Review

The third sex: A paradox of patriarchal oppression of the weaker man

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The study explores the paradox of potential patriarchal subjugation of weaker men. The paper is informed by the belief that is contrary to the popular view in some feminist quarters that all men in patriarchal societies enjoy protection under the male-biased society that brutalizes its weaker female members, there is, in fact, a certain class of underrepresented males who are victimized by a system believed to pamper them. Critical analysis of the African and African-American fiction has revealed that some men, too, fall victim in their attempt to obey gender expectations or in their failure to satisfy their cultural prescription. The study finds limitations in the view that dismisses all men as beneficiaries of patriarchy and, therefore, without any cause to challenge that order. Thus, the research calls for a more gender inclusive fight against patriarchy for evidence seems to suggest that patriarchy has no respect for sex though more men have benefited by it just as more women have suffered because of it.

Key words: Patriarchy, weaker man, ideal man, emasculation, feminism

INTRODUCTION

There has been a proliferation of studies steeped in gender studies linked to Feminism. Most of these studies have portrayed the relationship between the man and the woman as lopsided and tilted in favour of the man (Lerner, 1986; Kristeva, 1982). The man has been painted as the perpetrator of gender violence while the woman has almost always been the innocent victim (Millet, 1977). Recent studies, particularly by Butler, have attempted to “destabilize the heterosexist signifying chain” by suggesting that gender is not tied culturally prescription. The study

The paper is that while the subordination and margi-nalisation of women in patriarchal contexts as reflected in works of art is fairly well documented, that of the weaker man is not. For instance, while critics have been quick to rightfully condemn Okonkwo’s brutality in the way he treats his wives and children in Achebe’s Things Fall Apart, the same critics have been slow or hesitant to comment about the effect of the same societal values on the internal oppression and conduct of one who “down in his heart was not a cruel man” (p. 9).

This paper, therefore, seeks to examine the trials and tribulations of such male characters who seem to belong to a forgotten sex, what the researchers call the third sex the weaker men who are psychologically traumatized by the patriarchal values of their societies but suffer in silence because it is unmanly to express emotion. The purpose of the paper is to render visible some facts about the reality of these weaker men’s lives which could have been formerly unnoticed or less visible. It is also spurred by the realization that there is a yawning absence of a literary theory to explain or reflect the possibility of some men being casualties of the same patriarchal structures that have relegated the woman to the fringes of society.

Feminism as a literary interdisciplinary theory argues that at the centre of the gender question is the patriarchal

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exclusion from the centre and brutalization of the female sex by her more powerful male counterpart (Millet, 1977). Patriarchy as defined by Walby (1990) is the manner in which men as a social group exploit, dominate and oppress women as a social group. Such definitions have tended to “build a natural distinction between men and women” basing on one’s genitalia with men labelled “the oppressor class” (Hepburn, 2003: 102). Such a view portrays patriarchy as an institution in which the female is relegated to the lowest rungs of the social ladder while the male occupies the citadel of power at the apex of the same ladder. This tends to homogenize all men by viewing all and sundry in the male social category as perpetrators of gender aggression and never victims of patriarchy. The question that this paper will attempt to answer is whether this is always the case.

This study is mainly a library-based research of literary texts whose focal point is an attempt to demonstrate that viewing all men as oppressors of the female half is a view that has been transformed into a stereotyped idea that imprisons all men, especially in a context where Butler’s (1993) “lesbian phallus” has obliterated the view about men as the only all powerful. In order to succinctly discuss these issues, the article will make a detailed examination of selected literary works from across sub-Saharan Africa, which portray the negative impact of patriarchal values on the men. Works of literary art have been targeted because not only do they mirror particular historical or socio-cultural milieu, but also are mostly studied in schools, colleges and universities, all of which are sites of socialization where the traditional values of gender are stored and imparted. As such, these institutions can be viewed as arenas from which the solutions to gender related conflicts could be found.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In order to evaluate whether some men are victims of the patriarchal order or not, there is need to first examine the theoretical underpinnings of patriarchy as reflected in feminist discourse. An understanding of the patriarchal values and expectations on the men is central as it provides a framework by which we can weigh whether these values are injurious to the men or not. Generally, feminist scholars posit that patriarchy is an institutionalized form of male dominance over women and children, both within the family and in society in general (Lerner, 1986; Showalter, 1996). Patriarchy has been seen as the means “through which women are constituted not as subjects, but the ‘other’ they are the objects, not the subjects, of discourse” (May, 2001). In other words, feminists view the hierarchical patriarchal structure of society as the arena of women’s subordination and the architecture of discriminatory gender roles (Firestone, 1977). This view casts the women in the powerless role of biological victims of the social order and all men as occupiers of the centre of power.

Following this argument, Metcalf (1989), for instance, labels all men as “members of the oppressing class” and dismisses male writers’ attempts to participate in the production of “a true literature of liberation of the oppressed...[because] male African novelists, accomplished as they may be... are...members of the oppressing class.” This view carries the gender question onto the sexual plane where women and men are seen as locked in a dichotomous opposition with men being dismissed and lumped together into a class of oppressors. However, these mainstream criticisms of patriarchy have been seen as unhelpful to the feminist cause (May, 2001; Hepburn, 2003) as they tend to bracket out the possibility of unity in male-female struggle against the chains of patriarchy. This current research is interested in these views about patriarchy in as far as they help to explain some of the tormented fear of failure to fulfill masculine expectations by some male members of the male dominated patriarchy as represented in literary works.

On the other hand, there are emerging voices which believe that patriarchy places certain premiums and expectations on both men and women (Burck and Speed, 1995; Muchemwa and Muponde, 2007). Burck and Speed (1995: 18), for instance, argue that “…whether we are women or men, all the selves we are and could be are organized, and sometimes constrained and warped, by the various layers of the culture in which we live.” This seems to suggest that there are definite expectations that the patriarchal culture places on people irrespective of their sex.

In other words, nobody is free and exempted but all are expected to conform and adhere to their sexual social script role as determined by their culture. For this reason, sex roles for both male and female become prisons if they do not allow for individual variation. Strong and De Vault (1989: 59) further point out that “being male is not an easy task” since there are social demands peculiar to them. For instance, maleness, a biological factor, is equated with aggression, competitiveness, lack of fear, analytic reasoning, anger, fear of failure, aggression, competition, strength as well as being assertive and unemotional.

On the other hand, femininity is equated to: submissiveness, weakness, irrational, emotionality, complaining and being dependent (May, 2001). This demonstrates patriarchal tradition’s highly rigid regulatory frame for both sexes. It becomes obvious that in as much as patriarchy lectures a woman to value submission to the man, the same patriarchy admonishes the man to exhibit his so-called masculinity. The implication is that the patriarchal world does not accommodate both men and women who fail to abide by their socially expected behavior. This is indicative of the fact that power, powerlessness and power struggles are much more complex phenomena than limiting them to only two
asymmetrical factions fighting, with one’s biology as the determinist matrix. Thus, there have been cases of both men and women living outside the shells of their socially defined roles as reflected in works of art.

This paper investigates how the patriarchal system has been oppressive to the weaker man, a man who had been socialized to associate male sex with masculinity, power, production and authority and female body with weakness, reproduction and powerlessness. The paper acknowledges the existence of marginalized women in several facets of life as represented in literature and documented in several books but argues that a theory of a “true literature of the oppressed” should also embrace the potential existence of marginalized masculinities. This is a field of academic study hitherto neglected and this makes this study quite significant.

LITERATURE REVIEW

To fully understand the impact of patriarchal values on the man, it is important to analyse the contributions of various scholars with a vested interest in gender imbalance. The majority of these scholars have focused more on the trials and tribulations of the female half while the study of the possible oppression of the man has never really become an object of critical investigation. However, in recent years, the issue of the oppressor and the oppressed under patriarchy is contested. Hence, those who may outwardly show or symbolize power may internally, or, in fact, be the vulnerable. Research in social studies, literature and feminist study has indicated that both sexes are cultural creations. For instance, Uwakweh (1988: 9) points out “starting from birth, through childhood to adulthood, social expectations for the male and female child differ in ever-widening circles, reaching a stage where each child inculcates the roles of their kind.” This is indicative of how society has definite expectations from everyone, on the basis of one’s biological make-up. As men and women “differ and grow in ever-widening circles”, a man is not expected to show personality traits that are attributed to the woman and vice-versa.

The general impression one gets from most gender related studies is that men monopolize oppression of the other sex and can themselves never be oppressed. Metcalf (1989: 20) advances this view when she states “men are seen to collaborate...in oppressing women.” This view has opened a plethora of attacks on patriarchy on the presumption of male chauvinism and brutality on one hand and female innocence on the other. Simone de Beauvoir (1949: 61) categorically rejects the notion of males as victims of gender relations when she argues:

“If he seems to be the victim, it is because his burdens are most evident; woman is supported by him like a parasite; but “a parasite is not a conquering master” but the fact is that... it is the society developed by the males in their interest that has established women’s torment for both sexes”.

De Beauvoir’s comparison of woman to “a parasite” and man to “a conquering master” dismisses the possibility of man feeling the oppressive function of patriarchy. In her view, the oppression of men is only a feeling and not something that is real. However, if a parasite can suck the blood of the conquering master, then, the man, too, cannot escape suffering some form of pain despite his stature. It appears from this analogy that men can also be viewed as victims of the system that promotes gender differentiation. It is this argument that Jones (1983: 160) brings out when he asserts that, “male and female, together, live out their agonies, paradoxes and dilemmas.” This view acknowledges that both men and women are casualties of the patriarchal tradition.

Similar sentiments are echoed by Strong et al. (1983: 52) who point out that, “A man may wish to give up his role as the family provider and become a “househusband” but there are pressures against such decisions. Although in the West the modern reality is that a man can now deviate from his traditional role of fending for the family and choose to become a “househusband”, it is clear that society has definite expectations on all and a sense of obligation is created in both men and women to fulfill that mandate. This means that patriarchy, though a metascript of male domination and female subordination, can ironically disempower its own. Owing to this, it becomes apparent how controversial it can be to generalize and point at all men as oppressors. This research studies how this seeming contradiction is portrayed in a selection of African and African American prose works. The wider implication of it all is whether, in literature, all men are portrayed as behaving equally the same and exhibiting similar personality traits in a social set-up that promotes gender differentiation. One wonders whether it is not a misrepresentation to view patriarchy as a determinist matrix that constructs man as the agent and norm (Cullhed, 2006).

There are some scholars who seem to suggest that even men, should struggle for freedom from the system that promotes gender differentiation just like the feminists champion women’s struggle (Muchemwa and Muponde, 2007; Foreman, 1982). In “The Los Angeles Times” of May 10 1982, Foreman claims:

“…men’s movement may eventually develop...because the traditional male role is dysfunctional. Yet men rarely express the pain that lies beneath the surface of their lives because it is not considered manly to express emotions.”

Although this view can be frowned upon in some feminist quarters, it suggests that men suffer a common plight because there is a conspiracy of silence since it is
deemed unmanly to express emotions. This explains the need for a careful examination of the portrayal of how man functions under patriarchy, a system some feminists argue is meant to elevate him, as, represented in literature. The body has become a terrain for psychological conflict for both males and females. Burkitt (1999) contends that the male has used his body to manage and control social relations in his favour. However, our research is interested in extending this argument further by showing how the same male body can be a prism of oppression for the owner. As an example, in Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s (p. 97) short story “Wedding at the Cross” in Secret Lives, Wariuki, a poor milk clerk, “without a cent buried anywhere, not even for the rainiest day...” is disabled by the social demands from the male body he possesses.

He is a weaker man when compared to Douglas Jones, the rich businessman whose daughter, Miriamu, he wants to marry. One cannot help ask whether Wariuki is made of the same steely masculine fibre that defines Jones. In the presence of Jones, Wariuki feels less a man, fixing “his eyes to the wall... (feeling) crushed (and) desperately (looking) to the door and to the open space” (Ngugi, p. 100) an allusion to his thoughts of escaping from the presence of this towering giant whose eyes he cannot even meet.

This highlights Wariuki’s disequilibrium in the presence of a man he considers more manly than himself. Such a feeling of oppression of a man by another man emphasizes the idea that men, too, are unequal. Butler (1990) buttresses this view when she rejects the notion that the body has a materiality prior to its signification and she prefers to seek ways of reading the body as a signifying practice. In other words, we should be able to distinguish the anatomy – the supposed site of sexual difference - from the reality of social experience.

Victims or oppressors?

This section examines the impact of gender expectations on the man who fails to be man enough to meet his expected roles. This man will be referred to as the weaker man throughout this study. In order to succinctly capture whether this man is a prisoner or a gaoler of the ‘other’ in the patriarchal system, the study will examine the literary portrayal of men under the following subheadings: (a) the weight of social expectations (b) the sense of emasculation (c) economic instability; and (d) victimization of the weaker man by the ideal man.

The weight of social expectations

One theme that portrays how man suffers under patriarchy is the psychological entrapment of man by social demands. This can be illustrated through a reading of the Nigerian writer, Achebe’s (1985) Things Fall Apart. The novel, set in the villages of Umuofia and Mbanta, catapults the reader to an understanding of some of the patriarchal values that regulate men’s lives. For instance, men in Umuofia are expected to be “warlike” (p. 9) and to be aggressive as well as express no emotion. Failure to meet these social demands results in one being labeled a woman. Butler (1990) has shown that both masculinity and femininity arise through the performance of gender. The fear of being called a failed man and a woman ignites some kind of mental torture in most men in this novel. One such man is Okonkwo who “…down in his heart... was not a cruel man.” (p. 9) but grows into a man who “had no patience with unsuccessful men” (p. 3) in order to satiate masculine script of his own society. Okonkwo has no patience with his own father, Unoka, and later his son Nwoye.

What drives Okonkwo’s contempt of Unoka (underrated in the eyes of his community) is “the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father” (p. 9) - An unmanly male character in the eyes of his community, a coward who dies with no title to his name. The desire to be counted as a man and escape the scorn of being considered a less man transforms Okonkwo into a harsh and brutal father and husband. The patriarchal values in Umuofia have taught him to be “a man of action, a man of war” (p. 7) and he internalizes them and follows them with rigidity and no flexibility. As a result of the weight of the social demands expected of him, “Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children” (p. 9). Although Okonkwo’s family believes that Okonkwo has a “fiery temper”, it is not his fiery temper that is at fault here. Instead, it is his conception of what manhood means as dictated by the Umuofian community.

As we read, we query what inner demons drive Okonkwo to ‘murder’ his adopted son, Ikemefuna, in cold blood, or the callous attitude he exhibits, when he disowns Nwoye who “prefers to be a woman” (p. 122) instead of the man Okonkwo and the Umuofian values expect him to be. Okonkwo says of Nwoye to his other sons “now he is no longer my son or your brother. I will only have a son who is a man...” (pp. 121, 122). In the eyes of Okonkwo and his society, Nwoye is a failed man, a symbolism of the phallus without an owner, and this opens up “the possibility of resignification and deprivileging in relation to anatomy” (Butler, 1993: 88).

As critics castigate Okonkwo’s actions, they should not lose focus of the internalized cultural forces that drive his actions. The narrator says of him (p. 9), “Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness... It was not external but lay deep within himself.” What this demonstrates is how the yoke of social expectations weighs Okonkwo down. In that context, Okonkwo is entrapped within the web of his
culture’s patriarchal values. Here is a man with a hard exterior but a soft interior. Perhaps his role in the ritual murder of Ikemefuna can help show his psychological entrapment. During Ikemefuna’s stay at his home, Okonkwo “became very fond of the boy (and) … there was no doubt that he liked the boy” (p. 20). Despite this love for Ikemefuna, when the hour of the boy’s death arrives and as the boy runs towards him for protection, the irony of it all is that “dazed with fear”, Okonkwo drew his matchet and cut him down. He was “afraid” of being thought “weak” (p. 43). Okonkwo fails to protect Ikemefuna because “to show affection was a sign of weakness” (p. 20).

This fear can be interpreted to be the fear of the traditions of his society that which we called patriarchal values in this study. One is left with questions on whether Okonkwo is an oppressor of the weak in his society or he is a prisoner of the fear which he cannot openly admit to having. His inability to express his fear and his love places him in the ambiguous position of being both the oppressed male and the unwilling oppressor. His tragic dual personality and identity is seen in that the exterior harshness is just a mask for the interior softness which culminates in his suicide at the end. Apart from Okonkwo, Obierika is another male character in Things Fall Apart who feels entrapped by the demands of his society’s patriarchal traditions. Obierika’s internal monologue when Okonkwo is banished to Mbanta for seven years after he accidentally shoots Ezeudu’s son, is a window through which we can examine his bitterness with tradition as he asks (p. 87):

“What should a man suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently?” But although he thought for a long time, he found no answer…. He remembered his wife’s twin children, whom he had thrown away. What crime had they committed?”

It is through the prism of Obierika’s rhetorical questions that we can see his utter helplessness before the demands of Umuofian society. Despite his inward torture and love for his children, he, too, cannot express his emotions because to do that would be considered womanly. Therefore, Obierika openly upholds Umuofia’s patriarchal traditions but with a weeping heart. His psychological suffering can be equated to that of Okonkwo who “did not taste any food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna… (and) did not sleep at night” (p. 44). In the eyes of some critics, Okonkwo is heartless and brutal, yet, his inner suffering depicts that he is just but a prisoner of “the law of the land (which) must be obeyed” (p. 48). While readers may be drawn towards Obierika who reasons and asks questions, albeit internally, we fail to sympathise with Okonkwo who unquestioningly and judiciously acquiesces to the cultural prescription despite the mental anguish it causes him. What readers of Things Fall Apart tend to get when they analyze the characters of the protagonists Okonkwo and Obierika; friend and foil, seems to be that most men are victims of the drama of patriarchy and all men seem to be actors playing roles.

The sense of emasculation

Apart from the weight of patriarchal culture’s expectations, some men’s silent suffering under patriarchy can also issue from a sense of castration that oppresses them psychologically and makes them feel less of men. In Walker’s (1982) The Colour Purple, Harpo is a male character who exhibits this sense of emasculation. It is Harpo’s felt failure to stamp his authority over his wife, Sofia, in line with the patriarchal expectations of his society that fills him with an intense sense of loss of manhood. Harpo’s dream is “to make Sofia mind” (p. 37). Making her mind in this instance means making her subordinate to his wishes. As a young husband, Harpo has his own nameless father, Mr- as the only referral point to emulate on how husbands should behave. Harpo’s behavior and lack of knowledge on how a newly married man should relate to his wife echoes that of Tiger in Selvon’s (1983) novel, A Brighter Sun. Tiger, who is only sixteen when his parents marry him off to Urmilla, wonders “if she knew anything about what boys and girls do when they got married, because he didn’t know either… neither of them understood…” (p. 5). Mentally, Tiger traverses to the past to discover how his father had behaved in his marriage, in the same way that Harpo does. However, when Tiger “decided that he was not going to appear a small boy before his wife” (p. 11), he begins to smoke to show that he is a real man.

On the other hand, Harpo decides to beat his wife, just as he had seen his father doing. He does not beat her because he is inherently brutal and callous but because it is his society rather than he who controls the supposedly dominant male body. In light of this, it can be concluded that even young men are not exempted from the yoke of patriarchal oppression which lectures them on how to relate with women.

One is left wondering whether Tiger and Harpo are oppressors or victims of the system. This is because they oscillate and constantly disappear into what Spivak (1988: 13) calls “a violent aporia between subject and object status.” They are imprisoned in their anxious search for the fulfillment of their patriarchal roles, yet, they too victimize their unfortunate, innocent wives. So overpowering is Harpo’s desire to exhibit his expected maleness that at the advice of Celie and Mr-, he attempts to manhandle Sofia and beat her to stamp his authority. Unfortunately for him, his wife is a “big, strong healthy girl” who thrashes him.

The loss of this fistfight further deflates his sense of masculinity to the extent that he explains his injuries on the storm and a mule that banged him up. All this lying is
an effort to hide his shattered manhood. What we see is Harpo’s struggle to live according to the dictates of his gender script but he fails. In the end, Harpo gets so psychologically consumed with his failure “to make Sofia mind” that he drowns his sorrow in his food. He attacks his food with gusto and eats food morning, noon and night till he grows a disproportionate body. Harpo’s withdrawal into himself and his new eating habits are some form of escapism from this cruel patriarchal world that has placed expectations on him which he cannot achieve. Thus, being a weaker man in his society he suffers tremendously as a victim whose male ego is injured and deflated. His crushing sense of emasculation drives him to abandon his wife and get married to Mary Agnes whom he can control and oppress. The patriarchal society in which he lives, therefore, makes Harpo both the victimized and the oppressive man he turns out to be. Therefore, these men are an illustration of the need for a concerted male-female effort to deconstruct the masculine-feminine binary constructions.

The fragility of weaker men under the strain of patriarchal and cultural norms can also be a result of childlessness. This is true of Gwizo in “The Empty House”, a short story in the Zimbabwean writer, Mungoshi’s (1997) Walking Still. The title “The Empty House” is itself a pointer at how lifeless the home can be if there is no child in it. For Gwizo, life is empty of meaning and a torture because of the societal pressures on his shoulders to be a father. Although initially Gwizo is supportive and comforts Agatha, his wife, over their childlessness, he later succumbs to the external pressure, represented here by the patriarchal mouthpiece - his father, that demands he proves his manhood by producing a child. Thereafter, Gwizo’s psychological disintegration sets in as portrayed in his unaccustomed outbursts to his wife whom he blames for their childlessness. Having failed to cope with the infinite demands for expressing his masculinity, Gwizo turns to alcohol as an escape route from his anguish. He also loses his artistic touch, abandons his painting and sneaks away from his wife.

Gwizo’s artistic impotence symbolizes his sexual impotence and tortured mind. He now harbours thoughts about suicide but the irony of it all is that he still does not want to die what he calls “a feminine death”. Childlessness is a wound that pricks at Gwizo’s manhood in the same way that it does Mr Pfende in the short story “The day the bread van didn’t come” in Some Kinds of Wounds by the same author. So great is Mr Pfende’s sense of castration that he feels “his money…wouldn’t have soothed the wound in him: childlessness” (p. 49). Thus, Gwizo and Mr Pfende are engulfed by feelings of inferiority and inadequacy as their maleness comes under scrutiny in a patriarchal culture that cannot accommodate their failure to exhibit their virility. While Mr Pfende shuts himself in a cocoon of utter hopelessness and self-pity in which his dialogic fragmentation is seen in how he can only converse internally, Gwizo, on the other hand, metamorphosises from victim to oppressor.

Their reactions to their desperate circumstances reflect their psychological disequilibria whose source is in how their societies conceive their failure to make their wives pregnant. Muchemwa and Muponde (2007: 17) argue:

“Accustomed to disciplining other bodies, the male body finds itself in crisis when confronted by the possibilities opened up by the demise of its virility and physical wellness and the collapse of the life supporting fictions of its indomitableness”.

In short, some men too are psychologically disabled and incapacitated by the demands of the stereotyped life routes that patriarchal societies impose on them. While in truth these men are not females, yet, in reality they are no longer males because it appears as if they have been released from male physiology by both their impotence and the society’s insistence that they prove their manhood. Hence, some men are victims of the tensions between traditional attitudes and modern realities and they feel oppressed by their inability to perform their masculinities as they conceive them.

**Economic instability**

Economic instability can at times make some men feel less man. The patriarchal code dictates that a man has to provide for and fend for his wife and children and when the ability to do that is lost, the sense of manhood in him too, is lost. What heightens that sense of castration is a situation, especially, where the wife emerges from the shadows of the domestic sphere to dominate the economic sphere while the husband is relegated to the kitchen. Such a reversal of roles is portrayed in another Mungoshi short story “The Hare” in Walking Still through the character Nhongo. Nhongo’s stable world collapses around him the moment he loses his job. Bred in the “proud tradition that said the hunting is done by the man of the house” (p. 13), Nhongo loses control when his wife Sarah takes over the “hunting”.

Having failed to stomach the challenge and ‘humiliation’ of being a dependent of his cross-border wife, he retreats to his rural home the bastion of patriarchal security. What we see in this journey motif is a physical and psychological journey into the past in search of psychological stability offered by the traditions which have shaped his worldview. The name “Nhongo” is also important as it develops the theme of emasculation even further. A “nhongo” in the Shona language is a castrated he-goat and, hence, this name for this character signifies how he has lost his sense of masculinity by the changed economic relations in the home, which breed inner feelings of castration. It is all because patriarchal tradition has prepared him for a role he cannot enforce and which he no longer plays. In the eyes of his society, he is a failed man and that view makes him a he-victim of his
own culture. In the words of Kuzwayo (1985: 261):

“The changing role of the...woman as she makes an increasing contribution towards the family income, even brings in more money than the husband, has added to the problems of family relationships. This factor hits at the root of the traditional acceptance of the man as the head of the family...father and master, with his word the last in family decisions”.

Kuzwayo here, shows the psychological dilemma which the man suffers if the traditional ‘order is upset and reinstalled differently. Thus, some men who are fossilized in patriarchal traditions of their societies have become trapped and incapacitated by the modern realities which conflict with the traditional script. The same shattering sense of disequilibrium induced in men by economic instability is found in another Zimbabwean writer, Mujajati’s (1999) novel The Sun Will Rise Again. The form of this novel allows each character a chance for careful introspection. Written in the form of different characters' points of view, Mujajati’s novel ushers us into the disharmony that rips apart Jeremiah and Matilda's marriage as a result of the husband’s inability to provide the wife with enough money to buy what the family needs.

In the privacy of his mind, Jeremiah monologues about the causes of the disintegration of their marriage and the emotional gulf that develops as a result. What precipitates his mental anguish is the fact that his wife takes every opportunity to remind him about the inadequacy of his teacher's salary and how he is not a co-owner of their matrimonial home which she calls “…my flat...yes, my very own flat which I got with little help from you” (p. 21). This creates an imbalance in Jeremiah, whose meagre salary makes him feel threatened, inadequate and inferior. The wife now has many male friends and does not hide that fact from her husband. Matilda becomes a symbol of Jeremiah’s oppression by her insistence and application of the same social expectations in his environment. In the end, Jeremiah leaves his wife and rents out his own small room, a reflection of his struggle to reassert his manhood, which he has been robbed of by his economic circumstances. Unfortunately, for Jeremiah, his new home is always in disorder with unwashed stockings, unwashed utensils, cigarette stubs and empty beer bottles scattered all over which is a manifestation of the inner turmoil and lack of peace that haunts him. His new lodgings are a form of retreat from the harsh patriarchal world that he cannot fit in which makes him a victim and a weaker man entrapped by patriarchal values.

Victimization of the weaker men by the ideal men

Scales of patriarchy and are found wanting fall prey to those men who are exemplars of patriarchy. Such is the case with Takundwa in The Sun Will Rise Again whose poverty makes him feel overshadowed by rich and prosperous men such as Nyati. Takundwa’s admiration and veneration of the “men of substance... men for whom song and verse would be composed...men who would capture the admiration of every woman on earth” (p. 60) creates a void in him and a crippling sense of inadequacy as a man. The gap between his dream and reality create a mental chasm that unsettles him. In his quest to be a man of substance, Takundwa sits “quietly amongst those high profile businessmen and politicians, not even listening...not even thinking, just sitting there stone dead, waiting to be sent ...” (p. 88, 89). Takundwa has neither voice, nor identity but sits in the shadow of the ‘men of substance’ because he is weakened by his economic status.

We do not sympathize with him, however, because he vents his anger and frustration on his family to the extent of sacrificing his two daughters. Such unpardonable extended aggression is some form of escape from the reality of his depraved economic conditions. Nyati seizes every opportunity to exploit Takundwa’s inability to assert his manhood, first by raping Takundwa’s daughter, Sophia, and then ordering Takundwa to murder his other six year old daughter, Tabitha. Deep in his heart, Takundwa does not want to commit murder and agonizes over it. However, he is not master of his decisions because, as a weaker man, he has a muted voice. The fact that Takundwa is prepared to sup with the devil in order to become a man of substance thrusts him into the paradoxical position of both a victim and oppressor. Although his callous brutality against his own blood ignites our contempt and condemnation, we cannot help but underscore that he too is trapped and weighed down by the social expectations in his environment.

On the racial level, whiteness is an ideal of purity and goodness while blackness connotes filth and ugliness. Thrust against the backdrop of the patriarchal demand for men that exhibit a strong character, aggression and assertiveness, some black men buckle under the pressure of racial discrimination because their attempt to parade their masculinity is negated. As an example, racial abuse of black men in the South African writer Mzamane’s (1986) “Hungry Flames” results in the black men feeling weaker than the giant towering figure of the white man who becomes a double oppressor as a stronger man and as a white, superior man. In that regard, the patriarchal culture that prepares the black man to be competitive and to exude strength becomes the snare that incapacitates him from exhibiting his masculinity.

The short story “Call Me Not a Man” by Mzamane (1986) catapults the reader into the anguish of a man denied manhood by racial intolerance. In the story, what bruises the narrator’s manly pride is how he is “slapped on my mouth in front of my womenfolk and getting sworn at with my mother’s private parts...” (p. 113) by the white man, yet, he cannot hit back because it is taboo for a
black South African man to challenge a white man. The narrator acutely feels the torture of racial brutality and intolerance as demonstrated in couplet, which introduces the story:

For neither am I a man in the eyes of the law; nor am I a man in the eyes of my fellow man. The racial injury that the narrator sustains fractures and negates his sense of manhood and assertiveness, which the patriarchal values had prepared him for. One wonders whether we should look at all men as occupying positions of power or there are instances when some men are rendered voiceless, absent, invisible, castrated and powerless in the eyes of a patriarchal society.

CONCLUSION

i) The paper has dismissed the idea of viewing all men in patriarchal societies as equally powerful, carrying homogenous character and personality traits that cause them to oppress their female counterparts.

ii) The study has shown that patriarchal socialization conditions both men and women to abide by their prescribed roles and both man and woman can fall victim to patriarchal excesses if one fails to live according to the content of their expected cultural roles.

iii) The research has also explored how the weaker victimized man transfers his frustrations onto perceived weaker others who in the majority are the wife and children.

iv) The weaker man’s extended aggression against the powerless members of the family, which is a misdirected attempt for assertion of manhood, is some form of escape from the harsh realities of their failure to exhibit the male cultural traits.

v) The sense of loss of manhood in some men can be as a result of their impotence and lack of virility, economic instability, and racial discrimination and the weight of social expectations, among others.

From such a literary based analysis of a cross section of texts, it is clear that it is faulty and erroneous to lump all men as members of the oppressor class of society’s female half because there are some men who, ironically, find themselves ensnared by the patriarchal machinery which is meant to elevate them on the patriarchal social ladder. Thus, patriarchy is not a selective system but treads upon and crushes any man or woman who dares challenge its ideology. It is in this light that men and women ought to join hands in the fight to dismantle the iron grip of a system that only benefits the real man of this world at the expense of the majority. Therefore, it becomes imperative for critics, educationists, sociologists and others to find a new literary theory that incorporates the view that patriarchy imprisons all women and some men.

There is also need for society to change the images associated with femininity and masculinity for since time immemorial these have arisen during the performance of gender (Butler, 1990).

REFERENCES


