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Women's Portrayal in the African Literary Text 'The Lion and The Jewel'

La représentation des femmes dans le texte littéraire africain Le Lion et le Joyau

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Abstract:

The representation of women in African literature remains a focal point in contemporary literary criticism. This paper examines how African women are portrayed in *The Lion and the Jewel* by Wole Soyinka, using a feminist critical lens to investigate the gender-aware perspective presented in the play. The main goal is to shed light on the often inaccurate portrayals of women in male-authored texts and to explore how these narratives attempt to reflect women's roles and agency within society. The study reveals a significant gender disparity, with women frequently depicted as subordinate in various aspects of life. It also underscores the ongoing dominance of male authority in many African patriarchal settings, where women continue to face marginalisation—particularly in rural communities where traditional practices still uphold gender inequality.

Keywords: Women's representation- African literature- Feminist literary criticism- Female agency- patriarchy

Résumé :
La représentation des femmes dans la littérature africaine continue de faire l'objet d'une attention active dans le domaine de la critique littéraire. Cet article vise à analyser la représentation des femmes africaines dans Le Lion et Le Joyau de Wole Soyinka. L'étude adopte une approche critique féministe pour explorer la perspective de plus en plus sensible au genre décrite dans cette œuvre littéraire. L'objectif principal est de mettre en évidence la représentation inexacte des femmes dans les écrits masculins et la façon dont ils s'efforcent de dessiner des images des femmes et de leur action dans la société. Les résultats ont montré l'écart entre les sexes en les présentant comme inégaux dans toutes les sphères de la vie. La prédominance de la suprématie et de la souveraineté masculines est encore une réalité dans certaines sociétés patriarcales africaines et les femmes souffrent toujours aux dépens des hommes, car le patriarcat existe toujours.

Mots- clés : Représentation des femmes- littérature africaine- critique littéraire- perspective de genre- patriarcat

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Introduction

In many African societies, patriarchal systems have long shaped social structures, often placing women in subordinate roles and denying them equal authority and recognition. Nigerian women, in particular, are born into a cultural framework that reinforces gender stereotypes and limits their societal roles based solely on their gender. These ingrained inequalities are not only reflected in daily life but are also echoed in African literature, where male authors have historically constructed narratives that marginalise female voices and agency. Scholars such as Badoe (1984) observe that African literary texts frequently mirror the expectations imposed on women by male-dominated societies, often portraying men as dynamic agents of action and women as passive and voiceless. Darweesh and Ghayadh (2016) similarly argue that even when fiction seeks to represent human experience universally, it typically allows male characters control over their destinies while depicting female characters as helpless victims of fate.

This pattern of representation is particularly evident in the works of Wole Soyinka, one of Africa's most influential playwrights. His play *The Lion and the Jewel* exemplifies the gendered portrayals common in male-authored African texts, where women are often confined to traditional roles and depicted through stereotypes that reflect societal norms. As Onyeka (2013) notes, Soyinka's use of language and characterisation often reinforces sexist ideologies, portraying women as inferior to men within the narrative structure. This study seeks to critically examine the representation of women in *The Lion and the Jewel* through a feminist literary lens. It aims to highlight how women are portrayed in male writing, the implications of these portrayals, and the subtle ways in which female characters strive to assert agency within a patriarchal framework.

1. Literature Review

The representation of women in African literature has been a focal point of feminist literary criticism, particularly due to the pervasive influence of patriarchal ideologies embedded within many African societies. Scholars have long noted that African literary texts, especially those authored by men, often reflect gender norms that position women as passive, subordinate, and dependent. These portrayals reinforce societal structures that marginalize women and restrict their agency. According to Molara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994), early African literature frequently confines female characters to domestic and reproductive roles, portraying them as caregivers, mothers, and wives rather than as autonomous individuals. Similarly, Buchi Emecheta (1989), both a writer and critic, challenged male-authored literature for failing to represent African women as complex, active participants in society.

Badoe (1984) points out that African literature traditionally mirrors the patriarchal expectations imposed on women, highlighting their limitations rather than their potential. Women are often depicted as lacking depth or agency, while male characters are shown navigating the full spectrum of human experience. Darweesh and Ghayadh (2016) emphasize that even when fiction aims to portray universal themes, it often reserves power, action, and control for male characters, relegating women to roles determined by fate or social constraints. This gendered division of literary space reinforces the view of women as inherently passive and secondary.

Within this broader literary tradition, Wole Soyinka's portrayal of women has generated significant scholarly debate. While Soyinka is widely recognized for his contributions to African theatre and for addressing complex political and cultural themes, critics argue that his representation of female characters often lacks nuance. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, for example, the character of Sidi is portrayed as beautiful yet naive, and her worth is largely determined by how men perceive her. Lakunle, the Westernized schoolteacher, and Baroka, the traditional village chief, both reduce her to an object of competition, further emphasizing the male-centered narrative. Onyeka (2013) argues that Soyinka's use of language and characterisation reflects ingrained sexist ideologies, portraying women through a lens of inferiority and reinforcing patriarchal dominance. Critics like Stratton (1994) have also pointed out that Soyinka, like many male African writers, often overlooks female subjectivity and rarely gives women a central voice in his narratives.

However, some scholars suggest a more nuanced reading of Soyinka's work. They argue that although his female characters may initially appear stereotypical, there are moments where they resist, subvert, or manipulate the systems around them. For instance, Sidi, though objectified, ultimately asserts a form of agency by rejecting Lakunle's condescending modernism. This has led critics to propose that Soyinka's plays reflect the contradictions of a society in transition, where women's roles are both constrained and evolving.

Despite these differing perspectives, there is broad consensus that African literature, including Soyinka's works, has historically marginalized female characters and underrepresented women's voices. Feminist scholars continue to advocate for re-readings of these texts to uncover moments of resistance and to highlight the need for more authentic and empowering representations of African women.

2. Background

2.1. About The Author

Akinwande Oluwole Soyinka is Africa's most distinguished playwriter with the Noble Prize for literature in 1986. Soyinka was involved with various production in Great Britain before turning to Nigeria. He has been commissioned to write a play to celebrate that nations independent in 1960. Soyinka has always focused on his African roots and traditions. From the beginning he was a political figure during the Nigerian Civil War. He was not sufficiently anti-Biefran to accept the government and was put into solitary confinement for two years, being released only after a large powerful international compaign. Soyinka is a modern dramatist_ Gibbs (1981) declares that he was influenced by a Western occasion in 1950s; he has an international audience. His techniques are that of a satirical. He criticizes many aspects of his society. As McDowrill's opinion, *''Soyinka makes use of facinating devices in his own experimentalist plays : dancing, singing, speeches in verse (poetry), flashbacks and characters from the spirit world''*. He implies techniques similar to Nigerian festivals and utilizes any poetic methods which re-inforce the emotional and intellectual impact of his drama. Among his plays The Lion and The Jewel that includes different themes.

2.2. Analysis of The Lion and The Jewel

While Soyinka was influenced by the traditional theatre, he took his material from Yoruba mythology. He said, ''I come from a society which is very rich of theoretical tradition and I saw from my childhood the traditional forms of theatre and it became for me a logical means of expressing some of my most profoundly felt intuitions''. This play is divided into three parts, in

the first part there is a conflict between two ways of living progress and modernity represented by Lakunle, the school teacher, and tradition represented by Sidi the village belle. There is an assuming struggle between the young Lakunle and the Bale; both wanted Sidi. Wole Soyinka is not against progress, but he is criticising the false notion of progress and civilization because Lakunle was attracted by Western way of life. He wants to turn Sidi into a sofisticated lady, for instance, by using the red lip-stick and wearing high shoes. Lakunle had two aims, he wanted to turn the village into a modern city by cutting the trees and wanted to drink tea as the British instead of palmunine. He doesnt want Sidi to eat with her fingers, but she should use the fork and the knife. He is against polygamy and paying bride price. He prefers to wed just one woman. Lakunle, all his knowledge, culture and education are taken from books and not based on experience. He is like a parrot, just repeating words taken from many books including Bible. The Bale, Baroka is polygamous, illiterate, he has much privilege, and he is not silly. At the Lakunle is going to be defeated by the Bale. Through out the play Soyinka wanted to say the superficial progress leads to confusion. Sidi is mature, her actions are based on experience, contrary to Lakunle.

2.3. The structure of the novel

The structure of the first part 'morning', the first part is divided into two parts. It is from page one to page eleven, there is discussion between Sid and Lakunle, then the girls and drummers enter the scene. Here, we notice Soyinka 's punctilious interest in music sounds and rythm as it's shown in this part. It also gives a description of both characters Sidi and Lakunle. Lakunle is always represented like a laughing stock every body makes fun of him (In relation to his way of dressing) as he is described as a parrot because he repeats ords from books ; he lacks maturity and experience whereas Sidi is different, mature and her actions are based on experience. The second part 'noon', in this part, Sadiku, Baroka's headife, tells Sidi that the Bale ants her as a wife. She said to her that the Bale invited her to have dinner with him. Baroka refuses change because the latter destroys his on priviledge and traditions; he stresses that progress is confusion. In this part there is the use of mime and singing. Also, Sidi did not consider Lakunle as a man (p. 2); her attitude did not change though Lakunle is kind with her. Lakunle is an unlucky person and he is rejected by everybody.The third part of the play 'Night', Baroka pretends should be at ease and ignores what Sidi comes for, but deep in down he is looking forward for her coming. The victory dance was meant for omen (Baroka's wives) _ Lakunle is described as lacking experience (When he speaks about the mixed stories) it is impossible to take Lakunle as a prophet of real progress.

2.4. African Feminist Theory Criticism

Feminist literary critique is a transformative movement initiated by feminists to challenge the portrayal of female identity and experiences through masculine perspectives, with the aim of promoting female awareness and understanding. Feminist critique, as described by several scholars, examines the portrayal of women in texts written by males. It involves the political and argumentative analysis of male literature and masculine culture from a feminist perspective, with a focus on women as readers. It assists readers and academics in approaching

literature from a different perspective. The literature we read applies the principles and viewpoints of feminism.

Feminist theory serves as a framework for examining literary texts through the lens of gender and for formulating interview questions. According to Tyson (2006), feminist critique is the analysis of how literature and other cultural works either support or challenge the economic, political, social, and psychological subjugation of women (p.83). Feminist criticism is commonly employed to analyse how gender roles in literary works either mirror or challenge conventional gender roles. Feminist critics employ this theory to enhance our comprehension of women's experiences, both historically and contemporarily, and to foster our recognition of women's significance in society (p.119). Feminist literary theory focuses on analysing the dynamics between men and women and their respective societal positions. The feminist literary theory seeks to highlight the disparity between men and women in society and primarily reflects the patriarchal ideology that manifests in diverse forms within the creation of literature and literary texts. According to Dhanya (2014) the text explores the analysis of images and stereotypes of women in literature, focusing on how women have been excluded and misinterpreted in the context of literary history.

There exists a wide array of diverse feminist literary theories. Certain feminist theorists prioritise the analysis of language and symbols, specifically how they are "gendered". Others analyse the distinction between women's and men's writings and examine how the author's gender influences their writing. Typically, feminist critics analyse the portrayal of characters in literature and literary texts. In addition, feminist literary theory posits that the gender of the reader frequently influences our reactions to a work. Tyson (2006) outlines that feminist thought revolves around a set of common inquiries:

• How is the portrayal of the relationship between men and women depicted?

What is the dynamic of power between men and women (or characters assuming male/female roles)?

• What is the definition of male and female roles?

• What defines the characteristics and qualities associated with masculinity and femininity?

• How do characters exemplify or personify these characteristics?

Do characters exhibit characteristics typically associated with the opposing gender? Could you please clarify or provide more details? How does this alteration influence the responses of others towards them?

What insights does the work provide regarding the functioning of patriarchy in terms of its economic, political, social, or psychological aspects?

What does the work suggest about the potential of sisterhood as a means of opposing patriarchy?

The work explores the concept of women's creativity.

What insights can we gain about the functioning of patriarchy from the historical reception of the work by the public and critics?

What significance does the work have in relation to women's literary history and literary tradition?

To analyse a literary text from a feminist standpoint, it is important to consider the following questions: the gender of the author, the gender of the narrator, the portrayal of women's roles in the text, the gender of the protagonist, the presence of any stereotypes of women, the attitudes of male characters towards women, the influence of the author's attitude towards women in

society and culture, the prevalence of feminine imagery in the text, and any differences in speech between female and male characters (Bressler, 2007). According to this theory, Soyinka's literary text The Lion and The Jewel will be analysed and examined using the textual analysis approach to explore the gender issues it portrays.

3. Results and Findings

This study employed a qualitative research approach to examine the representation of characters through a feminist perspective, focusing on uncovering gender stereotypes and identifying gender-related traits. Wole Soyinka's play *The Lion and the Jewel* served as the primary source of data. The analysis was guided by postcolonial feminist theory, which provided the theoretical framework for interpreting the text. Data collection involved a detailed textual analysis of the play, concentrating on how women are portrayed by closely examining key scenes, dialogues, and character interactions that highlight gender issues.

Feminist theory in literary analysis focuses on the ways texts reinforce or challenge gender roles, women's agency, and power structures. In *The Lion and the Jewel*, the portrayal of Sidi, the central female character, reflects complex issues of gender, beauty, autonomy, and societal roles. This literary text analysis will be structured around key feminist concepts such as objectification, patriarchal control, and female agency.

Women are shown as subservient and inferior individuals in society, with limited agency and decision-making power.

The central conflict of The Lion and the Jewel revolves around the clash between traditional values and modernity. Soyinka's drama was written during a period of profound discord between proponents of Westernisation and modernization in Nigeria, and those who advocated for the preservation of traditional values. The conflicts between Baroka and Lakunle manifest in their conflict over Sidi, as both men aspire to marry her without regard for her wishes or emotions. Despite their contrasting ideologies, Baroka and Lakunkle hold similar perspectives on women, despite Baroka being a traditionalist and Lakunkle being heavily influenced by Western culture. Both of them hold the belief that women are incapable of having autonomous lives and must instead rely on their spouses. Neither Sidi nor any other woman entertains the notion of pursuing her own endeavours.

Wole Soyinka portrays women in the play The Lion and the Jewel as being entangled in the conflict between traditional values and contemporary ideals. Women, represented by Sidi, have no agency in determining how they should lead their life. This is due to the fact that individuals are deprived of autonomy by both of these conflicting ideologies. The title of the play provides a clear indication of the portrayal of women: the "jewel" refers to Sidi, a beautiful lady who is objectified and desired by two specific males. The individuals in question are Baroka, an elderly man known as the "lion," and Lakunle, a young school teacher who has received a Western education.

Based on the destiny of Sidi, it may be concluded that the prospects for Nigerian women are quite bleak. The drama gives the notion that both traditionalism and modernism primarily serve the interests of males rather than women. This situation leaves women, including strong and independent-minded individuals like Sidi, largely vulnerable to the dominance and

regulation of a patriarchal culture, whether it is traditional or modern, which marginalises and exercises control over them.

3.1. Women are regarded as subordinate to males, fundamentally destined to fulfil the role of serving them.

Women are regarded as subordinate to men, fundamentally destined to fulfill the role of serving them. This is evident in the way female characters, especially Sidi, are portrayed within the traditional, male-dominated culture of Ilujinle. However, Lakunle, a schoolteacher influenced by Western ideals, claims to desire a different kind of relationship. He tells Sidi, "I seek a life-companion... I want a modern wife, not a slave" (Soyinka, p. 7). Unlike most men in his village, Lakunle objects to traditional practices that reduce women to physical laborers, such as carrying water. He says to Sidi, "You and your bush-girl habits—smearing yourself with oil and things, and rolling on the floor at the slightest excuse… carrying loads on your head that sprain your neck" (p. 8). Here, he expresses concern for her physical well-being and critiques what he sees as backward customs. Despite Lakunle's modern rhetoric, his actions and words often betray a sense of male superiority. For example, he remarks, "Do you know, Sidi, they will soon be teaching girls in school? And I believe it is bad. It is bad because it will turn them into a laughing-stock in the village" (p. 9), revealing his underlying belief in female inferiority. Sidi, while seemingly assertive, is still shaped by the patriarchal norms of her community. This is apparent when she quickly takes the water pail from Lakunle upon seeing villagers approaching, saying, "Let me take it. Quick. They are coming. They will laugh at me" (p. 9). Her concern for public perception reflects her internalization of gender roles, where strength and status are linked to male activity and female submission. Moreover, Sidi mocks Lakunle's modern ideals, calling him "madman" multiple times and rejecting his proposal because he refuses to pay the bride price: "I will not make you a laughing-stock. My bride-price must be paid" (p. 10). This indicates her adherence to tradition and the value placed on customs that reinforce her own subjugation. Despite his claims of progressiveness, Lakunle's condescension is evident when he says, "A natural feeling, women have a smaller brain than us" (p. 6), thus reinforcing the very sexist views he pretends to oppose.

3.2. Women's depiction ignorant and traditional.

Soyinka portrays women, particularly through the character of Sidi, as largely uninformed and strongly tied to traditional customs. Sidi's worldview is shaped by cultural expectations that equate a woman's worth with the payment of the bride price. Despite Lakunle's formal education and supposed modern values, she rejects his marriage proposal solely because he refuses to follow tradition. When Lakunle says, "To pay the price would be to buy a heifer off the market stall. You'd be my chattel, my mere property," (Soyinka, p. 6), he attempts to rationalize his refusal to pay the dowry by framing it as a rejection of women's commodification. However, Sidi remains unconvinced and insists on maintaining traditional values: "A man must pay the price. That is plain. A fair bargain must be struck" (p. 7). This illustrates her internalization of cultural norms that reinforce patriarchal control over women. Though Sidi demonstrates moments of strength, wit, and independence—often mocking Lakunle's pompous attitude—she still conforms to the expectations of her community. She

scorns Lakunle's refusal to pay the bride price not because she believes in equality, but because she sees his actions as shameful and emasculating: "If you like to play the fool and throw away your bride-price, that is your own business. But I will not make myself the laughing-stock of the village" (p. 10). Her concern is not about challenging oppressive customs but about upholding social respectability. Additionally, Lakunle's patronizing tone is evident when he calls Sidi an "uneducated savage" and laments that she is "a child, simply a child" (p. 6), reinforcing the stereotype of African women as ignorant and in need of "civilizing." Ironically, while Sidi appears spirited and self-assured, she ultimately submits to the traditional gender expectations of her society by marrying Baroka—a man who cunningly outmaneuvers her.

3.3. Women are objectified and regarded as inferior to men.

During a village performance in The Lion and the Jewel, the symbolic roles assigned to women clearly reflect their inferior societal status. In this scene, the women act as the wheels of the car, while Lakunle assumes the role of the driver—an overt metaphor for male control and female subordination (Soyinka, p. 19). This physical staging emphasizes how women are perceived as functional extensions of male ambition, rather than as autonomous individuals. Both Baroka and Lakunle view Sidi as an object of desire, a possession to be acquired rather than a partner with agency. Lakunle attempts to assert his dominance from the start of the play, criticizing Sidi for her attire and habits. He says, "You could wear something more modern… not these unkind ropes of beads, and cover yourself with a dress… a lipstick would help too… and high heels" (p. 7). Here, he equates her worth with her ability to conform to his vision of modern womanhood, revealing a desire to shape her identity according to his own ideals.

Despite his claims of progressive thinking, Lakunle's condescension is evident when he declares, "A man must live by learning. A woman by the whims of her whims" (p. 8), and later, "Women have smaller brains, that's why they can't be as clever as us" (p. 6), reducing Sidi to an intellectually inferior being. Meanwhile, Baroka's pursuit of Sidi is rooted in his desire to affirm his traditional authority through polygamy and reproduction. His attraction to Sidi is less about love than it is about legacy and status. Sidi's beauty, captured in photographs by a visiting foreigner, becomes commodified—her image is admired and displayed, but her personhood is overlooked. As Simone de Beauvoir writes in The Second Sex, woman is positioned as "the Other," valued not for herself but as a reflection of male identity and desire. Sidi embodies this concept, admired as an exotic "jewel" and treated as a symbol of prestige rather than a person with agency.

Thus, through both characters, Soyinka reviews how women are objectified—whether in the name of modernity or tradition—and reveals how deeply entrenched patriarchal values reduce women to objects of male ambition, beauty, and control.

3.5 Gender-based marginalisation of women

In The Lion and the Jewel, Sidi's worth is predominantly tied to her physical beauty and virginity, reinforcing the patriarchal idea that a woman's value lies in her body and purity. Unlike the male characters, who are evaluated based on intellect, leadership, or accomplishments, Sidi is celebrated for her external appearance alone. Lakunle esteems himself for his Western education and mission to bring "books and schools and the Christian way of

life" to Ilujinle (Soyinka, p. 11), while Baroka takes pride in his political influence and past achievements as the Bale, asserting his relevance by boasting of thwarting government attempts to modernize the town with a railway (p. 26). In contrast, Sidi's prestige rises only after her photographs appear in a foreign magazine, reducing her to a visual symbol—what Simone de Beauvoir describes in The Second Sex as "the Other"—a being defined through the male gaze and for male validation. Sidi is treated not as a person with agency, but as a jewel: admired, possessed, and eventually subdued.

This objectification is further underscored by the symbolic meaning behind the play's title. The Lion, representing Baroka, connotes dominance, power, and calculated manipulation; while the Jewel, symbolizing Sidi, evokes a sense of preciousness without autonomy—something to be admired and possessed. Baroka manipulates those around him—including his senior wife Sadiku—to secure Sidi as his newest bride. In a telling moment, Sadiku proudly declares: "I did it. I saw it happen with your father Okiki… I used to be his favourite too" (p. 32), ironically celebrating a cycle of patriarchal possession passed from one generation to the next. Her celebration of Baroka's supposed impotence, which he fabricated as a ruse, only reinforces how women in the play are used as tools for male gamesmanship.

Baroka's ability to deceive Sadiku and eventually entrap Sidi reflects the systematic manipulation of women within Ilujinle's traditional society. Even Ailatu, Baroka's favorite wife, is momentarily pacified with empty promises while he plans his next conquest. When questioned by Sidi about Ailatu's jealousy, Baroka deflects the issue and instead lectures Sidi on the burdens of male leadership, drawing attention away from female suffering and back onto himself (p. 39). By the play's end, Sidi is married to Baroka—not out of love, but out of a defeated submission. Lakunle's vision of modern equality is rendered ineffective, as Sidi ultimately conforms to the norms dictated by the village's patriarchal structure.

The play's final implication is clear: women remain subject to a long-standing patriarchal order, whether through the seductive authority of tradition (Baroka) or the shallow idealism of modernity (Lakunle). Soyinka's The Lion and the Jewel thus becomes not merely a satire of modern vs. traditional values but a sharp commentary on gender inequality, where women are assigned value only through their utility to men. The work critiques both colonial modernity and indigenous patriarchy, showing how both systems fail to empower women or recognize them as full human beings.

Wole Soyinka portrays women as lacking intelligence.

In The Lion and the Jewel, Wole Soyinka portrays female characters as intellectually inferior and easily manipulated within a male-dominated society. Sidi's initial defiance and attempt to ridicule Baroka—mocking his supposed impotence—quickly unravels when she is lured into his trap. Baroka seduces her by appealing to her vanity and curiosity, showing her a stamp-making machine and promising her image will appear on national stamps, thereby commodifying her beauty and exploiting her desire for recognition (Soyinka, p. 38). This episode exemplifies how Sidi, despite her spirited nature, becomes a victim of patriarchal manipulation, seduced not by genuine affection but by promises of fame and symbolic power.

Sadiku, on the other hand, is portrayed as deeply naive. She eagerly believes Baroka's fabricated impotence and spreads the rumor without question, exclaiming with pride: "I did it! I did it to your father too, Okiki. I tamed him!" (p. 32). Her gullibility makes her an unwitting accomplice in Baroka's plan to entrap Sidi. Like Sidi, she is used as a pawn—celebrating what she believes is a triumph over male power, while actually being manipulated by it. This pattern reflects Simone de Beauvoir's notion of woman as "the Other," in which women are denied subjectivity and are instead defined and used by men according to male interests and narratives.

Furthermore, Lakunle's patronizing attitude reinforces the portrayal of women as intellectually inferior. He tells Sidi, "You have a smaller brain than mine. That is why you are a woman" (p. 6), echoing colonial-era pseudo-scientific justifications for gender inequality. Although Lakunle positions himself as a modern reformer, he upholds sexist ideologies that undermine women's intelligence and agency. Ultimately, both Sidi and Sadiku are portrayed as women lacking the critical capacity to navigate a world controlled by manipulative and self-assured men.

Through these depictions, Soyinka critiques not only traditional Yoruba patriarchy but also the failure of so-called modernist men like Lakunle to offer true gender equality. The women in the play remain defined by their relationships to men—desired, used, or ridiculed—but rarely empowered to shape their own destinies. This reinforces the central feminist reading of the play: women are portrayed less as autonomous individuals and more as symbolic objects within a patriarchal cultural framework.

3.6. The subordinate position of women as objects of possession

The subjugation and objectification of women in The Lion and the Jewel are vividly embodied through the character of Baroka, the titular "lion," who accumulates wives as though they were ornamental possessions—comparable to a curated collection of fine china. In one revealing scene, while one of his wives, Ailatu, is plucking his armpit hairs, Baroka casually informs her of his intention to take another wife. He assures her, however, that she alone will retain the "honour" of this peculiar grooming ritual. This interaction, laced with both playful mockery and strategic manipulation, illustrates Baroka's emotional control over his wives and underscores the transactional nature of marriage in the play (Soyinka, p. 29). The act is symbolic: even the most intimate moments between husband and wife are reduced to acts of submission and ownership.

This commodification of women is further reinforced by the traditional practice of paying a bride-price, which reduces marriage to a financial exchange. Lakunle rejects the custom, calling it "the buying of a heifer from the herd" (p. 8), though ironically, he still regards Sidi as inferior due to her gender. Sidi herself, while initially resistant to patriarchal expectations, becomes intoxicated by her newfound fame after her photograph is published in a foreign magazine. Her self-perception shifts dramatically: she no longer wishes simply to marry, but now seeks admiration and recognition. Her pride in being desired reflects how her identity is shaped not by internal growth, but by how men and society perceive her outward beauty.

Through these examples, Soyinka reveals how women are reduced to objects for male possession and admiration. Sidi is no longer merely a village girl—she becomes a jewel, valuable only insofar as she can be flaunted. This ties directly into Simone de Beauvoir's argument in The Second Sex, where she asserts that "woman is defined and differentiated with reference to man… she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential." In the world of Ilujinle, women are consistently defined by how useful, beautiful, or obedient they are to men, with little regard for their inner lives or autonomy. Baroka's manipulation of his wives and his eventual conquest of Sidi reinforce a patriarchal hierarchy where men dominate and women are both literally and symbolically owned.

Discussion

In *The Lion and the Jewel*, Wole Soyinka presents a complex portrayal of women that both reflects and critiques traditional gender roles, making the play a rich site for feminist analysis—particularly from a postcolonial feminist perspective. The central female character, Sidi, is depicted primarily through the lens of her physical beauty, which becomes a symbol of her social worth. This mirrors Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman as "the other," defined in relation to male desire and validation. Sidi's image in the foreign magazine elevates her status in the village, yet this recognition is rooted in external, male-dominated media that objectifies her. Despite rejecting Lakunle's patriarchal modernism, which disguises sexist attitudes as progressivism, Sidi ultimately succumbs to Baroka's manipulative charm, raising questions about female agency in a male-dominated society. From a postcolonial feminist viewpoint, Sidi's journey highlights the intersection of tradition, gender, and power, revealing how women's roles are constructed and constrained within cultural and colonial legacies. This complexity in her character invites a nuanced reading that sees her as neither entirely empowered nor fully oppressed, but rather caught in the shifting dynamics of gender and authority in a postcolonial context.

Women are shown in a negative light by portraying them as submissive, inert, and authentic. The depiction of women in a negative manner suggests the presence of gender bias. They are depicted as the recipients of masculine deeds and the conduits or bearers of men's issues. Women are shown as the conduits or bearers of men's issues. In the scenario when Baroka desired a new spouse, he dispatched Sadiku, his primary wife, to inform Sidi that the village chief wants to take her as his wife. This predicament is resolved when Sidi consents to marry Baroka after succumbing to his cunning tactics. Baroka's manipulation of Sidi into marrying him shows how power is exercised over women using charm and trickery. Considering the treatment of female characters by Soiynka, it clearly appears that he writes from a marked traditional ideological point of view. Mulvey (as mentioned in Gauntlet, 2002) also discovered similar findings, stating that women performers and characters are portrayed differently from men. Men typically dominate the narrative, whereas women are often seen as submissive.

In the play, The Lion and the Jewel, Lakunle considers himself superior due to his education in Western countries. He harbors a condescending attitude towards female characters, particularly Sidi and Sadiku. He considers them to be primitive because they lack education and continue to uphold traditional customs such as bride-prices, which he views as barbarous and characteristic of uncivilized societies. He desires to alter Sidi's attire and intends for Sadiku to attend school at the age of seventy. This demonstrates that women are represented through men's ideologies. Patriarchal ideologies in different societies in the world have fuelled the crisis of stereotyping

women through their literary texts. Therefore, women are mostly affected because society deems them inferior.

Furthermore, it is found that women are depicted in a negative and objectifying manner compared to men. They are often portrayed as sexual objects, with only certain parts of their bodies, such as hands, legs, or lips, being highlighted rather than their bodies as a whole. In instances where their full bodies are shown, the images tend to be sexually provocative. Sidi's beauty is likened to the radiance of sunlight and the delicate freshness of morning dew. Similarly, Woldemariam (2018) discovered that women experience fragmentation when their bodily parts are compared to elements of nature, such as roses, sunlight, and stars. This comparison portrays women as passive, natural, and consumable. In addition, Al-Nakeeb (2018) discovered female characters are primarily portrayed based on their physical attractiveness and sexual availability, but this is not the true for male characters.

Conclusion

This study has examined Wole Soyinka's The Lion and the Jewel in the light of feminism and discovered a patriarchal representation. The women in the play are presented as predominantly passive, second-class, and man-dependent, beset by rural backwardness, and endowed with little intellectual or agency power. They are largely confined to the traditional roles of caretakers and small traders, since men occupy seats of authority, decision-making, and intellectual leadership. Such a gendered division reflects a more pervasive societal structuring that prioritizes masculine authority and maintains female voices marginalized. The research identifies how the play supports stereotypical gender roles by presenting males as active agents and females as recipients of action, supporting the hierarchical values of a patriarchal society. The evaluation of women as emotionally driven and intellectually limited underlies their prohibition from playing influential roles in society. Even with its satirical critique of contemporary modernity and humorous tone, The Lion and the Jewel eventually reinstates the traditional values restricting women's activities and validating male dominance. These findings contribute to a better understanding of how African literature is both capable of reflecting and subverting the dominant gender norms. Through its interrogation of gender roles assigned to women in these texts, this study identifies a need for engaging feminist criticism to retrieve and problematize the cultural discourses affecting gender identities within postcolonial societies. This, therefore, means that what women are seen to be, in Soyinka's text, is not just a description of fictional characters but an articulation of broader society attitudes which still impact how and what women come to represent within African contexts.

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