



Journal of Gender and Power

Vol. 22, No. 2, 2024



Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM

ADAM MICKIEWICZ UNIVERSITY IN POZNAN

Journal of Gender and Power

Vol. 22, No. 2, 2024



POZNAN 2024

Journal of Gender and Power is aimed at providing an international forum for discussing various issues and processes of gender construction. It is a scholarly, interdisciplinary journal, which features articles in all fields of gender studies, drawing on various paradigms and approaches. We invite scholars to submit articles and reviews reporting on theoretical considerations and empirical research.

Journal of Gender and Power is published by Faculty of Educational Studies,
Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznan (Poland).

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Publikacja sfinansowana przez Wydział Studiów Edukacyjnych UAM

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Wersja pierwotna czasopisma: drukowana

Opracowanie komputerowe okładki: K. & S. Szurpik

Zdjęcie na okładce: pexels / olia danilevich

ISSN (Online) 2657-9170 ISSN (Print) 2391-8187 DOI: 10.14746/jpg

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Editor's Preface

In public debate, the issue of gender is increasingly being raised. Concepts such as cultural gender, gender identity, gender inequalities, and gender stereotypes are of interest to many theorists and researchers of masculinity and femininity. *Journal of Gender and Power* is a space where, we have been presenting reflections, analyses, and the results of scientific research on these socially significant issues for over 10 years now.

Among some parts of society, the topic of gender—focusing primarily on the socially constructed nature of gender, i.e., the assumption that gender is not biologically assigned but rather understood as variable over time—remains a subject of ridicule and a platform for discrimination and prejudice. *Journal of Gender and Power* opposes this and breaks away from the essentialist understanding of gender—that is, the attribution of pre-defined roles and characteristics to men and women. Instead, it asserts that masculinity and femininity are social constructs. Their perception, therefore, differs across cultures, depends on specific time periods and spaces, and emphasizing the need for tolerance and openness to cultural differences in this regard is one of the key ideas of this journal.

Anna Sobczak



ARTICLES





Nicholas Efe Akpore

Osun State University (Nigeria)

ORCID: 0000-0002-0653-114X

Nollywood and Female Gender Exploitation in Kenneth Gyang's *Oloture*

ABSTRACT. This study explores gender exploitation in *Oloture*, focusing on gender issues within the Nigerian film industry, with particular emphasis on the portrayal of women. Using Kenneth Gyang's *Oloture* as a case study, the research examines how Nollywood projects gender dynamics and its role in shaping societal perceptions. Given the persistent gender inequalities in contemporary society, this study is both relevant and necessary. These issues have fueled the rise of feminism—an ideology and movement advocating for women's emancipation. The paper investigates how gender is represented in Nollywood, assessing the industry's influence in shaping gender narratives. Employing literary and sociological methodologies, the study analyzes how audiences consciously and unconsciously absorb messages from films. The findings reveal that the film industry wields significant power in shaping viewers' perceptions through its portrayals. Given the urgent need to address gender discrimination and exploitation, all stakeholders must collaborate in tackling these issues. As a key recommendation, the study emphasizes the importance of women attaining economic empowerment, as this is crucial to bridging the persistent gender gap in society.

KEYWORDS: gender exploitation, feminism, film, Nollywood, women empowerment

Introduction

Gender is the socially and culturally constructed roles for men and women. For instance, gender roles of men as owners of property, decision makers and heads of household are socially, historically and culturally constructed and have nothing to do with biological differences. It is important to note the difference between gender and sex. Sex refers to the biological differences between male and female. For example, the adult female has breast that can secrete milk to feed a baby but the adult male does not have. Gender roles differ from one place to another and change with time. For the sake of this study, it is essential to also explain what gender relations mean. Gender Relations are part of social relations, referring to the

ways in which the social categories of men and women, male and female, relate over the whole range of social organisation, not just to interactions between individual men and women in the sphere of personal relationships, or in terms of biological reproduction (Allanana, 2013, p. 32). An end-product of gender relations is gender issue. Gender issue includes gender exploitation, gender discrimination and other related issues.

Gender issue is one of the most discussions in the social sciences nowadays. The discussion has spurred a movement known as feminism this can be simply referred to as fight against the oppression, subjugation and suppression of the female folks. Tracing the origin of gender issue is like tracing the origin of humans. It has been noted from time immemorial that women are seen as lesser to man in all ramifications. However, this belief has exceeded just a notion and transformed into practice which is very derogatory of the women folks. The women folks were used as slaves, seen as sex objects, raped, beaten unjustly and so on. In the modern sense of it, there are certain jobs that are not given to women, not because they are not qualified for it but because they are women. In schools, they are sexually harassed by lecturers for grade. There have been several incidents in various Nigerian institutions where lecturers are arraigned for failing female students just because the affected students refused to share bed with them. In some cases, they are discriminated against in their places of work and so on. The acts stated earlier among others birthed the feminist movement. This movement gets modified as time moves—there are different stripes of it.

The term ‘feminism’ has many different uses and its meanings are often contested. For example, some writers use the term feminism to refer to a historically specific political movement in the United States and Europe; other writers use it to refer to the belief that there are injustices against women, though there is no consensus on the exact list of these injustices. Generally, feminism is both an intellectual and a political movement that seeks justice for all women and the end of sexism in all forms. Motivated by the quest for social justice, feminist inquiry provides a wide range of perspectives on social, cultural, economic and political phenomena. While explaining the origin of this movement, the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy documents thus:

‘Contemporary feminist philosophical scholarship emerged in the 1970s as more women began careers in higher education, including philosophy. As they did so, they also began taking up matters from their own experience

for philosophical scrutiny. These scholars were both influenced both by feminist movement in their midst as well as by their philosophical training, which was anything but feminist. Until recently one could not go to a graduate school to study 'Feminist philosophy'. While students and scholars could turn to the writings of Simone de Beauvoir or look back historically to the writings of 'first wave' feminists like Mary Wollstonecraft, most of the philosophers writing in the first decade of emergence of feminist philosophy brought their particular training and expertise to bear on analysing issues raised by the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s, such as abortion, affirmative action, equal opportunity, the institutions of marriage, sexuality and love.' (249)

It can be deduced from the above that feminism is a wide subject, it is a movement, a philosophy, an ideology, a fight among other things. The injustices felt by the women folks are outlined to be fought by the feminists. In other instance, feminism seeks to erode patriarchy. Patriarchy was used originally to describe father as the head of the house, the post 1906s feminists refer to it as 'systematic organisation of male supremacy and female subordination' (Kramarae, 1981, p. 92).

The media has played a pivotal role in the gender issue discourse. Media plays a big role of influencing the people's daily lives, this is because of how people view the world in general. Mass media is an agent of socialisation and from this role; it has been attacked by an array of criticism from different portions of the society. There is a wide range of media among them are television shows, movies, the radio, newspaper, advertisements and many more. In these many forms of media, there are images of men and women. These images are depicted in different ways and with different characteristics and different meanings. The way these depictions can alter the way people perceive social realities. Images can therefore play a very crucial role in stimulating anti-social behaviours such as violence, crime and delinquency among others as argued by Manatu when she explains that;

To people such as radical feminists, mass media is seen as an agent of male chauvinism. This systematically depicts a male dominated socio-cultural, political and economic order. These depictions come about from the continuous reinforcement of the negative gender stereotype of women. (54)

The representation of women in visual media continues to ignite quite a considerable amount of debate and scholarly investigation across the

globe. In Nigeria, the roles and treatment of women in the nascent film industry popularly known as Nollywood remain contentious. Critics of Nollywood films especially feminist scholars have attacked the predominant, if not exclusive portrayal of women for its narrowly traditional occupational and domestic roles and images. It is against this background that this study seeks to explore female gender exploitation using *Oloture* by Kenneth Gyang as case study.

Statement of the Problem

This study is necessary as a result of the burning gender issues in present day society. This is what gave rise to feminism which is an ideology and a movement of women emancipation. Feminists feel there is a huge disparity in the societal roles of men and women. While men are seen as 'super' human being, women are seen as the weaker vessels this in turn relegated them in the space of things in the society. This is owing to a lot of things, one of which is stereotypes created by media such as books, movies, radios and so on; there are many 'bad' projections of the female gender in these medias such as objectification, inferiorisation and so on. As a result of this, there is a need to further investigate the gender issues as displayed in *Oloture*.

Methodology of the Study

The study employs the use of literary methodology which is a unit of qualitative research, for the purpose of data collection. The literary method will involve the discussion and exploration of documents. The documents here include textbooks, articles and journals, materials got online and so on. It will also feature the literary and analytical method of film criticism which will be used to critically discuss the selected film in relation to the subject matter of the study.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on the theory of feminism. Feminism is basically a movement against the oppression, maltreatment and subjugation

of the women folks. It aims at complete removal of sexism and patriarchy. Feminist criticism grew out of the women's movement that followed the World War II and seeks to analyse the role of gender in works of literature. The feminist theory is founded on three main principles:

- i. Women have something valuable to contribute to every aspect of the world.
- ii. As an oppressed group, women have been unable to achieve their potential, receive rewards, or gain full participation in society.
- iii. Feminist research should do more than critique, but should work towards social transformation (Ropers-Huilman, 1998, p. 202).

This paper will critique the representation of women in the Nollywood movie *Oloture* and also suggest solution towards a social transformation. To be able to fully address the set objectives, the form of feminism that will be used is Marxist/Socialist feminism. In this feminism, the lens of feminism incorporates perspectives of social justice as well as socio-economic differences. For many centuries, women were considered the property of men and a key cog in the capitalist machine from a commoditized perspective just as we have in *Oloture* where women are used to earn money for some people.

Marxist feminists argue that the path to gender equality is led by the destruction of our capitalist society. If there is no social class again in the society, equality will be achieved for all especially the women. Socialist feminists purport that women can only achieve true freedom when working to end both economic and cultural oppression.

Synopsis of Kenneth Gyang's *Oloture*

The film, *Oloture* was premiered on October 31, 2019 at Carthage Film Festival in Tunisia. In September 2020, Netflix acquires distribution rights to the film. Airing began on October 2, 2020. Within days of its release, *Oloture* ranked among the top 10 most watched movies in the world on Netflix. The movie was directed by Kenneth Gyang and produced by Temitayo Abudu, James Amuta and Heidi Uys. It features movie stars like Omoni Oboli, Beverly Osu, Segun Arinze, Yemi Solade, Sharon Ooja, Blossom Chukwujekwu and many more. The film is partially inspired and based on a 2014 article by Nigerian journalist Toboure Ovuorie in the Premium Times 'INVESTIGATION: Inside Nigeria's Ruthless Human Trafficking Mafia'. Toboure went undercover as a prostitute in the city of Abuja. The

article frames many of the scenes and themes of the film like the deeply entrenched corruption and criminality in the Nigerian political society that enables prostitution-trafficking rings.

Oloture translated as 'Endurance' is a captivating movie that explores the institution of women trafficking and prostitution in present day Nigeria. The film's protagonist, Ehi also known as Oloture (acted by Sharon Ooja) is an undercover journalist who with the partnership of her colleague in work, Emeka ventures into the prostitution business in Lagos so as to get to the root of the human trafficking business in Nigeria.

The movie begins by showing the viewers the Lagos prostitution business. Many of the prostitutes engage in street-based prostitution whereby they will stay at roadsides wearing provocative dresses, smoking cigarettes while they wave at men who might be their potential customers. It is shown to the viewers how these prostitutes cohabit, the way they communicate and many others. Ehi (Oloture) tries as much as possible to fit in to the society and Emeka visits her regularly.

Due to her mission in the business, Ehi confronts Linda, one of the prostitutes and asks her if she knows a way she can get to Europe. Linda reveals to Ehi that she has a 'Madam' who knows about such deal and she has been paying the Madam (who is later identified as Alero) in small instalments the fees that will take her to Europe, Italy to be precise. This sounds golden to Ehi as this seems to be a way for her to fulfil her mission. Unknowingly to Linda, Ehi follows Linda to Alero's shop, spying on what is going on before Alero's bodyguard catches her. She pleads to Alero that she is also interested in going to Italy. Alero gets offended with the fact that Linda refuses to keep the deal secret.

Not long after that, Alero gets the contract of supplying prostitutes for a politician's (Sir Philips) party and decides to recruit Ehi and her colleagues to the party. It was at this party that Alero agrees to take Ehi to Europe after introducing her to Sir Philips. Ehi devices a plan that she always do to avert any intimate relationship with her 'customers', this leads to her being drugged and raped by Sir Phillips. Ehi determined to continue the story decides to be paying to Alero for the trip.

The time to leave for Europe clocks and the ladies unpack their bags as they follow a big Marco-polo bus brought by Alero and her accomplices. They are camped at a building where they are trained. Linda gets killed because she is found using a phone which actually does not belong to her but to Ehi, the phone is found to have been sending info of their whereabouts outside. This prompts them to leave the building and set for Benin

republic. Having gotten the info, Emeka informs the police force and they raid the house only to found Linda's dead body. The trafficked ladies are later transported into Benin Republic including Ehi.

Thematic Preoccupations in *Oloture*

Themes are universal message that a work is trying to voice out, we have major and minor themes and some of them shall be discussed here:

Female gender objectification: It has been an issue from time immemorial that the female gender are objectified by their male counterparts—they are seen as sexual objects and relegated to the rear in the society. They are only to be 'seen' but not 'heard'. This has been a headache for emerging feminists on how to ensure that the imbalance is brought to a stop. If the inequality is addressed, women would be able to maximise their full potentials and there can be growth and development in the society.

Most female casts in the movie are relevant because of objectification. A lot of them are commercial sex workers, they take pleasure in selling their bodies. And the male folks see no use for them too except as sexual objects. The only seeming exception is Ehi because she has access to formal education. Even despite this, she is still being greatly admired as a sexual object when she goes undercover. The two businesses explored in the films have objectification of women as the common attribute.

Corruption: It is rare to see a work addressing societal issue in Nigeria without talking about corruption. Corruption is the act of compromising integrity. People who lack integrity are bent to undergo any act just because of money, this is evidently shown in some constructions in the play. Human trafficking is a menace identified and tackled by the Nigerian government. Many funds and human personnel has been spent on combating human trafficking but due to the dishonesty, greed and particularly corruption. Corruption is particularly evident in the later part of the movie—the moment Victor, Sheriff and co. are transporting the ladies into Benin Republic. They are not subjected to other checks by the immigration officers as the others. In fact, Victor is told to jump the queue so they can attend to them ahead of others. Victor in turn arranges dollar notes for the officers. Also, Emeka is not given audience to lodge the complaint of *Oloture* missing by the immigration officer's despite being identified as a press man. Their conversation went thus:

EMEKA: (*pleading to the officer*) ...this is a matter of life and death. It is very important. My staff is there (*pointing to the road ahead*) I really need to be there. Please sir, understand my point.

OFFICER 1: Mr. Man, you understand me now. I say shut up, enter that car and get out!

OFFICER 2: Mr. Man! Get out! (*about to shoot*).

Inordinate quest for wealth: The movie is poignant in depicting this theme. Many of the actions and inactions in the movie are guided by economic demands—quest for money. The theme can be linked to one of the Marxist theorists' propositions which is economic determinism. This means that every spheres and societal structures such as fashion, religion, politics, education, culture and so on are modelled by the economy. It places economy at the base (substructure) upon which other sectors (the superstructures) is built on. Characters like Linda, Blessing and Vanessa represent the commercial sex workers in the movie with the way they dress, act and talk—it brings to the audience a maximum feel of realism with how prostitutes out there really behave. The prostitutes in the movie do not 'willingly' go into the trade if not for money. Prostitution is usually termed transactional sex. They will give their customers pleasure and get paid in return, as they always say '*Money for hand, back for ground*' which means, 'pay me and you will have your way with my body'. The business-prostitution is a cruel one as the workers are prone to physical and emotional attacks. They engage in smoking, alcohol and all to put their troubles past them and to get into the mood. Linda advances cigarette to Ehi after she fled the hotel in the beginning of the movies having get physically injured and emotionally trouble.

This same inordinate quest for wealth is the same thing that drives Linda and other prostitutes to wanting to Europe to 'step-up'. Their belief is that there are better customers over there who will give them more money and their condition will change. The *middlemen* for the human trafficking business are also in quest of wealth. It is safe to conclude that they all anticipate a huge financial gain after successfully getting them to Europe. It is partly shown when Ehi requests that she should read the form they are asked to fill before signing different inhumane and gruesome demands of the company. Sheriff, Victor and Madam Alero especially are also in quest for better economic lifestyle by putting in for such ungodly act. The recruitment of ladies to politicians' parties by Madam Alero also does not go for free. In fact, this does not exclude the government operatives

too, especially the immigration officers as payment of bribes by these evil companies deny them opportunity to exercise their duties impartially.

Bad state of the nation: The country where the movie is set is one of the headquarters of poverty in the world. It is a country of over 200 million people and more than 50% of the citizenry live in poverty. The state of the nation is what determines how things work and are run. For instance, it is unheard of for Europeans or Americans to be trafficked into Africa, for what? This is because the situation in those continents is relatively okay and enduring compared to what we have in Africa and in Nigeria in particular. There are thousands of graduates who are not employed or under-employed. To find gainful employment is difficult just like looking for the teeth of a lion. The circumstances and frameworks put on ground are not conducive for economic development. This is what prompt many of the prostitutes, human traffickers and others out there to result into 'unholy swift' means for survival.

Another instance in the movie to show the condemnable state of the country is during Emeka's visit to the NAPTIP (National Agency for Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons) office to work the rescue of Ehi's (*Oloture*) and others' rescue. NAPTIP is a body established by the Nigeria government under the leadership of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo to combat and reduce the rate of human trafficking in the country. *Oloture* and others would have been if there were enough personnel on ground when Emeka went. The Director, Jubril (acted by Yemi Solade) told Emeka that 'I hear you Mr Okolie (Emeka), all my men are out there on special operations today. It's not possible!' This signifies that the government does not pay attention to funding and equipping the agency for active performance. This singular reason compromised the rescue plan for Ehi and others.

Female Gender Exploitation in *Oloture*

The movie is largely peopled by ladies and women, the male characters in there have minor or little roles and significance. The representation of gender in Nollywood has quite dominated the scenery of movie studies and criticism for a while. *Oloture*, is another movie that shows the treatments women go through in patriarchal societies like Nigeria. The female characters in the movie are victims of exploitation. The only ones that can be mapped out of this group are Madam Alero and Ehi. Even with that, those two characters can be placed in exploitation game review. Ehi is

a journalist that jumps into the lion's den in the name of getting a story. She even gets physically and sexually abused as in the case of Sir Phillips and Chuks. She has superiors who are men, especially her supervisor, Emeka. Though it can be argued that due to the fact that they are male, they cannot venture into such sojourn. But the big question should be why are the women folk's victims of all cases. Ehi, the privileged lady gets exploited and even the unprivileged ones, Blessing, Vanessa, Linda and others face maximum exploitation.

Madam Alero though might be seen as a middleman but she herself is a victim of the corrupt system. She has little or no say in the business, she is either threatened or controlled by the male characters. For instance, she answers Sir Phillips' call anytime because of the monetary and political power. In other instance, she faces threats majorly because she is a female from people who are also in the line of the business. The first one is evident in a conversation between her and Tony, another 'middleman' in the business. The other incident is after Linda was caught with a phone and killed.

Victor: ...she dey send information give somebody, who she b? who she dey work for?... (Who is she (Linda), who does she work for? She is sending information to some people).

Alero: I no know o (I do not know).

Victor: dah one no b answer o (that is not an answer), na ur job to know (It is your responsibility to know), u suppose don investigate these things (you ought to have investigated things like this)...if any yawa dey on top this matter, u sef go hear am (if any problem comes from this, you will be dealt with too).

Alero looks perplexed after this statement.

By the virtue of hierarchy, Alero should be a senior to Victor, she has the major responsibility of recruiting ladies while Victor is like the Chief Security Officer of the network swears to deal with her if it happens that Linda is using the phone to communicate with the police. If he will at least maintain that things are in order, there should be a tone of regard to an extent. But since it is a patriarchal society, she has little or no 'rugged' power to resist such disrespect.

The next sets of women evidently exploited are the prostitutes and the victims of human trafficking. They are the sets of people who one way or the other have been denied the rights to make a justifiable means of living, these people have no option in the country and they see the transaction of their body as the last resort. Someone like Blessing on many occasions gets abused by her boyfriend, Chuks. Despite several series of advice from

friends to leave him, she insists she cannot leave Chuks. She is getting maltreated and she dares not leave—that is evil at its zenith.

The movie, *Oloture* shows that the world is still in the hands of men and if women do not find working solutions, issues like gender exploitation would still be in the society. And as our theory states, the only way for women to emancipate themselves is to get economic independence. We can see that from the movie that most of the women subjected to exploitation here are victims because of economic game-play. If they all reliable and legitimate means of survival, such would dare not happen. Even though it was not shown in the movie, Sir Phillips and other politicians like would definitely have wives and daughters and it is of a very high possibility that they would not be in such gathering in those positions. The movie has further illuminated the debate about the role of Nollywood in Gender projection. According to several interviews held with those who have seen the movie, they all argue from the same point of view that Nollywood movies count in the area of gender projection in our society, Nigeria.

Observation and Findings

After a successful work of this research, a lot of points have come to light. Gender projection is a sensitive issue and many Nollywood movies have aggravated the status of gender imbalance in the society. That is why we see women in movies acting as 'second-class' citizens to their male counterparts. This automatically affects the way viewers see things most especially the youths as they this projection engrave impressions in them. It has been observed that viewers take messages from movies quite serious either consciously or unconsciously and this has given the movie industry the ability to be able to control the minds of their viewers by what they show to them. Gender discrimination/exploitation is an issue that needs all hands-on deck to solve, all stakeholders must intensify efforts in fighting the issue.

Conclusion/Recommendations

The study recommends based on the observation of the study the solution to gender exploitation in the society. The theory employed to analyse this work forms the maxim of the solution discussion. Patriarchy is deter-

mined to 'dispower' women and keep them at the background. The roles women are allowed and expected to perform in the society are less-valued and not developmental, the voice to control this births feminism. In conclusion, the study recommends that women should seek economic power as this will be the absolute solution to the much-seen gap in gender relations in the society.

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Anthony Ojarikre

Michael and Cecilia Ibru University(Nigeria)

ORCID: 0009-0008-9990-3053

Ecofeminist Philosophy and Transitivity Selections in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*

ABSTRACT. The term ecocriticism is used to refer to literary criticism that examines the relationship between literature and environment. Ecofeminism can be regarded as an off-shoot or sub-theory of ecocriticism. The interest here is not just environmental justice but “gender justice” in relation to the environment. The paper therefore looks at environmental exploitation of women using Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*. The theoretical framework for the study is Transitivity. Transitivity devices are identified; their frequencies and percentages are calculated; while the foregrounded ones are used for analysis. The results show a parallel pillaging, exploitation and degradation of the environment and the female gender.

KEYWORDS: ecocriticism, ecofeminism, transitivity, critical stylistics, environmental degradation

Introduction

Ecocriticism is defined by Glotfelty (1996) as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment”. Ojaide (2013) defines it as ecologically sensitive creative writing and criticism designed to promote ecological literacy. The bottom line here is how literature reacts to developments in the environment. In the context of Nigeria, the Niger Delta has been the locus of the cry for environmental justice. The battle to attract development from the Nigerian government and corporate social responsibility from the transnationals was fought both physically and intellectually. The intellectual arm of the struggle led to a corpus of literature called Niger Delta Protest Literature in the three genres of prose, poetry and drama.

Ogude (2011) identifies Gabriel Okaro's *The Voice*, Elechi Amadi's *The Great Ponds* (1969) and *The Concubine* (1966) as pioneer efforts in Niger

Delta eco-critical prose fiction. Isidore Okpewho's *Tides*, pervasively eco-critical, was published in (1993) before the literary flourish that attended Saro-Wiwa's death in 1995. Isidore Okpewho and other Niger Delta writers like Buchi Emecheta and Festus Iyayi could be classified as second generation of Niger Delta prose writers. Buchi Emecheta wrote *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Second Class Citizen*; among others, in 1974. As Nutsukpo (2011) observes, her works were mainly feminist, depicting the lot of the woman in a patriarchal society and her own travails in the journey of life. Her feminist perspectives are taken further by Kaine Agary who looks at the lot of the Niger Delta woman against the background of oil exploration and exploitation in the Niger Delta. This paper therefore looks at the feminist perspective of ecocriticism captured as ecofeminist philosophy in Kaine Agary's prose fiction, *Yellow-Yellow*.

Ecofeminism

Wikipedia tells us that the term ecofeminism was coined by the French writer Françoise d'Eaubonne in her book *Le Feminisme ou la Mort* (1974). Ecofeminist analysis explores the connections between women and nature in culture, economy, religion, politics, literature and iconography and addresses the parallels between the oppression of nature and the oppression of women. Ecofeminist philosophy emphasizes the ways both nature and women are treated in patriarchal societies. To Regan (2020), Ecofeminism is an ideology and movement that sees climate change, gender equality, and social justice more broadly as intrinsically related issues, all tied to masculine dominance of society. Furthermore, Ecofeminism also calls to attention that women are disproportionately affected by environmental issues.

Miles (2018) says that modern ecofeminist movement was born out of a series of conferences and workshops held in the United States by a coalition of academic and professional women during the late 1970s and early 1980s. They discussed the ways in which feminism and environmentalism could promote respect for women and nature, motivated by the notion that the age-long association of women with nature has led to the oppression of both.

McIlhenny (1998) discusses the proper representation of women anglers in seventeenth-century British Poetry and regrets that women are no longer well represented. It is observed that in the seventeenth centu-

ry, representations of women anglers proliferated in pastoral and georgic poems, but that these depictions have been largely overlooked in current considerations of the woman angler. In her essay, "Whole Shoals of Men: Representations of Women Anglers in Seventeenth-Century British Poetry," she attempts to revive the image of the seventeenth-century woman angler and to explore the significance of this image within the context of the larger genre to which it belongs, the British piscatory (fishing) pastoral.

Mellin (1998) citing *The Alfoxden Journal*, comments on Dorothy Wordsworth's "disconcerting recognition of gender relations at the end of eighteenth-century England. In Dorothy Wordsworth's reading of the Alfoxden region, she observes the privileged place of men in the social structure. She describes one of the men in the landscape as "a razor-grinder with a soldier's jacket on, aknapsack on his back, and a boy to drag his wheel"; while the young lasses are described with their "summer holiday clothes, pink petticoats and blue. Mothers with their children in arms..." This is interpreted by Mellin to mean that unlike men, women's place is domestic: they are simply mothers.

Carew-Miller (1998) observes that much of Mary Austin's scholarship focused on her significant contribution to women's tradition of nature writing and her proto-feminist characterization of the natural world. She "feminizes the masculine genre of nature writing ... by inventing a female character who embodies and ideal relationship to the natural world".

Murphy (2000) talks about those feminisms committed to exposing, critiquing, and ending the oppression of women, overthrowing patriarchy and phallioncentrism, demand male recognition of the other as not only different in more ways than binary configurations can recognize, but also of equal ontological status. Armbruster (2000) tells us that ecofeminism explicitly works to challenge dominant ideologies of dualism and hierarchy within Western culture that construct nature as separate from and inferior to human culture (and women as inferior to men). Warren (2000) in "Nature Is a Feminist Issue" mentions the claim by ecological feminists (ecofeminists) that there are important connections between the unjustified dominations of women, people of colour, children and the poor and the unjustified domination of nature. Unjustifiably dominated groups are referred to as "Others", both "human Others" (such as women, people of colour, children, and the poor) and "earth Others" (such as animals, forests and the land). These others (human and earth) have been unjustifiably exploited and dominated.

Siddall (2009) documents feminist approaches to nature: Plato, speculating on cosmology in the *Timaeus*, saw the soul of the whole world as female and the earth as our nurse. Neo-platonic thinkers in the Middle Ages linked this with Christian belief: the goddess Nature is subordinate to God and acts as midwife to turn abstract ideas into material life. Nature was often presented visually, wearing a robe decorated with creatures from water and land, plants and trees - and with a flower on her shoes. Dame Nature ('vicayre of the almighty lord'), presides in Chaucer's *Parlement of Foulys*, holding on her wrist the most perfect female eagle; beneath her is the hierarchy of creation, each in its correct place and subject to Nature's judgement. Siddall (2009) documents further that modern ecology movements aim to restore a greater respect for 'mother' nature, which has been damaged by male greed and aggression. Science and technology have asserted man's mastery and plundered the earth's resources; men have treated nature as a passive, acquiescent female who must constantly supply them with comfort and nourishment. In traditional cultures, it was common for miners, burrowing as in a woman for minerals, to perform ceremonies of propitiation to the deities of the soil and as an apology to the mother. Gough (2024) examines issues of the environment and how they relate to gender and education.

Transitivity

Representing Actions, Events and States is based on the notion that the verbal element of a clause (predicator) is the location of the actions and processes that take place between the entities. Actions represent what is being done; events have to do with what is happening and states, what simply is. Depending on the ideological standpoint, the following groups may describe a waning economy as:

1. World markets are falling. Event (This is the politician who wishes to get votes).
2. The honourable member has ruined the economy. Action (This is a member of the opposition).
3. The world economy is in crisis. State (This is a commentator).

It is obvious that each speaker has taken a perspective for a purpose. The politician canvassing for votes (presumably an incumbent) would

want to downplay the situation by blaming domestic economic problems on the international market; the opposition will take a strong stance by scathing criticism; while the impartial commentator would present it as it is. Each of these choices has consequences for the perception of the reader or hearer.

The following are the main categories as identified by Jeffries (2010) based on Simpson's (1993) explication of Halliday (1985).

1. Material Action

This is referred to as the most prototypical verb, having to do with something that is done or happens in a physical way. Examples are

The joint union committee walked out of the meeting.
The government postponed their enquiry.

The participants in the clause are the actor (grammatical subject) and the goal (grammatical object). The actors, in this case, are 'The joint union committee' and 'The government' respectively, while the goals are 'the meeting' and 'their enquiry'. The reason for this participant labels is to distinguish the semantic role that such participants play from their grammatical role.

The sub-categories of material actions are:

(a) Material Action Intentional (MAI)

This is an intentional material action performed by a conscious being as in the previous example.

(b) Material Action Supervention (MAS)

This is unintentional action by a conscious being. As in
The baby fell out of his pram onto the tarmac.
The judge lost her temper.

In both cases, the actors, though conscious, are not in control.

(c) **Material Action Events (MAE).** This is action by an inanimate actor. The car backfired

2. Verbalization Processes

This is the process of saying.

Participant roles are sayer and target.

It has a human actor.

Sayer	/	process	/	target	/	verbiage
John		told		Mary		his life story.

Sayer	/	process	/	verbiage
He		said		that.

3. Mental Processes

Mental processes refer to what happens within human beings. This is further sub-divided into:

(a) Mental Cognition(MC)

– Thinking, knowing, realizing, understanding and so on

(b) Mental Reaction (MR)

– Feeling (emotionally), liking, hating and so on

(c) Mental Perception(MP)

– Sensing, hearing, feeling (literally), seeing, tasting and so on.

The following examples.

For a mental process verb, the other participants are senser and phenomenon, as in the following examples.

Senser	Process	Phenomenon	
<i>The interviewer</i>	<i>realized</i>	<i>her mistake</i>	<i>MC</i>
<i>I</i>	<i>hate</i>	<i>the political system</i>	
		<i>in Britain</i>	<i>MR</i>
<i>They</i>	<i>heard</i>	<i>the rumour about</i>	
		<i>Mr. Price</i>	<i>MP</i>

4. The Relational Category

This represents the static or stable relationships between carriers and attributes rather than any changes or dynamic actions. The verbs in this category are:

- The copula verb (to be) and other intensive relations (RI)
- Possessive relations as indicated by verbs like 'have' (RP)
- Circumstantial relations (RC) which involves verbs of movement and the verb 'be' as well

(a) Relational Intensive

'x is a' relationship. It involves the copula verb 'be' and other intensive relations

Carrier / *process* / *attribute* /
Mary / *is* / *wise* / *Tom seems foolish*

(b) Relational Possessive

'x has a' relationship
Gill has a guitar. John owns a piano.

(c) Relational Circumstantial

'x is at/on a' relationship: verbs of movement and verb 'be' as well.
Bill is at home/John was in the room.

In traditional grammar, the verb is defined as a word that shows action or a state of being. This has been interestingly broken down into 'event', 'action' and 'state'. The 'action' component fits into material actions, the event component fits roughly into mental processes, while state fits roughly into relational processes. This model represents Halliday's ideational function of language, relevant to uncovering ideologies. The transitivity model as Simpson (1993, p. 88) notes is concerned with the transmission of ideas and it is a part of the ideational function of language. This is what Jeffries (2010) adapts for critical stylistic analysis.

Methodology

Primary data are collected from the novel, *Yellow-Yellow*. It is divided into three extracts based on the storyline. The first extract represents her

life in the village where she stayed with her mum, cut off civilization; the second chronicles her movement away from her “claustrophobic village’ to Port Harcourt, the supposed land of opportunities; while the third extract tells the story of how she met Sergio, then Admiral and how she got pregnant for Admiral. These extracts form the basis of the analysis in charts and tables.

Data are analyzed using the critical stylistic tool of Representing Actions, Events and States, which is actually Leslie Jeffries’ (2010) adaptation of Transitivity by Halliday (1985) and Simpson (1993). Furthermore, the simple statistical method of frequency distribution is used to determine the rate of occurrence of the Hallidayan transitivity devices as adapted by Jeffries (2010). The frequency gives the number of times a particular device occurs, while the percentage is calculated using the formula.

Number of Devices Identified x 100

Total Number of Devices 1

The results are put on charts and tables for analysis

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Sayer	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
				the oil company	said		they suspected sabotage...	VP					
	were not going to pay		[and] MAI										
	lost	compensation ...	in a single day	MAS									
my mother	had [gradual]y lost,	her main source of sustenance	year after year.	MAS									
...she and others in the village		the creatures of the rivers to oil spills, acid rain, gas flares, and who knows what else,		MAS									

(Agary 2006, pp. 3 and 4)

Extract 1(b)

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Sayer	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
				Our visitors	Told		of times						
			when they fell into the hands of a crazy whitey who beat them up or pushed objects like bottles into their privates as part of the "fun" ...					VP					
			After recounting all of these terrifying tales,...	Our visitors		would add	VP						
			[and]								na		our money]
											Na		our oil money!

(Agary 2006, pp. 37 and 38)

Extract 1(c)

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Sayer	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
Farming and fishing...	[no longer] provide	gain	MAE					I	had witnessed	hands claimed by massive floods	MP		
Women	Rowed	their canoes	during the rainy season the earth slowly melting into the rivers. farther and farther away to find land for farming. MAI In addition, every year	MAI							it	was	harder to catch fish
			as though the water spirits had tied the fishes wombs....	My mother	told	me	of the days of her youth						
			when every husband was expected to give his wife a dug out canoe that he carved and crafted himself.										
The wife	would use	this canoe	to fish, earn a living, and help to feed the family. MAI										
			Those were the days when										
the jaw woman	could ignore	the nature of the jaw man	because she had a means of earning a living and providing the needs of her children. MAI										
			Those were the days when										
Jaw women	cooked	a fresh pot of soup	everyday because the rivers were teeming with fish.... MAI										
			Nowadays										

RI

RI

"Lord,	Take	my soul,	but the struggle continues" So about the village amlessly, dropping the phrase "Aluta continua" at the slightest provocation. As for the girls, to have their babies....	MAI																Wawa's last words on the day of his execution were.
boys	wandered			MAI																
they	dropped out			MAS																

(Agary 2006, p. 34)

Extract 1
Kaine Agary: *Yellow-Yellow*
Frequency Table

Transitivity Devices	Frequencies	Percentages
Material Action Intentional (MAI)	9	26.47
Material Action Supervention (MAS)	4	11.76
Material Action Event (MAE)	3	8.82
Verbalization Process (VP)	4	11.76
Mental Cognition (MC)	-	-
Mental Reaction (MR)	1	2.94
Mental Perception (MP)	3	8.82
Relational Intensive (RI)	9	26.47
Relational Possessive (RP)	1	2.94
Relational Circumstantial (RC)	-	-
Total	34	100

Discussion of Extract 1

The 26.47% Rational Intensive device is used to convey the strong smell of spilled crude which makes Yellow-Yellow dizzy as explained in 1(a). The other part of the RI device is explained in 1(b), the ‘returnee girls’ after explaining their ordeals in the hands of ‘crazywhiteys’ exclaim, ‘na our money!’; ‘Na our oil money!. This presents the Niger Delta woman as spoils of physical and economic conquest. Just like the land, they are raped, pillaged and left to lie waste. The eco-feminist perspective of the novel is illustrated here. The 26.47% Material Action Intentional devices combine with Relational Intensive devices of the same percentage (26.47), Mental Perception of 8.82% and Verbalization Process of 11.76% to present women’s rights and contrast the pre-and post-oil eras.

While the pre-oil era respected women’s rights; the post-oil era abused women. The eco-feminist dimension of the novel is taken a notch further here. As espoused in 1(c), the women are exploited and abused from within and without by black and white men alike. In 1(d), Relational Intensive (RI) combines with Relational Possessive(RP) and Material Action Intentional(MAI) to explain the motivation for militancy. Youths moved about the village dropping the phrase, “Aluta continua” after Saro-Wiwa’s death inspired by what was purported to be Ken Saro-Wiwa’s last words, “Take my soul, but the struggle continues.”

Extract (2a)

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Sayer	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
Everybody	knew	everyone else	in Town ...	MAI							town	Was	the centre of activity in the colonial days
Everyone	made	an effort											
		to be their neighbour's keeper	MAI										
All Town			together;	MAI									
Children all Town	played		together;	MAI									
Children all Town	Ate		together;	MAI									
mothers ...	gossiped												
	and backbit		together;	MAI							town	was	where the
													erème de la
													erème of old
													Port Harcourt
													society lived
The nouveau Rich	lived		in an area called New GRA (Government Residential Area) although most residents there were not government workers.	MAI									

(Agary, 2006, p. 55)

Extract (2b)

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Sayer	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
			Walking into Sisi's house.								I	was	Struck dumb
											It	was	Like nothing
													I had ever
											There	were	seen before
													some big
													houses
I	did not expect	to see so much free space around the house.	in my village... MAS ... when I saw Sisi's with my own eyes,										
									felt	sorry for this old man at the porter's lodge who had to work the distance to the front door to announce visitors.	MR		
I	marvelled		at the beauty of everything, at the ease with which Esther was able to do something like boil water for tea.	MAS									

(Agary, 2006, p. 61-62)

Extract 2
Kaine Agary: *Yellow-Yellow*
Frequency Table

Transitivity Devices	Frequencies	Percentages
Material Action Intentional (MAI)	6	42.85
Material Action Supervention (MAS)	2	14.28
Material Action Event (MAE)	-	-
Verbalization Process (VP)	-	-
Mental Cognition (MC)	-	-
Mental Reaction (MR)	1	7.14
Mental Perception (MP)	-	-
Relational Intensive (RI)	5	3
Relational Possessive (RP)	-	-
Relational Circumstantial (RC)	-	-
Total	14	100

Discussion of Extract 2

The two most foregrounded devices here are Material Action Intentional and Relational Intensive with 42.85 and 35.71% respectively. The 'oneness and classlessness of 'Town' in Old Port Harcourt contrasts with the segregation and class consciousness in New GRA (Government Residential Area). This is expressed in 2(a) where we are told that all Town children played together in contrast with GRA where the crème de la crème of old Port Harcourt society lived in seclusion. These two devices, together with the 14.28% Material Action Supervention contrast the comfort of Port-Harcourt with the discomfort of *Yellow-Yellow's* 'claustrophobic village' and 'colourless existence': the 14.28% Material Action Supervention shows how *Yellow-Yellow* marvelled at seeing modern facilities in Sisi's house. She had not seen so much space around a house before and wondered at the ease with which, tea was made with an electric kettle. She was fascinated by these facilities which were not there in her little village.

Extract (3a)

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Sayer	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
												were getting	more expensive
	went up.		In actuality, As petrol prices	MAE							things		
bus fares	went up	MAE											
The price of bread	went up	MAE											
... school fees	went up	MAE											
... salaries	remained		the same.	MAE									

(Agary, 2006, p. 110)

Extract (3b)

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Sayer	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
Admiral and I	talked		until very late, when he dozed off	MAI									
			with his dimples and sprinkles of grey in his hair								He	Was	so handsome
			not because of the comfort Emem hinted at, which was money, but because I was hoping that the relationship would give me a taste of paternal affection that I had never had.					I	felt	a deep sense of longing for him			
											MIR		

(Agary, 2006, p. 124)

Extract (3c)

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Saver	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
			very awkward as I fought the intruding sounds of my mother's disapproving voice, telling me not to spoil myself.					It all	felt	MR	He	was	so handsome
			Nevertheless,					I	reasoned	that she was far away	MC	was	no way she could know that I had spoilt myself;
I	gave up my virginity to Admiral		with this consolation,	MAI									

(Agary, 2006, p. 144)

Extract (3d)

Actor	Process	Goal	Circumstance	Saver	Process	Target	Verbiage	Senser	Process	Phenomenon	Carrier	Process	Attribute
He	made	the moves,	kissing my ear and my neck,	MAI									
I	wanted	something to compare with Admiral	since I'd only been with him to my head	MAI									
... it all	went			MAS									
... I	followed	Sergio's lead	MAI										
We	ended up making	love	MAS										

(Agary, 2006, p. 172)

Extract 3
Kaine Agary: *Yellow-Yellow*
Frequency Table

Transitivity Devices	Frequencies	Percentages
Material Action Intentional (MAI)	5	25
Material Action Supervention (MAS)	2	10
Material Action Event (MAE)	5	25
Verbalization Process (VP)	-	-
Mental Cognition (MC)	1	5
Mental Reaction (MR)	2	10
Mental Perception (MP)	-	-
Relational Intensive (RI)	5	25
Relational Possessive (RP)	-	-
Relational Circumstantial (RC)	-	-
Total	20	100

Discussion of Extract 3

The 25% Material Action Event in 3(a) expresses the paradox of high cost of living, high petroleum products prices in spite of resource endowment; while the 25% each of Relational Intensive and Material Action Intentional show how Yellow-Yellow was sexually exploited by Admiral and Sergio, having lost her defences, like other Niger Delta girls, to poverty and lack of opportunities. Material Action Event is also 25%. It depicts the high cost of living during the Abacha regime, There was high cost of living. Prices of goods and services went up, while salaries remained the same. Material Action Supervention and Mental Reaction are 10% each. They depict how Yellow-Yellow, after offering herself to Admiral wanted to have the taste of a white man. In spite of her mother's admonition ringing in her ears, she still offered herself to Sergio. This further deepens the ecofeminist perspective of the novel.

Summary Table of the Frequencies

Transitivity Devices	Extract One	Extract Two	Extract Three	Frequencies	Percentages
MAI	9	6	5	20	29.41
MAS	4	2	2	8	11.76
MAE	3	-	5	8	11.76
VP	4	-	-	4	5.88

MC	-	-	1	1	1.47
MR	1	1	2	4	5.88
MP	3	-	-	3	4.41
RI	9	5	5	19	27.94
RP	1			1	1.47
RC	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL				68	100

Conclusion

Material Action, usually referred to as the most prototypical verb, is dominant here. It involves what is done or happens in a physical way. It is instructive that Material Action Intentional dominates the transitivity with 29.41%. It presents the intentional actions of the actors of feminist exploitation and dehumanization. The lot of women pre-and post-oil is presented. They were a lot better before oil when they could fish and farm. Apart from Relational Intensive, Material Action Supervention and Material Action event also underscore acts of feminist exploitation. The Relational Intensive device of 27.94% captures the state of affairs. It explains the ordeal of Niger Delta females who have gone into prostitution to survive. They have lost their defences to poverty, deprivation and a lack of opportunities. In their frustrated and dehumanized state, they exclaim that they are victims of their own God-given wealth. Other devices like verbalization express the situation of females; while Mental Processes feel and perceive the sorry state of the Niger Delta Woman.

The different perspectives of the various devices foreground the ecofeminist slant of the novel "Yellow-Yellow". The transnational oil companies not only exploited and degraded the environment; they also exploited and degraded the female gender.

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Sunday Olufemi Akande

Olabisi Onabanjo University (Nigeria)

ORCID: 0000-0001-7536-4333

Gender-Specific Outcomes of Musical Preferences and Interventions for High Blood Pressure among Selected Adults in Ago-Iwoye

ABSTRACT. Hypertension is a prevalent health issue among Adults, necessitating effective management strategies. Music therapy has shown promise in reducing blood pressure, but gender differences in its efficacy remain understudied. This study investigated gender-specific outcomes of musical interventions on high blood pressure among selected Adults in Ago-iwoye. It elucidates aptly on factors responsible for high blood pressure. This quasi-experimental study involved 20 adults (10 males, 10 females) with hypertension. Participants were randomly assigned to either a music intervention group (30 minutes of relaxing music, twice weekly, for 4 weeks). Blood pressure measurements were taken at baseline, 4 weeks. Results showed significant reductions in systolic and diastolic blood pressure in both males and females in the music intervention group. However, the preferred music genre for both male and female differ. Conversely, musical preferences are significant in the outcome of the musical intervention on participants. This study highlights the effectiveness of musical interventions in reducing high blood pressure among adults, with gender-specific differences in outcomes. These findings inform tailored hypertension management strategies for adults and recommended the development of personalized hypertension management programme, particularly in local settings, and underscore the importance of considering gender differences with individual musical genre preferences in the design of music-based interventions.

KEYWORDS: music therapy, hypertension, gender differences, adults

Introduction

Millions of people worldwide suffer with hypertension, also known as high blood pressure, a widespread public health issue that is particularly prevalent in Nigeria. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that 46% of adult Nigerians suffer from hypertension, which raises their risk of renal disease, stroke, and cardiovascular disease. High blood pressure

(hypertension) is a significant public health concern globally, linked to increased risks of cardiovascular diseases, stroke, and kidney failure (World Health Organization, 2021). Urban and semi-urban areas like Ago-Iwoye have a notably high prevalence of hypertension, which is exacerbated by stress, lifestyle choices, and limited access to treatment. The rise of hypertension in the country is reflected in the semi-urban village of Ago-Iwoye in Ogun State, Nigeria. According to local surveys, 43.8% of people in Ago-Iwoye have hypertension (Ogunyemi et al., 2013). The prevalence is higher in females (46.5%) than in males (40.5%).

Recent research has shown how effective non-pharmacological treatments, like music therapy, may be in controlling high blood pressure. Stress and anxiety are known to be antecedents to hypertension, and music has been demonstrated to have a relaxing effect on the nervous system. Therapies such as musical interventions have gained attention for their potential benefits in managing hypertension (Thoma et al., 2013). Musical interventions, which encompass various forms of music therapy, listening, and participatory music-making, can influence physiological responses such as heart rate and blood pressure. Research suggests that music can reduce stress and anxiety, both of which are known contributors to hypertension (Bradt & Dileo, 2014).

However, current research has mostly ignored potential gender differences in favor of generic populations. The prevalence, symptoms, and results of therapy of hypertension are significantly influenced by gender. Research has consistently demonstrated that men and women react differently to stress on a physiological and psychological level, which could affect how well music therapy works. Furthermore, the ways that men and women suffer hypertension may differ depending on socio-cultural factors like caring duties and stress at work. Notably, gender differences in response to musical interventions have been highlighted, indicating that men and women may experience varying outcomes due to psychological and physiological factors (Gerra et al., 2000). Everyday human life involves music. Despite its apparent function as entertainment, music has many practical applications. Understanding and researching psychological concerns can be aided by music.

This study examines how musical therapies for hypertension in adults in Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria, differ by gender. This study attempts to offer insights that could improve customized interventions in the management of hypertension by analyzing the differences in responses between men and women to musical therapy. Understanding these gender disparities has

important ramifications for creating individualized, successful treatment programs that cater to each gender's particular demands.

Factors Contributing to High Blood Pressure

In many areas, including Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria, hypertension, a disorder characterized by consistently high blood pressure has become more common. This health problem is caused by a number of causes, which can be broadly divided into environmental, socioeconomic, and lifestyle impacts.

a. Dietary Practices:

Consuming a lot of sodium is a major cause of hypertension. According to Adewoye et al. (2018), a significant portion of the population consumes diets high in processed foods and excessive salt, which are well-known contributors to elevated blood pressure and increased risk of hypertension. These dietary patterns, combined with low intake of fruits and vegetables, which are essential for maintaining cardiovascular health, exacerbate the problem further. Ogunmola et al. (2020) emphasize that inadequate consumption of nutrient-rich fruits and vegetables leads to poor cardiovascular outcomes by limiting the intake of antioxidants, dietary fiber, and potassium, all of which play protective roles against hypertension and related cardiovascular diseases. This is a case with most participants when people hardly consume fruits and vegetables. Most people, especially in local areas, trade with vegetables and fruits instead of feeding on vegetables. The level of ignorance on the importance of the consumption of vegetables results into being victim of high blood pressure. The bush meat and other food such as locust beans are traditionally preserved with heavy salt and thus result into consumption of too much of salt if additional salt measurement is not well considered in food preparation.

b. Physical Inactivity:

Individuals who lead predominantly sedentary lifestyles are at a significantly higher risk of developing high blood pressure. Physical inactivity contributes to various physiological changes, including impaired vascular function, increased arterial stiffness, and unfavorable alterations in body weight, all of which can elevate blood pressure levels. Conversely, engaging in regular physical activity has been consistently demonstrated to have a protective effect by lowering both systolic and diastolic blood pressure.

Exercise promotes improved cardiovascular efficiency, enhances endothelial function, and aids in weight management, thereby reducing the risk of hypertension. The absence of such activity, therefore, stands as a major modifiable risk factor for the development and progression of high blood pressure (Ibrahim & Damisa, 2020).

c. Socio-Economic Factors:

Lower-income individuals experience financial stress, limiting their access to healthy food, healthcare, and other resources that can help manage high blood pressure. Health outcomes are strongly influenced by socioeconomic position. Individuals with limited social support experience increased stress levels, which contributes to the development of high blood pressure. In Ago-Iwoye, where the university is the major source of economic survival at closure of the university, indigenes live in poverty and the lack of financial support to access medical facilities leads to uncontrolled hypertension. In an attempt to break even of poverty, indigenes engage in lots of hard labour and experience increased stress levels, which contributes to the development of high blood pressure. (Adeyemo et al., 2017) Corroborates the view that those with lower incomes also have less access to preventive care and health education.

d. Stress and Mental Health:

Psychological stress is a well-recognized contributor to the development and persistence of high blood pressure. Chronic exposure to stress often has driven by social and economic challenges such as poverty, unemployment, social isolation, and discrimination can have a profound impact on cardiovascular health. When individuals are subjected to long-term stress, the body activates the sympathetic nervous system and the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis, initiating the “fight-or-flight” response. This physiological reaction leads to the release of stress hormones, particularly cortisol and adrenaline, which increase heart rate, constrict blood vessels, and elevate blood pressure. According to Ogunyemi et al. (2019), sustained activation of this stress response can result in consistently high cortisol levels, which in turn contribute to vascular dysfunction and the eventual development of hypertension. The link between socioeconomic status and elevated stress levels further emphasizes the need for public health interventions that address both psychological well-being and social inequality as part of comprehensive hypertension prevention strategies.

e. Genetic Predisposition:

A known risk factor for developing hypertension is a family history of the condition. Genetic predisposition plays a significant role in determining an individual's vulnerability to high blood pressure. Numerous studies have demonstrated that individuals with hypertensive first-degree relatives are at a higher risk of developing hypertension themselves, even when accounting for environmental and lifestyle factors. This familial aggregation suggests a strong hereditary component to blood pressure regulation. According to Ekhatior et al. (2021), genetic factors contribute notably to hypertension susceptibility across various population groups, underscoring the importance of early screening and preventive strategies in individuals with a positive family history.

f. Cultural Practices:

Hypertension may also be influenced by specific cultural norms and customs. For instance, using traditional herbal treatments without the right supervision can result in uncontrolled substance intake that could have an impact on blood pressure (Adewale et al., 2022). This is a case with Ago-iwoye as the culture encourages the use of uncontrolled herbal treatments. The uncontrolled or unmeasured herbal treatment consequently results into high blood pressure. The indigenous people believe so much in the use of herbal treatment for virtually all ailments due to the cultural practices.

Efficacy of Musical Intervention on Lowering Blood Pressure

Studies have demonstrated that music can successfully elicit and modulate moods and emotions in conjunction with variations in respiration, blood pressure, and heart rate. Lakshmi et al. (2015) carried out a pre-test, post-test investigation using a quasi-experimental methodology. The music therapy experiences of a few adults with hypertension were assessed. The results demonstrated a robust association between the advantages of music therapy and reduced blood pressure in older persons. Musical stimuli have the ability to activate specific brain circuits, such as the limbic system, which are connected to emotional behavior. Listening to music can help people unwind and activate their limbic system. This relaxed state lowers blood pressure. The use of music therapy as a therapeutic technique can help to preserve, enhance, and repair mental, physical, and emo-

tional health. Music can be utilized as a therapeutic tool to help patients with hypertension lower their blood pressure.

Musical Preferences

The enjoyment of particular music at a particular moment might be characterized as musical preference (Abeles, 1980). Numerous studies have defined musical preference as the degree to which one likes a certain musical style or genre and also has the behavioral propensity to listen to that style or genre instead of others. Such a desire could be a long-term or short-term mindset.

Nonetheless, musical preference is a long-term phenomenon according to music psychology (Schafer, 2008). A person's taste in music is shaped by a complex interplay of multiple factors, reflecting both internal dispositions and external circumstances. According to Müller (2000), these elements can be broadly categorized into four key domains: the music itself, the listener, the situation, and the use of music. The music includes intrinsic qualities such as melody, rhythm, harmony, tempo, and lyrics, which influence how appealing a piece is to a listener and then, individual characteristics like personality, age, cultural background, emotional state, and past experiences, all of which contribute to personal musical preferences. To note are also contextual variables such as the environment in which the music is heard (e.g., a party, during study, or in solitude), time of day, and social setting, all of which can alter the listener's perception and enjoyment of music. According to research, people mostly mention genres when discussing their musical preferences. Accordingly, musical genres offer the best research environment (Rentfrow & Gosling, 2003).

Data Presentation

Post-Musical Intervention (Males)

The table revealed improvement and change in the systolic and diastolic of male participants after the musical intervention. This finding is consistent with previous studies that have shown music to be an effective adjunctive therapy for reducing blood pressure (Hanna-Pladdy & Mackay, 2011; Koelsch, 2013). It is noteworthy that the diastolic blood pressure of male participants exhibited a more significant change following the musi-

Male Participants	Music Genre Preferences	Age	Before MI Systolic (mmHg)	After MI Systolic (mmHg)	Status	Before MI Diastolic (mmHg)	After MI Diastolic (mmHg)	Status
M1	Hip Pop	35	125	115	Normal	82	75	Normal
M2	Afrobeat	42	138	120	Normal	90	70	Normal
M3	Afro-beat	38	118	110	Normal	78	70	Normal
M4	High Life	50	142	115	Normal	95	85	Elevated
M5	High Life	60	122	118	Normal	80	75	Normal
M6	Fuji	45	130	120	Normal	85	78	Normal
M7	Afro-beat	38	128	120	Normal	84	80	Normal
M8	Hip-Pop	39	120	112	Normal	75	68	Normal
M9	Fuji	48	125	110	Normal	92	75	Normal
M10	High Life	60	132	115	Normal	88	82	Elevated

cal intervention when compared to their female counterparts. This observation highlights potential gender-based physiological differences in how individuals respond to music as a therapeutic tool. Supporting this, a study by Trappe (2012) found that men experienced a greater reduction in systolic blood pressure, averaging a decrease of 7.1 mmHg—compared to women, who showed a more modest reduction of 3.5 mmHg after participating in a music-making intervention. These findings suggest that men may have a more pronounced cardiovascular response to certain types of musical engagement, possibly due to differences in autonomic nervous system activity, hormonal influences, or emotional processing of music. Understanding such gender-specific responses is essential for tailoring music therapy interventions to maximize health benefits for diverse populations. However, the study also showed the differences in musical taste or preferences of male participants. Males, below the age of 50 preferred energetic music where they could exact their energy while the music is being played, whereas those above the age of (50), preferred a slow music genre such as high life.

Post-Musical Intervention (Females)

This study demonstrated that, following the musical intervention, the diastolic blood pressure of female participants returned to normal levels, indicating a more favorable response compared to male participants. These findings align with previous research highlighting gender differences in cardiovascular responses to music. For example, Lee (2012) reported that women exhibited a greater reduction in diastolic blood pressure, with an average decrease of 4.2 mmHg, whereas men showed a smaller reduction of 2.1 mmHg after listening to music. In contrast, Trappe (2012) found that men experienced a more pronounced reduction in systolic blood pressure, averaging 7.1 mmHg, compared to women, who showed a decrease of 3.5 mmHg following participation in a music-making intervention. Furthermore, the study revealed that female participants tended to prefer slower, more solemn genres of music, which may have contributed to their more substantial diastolic blood pressure improvement. These gender-specific preferences and physiological responses suggest that tailoring musical interventions to individual characteristics, including gender and music style preference, could enhance their effectiveness in managing blood pressure.

Female Participants	Music Genre Preferences	Age	Systolic (mmHg) Before MI	Systolic (mmHg) After MI	Status	Diastolic (mmHg) Before MI	Diastolic (mmHg) After MI	Status
F1	Hip-Pop	36	115	105	Normal	72	65	Normal
F2	Blues	41	135	120	Normal	89	78	Normal
F3	Juju	40	110	100	Normal	70	60	Normal
F4	High Life	55	145	125	Elevated	96	76	Normal
F5	Blues	36	125	115	Normal	82	75	Normal
F6	High Life	59	139	120	Normal	91	80	Normal
F7	Blues	33	118	110	Normal	77	70	Normal
F8	Blues	37	112	105	Normal	69	65	Normal
F9	High Life	60	148	130	Elevated	99	77	Normal
F10	Blues	44	138	128	Elevated	90	75	Normal

Conclusion

The study investigated the impact of musical interventions on high blood pressure among selected adults in Ago-Iwoye, with a focus on gender-specific outcomes. The results showed that Musical interventions were effective in reducing systolic and diastolic blood pressure in both male and female participants. Male participants showed a greater reduction in systolic blood pressure compared to male participants. Female participants showed a greater reduction in diastolic blood pressure compared to female participants. Several theories have been proposed that Hormonal fluctuations may play a role in the differing responses to musical intervention between men and women (Kirschbaum et al., 1999). Also, differences in brain structure and function between men and women may also contribute to the differing responses to musical intervention (Cosgrove et al., 2007). The differences in the preferences of participants in this study have consequently been significant to the reduction in the blood pressure after musical intervention.

The study also found that musical preference played a significant role in the effectiveness of the musical intervention, with participants who preferred the music showing greater reductions in blood pressure. The findings of this study have implications for the development of musical interventions for high blood pressure management. Specifically, musical interventions can be tailored to meet the specific needs of male and female participants. Musical preference should be taken into account when designing musical interventions. Musical interventions can be used as a complementary therapy for high blood pressure management. The study recommends that healthcare professionals should consider incorporating musical interventions into their treatment plans for high blood pressure management and also that Musical interventions should be tailored to meet the specific needs of different populations, including males and females.

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Vol. 22, No. 2, 2024

<https://doi.org/10.14746/jpg.2024.22.2.11>

Erum Mariam

ORCID: 0000-0002-8711-3504

Nashida Ahmed

ORCID: 0009-0009-1448-8805

Niloy Hossain

ORCID: 0009-0000-6736-7075

Rabiya Khatun

ORCID: 0009-0000-7307-6661

Taslima Begum

ORCID: 0000-0001-8568-4146

Shamma Tasnim

ORCID: 0009-0005-6062-272X

BRAC University (Bangladesh)

Home-based Care Model, Values and Entrepreneurial Aspirations of Women Caregivers, and Gender Equality in Bangladesh

ABSTRACT. Despite the increased visibility of the important role women play in entrepreneurship; socially constructed stereotypic views continue to reproduce gender discrimination in terms of opportunities, resources, and rewards; and lower women's self-confidence; consequently, women become less entrepreneurial compared to men. Given that the process of undoing negative social constructions varies widely according to culture and interventions, to better explain the intervention process that works to promote gender equality and supports unique aspects of women's values in specific cultural settings requires research enquiry. This research explores how a care model provision fosters gender equality and women's entrepreneurial aspirations, drawn from observation of ten para-counselors who have shared everyday lives and views of the children and adults of the care model. The care model has great potential to promote gender equality as the model opens up opportunities for women having disadvantaged backgrounds to access education capital that supports women to reach their fullest human potential, realize dignity, and contribute

to and benefit from economic, social, cultural, and structural development. Furthermore, the values of these women opened up opportunities to fulfill ideological deficiencies of the girls' socialization process at an early age, help girls from low socio-economic backgrounds to experience early learning and development crucial for reaching their fullest potentials, alter socially constructed male-female differences, and emancipate women and girls from patriarchal oppression. Women caregivers' such values and increased personal abilities had a noticeable impact on these women's aspirations to be entrepreneurs, which differ from the constraints placed by cultural stereotypes and prejudices on their gender roles.

KEYWORDS: care model, gender equality, women's entrepreneurial aspirations

Introduction

Various gender-related biases have declined over the decades which led to dramatic increase in women's participation in labor market and visibility of the important role they play in entrepreneurship; stereotypic views have been leading to gender discrimination in terms of opportunities, resources, and rewards according to gender; consequently, women are less likely to be entrepreneurs compared to men (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021; UN Women, 2018; Rubio-Ba˜n3n & Esteban-Lloret, 2016; Gupta et al., 2009). Women entrepreneurs' experiences of constraints that are gender specific and stream from cultural values and gender stereotypes include: the traditionally defined gender roles within the home that put household and family responsibilities largely on women, while men provide economically for the family by working outside; the stereotypic view that favors women less than men as potentials leaders because expected behaviors for their gender roles are inconsistent with attributions of leadership; and consideration of male-centered business model as the natural model of doing business in mainstream academic literature where males are believed to possess the masculine traits such as being assertive, dominating, independent, and competitive that are deemed necessary for leadership and associated with high-growth entrepreneurial ventures (Bullough et al., 2022; Yadav and Unni, 2016).

Many theorists have shown that 'abilities ascribed to a particular set of people are to a large degree socially constructed' (Rowlands, 1995, p. 102). Such social construction, on the one hand, reproduces false dichotomies, patriarchal expectations; and unequal status between men and women that value 'hegemonic masculinity' that positions men in society through certain ideologies and discourses that allow men to gain and maintain an advantage over women (Rubio-Ba˜n3n, Esteban-Lloret, 2016, p. 10); on

the other hand, devalues women's performance by interpreting the same behavior differently and/or by denying credit to women for their successes; lowering women's self-confidence and self-esteem which may result in women withdrawing from the paths leading to success; and demotivating women's aspirations to be entrepreneurs (Tabassum & Nayak, 2021).

Emerging literature supporting undoing negative social constructions describes the consensus among scholars and suggests that women's leadership qualities can also play a significant role in the larger entrepreneurship phenomenon and economic development (Sarfaraz et al., 2014, p. 1). According to this view, women's values can initiate, respect, and maintain gender equality. Given that the process of undoing negative social constructions varies widely according to culture (Rowlands, 1997) and interventions (e.g., Besnier et. al., 2024); to better explain the intervention process that works to promote gender equality and supports the unique aspects of women's values in a specific cultural setting requires research enquiry.

This research is about the values and entrepreneurial aspirations of the women caregivers who have access to home-based care model provisions initiated by BRAC Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University and how these women's values and the values of the care model promote gender equality. Gender equality can be conceptualized as, "women and men, girls and boys have equal conditions and opportunities for realizing full potential, human rights and dignity, and for contributing to (and benefiting from) economic, social, cultural and political development...Gender equality implies that all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations imposed by stereotypes and prejudices about gender roles" (BBS, 2022, p. 7; UNICEF, 2017, p. 3).

For many social workers, a concern about gender equality is important because throughout history, women have been and continue to be oppressed and discriminated against in ways that are different than men (Turner and Maschi, 2014, p.1). Women are one-half of the world's population and perform two-thirds of hours work, yet they are poorer in resources and representation in positions of decision-making (Khattak, 2011, p. 69). In the vast majority of countries, women relative to men have less education despite the fact that education for women is considered a ladder to independence; less access to resources and control; more social obligations; and less advantageous cultural ideologies (Evans et. al., 2020; Huis et. al., 2017; Khattak, 2011). Globally, 10.3 percent of women live in extreme poverty today, and they are poorer than men, which requires invest-

ing in policies and programs that address gender inequalities and support boosting women's agency and leadership and that create millions of jobs by 2035 through investments in care services (UN Women, 2024).

Similar to the discussion in relation to women's empowerment (e.g., Huis et al., 2017), gender inequality has been historically conceptualized and continues to be conceptualized, and various feminist theories on gender inequality have been developed to explain the phenomenon (e.g., Anderson, 2016). Gender equality has also been a concern for world leaders (UNICEF, 2017, P. 3) and achieving gender equality and empowering of all women and girls is perceived as a key sustainable development goal (SDG 5) and central to the achievement of other SDGs including education, ending poverty, enhancing health and well-being, establishing decent work, and promoting peaceful and inclusive societies (Unterhalter and Howell, 2019; UN Women, 2018). Interventions such as 0-3 pre-school education, a model for provision of quality child care, child nutrition programs, and child grants programs have been implemented to end discrimination against women and girls, to deconstruct gender prejudice, and to close gender gaps (e.g., Besnier et al., 2024; Thilakoun et al., 2023; Okelo et al., 2022; Gallego and Maestripieri, 2022).

A growing body of evidence shows that empowering women economically may lead to economic benefits for women themselves and their households and communities (Jaysawal and Saha, 2023; Anderson et al., 2021, P. 193; Smet and Boros, 2021; Revenga and Shetty, 2012) and the well-being of all in societies (Looze et al., 2018). However, accessing these benefits requires giving full scope to the full range of human abilities and potential (Rowlands, 1995, p. 102) including education, upskilling, and re-skilling over the life course which is critical for women's and girls' dignity, well-being, and their participation in the labor market e.g., in care services (UN Women, 2018; Martínez et al., 2017; McCracken et al., 2015).

Care work, conceptualized in terms of 'who benefits' (Folbre, 2006, p. 186) and considered as 'a critical social good' (Grantham and Somji, 2022, p. 1), is one of the most important means in developing countries to promote gender equality and empower women from disadvantaged backgrounds. A growing body of research suggests that working women who use childcare provisions in low and/or middle-income countries experience empowerment (Okelo et al., 2022; Leuning and Ngavirue, 1995); improved labor market outcomes (Grantham and Somji, 2022); increased probabilities to be paid in cash (Nandi et al., 2020); and more time to earn

an income and seek employment and thus can help break the cycle of gendered and intergenerational poverty (Moussié, 2021).

Child daycare is a place where children, usually, are taken care of by people other than their parents for money (Islam and Khan, 2015, p. 72). Given that subsidized child care for women in poor urban settings could be a powerful mechanism to improve female labor outcomes and reduce gender inequalities (Clark et.al., 2017) and that caregiver sensitivity in home-based care is positively associated with children's well-being (Sluiter et. al., 2023); home-based child care can be the most prevalent form of noncustodial child care, especially for infants and toddlers and children living in poverty (Tonyana, 2017).

In Bangladesh, research concerning child caregivers and care for children focuses on essential aspects such as alternative care for children of working women (Mridha, 2023). Research on 'child-caregivers' defined as the 'person responsible to educate and take care of children in a home-based setting, ... or other improvised family arrangement setting' (Rahman et. al., 2022, p. 5), specifically, their values, abilities, and entrepreneurial aspirations as well as the values of a care model/intervention concerning gender equality is limited but important for several reasons. Firstly, values act as guiding principles in people's lives and can mediate the relationships between gender and different outcomes (Stefani and Prati, 2021; Connolly et. al., 2020; Prince-Gibson and Schwartz, 1998). Values can shape 'culturally specific socialization through which children can learn gender identities' (Khattak, 2011, p. 69). Given that child caregivers are part of everyday life for many young children and full-day non-parental child care is, after the home setting, the second most important environment in which children develop their early years (Sluiter et al, 2023, p. 102), exploring the role of caregivers' values and skills in socializing children is significant to understand gender equality. Secondly, the theory of change illustrating pathways to women's economic empowerment demonstrates how training of caregivers on appropriate early childhood development practices is considered as the individual level input that shapes access to quality child care services and corresponding working mothers' labor market participation and economic empowerment (Okelo et.al., 2022, p. 3). Thirdly, effective models/interventions to bring changes in women's lives contribute to women's personal, relational, and collective empowerment and achievement of gender equality (Rowlands, 1997). Finally, the promotion of innovation and entrepreneurship is a crucial element in achieving gender equality (Veckalne & Tambovceva, 2023).

This research aims to explore how the home-based care model initiated by BRAC Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University promotes gender equality and women's entrepreneurial aspirations, centering on early childhood development in Bangladesh. More specifically, the research aims to better understand: How do the values of caregivers who represent disadvantaged women's groups in Bangladesh help to promote gender equality and gender justice in Bangladesh? What are the aspirations of these women regarding the care model, and how meaningful are the aspirations in the cultural context of Bangladesh? In which ways are the values of these women reflected in the entrepreneurial decision-making process? The research adopts the three feminist conceptualizations of gender inequality that involve opening up opportunities for women to become equal to men in society; elimination of patriarchy, or men's systematic oppression of women; and the idea such as the socially constructed differences between men and women can be socially alterable, to understand how the care model promotes gender equality (Anderson, 2016; Khattak, 2011; Friedman et. al., 1987). The research also uses the framework for women's entrepreneurship and culture research (Bullough et. al., 2022) to illustrate how the care model promotes women's entrepreneurial aspirations. The reason behind using these conceptualizations and framework is shaped by the views of many researchers who suggest that the existing concepts of entrepreneurship can be used in conjunction with feminist theories to extend the theoretical foundation of the larger entrepreneurship field (Yadav and Unni, 2016, p. 15). We assume that women caregivers' values, their entrepreneurial decision-making, and gender equality are closely intertwined. The analysis of the research will provide nuanced insights and inspire practitioners, policy makers, educators, researchers, and advocates to identify a care model for achieving gender equality and empowerment of disadvantaged women in Bangladesh.

The Care Model

BRAC Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University has been working to promote human potential including enabling women and girls to reach their fullest potential through model development, capacity building, research, and advocacy (Mariam, 2024; Mariam et. al., 2021; Play Lab Research Brief, 2021) and is currently in the process of transforming child care into care model that supports the well-being of child, caregivers, and moth-

ers and that is rooted in Bangladeshi cultural context and catered to a co-dependent ecosystem that includes a working mother who, during work hours, leaves her child to a trusted care provider in the community in exchange for some remuneration. The model is a co-created interdisciplinary model that connects gender empowerment and livelihood with mental health, ECD, and child protection. Empowering women to participate in the labor market, ensuring their respect and emotional support, enabling them to apply their values, and providing equal opportunities for children to learn, grow, and participate actively are a few key features of the care model. To support the well-being of the children, BRAC IED rigorously trains care providers on child development, play, child rearing, fundamentals of care, safety, safeguarding, and financial management following liberal learning experiences. A team of para-counsellors supports the socio-emotional needs of care providers through meaningful conversations (Khanom, 2024; Guha, 2024).

Understanding Gender and Gender Inequality

Gender is a social construction; it concerns the differing qualities culturally attributed to women and men and refers to behavior expectations that are socially learned through culturally specific socialization and that distinguish between assumed identities of men and women, in other words, masculinity and femininity. Culturally, greater value is assigned to that which is associated with masculinity and lesser value to that which is associated with femininity (Khattak, 2011, p. 68–69).

According to feminist social workers, gender must be considered when examining discrimination, oppression, and powerlessness in a society (Turner and Maschi, 2014, p.1). Despite that gender is about both men and women, ideas centering gender empowerment and gender analysis conventionally indicate the empowerment of women and how women are an important part of the presence-absence in regard to men and women (Gender Empowerment, Wikipedia, 2024; Khattak, 2011, p. 69).

Gender inequality has been conceptualized in various ways. Some believers state women and men are the same and conceptualize gender inequality based on the idea that women's participation in public and social life should be equal to men; therefore, opportunities have to be opened up to allow women to become equals in society (Anderson, 2016, p. 40; Khattak, 2011, p. 72). For other believers, patriarchy, or men's systematic oppression of women, is the primary concept useful for explaining gen-

der inequality. They conceptualize the categories of women and men as distinctly different and call for an overhaul of the appraisal of values so that “women’s values” become valued (Anderson, 2016, p. 41). Many also argue that if the role of men and women can change over time or from one society to another, then it must follow that the differences between women and men are not predetermined, but rather socially constructed and therefore socially alterable (Friedman et al., 2011, p. 16).

Gender Equality in the Context of Bangladesh

The Women Development Policy of Bangladesh 2010 and the 8th five-year plan of Bangladesh 2020-2025 emphasize on the elimination of discrimination and abuse of women and female children; the development of women as educated and skilled human resources; providing overall assistance in ensuring the growth of women entrepreneurs; and reducing discriminatory barriers by taking both developmental and institutional measures (BBS, 2022).

Interestingly, in Bangladesh, Female Labor Force Participation (LFP) has increased more rapidly for women compared to men (Nora et. al., 2021) and much of this gain was due to an increasing number of urban and rural women working from home (Islam and Kotikula, 2023); women’s increased accessed to microcredit schemes to become self-employed; women’s employment as teachers etc.; and the expansion of garment industry (UNICEF, 2015). Yet, the LFP gender gap remains wide (Nora et. al., 2021). By sex, Bangladesh’s labour force participation rate in 2016-17 was 36.3 percent for women and 80.5 percent for men (BBS, 2022). Lack of access to childcare (Kotikula, 2019; ADB Briefs, 2016); gender norms that shape the division of labor in families; marriage; *purdah* practices; and gender-based violence in the public sphere are pressing issues for Bangladeshi women affecting their employment decisions (Nora et al., 2021; ADB Briefs, 2016).

The number of women entrepreneurs in Bangladesh is low, but growing, and more work is required to reach the desired outcome (Mariam, 2023; Nora et. al., 2021; Lubna and Parvin, 2017). A larger share of Bangladeshi women (62 percent) undertakes home-based work compared to Bangladeshi men (6 percent), and women overwhelmingly work from home as women’s entrepreneurship in rural areas often involves micro-businesses (Nora et. al., 2021). Notably, despite Bangladeshi women’s increasing entrepreneurship and educational attainment, existing pro-

grams to build the capacity of women entrepreneurs compared to their male counterparts as well as to support these women financially are currently inadequate (Nora et al., 2021; Lubna & Parvin, 2017).

Importantly, in the context of urbanization, children from low socio-economic status are affected by inadequate access to child protection, education, and health care services, which has created a need for child care for working mothers from low socio-economic backgrounds (Islam and Khan, 2015; UNICEF, 2015). Moreover, women's involvement with jobs in the garments sector, the increased rate of working women due to increased female education rate, and the scarcity of housemaids led to the demand for child day care centers in Bangladesh (Islam and Khan, 2015). Child care research has also recommended developing such an alternative care system for children (Mridha, 2023).

Regarding children, despite the Children Act 013 favors children; social perceptions and expectations of childhood vary according to age, gender, class, disability, etc. Accordingly, children who are "non-understanding" are considered dependent (UNICEF, 2015, p. 46). "Understanding" is likewise linked to gender roles; for example, an "understanding" girl is born to be given in marriage and is expected to be submissive and participate in housework, and an "understanding" boy is expected to work outside the household and earn an income, and to be responsible for the women and children in his family. Thus, the status of children in Bangladesh is deeply rooted in gender beliefs, norms, attitudes, and practices (UNICEF, 2015, p. 47).

Methodology

In this qualitative research, critical ethnography research was chosen to discover, describe, and interpret everyday interaction patterns of the culture-sharing group involving children, women caregivers, and mothers marginalized in society; the shared and learned patterns of values of these women caregivers, and the care model to promote gender equality. Ethnographic fieldwork or 'naturalistic enquiry' was conducted by the ten women para-counsellors who located themselves in the field and spent several months with the group of women caregivers and children, as members in the childcare centers; played an important role in obtaining meaningful cultural information by observing and interacting with the group of women caregivers, children, and others in their real-life situation or

ordinary settings in the child care centers; and made sense of the cultural characteristics of this group of individuals, in other words, how local culture or developed norms operates, how women caregivers collectively make meanings of their values, and how gender and power is negotiated across multiple childcare centers of the care model. In line with the idea of 'collaborative ethnography', these para-counselors simultaneously conducted their individual fieldwork in childcare centers in different contexts or field sites, i.e., Dhaka, Gazipur, and Tongi, and collaborated by sharing insights and sometimes their own fieldnotes. More specifically, an initial collective goal guided the para-counselors' individual fieldwork in different contexts that were then brought into dialogue.

Importantly, these para-counselors came together, collaborated, and shared their dialogue, specifically their rich insights of everyday interaction, detailed observations of day-to-day lives, the meaning of behavior, and language; as well as the voices of the children and adults in the centers, following a storytelling approach. They shared their stories through three repeated one-hour and thirty-minute consultation sessions, facilitated by a woman moderator who asked open-ended questions, such as, "When you entered the center, what did you observe?" etc., accepted and respected a diversity of responses; and ensured a comfortable environment that created opportunities for all para-counselors to freely express their thoughts, or "to speak on their own". Consent was sought for para-counselors' autonomy to participate in and voice recording before beginning each consultation session. A back-and-forth process was followed, where para-counselors shared insights in a consultation session and then went for individual fieldwork, and then came together to share insights. The emerged insights of these para-counselors in the form of collective ethnography experiences gathered from what is observed or heard from participants were synthesized following the emerged themes and an overall interpretation incorporating both emic and etic perspectives to conclude how the cultural values of a group of women caregivers marginalized in society contributed to promoting gender equality in the context of Bangladesh.

Findings

Women caregivers are located and care for children in a context that often describes disempowering lived realities due to cultural and economic marginalization of women and girls in the community influenced by son

preference, less recognition of girls' potentials, abuse of girls and child marriage, female gender expectations and denial of opportunities and choices that shape low self-esteem and low self-worth of girls and women. In this context of unjust gender inequalities, the philosophy of the care model and the values of caregivers support the liberation of women and girls, the emancipation of women and girls from oppression, the reconsideration of socially constructed male-female differences, and women's entrepreneurial aspirations.

1. Liberation of Women and Girls

The philosophy of the care model supports the idea that women and men are the same, and therefore, they should be afforded equal status and opportunity. Hence, the model provided an opportunity for women to participate in the labor market on equal terms with men. By providing such an opportunity to participate in the labor market, the model contributed to liberating women from low socio-economic backgrounds and enabled them to exercise their freedom to choose their roles as housewives or institutionalized child caregivers. Moreover, the liberation of these women who have migrated from rural to urban areas also liberated men from bearing the responsibility alone for the well-being of their families, as well as the next generation to study in urban areas and find a job. Thus, the care model is important for women and promoting gender equality by liberating women to participate in the labor market equally with men. These women's values centering on child care can be an asset because, through care work, they access public opportunities, improve their quality of life, and liberate men from one-sided responsibilities for the well-being of their families. Hence, women's values centering care work have the same worth as that of men, and by doing such work, women can succeed and promote the idea that the women's way of doing business is the right way of doing business.

In line with the values of the care model, the process of women's liberation was strengthened by creating provisions for the capacity building of these women caregivers. Besides ensuring women's access to the labor market, the care model also provided equal opportunity for women to develop their fullest potential. Women caregivers' such access to quality care education and care pedagogy seemed useful to improve and develop skills to enable them to understand the difference between women's natural capacities of child care and education; perform the care

work with greater capacity; see revised socialization about continuing their participation in the labor market; and demonstrate their values towards 'openness to change'.

Women caregivers' values created provisions for liberating young girls by ensuring opportunities for girls in early learning and development to reach their fullest potential on equal terms with boys. In other words, by creating such provisions, women caregivers contributed to bringing up a generation of girls with opportunities for early learning and development, and promoting their well-being. In the child care centers, it was observed that caregivers played the role of the first teacher in the lives of many of these girls and boys, specifically for those who attended the centers at a very young age and spent most of the time of the day with the caregivers. Caregivers sang songs including traditional songs that were appealing to children; told rhymes and imagination-based stories, helped children to draw, supported children's free play with blocks and other play materials that favor girls' emergent literacy and numeracy development; brain development, cognitive and language development; social-emotional development, physical development; and development of a range of skills including thinking, creativity, problem-solving, recognize colors and shapes etc. Interestingly, a range of caregivers-girls interactions e.g., feeding children with much care; watching TV and sleeping together by singing songs; helping children to play in natural outdoor space or using a self-made cradle with the support of a cloth, sac, and mango tree behind the home to help children "to feel fresh"; taking care of a neglected child during Eid day (Muslim religious festival); and cooking for children in few instances because children were fond of food that the caregivers prepared etc., can be characterized by positive relationship, love, and kindness crucial to promote girls' enhanced social-emotional wellbeing.

It was also observed that caregivers empower girls with opportunities for exploration and freedom to choose, given that girls are allowed to participate in all types of play using all categories of toys. During free play time, girls were found to choose whether they would play alone or in pairs or groups, on the bed or the floor, and watch TV or play. According to the girls' own choice, they participated in group play from a range of culturally relevant play, such as role-playing of a teacher and learners, hide and seek, etc.; chose play materials from a variety of toys, including colors; chose a space to play, such as indoor or outdoor spaces; and chose forms of entertainment such as cartoon, songs, and dance in television. To sup-

port such a process of making a choice, caregivers were found to consider individual girls' needs and interests. Interestingly, the process of enabling girls to make their own choices led to increased self-confidence and independence among girls. Girls' responses such as "I can sing", girls' interest in "serving food independently", etc., are examples of their increased confidence and independence, which are important gains in early life.

In the childcare centers, caregivers encouraged children to collaborate and play together, mentioning that they are friends. Caregivers' values thus value collaboration rather than developing and reinforcing sex segregation, stereotypes, and discrimination between young girls and boys, and thereby indicate their concern to promote a non-sexist attitude, with the implication that the care model will change the attitudes of children of the present day, which in the long run will change society that sustains gender stereotypes and discrimination. Observation data also suggest that caregivers' values regarding equal opportunity for girls were crucial to empower girls who were marginalized due to poverty and developmental delays. Caregivers' values are demonstrated by their willingness to include special needs girls in spaces mostly used by abled children. In this inclusive space, caregivers displayed sensitivity and responsiveness and enhanced caregiver-girls communication as they interacted with girls with developmental delays. They loved these girls more than other children, were much more concerned about their preferences, and spent more time supporting their learning and development. Consequently, these girls developed skills to use the necessary vocabulary and experienced positive well-being. Thus, by ensuring opportunities to access childcare centers and scaffolding early learning and development, caregivers played an important role in supporting these girls to address difficulties compounded by community attitudes and beliefs regarding girls from poor families and widespread taboos and discrimination based on deeply rooted negative perceptions about disability.

Caregivers' values that ensure opportunities for early learning and development for girls from different backgrounds may result in girls' experience of equal status to that of boys. Such equal opportunity fulfills deficiencies related to the ideology of girls' socialization process at an early age as remedies to girls' appropriate socialization, which has the potential to enable girls to advance in any discipline of education, and disregard the belief that women are not suited for certain kinds of men's jobs. In this sense, equal opportunity for girls in early learning and development has the power to promote gender equality.

2. Emancipation of Women and Girls from Oppression

Besides the liberation of women and girls, the care model shows women's values that support emancipating women and girls from patriarchal oppression, leading to the transformation of a gendered society and promoting gender equality. A range of examples supports the idea.

The organizational structure and management process of the child-care centers emphasized the creation of women-centered spaces and girls-only centers. The home-based child care centers were run by women caregivers and supported by women para-counselors, women trainers, and other professionals. Thus, a group of women managed these women-only centers and drew attention to the unfolding and inclusion of women's perspectives; defined rules that differ from men-defined rules, which men change as soon as women show any sign of becoming as successful as them; and ended sexual harassment against women in the workplace. Thus, the philosophy of the care model supported overcoming the structural barriers and reproductions of power relations. Similarly, by creating girls-only centers as a space, caregivers' values contested structures that perpetuate discrimination in the form of exclusionary practices, and older boys' defined values that often benefit boys in different settings, including home, playground, etc.

Additionally, in the child care centers, caregivers practiced an alternative management process, which is primarily collective and sharing, and which functioned as a non-hierarchical way in relation to division of labor, roles, and responsibilities. In this system, along with caregivers, their daughters and daughters-in-law, sons, and husbands shared labor for accompanying children, and helping children to play in the outdoor space and take a shower. Caregivers' husbands were observed telling stories to the children, feeding them, helping children to sleep, etc. It was noted that children loved to spend time with para-counselors because of their friendly, trusted, and close relationship with the para-counselors. Thus, in the management process of the care centers, the caregivers contested male-centered views, such as hierarchical with a clear division of labor, roles and responsibilities, competition, and power distance. Caregivers' such management practice can be described as collaborative, cooperative, team-oriented, flexible, loosely structured, like a community, and friendly, which encourages open communication. Hence, caregivers' values embraced egalitarian, non-hierarchical and mutual relationships that fostered equality and mutual respect in the process of managing home-based

child care centers that train children in various skills and support early learning and development.

Besides practicing the collaborative management process of the child-care centers, caregivers also demonstrated non-hierarchical and cooperative interactions with external stakeholders. Caregivers' values mirrored the principle of being harmonizing and responsive to women's needs. As opposed to following a conflict-oriented approach, the caregivers followed a collaborative and flexible approach when deciding the timing for care centers (e.g., according to the work schedule of children's mothers), treatment of children when they are in the centers (e.g., by visiting a doctor and buying prescribed medicine), and feeding children (e.g., by providing self-made alternative food that children prefer). Caregivers' such values aligned with being cooperative and flexible, indicated their cooperation to enable working women to work in public spaces, which can help reconsider the subordinate status of women to men.

Importantly, caregivers' such practice of a value concerning non-hierarchical relationships is transferred among the children. It was repeatedly observed that the relationships between older and younger children in the care centers were very friendly, and children treated the youngest ones with much affection. This non-hierarchical relationship between girls and boys with age differences also supported equality and mutual respect between them.

Besides egalitarian and cooperative management practices, the caregivers' upbringing process of children supports the emancipation of girls from oppression. In a care center, it was observed that two girls were playing *Iching Biching*. Thus, the game allowed the girls to set rules; choose play, initiate play, and cooperate in play. Participation in such play enables girls to realize their strength in areas such as setting rules, making choices, initiating actions, and cooperating. Besides supporting such girl-girl play, caregivers encouraged boys and girls to be collaborative and flexible when sharing toys or playing in groups instead of demonstrating values concerning competition, aggression, emotional distance, and values related to a conflict-oriented approach. Thus, the caregivers encouraged boys to learn to respect girls and also to learn that the best way of resolving conflict is not a violent one. In this way, the care model serves to end violence against girls and eventually women, and promote gender equality. While these examples demonstrate that the upbringing process of girls and boys was different, some examples also show that the upbringing process of girls and boys was similar and supportive

in ending girls' oppression. Interaction patterns among children in the care model indicated that both boys and girls learn how to be nurturing as well as how to be inquisitive and creative. For example, it was observed that a boy child first erased the teardrops of a crying child and then showed affection so that the child stopped crying. Similarly, a girl child was playing with a doll, and another girl child was feeding a feeder to a child. Additionally, a special needs girl's endless questioning around different issues indicated the girl's inquisitive mind, intellectual curiosity, and intention for discovery. Similarly, boys indicated their creative and imaginative skills by making a horse and feeding the horse, drawing a fish, and expressing the idea of leaving the fish in water.

Caregivers' values regarding the non-gendered socialization of children by accepting and rewarding non-stereotypical play might have influenced children's toy preferences and play behavior. It was observed that girls preferred toys such as blocks, water, and a thermometer classified as neutral and important to stimulate intellectual and scientific skills; balls that are judged to be more competitive and conducive to moving in space; and a napkin to wipe the body for collaborative role-playing of teachers-learners, which required verbal interactions. Similarly, boys were also found to draw collaboratively on the floor and interact verbally. Consistent to this findings, research on sex differences in toy preference, and play creativity suggests that rural mothers in Bangladesh often appear less stereotypic about children's play behavior as they mention that girls may play with balls and boys may wish to play with dolls (Sharif, 2016), girls preferred neutral toys more than boys did (Davis and Hines, 2020), the time spent with male-typed toys increased with age for both girls and boys (Todd et. al., 2016), and no gender difference in play creativity (Cherney and Dempsey, 2010).

Caregivers' day-long engagement in care practices supports the idea that, in line with women's ways of valuing the process, caregivers valued process in care activities equally to product, specifically when considering early learning and development. Caregivers practiced playful parenting featured by joyful, actively engaging, meaningful, iterative, and socially interactive caregiver-child play. This process drew the power of culture to promote early learning and development and ranged from telling culturally relevant stories, including stories of kings and queens, angels etc., rhymes such as *Am pata jhora pata*, *Ayre pakhi Leg dula*, etc., songs including traditional songs or lyrical poetry; to involving children in a variety of play. As girls heard all these songs repeatedly, they learned how to sing the

songs. Additionally, girls in early childhood got the opportunity to learn through a process of observation and participation in culturally relevant play with other children using a range of toys.

It was observed that caregivers also valued learning through play as a process, the sequential process of skills acquisition through play, and strengthening the skills before attending school. Interestingly, different forms of play (such as object play, symbolic play, pretend role play, etc.) created different kinds of cultural environments for learning. Given that there are various benefits of play in children's learning and development, emphasis on play to learn as a process that helps children to explore new skills, roles, and values, bears implications on these children's early learning and development and corresponding school readiness and transition from home to school. School readiness is important for lifelong success. Caregivers' emphasis on the process of care activities thus seemed useful to help children to be 'ready child', in other words, equally 'ready girl' and 'ready boy', which is one of the three important dimensions of school readiness.

Importantly, caregivers valued the process of nurturing care (see, Karimov and Gokcay, 2025) including the *opportunity for early learning* by introducing stories including imagination-based stories, songs, rhymes, drawing, and opportunity to play; *responsive caregiving* by being responsive to each child's temperament and needs during play and feeding e.g., when a child was playing alone in the balcony, a caregiver did not discourage the child to play alone given that the caregiver perceived such diversity normal; *security and safety* by keeping all kitchen materials having a sharp edge, hot cooking pots, and vegetables that may cause itching in hands in places that were out of reach to children; and *adequate nutrition* by offering children alternative quality food if they did not wish to eat the food they brought from their homes. By valuing these processes equal to product, these caregivers valued the conceptual model for quality home-based child care (Blasberg et. al., 2019; Lehrer et. al., 2015).

Interestingly, when telling stories, caregivers displayed values of emphasizing female-centeredness in the story representation. Instead of representing male experience as everyone's experience and thus avoiding sexist bias in the representation of the male experience, caregivers' use of stories, for example, the story of the king and queen, represented women's visibility. In general, a queen in a story performs high-status tasks and demonstrates ability, a sense of creativity, and superiority. Hence, the education that caregivers provided to children differed from transmitting

a dominant ideology – i.e., masculine superiority. Thus, caregivers' stories against discrimination seemed useful to shape the ideas and experiences of young girls. From this point of view, the childcare model represented one of the ways in which girls and women were included in power, previously held by males.

The care model created provisions for caregivers to reconceptualize patriarchal power relations in which men are socially, economically, and politically more powerful than women. Caregivers' experience demonstrated that they are tremendously successful in child care activities, especially in creating strong emotional bonds with girls and boys attending the centers. Thus, caregivers empowered themselves and regained strength in the sense that they have the power to make things happen rather than having the power over others. This reevaluation of women's nurturing and caring roles enabled them to redefine their worth in areas of strong interpersonal relationships and trust in communication that differ from male values, such as assertion. Additionally, through care activities, the caregivers demonstrated the potential to shift power imbalance and thus experienced power as empowerment or power as capacity. A caregiver's experience suggests that her knowledge, skills, and values in regard to nurturing children were recognized by her local community; consequently, she earned a good image in her community. According to this example, the caregiver's power is not to influence people by imposing her supreme authority. Instead, her capacity for child rearing, following information related to child care, enabled her to acquire recognition from the community, which men often acquire by their socially constructed higher position in the power hierarchy. Furthermore, given that the skills of these women caregivers as marginalized groups were recognized and legitimized by society, it is possible that these caregivers can shift the power imbalance between the dominant culture and the culture of the oppressed.

In the care model, emotion is perceived as the source of power reconceptualization. A range of interactions between caregivers and children indicated how caregivers experienced the key emotions, such as excitement, happiness, and feeling loved and trusted. Such emotional bonding between them was understood by the language they used to call each other, and children's expressions of anxiety when a caregiver was unwell.

For example, a child who spent time with the caregiver throughout the day addressed her as "*Ma*" (mother). Hearing this word from a child of another mother functioned as the source of happiness and feeling

loved and trusted by the child. Similarly, many caregivers called children using the words "*Dadu Bhai, Nanu Bhai*" (grandchild), indicating their expression of love and affection for these children. Such feelings, resulting from reciprocity in expressing emotions, differ from the feelings that emerge from submissiveness and thus can contribute to caregivers' reconceptualization of power.

Moreover, children's expression of anxiety toward caregivers was evident when a caregiver placed her hands on her head, the children immediately asked her if there is a headache. Similarly, if a caregiver showed upset feelings, the children immediately said that they would never repeat such behavior. Children's such responses indicated their concern for the caregivers, which has grown day by day through the pleasant interaction between the caregivers and the children, and was helpful for caregivers to understand the meaning of power, which was not about exercising power over others.

Other responses supported emotional bonding between children and caregivers. During the conversation between the para-counselor and a caregiver, a child who was sleeping woke up and looked at both of their faces one by one. When the caregiver called the child with great affection, saying, "*Come, Dadu Bhai, come*", the child stood up and sat on the lap of the caregiver. This interaction indicates that the caregiver is trusted by the child and that the child has confidence in the caregiver. Furthermore, examples of caregivers' responses, such as "I look after the child similar to the way I take care of my child. I feel sad when I see that a child's lunch includes only rice and pulses. This is why I share my food, e.g., fish or meat, with the child", and "the child only eats when I feed her using my hand" illustrates feelings of trust and being loved, which may not always be present in oppressive power relations.

Considering all these, a caregiver felt compassion when she saw the faces of the children and felt truly sad when she thought that one day these children will leave her and this center. These feelings indicate that attachment, reciprocity, and trust are the power of child care, which are different from power as domination and feelings of submissiveness.

Caregivers demonstrated the ability to manage emotions, specifically anger, as they interacted with children. They convinced children with greater affection, made fun of children to calm them, and demonstrated patience, considering their responsibility and the age of the children, when there is peer conflict centered on a toy, or when a child sat on the shoulder of a caregiver. Thus, the information, skills, and values gained from the

care model and support provided by the para-counsellors seem useful for caregivers to reconceptualize powerlessness, described as the inability to manage emotions, skills, knowledge, and material resources.

Caregivers also recognized that the para-counsellors are the only people who are concerned about the painful life experiences of the caregivers. According to a caregiver, "If I feel sad, there is nobody to listen to my sad feelings. There is nobody who asks us about how we feel". Given that para-counselors are skilled in empathy, caregivers understood that stressful situations can be handled with empathy instead of creating violence, which men often practice. Thus, caregivers can understand power differently; specifically, they can relate power with the capacity to give others emotional comfort. Caregivers thus experienced benefits from the fully informed and engaged relationships with para-counselors and viewed the relationship as supportive, given that para-counselors examined the contexts of caregivers' needs and supported them with empathy in stressful situations.

Furthermore, caregivers openly discussed different problems in the training sessions and experienced a sense of solidarity through the collective understanding of the common problems when shared with female childcare trainers.

Caregivers' understanding of their strength and success in the areas described above and their reconceptualization of power may help them to experience improved self-esteem, self-efficacy, and feelings of pride.

Besides considering emotion as the source of power reconceptualization, the care model also provided options for many caregivers to be financially independent; consequently, their dependence on men has reduced, and they demonstrated the ability to support their families along with male family members. These capacities regarding independence indicate concepts such as autonomy and equality helpful for reconceptualizing women's unequal status in gender power relations.

The caregivers' experience of power as empowerment enabled them to remake the false dichotomy of "good mother" and "bad mother" that exists in the context of poverty. A caregiver who provided care to twelve children bore the cost of educational and other living expenses of her three sons and three daughters, as well as the treatment costs of her sons. In the absence of her husband's income, the caregiver's contribution indicates that the resources provided by the child care activities enabled caregivers to care for their children in ways that are aligned with their parenting be-

liefs and aspirations, and thus can be helpful for them to reconceptualize that women can empower others in the poverty context.

The idea of power as empowerment was also evident as caregivers, as a group, self-consciously enabled other women (mothers) to work in public spaces. Thus, caregivers demonstrated a collective purpose and determination to support these working women to reconceptualize female power.

Caregivers' provision for keeping children safe throughout the day resisted the practice of blaming mothers for sexual abuse of children and the enforcement of gender stereotypes of motherhood. Notably, "the child abuse establishment assigns responsibility for abuse to mothers regardless of who assaults the child, and responds punitively to women if women fail to meet expectations of "good mothering" (Stark and Flitcraft, 1988, p. 97). By keeping girls safe throughout the day in the care centers, caregivers prevented the abuse of girl child and thereby, protected punitive respond to women by men in their community, which seems useful for these women to negotiate violence against women and thus reconceptualize women's oppression or subordination of women to men.

Caregivers' experience of freedom to choose and autonomy, as well as their ability to make informed decisions in their daily lives, is another example of their emancipation from oppression. Caregivers exercised their freedom to determine the content and sequence of activities in the centers, including the selection of rhymes and stories; and deciding on the time for offering food, engaging children in play, and sleeping. They also exercised freedom to choose the space to advance their career as entrepreneurs. By virtue of the care work, caregivers experience increased autonomy in decision-making regarding leaving their homes. For example, engagement in a child model enabled a caregiver to go out every day with two children to play in an open space at around 11.00 am, where she sat under a tree and observed children's play. Another caregiver also experienced the autonomy of a walk outside the home by carrying a four-month-old child to get relief from the heat resulting from a power failure. Moreover, on every school day, many caregivers accompanied children when they were on the way to school. Furthermore, caregivers are supported with resources, i.e., relevant information, skills, and toys, by the intervention that enabled them to make informed decisions about their own lives and contributed to their agency. For example, a total of ten children attended a child care center, and the caregiver decided to increase the number of children.

3. Reconsideration of the Socially Constructed Difference Between Women and Men and Girls and Boys

Besides emancipating women and girls from patriarchal oppression, the care model shows women's values that support altering socially constructed differences between men and women and girls and boys. Altering such differences eventually can lead to the transformation of a gendered society and the promotion of gender equality. The following examples illustrate the idea.

The men-women interaction pattern in the childcare centers indicates that the roles of men and women can be changed over time. Observation findings revealed that men valued women's labor devoted to child rearing, and they were involved in nurturing children in the child care centers. Caregivers' husbands told stories and rhymes to children, sat and ate together with children during lunch time, helped them to sleep, and kept children on their laps at different times of the day. Consequently, women's gender-specific alienation or isolation in child care work was eliminated because they saw men as co-workers in child care work. Furthermore, keeping children in the child care center for specific hours of the day enabled other women to work in public spaces. These examples thus provide insights regarding the altered role of men and women concerning the division of labor. It is also possible that by changing the roles of male and female, the way society sees and uses gender can be altered, and thus society can be transformed.

Women caregivers may experience false dichotomies aligned with sexism and classism. In the care model, caregivers negotiated with stereotypical classifications that support women's subordinate position to men. For instance, if a child played in the backyard with another child living next to a caregiver's door, the caregiver cautiously observed the child so that the child would not be out of sight. Additionally, they never left a child alone in the center, for example, when they went out to drop off other children at school. Caregivers thus demonstrated that they had the knowledge and skills to be responsible, and they applied such skills. Their ability to demonstrate such skills is useful to reconsider gender inequalities and dichotomies centering responsible/irresponsible and knowledge/ignorance that are reproduced through categorization processes in mainstream discourse over decades, and thus to deconstruct the prejudice, stereotypes, and/or discrimination typically against women as caregivers and the way the cultural norm sees women and constructs a system responsible for women's oppression.

Caregivers also contributed to remaking the socially and culturally constructed gender-based behavior that influences girls to learn how to be a girl and boys to learn how to be a boy, and the corresponding gender identity. To do so, caregivers allowed girls to adopt attitudes and behavior that are similar to other sex. For example, when playing, girls were allowed to set rules, choose play, and initiate play, which are often regarded as stereotypical traits of boys. Caregivers also facilitated the process of transforming girls' self-endorsement of gender stereotypic traits. They allowed a girl child to play sitting on the caregiver's shoulder and jumping from her shoulder. Thus, the caregiver attempted to remake the normative gender values, in other words, culturally defined, accepted, and traditional conceptions of the oppositional category of active/passive and fearless/timid. Additionally, caregivers also supported both the girls' and the boys' choice of space to play. They positively responded to a girl's choice to play in the rain in a public space and a boy's choice to watch cartoons and play with a phone in a private space. These examples also demonstrate that the caregivers practiced rewarding girls and boys if they did not display appropriate behavior in line with gender. Moreover, caregivers supported both girls and boys to play with balls, dolls, bats, blocks, thermometers, and pots, and to draw. Playing with these materials reshapes behavior categorized in line with preferences typically displayed by boys and girls and promotes non-gender-stereotyped behavior. In this way, the caregivers tried to deconstruct the fixed binary opposition, including active/passive, fearless/timid, public/private, and science/arts. The caregiver's such process of remaking the normative concept of fixed binary opposition is important to reconsider the traditional meaning of the former category as boys and masculine, and the latter category as girls and feminine. Girls in this process of remaking meaning seem to experience themselves as valued individuals because "in virtually all cultures whatever is thought of as manly is more highly valued than what is thought of as womanly" (Harding, 1986, p. 18). By changing the meaning of stereotypical forms of classification, caregivers thus tried to remake the socially approved difference between boys and girls and assign a particular position and status to girls in society.

4. Caregivers' Aspirations

Caregivers' values, beliefs, and ideologies centering on child care work eventually shaped their entrepreneurial aspirations. The language of the caregivers communicates their desire to expand female-owned start-ups.

Their justifications for service expansion were influenced by two ideas: the service is appealing, and the expansion of the service would achieve useful ends and thus be rewarding for them. Interestingly, the caregivers' such entrepreneurial aspirations were meaningful in accordance with their gender role expectations and identities, and entrepreneurial environment contexts.

Caregivers' gender role expectations and identities are aligned with entrepreneurial leadership style, including both female leadership style and masculine traits. Caregivers' experiences demonstrated that they were tremendously successful in nurturing children, specifically, in developing strong emotional bonding, and loving, warm, friendly, and kind relations with children, including girls attending their centers. A caregiver's experience suggested that girls and boys in her center truly love to spend time with her. Even on a Muslim religious festival, such as *Eid al-Fitr*, children wished to celebrate the festival with her, and to do so, early in the morning, they ran to her. This moment made the caregiver very happy; correspondingly, she thought that she truly loved the girls and boys and nurtured them accordingly, and this is the reward of her true love and devoted nurturing; in other words, this is her "success" of doing this work. Importantly, being nurturing and affectionate are qualities that are particularly important for leadership characteristics and thus can influence the successful running of child care entrepreneurship.

Additionally, in line with women's identity and leadership style, caregivers demonstrated their values associated with being compassionate and empathetic. Caregivers considered children as "blessings"; hence, they tried to understand children's feelings and respond to their feelings with compassion, and took full responsibility for these children throughout the day. Achievements of useful ends of taking such responsibilities included feeling less stressed and being able to avoid loneliness. Caregivers' such feelings and values, such as being compassionate and empathetic, also shaped their entrepreneurial decision-making process.

Caregivers' values, including concern for other women and enabling them to live a dignified life, largely influenced their entrepreneurial intentions. Such a value can be considered an important leadership trait aligned with women's gender roles and identity. Furthermore, women's values such as being cooperative, collaborative, egalitarian, and responsive to women's needs are important leadership characteristics and needed for being an entrepreneurial leader, and business creation and success within the existing child care services. Consistent to these findings, prior research

exploring feminist values within the venture-creation process suggests that opportunity construction is defined as 'building community with women like me', 'enabling other women', 'do more with my life', and 'opportunity knocked', and organizational structure and governance reflected cooperative, collaborative and ethical principles (Orser et. al., 2013).

The caregivers experienced a sense of gender equality and female empowerment because, as women, they were able to support their daughters' studies in secondary schools, which will eventually lead to achieving gender equality in education. Notably, the elimination of gender inequality seemed useful for reducing gender-based violence and living a life with dignity, particularly for women. In these contexts, caregivers functioned as change agents who were concerned with the improvement of women's quality of life and wellbeing, and represented a leadership trait crucial for being successful as women entrepreneurial leaders.

Caregivers' values concerning providing equal opportunity for girls, including girls with special needs, is helpful for these girls to reach their fullest potential, valuing process equal to product, and valuing power as empowerment or capacity to empower others are associated with feminine values and considered as assets and important leadership characteristics. Notably, caregivers' value regarding power as a capacity, put differently, their capacity to nurture children appropriately, enabled them to acquire recognition from their local community, which also shaped their entrepreneurial aspiration.

Interestingly, sometimes caregivers switched between different gender identities and leadership identities and styles, and thereby displayed masculine traits such as being responsible, independent, confident, inquisitive, and creative. Caregivers enjoyed the trait "independence" because such a trait enabled them to support their mothers' treatment, buy gifts for grandchildren, etc., which can be the source of immense pleasure and positive feelings. Caregivers also supported enabling other women and girls to be independent. Thus, caregivers contested gender binaries and gender order, doing gender, and social norms associated with gender status beliefs, centering masculinity and femininity. Given that entrepreneurship requires both masculine and feminine skills (Galloway et. al., 2015, p. 688), caregivers' such masculine traits seem useful for the successful running of their business.

Caregivers' entrepreneurial leadership style, experiences, and resulting vision may influence indirect learning and social encouragement among the aspiring female child caregivers or entrepreneurs to create, develop, and

lead their child care centers. In the research context, it is stated that “keeping children in child care centers has become the norm in recent days, in other words, every household is now interested in providing such support to children as care providers, even students are also interested in doing so because they can play with children and can help the working women of their community”. Thus, many women are now interested in playing the role of child caregivers. These women can be influenced by the role models who live in their community and may have close relations with them.

Besides the benefits of gender role expectations and identities, the entrepreneurial environment contexts were considered meaningful to promote caregivers’ entrepreneurial aspirations. Two ideas can be related to the entrepreneurial environment. One idea states that the gender aspect of cultural expectations and practices supports women’s business. Caregivers’ responses revealed that child care work allowed them to earn while staying at home. A thirty-five-year-old caregiver mentioned that she does not prefer to do any work that requires visiting public spaces. According to this example, caregivers’ values of work-family life balance can be a constructive solution to the problem related to gender role expectations that have traditionally limited women’s access to income-earning opportunities.

The other idea emphasizes the capacity building of caregivers and model development by women-friendly institutional provisions. Caregivers’ responses revealed that their access to resources, e.g., training and education on quality care education and care pedagogy, toys, and materials to decorate rooms provided by BRAC Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University was vastly useful to create provisions for women to improve and/or develop skills to perform the care work with greater capacity and concept, and to equip them in the labor market. Furthermore, by attending the capacity-building sessions, these women also had access to professional business ties that differ from personal networks in private space. Hence, the innovative and progressive institutional provisions for care model development, which offered ‘basic premises as a roadmap to achieve the goal’ (Rhee, et. al., 2008), and capacity building of women caregivers played a crucial role in advancing women’s values of nurturing children and developing their fullest human potentials. Regarding the role of the educative programs in developing women’s fullest human potentials, previous research illustrates, “Women, like all other people in our society, must have the chance to develop their fullest human potential...Educative programs have been considered as an important strategy to equalize opportunity and to enable these women to overcome the constraint on the

free choice of women” (Friedman et. al., 1987, pp. 6-7). Thus, women caregivers who have access to quality care education and care pedagogy can develop their fullest human potential and benefit from public opportunities. Additionally, prior research on developing human potential indicates that women caregivers’ access to capacity building and family support is considered as inputs of nurturing care for early childhood development and growth, and thereby is positively associated with a child’s early cognitive development, child growth, early learning, and nutrition outcomes (Besnier, 2023; Bliznashka et al., 2021; Heckert et. al., 2019). Hence, women caregivers’ values and increased capacity regarding child care are important for the liberation of young girls in the sense that these caregivers ensure opportunities for early learning and development for girls equally with boys, and thus support the girls to reach their fullest potential, who, in the future, would perform as human resources to promote justice and fairness across multiple aspects of society.

This research identified the importance of capacity building of women caregivers in the home-based care model. The findings of this research also bear implications for greater access to such capacity-building interventions for women willing to set up formal child care centers. According to the conditions specified in the ‘Child DayCare Center Act 2021’ applicable for formal child care centers’ (Helmerhorst et. al., 2023), Bangladeshi citizens should have a specific educational qualification and training to qualify to get registration for center establishment and operation (Child DayCare Center Act 2021). Hence, access to such capacity-building interventions may open opportunities for many women to advance their entrepreneurial aspirations in line with their values of nurturing children and participating in public and social life equally with men.

Conclusion

This research explored how the home-based care model provision of BRAC IED promotes gender equality and women’s entrepreneurial aspirations. Evidence suggests that the care model has great potential to promote gender equality in the sense that the model believes in the liberation of women and in line with such belief, the model has opened up opportunities for women with disadvantaged backgrounds to access education capital i.e., care education and pedagogy that enables women to reach their fullest human potential, realize dignity, and contribute to and benefit from

economic, social, cultural and structural development. Consistent with such values, these women caregivers' values opened up opportunities for girls to experience a different kind of socialization that can be helpful to alter culture-specific behavior expectations; support girls to realize their dignity and boys to respect girls; and enable girls from low socio-economic backgrounds and developmental delays to experience quality early learning and development vital to reach their fullest potentials. Moreover, men's supportive role in child care and women caregivers' transformed attributes that differ from culturally assigned qualities to women suggest that socially constructed gender roles can be socially alterable. Furthermore, the values of these women to promote women's values have the possibility to emancipate women and girls from patriarchal oppression and thus can reduce women's and girls' inequalities. Interestingly, women caregivers such values and increased personal abilities had a marked impact on these women's choices and aspirations to be entrepreneurs, which vary from the constraints imposed by cultural stereotypes and prejudices on their gender roles. Importantly, such aspiration is meaningful in line with women's leadership styles and in accordance with the entrepreneurially supportive environment where the women-friendly institutional provisions ensure access to resources such as education and training.

The analysis of this research unpacks the process of undoing women and girls' inequalities and provides evidence for decision-making regarding large-scale capacity building, centering values of the care model and the caregivers in Bangladesh and other geographical locations in a context-sensitive manner by considering the cultural differences in values and practices. Future research could therefore be conducted in other contexts to strengthen understanding of the full range of benefits of the care model in line with gender equality and empowerment of women and girls who are marginalized due to gender, class, ability, and/or other factors.

Acknowledgement

We are immensely grateful to all para-counselors of BRAC IED who shared their valuable insights drawn from their observation of the child-care centers and discussions with caregivers and children. We also express our sincere gratitude to Ms. Areefa Zafar, BRAC Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University, for reviewing the draft manuscript before submission to the manuscript.

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Vol. 22, No. 2, 2024

<https://doi.org/10.14746/jgp.2024.22.2.12>

Adetunji Mary Abosede

ORCID: 0000-0001-9098-6333

Eziwho Emenike Azunwo

ORCID: 0000-0003-1865-7505

Rivers state University (Nigeria)

Review of Eziwho Emenike Azunwo's *The Last Don*

Overview

Eziwho Emenike Azunwo's *The Last Don* published in 2024 by Pearl Publishers International LTD is a powerful and thought-provoking play that delves into the pervasive issue of sexual abuse within Nigerian tertiary institutions. Set against the backdrop of Academia, the play serves as a critical examination of the socio-cultural, economic, and political realities that define contemporary Nigerian society. Azunwo's work not only highlights the systemic failures that allow such abuses to persist but also calls for a collective awakening to the urgent need for reform and justice.

Storyline

The narrative unfolds in a university setting, where the character of The Don, a middle-aged, corrupt lecturer, exploits his position of power to manipulate female students. He engages in sexual coercion, demanding sexual favours in exchange for academic assistance. The play primarily follows the interactions between The Don and his students, particularly Celine, who finds herself caught in his web of exploitation. Dr. Felix, a principled lecturer, becomes aware of The Don's immoral activities and attempts to challenge him, advocating for the rights of the students. The tension escalates as The Don resorts to intimidation and violence to maintain his

dominance, culminating in a confrontation between the two characters that forces the university community to confront the pervasive culture of sexual abuse.

Contextual Background

Nigerian drama has historically been a medium for interrogating and evaluating the social realities of its time. From the colonial era to the present, playwrights have used the stage to reflect on societal issues, making it a vital part of cultural discourse. "The Last Don" fits into this tradition, tackling the sensitive topic of sexual violence against female students in universities, a subject that has garnered increasing attention in recent years due to numerous reported cases and societal outcry.

Plot Analysis

The play opens with a glimpse into the university environment, establishing it as a space meant for learning and moral development. However, this ideal is quickly subverted by the introduction of The Don, whose corrupt practices reveal the darker side of academia. As Celine seeks academic help, she becomes increasingly entangled in The Don's manipulative schemes. The audience witnesses her internal struggle as she grapples with the demands placed upon her. Dr. Felix's attempts to intervene highlight the growing tension between those who uphold integrity and those who exploit their power. The climax occurs when Dr. Felix confronts The Don, challenging his authority and exposing his corrupt practices. This moment is fraught with tension, as the stakes are raised for both characters. The confrontation serves as a turning point in the narrative, forcing the university community to reckon with the reality of sexual abuse.

Following the confrontation, the repercussions of The Don's actions begin to unfold. The play reveals the broader implications of sexual abuse on victims, emphasizing the emotional and psychological toll it takes on individuals. Dr. Felix's commitment to justice becomes increasingly evident as he works to support the victims and advocate for change. The resolution of the play underscores a glimmer of hope amidst

despair. While *The Don* faces potential consequences for his actions, the play leaves the audience with a sense of urgency to address the systemic issues that allow such abuses to persist. The final scenes call for collective action and societal change, emphasizing the need for reform within academic institutions.

Plot Narratives

The narrative is structured in a series of scenes that effectively build tension and develop character arcs. Azunwo employs sharp, impactful dialogue that reveals the underlying power dynamics and moral dilemmas faced by the characters. The pacing allows audiences to absorb the gravity of the issues presented while engaging with the emotional experiences of the characters.

The dialogue is rich with dramatic irony, particularly in the interactions between *The Don* and Dr. Felix. The audience is often left in suspense as they witness the unfolding conflict, knowing the potential consequences of *The Don's* actions. This technique serves to heighten the stakes and draw viewers deeper into the narrative.

Themes

Sexual Abuse and Exploitation

At the heart of *The Last Don* is the theme of sexual abuse, which Azunwo explores through the character of *The Don*. This character embodies the predatory nature of certain academic figures who exploit their authority to manipulate vulnerable students. The play vividly depicts various forms of sexual abuse, including unwanted advances, harassment, and coercion for academic favors. *The Don's* interactions with female students, particularly Celine, illustrate the power dynamics at play. He offers academic assistance in exchange for sexual favors, creating a toxic environment where students are forced to compromise their dignity for educational advancement. This exploitation is not merely an individual failing; it reflects a broader societal decay where moral values have eroded, and the very institutions meant to foster knowledge and integrity are instead breeding grounds for corruption.

Corruption in Academia

Azunwo's portrayal of academia reveals a deeply entrenched culture of corruption that undermines the integrity of educational institutions. The Don's character is not an isolated example; he represents a systemic issue where faculty members prioritize personal gain over their ethical obligations to students. The play exposes how this corruption permeates every level of the academic hierarchy, from the administration to the classroom. Dr. Felix emerges as a counterpoint to The Don, embodying the struggle for integrity within a compromised system. His attempts to challenge The Don's immoral practices highlight the difficulty of fighting against entrenched corruption. The play suggests that while there are individuals committed to righteousness, they often face insurmountable obstacles in their quest for justice.

Resistance and Hope

Despite the overwhelming darkness that pervades *The Last Don* Azunwo infuses the narrative with a sense of hope through characters like Dr. Felix. His unwavering commitment to justice and his willingness to confront The Don serve as a beacon of resistance against the tide of corruption and abuse.

The play suggests that change is possible, but it requires collective action and a willingness to confront uncomfortable truths. Dr. Felix's character illustrates that while the battle against sexual abuse and exploitation is fraught with challenges, it is a fight worth undertaking. His determination to protect his students and uphold the values of integrity and morality serves as a rallying cry for audiences to engage in the fight for justice.

Character Analysis

The Don

An antagonist, manipulative, corrupt, and self-serving. The Don is the embodiment of the systemic issues within academia, representing the exploitation of power dynamics that allow sexual abuse to thrive. His character serves as a stark reminder of the dangers posed by those in positions of authority who abuse their power for personal gain.

Dr. Felix

A protagonist, ethical, courageous, and principled. Dr. Felix stands as a moral compass in the narrative, representing the struggle for integrity within a corrupt system. His character arc demonstrates the complexities of fighting against established norms and the personal sacrifices required to uphold one's values.

Celine

She is the victim of exploitation vulnerable yet resilient. Celine's character highlights the plight of many female students who face pressure and coercion within academic settings. Her journey reflects the internal conflict many victims experience as they navigate the demands placed upon them by those in power.

Structure and Style

The *Last Don* is structured in a series of scenes that effectively build tension and develop character arcs. Azunwo employs sharp, impactful dialogue that reveals the underlying power dynamics and moral dilemmas faced by the characters. The play's pacing allows audiences to absorb the gravity of the issues presented while also engaging with the emotional experiences of the characters.

Dramatic Techniques

Azunwo's use of dramatic irony, particularly in the interactions between The Don and Dr. Felix, enhances the emotional weight of the narrative. The audience is often left in suspense as they witness the unfolding conflict, knowing the potential consequences of The Don's actions. This technique serves to heighten the stakes and draw viewers deeper into the narrative.

Additionally, the play employs symbolism to convey its themes. The university setting itself becomes a character in the narrative, representing both a place of learning and a site of moral decay. The contrast between the ideals of academia and the reality of corruption serves to underscore the urgency of the issues at hand.

Societal Relevance

Addressing Sexual Abuse

The main theme of the play focuses on the sexual abuse of female university students, a significant concern in Nigeria and various regions globally. By bringing attention to this societal problem, Azunwo participates in vital conversations regarding gender-based violence and the infringement of human rights. The characters, especially the Don, represent the entrenched misuse of authority, exploiting vulnerable learners for their own interests. This depiction resonates with real-life experiences of similar exploitation, emphasizing the critical need for societal reform.

Moral Decay in Academia

Azunwo provides a sharp analysis of the ethical decline present in academic institutions, proposing that these establishments, which should foster principled leaders, are in fact nurturing corruption. The play showcases how patriarchal systems allow offenders to act without consequences, often suppressing victims through the fear of being stigmatized. This mirrors wider societal problems where those who have experienced sexual violence are often pushed to the margins and their stories dismissed.

The Role of Authority Figures

Dr. Felix symbolizes the battle against corruption, reflecting the pursuit of justice and integrity within a flawed system. His dedication to opposing the Don's immoral actions acts as a light of hope, indicating that meaningful change can occur even when confronted with significant challenges. This interaction highlights the necessity for accountability among those in positions of power in both educational environments and broader society.

Artistic Expression

Azunwo skillfully employs dialogue and character development to communicate the emotional depth of the topic. The exchanges among characters are filled with tension, highlighting the intricacies of power, fear, and ethical decisions. The play's organization, featuring intense scenes and powerful confrontations, captivates the audience and encour-

ages thoughtful contemplation on the moral consequences of the characters' behaviors.

Conclusion

The Last Don is a compelling and thought-provoking play that addresses critical issues within Nigerian society, particularly in the realm of education. Azunwo's work serves as a powerful commentary on the need for reform in academic institutions, urging society to confront the realities of sexual abuse and corruption. Through its exploration of complex themes and richly developed characters, the play challenges audiences to reflect on their roles in combating these issues and advocating for justice.

Recommendation

This play is a must-read for anyone interested in social justice, gender studies, and the complexities of the educational system. It provokes a revolutionary thought for the cleansing and restoration of the hallowedness of the university. Azunwo's narrative encourages audiences to engage with the pressing issues of our time and to take action against the injustices that persist within our society. The Last Don is not just a play; it is a call to action, urging individuals to rise up against the forces of corruption and to champion the cause of justice. As the characters navigate the treacherous waters of academia, they remind us of the importance of integrity, morality, and the relentless pursuit of truth in the face of adversity.



Vol. 22, No. 2, 2024

<https://doi.org/10.14746/jpg.2024.22.2.13>

Lydia VK Pandian

University of New Brunswick (Canada)

ORCID: 0000-0003-2041-4588

Gender, Caste, and Colonialism: The Historical Construction of Indian Womanhood

ABSTRACT. Studying colonial translations of upper-caste Brahminical texts to contextualize ancient Indian women's status, began in the 19th and early 20th centuries and was influenced by Western positivist perspectives. Despite the diversity of thought found in the ancient texts and historical contexts, positivistic interpretations continue to play a significant role in perpetuating stereotypes, confining women to narrow roles within patriarchal and colonial frameworks.

In contrast to these prevailing narratives, pre-Vedic Indian society demonstrated egalitarian dispositions, with women actively engaged in various socioeconomic spheres of life. Colonial historiography's oversimplification of ancient Indian women's experiences failed to account for regional, linguistic, and cultural distinctions, obscuring the intricate realities of their lives. By threading these historical dynamics into our analysis, we gain insight into the rich tapestry of their experiences and contributions within the shadows of patriarchal and colonial ideologies.

KEYWORDS: colonialism, patriarchy, Indian women, womanhood, gender, caste

Setting the Context

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the histories and texts that have been used to describe and analyse women in India. Interest in studying ancient Indian women's status started around the 19th and early 20th century when Western positivists saw woman as a "conceptual category" (Singh, 2015, p. 7). As a conceptual category, ideologies of gender and womanhood were informed and understood through European colonial heteropatriarchal notions of womanhood (Icaza and Vasquez, 2016). By viewing the spectrum of experiences embodied by ancient Indian women through the lens of colonial heteropatriarchy applied to the Brahminical text, the positivist enquirers failed to measure their lives against various factors like education, economic participation, health, and so on (Singh,

2015; Thapar, 2019). Nongbri (2018) notes that these interpretations through a colonial lens read texts as male-centric, to displace and erase the variations in gender across India. Early in colonial advancement, the colonizers translated the Sanskrit into European languages and claimed it to be the only text that reflected all the branches of knowledge and aspects of Indian culture. This singular narrative produced a representation of women that was retold through a colonial lens of heteropatriarchy – where women's labour and outputs are owned by men.

It was not until much later, Max Muller, founder of Indology encouraged his students to study the South Indian culture, which had indigenous elements of great beauty but claimed they were only of historical value. It took almost one more century before the Dravidian side of Indian culture was considered worthy of study. Modern scholars like Romila Thapar (2019) and Parpola (2015) believe that Dravidian was the pan-Indian culture, an extension of the Indus Valley culture and the second urbanization at the Ganges. The South of India too is considered an extension of these areas that were prosperous before the Aryan descent, the characters of which are to be known from the literature of Prahrit.

Even though Buddhist texts of the Ganges- Magadha civilization and the South Tamil Sangam Literature were scripted between the 3rd Century B.C and the 3rd A.D, the colonial studies on ancient women's status erased these historical facts derived from these ancient texts (Singh, 2015). This analysis was done in isolation with traces of Brahminical normative contexts that positioned women only within the 'household' with patriarchal control over their labour and its products (Singh, 2015, p. 5). The role of gender, particularly in ancient Indian women's history, garnered accelerating attention in the mid-70s, resulting in disparate and fragmented accounts of their role and status. The experiences and positions of ancient women were generalized and placed along the lines of the Brahminical upper caste texts like 'Manusmriti,' the Vedas and the epics (Singh, 2015; Thapar, 2019, p. 66). In this work, Indian women were described in terms of 'bi-polarities', as defined by the patriarchal Brahminical texts (Ramaswamy, 2016, p. 219). They are either represented in relation to men or via colourism: 'wives' or 'prostitutes,' 'pious' or 'seductive,' 'fair-skinned and beautiful' or 'dark-skinned and vile' (Ramaswamy, 2016, p. 220; Thapar, 2021, p. 264). Colonial writing on the position of Indian women in the domestic sphere and the public domain as contributors to socio-economic development was inconspicuous in the Brahminical texts. They are rarely mentioned as prime social, economic, and political agents in reproduction (Ramaswamy, 2016).

However, before the advent of Vedic Brahminism, ancient India was an egalitarian society not rooted in gender-based inequality where difference was not hierarchized and women played an equal role in the community. The 'Sangam' literature and ancient art indicate that there had been no sexual division of labour, and the interdependency of men and women characterized society (Ramaswamy, 2016, p. 217; Singh, 2015). The ability to reproduce and continue lineage was revered as power; hence, women were worshipped as 'Mother Goddesses' (Singh, 2015, p. 16). Men or other women did not control them; thus, this society was considered 'matristic' (Singh, 2015, p. 16). Colonial historians fail to decipher these scripts/texts of ancient India and its matrilineal pockets of societal structure.

Thapar (2019) notes that the colonial histories borrowed from the abundant upper caste Brahminical texts paint the Indian Society as a patriarchal, caste-ridden, 'static' society with no record of social change. In asserting this claim, the rare ancient texts and art in the other languages are erased. Generalizations of the experiences, particularly the position of women in India through the ages, have been made by looking upon the State as a single unit and not as a congeries of micro-regions, religion, and languages (Singh, 2015). This erasure negates that early Indian society operated based on the division of labour and a barter system, not on caste and social class (Ramaswamy, 2016). Each tribal pocket or economic activity was based on geographical zones. For example, the 'Neydal' or the coastal region was bolstered by fishing and hawking fish (dry fish) bartered with the tribe from the 'Mullai' or Pastoral region for grains and paddy (Ramaswamy, 2016, p. 223). Thus, the colonial historians ignored the varying historical experiences and status of Indian men and women that influenced ancient India's political and socio-economic structures.

Consequently, studying the history of Indian Women based on the erroneously formed three stages of Hindu civilization, Muslim invasion, and the colonial period completely ignores an ancient Indian matriarchal society characterized by an egalitarian spirit expressed in its art, and literature (Jha, 2016; Thapar, 2019). This can also be attributed to the lack of recorded or very little available literature on women as agents of social processes and structure. Ancient Indian women were instead pushed to the periphery of records and were written as subjects to the changing dialogue between men, women, and socio-economic systems (Ramaswamy, 2016). Many Feminist historians have also written much about the absence of women from histories and the continuous exploitation of ancient women's

experiences and societal position by distorted inclusions in historical and socio-economic narratives (Ramaswamy, 2010; Singh, 2015).

To deconstruct the positioning of women as objects, I have at some length plotted out the positions enjoyed by women in ancient society. These positions are in relation to property rights, economic activities, sexuality, marriage, and motherhood, before the advent of Vedic Brahminism that brought colonial patriarchal values and the ideology of 'purity' to bear in women's lives. Finally, I have attended to the colonial era marked by defining Indian women through the patriarchal lens installed during imperialism and the Western barometers of women's status in society. This timeline is intended to aid in understanding the contemporary work of Indian women in articulating their self-perception, self-image, position in kinship structure, occupation, and social relationship along the axis of heteropatriarchy and eventually, colonialism.

Indian Women in Ancient India

The ample literature on the social position of Indian women is based on the Upper caste Brahmanical texts written by cultural historians from the Nationalist school of thought and greatly influenced by the colonial imperial ideology (Singh, 2015). Most of the traditional writings on the social position of early Indian women are entirely in the context of Hinduism, restricted to the Brahminical text (Chakravarti, 1989). These texts are heavily prejudiced against women's right to hold offices, property, marriage, motherhood, and education (Singh, 2015; Chakravarti, 1989). Though it is essential to understand the social positioning of women through readily available Brahmanical texts, it must be done with caution. Singh (2015) says that the available Brahmanical texts must be cross verified with the rare ancient texts and inscriptions to provide a more holistic perspective on historical space shared by women in early India. Understanding the nature of agency held by women is vital in understanding the evolution of social institutions/patterns that structure contemporary India. Recognizing the oral transmission of learning in early Indian culture, I attempted to cognize the position held by Indian women through the available literature on the 'Ten Idyllic Poems' and the Eight 'Anthologies,' the Grammatical Treatise 'Tholkappiam' of pre-Christian and the twin epics 'Sillapathikaram (2nd C A.D) and 'Manimegalai' (early 3rd C) of the early 'Cankam' or 'Changam' or the Sangam period. This early literature is based on the

culture that dominated South India before the influence of Sanskritic culture from the North.

The Sangam period lasted from the third century BC to the seventh century AD in the southern states of India, mainly Tamilnadu and Kerala (Ramaswamy, 2016). The Sangam literature, which chronicles South India, gives a significant insight into the social positioning of early women in this part of India. According to Ramaswamy (2016), meagre and scattered inscribed Sangam literature places the early Indian woman in the lines of daughter, wife, and mother and also as respected poets, accountants, judges, cultivators, and entrepreneurs. Ramaswamy (2016) and Singh (2015) point out that in the 4th to 5th centuries and before the invasion of Vedic Brahminism, the Indigenous tribes of India were 'matriastic,' where women shared equal space in the socio-economic arena. There was no rigid gendered differentiation of labour, and women were poets, priestesses, artisans, fishers, farmers, hunters, owned businesses, and professional mourners and were revered as goddesses (Chakravarti, 1989; Mitter, 2001; Singh, 2015). The Sangam literature indicated that the 'Kurava' and 'Marava' tribes in early India, were painted as a matriarchal society (Ramaswamy, 2016, pp. 56–57). In each of these tribes the women were earning through their skill in foretelling the future and celebrated for their medicinal knowledge. Women were also at the forefront of fishing, pearl diving, and extracting fish oil (Ramaswamy, 2016). The fisherfolk women from 'Neydal' or the coastal region were in charge of producing and selling 'toddy' or alcohol and dairy farming. The Sangam age also boasted famous female poets like Avai, Antal, Karaikal Ammayar and Akka Mahadevi, who contributed to the rich array of literature at the time and formed a close alliance with the rulers (Chakravarti, 1989, pp. 300–326).

Often, the group of women known as 'Parattai' during the Sangam age is falsely compared to the 'Kanikai' of the North. The Kanikai of the North were state-owned and trained in various arts to appease the carnal desires of men. In contrast, the Parattai of the South were women who shunned marriage, lived independently and sometimes took an interest in singing and dancing, but they were never state-owned or forced into servitude. Furthermore, Sangam-age women played a pioneering role in agriculture and irrigation. They actively participated in weeding, seeding, and plowing, while young girls watched over the paddy fields, engaging in romantic courtship through songs. This practise, called 'Kalavu,' was a socially accepted way of expressing love and companionship, illustrating that fe-

male sexuality was neither feared nor excessively controlled (Ramaswamy, 2016, pp. 218–219). Instead, it was embraced as a natural and integral aspect of life.

Women in early India were worshipped as goddesses and were involved in religious rituals and creating music. Notably, when the temples were built, 'tevaratiyal' (multi-talented women) entered the service during the early period and were extolled for being chaste (Mukund, 2019, pp. 202–203). They had the right to marry, were treated as equals to other temple workers and hiring them to dance was an act of merit (Mukund, 2019). They also officiated religious ceremonies and marriages. Only, in the eighteenth century, when foreigners like Marathi and Telugu kings who were advocating the ways of the Sanskrit, began to rule Tamil Nadu, these women were forced to yield to the King and the patrons and called 'dasis' (Thapar, 2019, pp. 268–269).

There was no marriage ritual as described in the Vedic period. The 'Tholkappiam' epic notes that women had agency in choosing their partner, to reject or renounce a marital relationship, premarital relationships and elopement, marked early India (Ramaswamy, 2010, p. 71). They had the right to divorce, remarry and have multiple partners. Polyandry was also practised by women who were able to celebrate their sexuality (Levine & Sangree, 1980). For instance, Levine and Sangree (1980) note that the 'Nayyar' group followed polyandry in South Asia where 'Sambandham,' is a simple custom that defines the bond between the man and woman as the sole reason for satisfying their sexual needs and procreating. This bond was not a permanent arrangement, and women maintained control over their sexuality and reproductive rights.

The ability to reproduce put women in a significant place with the power to continue the lineage. Pregnant women and mothers were revered, equal to the goddesses and believed to hold power over 'life and death' (Ramaswamy, 2016, p. 51; Singh 2015, p. 16). A nursing mother or a mother giving birth was painted beside Mother goddesses, and the power to procreate was considered valuable for the community's survival (Singh, 2015). Conception and giving birth did not stop women from participating in all economic activities and it placed them very close to the deities of the earth involved in generating crops, rain, animals, and fish (Singh, 2015). For example, in early South India, the Goddess 'Korravai' was worshipped as the symbol of fertility and warfare (Ramaswamy, 2016, p. 55). Thus, it can be understood that sexuality is only one aspect of female existence, not something that had to be controlled and owned. Women were not seen

as an extension of the family's Patriarch; they were equals and co-sharers in all socio-economic activities and held property by inheritance, gift, and work (Ramaswamy, 2010, p. 56; Singh, 2015, pp. 16–18).

Despite the dearth in the literature on early Indian women owning property, early society was characterized by matrilineal pockets dominated by matrilineal inheritance. Matrilineal is where the entire property is owned by the Matriarch head and is passed on to the daughters (Bhattacharya, 2016; Thurston & Rangachari, 1909). For example, the Nayyar 'tarwad' or joint family system still follows the matrilineal inheritance and takes on the matriarch's surname (Bhattacharya, 2016, p. 187). Additionally, Mukund (2016) says that many inscriptions in Tamilnadu talk about property transactions done by women. These inscriptions illuminated the elevated status of 'tevartiyars' who were exalted as the 'daughters of God' held the right to buy, sell and own property (Mukund, 2016, pp. 202–203; Orr 2016, pp. 252–254). This indicates that women had all forms of proprietary rights, which are remaining as a few matrilineal pockets in Tamil Nadu and Kerala (Mukund, 2016). It is also to be noted that early Indian women also held property through inheritance, not as gifts from their families. Moreover, with land ownership, women also supervised and controlled production (Mukund, 2016).

Thapar (1968) says that women's history in ancient India elicits more importance than just accumulating data on them/gender. In fact, understanding how women navigated their social relationships should take the front seat in ancient Indian women's studies. Historical writers like Chakravarthi have pointed out that in early India, women were pioneers in socio-economic activities. They wielded a high degree of respect and agency; they took the central role in structuring communities and identities in early India. From what we know, women held various roles and statuses that require a more in-depth historical explanation. Historical writers need to juxtapose multiple resources and not isolate fragments of texts to understand the position held by women in early India.

Indian Women in Pre-colonial India

With the advent of Vedic Brahminism in the later 5th century, Patriarchy and caste have been the unit of analysis for understanding India (Thapar, 2014). The early egalitarian society, marked by clan membership based on the nature of work, was inching toward a more rigid caste-rigid

den hierarchy, where membership was only through birth. The era was characterized by regulating work and production through gender hierarchies and maintenance of 'Varna' or Caste (Tyagi, 2016, pp. 76–77). Dominance over the inferior was asserted through the deprivation and control of resources and knowledge, justified through religion and caste (Thapar, 2019). However, Singh (2015) notes that the earlier version of caste was not a rigid system of organizing society, but a simple tool thought to rule society more efficiently.

Thapar (2019, pp. 105–108) says that 'Rigveda', an early religious text, mentions only two sects of Varnas, the 'Arya' and the 'Dasa' and that the linguistic and cultural differentiation dominated the division into two sects. The 'Aryas' spoke the Aryan or the Sanskrit language and were presumed superior to the 'Dasas' who did not speak or adopt their culture. However, this 'Varna' system eventually intertwined race with the division of society. These lines were then divided around here the Aryans who were fair-skinned, Sanskrit-speaking upper-caste Brahmins, and dark-skinned lower-caste Indian indigenous tribes became the Dasa or the Others (Singh, 2015, p. 19). The term 'Arya' demanded respect, whereas the 'Dasas' were subordinated and enslaved. The Indian society was divided into fair-skinned, Sanskrit-speaking upper-caste Brahmins wielding power over the dark-skinned, invaded lower-caste Indian indigenous tribes (Thapar, 2019, pp. 120–123). Eventually, the Varna or the caste system became the normative ideology that legitimized control through 'purity' and 'pollution,' strict rules over marriage and discarding any right to change occupation and status (Thapar, 2019, pp. 120–123).

The caste system legitimized genealogical lineage as a precondition to control and take right over resources and territory (Thapar, 2019, p. 117). The centrality of caste was achieved through the primacy of kinship by ensuring strict rules regarding marriage that controlled women (Singh, 2015, p. 19). The Brahmanical male concept of purity and pollution filtered through lower caste tribes and written onto women's bodies. The 'code of Manu' or 'Manusmriti' defines women as bodily beings that exude sexual and immoral inclinations that must be controlled (Singh 2015, pp. 19–18). This text dictates that women must be tamed and domesticated to not threaten society's social and moral order. Thus, women went from being 'partners' to being the ones positioned as needing control through the institution of 'marriage' (Thapar, 2021, p. 81). Thus, through the institution of marriage dictated by the 'code of Manu' where men hold the power of sexuality over women (Singh, 2015, pp. 18–19).

Vedic women also had no authority over themselves or any property and was identified only through her father, brother, or husband, eliciting her social status (Bhattacharya, 2016, p. 188). Also, Chakravarti (1989) noticed a distinct status stratification among women of the higher and lower castes in Vedic times. Though subjugated to patriarchal rules, higher and lower-caste women had different roles and duties. Consequently, I will explore Thapar's (2019) stratification of Vedic women into three categories based on their activities to encapsulate the patriarchal violence delivered on them. The first is the 'grihaptni' or the upper caste women or the housewife, followed by the 'dasis' or the lower caste women and finally, the courtesans or 'ganikas' (Thapar, 2019, pp. 86–93).

Grihaptni

With the enslavement of Indian indigenous tribes or the lower caste group, there was a continuous supply of labour for the upper caste (Thapar, 2019). This development attempted to nullify upper caste women's status as productive members of society (Singh, 2015). It was written that women's primary duty was procreation; she was expected to give numerous male progenies to carry on the ritual rights (Tyagi, 2016). She became the housekeeper, barred from recognition and had minimal to no socio-economic activities (Singh, 2015). Women were considered an economic liability to the family Patriarch who controlled her. She lost the right to perform rituals alongside the Patriarch, education, and work. She was denied the right to choose a partner and was married immediately after attaining puberty. This early marriage with no education proved very detrimental to the status of women. The marriage becomes irrevocable for the woman even if the husband abandons her; the 'Smriti' dictates that the woman must revere her husband as 'God' (Indra, 2016, p. 20). Whereas the men can divorce and take on a second wife if the first wife has been deemed to be not subservient nor producing male progeny (Dhankar, 2016; Singh, 2015).

However, Mukund (2016) says that women still had the right to inherit property from their fathers. Nevertheless, this does not indicate that they are seen as the natural heirs to the property owned by the father, unlike the sons who, with their birth, naturally become heirs to their father's property (Altekar, 2016; Mukund, 2016). However, she still owns her exclusive right to the 'stridhana', which was gifted to the woman at the time of marriage in which her husband did not have any authority, and this

wealth will be passed on to her daughter (Altekar, 2016, p. 151; Mukund, 2016). Surprisingly, the 'Manusmriti' is void of any information regarding the widow's property rights. (Mukund 2016, pp. 196–197). Despite what is written, Grihapatni women have traditionally played a vital role in maintaining family life, managing domestic responsibilities, and upholding cultural values. They often oversee various aspects of home management, including budgeting, cooking, and child-rearing, while also contributing to social and community activities.

The later Vedic age further reduced the age of marriage for girls; that is, they could be married before puberty (Sharma, 2016). The 'Purdah' system was the imposed practise of secluding women entirely from public observation (Shah, 2019). Women were expected to wear clothing that concealed them from head to toe, and high walls and screens were erected inside the house to seclude them from any male gaze apart from their husbands, brothers, fathers, and sons. Widows were not allowed to remarry, and 'Sati' or self-immolation through fire after the husband's death became an expected practise (Bhattacharji, 2016, p. 27; Chakravarti, 2019, p. 283). Eventually, the property owned by the widow went to the next of her male relatives and was no longer exclusive to her daughter. This subjugated status of upper-caste women eventually impacted ordinary families' wives.

Dasi

Moving onto the status of the lower caste women or 'Dasi' women, the Sanskritization process brought forward structural inequity that was laced with patriarchy. Through the 'Manusmriti' that viewed the dark-skinned tribes as inferior, the enslavement of the tribal (indigenous) women was justified. The 'dasis' or the lower caste women were the object of 'dana' or the gift enslaved people gave to men. Possessing enslaved women formed a considerable part of one's wealth (Singh, 2015, p. 19). These women fetched water, washed clothes, and tended to the Patriarch's wife (Thapar, 2019). They are also expected to satisfy the master's or his male guest's sexual needs and are placed as gifts by men when gambling (Singh, 2015; Thapar, 2019). 'Dasi' women can be only emancipated from her status with her master's consent (Tyagi, 2016). 'Dasi' women were considered unfree and had no proprietary right to fall back (Thapar, 2019, p. 88). They are also a part of 'stridhana' given to upper-caste women during their marriage and endured physical vio-

lence at the hands of their mistresses (Thapar 2019, pp. 87–88). Thus, she experienced physical and sexual violence not only at the hands of her master but also at her mistress.

Ganikas

Finally, apart from being virtuous, dutiful housewives, patriarchy ensured only two options for minuscule Vedic women to be trained as skilled professionals in arts and literature to become licentious courtesan or renounce to become nuns (Thapar, 2019). The Brahminical code says that virtuous housewives are needed to have rightful male progeny, and courtesans/prostitutes are needed for the Patriarch to control his sexual desires (Shah, 2016). Shah (2016, p. 394) says these women groups are considered a ‘necessary evil.’ The Brahminical code canonized courtesan or ‘ganikas’; hence, they cannot be in a marital relationship due to the nature of their work (Dhankar, 2016, p. 124). They must earn this status through their young beauty and charm (Bhattacharji, 2016). They were treated like commodities, and the men donated women for temple prostitution, believing they would grow rich and be set for heaven (Bhattacharji, 2016). They enjoyed considerable status, like beautiful young girls who had education in art and literary work, had the power to name their prices, and were employed by the court or the State. However, they have no choice in choosing their clients, and they are punished and fined if they refuse to take on clients (Dhankar, 2016; Shah, 2016). Ganikas cannot hold property and must pay half of their earnings to the State (Dhankar, 2016). Often maltreated, manhandled, mutilated, and murdered at the hands of her clients and was ignored and disregarded by society. The Patriarchal ‘Manusmriti’ denies ‘Ganikas’ the right to live a respectable life; the men solely enjoyed her body, beauty, and accomplishment as a ‘necessary evil’ (Shah, 2016, pp. 410–411). They were ostracised by the same Patriarchal values and treated as untouchables.

Women in Colonial India

Moving onto the colonial period, colonial historians attempted to record the past by looking at the recognizable recorded histories from the Sanskrit texts (Thapar, 2019). Any study of early India starts with the history outlined by colonial historians/scholars who have set aside the data available on ancient India. Being viewed as an ‘alien or the other’ culture

by Europe, colonial scholars assume that India had only Hindu and Muslim populations, with the former as dominant (Bourassa et al., 2005; Thapar, 2019). European scholars have ignored India's cultural and religious dynamics and past; India was viewed as a static society characterized by extreme poverty, oppressive rulers, and a lack of property (Thapar, 2019). Thus, the current history of ancient times is dominated by nineteenth-century colonial views, which demanded that Pre-colonial Indian history be drenched in obscurantism, which has/had no progress.

To justify imperialism, colonial historians drew only from the recorded texts of the upper caste patriarchy (Thapar, 2019). Though colonial scholars claimed to enlighten rationality in writing Indian history, they imposed a history that justified colonial dominance. The British defined colonial rule in India based on the Patriarchal construct and caste lines reinforcing gender violence and inequality, which immensely helped rule this pluralistic country (Buckley, 2015). Subsequently, racism, sexism, and colonialism have marginalized Indian women further, whom the Patriarchal caste structure has already ostracised.

Colonialism gained power by enforcing the principle of 'othering' where the society is divided into two categories: 'the reference group' and 'the other' (Bourassa et al., 2005, p. 24). The reference group is the colonizers and ideologically what imperialism wants to become the norm. The other becomes that which is needing to become the reference group – through violent means. It is along these axes that women experience more than one 'otherness' and suffer multiple oppressions, which has a cumulative effect on their socio-economic and health status. The rise of 'nationalist' Brahmanical views and ideology and the 'Colonialist' Patriarchal were two significant hegemonizing 'othering' discourses Indian women experienced in the colonial period. Indian woman hold the legacy of being marginalized by her religious caste-ridden Brahmanical society and colonial society. The racist and sexist notions about women's role were cemented upon in the invaded colony by the White European settlers with patriarchal consciousness (Smith, 2012). The colonialists failed to understand the male supremacy dominating their culture and miserably failed to analyse how they have reinforced a few aspects of male oppression in Indian culture. Thus, much of the analysis has not included the parallelism between the two cultures concerning male dominance (Liddell & Joshi, 1985).

The British Empire proclaimed a state of non-interference in Indian society's customs and practises, but at the same time believed imperialism to be the liberalizing force (Buckley, 2015). With this conflicting approach,

Liddell and Joshi (1985) say that the Colonists encountered varying unwritten Hindu law across different regional, caste and cultural boundaries, clashing with the universal written British law. Moreover, the geographical representation by the colonial scholars has always been the 'civilized' and the 'uncivilized' and one language; hence, the Indian State was divided into the dominant caste 'Hindus' and 'Sanskrit' as the State's language with all others labelled as primitive (Thapar, 2019, pp. 14–15). Consequently, in 1772, the colonists declared the well-documented Brahminical code the universal law for all Hindus (Buckley, 2015). This colonial assertion thrust all Indian women to severe restrictions to the Brahminical ideology of purity and property of their caste (Liddell & Joshi, 1985). Subsequently, widow remarriage, divorce, and property rights were forbidden, forcing Indian women to further marginalized lines.

Colonial rule also introduced conjugal rights and encouraged forced prostitution across India, marked with unaddressed violence and intimidation (Buckley, 2015; Liddell & Joshi, 1985). Conversely, Stanley and Kumari (2010) argue that Indian women enjoyed much better agency during colonial rule. They acknowledge that in the 1800s, the British abolished Sati, widow remarriage, polygamy, child marriage, and infanticide. Nevertheless, Liddell & Joshi (1985) argue that although the colonists improved Indian women's position, their social and political investment arose out of their desire to hold political and financial power over this foreign State. In this double move with the attempt to liberalize Indian women's sexuality, the colonists equipped the Indian Patriarchs with conjugal rights where the failure to fulfil the sexual obligations in marriage led to prison time (Engels, 1983). This 'liberalization' firmly tied the sexuality of Indian women to the Patriarch's control. Additionally, the British colonizers encouraged the use of Indian female prostitution for their soldiers (Buckley, 2015). The widows and child brides were abandoned because of the laws passed around remarriage and the consent age for marriage, and they were forced into prostitution. Ninety percent of widows and child brides who had no alternatives to support themselves engaged in prostitution for the British soldiers (Liddell & Joshi, 1985). These examples point out that though the British colonial rule supported Indian Women's agency on some issues, they also imposed a greater degree of constraint and obstructed changes for Indian women.

The colonizers were highly selective in contradicting India's liberalizing and non-interference policies, and Indian women's empowerment was not their priority. They encouraged women's marginalized position

in society to project that India was not yet fit for Independence. Therefore, it is argued that the colonists acknowledged the Brahmanical Patriarchal code to rule the diverse country and believed that India could be understood through the ideologies of the caste system. Caste as a 'custom' was modelled into law for the purposes of colonial rule (Buckley, 2015; Liddell & Joshi, 1985). Through this feat, the patriarchal system was solidified in Indian society by colonial law. Colonial rule came to tighten the shackles of Indian women intertwining gender oppression that coexists with caste hegemony.

One rising ideology with the advent of colonial rule in India is the Nationalist movement, or binding identities to the Nation-state. The emerging 'Nationalist' ideology firmly bound Indian women to the patriarchal ideology outlined in the Brahminical code. With the Independence of India in 1947, the ancient history pungently echoed the European and Nationalist voices (Thapar, 2019). Influenced by the colonial view of India's past, Nationalist Indian historians rewrite history that echoes two extreme 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' narratives reflecting anti-colonial and strong Brahminical ideologies (Thapar, 2019, pp. 22–24). Chowdhury (2001, p. 6) says that colonialism devalued family structure and loyalties to tribal and religious identities by demanding allegiance to the British Empire and introducing Western ideas, medicine, and technology through education. These demands led to this new form of identity that resisted colonial rule. Furthermore, the colonial discourses were dominated by the Patriarchal treatment of Indian women by the religious scripture the 'Manusmriti,' thereby emphasizing the superiority of British Women (Chatterjee, 1989, p. 627; Chowdhury, 2001, p. 67).

Consequently, as a response, the Nationalist discourse entrenched in Patriarchal and masculinist perspectives started to emerge (Chowdhury, 2001). This movement/ideology constructed Indian women's identity along with Vedic ideals of womanhood and defended it on the grounds of modernity (Chatterjee, 1989; Chowdhury, 2001). This reformed tradition produced the identity of the new 'Modern Indian Women' (MIW) and placed it as superior to Western women, traditional Indian women, and low-class women (Chatterjee, 1989). The crucial element here is that the MIW must retain the inner spirituality of her Indigenous social life by protecting and nurturing her home. Essentially, MIW cannot lose their spiritual, social, and feminine virtues by accepting Western ideologies (Chowdhury, 2001). The MIW are encouraged to become political players during the fight for Independence; they are instructed to play complementary roles drawing

on socially constructed gender roles based on 'hegemonic femininity' (Chatterjee, 1989, p. 629). For example, Banerjee (2003, p. 177) talks about one such 'hegemonic femininity' that dominated the Nationalist ideology: the concept of 'woman as mother,' deemed crucial in nation-building. Here, women are expected to give birth to children, especially sons, to protect their motherland and act as primary caregivers by educating them and passing on culture, rituals, and nationalist myths.

The manipulation and appropriation of ancient gender identities are politically salient in the Nationalist movement. The Nationalist movement expected MIW to play multiple roles; she is responsible for training her children in nation-building. It defined 'Motherhood' as having vast dimensions that extend beyond the family as a representation of the nation (Banerjee, 2003, pp. 177–178). It expects MIW to emulate the traditional discourse of women as 'Matri Shakthi' or maternal power for nation-building (Banerjee, 2003, p. 177). The MIW are seen as warriors and allowed to enter the masculinist political landscape through their motherhood. Thus, the nationalist movement imagined India as a woman who needed to be protected by her brave sons and placed national honour on women's bodies.

Indian Women in Post-Colonial India

During Independence, Indian women did not only fight for India's freedom but also simultaneously worked for their liberation. They became explicitly political through their participation in the freedom struggle by setting up autonomous institutions to analyse further action for women's liberation (Lidell & Joshi, 1985). The women's movement realised that their oppression did not end with the fall of colonial political domination but continued through the patriarchal organization of the family supported by the nationalist movement (Chatterjee, 1989; Lidell & Joshi, 1985). The women's movement recognized this and expressed their demands that would bring forth considerable changes in personal law surrounding marriage and inheritance in the Hindu Code (Chatterjee, 1989). The Hindu code eventually became the law in 1981 and dictated monogamy, inter-caste and inter-religion marriage, divorce, and equal inheritance and adoption rights for women. Although it failed to recognize women's housework as an economic activity and marriage equality, this law was passed under the sponsorship of Nehru, who believed that to be worthy of

Independence, Indian society needed emancipation from caste and gender problems (Everett, 1981).

Thus, only in the 1980s did Nehru and Ambedkar reform Hindu personal laws to grant women the voting franchise, enabling women to marry the person they wanted to, have the right to conduct the ceremony and the right to divorce a callous and violent partner, and the right to hold property (Everett, 1988). These changes represented a great struggle against Hindu orthodoxy supported by the Nationalist movement. The nationalist movement opposed these demands as they shattered the patriarchal privileges enjoyed in the family system. This period saw the emergence of Indian feminism with the sole agenda of encouraging women's liberation. It gained momentum by welcoming numerous women's empowerment organizations, and men openly supported the movement in many ways, for example, by writing women-centric, empowerment-rich poetry and songs (Everett, 1981). Conferences supporting women's movements with empowerment-centric agendas were organised (Omvedt, 1975). Numerous policies were drawn to improve and encourage women's status in the country's private and public domains.

However, this feministic growth denoted only a theoretically improved status for women, for the country's focus shifted to partition woes, combating communal violence and territorial fragmentations. Industrialization, illiteracy, and unemployment became the State's preoccupations (Virdi, 2003). Nonetheless, in the 20th century, there was a slow revival where new shades of feminism emerged for the Indian Diaspora. The country saw a surge of numerous private and public establishments supporting women's growth. The Indian Government sought to establish women's interests, but as these institutions sought more support from the Government, ironically, much of the institutions' funding was cut (Pande, 2018). The emancipation of women disappeared from the agenda, and the glorious emergence at the beginning of the century saw a gradual death towards the end.

Into the 21st century and with the ushering of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) rule, the Indian political State focuses on rewriting its history based on communalism and irrationalism. Though most Indian writers are rational and professional, some historians overlay communal myths and argue for the existence of Rama's Ayodhya without any historical evidence (Thapar, 2022). Indian historians, lawmakers, and religious heads wish to move away from the colonial disposition but fail to research alternate ancient paradigms of India (Thapar, 2019). The

BJP party even supports the caste system by ignoring the social inequity stressed by 'Manusmriti' and increasingly censures all critical studies of the Brahminical social structure. Manusmriti is posted on the cultural department website and in several state syllabi. The political, religious, and educational system draws its ideology primarily from the Brahminical texts highlighting the role of women as caregivers and dutiful wives. Their position has been sealed by religious literature and through the various discourses set forth by men. The focus is more on political dominance aligning with Vedic patriarchal values.

The BJP government projecting itself as the channel and the flag bearers of the Hindu culture draws oppressive laws like legalizing marital rape (Viridi, 2003). Any form of counter-hegemony (feminist movements) becomes futile or only partially successful because the patriarchal system is imbibed in the everyday lives of Indian women. This imbibement is achieved through religion, caste, and media to the extent that oppression becomes a state of normalcy for these women. Indian Hindu patriarchal views place women's safety below the safety of cows. The Indian women's internalization of Hindu ideology with its impenetrable caste system is augmented by the media and political leaders.

Consequently, Indian feminism faces various issues pivotal to the patriarchal structure that considers women, their problems, and their rights as second only to their religion, caste, and male-centred beliefs. The BJP, with its Hindutva ideology, views Western culture as an antithesis of Indian culture; hence, Indian feminists and their agendas are resented. When the #metoomovement brought down influential and wealthy sexual predators in the West, the movement had little to no effect on Indian society or even the Diaspora. The voices that echoed the movement's sentiment were less covered by the Indian media and slowly died.

Moreover, only a few elite women exposed to Western ideologies fight for their group's emancipation, and that, too, is restricted to only specific sectors. As a minority group, these Indian feminists lack political and capital support to fight more significant issues than everyday conflicts centred on urban problems like wage disparity, sexual harassment, a safe workplace, and equity in urban workplaces. They also face criticism of the unwilling orthodoxy and conformity of the average or politically motivated Indian women. Experiencing fragmentation and being preoccupied with fighting for the few elites, Indian feminism shifted its focus more on individual self-interest or organizational self-interest rather than the needs of women's movements, leading to a more open display of sectarianism than

unity (Kumar, 1989). Competition, Schisms, and bitterness overpowered the fight when cynicism and bureaucratic attitudes entered the women's movements, keeping Indian feminists from addressing the dominant power discourse regarding caste, religion, and community-based exploitation (Kumar, 1989). The movement has failed to develop grassroots resistance in caste-ridden rural India, where women are still oppressed and denied fundamental rights.

Indian feminism also lacked theoretical support, and the critical studies are minimal. Any slogan of the emancipation of Indian women is based on marginal freedom within structures. Indian women could wield decisions regarding household matters such as food preparation, groceries, and children's well-being but do not have any power concerning major financial decisions. Verma & Triandis (2000) note that Indian families abide by the collectivist worldview where the priority is the family's well-being, cohesiveness, and unity; in return, members are expected to show loyalty and gratitude. Women's ambitions, individual needs and the notion of privacy are less influential in most collective families (Noor, 2018).

Further, as Doyal and their colleagues (2003) say, occupation and social position are strongly associated with life chances, freedoms, opportunities, and living conditions, thereby significantly influencing an individual. The patriarchal nature of Indian society contributes to women's relative lack of empowerment around mobility, health, education, employment, and social, political, and economic participation, influencing their lives (Kantor, 2003). The established gender norms expect women to have emotional and social functions in the family, and the negligence of these norms leads to divorce, abandonment, or returning to their natal houses (Srivastava, 2013).

Conclusion

The societal expectations placed on Indian women to prioritize the well-being of their husbands and children while upholding traditional family values and honour underscore the deeply ingrained patriarchal norms within Indian culture. This expectation perpetuates gender inequality and reinforces the patriarchal control over female behaviour with more rigour. Nevertheless, despite the negative implications for women's autonomy and agency, many Indian women continue to endorse and uphold these norms, often unconsciously, further thrusting

the patriarchal system upon themselves. For example, the celebration of events such as the 'coming of age' ceremony, where a woman's readiness for motherhood is heralded as a source of pride for the patriarch, exemplifies the extent to which women internalize and perpetuate patriarchal ideals. Moreover, the intersectionality of gender with factors such as socio-economic status, caste, class, disability, and age further complicates the experiences of Indian women, influencing their access to support and shaping their lived realities.

Given these complexities, it is imperative that India prioritize the voices and narratives of Indian women who are marginalized along multiple axes of identity, including gender, class, caste, and disability. Only by centring these narratives can policymakers gain a deeper understanding of these women's challenges and develop interventions to address systemic inequalities. Only such concerted efforts can dismantle patriarchal structures and promote gender equity can launch India towards a more equitable and inclusive society.

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First edition. 7,00 publishing sheets. 7,625 printing sheets

PRINTED BY VOLUMINA.PL SP. Z O.O.,
SZCZECIN, UL. KS. WITOLDA 7-9



ISSN 2391-8187

