’s so clear that strategy doesn’t work. The truth is that raising each other up and channeling the power of collaboration is truly how we’ll change the equation—and have a lot more fun along the way (online).

¹“Womanpressionism” is a concept, which highlights female intra-gender repression in African literature and societies. At the moment I am working with Dr. Julius-Adeoye R.J, espousing this theory further in two papers already submitted for publication in different journals.

The above quote recognises the power in women collectiveness rather than as antagonist of individual's aspiration. In Julius-Adeoye's berates women of material substance who oppress those without, thus, "playing class role within female intra-gender, ought to be seen by all women as injurious to the collective aspiration of dismantling the patriarchal hegemony which is the big obstacle to the gender's political and societal achievement."² It will be against female gender's aspiration of collective emancipation from the status quo, if the "supposed elites" among the group isolates itself from the rest of the group after attaining the elitist status. In this regard, a collective frontal attack of this obstacle is of necessity.

According to Ojediran (2012), "one of the expectations of female readers is to see new writing and reading collectives, female characters who can effect the necessary changes that society has denied them, by realising fellow women's experiences as socio-cultural and socio-biological art" (11). In this regard, it is essential to ask, what are the relationships between female characters in Sofola's plays? One can only proffer answers to the question by analysing the characteristics of some female characters in selected dramatic texts by the playwrights through the language and position occupied by these characters. Expectation should be that Sofola would make a conscious attempt in the presentation of female characters that are burden sharers. This expectation is justified, considering the playwright's position as the precursor of womanism theory, as opined by M.E.M. Kolawole (1997):

According to Zulu Sofola, womanism needs to seek genuine liberation of the African woman, which involves probing

African culture, values, and tradition and understanding the real location of the woman. Sofola maintains that the woman in the traditional set-up who made history did so through traditional institutional roles (39).

Though Sofola is not for dissolution of the woman's role within the traditional cultural order of the society; she is vehemently against woman playing the role of cog in the wheel of traditional woman's aspiration, as long as the aspiration will not alter the societal order and peaceful co-existence. Her position is further enhanced by the Christian faith of which she was a strong believer.

Zulu Sofola: Birth, Family and Professional Life

Zulu Sofola (22nd June 1935–5th September 1995) also known as Nwazulu Onuekwuke Okwumabua was born in Issele-Uku, Aniocha North Local Government, Delta State, Nigeria. She is the first published female playwright and the first female Professor of Theatre Arts to emerge from Nigeria. Her father Chief Francis Ogana Okwumabua and his wife Mrs Caroline Dumnodu Nwaugbade were traditional aristocrats of Igbo origin. The family holds the title of Odogwu of Issele-Ukwu Oligbo Kingdom. Her father was a Music Master at the Federal Government Primary Schools in Asaba (A school Sofola attended and sang soprano in the choir) and Ogwashi-Uku both in Delta State. She came from a lineage of performers and undoubtedly inherited her love of theatre from her family. The younger sister Elsie Nwoko is a retired Professor of Music and folk music performer and composer (Nwoko, n.d: online). Her grandmother, Madam Chiwuzo Okwumabua, was a member of the "OMU" (Queen) in council at Issele-Uku, and was a lead singer of the group. According to Esogbue

² The statement was made by Julius-Adeoye, R.J. during discussion in September 2018.

(2016), The Omu and her council of female chiefs wield immense spiritual, cultural, economic and social power over all the women in the kingdom. They have total control of the market and those trading in it (15).

She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in English from Virginia Union University in Richmond, Virginia in 1959, obtained a Master of Arts degree in Drama from the Catholic University of America in Washington, DC in 1966 and in 1977, completed her PhD in Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, and started her academic career in the same department. Sofola had her elementary education at Federal Government Primary School, Asaba, and Baptist Girls' High School (BGHS), Agbor, both in Delta State, before proceeding to Southern Baptist Seminary, Tennessee, USA, on scholarship. Ezeimoh (2016) in her work states Baptist Girls' High School, Agbor, founded in 1946, was the first all-female secondary school established by the Baptist Mission in Nigeria (9), and young Nwazulu Onuekwuke Okwumabua was one of the earliest students of the school. She was a foundation academic member of staff of Department of The Performing Arts, University of Ilorin, Nigeria, which started in 1983, and she served at various times as Head of Department. She has about twenty plays, some of which were still in manuscript at the time of her death in 1995. At the university of Ilorin, Zulu Sofola was a dancer of dexterity, actor of many parts and seasoned director with many works to her credit.

Zulu Sofola's published plays, as stated by Julius-Adeoye (2013: 60) include *The Deer Hunter and The Hunter's Pearl* (1969), *The Disturbed Peace of Christmas* (performed in 1969, published 1971), *Wedlock of the Gods* (performed 1971, published 1972), *The Operators* (1973), *King Emene: Tragedy of a Rebellion* (1974), *The Wizard of Law* (1975),

The Sweet Trap (1977), *Old Wines Are Tasty* (1981), *Memories in the Moonlight* (1986), *Song of a Maiden: A Play* (first performed in 1985 as University of Ilorin Convocation Play, published in 1992), *Lost Dreams and Other Plays*, (1992). Her unpublished plays include *That Life Must Survive* (performed for the Vice Chancellor of University of Ilorin, 1985), *Love of a Nymph* (performed for University of Ilorin Staff School in 1986), *Queen Omu-ako of Oligbo*, performed in 1989, *Eclipso and the Fantasia*, performed in 1990, *The Showers*, performed in 1991, and *Celebration of Life*, and *The Ivory Tower* performed in 1992³. Kolawole, one of Africa's foremost womanist scholars, refers to Sofola as her sister and the precursor of African womanism (7).

Critics do not consider Sofola a feminist even though female characters are the protagonists in most of her plays. According to Adekoya (2000),

Zulu Sofola is not a feminist writer if by that expression is meant a conscious attempt to subvert male hegemony and invert gender relations. Her criticism of female oppression is inscribed within the general context of social injustice. She adopts a conceptual approach that a person be treated not on the basis of gender but purely as a human being worthy of respect. However, her perspective is neither Marxist nor socialist. Basically, it is Christian and essentialist (4).

³The information on the unpublished plays are found in a material of Professor Ayo Akinwale (Formerly Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin) who assisted in the directing of some of the plays and also acted as the Technical Director in many of Zulu Sofola's productions at University of Ilorin.

Her Christian beliefs are evident in some of her plays like *The Sweet Trap* where Clara, an erring wife is told to kneel to her husband and beg for forgiveness for her disobedience. This is in line with what is found in the Bible book of Ephesians chapter 5: 22 which urges wives to be in subjection to their husbands (American Standard Version). E.S. Fido (1987), believes that Sofola “challenge readers, critics and audiences in her way of presenting issues through complex dramatic confrontations” (53). She summarizes, Sofola’s writing style thus; “...her scripts are strikingly varied in form and style, depending on the occasion for which each was written or particular interest in experimenting with a form at the time” (58). In her dramatic works, various problems in the society are dealt with, problems like miscarriage of justice in the Nigerian judiciary (*Wizard of Law*), and the consequences of flouting age-old traditions (*Wedlock of the Gods and King Emene: Tragedy of a Rebellion*).

Sofola also deals with the oppression of women in her works, but as I will subsequently show with examples from selected plays, some women are guilty of this act of oppression as they serve as enablers of patriarchy in their societies. In this chapter, I will analyse three plays: *Wedlock of the Gods*, *The Sweet Trap* and *The Wizard of Law* as evidences that woman to woman oppression occurs and it is portrayed by the female characters found in the plays of Zulu Sofola.

Critics of Sofola’s work are obtuse in the categorization of her works in relation to variety of feminists’ theories that the playwright herself was quick to repudiate. Fido (1987), in a personal interview with Sofola in 1983, states that “Sofola’s theory reinforces her own experiential reality, a woman’s reality, but such a thing cannot be apprehended by women unless they have consciously dealt with male

definitions of the female role” (53). Fido argues that,

This is the reason that much of the creative work done by women at the time is concerned with overturning false assumptions about women (or the facile claim that they are no different from men). Many women, both feminists and those who refuse the term as applicable to themselves, both inside and outside Africa, have centred their concerns on the definition of reality for women and on the necessity for women’s literatures to articulate this (53).

This view is not a reflection of Sofola’s position because it does not bring to question nor reckon societal and cultural order, and the role women play in maintaining that order. When African feminists’ concern is centred on the definition of reality for women, in order to hinge their argument on the patriarchal order of the society, one is likely to be guilty of over generalisation without recourse to the diversity of the continent and factors that make a situation acceptable. Kolawole (1997) argues,

Several factors mediate the location of African women in gender discourse and some of these are personal, others are communal. One faces a problem in any attempt to generalize about all the women on a continent as diverse and vast as Africa. Colonialism brought different kinds of affiliation to different part of the continent (5).

Sofola is mindful of the position above, and she presents her character in relation to their experiences in a particular context without generalization. Each play present different characters that are trying to navigate through the society the text present. In order to drive home this point, it is my opinion that her traditional

society of Oligbo Kingdom in Aniocha Local Government of Delta State, Nigeria, becomes a reference point in traditional plays than other part of Nigeria. Iyorwuese Hagher (1981), emphasizes the point thus:

Because of the composite nature of African continent, where there is a confluence of the traditional and the modern, there is a need for critics to treat each work on its chosen theme and to assess the work – and its success or failure –by the goals set up by the playwrights. This is necessary if we are to avoid the mistake of generalization and categorisations of plays into critical types that are false. In fact, it is as possible as it is true that an African playwright can operate in a contemporary or traditional setting or that s/he can even choose a mixed setting (161).

In making his point clearer, Hagher (1981), would point out that,

In *Wedlock of the Gods* and *King Emene*, Zulu Sofola is operating in a traditional setting; in *Sweet Trap* and *Old Wines Are Tasty*, she is operating in a contemporary setting. In *Wizard of Law*, she is operating in a mixed setting and she appropriately changes her diction to pidgin (161).

In my agreement with Ojediran's (2012: 250) position, Zulu Sofola's writing style is simple, often portrays her knowledge of self and pride of Nigeria's heritage and tradition, and Anioma worldview in particular which is celebrated in her plays through the use of names, idioms, proverbs, icons, title (as in Queen Omuko of Oligbo), and so on. These are characteristics common with all Nigerian playwrights of Sofola's generation. A generation

that includes Wole Soyinka whose language and writing style have been argued by critics as esoteric and in some instances difficult – names of characters, idioms, proverbs, icons, motifs and most cases underlying philosophy, are drawn from their individual ethnic tradition and cultural heritage. These are what define their nationalistic ethos, mythopoeic and narratives styles. Their writings are connected to the Nigerian identity as a multicultural nation state. While Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi and Wale Ogunyemi write within the understanding of the projection of their Yoruba worldview, JP Clark affirms that he derived creative ingenuity from his Ijaw cosmology. Zulu Sofola's Anioma Igbo socio-cultural background and spiritual belief remains the fulcrum upon which most of her plays rotate.

Synopsis and Analysis of *Wedlock of the Gods*

Sofola presents Ogwoma, a wilful character that is forced into marriage to Adigwu by her parents contrary to her wish, because the money from her bride price is needed to pay for the treatment required by her brother who is sick. After the death of Adigwu-the husband-whom she professes to hate, Ogwoma disregards the period of mourning as designated by tradition and becomes pregnant for Uloko (her pre-marriage lover), instead of allowing herself be inherited by Adigwu's younger brother. This decision, however, costs her life and that of the lover Uloko as her mother-in-law Odibei-who is of the opinion that Ogwoma caused the death of her son, punishes her for her abominable acts.

The oppression of women by women can take different forms. According to Ojediran (2012) citing a quote from Sandra Harding, "women vary greatly, depending on age, class, ethnic identity, sexual orientation and so on" (70). Andre Lorde (1984), in one of her essays, mentions, "generation gap" as an important tool for any repressive society. She also mentions

“ageism, elitism and classism” as sources of conflicts amongst women. According to her: “if the younger members of a community view the older members as contemptible or suspect or excess, they will never be able to join hands and examine the living memories of the community” (117). The bridge that exists in the form of differences in age between women also serves as avenues for oppression. The analysis of *Wedlock of the Gods* will focus on how the differences in age, class, and ethnic identity serve as agents of repression and oppression in woman-to-woman relationships among some of the female characters that appear in the play. I have carefully chosen the characters Odibei, Nneka, Anwasia and Ogoli from to represent women who serve as oppressors of other women.

Ogwoma, the central character in *Wedlock of the Gods*, is a defiant woman who rebels against tradition and in the words of Sofola (2001), “resorts to adultery in a desperate attempt to avoid levitation and has illicit relations with the man she had desired to marry” (8). She becomes a threat to her community order and has to be punished to serve as a deterrent to other women who might want to tow the same path. Sofola considers Ogwoma’s action within the traditional Igbo society as adultery which has its own punishment (2001: 8). In Anwasia’s own words:

Anwasia: It is a common thing that when a man dies his brother takes his wife and makes her his wife. This is what our people do. Everyone knows that (21).

However, many traditional cultures in Nigeria now frown at the transfer of a widow to the deceased’s brother; a case in point is Edo people of Benin. For other cultures that still practice the tradition, the mourning period for a widow differs from one group to the other. According to a research carried out by *Research*

Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Canada (2000), the mourning period for a widow could last for about three months to one year depending on the ethnic group. In Ogwoma’s community, the period of mourning lasts for three months.

Sofola’s goal with this play is to pursue the transmission of the traditional culture and value systems of the Anioma people. In the case of Ogwoma, the propagators of culture are the women who surround her including her mother Nneka and friend Anwasia. Odibei, her mother-in-law erroneously believes that Ogwoma is responsible for the death of her son Adigwu.

Odibei: (*Still talking to herself*) Adigwu cannot die like that.

Otubo: Odibei, people are born and people die.

Odibei: She must have hidden it somewhere.

Otubo: Ogwoma could not have killed Adigwu.

Odibei: My son cannot go like that.

Otubo: He was sick. The sickness refused all the medicines, and so he...

Odibei: Adigwu died of a swollen stomach. A man who dies like a pregnant woman did not die a natural death. Somebody killed him.

Otubo: True, but Ogwoma could not have killed her own husband.

Odibei: If she didn’t, why is she not here in those ashes?

Otubo: A man who plays the flute also blows his knows.

Odibei: Not only two months after her husband's death (6).

In some parts of Nigeria, when a husband dies the wife is almost always blamed for the demise of her spouse, notwithstanding the circumstances surrounding his death. The irony is that women relatives of the deceased are most often the accusers and enforcers of the traditional punishment. In these communities the widow is forced to undergo certain rituals, according to the Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada (2000), such as:

drinking the water that was used to wash the husband's corpse, the shaving of the widow's hair, sleeping on the ground without a blanket for a month and a week, wearing the same garments for a year, sitting on the ground motionless for a specified period of time, eating only with the unwashed left hand, and fasting. The widow's drinking of the bathing-water of her husband's corpse is a ceremony of self-exculpation whereby it is believed the widow will die if she was blameworthy for her husband's death (online).

A widow's refusal to partake in these rites means that she is the cause of her husband's death. Odibei alludes to this when she tells Uloko:

Odibei: What man of respect would find the house of a woman in mourning inviting? Is it to see her shaven head or her body in ashes that you have come? Or is it what dwells within her? (15).

Since Ogwoma did not complete the period of mourning before getting pregnant for another man, Odibei concludes that she is responsible for her husband's demise and is determined to prove it. However, when she

cannot find the supposed poison that was used to kill her son, she concludes that Ogwoma's harlotry killed him:

Otubo: (disgusted) What are you looking for?

Odibei: I am looking for the medicine she used.

Otubo: What if there is no medicine?

Odibei: Then it is her harlotry that killed my son (6).

The perpetrators of these oppressive acts against widows are almost always the women themselves. According to Emeka Esogue, the Omu (Queen) in the tradition of Anioma is the head of all women in the kingdom, and one of her numerous functions is that she "imposes fine on any woman who breaks the rule while mourning her deceased husband" (17). In the eastern part of Nigeria, especially among the Igbo ethnic group, as Okoro and Nkama (2018) note, shaving of the widow's hair, is carried out by "older widows called Umuada" (47), women who have passed through the same cultural practice. It is surprising that these women do not subject husbands to the same practices when a wife dies.⁴

According to Nwachukwu (qtd by Akinbi), at the death of a partner, it is easier for widower to face the surging crowd of intruders while it is most difficult for a widow especially when the woman knows little or nothing about her husband as a result of the man's confidentiality (67). This position is further buttressed by Akinbi (2015), when he states, "the

⁴ My knowledge of this act stems from personal experience. My mother was subjected to some of these practices when my father died in 1994. His sister and other female relatives accused her of killing him even though he had died in an accident and was not even near the scene of the accident.

wife immediately becomes the primary suspect for her husband's death, the man is immediately offered an appropriate substitution to comfort him upon the loss of his wife" (68).

Odibei is portrayed as a vindictive woman who is blinded by hatred for her daughter-in-law and wants justice to be served to the supposed killer of her son Adigwu. All the female characters in the play are scared and wary of her. Although Ogwoma is defiant in the face of tradition she is also afraid of her mother-in-law as she plans to run away for fear of what might happen to her. Anwasia also alludes to Odibei's wickedness when she cautions Ogwoma. According to her:

Anwasia: Don't forget your mother-in-law.

Ogwoma: I am ready for her.

Anwasia: Odibei is not an easy woman to deal with. It is her son who died.

Ogwoma: I am ready for her (10).

Although one can understand that the death of her son has made her distraught but her vindictiveness blinds her to the fact that Ogwoma is innocent of the allegations. Odibei does not try to comprehend the situation from Ogwoma's viewpoint.

Odibei: One does not play with Odibei like that.

Uloko: What do you mean?

Odibei: I do not allow anything to end in my hands. I suspected this dog a long time ago. It is now clear that my son died as a result of the taboos that harlot broke (16).

One can argue that, by going ahead to copulate with her lover during the mourning

period, the youthfulness and emotional attachment of Ogwoma to Uloko informs her hasty decision which override her sense of probity in relation to respect for the late husband. Perhaps this youthful impulsive action of Ogwoma and Uloko inform Iyorwuese Hagher conclusions that "*Wedlock of the Gods* is modelled after *Romeo and Juliet*" (161) by William Shakespeare. Nevertheless, one can recognize this headstrong romantic affairs and youthful impulsive action as Ogwoma and Uloko's hubris – their tragic flaw that Sofola utilize as the vehicle to drive the play. As the conversation between Ogwoma and her childhood Anwasia – childhood friend suggests:

Ogwoma: you do not understand how my heart beats. Because you were not tied like a goat and whipped along the road to a man you hated, you are not able to understand what my heart tells me.

Anwasia: Ogwoma, our people say that a man's daughter is a source of wealth to him. Your parents needed the money for a very expensive sacrifice for your brother whom sickness almost killed. You should have been happy that your money saved the life of your own brother (9).

Anwasia, a fellow woman sanctions Ogwoma's treatment at the hands of her parents. In this case, a fellow sister holds the position that validates the humiliation and commodification of the female gender as entrenched by the society. This same line of discussion can be seen in Ogwoma exchange with her mother- Nneka- who sees nothing wrong in the commodification her daughter:

Ogwoma: No, it is not the way others are given away to their husbands that you and father threw me away to

Adigwu. No, mother, you and father were so hungry for money that you tied me like a goat and threw me away to a man I hated.

Nneka: Your tongue is bad and your heart is a rock. Any good daughter with a dying brother would have told her parents to give her away to a husband and use her bridewealth to cure her brother. You did not do that. We did the best the poor parents of a dying son could have done and all we now get from you is shame and disgrace (18).

Nneka as part of the custodian and one who believe in the sustenance of the traditional practice of levirate –argues that Ogwoma cannot assert her individuality in spousal selection – even after the death of her husband:

Ogwoma: Kill me if you like but you cannot stop me from loving Uloko.

Nneka: You are a man's wife, dead or alive. Adigwu has a brother and you are his wife (20).

Nneka not empathic to her daughter's plight insists on her carrying out tradition by marrying the surviving brother of her late husband. Within the Anioma society, and indeed the traditional Igbo ethnic group that Sofola writes from, when a man dies childless, the wife is made-over to the younger brother to father children for him. In this case, children born by the brother through the woman answers the name of the deceased and inherited his properties. It is my opinion that Sofola only use *Wedlock of the Gods* to draw global attention to a cultural practice that denies woman the power to speak and make personal choice in spousal selection. I think Ellen Savoury Fido (1987) captures this about Sofola succinctly when she assert, "In a number of her

plays, she seeks to shatter [reader]⁵ audience expectation and leave important questions in the air" (58).

Ogwoma symbolise the tenacious heart of woman when in love, one who can stand against any obstacle in order to achieve the object of her desire. For her, sincerity, truth and audacious resolution become driving force, especially after initially succumbing to filial love in order to honour her parents. She believes that the natural death of Adikwu is God's way of recognising her sacrifice for the honour of her parents, and has given the chance to follow her heart and be with Uloko whom she's truly in love with.

Ogwoma: what have I done to them? I have fought for the past four years to marry a man I love, but these people will not let it be. I was tied and whipped along the road to Adigwu. Now that God has freed me they still say I am his brother's wife (21).

While, culture is dynamic and events are known to serve as the wheel which allows change to be inevitable, the women in *Wedlock of the Gods* become the instrumentality that opposes change of any aspect of tradition by upholding the commodification ideal of their gender.

Ogoli: (to Anwusia) A girl from a good family, a child with proper home training, does not receive men while the spirit of her dead husband still wanders in the bush. This shameless dog has enticed my son into an abominable act, and I cannot walk on the road (21).

Uloko's mother, Ogoli, joins the other women like Odibei, Nneka and Anwusia to call

⁵ I include reader here because the same effect is exerted on the reader as well.

Ogwoma derogatory names for daring to stand against the culture that she considers anti-woman. For Ogoli, a woman like Ogwoma is a "...shameless dog who enticed her son into an abominable act" (21). This means that women are dogs while men are humans. She believes that, men can do no wrong on their own except through the enticement of women. This assumption furthers patriarchal. She maintains this stance, even when Anwusia tries to make her see reason that both Ogwoma and Uloko are old enough to make inform decision.

Anwusia: Nne, Ogwoma and Uloko are not children.

Ogoli: Uloko knows what every well-trained son ought to know. She was given to a man as a wife. That was not enough to put an end to her hunt for my son. She will not let her marriage stop her. Her husband died, but rather than wait and let his spirit return to the world of the gods, she has enticed and dragged my son into an act of death (23).

Ogoli does not blame her son who is also culpable in this act, but blames Ogwoma. Another interesting thing is that the women keep mentioning the shame that Ogwoma has brought to them, but they refuse to ask her opinion about the issue at hand. Their behaviour smacks of self-interest. While they as women are supposed to rally around one of their own, they tear her down with violent and derogatory words and actions. Rather than women solidarity for their own, it is the men that recognize Ogwoma's sacrifices and therefore attempt to salvage the situation in her favour.

Udo: when Diokpa Ibekwe was giving Ogwoma to her husband, she came to me several times in tears because she did not want to marry Adigwu. She begged me many times to talk to her

father about it. I did so without any success. Ibekwe did not want to listen because, as he said, it was he who fathered Ogwoma and it was he who gave her away. Brothers, when the matter almost caused trouble between me and Ibekwe, I swallowed everything else. Ogwoma was led to her husband still protesting and I did not as much as look through the door to see if she was carried to Adigwu or whipped along the way like a ram to the altar (26).

Ogwoma is portrayed as a woman of stoic character and attribute, an emblem of true love for Uloko and respect for her father (Ibekwe) and family. Instead of eloping with her lover or adamantly disobeying her father, she save the family honour by soliciting the assistance of a chief within the community to plead with her father to allow her marry a man of her choosing, when this plan did not work, she allowed herself to be forced to marry a man (Adigwe) she hated. Ogwoma's love for Uloko is neither based onwealth nor materialismshows that she is more honourable than her father who chose money and gain over his daughter.

Okolie: Edozie's sickness could only hear a sacrifice to our God. But that was not all, brothers. The oracle stated clearly that before Edozie could fully recover he must be initiated into manhood even at his age of ten. Ibekwe had not enough money for all these. But rather than lean on our backs he decided to give his daughter away. It is true that a man's daughter is his source of wealth, but never have our people supported such action when there is another way to solve the problem (28).

The men of the community blame their fellow man Ibekwe for giving his daughter away

in marriage against her choice. In a society where communal living and clanship is entrenched, one only results to taken drastic action unilateral action in the family when members of the clan deny one the needed help. Okolie emphasise this in the, "...Ibekwe had not enough money for all these. But rather than lean on our backs he decided to give his daughter away..." (28). In this Ibekwe's case, he did not solicit the support of his clan for the needed money in order to carryout the sacrifice demand over the sickness of his son.

Wedlock of the Gods portrays the wicked of not only women who are trapped within a repudiating traditional culture but that of men who are weak. Uloko highlights this in an exchange with his father.

Ogoli: Son, why must you...?

Uloko: Don't you know that, had you protested enough, Ibekwe would have sought another way to solve whatever problem he had at that time that made him force from my hands the only woman who was meant for me? (43).

Odibei is weak, and camouflage her weakness with vengeful and evil character. She's unforgiving and murderous. For her, Ogwoma's stoicism is a threat to her position of being the most feared woman in the community. To eliminate Ogwoma, she becomes diabolical, entrance and commands her (Ogwoma) to poison herself.

Ogwoma: *(still in a trance; she remains so until she gets home and does what she is asked to do. Speaking slowly)* I am here.

Odibei: That is good. Go to your house, open the door and enter. Behind your water-pot is another small pot. Open it

and say into it once, 'I have done what the land forbids.' Cup your hand thrice saying before each drink, 'I have done what the land forbids', 'Let me perish', 'Let my blood appease the disgraced spirit of my husband.' Close the pot and wait for whatever comes. Is that clear? (53).

Ogwoma's death after drinking the poisoned liquid becomes the springboard for more deaths and communal taboo. In order to avenge the death of his lover, Uloko kills Odibei, and afterward takes his own life too. Uloko's suicide is a taboo not only for his family, but for the whole community as well. At this point, the tragedy becomes communal rather than an individual one that affects a recalcitrant child(ren). Therefore, one can see the relationship that exists between the women in the play, aside that of friendship between Ogwoma and Anwasia, the others are of mother and daughter, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. All the women are complicit in their condemnation of Ogwoma, they all uphold not only widowhood practice but the commodification of the female gender as entrenched by the traditional institution as well.

Conclusion

In this paper, I discussed the practice of intra-gender oppression within Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* by highlighting the role of women in the entrenchment of widowhood practice in the Igbo society as set in the play. The concept of "Womanpressionism" as theoretical framework allows me to explore the complicity of women in the subjection of widows to dehumanizing practices at their most vulnerable moment. While women are already at disadvantage position due largely to the patrilineal composition of political power of societies in Africa, it therefore becomes preposterous when

women act as agents in the debasement of fellow women. When this occurs, as is the case with Ugwoma, the trend of tragedy becomes cyclical.

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