

Nigerian Female Playwrights and the Question of Patriarchy

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Abstract

One issue that Nigerian female writers have had to contend with repeatedly in their works is that of male domination as the manifestation of a deep patriarchal tradition that has for centuries been part of a people's culture, behavior, and attitude. In almost all the plays authored by women in Nigeria, there is an indubitable promotion of a sexist agenda based on the sufferings of women from their sexual counterparts, men. This study therefore employs the patriarchy theory in its interpretation of selected plays of Nigerian female playwrights and interrogates Hartmann's claim of a despondent relationship between patriarchy and capitalism. Through a study of selected works of female playwrights like Zulu Sofola, Tess Onwueme, and Foluke Ogunleye, the study discovers that capitalism, though an instrument employed for the furtherance of patriarchal interests, will not suffice to deliver women from male hegemonic departments.

Literature, from the very beginning, has been dominated by men who, without any prevarication, have written from a male perspective that is almost often patriarchal. Dramatic literature especially admitted no female participation either in scriptwriting or stage-acting when it originated in classical Greece in the 5th century. Worthen William explains that the Athenian theater admitted no woman and "female characters were played by men" (16). The classical age itself had no female writer; all the tragedians of the period were men, led by Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus and, as such, their plays are downright patriarchal. The patriarchy of the Classical period was equally complemented by the writings of male playwrights in Elizabethan England. Great plays such as *Richard II*, *Dr Faustus*, and the *King Henry* series are woven around notable male characters who bestride the plays. Even the female protagonist of Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* operates only within the whims of patriarchal interest which she fights to the death. M. H. Abrams notes that

patriarchy pervades those writings which have been considered great literature and which until recently have been written mainly by men for men. Typically, most highly regarded literary works focus on male protagonists – *Oedipus*, *Ulysses*, *Hamlet*, *Tom Jones*, *Faust* – who embody masculine interest in a masculine field of action. To these males, the female characters, when they play a role, are marginal and subordinate and represented either as complementary and subservient to, or in opposition to masculine desires and enterprises. (95)

The scenario is not different in the African literary scene especially in the domains of Nigerian dramatic literature where earlier writers have taken almost completely after their Classical and Elizabethan predecessors. Pacesetters of written Nigerian drama including Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, and J. P. Clark have been undeniably patriarchal in their approach. In response to many criticisms of this male chauvinistic approach noticeable in his writings, Soyinka is of the opinion that a man cannot correctly write about women and that it is the responsibility of women to write about women.

Thus male dramatists write from a masculine perspective that either leaves women out of the picture or portray them in a dented form that is usually unacceptable to the female reader/critic.



To this end, female writers who have evolved in Nigeria have deliberately tackled patriarchy and female gender imaging headlong, leaving no one in doubt of their sexist agenda in almost all the plays they have authored. Critics have reacted variously to gender issues in female-authored plays but mainly through the angle of gender imaging, gender roles, and characterization. Many such reactions decry the negative portrayal of women in modern Nigerian drama without delving deep into the patriarchal culture and background responsible for such imaging. Such critical ventures are yet to tackle the subject of patriarchy in Nigerian drama of female authorship by answering questions arising from the subject of male domination in the plays as in virtually all the cultures of the world. To this end, this paper hopes to find out, who institutes, practices, and benefits from the notion of patriarchy that characterizes social relations the world over as seen in the selected plays. How does patriarchy and capitalism, its backbone, sustain each other? Also, what choices are there for women in patriarchal settings?

The Patriarchy Theory

Patriarchy is an issue to contend with in most societies of the world where men tend to rule over women. From Western societies to Asian and African communities, attitudes that set the man over the woman in family and societal settings are upheld and this affects all areas of life such as agriculture, marriage, commerce, childrearing, and property holding. Patriarchal attitudes uphold the headship of the man and demands subservience of the woman in any adventure that brings both sexes together. Notions of patriarchy have been among human beings since as far back as the 4th century BC and become highly evident and prevalent in classical Greece where women were seen to be inferior to men by all standards.

Patriarchy became a matter of interest to feminists because of the disadvantaged position it places women in every area of life. Feminists such as Miriam Dixson and Juliet Mitchell soon developed a theory of patriarchy because feminism as a movement views patriarchy as the most potent weapon of male dominance and describes it as an unfair system against women. The theory of patriarchy affirms that there is an established division between men and women from which men gain power. Miriam Dixson in *The Real Matilda* launches the theory where she claims that the oppression of Irish women is due to the actions of working class men who in turn benefit immensely from the lot of the suffering women. The theory of patriarchy lays emphasis on different aspects of male domination ranging from the home and family life to the workplace and political circles. Kate Millet is the one who popularized the patriarchy theory among American feminists. Aside from the popular claim of male domination by other theorists of patriarchy, Millet maintains that women themselves are weak and passive. To her, it is because women are not putting up any resistance that men continue to dominate and oppress them. She maintains that patriarchy plays crucial roles in sexual relations and illustrates her points from literary works. Harris Mirkin later expatiates on the subject of women's passivity raised by Millet and concludes that:

The theorists of patriarchy also adhere to the patriarchal vision when they view traditional women as passive and weak. This, according to the theorists of patriarchy themselves, is the way in which men saw – and see – women. The only difference is that men have believed women were passive by nature, and the current theorists think that she was psychologically and institutionally enslaved by the dominant males. In other words, women are perceived as even weaker than the patriarchs saw them, because they are viewed as enslaved not by God, or nature, but by men. (55)

Proponents of the patriarchy theory are mainly socialist/Marxist feminists who rely on a Marxist analysis of the woman question to interpret the domination of women by men. They see men

almost exactly the way Marxists perceive the ruling class and see women as the oppressed class. Mirkin explains that “the advocates of the concept of patriarchy are often soft Marxists, who argue that underlying the economic class dialectic of Marx is an even more fundamental sexual class dialectic” (41). Heidi Hartmann in her essay, “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union,” attempts to bridge the gap between the two conflicting positions and detail the intricate aspects of the patriarchy question especially in a capitalist society. Hartmann’s postulation on patriarchy links patriarchy and female domination to capitalism and the control of it by men who also control one another in a different hierarchical order. Though still speaking from the standpoint of a socialist feminist, she attempts to find the nexus of Marxist and feminist views of gender relations and excoriates the pretentious correlation that exists between patriarchy and capital. She thus defines patriarchy as “a set of social relations between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence among men that enable them to dominate women” (177).

It is perceptible from the above discussion that the dominant purpose of patriarchy is the domination of women and the gain of men. In the attempt to dominate women therefore, men will have to first dominate one another through capitalism. The final result of the hierarchy among men is that, in the end, every man is dominating some woman. Hartmann’s position on the patriarchy issue clearly reveals that patriarchy is about domination that is deliberate, calculated, and systematic. As she later explains, “the material base of patriarchy is men’s control over women’s labour power” (180). In sum, Hartmann’s perception of the problem with patriarchy is a capitalist one; it is because men control capital that they dominate women, it is so that they might dominate women that they control capital. In her explanation of the conspiracy between the male gender and capitalism however, one is more fundamental than the other; to her, patriarchy is more fundamental than capitalism though they work together.

Patriarchal Overthrow in *The Reign of Wazobia*

The first aspect of patriarchy that Tess Onwueme attacks in *The Reign of Wazobia* is political domination. In most traditional African societies, women are trampled upon politically and treated as irrelevant where it concerns serious matters of state interest. To this end, African, and consequently Nigerian monarchical structures are headed by only male members of the ruling families. Female descendants of the royal families are set aside when kingship consultations are being made and that includes oracular predictions of the next occupant of the throne. However, to prevent interregnum and anarchic reactions, a regent must be placed on the throne to act as king anytime a king passes on, till a substantive king is installed. Initially, the tendency in regents to sit tight on the throne, arising from the fact that he is usually a member of the royal family and consequently has a right to the throne, led to the culture of appointing women as regents. In that case, the woman would constitute no threat and she is installed and uninstalled at will as determined by the male dominated group of kingmakers. This obvious exploitation of womenfolk in their whimsical coronation and removal as regent forms the central theme of Onwueme’s *The Reign of Wazobia*.

The woman regent in *The Reign of Wazobia* seizes the power at her disposal as regent and begins to reorder the culture that has put women in political, economic, and domestic servitude for innumerable generations. Wazobia starts by deliberately exceeding the three years stipulated as maximum for any (female) regent to reign before a substantive (male) king is enthroned. She

declares her agenda to upturn the sexist system of their customary operations right from the beginning of the play as she states:

... Ask yourselves
Why the law prescribes a female Regent?
Where are the men
If rulership is the sole preserve of men?
Do you think they contradict themselves when
They make a female regent rule for only
Three seasons when a king passes beyond?
They plant us as king unasked and supplant us at will.
I, Wazobia, know everything at my fingertips
They, of their volition threw the throne on
my lap and lap it, I must. (7)

This appears to be Wazobia's mission statement because, throughout the play, she refuses to relinquish power to the right owners as expected by the men and dedicatedly fights oppressive male practices from the throne. Wazobia draws the battle lines very clearly and states it without any prevarication while garnering every available support in order to uproot all forms of masculine oppression meted out to fellow women. *The Reign of Wazobia* is thus a revelation of the patriarchal, chauvinistic, and other male hegemonic factors that are in connection with the culture of regency as practiced in most African communities and a clear call for a discontinuation of such practices.

The rebellion of Wazobia against the traditional structure that permits only men to reign as king is stiffly opposed by men and Wazobia discerns that a real fight has to be put up before she can break the grounds she intends to because male resistance to her agenda is direct, strong, and insistent. At the first State Council she calls Iyase, her second in command, and informs him of her plans but Iyase replies plainly: "Then king, if we must deliberate on such serious state matters, women and the youth must be sent away" (27).

This resistance gets stronger as the play progresses but Wazobia's resoluteness, coupled with the unalloyed support she finally enjoys from the women populace and the youths, secures victory for her and the other women. The women not only seize but also maintain control of political powers till the end of the play and this affects the relationship between men and women in all sectors of the society of the play.

Patriarchy is also the bedrock of the relationship between men and women at the home front, and this affects a greater number of women than political domination. Men rule over their women at home and expect the women to kowtow along in unalloyed subjugation and deference. The men rule over the women and some are high-handed in the process while at the same time neglecting their responsibilities to the women. This signals a sharp departure from Hartmann's opinion that men control women because of capital. The assumption of responsibility that can naturally elicit submission from the women is absent yet the men expect the women to cater to the family needs and still be subservient to them. The following altercation between a man and his wife in *The Reign of Wazobia* captures the situation more accurately. The woman runs to Wazobia for solace while her husband pursues her hotly:

MAN *(Threateningly)*: You may run into a mouse hole.
 These hands must teach you today that
 They were not made of decaying plantain stem.
 Come out and I'll show you ...

WAZOBIA *(To the man)*: Do you realise
 That what you are doing now is against tradition?
 Tradition forbids you to touch anyone who has
 Protection of another. And more so, your king?
 Is it that men in these parts make traditions
 For others to bear them?

MAN
 Tradition?
 And is that why a woman
 A mere woman that I paid to get with my own hard-
 Earned money should challenge me in my house? Does
 She think I carry these balls in my thighs
 For nothing?

WAZOBIA
 And is that an answer to your king?

MAN
 It is no matter for king and subject, but a matter
 For man and woman. The gods of our land ordained
 That a man must own a wife to bear him children ... (24)

Through a self-conceited character, simply named Man, Onwueme has subtly displayed for all to see, the injustices suffered by women from their male counterparts in the family. This particular man apparently does not consider his wife having a higher status than his other property in the house hence the woman's stay in his house should justify the money he spent to acquire her by being obedient to him and bearing him children. Wazobia's response to the man's last claims demonstrates to us where her sympathy lies and this actually sounds a bit authorial:

WAZOBIA *(Interrupting)*: And did your gods also ordain that
 You must turn these women to slaves?
 That their tongues must be slashed for daring to see
 With their eyes? And with their ears that dare
 To reveal to them what tune time beats? (25)

From here, we see that Wazobia is beating the drum of change and is intent upon ensuring that all, both male and female, dance to the tunes. The sheer unfairness that pervades what is regarded as tradition in the relationship between man and woman receives her full attention in this play and is approached from different angles. The same man who goes on raging about his wife's lack of submission is later revealed to have abdicated his traditional role as breadwinner of the family and leaves his wife to provide for the family. This double injustice suffered by this woman and many others like her usually remains unspoken of but now with Wazobia's posture on the matter, the woman replies her husband thus:

MAN
 I have said it time and time again
 I will offer myself for castration
 The day I allow a woman
 That I paid for with my own money
 To lie on my top and taunt me with her fingers.



WOMAN Tell me how
 In my own house
 Why I should come home
 And not find my food
 With my woman waiting on the table?
 Why not? Of course I am part of the furniture
 in your house and once you come home,
 You have a ready platform to sit on.
 You pursue lizards while those with whom you started
 Now pursue rats.
 And if I must go in search of the food
 You must eat.
 Must I not leave the house to fetch that food? (32)

The significance of this utterance is that the material base of male domination has been removed in this and many other instances, while male domination still subsists and characterizes the relationship between men and women. This statement by Man is a shocking revelation of the state and attitude of the authoritative and unloving posture of the husband who still insists that he must always come home to have his food waiting for him on the table since he is the “head” of the home. *The Reign of Wazobia* here exposes quite unambiguously that patriarchy thrives on the silence and docility of women who are at the receiving end of the oppressive cultures and traditions thus confirming Millet’s and Mirkin’s opinion that female passivity is the sustaining power of patriarchy. This need for more self-assertive actions is what the play addresses and the women are made to take actions that lead to desired change in their situations.

The play consequently reveals the huge imbalance in familial and political customs, and calls on the female gender to break the silence and insist on fair treatment. Onwueme’s use of this play to display such politically and domestically uncanny attitude by men therefore breaks the silence and confirms Sanusi’s point that African women writers use their works “to redress the situation [...] by challenging the domination of African life socially, politically and economically by African men” (185). Women in *The Reign of Wazobia* actively resist oppression and break the silence by personally taking over the fight against patriarchal bondages. In *Wazobia*, the feminist battle against patriarchal control is won. That the women emerge victorious from the battle is seen in the final subjugation of the chief force of opposition against Wazobia: Iyase. Adeoti comments that “Iyase’s final submission therefore illustrates the erosion of the authority of patriarchy” (265). The play thus proposes that feminine passivity will only make women walk in circles and that liberation from masculine oppression can only be obtained by putting up strong resistance.

The *Idegbe* Tradition as a Manifestation of Patriarchy

The *Idegbe* tradition among the Igbo of Southern Nigerian is one the symptoms of the patriarchal culture basically because of its persistence of the sustenance of the paternal lineage. This particular practice obtains in some African societies because most patriarchal societies are patrilineal in which case property and title are inherited by the males. To this end, every family must produce a male child to continue the lineage and any family that does not have a male child is compelled by ageless tradition to solve the problem anyhow. In such cases, one of the female children, usually the first, is saddled with the responsibility of getting pregnant outside marriage in order to give the child to her father for the continuance of the family lineage. She is thus an *Idegbe*, a male daughter. This

culture, a popular one among the Igbo of Western Nigeria, is the main source of the dramatic conflict in Onwueme's *The Broken Calabash*. It is also the reason behind the tragedy of Okebuno in Zulu Sofola's *Old Wines are Tasty* although a cursory reading of the play might lead one to deduce that the tragic hero's rejection of the ways of his people is responsible for his eventual destruction at the end of the play.

In Sofola's *Old Wines are Tasty*, Okebuno comes to his village after living for five years in Lagos without visiting his hometown but later seeks the approval and support of his hometown for his political dreams. Okebuno behaves like a foreigner during his stay in his village Olona and this arouses the angst of the elders who firmly place a stamp of disapproval upon his candidature. This play has been read as the tragedy of a man who abandons the good old path of his forefathers to tow the line of foreigners to his detriment. Indeed, Okebuno has refused to honor the elders and comply with the traditional requirements of the people of Olona whose approval and votes he needs to achieve his political ambition. Okebuno is obsessed with Western ideas and ways, and this drives his disgust for the attitudes and actions of the Olona people which he considers primal and obsolescent.

The actions of the play at the beginning clearly point to the direction of failure for Okebuno. His failure is imminent from the display of ignorance and pride that inform his disregard for the same elders who hold the reins of the political horse he hopes to ride on in their hands. Okebuno's political opponent in Olona, Oloko, understands the terrain much better and soon begins to exploit Okebuno's ignorance to his (Oloko) own benefit. The reader therefore already anticipates Okebuno's failure in his political aspiration while Oloko would be chosen in spite of his educational disadvantage. It is thus a remarkable twist of events when Okebuno suddenly comes back home to question his mother about his paternity. In a quick turnaround of events, Anyasi's background is revealed: she is an *Idegbe* so she has to give her father a son since he had no male child. As fate would have it, her father got a son very shortly after Okebuno's birth so she had to give Okebuno to the next man in line, the husband she married after Okebuno's birth. She explains to Okebuno in her hurt:

ANYASI: Son, I was not a harlot. I did what every daughter of a man without a son does. I was an Idegbe because my father had hoped to get the son he lacked through me. I had your father as the man through whom I could satisfy my people's wish. But a few months after you were born, one of my father's wives gave him a son. (55)

This statement reveals the facts about Okebuno's real father, though not the details. Though Mr. Mukolu, his mother's husband, is Okebuno's official father, his biological father remains unknown in name, character, vocation, and town of origin and this accounts for Okebuno calling himself a "glorified bastard."

Okebuno's initial actions in the play can then be put in perspective through this revelation of his paternal background. Okebuno evidently has no ties with Olona and is most likely not an indigene of Olona; hence his inability to feel at home there. He is unable to either accept their ways and customs or be in tune with their cultural practices. This ingrained contrast between what Olona accepts and what Okebuno can give can be traceable to the secrecy and mystery that shroud his paternity. His uncle, Akuagwu, also insinuates that Okebuno is not from Olona in the following exchange between Ndudi, Okebuno, and Akuagwu:

NDUDI: 'Buno, where are you going?

OKEBUNO: I am going back to where I came from.

AKUAGWU: Do that, because that's where you belong. (56)

In the play, therefore, the driving wheel of tragedy is the practice and promotion of patriarchal ideals without taking cognizance of how they impact the lives of the individuals concerned. Okebuno's tragic death in a fatal accident right in front of his mother's house at the end of the play is another accurate portrayal of the ills of patriarchy as manifested in the *Idegbe* traditional practice. What's more, the *Idegbe* culture ruins the lives of the female child who has been designated an *Idegbe* by virtue of being the first or only child in the family. Such women are often left with a permanent marital dent as in the case of Anyasi who is later considered as a harlot by the same society that places the burden on her.

The *Idegbe* tradition is a demonstration of male domination at its extreme and the gains, both material and psychological, go to the men, while the pains are the lot of the women who have been caught in the trap. For Anyasi, it is a multiple tragedy because the son is no longer acceptable to her father by the time she gave birth to him since he already got one. With Anyasi's father having the choice of still fathering a son through any of the women in his harem, it becomes an issue that Anyasi too easily and quickly accepts the responsibility of solving her father's problem in that manner. This corroborates Millet's claim that female passivity is one of the sustaining factors of male domination. Anyasi put up no form of resistance against this congenital bondage but easily aligns herself with the traditional scheme of things. Yet the fact that Ona puts up a resistance in *The Broken Calabash* also critically queries the position of Millet and Mirkin that the problem of women is passivity. Truly, Anyasi is passive in her acceptance of the odd responsibility of giving her father a son but Ona, as shall soon be revealed, is not.

Onwueme's *The Broken Calabash* appears on the surface to be a play about radical university girls rebelling against parental guidance and societal values. However, the dramatic conflict in the play is brought about by a dilemma created for Onaby, a tradition whose roots are deeply ensconced in the fertile soil of patriarchy. It is in pursuit of patriarchal values that every family is expected to have a male child to perpetuate the paternal lineage. In *The Broken Calabash* Ona is perceived and accepted to be both male and female. She is an *Idegbe*, a male daughter with a choice of either procreating for her family herself or marrying a woman who would do the same for her father. The main interest is in getting children who will continue the family name/lineage.

Ona, unlike Anyasi, hates the culture with a passion and is highly disgusted by the description of her cultural responsibility as the only child of her parents. As a university undergraduate, Ona desires to live a normal life in her youth and have fun. She has a boyfriend whom she hopes to marry in the near future. However, her father's extreme actions and claims of love choke and frustrate her aspirations. Courtuma, Ona's father, resists all her movements and fences off her boyfriend, Diaku. In the course of the semester break that brings Ona and Diaku home, Courtuma reveals Ona's status as an *Idegbe* to her and tells her to choose between bringing him a pregnancy and marrying a fellow woman to bring Courtuma a pregnancy. Ona would have neither of the options. She pleads with her parents to let her live a normal life like her friend. She even asks Diaku to come and know her parents officially. Courtuma reveals through his actions that men would not allow women to break off the shackles of patriarchy without putting up a fight to defend the domination from which they have benefited for a long time. Courtuma insults Diaku's family and they leave in anger.

While this tears Ona apart completely, Courtuma is satisfied that that marriage prospect is destroyed and that Ona can still hold the “homestead” together. Once again in Onwueme, the issue of men’s insensitivity to women’s happiness and emotional well-being is raised.

Ona’s resolve not to stay bound within the shackles of a barbaric tradition is not enough to obtain liberation for her. Her father, representing the oppressive patriarchal tradition, is unwilling to let go freely. He deliberately destroys Ona’s only love relationship, expecting her to settle down thereafter and attend to the cultural demands on her as the only child of the family. On the contrary, Ona’s sense of loss upon discovering that Diaku now belongs to her best friend leads her to take desperate steps and avenge the injustice done to her. She meets her father’s display of absolute inconsideration for her happiness with an equally unkind action which leads ultimately to the tragic end of the play.

Although the attack on patriarchy in this play is almost without a material base, it is still discernible that patriarchal tradition is the bedrock of the crisis that upsets Ona’s life and catalyzes the tragic ending of the play. The heavy burden placed on Ona and every girl child in her position by strict observance of such culture is the underlying factor behind the composition of the play, which makes it another attack on oppressive patriarchal structures that weigh women down. Ona’s life is overtaken by her circumstances and her singular resistance is too feeble to have any impact on the deeply rooted culture of her ancestors. Although Ona puts up a desperate fight against male domination of her life, she fails because her fight is a lone battle with no support, not even from her mother. Her mother and members of her gender refuse to take a stand by her side and remain passive while Ona languishes under the unbearable yoke of masculine oppression.

Nesting in Patriarchal Cages

The subject of objectification alluded to in the case of the unnamed couple in *Wazobia* is given full treatment in Foluke Ogunleye’s *Nest in a Cage* and further amplified. Ogunleye’s perception of masculine domination in this play is seen from the angle of polygamy and female objectification, and her approach is an examination of the polygamous propensities of patriarchal cultures with focus on the modern man who, though married to one woman, keeps a harem of girls for sexual pleasure. Right from Biblical times, patriarchs have been polygamous. The main essence of polygamy is capital. Hence, in Africa where patriarchy is deeply entrenched and polygamy is taken for granted, women form only a part of the political and agricultural estates of great men who acquire them with money just like other properties and expect them to stay so.

Out of the four girls in *Nest in a Cage*, three of them have “Sugar Daddies” as they call the men who exploit them sexually and pay them in return. Nike’s case is peculiar and pathetic because, being a newcomer in the game, she dabbles on blindly without caution and ends up burning her fingers, and that very badly. She gets permanently scarred by erroneously entering Chief Agbabiaka’s net and believing every lie he tells her without considering that Chief only recently dated and jilted her friend, Lanre. Nike’s naïveté soon catches up with her as she gets pregnant for Chief, thinking the prospects of a marriage with him would now be higher. Her thinking is that a marriage to the wealthy Chief will solve her problem of poverty permanently. Quite contrary to her expectations, Chief demands an abortion immediately and throws her out empty-handed.

The weapon of male domination briefly alluded to in *The Reign of Wazobia* is also used here and even enlarged. Male domination is fuelled mainly by economic control that rests, in most cases, in



men who almost literally purchase and sustain the interest of members of the female gender with the power of money. This scenario is again a confirmation of Hartmann's claim that capital is the material base of patriarchy and that in patriarchy women are exploited. Just as the man in *Wazobia* says he will not take nonsense from a woman he has paid for, men in *Nest* use money to curry the attention and affection of young girls for their own advantage. Alhaji takes Deola to America and lavishes a lot of money on her only to dump her on arrival, for another catch most likely. Chief Agbabiaka dedicates a whole house to his extramarital affairs and spends a lot of money on any girl who is reigning at particular points in time. The ironical reality of his own case is that the entire wealth he parades about belongs to his wife.

Ogunleye has thus carefully nullified the basis for male domination, women objectification, and patriarchal oppression. Financial power, which is the backbone of male hegemonic attitudes, can now reside in women since whoever owns the weapon wields the power. This raises an entirely special subject. The peculiar situation of Chief Agbabiaka and his wife serves to confirm Hartmann's claim that "capitalism adjusts to patriarchy [...] patriarchy adjusts to capital" (183). Chief, though unable to control his promiscuous instincts, is hamstrung by an ingrained dependence on his wife for financial sustenance. Agbabiaka "submits" to his wife's control to a certain extent. He hides his philandering from her and takes his financial supplies from her company. He was only a clerk in his wife's company prior to their marriage and is under a very strong constraint that the day any of his adulterous trysts with girls result in pregnancy, he will lose his exalted post and become a clerk again. This explains his severity with the girls on the issue of pregnancy and the huge amount he pays to procure an abortion. While Mrs. Agbabiaka's attitude may be queried and excoriated, it reveals quite distinctly that male control is a matter of economic buoyancy. Thus, patriarchy adjusts to capital.

Nest in a Cage cleverly raises the question of the paternal family line which is a direct product of a patriarchal tradition. Chief Agbabiaka's wife, though a successful and rich woman, has only one problem in life, her inability to bear a male child. She is thus willing to acquire the male child fathered by her husband at any price. Although she arrogantly and very impersonally makes the request, the fact remains that she recognizes in Nike's son a missing part of her marital life which she would need to put an end to her fears. She is equally aware of the kind of power Nike can wield over her marriage in the near future if she so chooses as a result of the importance attached to the continuation of the male family lineage. Her request for the boy is thus a step calculated towards the real security of her shaky marriage by ensuring that her husband would not go in search of Nike's male child to maintain the family name. Mrs. Agbabiaka is still enslaved to patriarchal values in spite of her affluence. Therefore, capitalism adjusts to patriarchy.

Conclusion

It becomes quite clear, judging from the circumstances of the husband and wife relationship between Chief and Mrs. Agbabiaka in *Nest in a Cage*, that capitalism is the material base of patriarchal traditions and attitudes. The play reveals that both institutions – patriarchy and capitalism – respect and adjust to each other. The scenario from the warring couple in *Wazobia* sharply contradicts this claim by the insistence of the male on his supremacy and leadership even when the resources for sustaining the family are acquired from the woman's labor. Thus, in this case and in many others in Africa, patriarchy ignores and insults capitalism with its attendant powers.

The major opposition to Hartmann is in the two women cited above and the women of *Wazobia* who eventually seize the reins of political, and consequentially, financial power from the men

and exert it in their own interest. Another disconnect between Hartmann and the male-female relationships in the selected texts is that female oppression continues in spite of the fact that women may not rely on men for financial sustenance. Beyond the dictatorial powers of capitalist customs, the roots of patriarchy in Africa go deep down into obsolescent beliefs and practices which capital power alone will not suffice to uproot. Part of the problem therefore, as Mirkin and Millet claim, remain the passivity of women due to psychological bondage to which they have been subjected from time immemorial. Thus, passivity is one protracted predicament of women of older generations which Onwueme tackles headlong in *Wazobia* and proposes as a solution to patriarchal oppression.

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