

## A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ON WOMEN'S SUBORDINATION IN PRIVATE SPACES IN THREE SELECTED NIGERIAN DRAMA

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### ABSTRACT

Women with dreams and ambitions have become victims of subjugation through patriarchal dominance or women as subjugators themselves within the matrix of feminist discourse. Dramatists have done several works on violence against women. Literary scholars have interrogated several dramatic works along feminist lines; however, this study uses the works of select Nigerian dramatists to portray women subjugation and their plights in the private space. The study adopts a literary methodological approach based on content analysis of the selected primary texts with the support of literature method which includes library sources, internet based materials containing scholarly opinions on the subject of investigation. Specifically, it analysed Julie Okoh's *Mask*, Sofola's *Wedlock of the gods*, and Saviour Agoro's *The Remnant* to unearth women's subordination on the private space. It deploys Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's "subaltern postcolonial theory", which advocates freedom for the oppressed, to regain emancipation from exploitative individuals, group and institutions. The study discovered that women are subjugated in private spaces such as the matrimonial and the cultural spaces. Another finding of the work is that both men and women are subjugators of the woman's private space. The work concludes that women subjugation is harmful to womanhood. It recommends gender balancing where men and women complement each other towards a common purpose of peaceful co-existence and development.

**Keywords:** Women, Space, Subordination, Private-lives, Nigerian Drama.

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The struggle to assert the position of women in various spaces of their lives has been on for several decades. Women have been voiceless and repressed in many societies. Women with dreams and ambitions have become victims of subjugation through patriarchal dominance. The antecedents that led to the feminist movement are direct consequences of the relationship between members of the society; specifically, the relationship between the male and the female gender which is considered unbalanced and harmful to women folk. This has ushered in different forms of subjugation ranging from cultural seclusion, denial of the right to speak in public affairs, abuse of the female body and several other unfair treatments that women are exposed to. Women subjugation is noticed across different parts of the world and it is as evil as slavery. This is because the effect of subjugation has been really debasing on women due to the ill-treatments received in many ways and in many spaces. In all of these various ways, patriarchy is often accused of bringing about the oppression of women. In a bid to win back their dignity and take their rightful position, women have since struggled against these forms

of oppression and have searched for freedom, self-assertion and empowerment. Barbara Berg could not have been more apt in this regard when she stated that:

It is the freedom (for a woman) to decide her own destiny: freedom from sex determined roles; freedom from society's oppressive restrictions; freedom to express her thoughts fully and to convert them freely into action. Feminism demands the acceptance of woman's right to individual conscience and judgment. It postulates that women's essential worth stems from their common humanity and does not depend on the relationships of her life. (Cited in Bell 24)

The above view emphasises the importance of self-reliance and independence over restrictive social system and unhealthy cultural formations. Such restrictions do not only limit the opportunities for women to harness but it as well hinder them of the privilege to contribute meaningfully to the development of their society; thus, putting women in a helpless and hapless situation. In line with this observation Olukemi Lawanson and Umar Dominic affirm that aggregate productivity is hindered when there is no equal partnership between the male and female gender. Feminists consider the point that the extinction of all forms of inter-gender disparity, unfairness and oppression will establish an unprejudiced foundation. It will also create economic and cultural formation that will ease women's involvement in national and international development in their combat for economic and political inclusion. Feminism as a movement is premised on raising the consciousness of the subordinate space occupied by women in various societies. There is therefore no doubt that women rally around themselves in many ways to resist any philosophy or ideology that gives suffering to women. Teresa Njoku's description of the situation is a candid affirmation of women subjugation which has endured a life time; she expresses the point that, "the ideology of patriarchy emphasises male importance, dominance and superiority" (195).

This means that women are less important in a male dominated world. Thus, they are subjected to oppression, marginalisation, silencing and many other injustices. Indeed, women subjugation has become a subject of academic discourse across various disciplines, such as, Theatre Arts, Political Science, Sociology, English and Literary Studies, Philosophy, as well as Religion and Cultural Studies. Playwrights and literary scholars have added their voices to women's quest for emancipation. Scholarly works have been written on intra-gender and inter-gender subjugation on women's discourse with significant contributions made to raise the consciousness on women subjugation in Nigeria.

This paper is focussed on the treatment of the subject of women subjugation, particularly in the private spaces of women otherwise known as a dominated space in the select play texts of the study. This paper examine Okoh's Mask, Sofola's Wedlock of the gods, and Agoro's The Remnant with a view to critically highlight the subjugation of women on the private space as reflected in these selected primary texts, the forces responsible for their subjugation and the consequences of subjugation on women. Specifically, it analyses the subjugation on the domestic/marital space arising from cultural issues and patriarchal hegemonic system.

## 2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is hinged on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's subaltern postcolonial theory, which was developed to respond to the question of people who are voiceless, marginalised and occupy the silent space. Spivak, in her seminal essay christened, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" viewed the

subaltern theory as an avenue to contest for the oppressed, whether as a group or individual. It emerged in order to help the subaltern people to neutralise their forces of oppression and speak in their own voices and for themselves. Rather than being spoken for, this theory advocates freedom for the oppressed, to regain emancipation from exploitative individual, group and institutions as liberated people to speak their minds and articulate themselves as humans rather than the practice of being spoken for by the forces responsible for their oppression.

### **2.1 Julie Okoh's Mask**

The play, Mask, is about marital infidelity and its associated consequences. The man of the house, Mr. Okosun is involved in extramarital love relationship, which troubles his daughter and wife; often times they confide in Nkechi the daughter's friend who is now more like a family friend as Mrs. Okosun is also fond of her. Unknown to them she is the secret lover of Mr. Okosun. Nkechi being a desperate young girl, on several occasions advised Mrs. Okosun to file for divorce due to her husband's infidelity. This plan is hatched to take over Mrs. Okosun's position as the wife of the house. Unfortunately for her, Mrs. Okosun did not give in to the advice. At the long run, Mr. Okosun admits to his illicit moral act by confessing to his wife, yet he continued in his ways, with the excuse of being an African man who is at liberty to marry as many wives as he wishes. In spite of the betrayal, Mrs. Okosun still tries to wear attractive clothes and facial make-ups to attract her husband's attention but all to no avail. This behaviour of Mr. Okosun puts his wife running on the lane of emotional insanity and suffers dementia. Nkechi the mask is later revealed to be the secret lover of Mr. Okosun in Omena's birthday. As a result, Nkechi lost her relationship with Mr. Okosun. Subsequently, Okosun drinks a poisoned beer from his wife and collapses on the floor of his seating room.

### **2.2 Matrimonial Subjugation in Julie Okoh's Mask**

Founded on the blessing and love of God, the marital institution is the oldest of all institutions in the world. Whether it is a polygamous or monogamous home, spaces are delineated. Each person has his or her space. There is the man of the house, the woman or women and the children. These spaces in the marital home are considered special and sacrosanct. According to Binebai:

Good marriage is upheld when a spouse shows honesty and accountability anytime in dealing with the other spouse. This is because honesty is critical as a tool for fruitful and dependable marital relationship. A patronage of its antonym, dishonesty, fractures a marital union due to lack of communication. Other ingredients of marital boundary include: Protection against intruders, good communication within the home and the act of working together. A breach of these high points will bring about a Border-less marriage. (366)

Julie Okoh's Mask dramatises not only the desecration of the sacred borders of matrimony in a monogamous home but also brings subjugation on the woman in the marital space of that home. The playwright put to use two forces that vanquish the woman's marital space; the extramarital affairs of the husband and man of the house and the secret plot by Nkechi, his secret lover, to clear the woman of the house from her way so that she can take over her position as the woman of the home. This is a story that tells what happens in most marital homes. Men cheat on their wives. In some cases, the families are not set ablaze; and in some instances,

extramarital relationship leads to the destruction of a well-established matrimony. The marital home which is the private space occupied by both men and women is controlled by an individual-who in this case is the man and husband, Mr. Okosun at the detriment of the other-who happens to be Mrs. Okosun the woman an wife of the house. While the woman do all she can to keep the home, her effort is ruined by an unfaithful and selfish partner.

Mr. Okosun is not only an unfaithful husband but one full of ego. His egoistic nature would not allow him express remorse over desecrating his wife's private marital space. He uses African culture to justify his shameful act of infidelity with his daughter's friend. The culture of a society is instituted to control the conduct and activities of a people but is used as tool of oppression. This is common in traditional African society where people use cultural backings to justify their actions and right their wrongs. A practice that is unacceptable and condemnable as it creates room for acrimony in some societies in Africa. The marital institution which is to be secured through intentional commitment from both partners has rather become a responsibility for the woman alone. That is why in spite of the commitment shown by Mrs. Okosun, her space is tampered; disregarded; silenced; and unrecognised:

**Mrs. Okosun:** Look at you, just like a child caught red-handed. You cannot even deny it. Then it must be true. Alfred why? I trusted you. I gave you all my love. I worshipped you. I made everybody believe you were an ideal husband (Okoh 35)

Traditionally, it is believed that the loyalty of a woman is the most subtle method of gaining total control of a man's heart but in the case of Mrs. Okosun, her submissiveness is taken for granted. She is left with an option of either evacuating her marital space or sharing it with another woman against her will. To Mr. Okosun, his wife's legitimate right in the marital space is a wishful thinking.

**Mr. Okosun:** That was your mistake. The mistake every educated woman in this country ever commits. Just because you read about monogamy in foreign culture, then you begin to believe that everyman on earth should be monogamous. So, I didn't dare to disillusion you. Instead for several years now, I have dreaded this very moment. Why do you women always set your husbands' on a pedestal? Why can't you accept that we are still Africans irrespective of our education? Look polygamous blood flows through my veins. How can I wash it off huhh, how? (Okoh 36)

The cultural authorisation of an oppressive system is reflected in this conversation; a system that makes an average African man to believe that he is polygamous in nature. This brings to mind questions such as, is the blood flowing in the veins of a man different from that of the woman? Women are victims of cultural practices and laws instituted by men in their favour. In Mask, Julie Okoh brings to the fore, the greedy nature of patriarchy. Emerging from the text, this patriarchal oppressive nature is reflecting in the character of Mr. Okosun, a man concerned with only his own satisfaction, with no consideration for his wife. The explanation derivable from this situation is that African society, assigns the functional position to the patriarchy as seen through the character of Mr. Okosun.

This sad reality has made women voiceless, viewed through the character of Mrs. Okosun who wishes to protect her private space undermined by inter-gender constructs. Mr. Okosun has a fair share of the blame for his marital infidelity. He betrayed his marital partner and that

betrayal is sustained by cultural role in favour of patriarchy even in a state of moral weakness. The storm that rocks the Okosun family cannot be brushed aside as it is drawn from the moral weakness of Mr. Okosun who breaks the hallowed marital boundaries with his lasciviousness to open the gate for the subjugation of the female marital space.

On the other hand, the play also brings to the fore, the feminist discourse on intra-gender subjugation through the character of Nkechi. This is due to the fact that from all indications, it is Nkechi, the woman outside the marital boundaries who wants Mrs. Okosun the woman inside, to quit the home. The plan to drive Mrs. Okosun away from her marital space is orchestrated by Nkechi, a desperate lover even through Mr. Okosun's unfaithfulness to the marital union gives room to Nkechi's malevolence desires. She is selfish, dangerous and double-faced. She claims righteous and assumes a pious stand by advising the same woman she wants out of her way to divorce her husband, while she is the one kicking the storm against the Okosun family with her fornication.

**Nkechi:** Auntie, I like to tell you something. But...emh...emh

**Mrs. Okosun:** About what? (Stops doing exercise.)

**Nkechi:** It's about uncle (pauses) he is seeing another woman.

**Mrs. Okosun:** Yes, I know.

**Nkechi:** (With surprise.) You do? And you don't mind?

**Mrs. Okosun:** I do mind. But what can I do about it?

**Nkechi:** You can sue him, separate from him, divorce him!

**Mrs. Okosun:** Me take him to court? Oh no, not me

**Nkechi:** But Auntie, he is unfaithful to you. He switches from woman to woman like he changes from shirt to shirt. If you cannot do like him, you can at least have the law on him. Do me, I do you, God no vex. (Okoh 48)

There is therefore no denying the fact that the chief subjugator of a woman is a woman. Nkechi tries all she could to persuade a very devoted, tranquil and submissive wife of Okosun to file for divorce but Mrs. Okosun declined. Nkechi speaks ill of her own lover Mr Okosun before his wife to instil in her heart and soul, the seed of hatred and anger that will push her to divorce her husband, Okosun. In Phase four of the Mask, the true disposition of Nkechi and her purposes are exposed. She is the "mask" the character after which the play is titled.

Mrs. Okosun, the subaltern woman, is subjected to a state or consciousness of feeling inferior, wondering if there was something else she has to do to win back her husband's heart and commitment. With this, she tries to apply facial make-ups to enhance her beauty and gain visibility; yet, not noticed by Mr. Okosun, whose heart is snatched far away from home. This is the harsh reality of so many women in African societies. Noticeably, women in order to hold their space and prevent their husbands from cheating now compete with younger girls in dressing and make-up art to appear attractive yet most of such efforts go unnoticed. The less concern attitude of Mr. Okosun, despite Mrs. Okosun's painstaking attempts, results to her state of depression. Mrs. Okosun suffers depression from the ill-treatment she receives from a man she married at all cost; against her parents wish. Since the subaltern woman in the state of her subjugation could develop her own consciousness, Mrs. Okosun tries to resist her marital subjugation. Though in a mentally unstable state, she takes a decision which affected their entire family negatively.

Julie Okoh portrays the divided universe of women in the struggle to claim the wife's space in the marital home by no other person but another woman, one who is taken as friend and age mate of the family's daughter. Her treatment of the subject of intra-gender subjugation directs creativity and scholarship on feminism beyond the bounds of the feminist discourse. She portrays how women fight against their fellow women to take them off from their celebrated positions. Apparently, women need to love and support one another to get the needed emancipation desired of by the feminist movement. Collective reasoning will definitely energise women's cause but most times they are instrumental to the unhappiness and several other issues that cause relative unease experienced amongst them. The yearnings of women to gain voice in the marital space may not be successful if women do not come to the view themselves that they need to be united. Comparatively, Clark's *The Wives Revolt*; Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*; and Salami-Agunloye's *Sweet Revenge*; Ayakoroma's *Dance on His Grave* all emphasise the strength embedded in the unity of women. Thus, Julie Okoh's *Mask* is a very productive dramatic work in which the subjugation of the female within the marital space is treated intensely and extensively. In the family of Mr. and Mrs. Okosun, the contested and subjugated space is the female space; particularly the space of the wife and the playwright expresses clearly the misuse of that holy space by both genders.

### **3.0 CONSEQUENCES OF MATRIMONIAL SUBJUGATION ON THE SUBALTERN WOMAN IN THE MASK**

Mrs. Okosun, the subjugated woman, whose matrimonial space is being contested for, suffers a lot of emotional and physical torment as a result of Mr. Okosun's marital infidelity. Firstly, she is hurting as a result of betrayal by the husband, the very man she married against the wish of her parents. Thereby, loses the beautiful relationship she had with her parents; who now see her as an unworthy daughter. Mrs. Okosun tries in different ways to win back her husband's love and attention but all attempts failed. Rather, Mr. Okosun is more absorbed in the love of Nkechi. While battling with this, the pain is worsened by the realisation that the person contesting for her marital space is Nkechi, her daughter's friend whom she closely relates to. Consequently, this emotional traumatic situation, leads to dementia; an insane state in Mrs. Okosun, as a result, she poisons her husband and the marital institution is completely ruined.

### **3.1 Saviour Nathan Anari Agoro's The Remnant**

*The Remnant* is a contemporary play set in the land of Bayelsa State. It is a simple play on domestic violence that captures the African reality in most marital homes that practice patriarchal dominance. The story revolves around the family of Abedibe. Abedibe, husband of Ofinavie and father of Enimokie and Helen, drives his wife, Ofinavie, from his matrimonial home. At every little provocation Abedibe will abuse the entire family of his wife and threaten to send her back to her mother's house but Ofinavie continues to tolerate his excesses. His action does not go down well with their son, Enimokie, who challenges him and out of fear of the unknown, Abedibe calls for his arrest. Ofinavie, fed up of her husband's extremities, finally returns to her father's house but meets with stiff opposition from her brother, Giasa. Giasa insists that she goes back to her husband's house even if it promises her death. But the entry of their mother, Ategene, to the scene calms down the tension. When the attempt to arrest Enimokie failed, Abedibe returns to collect the bride price he paid on his wife Ofinavie but her family vehemently refused him.

His daughter Helen also moves in with her mother, because of the ill treatment her mother has received from her father. She expresses her fear for marriage and vows not to return to her father's house until her mother is recalled. Abedibe's attitude drives away all members of his family from him; he becomes lonely, hated and disrespected by even his children. Seeing how things played out, he comes to a point of self-realisation and goes to plead with the family he ones despised.

### 3.2 The Marital Subjugation in Agoro's The Remnant

The domestic space of the woman in Agoro's, *The Remnant* is badly tempered with by patriarchal dominance. Abedibe not only beats his wife, Ofinavie but also throws her away from his home after giving birth to two children. In this marital home, violence against women, women subordination, subjugation and silencing of voice is clearly demonstrated. Abedibe's daughter, Somkieni, reiterates thus:

Mother hasn't asked anything from you but her dues as a wife. Let me ask you, father was it reasonable for you to send her out of the house on the many occasions you did that? Was it right to seize her clothes because you had a minor disagreement? Was it right of you to insult her mother? Remember, you called my grandmother a witch. (Agoro 41)

Agoro as social realist dramatist appropriated this play to point to the destruction and reduction of the woman's space in marriage in the wider society. Cases of divorce, male brutality towards women and the unholy treatment accorded women in most marriages abound. The subaltern woman is not spared of patriarchal hegemony in *The Remnant*. Due to the traumatic situation of the subaltern woman, terribly threatened by the horrors of the woman's space in the marital home of her mother, Helen, takes a radical position as a young girl to avoid the horror and marital terrorism her mother is exposed to. In her words: "These few weeks I have stayed at home I have intensified my dislike against marriage" (Agoro 34). Helen abhors marriage due to the maltreatment of her mother. She declares her resolve not to marry any man or have anything to do with a man. Despite the stormy persuasion from her grandmother, Ategene to get married, Helen springs us superior feminist's arguments and logic to defend her position about marriage. Helen's protest against male dominance and barbarity towards women especially her mother's torture and sorrow under her father, is radical in nature. Her decision to declare the space of the wife vacant in a matrimonial home is influenced by male subordination and silencing of the female identity, integrity and voice. She sees her mother's place in her father's home as a space of inactivity, a space not seen and not known, a space that has no respect, a space of subjugation.

A close look at Abedibe's character reveals the thinking of a typical African man, one who believes that his wife's life is dependent on marriage. Thus, ceases every opportunity to threaten his wife of sending her back to her parents. This position of African men is not new to women in the society. However, to some extent, this is underscored by women's desperation for marriage. Driven by social pressure into marriage and fear of further criticism that may arise from a failed marriage, even in the face of brutality and domestic violence women painfully face the consequences.

Also, as portrayed in the character of Giasa, there are families that will sacrifice their morals and even the peace of their child on marital grounds. Giasa, totally disagreed with the idea of his sister Afinavie coming back to join them at the family house. Her experiences in marriage meant nothing to him. As far as he is concerned she has no place at the family house. His attitude is informed by the belief of enduring to the end no matter the circumstance. Giasa did not acknowledge the enormity of the offence committed by Abedibe. To him, her reality of being abused and beaten physically and verbally was all inconsequential. Hence, he insists on her return to her husband's house. "you wouldn't stay here, you will certainly return to his house" (Agoro 13). He agrees to the fact that she has been thrown out but his interest was more on protecting his family's reputation, than his sister's desire to be free from mental torture. A clear case of we have no business with you anymore. He probably, would have preferred her silence than rising up against the forces of her subjugation. Thus, insisting on her return to the subjugator to be used as a slave instead of being a wife appears to be more tolerable to him. In spite of the rejection from her brother, Ofinavie was resolute this time, and that leads to her emancipation from patriarchal subjugation of her marital space.

The space on which the subaltern woman experiences subjugation in Agoro's *The Remnant* like Julie Okoh's *Mask* is the space of the wife in the marital home but the subjugator in the case of *The Remnant* is not any woman but the husband. In post-colonial Africa, many homes suffer rejection of the female space because of male egotism. Ofinavie the mother of Helen Somkieni is a very calm and well-behaved woman yet she suffers patriarchal violence in the hands of her husband, Abedibe. Abedibe is a metaphor of African husband who does not care about the absence of a wife in his matrimonial home. This brand of men and husbands are people who have no respect and value for the women's space in the marital institution. For no fault of the wife, she is sacked. The action of Abedibe is so illogical and barbarous that people around him begin to think that he is not one who cherishes the space of the woman in his marital home. Abedibe's action against the wife's space in the marital home is so bad that it not only sets the family on fire but also sends messages of marital horrors to young women like Helen. The marital space occupied by the wife in Agoro's *The Remnant* is a space relegated, disregarded, terrorised and subjugated; a space that survives only at the mercy of the husband.

The playwright expresses the fact symbolically that patriarchal practice places men on top of women on family matters which is not a true definition of the idea of being a head of the family. Women are seen and considered as properties to be owned and disowned at will by men. Marriage is a mutual thing. The man and the woman come together to make it happen but when it is faced with disunity, it is the woman that leaves on her own or she is compelled to leave by the husband and his family.

*The Remnant* underscores the inferior position of the subaltern woman and her lack of recognition. The play dramatises the place of the woman in the matrimonial home as a woman denied self-worth and fulfilment of self. The freedom and independence of Ofinavie is destroyed by phallogocentric-pride and thus is muted by the sexist battle fronted by her husband. Clearly, Abedibe's sexist attitude diminishes the humanity of his wife. In a bid to justify his action of driving away his wife, he calls his mother-in-law, Ategene a witch. He takes his battle not only to his wife but also her mother and her children. Ofinavie is constructed as an appendage: as wives to be persecuted, a woman and wife who does not command the dignity of her place in the family and who does not enjoy her space.



#### **4.0 CONSEQUENCES OF THE PATRIARCHY AND WOMEN SUBJUGATION IN THE REMNANT**

The subaltern woman in *The Remnant* goes through pain, humiliation, rejection and separation; driven back to her parents from her matrimonial home by her husband. Also, the subjugation of Ofinavie emotionally traumatised her daughter Helen; she vows not to return to her father's house until her mother is called back. She also develops hatred for marital institution because of her mother's experiences. A family that once lived happily together is wrecked by patriarchal hegemonic system.

#### **4.1 Sofola's Wedlock of the Gods**

Sofola's *Wedlock of the gods* is another dramatic creation that makes strong cultural statements and raise consciousness on the subjugation of women. In this play the woman's space is also subjugated as seen in the other two play texts analysed in this paper. The play is a tragic love story that is woven around two-star lovers, Uloko and Ugwoma, who die same day, on the same spot after drinking poison from same evil pot. Ugwoma is separated from her lover Uloko by her forced marriage to an older and wealthier suitor, Adigwu. The essence is to generate a bride wealth for her poor parents to buy medicine for her sick brother. The husband, Adigwu, suddenly dies. Ugwoma becomes free of her unhappy life. The tradition holds that she must mourn her husband for three months and get married to her husband's brother. But Ugwoma violates her mourning rites and returns to make love to her lover and becomes pregnant. This is discovered in the second month of her mourning. This action of Ugwoma makes her mother-in-law to unleash missiles of death against her. Through the act of sorcery, her mother-in-law, Odibei cast a spell on Ugwoma to drink poisonous drink which kills her. Uloko her lover hears the tragedy of his lover's death by the poison of Odibei and rushes to kill Odibei after which he kills himself by drinking the poisoned drink which put an end to the life of his lover Ugwoma.

#### **4.2 Cultural Subjugation in Sofola's Wedlock of the gods**

In *Wedlock of the gods*, Sofola captures the subjugation of the woman in a patriarchal Igbo society. In this drama, culture established by men put the woman in a state of reduction. Society is made up of both male and female but the woman in the society of Zulu Sofola is a voiceless creature made so by culture and traditions manipulated by men. The culture of the land dramatised, pushes women to a subdued gap. Spivak emphasised on 'the third world' women's experiences stating that their right to speak was denied because their voice and agency are rooted to patriarchal codes, a reason for the treatment they receive as victims of barbaric culture that seems impossible to be reconstructed. As Spivak observes, "the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernity" (242). The question then is what steps can the subaltern woman take to gain her freedom from patriarchal cultural practices in Nigeria? Consequently, some women accept being commoditised, sold out to heal the sick. Natascha Proschel avers, rightly, thus:

Commodification has become an eminent subject in today's global society, as it goes hand in hand with consumerism. Every aspect of culture whether it involves tangible

goods such as cloths or intangible factors like traditions and customs, is nowadays transformed into a commodity. (8)

The above statement shows what takes place in traditional Nigerian societies in particular and African societies at large. Abnormal behaviours have contaminated the African culture; people deliberately take certain positions concerning African culture and the value system, not considering the kind of images projected thereof.

Ugwoma is not given the opportunity to choose the lover of her dream. She is forced out of her love world, where she enjoys peace and emotional bliss to another world that she rejects and hates so much. Ugwoma is given out in marriage on financial grounds to a man she had no intention of marrying. Thus, she has no space of worth. Wedlock of the gods suggests undoubtedly that women, particularly the girl child, have no voice of her own. She is procreated to settle family problems. This informs Spivak's statement that, "the sexed subaltern subject has no space from which she can speak" (307).

Reinforcing the predicament of the subaltern, the UNFPA comments thus, "in a patriarchal society, girls and women are often discriminated by culture" ([www.rcm.org.uk](http://www.rcm.org.uk)). Cultural practices initiated by humans turn out to be in favour of the male folk in its approach and technique, male dominant society, indiscriminate violence against women and human right abuse, among others. These cultural manifestations are the underpinning influences of female oppression, subjugation and other forceful conditions organised and adopted against women in various spaces. A fact well noted by Isam Shihada is that, "women are victims of patriarchy fortified by religion, traditions and culture" (167). Being a woman in Africa comes with its attendant challenges. Every stage of a woman's life comes with some form of sacrifice and endurance due to the numerous laws established by patriarchy, the custodian of African culture. These several cultural laws are institute against the female gender and compel women to succumb to practices against their wish. If at any point a woman tries to resist these harmful cultural acts, she is either reminded of her dependency on the cultural belief or she gets trapped by it. So, using culture acts patriarchy promotes female subjugation and a male dominant society.

It is interesting to note that, in the construction of Wedlock of the gods, intra-gender subjugation is given visibility just as in the case of Okoh's Mask. Apart from the men on all sides that conspired to reduce Ugwoma to nothing, women are also very prominent and strong participants in this ploy to humiliate and destroy Ugwoma. Apparently, these are also subaltern women that are permanently silenced and excluded from any meaning space to speak from and have accepted the atrocities as cultural act. These women have no voice. With that, they neither sympathise nor agree with anyone resisting subalternity. They did not see anything wrong with compelling a woman to marry against her will but they condemned her when she violated the law of mourning and gets pregnant while mourning. From the point of view of the moral dignity of a woman and the violation of the traditions guiding death and mourning in a typical Igbo society, Ugwoma is found guilty by women. The women are bulwarks of the patriarchal laws of the land; hence, in this paper, they are referred to as 'Patriarchal-women.' They are executors of the rules made by men. When Ugwoma declines the advice of Anwasia by sleeping with her lover and even getting pregnant while in mourning, culture of the land and its agencies come

heavily upon her. She is reminded by Anwasia that, “a woman’s honour lies in her name and her sense of shame.” (Sofola 8)

Anwasia, Ugwoma’s friend, draws belief from the culture she is born into by saying, “a friend must always be honest and truthful. It is a common thing that when a man dies his brother takes his wife and makes her his wife. This is what our people do. Everyone knows that” (Sofola 21). Anwasia persuades Ugwoma to accept her late husband’s brother as her next husband not Uloko, not minding what she wants as a person because culture has made it so.

Put succinctly, widowhood right is one of the most debasing cultural subjugations perpetrated on the subaltern woman. This is to say that the culture of an individual holds the most vital aspect of such an individual’s life, as its practices turn out to be the very first set of laws a person is subjected to and as such, form the basis for human operations. It is a system that is favourable to patriarchy and cruel to the oppressed women. The practice of a woman passing from hand to hand in one family as an inherited widow, has denied women of their right and pride as humans. The subaltern woman is forced to accept situations presented hook line and sinker and any attempt to go contrary, the same cultural laws will be evoked, very typical of Ugwoma’s experiences.

Anwasia’s other reason for speaking to Ugwoma about marrying Adigwu’s brother is still drawn from the cultural practice of most African societies. She underscores that “Adigwu had no child by you. His people want a child for him by a woman who was his wife. You are that wife and his brother can have that child for him by you” (Sofola 22). The subaltern woman is treated like a piece of property; a commodity that moves from hand to hand. The subaltern woman takes a stand in search for freedom through her refusal to remarry her late husband’s brother. Zulu Sofola presents Ugwoma as a revolutionary character that attempts to break away from the old cultural order to exercise her humanity and freedom of choice. Ugwoma tries to rebel so as to gain speaking status but is cut down by tradition promoted by witchcraft and sorcery. When Ugwoma did the abominable, Nneka notes:

Do you know that the punishment for this deed is a swelling of the body with water leaking from everywhere? Do you know that nobody will agree to treat you for fear they might also catch your curse? Do you know that even after death no forest will accept your body...? (Sofola 19)

The words of Nneka further exposes the punishment meted out to Ugwoma for adultery and violation of the mourning rites. She will be swollen; nobody will treat her when she falls sick for the fear that the sickness will be transferred to them and even at death the forest where the dead are buried will reject her. Uloko’s death is also attributed to the violation of the sacred laws and traditions of the land. In attempt to pacify her, Udo states that “What often destroys young men is rash and hasty action. A woman who loses her husband must not be visited by any other man until she has been cleansed. Any action against this is an abomination and our gods deal very severely with such offenders” (Sofola 35). From a cultural point of view, the death of the lovers, Ugwoma and Uloko, is a punishment from the gods but as revealed in the text, it is manipulated by a vengeful mortal, Odibei who takes the place of the gods through the use of witchcraft and sorcery powers.

Wedlock of the gods is a revenge tragedy; it is a play of death and revenge of death and the main victim of the play is a woman. A play in which the space of the subaltern is dimmed and rendered invisible. Zulu Sofola mounts consciousness on the position of women in African traditional practices that need to be seriously reformed. This position is gradually reflected even in the thoughts of some male scholars. It is to that effect that Awoyemi pointedly declares that:

The place of African woman in her society cannot be contested so also is her contribution in complementing the effort of the man as exemplified by some recent male literary dramatists that women can be heroes even though the playwrights are male, they have moved out of the accepted stereotyping of female character to evolve a new style of writing that is women-friendly and that can help motivate women into engaging in virtues and skills that can help move their society forward by being a part of its developmental process. (167)

Within the corpus of this study, our focus is not only on what social image the male gender has created of women but is also concerned with the relationship of women in society because it is imagined that women will understand the female psychology better than would men and be able to explore the motivations, which are at work in the lives of women and the several other issues that hinder their development process in society. Sadly, as exemplified in Sofola's Wedlock of the gods, women fail to understand the plight of a fellow woman but rather contest her freedom and peace of mind.

#### **4.3 Consequences of Cultural Subjugation on the Subaltern Woman in Wedlock of the gods**

In Sofola's Wedlock of the gods, Ugwoma the subaltern woman lives an unhappy life. A young woman, whose dream is to marry Ukolo and enjoy a beautiful marital experience thereafter, is suddenly frustrated by her father who imposes Adigwu on her for bride wealth. Suddenly there is a ray of hope for her to be reunited with her lover Ukolo at the death of Adigwu but then, cultural laws are evoked on her. She is being compelled to marry her late husband's brother to bear children in his name. This time she rises against opposition and finds her way to Ukolo but Odibei her mother-in-law unleashes missiles of death against her by casting a spell on her for refusing to marry her other son, which eventually leads to Ugwoma's death.

#### **5.0 CONCLUSION**

Women subjugation is harmful to womanhood. The damage done to women by acts of dominance cannot be understated. The destruction that comes with it to the female folk and society at large is unthinkable. The paper has critically analysed the select texts with special reference to women subjugation on the private spaces of women's lives. While Okoh's Mask and Agoro's The Remnant portray the subjugation of women on the marital space, resulting from acts of infidelity, abuse, and negligence of the woman's space in the marital institution, Sofola's Wedlock of the gods accounts for oppressive and demeaning acts that hinge on the freedom of women that manifest in the form of cultural practices informed by hegemonic system. There is no escaping to the fact that the inequality that prevails in the marital space create an aftermath effect which destroys the victims psyche and life. More significant the play texts have brought to the fore that the factors that constitute the subjugation of women's marital

and cultural spaces stem from both inter-gender and intra-gender insensitivities. The paper recommends resistance of oppressive system that are capable of denying women of their rights and dislocating them from the private spaces of their lives.

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