

Bondage of being born female in selected African literary texts

Iwabi Abraham Modahunsi
Department of English
Federal College of Education, Kontagora
An Affiliation with the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
E-mail: iwadahunsi@gmail.com

Ademola Michael
Department of French
Federal College of Education, Kontagora
An Affiliation with the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria
E-mail: wolemike002@gmail.com

Abstract

Many women have been victims of underage marriage, forced marriage, proxy marriage, levirate marriage, denial of education and the ignominy of male-child favouritism. These unwholesome practices have hampered the utilisation of the intellectual endowment of women, and have subjected them to untold trauma and deprivation. These plights are reflected in some female-authored works, and works by men who empathise with women. This study is an exegesis of selected African literary texts discountenancing the highlighted antiquated practices, within the ambit of feminist literary theory, with a view to explicating how the practices can be jettisoned. It is rendered in the course of the exegesis that under-age marriage, forced marriage and levirate marriage are still rampant in Africa; and also that male-child preference remains a phenomenon in the continent. The conclusion arrived at in the study is that no gender is superior to another. Marriage is a matter of choice, preference and mutual agreement between would-be spouses. It should not be imposed on anyone nor should anyone be forced into it. Rather than putting women in bondage, cultural practices which unburden their plights should be encouraged.

Keywords: Underage marriage, forced marriage, levirate marriage, male child preference.

Introduction

This study is contextualised to signify the encumbrances affecting women in the attainment of their potentials in a male-dominated society, and the herculean social realities that accompany being born a female in the African cultural milieu. It concerns itself with how being female, in Africa, is culturally organised upon repressive patriarchal norms that entrench male hegemony and limit female agency. Such gendered sociocultural structure the study avers, are not rationalised by biological necessity, but are anthropogenic constructs. This study, therefore, undergoes an analysis of how female existence summarises into bondage and burden in selected African literary texts.

African literature mirrors the autochthonous African lifestyle, colonial

and postcolonial events, as well as the impacts of modernism on African culture. Indeed, modern African literature interrogates cultural practices within the ambits of their social acceptability, their psychosocial effects and their civility in contemporary times. Under-age, forced and levirate marriages as well as the denial of the girl-child education are antiquated practices still commonplace in Africa, and reflected in its literature. Many female African writers, and their male counterparts that empathise with women, portray the devastating images of these cultural practices in their works. The authors who thematise these cultural practices discountenance them and canvass for change. Underage marriage, also known as child marriage, is a marital union, formally or informally contracted, between a child

who has not attained the statutory age of eighteen and above, and an adult or another child. It is a marriage in which one of the (or both) spouses is legally considered a minor. Often times, child marriages are forcefully imposed and conducted. The girl-child has often been the unfortunate victim of underage marriage. Patriarchal norms in many parts of the continent has objectified the girl-child especially during marriage rites, as an income generating commodity, whose proceeds are used to train and better the life of the male-child. Underage marriage and forced marriage go together often times. In some occasions however, forced marriage takes place independent of child marriage. Forced marriage occurs when one of the parties involved in a marital union is married off without his/her consent or against his/her will. It also takes place when one of the parties of a marital union who wishes to quit is forced to stay in the marriage, against his/her will. Hence, underage marriage may not necessarily be a forced marriage.

Adefarasin (2018) notes that, in a number of places in Nigeria, girls are given out in marriage at the age of twelve or thirteen, to men who are old enough to father them, or possibly be their grandfather. Adefarasin cites the example of a thirteen-year old girl given out in marriage to Ahmed Yerima, a Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, in 2017. Girls given out early in marriage, according to Adefarasin (2018), “do not only have their education aborted, or future truncated, but are also additionally exposed to early pregnancies and vesicovaginal fistula, a disease which leaves its victims deformed and unable to control urination” (p. 26).

Levirate marriage is a marriage in which the wife of a deceased man is obliged to marry the brother of the departed husband. In levirate marriage, exogamous marriage is frowned at. A wife of a deceased man is expected to remarry in the husband’s clan, preferably the brother of the widow’s husband. In this case, the woman becomes a property of the deceased, inheritable by the

men in the deceased’s family. Underage and forced marriages are human right violations that rob a girl of her childhood and education and, by so doing, hamper her potential for intellectual growth and stability. Risks in underage, forced and levirate marriages include violence, abuse, assault, early pregnancy, morbidity and maternal mortality. The root causes of underage and forced marriages are gender disparity and draconian norms, devaluing and restricting women in many spheres of life.

Methodology

This study is premised the research methodology. It involves an analytic and/or textual analysis of literary texts used for the study within the ambits of feminist literary theory. The analysis covers eight representative texts from Nigeria, Zimbabwe and Egypt, namely: El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero* (2007), Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* (1988); Fakolujo’s *Girls are Jewels* (2002); Onyemelukwe’s *Beyond the Boiling Point* (2015); Sofola’s *Wedlock of the Gods* (1972); Wood’s *Indigo* (2013); Yerima’s *Aetu* (2006) and Ari-Ajia’s *Women at Crossroads* (2005). El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero*, from Egypt, represents North Africa. Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*, a Zimbabwean text, represents East Africa. Fakolujo’s *Girls are Jewels*, Onyemelukwe’s *Beyond the Boiling Point*, Sofola’s *Wedlock of the Gods*, Wood’s *Indigo*, Yerima’s *Aetu* and Ari-Ajia’s *Women at Crossroads*, from Nigeria, represent West Africa. The texts are selected on the basis of their relevance to and suitability for the subject matter.

Theoretical framework

Feminism has no consensus definition, because its focus is usually determined by specific experiences of women in specific cultural settings. However, Lois Tyson (2015) avers that “feminist criticism examines the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforces or undermines the economic, political, social,

and psychological oppression of women” (p. 79). Akorede (2011) sees feminism as a theory which highlights issues like violence, discrimination, sex stereotyping, sexual objectification, patriarchy and oppression as they concern women. In other words, feminism projects the image of women in the society and highlights the negative and positive experiences of women in patriarchal society. Therefore, a feminist is a man or a woman who identifies inequality among the roles of men and women in the society and seeks fair play between the sexes. Hence, a good literary text, in the view of the feminists, is one that exposes the plights of women and advocates their emancipation from the shackle of oppression and patriarchal hegemony.

Girl-child abuse, forced and levirate marriages in selected African texts

A number of writers explore and highlight despicable cultural practices noticed in their locales in their writings, in order to educate while entertaining their readers. Girl-child abuse, forced and levirate marriages are some of the nubs of such works. Zulu Sofola’s *Wedlock of the Gods*, for instance, is a tragic play which revolves around its tragic heroine, Ogwoma, who is denied her right to marry Uloko, the preferred man, but forced, by her parents, to marry Adigwu, against her wish. Ogwoma is forced into marriage with Adigwu by her parents because, “they needed the money from her bridewealth to cure their son who was very sick” (p. 1). Sofola brings the plight of women to the fore, using Ogwoma as an archetypal character. Ogwoma becomes a first-choice commodity available to raise money to settle the hospital bill of her ill brother. This also borders on male-child priority and preference. Ogwoma’s brother’s health is given priority over her own wellbeing and the obvious potential for an unhappy marital life.

Ogwoma’s case is intertextual and similar with Aramide’s in Molar Wood’s “Girl on the Wall” – the eighth short story in *Indigo* (2013). It is a pathetic story of a

woman who is used, at a tender age, as collateral for the money borrowed to train her younger brother. The text is set in a patriarchal society, where male-child education is prioritised over that of the girl-child. Aramide’s mother had gone to Ilemo, “a town in the hinterlands to borrow money from a Merchant there. A huge sum as collateral. She left her daughter behind to serve as bonded labour” (p. 84). The money borrowed is used to sponsor her younger brother from primary school through to university. Although her mother’s plan is to defray the money she borrowed within two years, she is unable to raise the money. Only a sepia image of the girl is hung, in her mother’s apartment, as a remembrance of her existence. Aramide’s case is that of servitude. She is made to slave in order that her brother becomes “the first educated man” (p. 85) of his generation. Her prime age and education are sacrificed for male-child preference. She suffers filial disconnection and (psychosocial) alienation from her sibling.

In Sofola’s *Wedlock of the Gods*, Ogwoma loathes Adigwu but loves Uloko passionately. Unfortunately however, Uloko cannot afford the money required by Ogwoma’s parents to treat their male child. The marriage between Ogwoma and Adigwu does not last long. Adigwu dies untimely and Ogwoma considers herself freed from the entanglement of the forced marriage. She defies the tradition that requires a widow to observe mourning rites and be inherited by the brother of the deceased husband, within the tenets “of levitation, [and] ...became pregnant by her lover who eternally holds her heart” (p. 1). The patriarchal institution that stifles women’s rights, through traditional rites and taboos, supplies the conflict in the play. That Uloko impregnates Ogwoma during the mourning rites, and the desecration of the rite of widow inheritance, are ways Sofola render a disservice to institutionalised patriarchal taboos in the play.

From the creative tenor and style of Lanre Ari-Ajia’s *Women at Crossroads* it is

obvious that the playwright, though a man, sympathises with the female folk for being discriminated against and subjugated by the male folk. The setting of the play reflects the Yoruba traditional society where male-child preference is given primacy. The playwright develops the dramatic movement around Ogungbemi's polygamous home in which the first wife, Mama, is pregnant and consults the oracles to appease them to grant her a male-child. The male child is usually called "Arole" (p. 3) – the one who takes care of the home, when the female child is given off in marriage. It chronicles women's woes altogether, especially as it brings to bear, male child preference. While Mama moves from one soothsayer to another, Ogungbemi, her husband, is seen praying "fervently to Obatala to let his wife beget a baby boy" (p. 5). Prior to Sewa's birth, the parents' expectation is to have a male-child, because four girls – Adetutu, Omolabake, Fadeke and Omolanke – had been born and given out forcibly in marriage as minors. By providence, Sewa's formative years are heartening – unlike her elder siblings'. She is brave, courageous and graciously beautiful like Ezinma, in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo expresses disappointment in his son, Nwoye, believing he would be more enthused, if his daughter, Ezinma, had been a boy: "if Ezinma had been a boy, I would have been happier. She has the right spirit" (p. 46).

Sewa's burden is similar to Ogwoma's in Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and Ezinne's in Onyemelukwe's *Beyond the Boiling Point*. While Ogwoma is being forced by her parents to marry Adigwu because they need the bride-price to cure their son of sickness, Ezinne is almost withdrawn from school and forced into marriage of convenience with a man she has never seen, by her greedy uncle. Ogwoma hates Adigwu with passion, but has sheer love for Uloko "whom she could not marry because he did not have the money that her parents needed" (p. 1). Ezinne's discontent is contained in the excerpt below:

Imagine the bull's call, to bring me out of school only to be sold into marriage. Is it not the exorbitant dowry that entices them? No one deems it fit to seek for my consent. Nobody cares a hoot if a girl is at the ripe age for marriage or not and what would happen to the unfortunate girl after being sold into marriage (p. 7).

This predicament is called "violence against women" in Ari-Ajia's *Women at Crossroads*, and according to the playwright; "it is a criminal offence" (p. 13). Women are perpetually subjected under patriarchal hegemony in the guise of submissiveness to their husband as custom demands. Mama succinctly captures it in *Women at Crossroads*:

That is submission, my child. And that is tradition. A woman must be submissive to her husband in time of good. And also, when the other time comes she must not be barren. Never... Never must she. Because to be barren or to pretend to be, is to invite the wrath of our gods and our ancestors (p. 14).

It is obvious, in the quote above, that women have been under the societal construct of traditional values and are psychologically subsumed under irrational stoicism in the face of tyranny. While the tradition grants the man the liberty to marry a second wife, it denies the woman the freedom to date another man to fulfil her own expectation. This is what happens when, without prior notice and the consent of his wife, Ogungbemi brings in a new wife to co-habit with Mama, promising himself that she is going to give him "a precious son" (pp. 29-

30). To worsen the situation, the new wife is put under Mama's care with strict instruction that: "she must know no pain. She must feel no suffering also" (p. 30).

Sewa traces the problem of gender inequality and the impossibility of changing the *status quo* to primordial times. Admonishing her contemporaries on the right path to tread, she cautions that as long as her friends continue to think that the best a woman can do is seek feminine equivalences to formative male imaginative expressions in play and games, the longer they will continue to be enslaved. In her words, "when a boy carries a toy guns, you too, play with a toy gun not a dolly. When they carry guns, you too learn to shoot a gun. If you don't learn it now while you're young, they will use it against you in the future" (p. 34). In semiotic analysis, the toy-gun symbolises valour associated with masculinity – the phallus – while the toy-babies epitomise the feminine psychic disposition towards fecundity.

Forced marriage and levirate in Ahmed Yerima's *Aetu*

Ahmed Yerima is a male playwright who empathises with women and uses his work to rebuke underage, forced and levirate marriages. A gothic reflection of forced and levirate marriage is the thrust of Ahmed Yerima's *Aetu*. In the play, Yerima dramatises the commodification of women as objects of erotic satisfaction and inheritance in a male-dominated society. The play is about the fourteen year-old eponymous character, Aetu, and her herdsman lover, Atiba, who are not allowed to get married. Aetu's father sacrifices her daughter's love for Atiba on the altar of a marriage of convenience. Her father betroths her to Oke – an old man – against her wish. Oke is described in the dramatic text as a "sinister big man of about seventy years (p. 27). His devilish inclination manifests in his coordination of the gruesome killing of Atiba, in the bush, and the forceful and barbaric manner he gains carnal knowledge of Aetu.

In the opening scene, one encounters Kande, in Suara's herbal consultation room. He brings his father, Obajimi, who suffers from a mysterious illness, which has defied medication for two years, to Suara, the priest of Esu, for possible cure. Obajimi manifests the symptoms of psychotic delusion, which is characterised by acute visual and auditory hallucination. Suara discovers, having consulted Esu (the divination god) that Obajimi's sickness is as a result of an ancestral curse put on his family by his grandmother, Aetu. Not until she is appeased will a solution surface. In a state of anger, humiliation and undignified treatment, Aetu lays a generational curse on Oke and his descendants, because she is forced into marriage without her consent, and committed into levirate marriage, which she detests strongly.

Aetu's spirit is invoked through necromantic procedure, and she appears. It is revealed, in the course of the conversation that ensued, that Aetu was not only forced into marriage with Oke, Obajimi's father, but she was also raped by the old man, in the presence of his sons, who help their father tie her to a wooden bed. The playwright recounts the horrible scene of the defilement thus:

Aetu: (*in tears and anger*) I was raped, Baba. Defiled!

Suara: Abomination! Lalu Ogirioko! Raped! By who?

Aetu: By an old fool who calls himself my husband.

Saura: Your husband? Why would a man forcefully take what is his? What madness would seize a man that he will rape a girl with... er... a tongue like yours?

Aetu: A madness propelled by greed. An old fool who desires what is not his. A mad old buffon... glutton who desires the tender flesh of a fourteen-year old child (p. 17).

Aetu: He tied my legs to each side of the wooden bed, and two of his sons held each hand so that I will not have hands to pull at his grey beard, and scratch his lecherous old face. With his breath burning my chest like the panting of a bull, he forced his way in...bringing me to the edge of life... (p. 18).

The heinous treatment Oke metes out to Aetu prompts her to curse him and his unborn generation, without sparing even the child the marriage produces. Through the use of flashback, the playwright shows Aetu, in a state of agony and distress, seriously embittered as she pronounces the curse. Aetu recounts:

They have killed Atiba,
Then they raped me.

Let the fool, Oke, who calls
himself my husband not find
peace till he dies.

Let my child that I carry dies
the same way.

Let any man who decides to
sleep with me suffer the same
fate. For both my passage and
womb belong to no one but
Atiba.

Before they die, let them be
sick in the head ...one leg
here on earth and one leg in
the land of the dead. Let them
remain haunted by the death
of Atiba... (p. 20).

Aetu's curse has an instant efficacy which lingers on in Oke's family. Everyone in Okediran's family, who takes Aetu as his wife in levirate marriage, dies mysteriously. Oke and two of his younger ones die in the same circumstance. His children and grandchildren suffer psychotic conditions and paralysis before they die.

Marriage and education of the girl child in African texts

A proxy marriage is one in which one or both individuals being united in marriage are not physically present. The absentee is/are usually being represented, by a close ally, when the marriage is contracted. In *Beyond the Boiling Point*, Ifeoma Onyemelukwe features a planned proxy marriage which the central character of the work thwarts. Written in first-person narrative technique, the novel is set in an imaginary town of Obodonwe, Southeastern Nigeria. It portrays a premeditated proxy marriage which Ezinne's uncle wants her to accept without her consent. Ezinne is the protagonist of the text. She is a young lady of sixteen, who David is sent to fetch from school, "in the heat of terminal examinations" (p. 3), in order that she may be given out in marriage, by her uncle, Ideji, to a man she has never met.

In this feminist text, Onyemelukwe narrates the plights of women in a patriarchal society. Like Ogwoma in Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and Aetu in Yerima's *Aetu*, Ezinne strongly resists her Uncle's sinister plan. She is not like her timid and passive mother who is caught up in the web of chauvinism and does nothing to resist the untoward plan of Ideji. Ezinne's mother has no genuine explanation to give to her daughter when the former asks her the reason she accepts Ideji's decision to withdraw her from school and be given out into proxy marriage. All the older woman can say, according to the narrator, is that:

Have you forgotten that I am only a woman? And a woman in our land is only to be seen and not to be heard. A woman has no say. She plays no role in decision making even when it concerns her own life. Has she any life of her own in the first place (p. 6)?

The excerpt above portrays the objectification and subjugation of women in male-dominated society. In the social milieu the novel reflects women do not have a say in decision making, even when it concerns them. The patriarchal structure explains the reason Ezinne is withdrawn from school and is about to be given out in marriage without her consent and her mother's. The protagonist sees the practice as an attack on the female folk, as well as an encumbrance to the exertion of their rights, which must be stopped. She decisively vows to change the cultural practices that make women a mere puppets and household accessories of men. In her words:

Woman must be set free from this and other forms of bondage, from all forms of violence perpetrated against her in our patriarchal society.

I said it must change.

...Imagine the bull's call, to bring me out of school only to be sold into marriage. Is it not the exorbitant dowry that entices them? No one deems it fit to seek for my consent. Nobody cares a hoot if a girl is at the ripe age for marriage or not and what would happen to the unfortunate girl after being sold into marriage (pp. 6-7).

How Ideji arranges to give out Ezinne in proxy marriage, without her knowledge, beats the imagination. The text highlights salient information prospective spouses would want to know concerning the other, such as his/her parental background, place of abode, level of academic attainment, health status, place and nature of work.

A scenario similar to Ezinne's is depicted in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman Point Zero*. Firdaus, the tragic heroine, is given out in marriage without her consent,

by her uncle, to Sheikh Mahmoud, who is "over sixty, whereas" she "had not yet turned nineteen" (p. 45). Firdaus' brilliant academic performance is traded off for perceived pecuniary gain which her uncle and his wife stand to receive from Sheikh Mahmoud. Firdaus' hatred for Mahmoud is as a result of the pus-oozing carbuncle on his chin, his old age and the reclusive lifestyle he lives. No one cares to seek the opinion of the protagonist about the choice of a man she will have as a spouse. Her husband is being chosen for and imposed on her. Firdaus's education is truncated on a flimsy pretext that sending her to the university will make her hobnob with men – a social life her uncle considers impious and the reason he wants her to be married off. Indeed, Firdaus' uncle denies her education in order to protect his own religious image and interest.

Instances of male-child preference and denial of a girl-child education in Zimbabwe can be found in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*. Tambudzai (shortened as Tambu), the protagonist and heroine of the text, is almost denied education but for the death of her brother, Nhamo, for whom her education had been halted. Tambu's education suffers not because she is dull. Indeed, she is in Sub A class while her elder brother, Nhamo, is in Sub B class. For paucity of fund, she is compelled to sacrifice her education for the training of her brother whose intelligent quotient does not match hers. Nhamo is chosen to be educated instead of his brilliant younger sister, Tambu, because he is a boy. In a number of African communities, the needs and sensibilities of the girl-child are not always considered a priority, or essential. In such communities, women are denied education and brainwashed to prepare for marriage at a tender age. In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga portrays Tambu as an archetypal African lady who could have been denied education. Her father once asked her if she could "cook books and feed them to her husband" and advises her to "stay at home with her

mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetable” (p. 15).

Depiction of bondage and burden of women by male-authors

Aside Yerima, other male writers have contributed immensely to this gender-critical discourse. Their writings are used to advocate for the jettisoning of draconian practices dehumanising women in patriarchal settings. Their works negate male chauvinism and canvass for the enabling environment to maximise the potentials of women. The positions of some of the writers are captured in the titles of their works. Lanre Ari-Ajia’s play is titled *Woman at Crossroads* and Debo Fakolujo’s is headlined *Girls are Jewels*. Ari-Ajia’s *Women at Crossroads* (2005) explores the aspect of male-child preference and the imperative of the education of the female child. Sewa, its central character, is presented in contrast to her mother who is chained down by male chauvinism. Her father refuses to send her to school because she is a girl. Her elder sisters Omolabake, Adetutu, Folake and Omolanke are given out in marriage before adolescent age and her father intends to give her out in the ways of her elder ones. While she is still in her mother’s womb, her parents offer sacrifice to Obatala (the Yoruba god of creation) and Ogun (the Yoruba god of iron), in order that the expectant child could be a male child. As soon as Ogungbemi (her father) learns that his wife has given birth to another girl, he simply regards the baby, who would later become Adesewa, as “another man’s property” who “will go the way of her sister before her... victim of early marriage, of course” (p. 8). From the imagery dispensed in the dramatic text, there is no hesitation inferring that the playwright commiserates with women and seeks their emancipation from masculine oppression.

Like a cancerous dreaded disease, women’s plight bears analogy “with leprosy” (p. 58) in the play. The submission of the playwright is that gender inequality has been since antiquity. From the

sensitisation talk Adesewa presents to the women at the village square, it is revealed that Aristotle and Nietzsche, “the best of the whites” (p. 57) also held patriarchal worldviews of women. The former was of the opinion that “certain classes of human beings who were excluded from the full exercise of human reasoning were slaves and women” (pp. 57-58), while the latter said that “woman was God’s second mistake” (p. 58). Adesewa tries to disentangle herself from patriarchal encumbrances by availing herself the opportunity western education and civilisation offered. Against her father’s parochial interest, she refuses to be given out in marriage prematurely like her elder siblings. She secures university admission and graduates. Arriving home, she helps settle her father’s backlog of debt accrued from unsettled palm-wine bills. That single act saves her father from being killed by Ogundare, the hunter, who is resolute on taking Ogungbemi’s life should he fail to liquidate the “seventeen pence” (p. 54) owed him. Added to that, she brings honour and dignity to her parents. The final words of the playwright epitomise optimism and unequivocally illuminate his stance. Rhetorically he asks: “will the women succeed?” (p. 59). The question is self-answered. The narrator opines that women will get to their destination and find places in the realm of affairs of the world. They will move from the margin to the sociopolitical and economic mainstream.

Women, in history and in the play examined, are presented by patriarchy as a symbol of erotic desire, positioned by race, class and gender as a subservient group of people lower and inferior to the male folk. Socially, women are perceived as culturally inferior (second-class citizens) and their identity is to be found in the desires to please, serve *others* and seek definition through submission to their men. The perception is that by the token of the *bride-price* paid on a lady by her husband, she is part of the man’s property. Bride-price is one of the encumbrances to the exertion of

women's rights, which feminists seek to annul. Why such payment is not called *groom-price* remains a serious concern to the feminists and a facet of the societal construct. Tess Onwueme reveals such plight in *The Reign of Wazobia* where the man who is guilty of wife-battering in the play asks:

...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 between
my thighs for nothing? (p.
24)

There are inter-textual convergences in thematic preoccupation, motif, setting and general locale between Lanre Ari-Ajia's *Women at Crossroads* and Debo Fakolaju's *Girls are Jewels*. Both works deconstruct the erroneous perception of the education of female child (ren) and demystify the associated stereotypes. Like the former, *Girls are Jewels* reflects the polygamous home of Mr. Sanya, a business magnate who has money and other things money can buy except happiness. His depressive state is not unconnected to the domestic mayhem permeating his home. The atmosphere is tense, characterised by incessant squabble, jealousy and unhealthy conspiracy. He has close to two dozen children, and of that number, only one is a boy. By the customary law, the male-child is the heir of his chain of business and other possessions. The male-child factor brews contention and predisposes Kayode, the only son to hazard, and makes him a potential victim of circumstance. It dawns on Mr. Sanya that he will be traumatised should Kayode die in the course of the domestic imbroglio. This is the psychogenesis of his mild bipolar disorder, a depressive and nervous condition emanating from uneasiness, fragmented thought, dilemma and incessant anxiety. Such condition, if not properly managed, could snowball to hypertension, a stroke and an

untimely death of the sufferer as almost experienced by the protagonist in the text examined, but for Gbade's wherewithal which remedies the situation.

Mr. Sanya denies his female children education and gives them out in marriage at a very tender age. Mr. Sanya's business takes much of his time to such extent that he has little or no time to give his children informal education. Gbade makes Sanya realise how out-of-touch he is with the times, also informing him that boys these days have no time to take care of their parents at old age due to their strive to meet ends meet: "but girls or ladies, even in their marital home will keep on remembering their parents" (p. 10). The issue of forced and early marriages which feminist movement stands against also comes to the fore like it does in *Women at Crossroads*. One of Sanya's daughters, Sade, could not but ask: "you realise that he disregarded us as his legitimate children. Is it a sin to be a female?" (p. 23). Mr. Sanya appears unaware of that fact that death is not a respecter of sex. Little wonder that Kayode is able to remark intelligently, telling the audience that: "I asked him-what if I die now? That means you keep your eggs in a basket" (p. 25). In the short story, the novelist exposes a number of encumbrances to the respect for the rights of female children: "young girls are exposed to marriage proposal at a tender age which... completely erode female education in the society" (p. 48).

Ari-Ajia does not only expose male opposition to the education of the female-child but also suggests the ways women can exert their potentials positively and get educated. In Fakolaju's *Girls are Jewels* Mr Sanya denies his sixteen daughters western education and resolves to educate his only son, Kayode. These male-writers sympathise with women in their unfortunate predicament and advocate for the education of both male and female children. They see education as source of enlightenment and a means to get liberated from the shackle of oppression, as well as the gateway to

economic independence and other opportunities.

Conclusion

Literature is a discipline that explores different facets of life. It examines cultural practices from different ethnic backgrounds. More often than not, it portrays the status quo and suggests ways to improve on and jettison antiquated practices. The writers whose works are analysed in this study reflect marital issues which are prevalent in their vicinities and educate their readers on the risks inherent in such practices. Underage, forced, levirate and proxy marriages are not best practices, and so is male-child preference over the female-child. These cultural practices are discountenanced altogether by the writers whose works are dissected in this study. Men and women are useful and both have the potentials to take care of their parents, their environment and contribute to the development of their societies. No gender is superior to another. Also, marriage is matter of choice, preference and mutual agreement between would-be spouses. It should not be imposed on anyone nor should anyone be forced into it. Rather than putting women in bondage, cultural practices which unburden their plights should be encouraged.

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