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National Advancement and Nation Building: The Role of the Female Literary Artist/Writer

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of female literary artists and writers in national advancement and nation-building, with a focus on Nigeria. It highlights how gender has become a crucial determinant in literary discourse and explores the contributions of female writers in shaping societal values, beliefs, and ideals. The study traces the evolution of Nigerian female literary writers, from early depictions of passive women in male-authored works to the emergence of strong, independent female characters in contemporary literature. It discusses the impact of feminism and womanism in redefining the representation of women in literature and emphasizes how education and economic independence have empowered female writers and their fictional characters. Through critical analyses of works by notable Nigerian female authors such as Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and Zaynab Alkali, the paper demonstrates how literature serves as a tool for advocating gender equality, social change, and national development. Ultimately, it argues that the recognition and appreciation of female literary voices are essential for fostering a balanced and progressive society.

Keywords: *national advancement, nation building, female literary writer, gender roles*

Introduction

Without mincing words, it is a well-known fact that women in any society are productive and innovative contributors to nation-building and societal advancement. Today, gender issues are so important that they have been regarded as a "crucial determinant in the production, circulation, and consumption of literary discourse" (Showalter, 1989, p. 1). In recent times, gender has become an acknowledged and observable fact, making it nearly impossible to discuss any issue whether literary, social, political, philosophical, or economic—without specific reference to gender.

Like their male counterparts, female literary writers and artists cannot be separated from their society, as they are integral to it. Through their creative works, they provide critical evaluations, productive analyses, and viewpoints on the political, social, and economic affairs of their society, thereby shaping and conveying their beliefs, values, ideals, and thoughts on building a productive nation. We believe that with fair play among all members of society, gender equality, gender balance, and empowerment, female writers and artists have played and continue to play significant roles in national advancement and nation-building, not only in Nigeria but around the world.

The Literary Artist/Writer in Nigeria:
Literary writing is a venture in which words and language are used imaginatively to express, explore, and discover feelings, ideas, and values across various forms, including prose, poetry, drama, fiction, and creative non-fiction. Regardless of the genre, a literary work reflects the way of life of its creators, capturing the reality of their experiences through devices such as language, setting, plot, figurative language, and characterization. A literary writer or artist channels creativity and imagination into writing or performance. Often, the literary writer or artist is depicted in various and sometimes conflicting ways. They may be viewed as a visionary or a madman, a prophet or a conformist, a creator or a destroyer. Thus, the literary writer or artist represents many things to many people; however, a recurring image emerges: the artistic quality, the gift of imagination, and the ability to visualize. The act of writing engages a writer's imagination and creativity in a critical sense. The writer writes about someone and for someone because:

> Literature is a social institution: it is created by the writer, who is a member of the society. Its medium is language, which is a social creation. It represents life, which is a social reality. It is addressed to men who form a social body. It is centrally conditioned by social and other forces and,

> in turn, exerts social influence (Demeterio, 2011, p. 11).

The literary writer as a member of the society projects his/her ideas on observations and happenings in the society through literary writings. Writing about the involvement of the writer in politics, Achebe states according to Dasylva that:

> …any African who tries to avoid the big social and political issues of contemporary African will end up being completely irrelevant like that absurd man in the proverb who leaves his house burning to pursue a rat fleeing from the flames (2003, p. 209).

Within the academic realm/circle, the literary writer is viewed as an academic or scholar in the field of knowledge. With this knowledge, the literary writer can then inform, educate, direct and when the need arises criticize happenings in the society with a view to effecting positive change. The literary writer uses this knowledge in:

> a specialized creative manner and with the sole aim of sourcing for relevant materials from the pool of experiences. The selected materials (experiences) he/she interprets, recreates imaginatively, and reflects or refracts, depending on his/her level of consciousness and degree of commitment (Dasylva, 2003, p. 201).

The power of the literary writer's imagination and innovative creativity is essential for development of a nation or society. A nation without visionaries or innovators of ideas and possibilities is a nation on the way to self-destruction. How then do the literary writer and his/her writings contribute to national development in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria?

The literary writer/artist and his/her creative works are one and the same. There might be an academic futility in trying to disengage one from the other for, one might be engaging in the dilemma of "who could not tell the hunter from the hunted". Therefore our discussion will alternate these terms; the literary writer(s)/artist(s) and literary writings/ arts/literature.

Nigerian Female Literary Writers:
Just like in other endeavors, male African writers were present in the literary scene long before women began to write. Consequently, their depiction of women in fictional works has been biased, presenting characters who seem satisfied with the subjugated roles assigned to them by society. The shadowy portrayal of women in early Nigerian literature reflects the patriarchal nature of society. Although women were integral and significant members of most traditional societies, they were often relegated to the background, hardly recognized or visible, and restricted to domestic chores. Meanwhile, developmental efforts and leadership struggles were primarily led by men. These authors focused on the male characters of society, while women remained unnoticed and invisible, often portrayed in abstract terms. With colonial domination, Western education became the standard for measuring advancement and civilization, yet schools were predominantly male-dominated. As a result, men were depicted as the pursuers of nation-building, societal advancement, and peaceful coexistence, while the few educated women were portrayed as girlfriends, socialites, wives, free women, mothers, or prostitutes.

Defending this action, (Taiwo, 1984, pp. 11-12) believes: "It is not because the male writers want to be biased, but women are portrayed as they are because the writer wants to be faithful to the realities of the world he represents".

Today, Nigerian women like their African Counterparts, are very active in the literary scene. Since Flora Nwapa wrote and got her first literary work *Efuru* published in London in 1966, more and more women have flooded the Nigerian literary scene. And by the early 1970s there emerged female writers like, Zulu Sofola, Catherine Acholonu, Adaora

Lily Ulasi, Buchi Emecheta, Zaynab Alkali etc. The emergence of women writers on the literary scene in Nigeria marks the beginning of female centered novels. Today, Nigeria has an avalanche of female writers from different parts of the country writing variously in the English language as well as in the different indigenous languages like; Hausa, Yoruba, Ibo, Nupe etc. The new generations of female writers in recent times have no doubt been more visible than their contemporaries. The likes of; Stella Oyedepo, Zaynab Alkali, Ifeoma Okoye, Balkisu Salisu Ahmad Funtua, Habiba Imam Ikara, Saliha Abdullahi Zaria, Mable Segun, Remi Adedeji, Folashayo Ogunrinde, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Asabe Kabir Usman Kaine Agary Razinatu Muhammad, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, Chika Unigwe etc are all household names in the literary world.

The Roles of Nigerian Female Literary Writers in National Advancement and Nation Building:

The female character in African fiction before the advent of female writers into the literary scene was that lack luster being, the docile and quiet member of the household who was satisfied with bearing children and taking care of the children. It is a presentation of a being that is satisfied with the subjugated role assigned her in a male dominated society; she is never part of any decision making whatsoever, even those that affect her directly and as (Chukwuma, 1989, p. 132) asserts, "A woman's limitations are many and in an argument, the husband is always right."

Many female writers believe that when a woman writes, she writes based on her personal experiences which in most cases have to do with things that affect them directly or indirectly especially gender related issues. Many of them have resorted to writing about their beliefs of the social, political and economic responsibilities as they affect the sexes. This ideology has been termed by critics' as feminism.

Feminism as a movement advocates for the social, political and economic equality of both sexes. It believes that women are discriminated upon by society, and that they have most often been excluded from contributing their quota to available social, political,

economic arenas and institutions. Chukwuma, (1994, p. ix) believes feminism "means a rejection of inferiority and striving for recognition. It seeks to give the woman a sense of self as a worthy, effectual and contributing human being; women conditioning in Africa is the greatest barrier toward a fulfillment of self". Furthermore;

> Feminism can be described as: a movement seeking the re-organization of the world upon a basis of gender equality in all human relations; a movement which would reject every differentiation between individuals upon the grounds of gender, that would abolish all gender privileges and burdens, and would strive to set up the recognition of the common humanity of women and men as the foundation of law and custom. (Kramarae and Treichler, 1986, p. 158)

Feminism therefore seeks out to advocate the social change in women's status by changing the way in which society views them. The term "feminism" has negative connotation in Africa even by female writers and it is sometimes regarded as a diversion or even a curse. African women scholars like Emecheta (1981), Kolawole (1997), Badejo (1999) and Ogunyemi (1985) have disowned and rejected the label "feminism" as they explore women's voicelessness and/or (in) audibility and human oppression in their writings. They have accused Western feminism of universalizing women's experience and hence occasioning cultural imperialism. Said (1993) confirms that Third World societies are designated in exclusionary terms and so women are excluded from most discourses even those that concern them. Min-Ha (1989) holds the same view when he argues that third world women are treated as an out-group to be spoken for by mainstream in-group.

To avoid this exclusion, African woman came up with a term "womanism". Womanism is a woman centered ideology which is compromising in nature and believes in the freedom and independence

of women (Ogunyemi 1996). The womanists believe it is time for women to be heard, listened to, and their meaningful contributions to society accepted as relevant in social, political and economic development. "Womanism thus, desires that man and woman should be in harmony in the home and in the society at large" (Ogini, 1996, p.15): womanism seeks to support all women and what they stand for and to expose all infringements committed against them. "Womanist theory has always played a pivotal role in consciousness-raising, while it also acts in the public spotlight to improve the life of women in general" (Peter, 2010, p. 204). "Womanism is black centred; it is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism but, unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men" (Ogunyemi, 1985, p. 60). Unlike western feminism, womanism does not work against men but rather accommodates them. This is because most African women are also committed to the institution of the family and even though they hold their men in high regard and do not want to do without them, they certainly do not want to be maltreated by them.

> It takes into account the African philosophy of life which emphasizes marriage as a social institution. However, it condemns all forms of patriarchy which dehumanizes woman and portrays her as a second-class citizen. Rooted in African historical and cultural experiences, it advances the view of the complementarities between man and woman by stressing the Male-Female principle in the creative order. (Maduka, 2005, pp. 8-9)

Female writers from Nigeria like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Ifeoma Okoye, Zaynab Alkali, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Kaine Agary, etc all respond differently to their characterization of women in their fictional works: thus, they depict most of their women as significant

beings whose roles in society are so pertinent and vital that without them, the male characters in the fictional works cannot function successfully. The earlier presentation of the submissive, lack luster, uneducated woman is replaced by a modern woman, who is educated to a certain level, a self-confident figure who knows what she wants and is ready to fight for, claim, and keep what she feels rightly belongs to her. These heroines are portrayed as important and viable individuals, participating in a world shared with their male counterparts, defining their own space and contributing to the social realities of their societies. These female authors try to build their characters as important component of their societies who strive in their different ways to make meaningful contributions to national advancement and nation building. A few examples from selected novels written by Nigerian female writers will illustrate our arguments.

Buchi Emecheta's female in *Second Class Citizen*, *Kehinde*, *Destination Biafra* etc, try to extricate themselves from the dogmas of tradition which tie them down to be responsible members of the society, thereby helping to build and advance its development:

> The women excel in their roles. They are forceful and articulate thinking beings whom the reader is brought to recognize and appreciate as individuals not types. Each character brings to bear on a shifting situation her own peculiar way of solving the problem hence we appreciate them for what they are and have become and not so much what they are supposed to be (Chukwuma, 1989, p. 9).

This we see in the characters of Adah in *Second Class Citizen*; Kehinde in *Kehinde*; Nnuego and Adaku in *The Joys of Motherhood.* For instance, Debbie in Emecheta's *Destination Biafra*;

> Wanted to do something more than just child breading and rearing and being a good passive wife to a man whose ego she must boost all her days while making sure

> to submerge every impulse that made her a full human…. Surely every person should have the right to live as he or she wished, however different that life might seem to another (45).

We see these women like Debbie struggling and surviving by any means, creating, planning, organizing and responding to a society that seeks to deny them a place, a voice, value and sometimes even visibility.

Agary in *Yellow-Yellow* builds her formidable characters around Sisi, Zilayefa, Lolo and Bibi, the four prominent female characters. In Sisi, Agary portrays an independent, society woman who was a business tycoon:

> Sisi was so business savvy and creative that she was very good at coming up with ideas, with projects that she would sell to the procurement officer of an establishment for the oil companies. She supplied everything from toilet paper to pickup trucks for lease. That was how she made her money. When she started, she was the only woman in Port Harcourt who won contracts of large value from most companies, and she was the only woman, period who had contracts from the oil companies (54-55).

We see in Bibi the depiction of a very courageous woman who could go an extra mile to make sure her daughter gets the best in life. In Lolo, Agary creates a role model for Zilayefa, because, after her youth service at Elf Acquaintance in Lagos, she went back to Port-Harcourt and jumped into the family business. "Lolo quickly jumped into the role of custodian, managing her parents' investments and properties" (58). Clara described Lolo to Zilayefa as "small but mighty" (59). Lolo was depicted as a courageous and open minded person who strives to

achieve what she feels she wants in life and "even though Lolo's parents and her brothers had been very protective of her when she was growing up, she was very ambitious. She knew the value of her name in Port-Harcourt and knew how to use it to open doors. She used her connections to get contracts with the oil companies", (59).

In *Yellow-Yellow,* Agary creates a new vision of African women who seek self-identity by defining themselves, doing what they want, and seeking how best they can achieve their dreams by escaping the traditional and cultural roles assigned them as wives, mothers, daughters or sisters. In general, Agary's female characters are portrayed as hardworking, industrious, business-like and economically independent.

Adichie, in her second novel *Half of a Yellow Sun* tackles issues which are thematically related to what is in *Purple Hibiscus*. The author projects women characters struggling to keep their families, hopeful even when the country is going through a civil war. In *Half of a Yellow Sun* women are portrayed as determined and progressive. They give direction when and where necessary and guide their men and society in time of difficulties. For example, they frantically and continuously search for food and medicine during the war and that way sustain their communities. Kainene for example, introduces the idea of growing crops to feed the refugees during the time when there is no food forthcoming to the Biafrans. Olanna on the other hand goes ahead to try and get an alternative job for her husband who appears reserved as the war gets fierce. She also starts a school to teach the children such that there would be continuity after the war.

In *Purple Hibiscus* Aunty Ifeoma and Aunty Phillipa are educated and thus enlightened. Ifeoma's forthrightness and assertiveness are as a result of the power of education. She is educated and aware when things are going wrong. Adichie uses her so that she can contrast her with the sister-in-law Beatrice who depends on her husband economically. Women also come together for the sake of their communities by supplying food and singlet to the Biafra army. Women supply things to the army in their win-the-war efforts: Madu says:

"there is a group of women at the barracks every other day, from all sorts of backwater villages, bringing yams and plantains and fruits to the soldiers" (183). Women also organize a seminar in Nsukka titled "In Case of War", in an effort to prepare fellow women in case war breaks out.

The theme of women education in Adichie‟s novels resonates well with Mariama Ba in *So Long a Letter* where education has the potential to provide women with the possibility of crafting new identity beyond that of womanhood and acquire consciousness of empowerment that impacts on their relationship with males at the family and societal levels. This we see in the character of Assatou.

Abdulmajid in *Mace Mutum* like other contemporary Hausa women writers, in reality draws the reader and the critic into reading their novels as their contributions to the ongoing debate over a number of very important issues that pose as challenges to traditional and contemporary Hausa women and the marriage institution within the cultural, historical, and social contexts of a traditional society that has nonetheless undergone tremendous social changes. These changes include education and its role in raising the woman to the apex in her society. In fact these women "Strive to extricate their feet from cultural impediments as they embark on the journey to their dream land" (Opara, 1990, p. 160).

In *Sa'adatu Sa'ar Mata (Sa'adatu the Glowing Star)*, Balkisu Ahmad creates a new vision of a Hausa woman character who seeks self identity by defining herself, doing what she wants, and seeking how best she can achieve her dreams without necessarily defying the religious, traditional and cultural roles assigned her first as daughter, later as wife and finally as mother. Balkisu Ahmad depicted Sa'adatu as a hardworking, industrious, business-like and economically independent character. We see this when Sa'adatu went for a professional course in the United Kingdom and she used the little money she was earning in her spare time to start a business. This business later became a partnership with a colleague Cinvia, whom she had met in the United Kingdom.

In Zaynab Alkali's *The Descendants*, Seytu the heroine is portrayed as rising from a very humble background to become a medical doctor. Through Seytu, Alkali voices out her disgust at women who are weak and do not have a focus in life. She illustrates the value of education and self determination for aspiring woman who struggle against sexual discrimination, unhappy marital life to achieve individuality and independence. This same view was asserted once by Emecheta (1998, p. 175), when she says:

> I have no sympathy for a woman who deserts her children neither do I have sympathy for a woman who insists in staying in a marriage with a brute of a man; simply to be respectable. I want very much to further the education of women in Africa because education really helps the women.

Education is one of the most significant devices of empowerment highlighted by female writers. Most of them write about the virtues and values of education to the life of the girl-child which eventually leads her to the apex in society. For example Seytu in Alkali's *The Descendants* rises to become the chief medical director of a hospital. Hawwa her daughter becomes the commissioner for health in her state. Their rise to these positions enables them to contribute their quota to the development of their societies. Hasiya the heroine of Balkisu Salisu Funtua's *Allura Cikin Ruwa* is portrayed as a very successful barrister; Fatima in *Wa Ya San Gobe* becomes the Commissioner for Education in her state; while Saadatu in *Saadatu Sa'ar* Mata becomes a renowned business woman.

Most of these female writers believe that the only thing that can save the girl-child from negative cultural values is "a good and sound education". Their views on the education of the female child as a weapon for liberation was echoed sometimes ago by a renowned writer the late Alhaji Abubakar Gimba (1999), when he advocated in "A letter to my Daughter that:

> Your education…will…. enable you to be able to stand on your own and take care of yourself, but also help you to be a good mother. A good mother brings up good and responsible children, who will be future good wives and good husbands…On good mothers depend the evolution of good families and good families make for a wonderful nation….so a good mother is the bedrock of a good society (105).

As a result, in Nigeria as in other African Countries, the perception that women's education ends in the kitchen is fast fading as women today, have managed to combine, wifehood and womanhood with their respective careers. With education women strive to have a say in the developmental process of their societies. Gone are the days when you have the women being relegated to the background. They have successfully survived both roles and they are found at the top in the society. For example, as a result of education, women in Nigeria today hold important and sensitive positions in their pursuit for nation building, advancement and socioeconomic development of their societies. In Nigeria today, there are female judges, ministers, permanent Secretaries, heads if tertiary institutions, heads of Federal government agencies, special advisers, ambassadors and high commissioners who are forces to reckon with in building the Nigerian nation as well as advancing her development. Illustrations of these successful females most times form the characters of the female literary writer/artist in her quest in positing the roles of the female literary writer in national advancement and nation building.

Conclusion

The portrayals of female characters created by most early Nigerian contemporary male and female writers revolve around marriage and procreation. This depiction suggests that a woman's life is incomplete without a life partner or children, especially male children. Women are often forced to live in men's bondage, with their identities defined solely by their fathers, brothers, husbands, or sons never by themselves. As Arndth (2002, p. 109) notes, "this adversely weakens

their position in society." The most compelling factor contributing to female subjugation in Nigeria, as in other African countries, has always been a lack of education and economic dependence on male family members, along with traditional and social demands that keep women tied to societal expectations, as their identities are rooted there. Today, the narrative is changing. Nigerian female writers are challenging these depictions by portraying their female characters as vital and capable individuals who participate equally in a world shared with their male counterparts. These characters define their own spaces and contribute to the social realities of their lives. They possess substantial life experience and strive to determine their own paths. These new heroines break free from cultural constraints, as noted by Opara (1990, p. 160): "They strive to extricate their feet from cultural impediments as they embark on the journey to their dream land." It is no wonder that their female characters are portrayed as heroines of reality. From the examples provided, it is clear that female-authored texts offer self-images, patterns of self-analysis, and insights into women's experiences that have been overlooked by male and colonial writers. Similarly, female writers highlight their femaleness and femininity in their narratives, emphasizing the power differences between men and women. For a country to achieve success in national advancement and nation-building, its female literary writers must be recognized and appreciated. To remain relevant, female literary writers must be attuned to the social realities of their society to advocate for national progress through their characters, as "social experience is the primary source of literature" (Amuta, 1986, p. 85).

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Sanditon **and the Woman Figure***: A Struggle for Wholeness*

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Abstract

The study examined Sanditon, an unfinished novella written by Jane Austen, the English woman writer of the nineteenth century whose ideology was mostly considered to be antediluvian. It investigated the genesis of women's oppression and social position during the Victorian era and argued that there is a discontinuity in the author's focus in this fragmentary novella for rather than the naïve, docile "feminine ideal" that permeate her earlier novels, Sanditon challenges traditional gender roles by presenting independent female characters who symbolise female agency, female desire, autonomy and self-determination. The novella again critiques patriarchal society through a satirical depiction of masculine agency and the exposure of gender-based oppression.

Keywords: *Nineteenth Century Ideology, Sex/Gender Distinction, Female Oppression, Female agency, Desire and Autonomy.*

Introduction

Jane Austen is often known, studied and interpreted as a writer too plain "plain Jane," domesticated and obsessed with depicting human life "all human life," despite the elegant character depiction in her novels, her precision of language and exquisite narrative strategy (see amongst others, Dicks 1992:39-43 & Reeves 1968:41-3). The writer has been criticised of always portraying female characters, trivial life, and writing about the prosperous people in the society. It is against this background that this study seeks to re-evaluate Austen's *Sanditon*, a fragmentary novella written at the height of her literary career, from a distinct female perspective, a perspective that breaks away from earlier misconceptions that lump her work into historical narratives governed by presuppositions that remain predominantly masculine.

Sanditon's **Storyline**

Known by Cassandra (Jane Austen's elder sister) as "The Brothers", and by the rest of the family as "The Last Work," *Sanditon* focuses centrally on notions of home, origin and belonging. The story begins in agitation. Mr. and Mrs. Parker, travelling from London to the Coast, are upset and slightly injured in an accident. Immediately however, they recover in a nearby household. In a moment then, the reader is hustled into Sanditon itself, which refers to a small village on the Sussex Coast, which the endlessly enthusiastic and entrepreneurial Mr. Parker hopes to see develop into a fashionable resort:

> The sure resort of the very best company whose regular, steady, private families of thorough gentility and character, who are a blessing everywhere, excited the industry of the poor and diffuse comfort and improvement among them of every sort (P. 10)

Mr. Parker's efforts in that direction forms a major part of the story, as the writer, in her usual fashion, appears to satirise the spirit of novelty and change which characterised the time, and the hypochondria and vogue for new cures involved in resort life.

On another level, *Sanditon* features among Austen's literary works labelled "minor works," perhaps partly because of their fragmentary nature. However, despite its designation as "minor" the novella contains not only the historical recreation evident in the "major works" but also a literary style that explores both moral and feminist predicaments. The novella describes the social and romantic entanglements of Charlotte Heywood, a sensible and level-headed young woman, the local great lady/ the avaricious lady Denham, and another young woman, Clara Brereton, who was being courted, not entirely honourably by lady Denham's nephew, Edward. Towards the end of the story, the arrival of the West Indian heiress, whom Lady Denham plans to pair with Edward, complicates the scene even further.

Women in Nineteenth Century English Society
In Western philosophy, women were portrayed as matter, body, fluidity, physicality, "boundarylessness", irrationality and artificiality. Many women in the western world lacked political or economic rights.

They are "the other" or the opposite, the mirror image or the shadow of all the positive values male dominated western philosophy privileges and respects, from reason to truth, identity and authenticity. In this sense, a woman is linked either as a daughter or a wife, to the inescapable umbilical cord, "the man". As a daughter, she is owned by the father while as a wife she is the inertial property of the husband. In essence, the patriarchal society views woman as a domesticated being whose rightful place is the home.

In this light, early modern English women were directed to confine their literary aspirations to socially acceptable "feminine" genres like religion, parables and translation of male-authored texts. These areas corresponded to traditional female virtues of chastity and obedience, and the domestic roles that male writers of conduct books exhorted women cultivate. Within the literary hierarchies also, these private genres ranked below the masculine public ones like Epic Poetry, Tragedy and History (see among others, Morgan 1991 & Martin 1997)

The early nineteenth century Europe therefore was a period of double critical standard which had seriously affected the socio-political outlook. While social changes brought about by Humanist theories and Reformation ideologies admittedly had little effect in achieving greater female participation in politics, government and related areas, they however did gradually encourage many women to develop a heightened awareness about their nature and status, and to prompt a few into writing "eloquently creative challenges to gender restrictions" (Thompson, 1950).

Consequent upon that, a good number of literature has been written on the prominence of the female voice to demonstrate the struggle against female domination. Virginia Woolf, a central figure within the English literary tradition extensively engaged with the question of gender and sexuality. Her "Room of One's Own" (1929) expresses the social and psychic meanings of gendered identity. In the essay, she considers the essence/nature of women, the kind of literature they produce and equally the one written about them. Her long essay, "Three Guineas" (1938) argues for a profound connection between patriarchal forms of

culture and the rise of fascism (Moi, 1999:154-5). Again, J.S Mills' *The Subjection of Women* (1869) serves as a classic rejection of unequal treatment of the sexes.

In a nutshell, during the nineteenth century, when Jane Austen was writing, many female writers were intensively involved with fiction about national and cultural identity and its complex relations to gender. At that time, the best history of a nation "cultural nationalism" involved myth and fantasy, popular customs and sentiments, the exploration of identity as well as the struggle to tell your own story (Eagleton, 2005)

The Sex/Gender Distinction

My point of departure in this essay is to explore how the novella, *Sanditon,* represents our perception of feminist ideology in mid-nineteenth century, especially in a writer so acclaimed simply as a realist, concerned with the depiction of an ideal society. In the novella, Austen deploys characters like Sir Edward Denham, to satirise masculine entitlement and the objectification of women. This goes a long way to expose gender-based oppression. *Sanditon* highlights the limited options and opportunities available to women, especially with regards to marriage and economic independence. According to Toril Moi, a renowned feminist scholar whose radical perspectives in *What is a Woman*, demonstrates her ability to rethink current debates about sex, gender and the body. Moi believes that critique and change may occur even within fairly traditional social structures of gender. She further rhetorically asks, "What does it take to change dominant gender relations, to undo *la dominance masculine*?" since patriarchal power is viewed as something universal and natural which is somewhat difficult to denaturalize (1999:284).

According to Simone de Beauvoir, another significant figure and progenitor of the feminist theory from whom Moi drew significant inspiration, and whose seminal work, *The Second Sex*, serves as a gospel to modern day feminist:

> Throughout history (women) have always been subordinated to men; their dependency is not the result of an event or a change- it was not something that *occurred*. It is in part because it does not have (*echappe a*) the accidental character of a historical fact that otherness in this case appears as an absolute. A situation created over time can be abolished at some other time, as the Negroes of Haiti and others have proved; but it seems that a natural condition
>
> is beyond the possibility of change. In truth, however, nature is no more immutably given than is historical reality. If woman discovers that she is the inessential which never returns to the essential, it is because she herself fails to take charge of this return (SS XXIV-XXV; DSa 18; TA)

To Beauvoir therefore, there can be no liberation until women themselves cease to reproduce the power mechanisms that confine them to their place, even though in spite of her own heroic efforts to construct a social understanding of the female condition, Beauvoir overestimates the ease with which change may be effected. In line with the foregoing argument, and despite the contribution of women in the perpetuation of a tradition which imprisons them, feminists have long ago criticised the notion of "male science," "male theory," or "male rationality." They argue that such phenomenon is inextricably linked with traditional sexualised categories of dominance and oppression.

According to the patriarchal imagination, what a woman needs is a man, not philosophy. If for instance, a woman declares that she too, feels the philosophical lack, her desire for knowledge can only be a compensation for her primary sexual frustration. On this logic then, the thinking woman necessarily becomes synonymous with what Moi describes as "the frustrated spinster of patriarchal ideology." So by positioning woman as a symbol of lack and negativity, Western Philosophy "turns her into the grand of her own existence." That is to say, by her very inferiority, she guarantees the superiority of

philosophy. Indeed, it is the very structure of scientific thought that philosophy presents woman as that which relentlessly undermines man's rational endeavours. (see Moi, 1999:348, Eagleton, 1990: 93-8 & Rivkin and Ryan eds. 1998:306).

The Subversion of Traditional Gender Roles in *Sanditon*

A careful scrutiny into Austen's earlier works reveals most of the female characters to be domestically restricted in their preoccupation with the solidity of everyday world, their shyness of absolute crises and ruptures, or their nervousness of the political. In other words, they possess ideal feminine values which complicates their own oppression. In those novels, the female characters tend to re-assert, nay perpetuate, the original subject/object division, nature objectified is female, whereas knowledge is characterised as male.

In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Mr. Bennet, who cannot bear the endless nattering of his foolish wife whose business in life was "to get her daughters married" and whose solace was "visiting and news," almost always finds consolation in his library. Likewise, while commenting on Mr. Wickham's elopement with Lydia in the same novel, the authorial voice tells us that "poor Jane would willingly have gone through the world without believing that so much wickedness existed in the whole race of mankind, as was collected here in one person," (Chp:33) which clearly refers to the distorted idealism common among the feminine ideal. Similarly, Anne Elliot in *Persuasion* (1818) has no say in where she will live or with whom, but once upon Upper cross, she hopes 'ere long' to become a not unworthy member of the circle. In *Mansfield Park* (1815), most of the characters, especially Fanny, appear natural and well-supported.

Critique of Patriarchal Society

In *Sanditon*, Austen stands to critique patriarchal society through a satirical portrayal of masculine entitlement and the objectification of women. The ludicrous Sir Edward Denham (a handsome fool who expects to make easy conquests by showing off his figure and parroting the language of sensibility) whose great object in life was to be

seductive, with such personal advantages as he knew himself to possess, and such talents as he also gives himself credit for, felt that he was formed to be:

> A dangerous man, quite in the line of the loveless, the very name of Sir Edward he thought, carried some degree of fascination with it - to be generally gallant and assiduous about the fair, to make fine speeches to every pretty girl, was but inferior part of the character he had to play (P. 49)

Yet, despite his conceited self-recommendation, (he was entitled according to his own view of society, "to approach Miss Heywood or any other young woman with pretensions to beauty, with high compliment and rhapsody, on the slightest acquaintance,") he was properly humbled by Charlotte's irremediable disdain. For in relation to Beauvoir's definitional concept of freedom, Austen's female characters in *Sanditon*, could be described as autonomous and self-determined. The major part of the narrative revolves around the encounter among the principal female characters and Mr. Edward. Miss Heywood (Charlotte), a reasonably sensible and responsible person who like most heroines in an Austen novel (Elizabeth Bennet, Anne Elliot, Emma Woodhouse) is not in the least tempted either by a man's good breeding or his social status. She assertively shows Edward how insufficient were his pretensions to attract her. Charlotte represents female agency. She undermines the view of the feminine ideal and stands to take charge of her life, make her own personal decisions and therefore defy categorisation

Similarly, in *Sanditon*, Austen attempts assiduously to question the imposition of social power which inevitably leads to the transmission or reproduction of power in other social spheres. While discussing "the arts," during a visit to the Parkers, (the popularity of the Parkers brought them so many visitors, among them Sir Edward Denham and his sisters) Sir Edward tries strenuously to show the superiority of man's feelings over that of a woman. In other words, he schematically attempts to recommend himself to the young ladies through eloquence,

even going further to make allusions to great male literary figures like Montgomery, Wordsworth and Campbell, which in itself embodies some underlying politics which associates literary production and gender, even though scholars like John Fawles links all literary creativity with femininity, because there are "Adam-women and Eve-men," yet, the literary enterprise was not considered fit for women (Eagleton, 1990:83)

Sir Edward, in his continued male /self-approbation demonstrates that a high-toned genius cannot in anyway be expected to display the grovellings of a "common mind." Charlotte, on her part, listened with unaffected scorn, to his half-baked literary allusions and calmly but sarcastically replies:

> I have read several of Burns poems with great delight, but I am not poetic enough to separate a man's poetry entirely from his character; and poor Burns' known irregularities, greatly interrupt my enjoyment of his lines. I have difficulty in depending on the truth of his feelings as a lover. I have not faith in the sincerity of the affections of a man of his descriptions. He felt and he wrote and he forgot (P. 42)

Therefore, despite his conspicuous self-approbation, there is nothing noble about Sir Edward's character. On the other hand, Lady Denham, an impoverished gentry, described as "the great lady of Sanditon," happens to exert power as a strong influence towards the development of the storyline. She had "been often necessarily mentioned at Willingden," for being Mr. Parker's colleague in speculation, as "Sanditon itself could not be talked of long, without the introduction of Lady Denham" who was a very rich old lady, who had buried two husbands, who knew the value of money" (P. 17).

In relation to the above, the fact that a particular woman "was very much looked up to" in a society where women were predominantly looked down upon is a vigorous reaction to the traditional and conservative view of women in nineteenth century England. Traditionally in European societies, women could neither inherit

property nor money as we have seen within the Bennet family in *Pride and Prejudice,* whose estate was entailed to a distant cousin despite the presence of a wife and five daughters. Here, the portrayal of Lady Denham in *Sanditon*, as a woman of great fortune who had survived two husbands, points to the fact that women, as members of a class which is economically oppressed, are beginning to gain economic independence. They are beginning to develop a political and social sense, in contrast to their lack for leisure and their inheritance of a traditional submissiveness. It is thus:

> Through gainful employment that woman has traversed most of the distance that separated her from the male… once she has ceased to be a parasite, the system crumbles, between her and the universe, there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator Beauvoir (1949:689).

Again, even after the death of Lady Denham's first husband, and she was to remarry, Sir Harry Denham of Denham Park, only succeeded in removing her and her large income to his own domains but failed to succeed in the views of permanently enriching his family, for she had been careful enough and "too weary to put anything out of her own power" (P. 18). In view of the foregoing discussion, it is evident that in order to produce the necessary social belief in the legitimacy of the existing dominant power structures, one must be able to estimate sterling moral qualities to the same extent, which however, may be difficult to uphold, just like Moi (1999) asserts:

> One must be noble to act nobly, but one would cease to be noble if one did not act nobly. In other words, social magic has very real effects. Assigning someone to a group of superior essence, (noblemen as opposed to commoners, men as opposed to women, educated as opposed to uneducated, etc) causes that person to undergo a subjective transformation that contributes to bringing about a real transformation likely to bring him closer to the assigned define-tion. P305

Female Agency

In Austen's late stories, to which *Sanditon* belongs, there is a shift from the general concern with displacement and disarray, especially as evidenced in her completed novels, to one of settlement and resolution. In *Sanditon*, the writer attempts a striking repositioning of the female roles. Therefore, rather than a concern with the "feminine ideal," she offers insights into the lives and experiences of women in the early nineteenth century England. In the novella, traditional gender roles are questioned by portraying women who take charge of their lives, making decisions about their own future and well-being. Strong-willed independent female characters, like Charlotte Heywood, challenge traditional gender ascriptions. Charlotte's role in the story suggests that the female lack is not truly a philosophical lack. It is rather the view of male theory which portrays the woman as "unthinking" and "unthinkable," because she is taken to suffer from the wrong lack. According to Hegel, cited in Moi (1999):

> Women may be capable of Education, but they are not made for the more advanced sciences, for philosophy and certain forms of artistic productions which require universality. Women may have ideas, taste and elegance, but they do not have the ideal. The difference between men and women is like that between animals and plants; men correspond to animals, while women correspond to plants because their life is a more placid unfolding, the principle of which is the undermined unity of feeling. When women hold the helm of
> government, the state is at once in jeopardy, because women regulate their actions not by the demand of universality, but by arbitrary inclinations and opinions (P. 356-7).

This points to the idea that a woman is perceived to be an inferior thinker, though not because of her lack, but because of her "lack of a lack". She is lacking in philosophy, which conveniently designates her as irrational. Thus, in a sexist society, women often find themselves in

situations where they are obliged to choose between being imprisoned in femininity or having to devoid it.

In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir illustrates that, sexist ideologies and practices produce only the alienating split in women's subjectivity. Her phenomenological understanding falls outside the parameters of sex/gender distinction because "in that primitive division of labor, the two sexes constituted in a way two classes, and there was equality between these classes" (Beauvoir 1949:85).

In essence, Beauvoir's fundamental point in *The Second Sex* is the concept of "freedom, alienation and oppression," rather than the opposition between identity and difference. She sees freedom as "the highest human value" as stated succinctly in the following extract:

> The attainment of sexual freedom by the unmarried woman, further is still made difficult by social customs. Adultery committed by a wife has been considered, up to the present time, to be a legal offence, whereas no law forbids a woman free love; nevertheless, if she wishes to take a lover, she must first get married. Even at the present time, many young middle-class women of strict behavior marry 'so as to be free' (1949:450).

In a similar manner, Miss Brereton (Clara) is depicted in *Sanditon* as a strong female character that stands to question dominant norms. She is a beautiful cousin of Sir Edward's stepmother whom he determined to abduct at any cost because her seduction was quite determined on, for she was his rival in Lady Denham's favour; she was young, lovely and dependent. He had very early seen the necessity of the case and "had now been long trying with cautious assiduity to make an impression on her heart, and to undermine her principles" (. P50), but Clara refused to be the eternal feminine of metaphysical speculation we have seen in Lydia Bennet, who sheepishly eloped with a militia officer in *Pride and Prejudice* or the flirtatious Marriane in *Sense and Sensibility*. She meticulously saw through him by analysing his expressions and anecdotes from everyday life. Clara had not the least intention of being seduced, though she bore with him patiently enough to confirm the

sort of attachment which her personal charms had raised. For, she sensed "a greater degree of discouragement indeed would not have affected Sir Edward" because:

> He was armed against the highest pitch of disdain and aversion. If she could not be won by affection, he must carry her off. He knew his business already had many musings on the subject. If he were constrained so to act he must naturally wish to strike out something new, to exceed those who had gone before him and he felt a strong curiosity to ascertain whether the neighbourhood of Timbuctoo might not afford some solitary house adapted Clara's reception (P. 50)

However, Edward had to think of the expense, he feels that masterly style not well suited to his purse and probably, prudence might have obliged him to prefer the quieter sort of ruin and disgrace for the object of his affections, to the more obvious.

Conclusion
In the final analysis, it is striking that Victorian novels often present emotional feelings and a stereotypical female in a realistic world. However, what we have in *Sanditon* is a Victorian woman in transition, though far from the "strong-willed woman who step out of the ordinary," of Showalter's conception, Clara pays little or no attention to Sir Edward's conceit and self-approbation, quite in contrast to Miss Elizer Bennet who, on seeing Mr. Darcy's magnificent country seat at Pamberley, instantly changes her views and in a moment begins to like him.

Secondly, far from concentrating on challenges from outside, Austen dwells more on threats to the governing bloc of gentry and aristocracy from within. Sir Edward's (as representative of the gentry) preference for "the quieter sort of ruin and disgrace for the object of his affections, to the more renowned," shows the writer's attempt to depict male villainy. Like Catherine Moreland in *Northanger Abbey*, Edward bases his dream upon fictional models, which show the relationship between literature and life. This is a recurrent theme indeed in Jane Austen,

particularly in her short stories and fragmentary novellas like *Love and Friendship* or *Sanditon*.

In sum, almost all the major female characters in *Sanditon* struggle in one way or the other to become independent. Like Lady Denham, Charlotte succeeds in resisting all the temptations in her relationship with the gallant Sir Edward. Clara desists his self-approbation by showing him how insufficient were his pretensions to please a woman worthy of being pleased. Like his namesake in *Love and Friendship*, who picks up "unmeaning gibberish," by studying romantic novels, Sir Edward's determination to be original at any price marks him out through his unorganised literary allusions. In essence, he stands as a symbol of lack, negativity, fluidity and irrationality. While the female characters symbolise re-birth and reorientation, they may even stand for "the new woman," who knows herself and the intricacies surrounding her existence. In the end, the experiences of the female characters in *Sanditon* can be described as a struggle to relocate the disintegrated whole, in other words, a struggle for wholeness.

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Influence of Broadcast Media Enlightenment Campaigns on Knowledge of Budget Padding among Market Women in South West, Nigeria

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Abstract
Budget padding and abuses have brought issues of accountability, transparency, and the need for a fraud-free national budget into public discourse in Nigeria. The most viable means of conducting mass enlightenment campaigns about budget padding in South-Western Nigeria are through mass communication media such as radio and television. This study aims to investigate the impact of broadcast enlightenment campaigns on the knowledge of budget padding among market women in South-Western Nigeria. A mixed-method approach was adopted for this study, utilizing paired depth interviews and surveys to explore the sources of information most preferred by market women for budget padding messages, as well as the barriers to accessing information about budget padding. Findings indicate that radio is the most preferred source of information on budget padding among market women in South-Western Nigeria, and that radio broadcast enlightenment campaigns have been effective in raising awareness on this issue. Additionally, the study identified a lack of literacy skills and the absence of media literacy programs as significant barriers to information acquisition about budget padding among market women in the region. Consequently, it is recommended that relevant stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and governments at all levels, should make concerted efforts to continue using radio as a platform to educate citizens about the evils and ripple effects of budget padding, particularly among poor and vulnerable market women in the South-Western geo-political zone of Nigeria. Furthermore, adult education and market-based media literacy campaigns should be initiated and sustained by both government and non-governmental organizations to enhance media literacy skills among market women.

Key Words: *Broadcast Media, Enlightenment Campaigns, Knowledge, Budget Padding,   Market Women*

1. Introduction

Budget padding, as a concept, has been defined as the over-bloating of the annual budget presented by the State and Federal Governments to state and National Assemblies for approval. It is a document that contains a well-laid out means of how funds are to be allocated to each sector of the society in a given fiscal year. Budgeting is designed to make government business more transparent, especially regarding government spending on numerous areas of national concerns. Budgeting is a yardstick to measure government performances and attention to national concerns (Felix and Emmanuel, 2022). In Nigeria's democratic experiment, the legislative arm of government has been accused of budget padding almost on a yearly basis (Das, 2018). Budget padding has been a recurrent issue in finance and budget process every year in Nigeria (Theophilus, 2016). Hardly can a year pass in Nigeria without media reportage of budget padding. However, the media, especially the broadcast have always been silent about actors of budget padding in Nigeria. Budget padding is negatively impactful on socio-economic and political development of a nation. Budget padding has complicated the issues of resource allocations in developing nations (Mittendorf, 2006). Nigeria's budget process is characterised by improprieties, stealing, padding and corruption, especially between the executive and the legislature (Gabriel et al., 2022). Media beaming their searchlights on budget padding in Nigeria's National Assembly has brought about a robust public discussion about budgetary reforms (Gabriel et al., 2022). Radio and television are the two most popular media of mass communication in Africa. Broadcast media message reception is convenient, and the audience do not require spending and hence, the qualities endear the media to most members of the audience, especially the poor, vulnerable and the illiterate in Nigeria. For budget transparency and accountability, citizens must be informed of the budget planning and implementations as well as allocations of resources. While television has been identified to enlighten citizens in the urban sector of the society, radio is a medium for rural areas meant

for the illiterate, vulnerable, uneducated and poor inhabitants of those places (James, 2019). Broadcast media are the means through which public-target information and other messages are made available to members of the public through radio and television (Michael, 2024). Radio and television are the most received media of wide communication among the educated and the illiterate in Nigeria (James, 2019).

In a study conducted by de Fatimah et al., (2024) 74% of the respondents maintained that they receive their information about health and economic news on radio and television. Radio, as a medium of education and enlightenment campaigns, leads other media when it comes to the dissemination of development messages, accessibility and breaking of illiteracy barriers. Although, television has audio-visual appeals, market women prefer listening to radio because they do not need to engage their visual attention to get enlightened about contemporary issues in the society (Papachristou, 2024). Besides, news reports and television broadcasts on budget padding has been scanty in Nigeria's media terrains. Radio and television influence attitudinal and behavioural change and persuade people to accept certain messages after enlightenment campaigns (Gillanders and McNamara, 2024). Broadcast media coverage of budget padding in Nigeria has been poor as a result of some factors among which are the media ownership factors, interests, media tangible and intangible profits and the influences of big advertisers (James, 2019).

Information on policies of government that affect the standard of living of the citizens is hardly made available by the broadcast media for public scrutiny in Nigeria, except for the few ones. A study conducted by Ola (2024) showed that women who have unrestrained access to radio and television are more knowledgeable about socio-economic issues in developing nations. The study also revealed that effects of broadcast media on attitudinal and behavioural change on economic issues among women have not been positive (Ola, 2024). Busindeli (2024) conducted a study on gender-based factors influencing the choice of communication media for agricultural information and found

that illiterate women and women with low-income level prefer to access their enlightenment messages on radio and interpersonal contacts. Low level literacy among market women have influenced the adoption of the radio medium for the socio-economic and political information and messages by market women in the South-West, Nigeria.

The presentation of national budget by the Executive Arm of government and its approval by the National Assembly brightens the hope of many Nigerians every year for a better and more vibrant economy. However, controversies abound about whether annual budget in Nigeria solves a myriad of socio-economic and political issues it is primarily meant to solve (Abiola and Mustapha, 2015). Budget padding has been under-researched in Nigeria as a result of political, ethnic and economic interests by various individuals and organisations. In Nigeria, there has been a broken connection between annual budgeting and its impact on the citizens due to many factors of which are corruption, wrong and misplaced allocations of resources and weak implementations (Richardson and Nelson, 2017). Budget padding and abuses have brought to the fore the issues of accountability, transparency and the need for fraud-free public budget in Nigeria every year (Egbide and Agbude, 2018). Budget padding issues pervaded the Nigerian public space in July 2016 when Jibrin Abdulmumin accused Yakubu Dogara of appropriation of N40 Billion by way of padding (Dunu et al., 2019). Budget actors and initiators in Nigeria see annual budget as a means of enriching themselves and for personal advantage rather than for the poor and the vulnerable (Ndukwe, 2018). Issues of budget padding have negatively affected the employment generations, provision of social facilities, education and living standard of more 80 percent of the population of Nigeria (Dickson and Eminue, 2020). This study is designed to investigate the influence of broadcast media on knowledge of budget padding among market women in South-Western Nigeria. Objectives of the study are to: understand the sources of information most preferred by market women for budget padding messages; know the effectiveness of broadcast media reportage of budget padding among market women

in South-Western Nigeria; and ascertain the barriers to information about budget padding among market women in the South-West, Nigeria.

The study is hinged on knowledge gap theory. The theory was propounded by Tichenor, Donohue and Olien in the 1970s. The theory explains that there are social classes in the society and that people have different means of accessing and acquiring information in the society (Okon and Ekpang, 2021). Knowledge gap theory postulates that as information pours into social system, certain segments of the society with higher socio-economic acquire information more speedily than people of lower socio-economic status, and therefore, gap in knowledge increases rather than decreasing (Rohs and Ganz, 2015). Basically, people of higher socio-economic status receive information faster and are more exposed to media of communication and possess better communication skills than those who are of poor and low educational and socio-economic backgrounds (Okon and Ekpang, 2021). Knowledge gap between two classes of people tends to expand rather than contract or shrink due to some individual and community characteristics (Zeng, 2011). While some people are better informed and more exposed to the media of communication than others, some people are less informed and exposed to the media of communication. People of higher socioeconomic status enjoy good communication skills, better knowledge of media operations, social contacts and selective use of information (Rohr and Ganz, 2015). Unequal use and access to media of communication is the basic notion of knowledge gap theory (Rohs and Ganz, 2015). Knowledge gap theory is in line with this study because it deals with the knowledge of budget padding among a group of people considered to have a lower socioeconomic status than other people of other segments of the society who have better access and exposure to media of communication as a result of their educational exposure, high literacy level, quality social contacts, good communication skills and selective use of information.

2. Materials and Methods
2.1 Study Design and Participants

A mixed-method was adopted for this study. Paired depth interview and survey methods were used for the study. Paired depth interview is defined as interviewing two subjects or respondents together for the purpose of gathering qualitative data about how the duo perceives the same issue under investigations (Wilson et al., 2016). Survey method was used to extract knowledge, views, information and opinions from a large number of respondents, so large as it is involved in this study. Survey method could be used to conduct national studies or to examine small query (Keough and Tanabe, 2011). A survey method was adopted for this study because a large number of respondents are involved in the study. A paired depth was used to sample the opinions and view of the leaders of market women about the influence of broadcast media on budget padding in South-Western Nigeria.

A purposive sampling technique is used. A purposive sample is used in a study on the basis of certain characteristics, qualities or features that the subjects or respondents of the study possess. Both qualitative and quantitative methods of research may be used when the samples are chosen purposively (Tongco, 2007). Using a purposive sampling, researchers set out to locate subjects or respondents who are prepared and willing to provide information on the basis of their knowledge and experience about budget padding and broadcast media enlightenment campaigns (Tongco, 2007). Thus, two leaders of market women associations or unions were selected in one most popular market in each of the six states of the South-West for paired depth interview. The two leaders of the associations were selected because it is assumed that they have better communication skills, and also possess knowledge about budget padding in Nigeria. As Crossman (2024) maintains, purposive sampling is selected on the basis of certain characteristics or qualities of the population and the objectives of the study. Therefore, the six most popular selected markets in the South-Western Nigeria are: Gbagi Market in Ibadan, Oyo State, Oshodi Market in Lagos, Oja-Oba in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Kuto market in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Oja-Oba market in Akure, Ondo State and Oluode market in Osogbo, Osun State.

Using simple random sample, two leaders of market women associations and unions were selected in the most popular Market in each of the selected states of the South-West for paired depth interview session. The leaders of market women are assumed to possess knowledge their information sources with regard to budget padding, understand the effectiveness of broadcast media enlightenment campaigns on budget padding and the barriers to information about budget padding in the South-Western Nigeria. Other market women were given questionnaire to fill. Those who were given copies of questionnaire were those willing and ready to help the researchers fill in the questionnaire. A simple random sample is a subset of a group of individuals. Every member of the population is selected by chance and randomly in such a way that all members of the group have an equal chance of being selected (Kirk, 2011).

Adopting convenience sampling, leaders of the market associations and unions were selected on the basis of availability, easy access, convenient proximity, and expressed willingness to participate in the study under investigation. In convenience sampling, data could be collected from the subjects of the study faster and more speedily. Since it is basically not realistic to have access to all respondents or subjects of this study, those available and willing to participate in the study were conveniently sampled and included in the study. Convenience sampling, according to Obilor (2023), is used to select subjects or respondents for the study on the basis of convenience, proximity and convenient geographical locations to the researchers. We adopted paired interview because it enables the research to have access to the opinions, views, attitude and perceptions of market women about broadcast media reportage of budget padding among market women in South-Western Nigeria. Thus, Two leaders of market women association were selected in Gbagi Market in Ibadan, Oyo State, two leaders of market women association were selected at Oshodi Market in Lagos, two leaders of market women association were selected at Oja-Oba in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, two leaders of market women association were selected at Kuto market in Abeokuta, Ogun State, two leaders of market women association were selected at Oja-Oba market

in Akure, Ondo State and two leaders of market women association were selected at Oluode market in Osogbo, Osun State. In all, twelve leaders of market women association were interviewed using a paired depth interview method. Three hundred and ninety-six copies of questionnaire were administered on other market women apart from the leaders of market women associations. Sixty-six copies of questionnaire were given to market women in each of the most popular markets in the six states of the South-West, making 396 copies of questionnaire in all. However, of the 396 copies of questionnaire administered on the respondents in six most popular markets in the state capitals of the six states in the South-West, only 380 copies of those questionnaires were returned and found useful for this study.

2.2 Data Collection

Two methods were used in data collection procedure in this study: the questionnaire and the interview guide. Six research assistants were recruited and trained on the objectives of the study. They assisted the researchers to collect data from the subjects of this study in six different most popular markets in the South-West. The paired depth comprised twelve market women leaders in all. Two leaders of market women were selected in each of the most popular markets in the South-West for paired depth interview, while copies of questionnaire were given to other market women to help fill. The interview guide and questionnaire items were in tandem with the objectives of the study. In all, twelve leaders of market women association were interviewed using a paired depth interview method. Three hundred and ninety-six copies of questionnaire were administered on other market women apart from the leaders of market women associations. Sixty-six copies of questionnaire were given to market women in each of the most popular markets in the six states of the South-West.

2.3 Statistical Analyses

The interview session ensured a high level of confidentiality because the identities of paired depth interviews were never made known for ethical reasons. Data obtained through the paired depth interview were analysed thematically, interpreted and presented with the use of

explanation building in tandem with the research objectives. Inferences were made about the knowledge of sources of information most preferred by market women for budget padding messages; the effectiveness of broadcast media reportage of budget padding among market women in South-Western Nigeria; and the barriers to information about budget padding among market women in the South-West, Nigeria. Data gathered from the questionnaire administration on market women were analysed using frequency and percentage.

3. Results

Qualitative Data Analysis, Interpretations and Presentation for Paired Depth Interview

3.1 Theme 1: Sources of Information Preferred by Market Women for Budget Padding Messages

The data gathered from the paired depth interview revealed the sources of information preferred by market women for budget padding messages. The discussion demonstrated that radio enlightenment campaigns are the source most preferred by market women for budget padding in the South-Western Nigeria. The interviewees are the leaders of market women association in the most popular market in each of the state capitals of six different states in the South-West, Nigeria. Providing more information, an interviewee at Gbagi Market in Ibadan, Oyo State, said that:

> We do not have time to watch television or meeting people because we are always busy doing our business here in the market. However, of all the means of information reception such as television, radio and internet, radio is the major sources of our information on socio-economic and political issues. In fact, the first time I heard about budget padding was on radio in 2016 when some members of the National Assembly were reported to have padded the budget of that year. Thus, we listen to different radio programmes when attending to our customers because we do not need to focus our full attention on it unlike television. Besides, most of radio

> programmes in Ibadan here are done in Yoruba Language, making comprehension very much easy for us. Most television programmes we watch in the evening when we get home are beamed to us in English. We are more comfortable with Yoruba radio programmes that the ones done in English. I hear radio discussion and interview programmes regularly about budget padding.

Another interviewee, who is a leader of market women association at Oja-Oba Market in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State Capital, said:

> No media of mass communication can be compared to radio. As far as I am concerned, my radio set is my best friend even when no one is around at home, I am not bored, going by various programmes that are done on economic, social and political matters. Regarding budget padding, radio programmes exist here in Ekiti that enlighten people about budget padding. Until recently, I did not understand the meaning of budget padding until one radio interview programme explained to us in Yoruba Language. Budget padding is about adding unofficial extra fund to the budget which will eventually end up in the pockets of some members of National Assembly. It is the same as adding and pilfering of money that has not officially been allocated.

3.2 Theme 2: Effectiveness of Broadcast Media Reportage of Budget Padding among Market Women

The data gathered from the paired depth interview revealed the effectiveness of broadcast media reportage of budget padding among market women. The discussion revealed that radio broadcast enlightenment campaign has been effective about budget padding among market women in the South-Western Nigeria. The interviewees are the leaders of market women association in the most popular markets in each of the state capital of six different states in the South-West, Nigeria. Giving more details, an interviewee in Lagos State, said that:

> Radio has been effective in the enlightenment campaigns of budget padding among market women. When you look at the population of the illiterate among us, you will be shocked because about 85% of us here are illiterate. Therefore, we rely on radio most time for latest information on economy, politics and political issues. Whenever we listen to amount of money that is being pilfered every day in the National Assembly some of us become pessimistic about the greatness of this country. I think the government should do something about budget padding if truly what we hear annually on radio about budget padding is true. There is no way citizens will not suffer with the amount of money that is padded and stolen every year. In the absence of radio, we would have been in the darkness with regard to the issues of budget padding in Nigeria. Our knowledge of budget padding has been through the medium of radio news, discussion programmes and interview programmes.

Giving more information, another participant who is a leader of market women association at Ojo-Oba Market at Akure, Ondo State, said:

> Radio effectiveness when it comes to enlightening us on budget padding is second to none. Radio speaks our language. At times, radio presenters give room for phone-in session by listeners. This opportunity affords the citizens to ask question about contemporary issues, including budget padding. Budget padding news and discussion programmes hit the radio airwaves when the budget is about to be passed or has been passed by the National Assembly every year. Unlike television set that we watch when we get back home in the evening, news and radio programmes are aired almost on an hour basis. We do not need to get home to get relevant information

about padding. Radio reports budget padding issues whenever the budget is to be passed every year.

3.3 Theme 3: Barriers to Information Acquisition about Budget Padding among Market Women

The data gathered from the paired depth interview showed the barriers to information acquisition about budget padding among market women. The discussion showed that lack of literacy skills and absence of media literacy programmes are the barriers to information acquisition about budget padding among market women in the South-Western Nigeria. The interviewees are the leaders of market women association in the most popular market in each of the state capital of six different states in the South-West, Nigeria. Giving more details, an interviewee in Abeokuta, Ogun State, said that:

> There are many barriers to information acquisition about budget padding among women in the South-Western Nigeria. Most of the market women here lack literacy skills. They cannot read and write, or speak English Language. This is the reason most of the market women resort to radio medium for the information and enlightenment campaigns on socio-political and economic matters. Besides, media literacy is also an issue among market women because they believe hook, line and sinker any message they get about budget padding in Nigeria. Government owned media organisations have not been fair and objective in the reportage of budget padding in Nigeria. Although, private-owned media organisations attempt to be objective, but they are also part of the government.

Providing more information, an interviewee who is a leader of market women association at Oluode Market in Osogbo Osun State, said that:

> Barriers to budget padding are manifold. However, lack of literacy skills has been a major challenge in acquisition of information about budget padding in South-Western Nigeria. Most market women have no capability to sieve

the truth from the falsehood when listening to messages about budget padding in South-Western Nigeria. All pieces of information disseminated to illiterate market women are treated as the truth whereas some government-owned media twist the budget padding messages to suit the purposes of their government-financiers and founders.

Quantitative Data Analysis, Interpretations and Presentation for Survey Method

Table 1: Sources of Information Preferred by Market Women for Budget Padding Messages

Items Percentage	Frequency
Radio 44.5%	169
Television 31.8%	121
Social Contacts 13.4%	51
Market Leaders 10.3%	39
Total 100	380

Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2024

Table 1 shows that radio 169 respondents representing 44.5% maintained that radio is the major source of information preferred by market women for budget padding messages in the South-West, 121 respondents representing 31.8% stated that television is the source of information preferred by market women for budget padding messages in South-West, 51 respondents representing 13.4% averred that social contact is the source of information preferred by market women for budget padding messages in South-West, while 39 respondents representing 10.3% stated that market leader is the source of

information preferred by market women for budget padding messages in South-West, Nigeria.

Table 2: Effectiveness of Broadcast Media Reportage of Budget Padding among Market Women

Items Percentage	Frequency
Radio enlightenment campaign on budget padding is effective 32.1%	122
Television enlightenment campaign on budget padding is effective 26.6%	101
Market leaders are effective sources of enlightenment campaign on budget padding in South-Western Nigeria 20.8%	79
Social contacts are effective sources of enlightenment campaigns on budget padding in South-Western Nigeria 20.5%	78
Total **100%**	**380**

Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2024

Table 2 shows that 122 respondents representing 32.1% averred that radio enlightenment campaign on budget padding is effective, 101 respondents representing 26.6% maintained that television enlightenment campaign on budget padding is effective, 79 respondents representing 20.8% affirmed that market leaders are effective source of enlightenment campaign on budget padding in South-Western Nigeria, and 78 respondents representing 20.5% stated that social contact is an effective source of enlightenment campaign on budget padding in South-West, Nigeria.

Table 3: Barriers to Information Acquisition about Budget Padding among Market Women

Items	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of Literacy Skills	149	39.2%
Poor Educational Backgrounds	57	15%
Unequal Access to Media of Communication	51	13.4%
Lack of Media Literacy	123	32.4%
Total	**380**	**100%**

Source: Researchers' Fieldwork, 2024

Table 3 shows that 149 respondents representing 39.2% maintained that lack of literacy skill is the major barrier to information acquisition about budget padding among market women in the South-West, 57 respondents representing 15% affirmed that poor educational background is the barrier to information acquisition about budget padding among market women in the South-West, 51 respondents representing 13.4% stated that unequal access to media of communication is the barrier to information acquisition about budget padding among market women in the South-West, while 123 respondents representing 32.4% averred that lack of media literacy is the barrier to information acquisition about budget padding among market women in the South-Western Nigeria.

4. Discussions

Findings showed that radio enlightenment campaign is the source most preferred by market women for budget padding in the South-Western Nigeria. The findings agree with the position of James (2019) who found that radio is the most pervasive and the most popular of the media of communication due to its certain features it has over all other of mass communication. Besides, the level of illiteracy, poverty and overwhelming numbers of rural areas has endeared radio medium to illiterate and the vulnerable in Nigerian societies. He also found that radio has the tongues of many ethnic groups and can mobilise, enlighten and educate the citizenry on an issue that border on socio-economic and political matters that affect the well-being of the masses.

Findings showed that radio broadcast enlightenment campaign has been effective about budget padding among market women in the South-Western Nigeria. The findings corroborate the findings of James (2019) who found that when it comes to educating the illiterate about economic and political matters, radio is the most suitable for the message.

Lack of literacy skills and absence of media literacy programmes are the barriers to information acquisition about budget padding among market women in the South-Western Nigeria. The findings align with the postulations of gap knowledge theory which assume that people of higher educational and socio-economic status receive information faster and are more exposed to media of communication and possess better communication skills than those who lack literacy skills, media literacy and those who are of poor socio-economic backgrounds (Okon and Ekpang, 2021).

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Radio is the most preferred source of information about budget padding among market women in the South-West. Its effectiveness has proved beyond reasonable doubt that its effectiveness in disseminating messages to both illiterate and educated women is well established. Therefore, radio programs cantered on market women must be initiated and sustained. These programs should focus on topics relevant to market activities, ensuring that messages about budget padding and other important issues reach this audience. Given the effectiveness of radio campaigns in raising awareness about budget padding among market women in South-Western Nigeria, stakeholders—including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), government entities, and various ministries—should continue to utilize radio as a platform for educating citizens about the harmful effects of budget padding, particularly on the poor and vulnerable market women in the region. Barriers to information acquisition about budget padding among market women in South-West Nigeria include a lack of literacy skills and the absence of media literacy programs. To address this, adult education and market-based media literacy campaigns

should be initiated and sustained by both government and non-governmental organizations to enhance media literacy skills among market women.

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A Literary Reading of Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *Echoes of a New Dawn* for Sustainable Development

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Peace Adaobi Ike

Abstract

A life without a future is more likely to devolve into violence. A man's sense of right and wrong embodies his worldview, which shapes his morals, beliefs, and values. Consciously or unconsciously, these beliefs fuel a passion for improved living conditions. The novelist under study, Ngozi Chuma-Udeh, is Nigerian, and her work critically examines aspects of tradition that have hindered sustainable development in some communities. These societies continue to experience various forms of injustice, including oppression and humiliation, and remain partially unfree. This paper explores the relationship between the passions generated by individual worldviews within these societies and the actions they inspire, with a particular focus on the use of burial rites as a tool in struggles for liberation. To achieve this, Reader Response theory is employed as the most effective approach for illustrating the realities faced by women in the Ibonse community upon the death of their husbands, as well as the efforts made to abolish such dreadful practices. This study contributes to scholarly discourse by examining the causes and consequences of preserving traditions that hinder sustainable development.

Key Words: *Belief system, widowhood, freedom, humiliation*

Introduction

The average Nigerian was filled with hope for political independence. It arrived with the expectation that it would largely address socio-political problems and create opportunities for a more fulfilled life for the average citizen. In the wake of independence, many promises were made. Economic plans were rooted in broad egalitarian principles, with assurances of equal opportunities for all citizens in education, health, and employment. Independence was widely anticipated to herald a new era of progress for everyone. It came with hopes for economic, social, cultural, and human development for all citizens of the new

nation. It was meant to signal a new chapter in the political landscape of the country. Independence was intended to be a turning point, freeing the nation from the shackles of colonial experiences and ushering in the righteousness of self-rule. It was to mark the end of servitude and the conclusion of unfulfilled lives, conflict, brutality, and the pains of economic sabotage.

Great changes are going on in issues concerning women in various parts of the world but it has been proved that much still remains in order to achieve this goal of liberation among women in societies dominated by men. Women still cry over the cruel situation they find themselves especially in Africa. This traumatic condition of women is the capital issue of the moment that attracts discussions in various social environment and workshops. The main preoccupation in this paper is to expose the portrait of women buttressed by a Nigerian author and the emotional versus psychological injury the women go through. Notably, from the earliest period in the history of Nigeria to present, women have made impressive strides in many areas of live. Even in their disadvantaged position, they have competed in the male's domain and are victorious. They struggle against all antagonisms as Abhulimen states breaching from the other side of the barrier where culture and self-interest of men have sought to place them (14-21). Some of these women have made great contribution to nation building.

As women end up in different trends in the novels, they also tend to respond to the issues of oppression and marginalization according to their different perspectives, which is the reason Nnolim refers to the contours as the plethora of feminist theory that are making rounds in current headlines in landscape of feminist ideas (134). The contours of the landscape are uneven and zigzag in see saw of confusion. This is simply because in Nigeria, women are fighting multiple wars. They are not only fighting colonialism and its aftermaths but they are faced also with traditional et cultural practices and beliefs prevalent in most part of Nigeria such as female genital mutilation, lack of participation in family decision, early girl child marriage, male child preference, denial of women to own and inherit property, ritualistic widowhood rite as

seen in the novel under study, *Echoes of a New Dawn*. An attempt to name these struggles gives rise to various phraseologies. As a result, the female author conceptualizes and theorizes African feminism to match her environment, uniqueness, complexity of their oppression as womanism, stiwanism and Negro feminism.

One of the main pre-occupations of many African writers according to Inyama, has been the rehabilitation of the African image(56-66). This concern arose as a reaction or response to the negative, distorted image of Africa and her people presented in literary works and travel reports of European writers and explores. The works of such writers as Joyce Cary, Rider Haggard, Joseph Conrad, and so on created widely believed images of Africa and her people as wild, untamed, totally ignorant and savage. Such widely accepted notions encouraged European abuse of and contempt for Africa and Africans. Inyama (56-66)) says that in rejecting these images, African writers have in the main, been at pains to highlight the nobility, cultural richness, and social and political cohesiveness of African societies. Achebe for instance, has said that one of his aims in writing his first novel was to show that Africans did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans, and that the African world was not, contrary to European belief and notion, one long night of perpetual darkness (53). Achebe is a representative of authors who have adopted the realistic approach in their recreation of the traditional and pre-colonial African world. In such presentation, the writers do not pretend that Africa is a flawless paradise. Rather, they presented African people in a realistic light, with the positive and negative balanced as also seen in Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *Echoes of a New Dawn*. It must be stated again that these writers are neither glorifying their world nor apologizing for its shortcomings. Their goal is to teach the world that Africa is not the barbaric and irrational continent which Europe took it to be. It has its fair and legitimate share of ignorance, superstition, and ignorance, but it has got wealth of other positive human attributes too.

Theoretical Framework

Reader Response theory is used as the best approach for this paper. In the words of Abraham's reader response theory does not designate any one critical theory, but a focus on the activity of reading a work of literature which is shared by many critical theories (350). It is a critical theory that contains a body of literary investigations, which looks into the nature of the reader's activity in the process of understanding literary texts. The literary proposition of this critical school is that literary works are incomplete until the reader has actualized those elements that are left to his imagination and that literary texts are produced by the strategies of interpretations that guide us to seek certain meaning in the reader's critical interpretation. In effect, Reader response theory turn their attention from a work as an achieved structure of meaning to the responses of the reader as his eye follows a text on the page before him. Abraham declares: By this shift of perspective, a literary work is converted into an activity on the stage of a reader's mind, and what in standard critical analysis had been features of the work itself - including narrator, plot, character, style and structure - are described as an evolving temporary process consisting primarily of expectations and violation, deferments and satisfactions of expectations, in flow of a reader experience (350). In this extent, Reader- response critics of all theoretical persuasions concur to a reasonable degree that the meanings of a text are the production or creation of the individual reader hence that there is no one or incontrovertible or correct meaning, either of the linguistic parts or of the artistic whole of a text. This means that the response of critical readers to a text or work of art can yield multiplicity of meanings which can be deemed correct as far as the meanings are tangible and critical responses of the reader.

Reader-response critics agree that no one response or interpretation of a work of art has the monopoly of being the best but greatly differed on the major factors that determine a reader's response, the dividing line between objective and subjective responses and the extent, if any, to which a texts limits a reader's response, so as to empower us to reject at least some reading and misreading, even if we are unable to demonstrate that any one reading or response is the right one. From the

Reader-response critical perspective, the literary text, as a product of the writer's intentional acts, to a substantial extent, controls the reader's responses to the text, but always contains to a notable degree, some gaps or unintended or indeterminate elements. These gaps, the actual reader must fill in subjectively by a creative participation with what is given in the text before him. It is pertinent at this point to observe that the experience of reading is an evolving process of anticipation, frustration, retrospection and reconstruction. To this extent, critical reading and responses are very serious academic exercise. In summary, Reader-response critical approach involves an informed response to a text or work of art without formal reference to a laid down critical criteria.

Cultural Values in *Echoes of a New Dawn*
Ngozi Chuma-Udeh unlike other literary writers delved into the activities of a known tradition that caged the people of Ibonse especially widows. This has been a long living way of life of the people. Beliefs differ and people love and cherish whatever they meet as their culture from generation to generation. Despite some difficulties and challenges in most of these traditions, many follow it as a result of fear. Either the person is threatened by death or excommunication. The most painful experience in the tradition of Ibonse is the harmful *Ikwa Ajadu*. This has become possible through the selfish and greedy passion the old chief priest has on the widows. Ibonse men are known and are also educated. They live far in developed cities but the problem of archaic tradition subject their wives to unbearable hardship, humiliation, oppression and trauma. Some women from other closer communities warn their daughters against any relationship with Ibonse men to avert this dreadful mourning tradition in future. Those who have no knowledge of this tradition become victims of a foreign culture as seen in the case of Anita and Lucia. Some would dare the consequences as seen in the novel where Ike's daughter told the mother that her case would be different despite the admonishment as the novelist states, "I was in the secondary school when my elder sister married her heartthrob. We were all delighted at her marriage but my mother kicked vehemently against this seemingly well-matched marriage. We

asked her the basis for her objections and she maintained that she had nothing against the young man but she equally pointed out that the traditions of his village were weird and disgusting. In her exact words, Ibonse wallows in the primitivism of too many vile and unspeakable traditions" (209). The above point clears how others from another near community grade Ibonse and what they still practice in the name of culture. From Mrs Ike's voice, it is obvious that there would be no girl in her rightful senses that would accept marriage of Ibonse man. People modernize and polish their tradition to suit the present society and as well, bring about sustainable development to the community. Instead of scary tales, unkind functions and dreadful practices, social life can be illuminated to attract more investment for sustainability. Peaceful environment generates social and healthy humans.

In another development, the state of the family who lost a dear one is portrayed through one of the victims thus, "After the burial, before the *Ikwa Ajadu* rituals, my husband told me he had run short of money and would have to rush down to his station at the northern part of the country to source for funds" (210). The above assertion declares the frustration families are subjected to at the point of mourning of a dear one. Other members of the community stay awake to such acts. They feel nothing could be done to improve on what they have as tradition. At this point, we see how much people love and cherish their culture. To them, it is what has been and nothing should change it. This becomes the understanding and belief system of a people who have common view. Man made laws to install order in the society. Law is meant for man and not man for law. But in a situation where people subject themselves to a norm that adds no value into their life style, is a contrary view. One wonders how man arrives at this direction. The novelist joins her voice to other positive minds to bring to a change into this and possibly polish the tradition in accordance with new innovations for sustainability. Note that a widow is meant to sit in ash seclusion for three weeks without bathing. She would be fed twice a day through a hole without seeing anyone. Her children would be sent to her own village, branded children of an abominable woman who killed her husband. The innocent children who know nothing about the

culture of their people are not spared at this point. Nobody considers the psychological effects of this demented treatment of the children. The young ones who are suppose to be the light and future generation of every given society are crushed that they wish never to have anything common with the said community. They see their own people as wicked and evil. Emotionally, they live with such mentality that everything about their people is demonic.

The novelist further buttressed this singular unkind act through a lady who was meant to mourn a total stranger, "I saw the man in the casket and I told them that it was not my husband. The whole village erupted in anger and made me to carry the casket containing the already decomposing corpse on my head. I was forced to carry this heavy and stinking casket on my bare head right round the village" (212). Not just that the woman was meant to carry the corpse of a strange man round the village, but she was forced to keep wake over the night alone with the strange corpse. Finally, she was meant to drink the water used to bath the decomposing corpse all to prove her innocence. A deep look and anatomy of the actions of the villagers will reveal the cowardice spirit in them. They are brave at the outside but, cowards and full of fears in the inside. For any sustainable development to take place there must be a peaceful coexistence among the citizens. Lucia, an American wondered why there are more dwarfs in Ibonse community especially among the widows. She was shocked at the revelation made by some widows on how they were raped by the chief priest and dwarfs during the *Ikwa Ajadu* mourning, "I woke up in a hospital bed two weeks later. I was badly compromised. Two months later, the doctor realized that the ailment has taken another dimension. The laboratory tests revealed that I was pregnant. Pregnant for the dwarfs and that crazy burn of a chief priest. I was a wreck, a broken soul, a victim of tradition" (198). The activities of Ibonse people prove the level of education and exposure they have. Even at that, they have their young able youth in a civilized society yet; they do not feel is ripe time to come to a round table to discuss a way forward on what will bring fresh breadth around every corner of their community. Rather, they ignore whatever that goes on; they believe nothing will make them go closer to the village.

They forget that at the end, they must return home, alive or dead as seen in the case of Anita and Lucia who married their husbands in the city. They know nothing about the tradition of their people until the death of their husbands. Both Anita and Lucia were visitors in Ibonse. They frown at the fetish satanic tradition of Ibonse. They stood their ground and bent on a reverse on such tradition.

Echoes of a New Dawn and Sustainable Development
In this fast moving global civilization, societies should expunge some of the cultural elements that retard progression. Women are advised to embrace literacy to protect their human rights. Tremendous changes are going on in issues concerning women in various parts of the world but it has been proved that much still remains. Women still cry over the cruel condition they find themselves especially in this part of the word. Nonetheless, women are still oppressed; their sanctrioum position in both family and society is also neglected especially as a widow. This gloomy status of women in most African societies results to underdevelopment because there is no progress without harmony. In the attempt to set themselves free from the harsh treatment of *Ikwa Ajadu*, Anita and Lucia end up with different complex trends during their mourning period, dislocated the tradition, "The commotion that ensued was monumental. The children vented on them the anger of the past months. The revenge was properly taken. The chief priest knelt before my children ragged like a very demented man forsaken by his kinsmen. The apex came when he lost grip of his *oji* which was his staff of office and the symbol of whatever authority he represented. The children got hold of it, threatened to set it ablaze" (203). Amita's children vented their anger on both the chief priest, their father's elder brother and his most elder sister. They were ready to face banishment from the community. The aim to reduce the chief priest to nothing was their target. Before then, they investigated everything about the power and office of the chief priest, including what can make or mar him. His *oji* remains the main symbol of his office. Anytime he losses that, he is as good as dead. He is to be buried with it at death. Destroying it before him therefore, amounts to reducing him to a living corpse. It marks the end of his malicious ritual rites and other unholy acts he performs as

chief priest. If it was known that another person was in possession of the *oji* for just a split second or even less, the chief priest and his entire lineage would be stripped of the revered office and that would be calamity for him. At this point, he has been insulted and humiliated. The children made him to swear never to near their house again take part in any type of attack on the family.

In same way, Lucia a white lady utilized her only opportunity, disgraced the chief priest publicly. This was easier because she paid kin and apt attention to other widows and their gory stories involved in *Ikwa Ajadu*. She planned all this with Nkechi, the sister-in-law who dread the tradition and whatever it represents in Ibonse. She knows fully well that as a widow, Lucia was not supposed to throw sand into the husband's grave. Such abominable acts must not take place before the chief priest and the other traditional men and women in Ibonse. It is a taboo. Her actions, if successful, would help to usher in a new dawn particularly in Ibonse and the society at large. The novelist exposes this act thus, "The unbelievable was happening before their very eyes. A woman was pouring sand into a man's grave" (323). The plan to destroy the long age tradition gained ground as Lucia's action created a bridge among the people. To worsen the situation, she pushed the chief priest into the fresh grave, continued to pour red sand on him, "Before the fetish priest could regain himself, three or more shovelful of sand had landed on top of him as he lay on the casket. The sand landed with reckless abandon on his head. He struggled up, spat out the sand that got into his mouth and frantically sought to climb out of the grave" (233). His aides were too dazed by the unfolding drama. They stood looking at him in utmost horror. None of them would dare come to his aid. They watched as the woman buried their master without being able to help because he has been contaminated. This traditionally, means he has been buried alive. None dared go near the enraged woman with the shovel for fear of the red mud touching them too. They began to leave one after the other as fast as their legs could take them. There was a flurry of activities as the movement in the compound becomes two-dimensional. The pagan women left and another set of women took their place. There were no fiery-eyed young

men to disrupt the activities because there was no longer a chief priest to give the directives. The office of the chief priest has been declared vacant by the unwritten code of tradition. The young men left in confusion like sheep without shepherd. The shepherd has been condemned by the very order he propagated. This also marks freedom for the palm tree that the frond is always cut. The people of Ibonse had never considered the economic problem this their action of cutting the frond cause in the economy, "At dawn, we woke up to see the gate sealed off with *omu*" (206)

Conclusion

In conclusion, one does not need to journey to Malaysia to recognize that customs and harmful traditional practices against women, including widowhood rites prevalent in many parts of Nigeria as depicted in the novel under study, violate human rights and are incompatible with today's civilized world. The novelist asserts that traditional practices associated with widowhood rites—such as sitting on a heap of ashes for weeks, bathing with wastewater collected from washing the husband's corpse, having a dozen eggs broken and smeared over a widow's body, particularly on her genitals, and, worst of all, forcing the widow to engage in sexual relations with a group of men—are repugnant to natural justice, good conscience, and equity. This discourse rightly condemns the system that perpetuates these practices and advocates for a change in men's mindsets towards these traditions, emphasizing that the sexes are meant to complement each other. It also calls for a novel orientation for our youth regarding the responsible use of masculinity and promotes literacy. This narrative is a protest against injustice, subjugation, oppression, and intimidation faced by widows. The experiences of women in Chuma-Udeh's *Echoes of a New Dawn* challenge their humanity and highlight the authenticity of their positive responses. Against all odds, the prevailing attitudes of men towards women are rejected. It is suggested that the ideological systems of exploitation, oppression, and patriarchal power can be reformed. Gender sensitization is crucial, and it is advisable to incorporate it into school curricula, where young girls should learn to assert and defend their rights, particularly their sexual rights.

Conversely, young boys should be taught that their sexual advances can be declined and that they must accept rejection without resorting to violence to ensure sustainable development, peace, and unity. Ultimately, women's freedom is envisioned to lead to a balanced partnership between both genders, achievable only through the collective efforts of families, churches, and other institutions. Grievance is a barrier to the social, economic, and political growth and development of any society.

This paper has revisited the tradition of Ibonse and the activities of the chief priest. A close examination of the chief priest's life, actions, and inactions reveals him to be a coward. He instills fear in the community under the guise of tradition, preventing anyone from questioning his authority. No one dares challenge him, allowing him to hinder the progress and development of the entire Ibonse community. The reign of the chief priest and all that he represented was dismantled when he was pushed into a fresh grave—a taboo in the community. This act was made possible through the collaboration of women, who immediately threw mud on him as Lucia deliberately pushed him into the grave to end his unnecessary greed and the harmful practices inflicted upon widows. There was a sound of joy, signaling a new dawn in Ibonse.

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The Image of Men in Recent Nigerian Women Writing: A Womanist Reading of Hadiza Isma El-Rufai's *An Abundance of Scorpions*

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Abstract

This paper examines the representation of men in the work of Hadiza Isma El-Rufai, focusing on how she depicts her male characters. Using Womanism as a theoretical framework, it highlights the portrayal of men in An Abundance of Scorpions and indicates a paradigm shift in the depiction of male characters in the novel. The paper finds that, rather than being oppressors or victimizers, the male characters are kind, sympathetic, considerate, thoughtful, and often oppressed or manipulated by some women against other women. This contrasts sharply with the portrayals in Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood, Alkali's The Stillborn, Adichie's Purple Hibiscus, and Atta's Everything Good Will Come, where men are depicted as untrustworthy, wicked, and ungodly. The paper concludes that most male characters in An Abundance of Scorpions are depicted as partners in progress, always ready to assist female characters in acquiring education and achieving economic independence. In summary, the findings reveal that El-Rufai, as a contemporary female writer, portrays men positively, viewing them as generous, supportive, caring, and philanthropic rather than indifferent or intimidating.

Introduction

In recent time, there has been a proliferation of writing by women authors from Northern Nigeria, a region where female voices were previously all but stifled with the exception of Zaynab Alkali, whose identity became a household name in 1984 with the publication of her maiden novel – *The Stillborn*. Until then, women voices in this region were barely heard, especially in the creative writing sphere in which English is deployed as a communicative tool. Presently, women's voices in English from northern Nigeria are loudly heard. In fiction, they take centre stage. Writers like Fatima Ba'aram Alkali, Zahra Tabi'u, Rashida Lawal, Azizah Idris Muhammad, Safiya Ismaila Yero, Razinat T. Mohammed, Phebe Veronica Jatau, Asabe Kabir Usman,

Maryam Bobi, Habiba Nur-Alkali, A'aisha Abdulkareem and Khadija Abubakar Jalli, among others have emerged and established themselves.

Notably, from the publication of *Efuru* in 1966 and *The Joys of Motherhood* in 1971 by Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta, the two prominent female writers from Southern Nigeria and *The Stillborn* in 1984 by Zanyab Alkali, the image of men like that of women in male authored texts has become a hotly debated issue and an interesting area of scholarly research. This is because in texts, like *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *People of the City* (1963), *The Concubine* (1066) and *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born* by Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Elechi Amadi and Ayi Kwei Armah respectively, women are ascribed ugly stereotypical images as dependant, helpless, gullible and whores or mere appendages to male characters. Such negative portrayal of women compelled the above named female writers to enter the literary scene to correct the lopsided images ascribed to them and fight male chauvinism in African Literature. Thus, the arrival of African women writers into the literary scene has brought new approaches and perspectives to African Literature. Saje (1993:10) put it that, "The entrance of female writers into the hitherto male-dominated world of African Literature has, to a great extent, changed the stereotypical image of the African women." They came up with their own perception of the woman and tried to advocate for her rights no different from man. In her essay, titled "The Female Predicament in the Nigerian Novels", Acholonu (1994:38) describes the status of women in early Nigerian literary scene as:

> Most of the Nigerian novels written by men fall short of giving us a full representation and comprehensive picture of the contemporary Nigerian women who have successfully distinguished themselves in various skills and professions.

Ogunyemi (1998:60) corroborates Acholonu's stance when she states that:

> Nigerian literature is phallic, dominated as it is by male writers and male critics who deal almost exclusively with male characters and male concerns, naturally aimed at a predominantly male audience.

It is as a result of such characterization that female writers emerged to challenge such unfavourable depictions. According to Zakariyah (2012:227) "Female writers' works are symbolic responses to the hostile cultural stimuli against women, and that the trend will continue as long as the obnoxious cultural practices against women are not addressed." In other words, their efforts to present assertive and individualistic female protagonists have helped to salvage the lop-sided image that male writers have created.

However, with the emergence of contemporary African-cum-Nigerian female writers, like Razinat, T. Mohammed, Azizah Idris Muhammad, Safiya Ismaila Yero, Bilqisu Abubakar and Hazida Isma El-Rufai, among others too numerous to mention here, 'the war of revenge' seems to be over. These writers portray men positively in their texts. They regard them as partners in progress and not oppressors or victimizers. It is against this background that this paper, deploying Womanism as its reading technique, examines the portrayal of male characters in Hadiza Isma El-Rufai's *An Abundance of Scorpions* (2017).

Critical Works on *An Abundance of Scorpions*
As far as the available data reveal, El-Rufai's *An Abundance of Scorpions* is mostly interpreted from linguistic perspectives by critics like Yahaya (2020), Hashim (2021) and Garba (2021), among others. Yahaya (2020) examines how power is invested along gender lines through language choices in El-Rufai's *An Abundance of Scorpions* and Alkali's *The Descendants* using Halliday's Systematic Functional Linguistics (SFL) approach as the theoretical framework. Concentrating on gendered scenes, lexical choices, transitivity patterns and prepositional patterns, this critic identifies the structural patterns in scenes which portray the female characters' assertiveness, boldness and agility. He argues that "The main characters of the books are women with varied levels of education; age and socio-economic dynamics but they all have strong

ideals and sense of selfhood" (99). He further notes that El-Rufai in *An Abundance of Scorpions*, her first novel, changes the direction of the tradition of African women writings where men are more or less seen as the monsters who are always trying in one way or another to dominate or enslave women at every opportunity. The novel's central theme according to this critic is that of love, strength and perseverance. He adds that "It is a story of a woman by the name Tambaya, who suffered in the hands of women as against the normal storyline where women have been shown to be maltreated by men... It is an uplifting story of a woman who suffers the malice of other women as a result of greed, jealousy and corruption" (106). It is this paradigm shift in the characterization of men and women in the works of contemporary African female writers like El-Rufai the present study seeks to examine.

Garba's (2021) study is a pragmatic analysis of *An Abundance of Scorpions*. It employs Austin and Searle's (1969) Speech Act Theory as its theoretical framework. The critic categorizes the utterances of the characters in the text according to the five major categories of speech acts proposed by Austin and Searle: expressives, commissives, declaratives, representatives, and directives. The findings indicate that the writer uses language expressively to achieve a pragmatic effect in her novel. Additionally, the study reveals that each speech act encompasses a broader range of sub-acts, each with a specific significance in a given speech situation. Consequently, the writer employs different speech acts to convey her intended meaning. The study concludes that El-Rufai explores pragmatics from all angles in her narrative. She utilizes her characters to achieve a pragmatic effect in her discourse, with expressive and representative speech acts occurring most frequently in the text. This suggests that she allows her characters to perceive the world as they understand it (15).

Hashim (2021) examines the place of Northern Nigerian women in religion as portrayed in Phebe Veronica Jatau's *The Hound* (2014), Bilqisu Abubakar's *The Woman in Me* (2018) and Hadiza Isma El-Rufai's *An Abundance of Scorpions* (2017) from two perspectives. First, the contribution of women towards religious development, and second, the

socio-cultural factors that trigger modern women of Northern Nigeria to begin doubting and questioning some religious dogmas, especially the ones that support the superiority of man over woman. He argues that:

> Religion as a pervasive socio-cultural institution is not only paramount but a necessary tool used in shaping the world view as well as directing the day-to-day affairs of believers. Throughout history Northern Nigerian women have played important roles in organizing religious activities as well as propagating the teachings of the message of religion. Even though, hardly are they placed in any politically or socially recognized position, Northern Nigerian women, like their counterparts in the South, directly or indirectly have significant impact in every religious endeavour (1).

To prove his stance, this critic cited some instances from the novels that depict how women writers from Northern Nigeria are always proud and conscious of their faith, and they play very important roles in promoting and propagating the message of the religions they so much believe in. Hashim further argues that, "The current development in digital technology, important changes and awareness within religious space enable women to open their eyes and understand the reality of things... Women begin to have their voice heard in religious discourse" (16). Thus, despite the fatalistic nature of the Muslims, especially in Northern part of Nigeria, the women in the novels examined such Safiyya and Rosie begin to question manipulation in religion. However, according to this critic, Tambaya, the protagonist in *An Abundance of Scorpions*, is conscious of her religion despite being a modern Hausa woman. She is portrayed as an obedient wife. Also, she never hesitates to pray. Through her, El-Rufai, as Hashim argues "indicate that Dua (supplication) is the only solution to human problems. For this reason, she encourages people to always pray in everything they endeavour" (14). The study concludes by pointing out that the three writers examined are not only writing to tell the good news of religion; they

are also exposing how it is manipulated in order to serve personal interest of religious leaders as well as their followers (19).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Womanism as its theoretical guide. Womanism is a branch of African feminism grounded in the racial, sexist, political, cultural and economic realities of the women. It is an approach in which women should have a holistic perspective towards patriarchy and female subjugation. It aims at redefining the position of women in the society, as reflected in most African female writings. In other words, Womanism is ethnically and culturally rooted. It does not seek to negate differences; rather, it seeks to harmonize and coordinate the differences, so that they do not become irreconcilable and degenerate into violence. The womanist, therefore, is one who strives for self-assertion and self-commitment, justice and fairness for herself and all oppressed people; and also appreciates her difference with others as well.

As a neologism coined by Alice Walker (an African American novelist, short story writer, poet, essayist and social activist), Womanism is concerned with the wholeness and well-being of all humanity – male, female and the black community. In other words, womanists advocate that for sustainable change to be achieved in the society, men and women should work together harmoniously and complement each other's efforts. Walker (1983) describes a womanist as:

> A black feminist or feminist of colour... who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility... and women's strength. Sometimes love individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually... Committed to survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, expect periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist... Womanism is to Feminism as purple to lavender.

From the reference above, it is clear that there is no place for separation in Womanist ideology. Men and women are expected to work

collaboratively for the betterment of their society. Walker's Womanist theory is a critique of and challenge to radical white feminist theory and practice. She states clearly that womanists are not separatists, but rather traditionally universalists. She illustrates this by means of the metaphor of the garden in which the women and men of different colors coexist like flowers in a garden yet retain their cultural distinctiveness and integrity. This is an indication that tolerance is desired for a peaceful co-existence of both male and female.

Kolawole in her book, *Womanism and African Consciousness* (1997) elucidates that African Womanism is the one that takes care of the rights of women of African descents alone. Her attempt at defining Womanism goes thus:

> To Africans, Womanism is the totality of feminine self-expression, self-retrieval, and self-assertion in positive cultural ways. It is generally believed that Alice Walker brought the word into focus as an aspect of African Americans' appreciation of mature womanhood in a girl... The consciousness that informed Womanism, however, transcends individual awareness and is not new to African women (Kolawole, 1997:24).

From this reference, it is apparent that the African women's mobilisation had begun long before the Western feminist's movement. According to Akorode (2011:44):

> Womanism is the black woman's intellectual framework that articulates her standpoint on self, community and society. It is committed to forging positive self-definition, self-relevance, self-reliance, self-discovery and self-independence that is capable of fighting racial and sexist oppression.

This definition explains that womanists unlike feminists believe in the emancipation of the total race and not that of the women alone. While Western feminism negates men, Womanism accommodates them. It embraces men as partners in progress and it seeks to end all forms of oppression: race, class and gender. Womanism is neither against

marriage or child bearing. It is also the struggle of women to be free, the belief that women too, are human beings and should be treated the same way men are treated.

Thus, as a theory, Womanism evolved as a rejection of feminism by many black scholars and critics notably Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985), Carol Boyce Davies (1986), Chandra Tilpade Mohanty (1991), Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993), Gwendolyn Mikell (2003), Molara Ogundipe Leslie (1994), Obioma Nnaemeka (1994) and Mary E. Modupe Kolawole (1997), among others. These critics have questioned the homogeneity of Western feminism. In essence, Womanism is an Afrocentric gender perception that celebrates blackness and black people's unique experience and lifestyles. It makes the aspirations, needs and desires of the black women its priority and is aimed at achieving self-definition and self-actualization for black women. Clearly, Womanism like all social theories has a number of tenets. It explores the human conditions; thus transcending the concern with the condition of one gender against the other, based on the premise that each gender constitutes the critical half that makes the human whole. It explores things, such as compromise, understanding and complimentarity which a womanist critic is expected to identify in her interpretation of works. As such, womanism is deployed in the analysis of the portrayal of male characters in Hadiza Isma El-Rufai's *An Abundance of Scorpions* to depict how men are portrayed as partners in progress not oppressors or victimizers.

The Portrayal of Male Characters in *An Abundance of Scorpions*
A critical examination of the portrayal of male characters in El-Rufai's *An Abundance of Scorpions* reveals the attitude of a womanist writer towards men. While female characters are positively portrayed, male characters, in contrast, are depicted negatively in nearly all the works of feminist writers such as Nwapa, Emecheta, and Alkali. In contrast, womanist writers like El-Rufai, Abubakar, and Mohammed offer a more ambivalent portrayal of their characters. They illustrate that among women, there are both wicked individuals and those who are kind and sympathetic men, ready to support women in their pursuits.

The novel under study features many male characters, but this analysis will focus only on those who play significant roles, including Yakubu, Baba, Aminu, Idris, and Alhaji Surajo Lawal.

Yakubu: A Loving and Considerate Husband
Yakubu is the first male character we meet in the text. He is the caring, loving, considerate and responsible husband of Tambaya. Though he dies prematurely, he is remembered for his kindness, loyalty and generosity throughout the story. As a pediatrician, Yakubu works at Katsina General Hospital and to make ends meet he also works for three hours twice a week at a nearby private clinic which enables him to take good care of his wife and daughter as well as his old parents, who live in Kano. Giving comfort to his wife is among his hobbies. When Tambaya is disturbed about having only one daughter, Yakubu assures her that he is satisfied with the one child they have but Tambaya insists on taking a fertility drug. It causes bloating and nausea in her. Indeed, she commends Yakubu for his patience and tolerance as she reveals that, "Yakubu put up with my mood swings and the days of crying that followed each failed procedure. He never complained" (p.3). Likewise, Yakubu is always ready to please his wife. He helps her with domestic works. He is not like Audi Adam, who regards his wife, Dijangala, as a house-maid in Kamal's *Life Afresh* (2012). He is also good in cracking jokes solely to please his wife. Thus, when they are about to leave Katsina for Kano in order to celebrate Sallah there, Tambaya wonders if the space in the car can take all their luggage. In a funny romantic way, Yakubu says to her, "Just wait and see. I'm a good packer. Isn't that why you married me?" (p.8). Tragically, before they reach Kano, Yakubu and Fatima (their daughter) die in a fatal accident. And after his death, it is discovered that he owes debts to three people but Tambaya promises to pay for him, being an amiable and a nice husband.

Baba: A Generous and Amiable Father-in-law
Baba, Yakubu's father, is among the prominent male character, who plays a significant role in the text. He is a good father-in-law. We first meet him in the hospital eagerly waiting for Tambaya to regain

consciousness after the accident, which claims the lives of her loving husband and her only beautiful daughter. When Tambaya opens her eyes, Baba is the second person she recognizes after Esther, her confidant. Tambaya narrates that:

> My father-in-law was the one sitting on the chair this time, reading the Qur'an. Baba was a tall man with a long Fulani nose on which now rested a pair of round rimless reading glasses. I watched him for a long moment. He seemed to sense my eyes on him and lifted his head. With the help of a walking stick, he heaved himself up and trudged to my bedside (p.11).

As a highly religious person and a man of great wisdom, Baba asks Tambaya about her health first before employing string of persuasive words to comfort her and sympathizes with her about the inevitable lost. In a preachy but pitiful voice Baba console Tambaya:

> Tambaya, we all came from God and, for sure, we're all going back to Him. Only Allah knows why these things happen. The most important thing for all good Muslims to remember is that Islam means total submission to the will of God. And this, hard as it may be, is His will; it is His plan. If it's any consolation, they both died instantly. They did not suffer. Indeed, they are blessed. Allah took their lives in this glorious month of Ramadan (pp.11-12).

Clearly, Baba is not like Grandfather, the unsympathetic and self-opinionated father of Bala Gano, who makes the life of his daughter-in-law, Hajjo's mother, miserable and extremely unbearable, leading to her death in Kamal's *Hausa Girl* (2012). Contrarily, Baba is a kind in-law and generous to a fault. After Tambaya is discharged from hospital, he pleads with her to stay with them and even asks Suleiman (Yakubu's brother) to propose to her because he wants her to remain in their family. Appreciating her in-laws' unflinching kindness and loyalty, Tambaya reveals that, "Yakubu's parents took good care of me. They ensured that there were always people around praying with me" (p.15). Pointedly, both Baba and Mama, his wife, treat Tmbaya like

their own biological daughter. Even Tambaya confirms this when she says to Suleiman, "Baba is most generous" (p.26). In fact, it is through him that the author graphically depicts a society that is evolving out its patriarchal beliefs and tending towards seeing women with a great sense of worth and value. As Baba says to Tambaya, "Really sometimes women can even be better than men" (p.118).

Aminu Giant: A Supportive Brother
The next male character who plays a crucial role in the text is Aminu, Tambaya's supportive brother. After his graduation from Barewa College, he ventures into the textile business in Kano but when it collapsed, he relocates to Ghana to explore the gold-mining industry there. Unfortunately, it does not work for him either. However, instead of coming back to Nigeria, he tries another job being a determined person and eventually gets the job of a sales agent in a pharmaceutical company. After some years, he marries Jamila, a Ghanaian woman. He is always ready to help Tambaya. Thus, when Tambaya leaves Baba's house because of Maryam (Suleiman's wife) and relocates to Aminu's house, Tambaya says to him, "You're doing enough already. I'm an extra mouth for you to feed, and with your wife expecting -." He quickly cuts her off and replies that, "I've told you before, now that you have neither father nor husband, you're my responsibility" (p.51). But Tambaya still believes that she should not be a burden. This statement really annoys him and he says to her, "What are you talking about? We're Africans. You're my sister. My home is your home" (p.51). This shows that the ultimate calling of the Womanist writer is for her to show commitment to the survival of males, females and children; the willingness to show that the independence of women lies not in their breaking away from and rejecting the presence of men in that struggle but encouraging cooperation and unity to promote a world built on communal values rather than individual pursuits.

Interestingly, before Tambaya's arrival, everything is set accordingly. The room which she resides in is decorated so much that she really appreciates it when she arrived. Not only that, Aminu also tells her to feel at home and relax. He then says to her, "Here's a key to the main

house. You can go in and make yourself breakfast. Jamila never wakes up before noon" (p.56). Also, being very kind, Aminu lets Jamila's brother, Musa, and her sister, Zaynab, reside in this house and takes care of all their responsibilities. In fact, he is not aware of the ignoble treatment and untold humiliation Tambaya faces from Jamila, his treacherous wife, and Tambaya never tells him about it. He completely believes that Tambaya is leading a comfortable life in his house. Thus, when she tells him that she is moving back to Nigeria (she is promised a job there), he looks unhappy but she convinces him that Esther and her husband, Idris, will give her all the necessary support.

To further prove his brotherly support, Aminu accompanies Tambaya to the motor station and gives her huge sum of money to take care of herself before she begins to receive her salary. This really surprises Tambaya and thus narrates what transpired between her and Aminu before she left Ghana in the dialogue below:

> My brother looked glum all the way to the motor-park. Just before I boarded the station wagon, he brought out an envelope from his pocket and pressed it into my palm. Tucked inside were three crisp one-hundred-dollar notes. 'What's this for?'
> 'Your plane ticket from Lagos to Abuja.'
> Knowing it was money he couldn't afford to give away. I pushed the envelope back to him. 'There's no need for that. I can take the bus, just like I did when I was coming here.'
> He refused to accept the money. 'You should go by air. It's easier.'
> 'But this is too much even for a plane ticket.'
> 'You may have a job waiting for you, but it will take some time before they start paying you. You'll need money for immediate expenses' (p100).

Tambaya thanked him profusely and left. Since then, they had not met until Aminu ran to Abuja with his little son, Farouk, to escape his wife's threat of taking Farouk away from him. She had divorced him and

wanted to marry Alhaji Ibrahim, her former boss. After Tambaya returned to Nigeria, Aminu also suffered and experienced various types of maltreatment from Jamila. This is why he quickly fled to Nigeria to avoid her cruelty. The narrator reveals, "He was right. As a foreigner, he stood no chance at all. In any case, unlike in Nigeria, the culture in Ghana was largely matrilineal" (p.194). Thus, when Tambaya met him at Esther's house on the very night he returned from Ghana, she easily noticed that:

> He'd lost so much weight that his shirt and trousers hung from his torso. He had large bags under tired, bloodshot eyes, and he'd grown an unkempt beard. For a brief moment, it seemed like he was going to smile, but he couldn't muster the effort needed (p.192).

Yet, Aminu is uncomfortable staying in Abuja for fear that Jamila could easily locate him. Therefore, he decides to go to Kano to meet his classmate and friend, Alhaji Surajo, a well-known business tycoon in Kantin Kwari Market. Aminu tells Tambaya, "They'll come after me, I'm sure. That's why I'm going to Kano. With millions of people there, they'll never find me" (p.195). However, since he left for Kano, he has not been heard from again by the end of the story.

Idris: A Caring and Responsible Husband
Idris, Esther's husband, is another kind man in the story. Although not much is said about him, his personality and impeccable manners invite thoughtful analysis. Through him, the themes of religious tolerance, mutual love, and inter-tribal marriage are explored in the text. Despite being a Hausa Muslim and Esther an Igbo Christian, Idris understands family responsibilities well. In fact, he is the catalyst for Esther's achievements. Even Tambaya is fascinated by the harmonious way the couple leads their marital life. Through her, we learn that:

> Both Esther and her husband worked for the government. She was an architect and he, a chemical engineer. Idris, though, had been trying for ages to get employment with ELF, a Multinational Oil Company (p.44).

Luckily, after some years, Idris finally gets the ELF job. He tells Tambaya, "After all these years, everything is happening so fast now. I'm going to Port Harcourt next week to start work. Esther and the kids will join me in September, and then we leave for France" (p.107). Before marrying Esther, Idris had to use persuasive words to convince Hajiya, his mother, who opposed his marriage due to their religious and cultural differences, to accept Esther as her rightful sister-in-law. He eventually succeeded. One thing that attracts Idris to Esther is her uprightness and loyalty, a quality that is evident throughout their marriage. Initially, the relationship between Esther and Hajiya is sour, as Tambaya reveals:

> The relationship between Esther and her mother-in-law had improved greatly over the years, but I still remembered those early days when, in Hajiya's eyes, Esther could never do anything right. Hajiya, naturally, wanted her son to marry a nice Hausa Muslim girl. She'd been appalled when he told her he wanted to marry Esther. 'A Christian? You want to marry someone who doesn't wash her anus after shitting? Idris insisted, and his mother came to understand that alienating Esther would drive a wedge between her and her only son' (p.302).

However, when the former proves who she really is by displaying her sterling qualities, the latter embraces her wholeheartedly. Hajiya is not like the indifferent Gwaggo, Uwani's mother-in-law, who blackmails Ahmad to marry a second wife because of Uwani's failure to give birth to more children after the birth of Yasmin and Faisal or Inna, Rosemond's mother-in-law, who also blackmails Ibrahim to marry a second wife in Bilkisu Abubakar's *To Live Again* (2007) and *The Woman in Me* (2018). Also, she is not wicked and selfish like Hafsatu, Saleh's mother who makes the marital life of her daughters-in-law, Kande and Sadiya, miserable and extremely unbearable in Razinat Mohammed's *Habiba* (2013) or Umma Sala, the pretentious but wicked mother-in-law of Hadiza Musa in Azizah Idris Muhammad's *A Sackful of Wishes*

(2018). Thus, when Idris' family comes for a holiday from France, Esther asks Hajiya to come to Abuja because there will be no time for them to go to the village and see her and she came. Tambaya, who is also there, really appreciates this as she says to Esther, "It's amazing the way you two get along now" (p.302).

Alhaji Surajo Lawal: A Sympathetic and Kind Man
Alhaji Surajo is also a prominent male character in the text whose portrayal is worthy of examination. In him, the author paints a sympathetic, considerate and generous man. Though we meet him at the middle of the story, the role he plays in the novel is quite impressive as far as womanist ideology is concerned. Through Aminu Salihu, Tambaya's brother, we first heard of him in the story; they attended Barewa College together. Tambaya narrates that:

> When Aminu was in secondary school, he talked a lot about Surajo, his friend and classmate, but I'd never met him. I remembered Aminu telling me that Surajo had enrolled in university after secondary school. Eager to start making money, my brother had opted to go straight into business (p.195).

Thus, when Aminu lost his job in Ghana and his cantankerous wife, Jamila, divorced him and married Alhaji Ibrahim (with whom she had several affairs even before she married Aminu), his available option is to come to Kano and join the textile business that Alhaji Surajo engages in. He becomes a fabulously and famously rich man. So, when Tambaya loses contact with him since he leaves Abuja for Kano, she decided to come to Kano in search for him. Through Baba's friend in Kano, Tambaya meets with Alhaji Surajo, a textile dealer in Kantin Kwari. Unfortunately, her subsequent conversation with him reveals that Aminu is not in Kano:

> I think you know my brother, Aminu. Aminu Salihu?
> You were at Barewa College together.
> Ah, Aminu Giant, he said. You're his sister?
> Yes.

> The one who lost her husband?
> Yes.
> So sorry for the loss.
> Thank you.
> So how is Aminu these days?
> My throat turned dry, and my eyes welled up with tears
> (p.241).

Seeing this, sympathy is immediately registered on Alhaji Surajo's face and he quickly asks Sani (Baba's driver, who brought Tambaya to Kantin Kwari) to tell him what is wrong with Tambaya. Sani tells him that Tambaya is looking for her Aminu. It takes time before Alhaji Surajo pacifies and persuades her to control her sobbing and tell him what actually happened. She narrates him:

> Two weeks ago, Aminu came to visit me in Abuja. He left the next day to come and see you. He was hoping you'd be able to help him settle down here. Things didn't work for him in Accra. I haven't heard from him since then (p.241).

By hearing that, he promised to in give a helping hand to find out Aminu's whereabouts. He says to Tambaya, "My last contact with Aminu was when he came to me to see you after the accident. He was here for about an hour. I was the one that dropped him off at the motor-park" (p.241). Together with Sani and Tambaya, Alhaji Surajo reports the matter to the police headquaters but they do not meet the Assistant Commissioner of Police. Yet, Alhaji Surajo assures Tambaya that he will come back to the police station. He says to her, "I'll come back tomorrow to try to see the Assistant Commissioner, so that they take the matter seriously. I'll also arrange for announcement to be placed on the radio and on TV. I'll need Aminu's photograph" (p.242). He then collects her number in order to be informing her about the progress on the matter. Since then, Alhaji Surajo has been a great comfort to Tambaya, who is in a melancholic state of mind after her brother's disappearance. Even when he goes to Abuja for a business purpose, he visits Tambaya in Gadam Orphanage to further comfort

her. Thus, being generous to a fault, before he leaves, he says to her, "If you need anything, whatever it is, let me know" (p.248). Had Tambaya told him about her deceased husband's debts, he would surely pay for it.

Interestingly, from that visit, Tambaya's love surges through Alhaji Surajo. He is mesmerized by her impeccable manners and the way she adoringly nurses the orphans like her biological children. He frequently calls her to ask about herself and the orphans. Out of his philanthropy, he donates a cow to the orphanage for the celebration of the New Year. The narrator reveals that:

> On New Year's Eve, two men drove into the orphanage with a big cow at the back of their pickup. They had brought it all the way from Kano – a gift from Alhaji Surajo. The children watched dry-eyed as the men slaughtered the animal, skinned and cup up the carcass (p.255).

Tambaya and the orphans really appreciated such a kind gesture and utmost concern for their well being. In a phone call, she thanks him profusely for the donation. Alhaji Surajo's kindness does not end there. When Tambaya tells him that she has been offered a permanent job as a Matron in Gadam Orphanage, he insists on driving down to Abuja to celebrate with her. Thereafter, he visits the orphanage regularly to give her a helping hand in looking after the orphans so much that they begin to call him uncle. Tambaya narrates that:

> Alhaji Surajo was subtle but relentless in wooing me. He came back from Austria with the technicians, and they started work in setting up his new factory. It was a busy time for him, but every so often he drove down to Abuja. At first, he'd just sit in living room at the residence while I carried on with my duties, but gradually he started engaging the children, helping them with their homework and playing games with them. The children soon began to call him 'Uncle' (p.310).

At this juncture, it is pertinent to reveal that El-Rufai, as an advocate of Womanism, depicts the philanthropic nature of men. Her portrayal of men contrasts sharply with their representation in certain feminist texts, such as Alkali's The Stillborn (1984) and Atta's Everything Good Will Come (2006), as well as in some male feminist works like Gimba's Sacred Apples (1994), Giwa's I'd Rather Die! (1994), and Kamal's Life Afresh (2012). For instance, Alhaji Surajo is neither selfish nor indifferent, unlike Alhaji Bature in The Stillborn, whose love for Li, the ambitious protagonist, is insincere. Li criticizes him when she bursts out:

> He was a greedy, selfish man who spread his wealth to get what he wanted even at the cost of other people's happiness. He was a cunning, dirty man who showed no interest in a woman until another man did (p.57).

Also, Alhaji Surajo is not like Nousah Waahid, Zahrah's second husband in *Sacred Apples* who married solely because of his inordinate desire for a child. Not long after their marriage, he betrays her and breaks his promise (of not taking another wife after her) by marrying Aalimah, a young graduate and also brings back his first wife, Salma, whom he divorced, thus turning the house into a polygamous enclave. He is always in support of his other wives and completely turns his back against Zahrah.

Similarly, Alhaji Surajo is not only ready to give a helping hand in the domestic chores in his house but also ready to cook. Cooking is his hobby. When he invites Tambaya for dinner and lifts the cover of the tray before she utters a word, the delicious aroma of chicken casserole wafts towards her, causing her stomach to rumble. Tambaya is taken aback to hear that he cooked the food. Clearly, he is different from Niyi in *Everything Good Will Come*, who chauvinistically believes that the kitchen remains the female sphere. He never gives a helping hand in domestic chores to his wife, Enitan. In fact, he is afraid of being called a "woman wrapper" (p.182) by his friends. Niyi is a microcosm of macho males, who believe in the absolute submission of women to men but never Alhaji Surajo, who regards women as mates and not maids.

Likewise, Alhaji Surajo is not like Alhaji Maikudi in *I'd Rather Die!* or Audi in *Life Afresh*, who only regard women as objects of sexual gratification. In other words, men like them see women as 'attire' that can be changed at will. Alhaji Surajo is far from that. He sincerely and wholeheartedly loves Tambaya not for her physical appearance but her sterling qualities. Despite the romantic moments they have together, they never engage in an illicit affair. Attesting Alhaji Surajo's sincerity and genuine love for her, Tambaya reveals that:

> …But I believed he was being sincere. After all, he could have exploited my vulnerability back there at his house. A lesser man would have done so, and I'd have succumbed too. It was only because of Alhaji Surajo's restrain that we escaped committing a grievous sin (p.317).

Evidently, rather than seeing man as a 'monster' or to use the usual feminist term an 'oppressor', womanist writers like El-Rufai regard men as partners in progress. Clearly, through the graphic portrayal of Alhaji Surajo, a philanthropist and a good Samaritan, who is always ready to assist vulnerable women like Tambaya, the author artistically and beautifully depicts her womanist ideology.

Other Male Characters in the Novel
Sani, Suleiman, Musa, Donatus and Alhaji Ibrahim (Jamila's former boss) are the other male characters in the novel whose roles though not major are significant. Through Donatus, for instance, the author shows how women like Miss Scholastica engage innocent men in the perpetuation and execution of various nefarious and barbarous acts against other women. Madam Schola used and misused Donatus to achieve her selfish ambition. She orders him to act as a spy, a hypocrite and an informer; to be reporting to her secretly every bit of information concerning Tambaya, that is, whatever she does in the orphanage. Thus, from the very day Tambaya assumes duty, Donatus starts his job in order to ingratiate his god-mother. He cunningly says to Tambaya, "I'm the driver. Donatus by name, Ma. Madam tell me say to clean the place well-well for you…Do you need anything, Ma?" (p.134). This

way, he easily deceives her into believing that he is a kind man, who is ready to help her in the orphanage not knowing that he is one of the secret agents of Madam Schola. When Tambaya asks him to drive her to Esther's house at eleven o'clock in the night, he suspects that there must be something that Tambaya is planning. When they reach the house, Tambaya quickly goes in and Donatus runs hastily to the back of the house and eavesdrops on everything they say through the window. So, when Tambaya tells him that he can go and that Esther will bring her back, she does not see him. Suddenly, she sees him coming out from behind the house zipping up his trousers but he cleverly says to her, "I go bush to piss" (p.198). Thus, immediately he comes back to the orphanage, he narrates everything to Madam. Madam Schola frankly says to Tambaya that Donatus has told her all that happened. Taken aback by the unexpected revelation, Tambaya bursts out that:

> Ah! Loquacious, deceitful Donatus. That night at Esther's house when I went out to dismiss him, e wasn't waiting in the car like he was supposed to. He'd emerged from the back of the house, claiming to have gone there to relieve himself. He was spying on us, probably through a back window. And it was barely two weeks later that he hurriedly quit his job. The lout must have sold the information he'd gathered to Miss Schalastica (p.279).

That is why when Donatus voluntarily resigned, he does not tell Tambaya, so that she will not find out where he resides or that he worked not only as a driver but also as a spy for Madam Schola.

On the other hand, Sani and Musa are very kind to Tambaya. As Baba's driver, Sani is always ready to help her. Along with Alhaji Surajo, he travels from place to place searching for her missing brother, Aminu. Although he no longer works for Baba due to financial constraints, Sani continues to run errands for him out of kindness, even traveling to Abuja to collect money from Tambaya for Baba. Similarly, Musa, Jamila's brother, treats Tambaya with kindness. Throughout her stay in Aminu's house, he never does anything to annoy her and is unhappy

with the way his sister treats her. In contrast, Suleiman and Alhaji Ibrahim behave poorly due to the negative influence of women. Suleiman is unkind to Tambaya because his wife, Maryam, does not appreciate her presence in their home. Meanwhile, Alhaji Ibrahim pressures Aminu at Jamila's behest, compelling him to travel from Ghana to Nigeria so that Jamila can marry her former boss, Alhaji Ibrahim.

Conclusion

The analysis thus far has adequately examined the portrayal of male characters in *An Abundance of Scorpions* by Hadiza Isma El-Rufai, a contemporary Nigerian female writer who takes a different approach from the conventional blame placed on men as the architects of the problems faced by women. This paper, through the lens of womanism, uncovers a role reversal. While female characters like Maryam, Jamila, and Miss Scholastica subjugate and complicate the lives of other women, male characters like Baba, Aminu, Idris, and Alhaji Surajo are more inclined to support women in their pursuit of education and economic independence. This portrayal of men alters women's perceptions of them and reveals the author's womanist stance. Essentially, this paper argues that while feminist writers often criticize men, womanist writers celebrate them. Overall, El-Rufai's debut novel, *An Abundance of Scorpions*, exemplifies a womanist text that portrays harmony, love, respect, and mutual understanding between the sexes. Consequently, she depicts men as caring, humane, generous, and supportive.

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Achieving Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria: A Study of the Contribution of Gbagyi Women Farmers toward Food Security in Kuje Area Council, Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract

Achieving sustainable development goals for food security in Nigeria requires the active participation and contribution of women in productive and sustainable agricultural practices. Women play a crucial role in agriculture, engaging in various activities such as crop production, livestock rearing, fishery, and post-harvesting processing and storage. Despite these contributions, women's roles in food and agricultural production are often undervalued. They face numerous challenges that hinder their full potential and limit their contributions to food security, negatively affecting their productivity and reinforcing their subservient status. This study assessed the contributions of Gbagyi women farmers toward food security in the Kuje Area Council of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, Nigeria. The Structural Functionalist Theory was employed, and the population included rural women in the study area. Data were collected using a questionnaire and in-depth interviews with a sample size of 300, drawn using multistage cluster sampling techniques. Data were obtained using frequency and percentage. The results revealed that women were primarily involved in crop production (41.5%), with cereals (42.5%) being the major crops produced. Most farmland was acquired through husbands, parents, brothers, or uncles (43%). The primary source of farming finance was personal savings (38.5%), while the major challenge faced was land speculation (31.3%). The study concluded that women play a significant role in achieving food security. It is recommended that Gbagyi women's contributions to agriculture be recognized more fully and that they be given equitable access to land, credit facilities, extension services, improved tools, and membership in cooperatives and other community benefits.

Key words: *Agriculture, food security, Gbagyi, sustainable development, women.*

Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted in 2015 set a high level of ambition. Targets for SDG 2 include not only ending hunger but also all forms of malnutrition by 2030. The international community has achieved some notable progress, yet many challenges remain. Among these are the persistent high numbers of undernourished people, the chronic deficiency of essential micronutrients, hunger and poverty on food security. To achieve this goal, agriculture is a key factor since it is the only source of food supply globally. Promoting gender equality is recognized globally in contributing to agricultural productivity and food security. Hence, ensuring greater gender equality makes households more food secure (Brot, 2018).

Sustainable production of food is the first pillar of food security. In every region of the developing world, but perhaps most in Africa; millions of women work as farmers, farm workers and natural resource managers. In doing so, they contribute to national agricultural output, maintenance of the environment and family food security. They make these contributions despite unequal access to land, inputs such as improved seeds and fertilizers as well as to information. A growing body of evidence indicates that, if male-female access to inputs were unequal; substantial gains in agricultural output would occur, benefiting both women and men. Women occupy a central place in subsistence agricultural production and are accountable for 80% of agricultural production (FAO, 2011 in Lane, 2022). They are majorly involved in food production, processing, preparation and marketing. In many developing countries, women often face a range of obstacles to achieving their full potential, ranging from constricting cultural practices to biased laws and highly fragmented labor markets. Gender discrepancies in access to agricultural resources and services adversely influence their productivity and subsequently, the food and nutrition security of their households (Adepoju *et al*., 2015).

According to Agaptus *et al*. (2019), the crux of Nigeria's agricultural policy is to boost agricultural production such that the country would

be food secured and cease to depend on food importation as prelude to achieving food security. However, women's role in Nigeria agriculture tends to be underappreciated, owing to the commonly held view that women are not involved in agricultural production, especially outside the homestead, because of cultural norms that value female seclusion and undervalue female labor. Thus, women have suffered long-term discrimination in the allocation and control of productive resources, despite their essential roles in the maintenance of the family by guaranteeing food security at the household level and in general society. Kanani (2020) avers that, efforts by national government and the international community to achieve their goals for agricultural development, economic growth and food security will be strengthened and accelerated if they build on the contributions that women make and take steps to alleviate these constraints.

Located within the Abuja city region are the Gbagyi whose livelihoods are tied to the land on which they allocate their other resources of labor and capital. Agriculture is regarded as an essential way of life of the indigenous people in Abuja. It was also strongly believed by the people that agriculture was the most honorable productive activity practiced by up to 85 % of the indigenous inhabitants (Ishaya, 2024). According to Abenu *et al.* (2023), most of the crops produced by these farmers are cereals (maize, guinea corn, millet, and rice) and yam. Ishaya (2018) avers that Gbagyi people are feeding the teeming population or immigrants into Abuja with their agricultural produce which are sold across markets thus, boosting food security in the territory. It is against this backdrop that, this study assessed the contributions of Gbagyi women farmers and the challenges they face in the practice of agricultural activities towards ensuring food security in the FCT, Abuja, Nigeria.

Food Security Conceptualized
Food security has been defined in the World Food Summit in 1996 as the situation 'when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life'. This

definition encompasses four main dimensions of food security, namely physical availability of food, economic and physical access to food, ability of food utilization and stability of the other three dimensions over time (Faiez, 2018).

Adepoju *et al*. (2015) reported that more than 800 million people throughout the world and particularly in developing countries, Nigeria inclusive; do not have enough food to meet their basic nutritional needs. Even though food supplies have increased substantially, constraints on access to food and continuing inadequacy of household and national incomes to purchase food, instability of supply and demand, as well as natural and man-made disasters prevent basic food needs from being fulfilled. The problems of hunger and food insecurity have global dimensions and are likely to persist and even increase dramatically in some regions unless urgent, determined and concerted action is taken, given the anticipated increase in the world's population and the stress on natural resources

Audu et al. (2023) observed that Nigeria is an agrarian country. However, food and nutrition insecurity are prevalent in Nigeria despite its favorable agro-ecological endowments. It has a total landmass of 92.4 million hectares, out of which only about 32 million hectares or 34.63 % are under cultivation. Nigeria, therefore, lacks both the capacity and capability to cater for the food and nutrition requirements of its teeming population. As such, food insecurity and the prevalence of under-nutrition in Nigeria are among the worst globally (Fadare *et al*., 2019). Within the context of the study, food security means, availability, access, affordability and stability of food to individuals and households.

Women and Agriculture towards Food Security
Mutua (2010) observed that all over the world, women's contributions to household food security are enormous. In Asia, women account for more than two thirds of food production and some 45 % in Latin America and the Caribbean. Women farmers in Sub-Sahara Africa produce more than three-quarters of the region's basic food, manage some two-thirds of marketing of farm produce and at least one half the

activities required for storing food and raising animals. In addition, they are now cultivating crops and taking on tasks traditionally undertaken by men, and the women are also increasingly making decisions on the daily management of farms and households. With few exceptions, women fulfill these multiple jobs with little or no access to productivity enhancing resources and services such as credits and health care. Ajani (2008) in (Faiez, 2018) revealed that, women contribute significantly to food production, processing and marketing, while men control farm decisions and productive resources. All over the world, agricultural activities such as planting, weeding, harvesting, storage and marketing have always involved both men and women. While men play their part, women also play significant part in various agricultural production activities in the areas of food crop farming, food processing and marketing. African Development Bank (2020) reported that, agriculture provides significant opportunities for gender mainstreaming and the empowerment of women. Women's presence in the agricultural labor force is significant at 50 % and produces 80 % of Africa's food and there really is no better overlapping opportunity to support women's economic empowerment and to strengthen a critical sector on the continent. However, women's position in this sector today is precarious. They typically receive little to no remuneration because land is typically family-owned and they have limited access to financing and quality inputs–there is little entitlement for women compared to men. Empowering women in the continent is not only a moral imperative, it is critical for the broader economic success of the continent. Promoting the participation and productivity of women should have a direct impact on improved food security through increased productivity, improved quality of life of the rural communities supported by them through higher household incomes and increasingly sustainable livelihoods through broader participation and access to regional and global value chains.

In the same vein, Kanani, (2020) identified that, women play a significant and crucial role in agricultural development and allied fields including the main crop production, livestock production, horticulture, post-harvest operations, agro/social forestry and fisheries.

Furthermore, women make essential contributions to the agricultural and rural economies in all developing countries. Their roles vary considerably between and within regions and are changing rapidly in many parts of the world, where economic and social forces are transforming the agricultural sector.

Challenges faced by Women in Agriculture

Gusim (2012) opined that, women contribute tremendously to agricultural output but unfortunately they hardly benefit from agricultural incentives and innovation because of economic suppression, social and traditional practices which undermine the constitutional provisions on the equality of men and women. Alade (2013) opined that, women play an indispensable role in farming and in improving the quality of life in rural areas. However, their contributions often remain concealed due to some social barriers and gender bias. Culture and sub-cultures in Nigeria give preference to the masculine gender as they are usually regarded as the heir or even pillars of the family. Even government programmes often fail to focus on women in agriculture. Despite the contributions of women in the agricultural sector as well as in other developmental processes, their roles in promoting economic and social change continues to be inadequately recognized and undervalued. This undermines the potential benefits from programmes, especially those related to food production, household income improvements, nutrition, literacy, poverty alleviation and population control.

African Development Bank (2020), reported that women apply less fertilizer per hectare than men, they have less training in agronomic practices and they are responsible for household chores which reduces the time available to farm; lack access to reliable sources of electricity as well as the capital to buy efficient, modern processing equipment; and women commercial processors may produce less due to limited working capital to run their operations. Adepoju *et al*. (2015) observed that, in all regions rural women are consistently disadvantaged in their access to productive assets. There are also pronounced gender gaps in land ownership. Land is the most important asset in any agricultural

system, and women formally own a fraction of agricultural land worldwide. Moreover, in many regions rural women are the majority of farm workers as wage workers or land users. In the latter case, the lack of formal ownership hinders investment by preventing women from using land as collateral to access credit markets.

Ashagidigbi *et al*. (2022) revealed that economic, social and political marginalization and lack of participation are key factors driving hunger and violations of the right to food. This is specifically the case for women and girls as gender relations worldwide reflect unequal power relations and firmly fixed norms and hierarchies of values that privileged men and boys. In most societies, people are pushed into gender roles and patterns that restrict their decision-making powers and development. Women are often stereotyped as being weak and dependent which prevents them from developing their potential and skills, while it can be a burden for men to always have to come across as strong, courageous and invulnerable. Deviations from the norm are seen as a threat to the existing (gender) order. Lane (2022) revealed that women face negative and differential access to affordable and nutritious foods. Social norms often place them in a role where they process and prepare food for their households. They are responsible for ensuring food safety, quality and nutrition. Women are stereotyped into provider and maternal roles that often restrict their decision-making abilities on feeding and providing for themselves and their families. Women's agricultural activities are characterized by low levels of mechanization and use of technology because of limited financial capital at their disposal for investment. This translates directly into lower productivity, lower incomes and fewer means to expand these same agricultural activities. These characteristics cause farming women to fall outside the target groups of many development interventions which tend to support market-oriented, economically profitable and larger-scale agricultural activities.

Theoretical Framework- Functionalist Theory
The proponents of the structural functionalist theory include Herbert, Spencer, Emile Durkheim and Robert K. Merton. According to the

theory, society consists of interdependent parts each of which performs particular functions and helps to maintain the stability of the entire social system which has a tendency to seek equilibrium and balance. Imbalances in the system mean that the system has to adjust to new equilibrium. The theory emphasized on the interdependence of the parts of the society. Women, been an integral part of the society has a role to play in achieving sustainable development and food security. Women like their men counterparts have to be involved in productive agricultural practices to ensure food security in the territory. Therefore, all hands must be on deck towards achieving sustainable development agenda of zero hunger in the societies.

Methodology

The Study Area

This study was conducted in Kuje Area Council, Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. Kuje Area Council being one of the six area Councils is made up of about 78 villages and has a landmass of 1,682 square kilometers which represents 22.5% of the total landmass of the entire FCT which is 8000 km^2 (Abenu *et al*. 2023). The study area is bounded on the West by Gwagwalada Area Council, South West by Abaji Area Council and to the Northeast by Abuja Municipal Area Council. The Area Council had a population of about 97,367 people in 2006 (Musa, 2015). There are many indigenous ethnic groups in the area namely, Gbagyi, Bassa, Gade, Koro, Ganagana and Gwandara (Adenle & Ifejika, 2021 cited by Abenu *et al*., 2023). The population of the area is about 97,367 in 2006 (Musa, 2015). It is found within the Guinea Savanna Ecological Zone. The topography of the area is categorized into two (2) namely, highlands and lowlands. The highlands include ridges, plateau, round-top hills, conical hills and knolls. The lowlands are mostly undulating with both wet and dry valleys. The wet valleys contain rivers, streams, ponds and rivulets which are mostly seasonal. Geologically, there are rock outcrops which are mostly granitic in nature.

Methods of Data Collection and Analyses

Data was collected using a set of questionnaire and in-depth interviews. A multistage sampling technique was used for the study. The first stage was the random selection of three (3) wards. The wards selected are Guabe, Chibiri and Kabi. The second stage involves the random selection of four (4) communities per ward making a total of 12 communities. These communities include Gaube, Ruboci, Kuje-Kwa, Chukuku, Kiyi, Chibiri, Kebi-Mangoro, Kulo, Kwaku, Simami, Shezi and Pegi. The snowballing sampling technique was used to identify the Gbagyi households. This is because; the communities are conglomerate of different ethnic groups. This was done first, by selecting three main streets in the community, and second; Gbagyi households. The final stage was the purposive selection of twenty-five (25) women from each community to fill the questionnaires. Purposive sampling was used to target the woman whose occupation is largely farming. In all, a total of 300 copies of a set of questionnaire were distributed, but 275 copies were retrieved and used for this study. Furthermore, 12 respondents for the in-depth interview were purposively sampled within the wards and interviewed in their homes, offices and palaces. The interview was conducted personally by the researcher while also using tape recorder. The unit of analysis therefore consist of the households while, the unit of response consists of the selected Gbagyi women farmers. Data from the questionnaire was coded and transferred into the statistical packaged for social science (SPSS version 22) and then analyzed using frequency distribution and percentage while in-depth interviews were analyzed within the context of the study objective.

Results and Discussion of findings
Socio-Demographic Data of Respondents
Table 1 shows that a significant number 109 (39.9 %) of the respondents were within 26-30years of age. This implies that, majority of the women farmers in this area were young women and are in their productive years. Many of the respondents 138 (50.2 %) were married, others were single, widows and divorcee. It further shows that majority, 125 (45.5 %) of the respondents had secondary education, while only 88 (32 %), had no tertiary education. This implies that the respondents were relatively educated. Furthermore, 125 (45.5 %) of the respondents had

6-10 years of farming experience, while 90 (35 %), had 1-5years. Most of the respondents had small land for their personal farm, 128 (46.5 %) has less than hectares (ha) of land, 99 (36 %), had 1-2 ha while 99 (36 %), 28 (10.2 %) and 20 (7.3 %), respectively had 2-4 ha and 5 ha and above for farming. This implies that women assess to land is limited.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Age	F	%
20-25	71	25.8
26-30	109	39.6
31-40	56	20.4
41 and above	39	14.2
Total	**275**	**100**
Marital Status	**F**	**%**
Single	71	25.8
Married	138	50.2
Divorced	31	11.3
Widow	35	12.7
Total	**275**	**100**
Religion	**F**	**%**
Christianity	170	61.8
Islam	86	31.3
Traditional	19	6.9
Total	**275**	**100**
Highest Qualification Acquired	**F**	**%**
Primary	43	15.6
Secondary	125	45.5
Tertiary	88	32.0
Others	19	6.9
Total	**275**	**100**
Farm Experience		
1-5yrs	90	32.7
6- 10 years	125	45.5
10yrs and above	60	21.8
Total	**275**	**100**
Farm size (ha)		

Less than 1	128	46.5
1-2ha	99	36
3-4ha	28	10.2
5 ha and above	20	7.3
Total	**275**	**100**

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 2 indicates that an overwhelming majority 114 (41.5 %) of the women engaged in crop cultivation; 57 (20.7 %) engaged in animal husbandry, 50 (18.1) and 28 (10.2 %), engaged in poultry and fishery respectively. A few of them 26 (9.5 %) practice other types of agriculture. This implies that, women are involved in various agricultural practices, thereby contributing to food security. Mixed framing was also discovered in the study area. The data from one of the interviews agreed with the findings above. One of the women said;

> We plant a lot of crops alongside our husbands for consumption and for sale. I grew up and saw my parents involved in farming activities especially planting of different crops and rearing of animals like cattle, goat, dog and pig. Almost every Gbagyi households engage themselves in crop production; it is from this crops and animals we get our food for daily consumptions.

Table 2: Views of respondents of type of agriculture practiced by Gbagyi women

Types of farming/agriculture engaged by women	Frequency	Percent
Poultry	50	18.1
Crop cultivation	114	41.5
Animal husbandry like goat, cattle, sheep rearing	57	20.7
Fishery	28	10.2
Others	26	9.5
Total	**275**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 3 shows that, 117 (42.5 %) said the major crops produced by the women farmers is cereals such as maize, guinea corn, rice, cowpea and sorghum. 78 (28.4 %) cultivates legumes, while others cultivate fruits, vegetables as well as root and tuber crops. This is true owing that the major food consumed by the people is largely cereals. Mixed cropping was discovered in the area. One of the farmers interviewed in Gaube affirmed that;

> We farm crops like maize, guinea corn, millet and rice because in every Gbagyi households, these are the food we eat mostly. So we produce what we know we can eat and then sale the remaining one so as to get money for children school fees; chemicals and fertilizers for the next farming season. Other crops we farm in large quantities are yam, beans, groundnut, melon and potatoes. If we want to cook, we use okra, tomatoes, pepper, melon and garden egg produced in our farms. Fruits like cashew, guava, mango and orange are found within our households as either shade where we hide or rest during sunny day. When they produce fruits, we eat from it and sell the rest in the markets.

The result indicates that the Gbagyi women are largely involved in food production. The implication is that it contributes to the boasting of food security in the FCT. Guinea corn and millet are used for local breweries such as "burukutu" and "kunu" which are very common alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks.

Table 3: Views of respondents on the types crops cultivates by Gbagyi women

Crops cultivated	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Cereals like guinea corn, maize, millet, sorghum, wheat, rice and cowpea.	117	42.5
Fruits like mango, garden egg, cashew, guava, pawpaw orange etc.	35	12.7
Legumes like beans, bambara nut, groundnut, melon, soya beans	78	28.4
Root and tuber crops like yam, cassava, potatoes, ginger, cocoyam	26	9.5
Vegetables like pepper, tomatoes, cabbage, spinach, okra	19	6.9
Total	**275**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 4 shows that an overwhelming majority of the respondents 120 (43.6 %), acquired land for farming either through their husband, parents, brothers or uncles; 74 (26.9. %) is through lease/rent. Others acquire land through purchase, inheritance and as gift. This implies that women on their own have no direct access to lands and thus, lacks decision making on lands. All the interviews agreed with the findings.

A response from an interview avers that;

> Our culture does not permit us to have land nor inherit it. Only the men have automatic access or right of inheritance to land. For example, where I am farming presently was allocated to me by my husband after he has taken the most fertile one. I farm melon, groundnut and bambara nut on the land since it is not that fertile enough to plant crops like maize, yam or guinea corn. It is just as if he abandoned the land for now. When it becomes fertile again, he might take it back from me.

The implications of these findings on women have been low productivity because they have no full or equal access to lands like their male counterparts. Most of the available lands cultivated by them are the unfertile lands left fallow by their husbands or parents.

Table 4: Views of respondents on the mode of land acquisition for farming

Mode of land acquisition	Frequency	Percent
Inheritance	30	10.9
Lease/rent	74	26.9
Husband/parents/brothers/uncles	120	43.6
Purchase	40	14.5
Gift	11	04.0
Total	**275**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey, 2024

Table 5 revealed significant number 106 (38.5 %) of the respondents acquired capital through their personal savings, 78 (28.4 %) of the respondents get support from their husbands, family or friends; a few 41 (14.9 %) and 9 (3.3 %) of the respondents get theirs through cooperative societies and empowerment from government and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). This indicates that the women have limited sources of capital to boast productivity and food security in the area since most of the capital is from personal savings and support from husbands, family and friends. All the interviews agreed with the findings. A response from one of the interviewee said;

> The money I use in farming is from my personal savings, while part is usually given to me by my loving husband. Whenever, I sell my produce from the farm, I save part of it for the next farming season. I tried applying for loan but the processes and the requirements involved to get the loan are very difficult.

Table 5. Views of respondents on women source of capital for agriculture

Sources of capital for agriculture	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Personal savings	106	38.5
Cooperative Society/association	41	14.9
Bank loan	20	7.3
Husband/family/friends	78	28.4
Borrowed	21	7.6
Empowerment from government/Non-government organizations (NGOs)	09	3.3
Total	**275**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey, 2024

In Table 6, majority of the respondents, 89 (32.4 %) identified insufficient fund and poor access to financial services; 86 (31.3 %) said land is confiscated by governments and speculators; 50 (18.1 %) said population, encroachment and destruction of crops by herders are problems faced in terms of farming in the area. Others indicated insufficient farm inputs, distance from farm and inadequate of modern technology. All the qualitative data corroborates with the findings;

> Yes, money is a major problem because you know; farming is quite expensive now compared to the past. But again, our farm size is been reduced day by day as government takes over the land from us. The lands that are close to our locations are now converted for residential and commercial purposes, while we now farm in distance locations. I use to trek like 5-8 kilometers before getting to my farm. Because of distance, we don't go to farm everyday so Fulani-herdsmen will now use the opportunity of our absence in the farms to destroy our crops. This is usually discouraging after investing our resources in farms and experience little or no crop to harvest.

Another woman interviewed has this to say;

> The truth is that; I am always challenged by money whenever I think of expanding my farm size. I want to increase my farm size so that I can practice different kinds of farm. Beyond crop cultivation, I wish to rear animals like pig, cattle and poultry, but I don't have the resources required to start-up.

The above findings point that women are devoid of challenges in their agricultural practices and this tends to undermine their efforts towards food security.

Table 6: Views of respondents on the challenges faced by Gbagyi women in agriculture towards food security

Challenges encountered by women in agriculture	Frequency	Percentage(%)
Insufficient farm inputs like improved seeds, fertilizer, agro-chemicals etc.	19	6.9
Inadequate of modern technology like farm machineries	11	4
Insufficient fund/poor access to financial services	89	32.4
Population explosion, encroachment, destruction by herders	50	18.1
Confiscation of land by land speculators and government	86	31.3
Distance to farm	20	7.3
Total	**275**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey, 2024

Discussion of findings

The study revealed that, Gbagyi women participate in almost all agricultural activities and cultivates different kinds of crops; thus contributing to food security. This is in tandem with Dankani *et al*. (2023), who found that the role of women in food production and food security is paramount not only in the study area, but Nigeria at large. The involvement of women in agricultural activities in the study area has in no doubt contributed to food availability and food security.

Agriculture goes beyond crop production which was also discovered in this study and as such, women are involved in animal rearing, poultry and fishery aside crop production. These animals and birds provide meat, income, manure and employment to the women thereby promoting socio-economic activities in the area. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2021), crops, livestock, forestry and fishery contributed over 21 % of the entire Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in March, 2021. This finding is corroborated by Muktar &

Ahundu (2023) who discovered women involvement in urban livestock rearing in Konduga Local Government Area of Borno State.

On land availability for farming by women, as urbanization increases, agricultural land is diminishing in the study area. Agricultural land is being take over for other purposes such as residential, quarry and constructions especially, roads. This is rendering many women farmers unemployed and forcing them to change their means of livelihood to trade. Similarly, cultural barriers were also found to pose a constraint in land acquisition and agricultural productivity. Land among the Gbagyi people is entrusted in the hands of the male gender. Women have to beg for farmlands from husbands and relations before they could carry out whatever agricultural activities on it. It was further discovered that government compulsory land acquisition and activities of land grabbers/speculators have an impact on Gbagyi women agricultural practices and food security in the territory. Women also have limited access to agricultural land due to cultural factors. If women acquired agricultural land from her husband, at the slightest conflict or divorce, the land would be collected from her. This agreed with Rahman (2008) cited in Ibrahim *et al*. (2023) who discovered that, in Southern Kaduna, due to legal and cultural constraints, only 20% of women can be land holders. Likewise, Dankani (2024) stated that, compulsory land acquisition has impoverished all those affected by it.

Farmers in Nigeria generally have limited access to agricultural loans and due to high level of poverty, agricultural savings are very low. This culminated in limited agricultural land, especially; land tenure system leading to land fragmentation. Hence, agricultural land is always inadequate. To ameliorate this problem, few farmers purchase or hire land for farming. However, due to poverty, most women in the study area are unable to afford the price and the era of giving land for free had gone due to the commercialization of every means of livelihood in the study area. It should be noted that, large scale agriculture which would ensure large scale food production is capital intensive as all its stages need huge amount of money. It was also found that women have little access to capital and other assets that make agricultural

production easy and profitable. Specifically, majority of the women farmers have financial problem and lack financial assistance especially from government, NGOs and microfinance banks. Most of the agricultural finance are from their personal savings and support from husbands and/or parents. This affirmed the submission of Ogunremi *et al*. (2022), which state that agriculture is faced with the problem of finance

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study was conducted to assess the contribution of Gbagyi women towards food security and in turn find out the challenges they encounter in their agricultural practices towards ensuring food security in the study area. The study revealed that, crop production (41.5 %) is the major agricultural activity carried out in the study area. This is done by mostly literate women, while agricultural land is acquired mostly via their husbands/parents/brothers/uncles (43.6 %). Further results showed that, women farmers sourced their capital through personal savings (38.5 %); while confiscation of land by speculators and government (31.3 %) is the major challenge faced. The study concluded that, women played significant role in achieving food security. Therefore, there is the need to encourage female farmers, by making available all that is necessary for successful farming. Cultural barriers that limit women access to land and resources should be abolished so that women could have equitable access to agricultural resources such as land and funds. Gbagyi women participation in agricultural activities should continue to be encouraged in order to boost food production, avoid waste and achieve the much desired food self-sufficiency in the FCT. Credit facilities and input should be made available through farmers' cooperative societies and families. The existing women's group in the communities should be organized and strengthened to increase women's access to extension services, credit facilities, agricultural inputs and even marketing services. Access to education, extension services, information, land, credit facilities and other relevant agricultural innovations will entice many women to agricultural productions.

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Women and the *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Festival: An Exploration of Gender, Spirituality, and Cultural Heritage

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Abstract

This study explores the roles and representation of women in the Òṣun Òṣogbo Festival, a renowned cultural and religious celebration held annually in Osogbo, Nigeria, dedicated to the worship of the Yoruba goddess, Òṣun. It is a festival recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage site. The festival is deeply embedded in Yoruba cosmology, where Òṣun symbolises femininity, fertility, and motherhood. Despite the prominence of women in both the symbolism and ritual practices of the festival, their contributions and evolving roles remain underscored. This study focuses on the Òṣun Òṣogbo Festival to investigate the intersections of gender, spirituality, and cultural heritage. This study deploys both womanist and cultural anthropological framework to examine the active participation of women in the festival's ceremonies, their leadership roles, and the gender dynamics at play in a traditionally patriarchal context. The study employs ethnographic methods, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews with female participants, priestesses, ritual performers, and local women. Additionally, a documentary analysis of media presentations and archival materials were used to analyse public perceptions of women's involvement in the festival. The findings illuminate how women negotiate spiritual and social power within the festival, revealing their significant yet shifting roles amidst modernisation and cultural changes. The research contributes to the broader discourse on gender, religion, and cultural sustainability in postcolonial African societies, highlighting the need for greater recognition and inclusion of women in cultural preservation efforts. This study offers valuable insights for scholars of gender studies, African traditional religions, and cultural anthropology by enhancing gender representation in cultural heritage practices.

Keywords: *Festival, Òṣun festival, Òṣogbo, Cultural Heritage, Womanist theory*

Introduction

A Festival is a recurring feast or celebration of an occasion that is typically organised or carried out by communities (Raji 2024). It focuses on some unique aspects of that community and typically includes different forms of entertainment, performances and rituals, which are often held at a particular time of the year. It is not just a religious occasion, as it garners significant interest among the people. It provides a forum for entertainment and recreation. Thus, most feasts are observed to mark important religious and social activities in the lives of the people, manifesting in various performances, entertainment, merriment rites and ceremonies (Akintan, 2013). He further states that "the indigenous festivals, like other festivals in different religions, have their origins passed down from generation to generation orally and are expressed through myths and stories" (267).

Festivals in Yoruba culture preserve and reinforce Yoruba or African cosmology. Some of the most prominent festivals include *Olojo* Festival in *Ile-Ife*, Sango Festival in *Ede*, *Okebadan* Festival in Ibadan, *Ogun* Festival in *Ondo*, and many others across Yoruba land. Among all the festivals in Yoruba society in Nigeria, *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Festival remains one of the most prestigious, retaining its ancestral traditions with little to no influence from western culture.

Osogbo, the capital of Osun State, Nigeria, lies between longitudes 4.3°E and 4.4°E of the Greenwich Meridian and latitudes 7.4°N and 7.8°N of the Equator. It is bordered to the north by the Olorunda Local Government Area, to the south by Ede North and Atakumosa Local Government Areas, to the east by Obokun and Boripe Local Government Areas, and to the west by Egbedore Local Government Area. Serving as the headquarters of Òṣogbo Local Government Area, the city covers a total area of 250 km². The Òṣun Òṣogbo **Sacred Grove,** a 75-hectare undisturbed rainforest, is the primary venue for the renowned Òṣun Òṣogbo **Festival.** Every year, Òṣogbo, Nigeria, hosts the Òṣun Òṣogbo Festival, a vibrant celebration of spirituality and cultural heritage. The event has its roots in the worship of Òṣun, the Yoruba goddess of rivers, fertility, and love, and is recognised by UNESCO as a cultural heritage site that emphasises the lasting value of

traditional customs (OCHC 2007). This signifies that Òşun sacred rituals are performed in seclusion by the Ataoja along with   Òşun priests and priestesses, to reaffirm the sacred bond and reopen the pathway between the goddess and the people of Òşogbo (Badejo 1996). Various aspects of the festival are led by the *Ataoja*, the traditional ruler of *Òşogbo*, as well as the *Iya Òşun* (*Òşun* Priestess), the *Aworo Osun* (*Osun* Priest) and other *Osun* devotees (Oyeweso, 2013)

The *Òşun Òşogbo* Festival attracts a large number of participants and features numerous events, including *Iwopopo*, *Iboriade*, *Ayo-Olopon*, *Olojumerindogun*, and ultimately, the *Òşun* Festival, which draws the largest crowd. The first public event of the *Òşun Òşogbo* Festival is the *Iwopopo*, the traditional clearing of the *Òşogbo* main road, which takes place twelve days before the grand finale of the festival (Falasi, 2002). On this day, the *Ataoja* is typically accompanied by his wives, chiefs, the *Òşun* priestess, and other devotees as they proceed from his palace to Gbaemu, located at the centre of the town. At the designated point in Gbaemu, the *Ataoja*, dressed in full royal regalia and holding his staff of office, takes a seat to receive communal gifts from his subjects, (Oyeweso, 2013:4). The second major event, *Atupa Olojumerindogun*, follows *Iwopopo*. It usually takes place nine days before the festival's grand finale and is traditionally conducted at the *Ataoja's* palace, involving sixteen point lamps and other Òşun devotees. The Òşogbo Cultural Heritage Council (2007) asserts that:

> It is a sixteen point lamp of Oso-igbo now called Osayin lamp. It is a piece of metal about seventeen centimetres high. During Òşun Òşogbo Festival, the lamp is kept burning from seven p.m. till dawn. The Ataoja dances round it three times, followed by the chiefs, priest and the priestesses and other people at the gathering (9).

Devotees of *Ataoja* and *Osun* participate in several customary activities between the *Olojumerindinlogun* lamp-burning and the festival's grand finale. These activities include days dedicated to sacrifices in honour of all previous *Ataojas* and their crowns (Ojo Ibori and Iboade), the wives of former *Ataojas* (Ojo Ayaba Isale), and the house or palace of a past

Ataoja (Ojo Ogboni). Additionally, a special day is observed when the *Ataoja* provides food for his chiefs, family members, and the public while also distributing alms to the underprivileged in the community (Oyeweso, 2013). These rituals and ceremonies constitute essential aspects of the annual Osun festival, preceding the culminating events. The sacred rituals and secular dramatic performances take place at the **Òşun** Grove, located on the outskirts of Osogbo. On the day of the festival's grand finale, the *Ataoja, Ìyá Òşun,* **the** Votary Maid (*Arùgbá Òşun*), and other *Òşun* devotees perform sacrificial offerings to the goddess, marking the pinnacle of the annual *Òşun-Òşogbo* festival (Oyeweso, 2013). Amid elaborate ceremonies, the ***Arùgbá*** leads a grand procession of all Òşun devotees to the sacred grove following early morning prayers and rites at the *Òşun* shrine within the *Ataoja's* palace (Olufemi, 2004). Thus, the festival serves as a comprehensive celebration of Yoruba culture, extending beyond its spiritual dimensions. It features vibrant performances, traditional dances, music, and art exhibits. The myths, legends, and values associated with *Òşun* are transmitted by elders, providing a platform for the intergenerational transmission of cultural heritage. The *Òşun Òşogbo* Festival fosters cultural pride and solidarity among the Yoruba people and beyond, underscoring the significance of preserving indigenous traditions in an increasingly globalised society.

The limited scholarly focus on the intersection of gender, spirituality, and cultural practices has resulted in an incomplete understanding of how women navigate their roles within the festival. Moreover, the festival's evolving nature, particularly in response to modernisation, globalisation, and shifting gender norms, raises critical questions about the impact of these changes on women's participation. As the festival unfolds amid contemporary socio-cultural transformations, it presents an opportunity for a comprehensive examination of women's current involvement, their negotiation of spiritual authority, and their representation within this traditional religious framework. Thus, this study seeks to bridge the existing gaps in knowledge regarding the roles, representations, and evolving participation of women in the *Òşun Òşogbo* Festival. Specifically, it explores the spiritual and cultural

contributions of women, examining the extent to which modernization influences their roles in this historically significant event. This paper contributes to broader discussions on gender, religion, and cultural preservation in African societies.

Literature Review

It is essential to examine previous scholarly works on women and religion in Africa to contextualise this study within the broader academic discourse. Although not specifically focused on gender, several studies on African religion have acknowledged the roles and responsibilities of women in various spheres of society. From different methodological perspectives, Omoyajowo (1982), Peel (1968), Shorter (1980), and Tunner (1990) have explored the roles of women in African Christianity. A central argument in these works is that African traditions have influenced African Christianity and contributed to the improved status of women within the religion.

Nwosu (2012) examines the traditional marginalization of women in Nigeria, highlighting the significant changes in their roles resulting from societal shifts. Despite progress in enhancing women's status and participation, a substantial gender gap persists. He recommends that Nigerian society adapt to the evolving roles of women in a globalized world. Akintan (2013) investigates the role of women in female-oriented cults during *Ijebu*-land's annual festivals, emphasising their significant participation despite the pervasive influence of Christianity, Islam, and modernity. Ojiakor (2007) identifies culture and tourism as critical factors in the development of the Òṣun Òṣogbo Grove, emphasising its potential for sustainable development and social change transformation. She advocates for greater support for artists and the promotion of cultural seminars; however, her focus remains on tourism rather than women's roles in the festival.

Sheghale et al. (2015) examine the maintenance of *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Grove, highlighting the deterioration of cultural properties resulting inadequate funding, high repair costs, and poor construction techniques. Their research underscores the importance of preserving heritage for future generations, emphasising its connection to the

festival's cultural significance. Elizabeth (2013) explores the *Òṣun Òṣogbo* **Festival through** three key dimensions: the myths surrounding its origin, its day-to-day rituals and activities, and the festival's characteristics as a theatrical performance. She argues that elevating Nigerian cultural festivals to both national and international platforms would contribute significantly to Nigeria's development. Ajibade (2005) investigate the structure of the *Òṣun* cult in *Òṣogbo*, focusing on its cultic functions, gender inclusivity, and the role of verbal arts such as songs and chants. He highlights the influence of Islam and Christianity on the cult, examining how these religions have altered its traditional context.

From the aforementioned studies, it is evident that, although the roles of women and the *Òṣun* Festival have been the subject of critical scholarships, the specific role of women in *Òṣun Òṣogbo* festivals performances has not received substantial academic consideration. Therefore, this study seeks to critically examine the role of women in the performances of the *Òṣun Òṣogbo* festival.

Methodology
The study employs ethnographic methods, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews with female participants, priestesses, ritual performers, and local women. Additionally, documentary analysis of media presentations and archival materials were to examine public perceptions of women's involvement in the Òṣun Òṣogbo festival. This study is further grounded on womanist and cultural anthropological theories. Womanist theory explores the experiences, rights, and roles of women, particularly in African societies, emphasising self-assertion and cultural expression. It conceptualises men and women as collaborative agents in addressing societal issues and challenges cultural constraints that marginalises women. Cultural anthropology complements this framework by examining the Òṣun Òṣogbo Festival's cultural significance in preserving Yoruba heritage. Given that women play central roles in this festival, both theories provide a critical lens for analysing their

contributions, demonstrating how the event reflects and sustains the traditions and societal roles of Yoruba women.

Analysis of the roles of Women in the *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Festival

The *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Festival is a dynamic and culturally significant event characterised by a variety of activities and celebrations. Women occupy a central position in the festival, playing critical roles in shaping its proceedings, particularly because the festival is inherently cantered on feminine spirituality. The essence of *Òṣun* is manifested in the diverse roles women assume during the festival. These roles depict women as spiritual leaders, seers, healers, spokespersons, entertainers, and providers of nourishment, among others.

Women as Spiritual Leaders in *Òṣun Osogbo* Festival

The festival of *Òṣun Òṣogbo* positions women as spiritual leaders who play vital roles in the sacred rituals and ceremonies conducted throughout the festival. *Iya Òṣun, Arùgbá* and *Iya Oloshuns* serve as the principal spiritual figures, each assuming distinct and essential responsibilities. Among them, *Iya Òṣun* and *Arùgbá* are particularly significant, as their roles are unique and indispensable to the festival.

Ìyá Òṣun

Iya osun serves as the spiritual leader of all *Osun* priestesses. She is chosen by the goddess through Ifa divination, signifying divine approval by the goddess. Upon initiation, she is required to relocate to the king's palace, where she carries out her spiritual duties. According to oral tradition, *Iya Osuns* are often widows of past kings.

Fig.1: Iya Osun and her entourage

Prior to the festival day, *Iya Òşun*, accompanied by other devoted women of *Òşun*, follows *Arugba* to the king' s palace where they are accompanied by the rhythmic beating of drums as they dance around the palace. Their dance movements are often compared to those of a swimming fish, symbolising fluidity and grace. *Iya Osun* is responsible for preparing the sacred calabash, which the Votary Maid (*Arugbá*) carries to the shrine located within the sacred grove. Before the Votary Maid's processional journey, two female devotees precede her to perform a sacrificial offering at the shrine's alter. *Iya Osun* conducts rituals that invoke the healing essence of *Òşun*, offering prayers and sacrifices on behalf of the community. During the festival, female devotes lead the spiritual ceremonies and administer healing rites at the sacred grove and the *Òşun* River, where worshippers immerse themselves in the water to seek divine intervention and spiritual renewal.

***Arubga* (Voltary Maid)**

Fig.2: The *Arugba* (Voltary Maid)

The Voltary maide (*Arugba*) is chosen through *Eerindinlogun* divination. Her selection is determined in detail by the interpretation of cowries. She is a princess, traditionally chosen through *Ifa* divination by the priest. The *Arugba* is regarded as a sacred vessel, selected for her purity (traditionally a virgin) and spiritual preparedness. She carries a ceremonial calabash containing sacrificial items intended to appease and honour the *Osun* River goddess. She plays a central role in the prayers and rituals performed during the festival. As she leads the procession to the *Osun* Sacred Grove, she serves as the intermediary between the physical world and the divine. Her presence is indispensable, as the festival cannot proceed without her.

The *Arugba* carries the calabash containing the sacrificial offering to the Òşun deity. Her purity is believed to determine the efficacy of the sacrifice. The sacred calabash is typically covered with a red cloth resembling *Aso-Aro* (dyed cloth) and adorned with *Owo-Aje* (money beads). The sacrifice is ritually prepared inside the calabash at the *Arugba's* residence, located within the king's palace. Before proceeding to the sacred grove, she first presents the sacrifice at the king's palace to receive his blessing. The offering symbolises the collective prayers, wishes, and burdens of the *Osogbo* community and its visitors. It is widely believed that through the *Arugba*, goddess *Osun* bestows fertility, prosperity, and protection upon the people.

The *Arugba's* journey through the town, guided by devoted aides and priests, is a sacred ritual that symbolises the community's path to renewal, protection, and blessings from **Òṣun**. As she moves, she is closely guarded to prevent any intrusion to maintain the purity of her mission. Her role represents the collective trust of the community, and her successful journey is regarded as essential to the prosperity and spiritual cleansing of *Osogbo*. The *Arugba* serves not only as a spiritual guide for the festival but also as a symbol of unity, hope, and continuity, embodying the shared faith in *Osun*'s protection and the cultural resilience of the Yoruba people. She is more than an individual; she is a sacred vessel through which the spiritual and cultural essence of the *Osun Osogbo* Festival is channelled. Her role remains central to the festival, reflecting the Yoruba worldview's interconnectedness between physical and metaphysical realms.

The A*rugba* Pathfinder (*Ìyálásé,*)
The *Ìyálásé* also known as the *Arugba* ;Pathfinder , is responsible for consecrating all the paths taken by the *Arugba* (votary maid) as she carries the sacred calabash containing offerings for the goddess of the River.

Fig.3: *The Arugba* **Pathfinder (***Ìyálásé,***)**

During the *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Festival, *she* plays a central and sacred role in performing significant rituals that affirm her spiritual authority and connection to *Òṣun*. On the day of the festival, she begins by conducting a ritual known as *Oro* before the *Arugba* emerges from her residence. In this ritual, she holds a sacrificial hen and symbolically casts it at the entrance of the *Arugba*'s dwelling - a gesture believed to purify and prepare the path for the sacred procession. The responsibilities entrusted to her establish her as a spiritual custodian, not only overseeing the rituals that define the festival but also sustaining a continuous connection between the deity and the worshippers. Her role underscores the enduring significance of women in the spiritual and cultural practices of the *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Festival.

Women as Custodians of Healing in the *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Festival
The *Òṣun Òṣogbo* festival depicts women as healers, emphasising their spiritual and medicinal roles. *Osun* is revered as the divine mother, believed to possess power to cure even the most incurable diseases. The water from the *Òṣun* River is regarded as medicinal, with the capacity to restore health and well-being.

Fig.4: Women fetching water for people's healing

During the *Òṣun Òṣogbo* **Festival**, women are not just merely passive participants but active custodians of healing, spirituality, and cultural heritage. Particularly, the priestesses of *Òṣun,* serve as guardians of traditional medicine, using herbs, chants, and rituals believed to channel *Òṣun's* healing powers to address physical, emotional, and

spiritual ailments. Moreover, these women are frequently consulted by individuals and families seeking remedies for infertility, illnesses, and personal challenges. It is noted that water fetched daily from the *Òṣun* shrine within the sacred grove during the festival is specifically offered to barren women, pregnant women, sick infants, and children. This practice is widely believed to yield remarkable results: barren women conceive, sick children recover, and pregnant women give birth to healthy babies. Furthermore, these women play a crucial role in the intergenerational transmission of healing knowledge and practices. They train young women as apprentices in herbal medicine, spiritual rituals, and the *Òṣun* tradition, thereby preserving these customs for future generations. Their role as healers reinforces their importance in sustaining the Yoruba tradition and maintaining the health and prosperity of their communities. Thus, *Òṣun* embodies the role of women as both nurturers and healers, affirming their indispensable contributions to the well-being of society.

Women as Seers in the *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Festival

Fig.5: Women using cola-nuts, salt to interpret messages as seers

Women are revered as seers during the *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Festival, playing a pivotal role in spiritual consultations and divination. Throughout the festival, women are positioned at the centre of religious activities, tasked with appealing to *Òṣun* on behalf of supplicants seeking divine intervention .They serve as intermediaries, embodying sacred authority and facilitating communication between the divine and the community.

The priestesses of *Òṣun*, are highly respected for their ability to interpret messages from the goddess and provide guidance on both personal and communal matters. On this sacred day, some women become possessed by *Òṣun*, enabling them to reveal hidden spiritual truths about an individual's life. Through possession, *Osun* grants them the ability to perceive people's destinies at their current stage in life. These women engage in divination using traditional methods such as *Ifá* or cowry shells. Through their spiritual insight, they diagnose problems, prescribe solutions, and offer prophecies that influence individual decisions and communal actions. Their role as seers affirms the Yoruba belief in the interconnectedness of the physical and spiritual realms, positioning women as vessels of divine communication.

Women as Entertainers in the *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Festival.

Fig.6: *Osun* women dancing at the pavilion, showing their support to the *Ataoja*

During the *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Festival, women actively participate as drummers, performing alongside their male counterparts. They play calabash drums called *Kengbe* and also use gongs, drawing significant attention from festival-attendees, many of whom attend specifically to

witness the performances of women drummers. In addition to drumming, women engage in traditional dance performances and constitute the majority of the audience, reinforcing their central role in the festival's cultural expression.

The festival is further enriched by a diverse repertoire of songs, which not only entertain but heighten the celebratory atmosphere. These songs, often dedicated to venerating *Òşun*, reflect the community's deep reverence for the goddess, as demonstrated in the *Òşun* praise songs performed throughout the event. This underscores the significance of women in traditional dance performances, which depict narratives of *Òşun's* benevolence and embody the Yoruba worldview. Their graceful movements, often synchronised with the rhythms of the traditional drums, symbolises the beauty, fertility, and nurturing spirit of the goddess.

Women also contribute significantly by singing and chanting in groups before the king, demonstrating their support for his administration. Singing is a fundamental role for women in the *Òşun Òşogbo* Festival, fostering unity and communal harmony. Furthermore, the festival presents women as dancers, whose performances captivate both the audience and the dignitaries gathered at the central pavilion, which serves as a ceremonial space for the king and other esteemed guests. Various groups of women present distinct performances, adding vibrancy and cultural richness to the event. Through their roles as singers, dancers, dramatists, and artists, women not only enliven the Festival, but also affirm their status as custodians of Yoruba cultural identity and spirituality.

Women as Sole Providers of Food and Drink in the *Òşun Òşogbo* Festival
Ìyá Òşun and other *Òşun* women devotees play a pivotal role in the *Òşun Òşogbo* Festival, particularly in ensuring the provision of sustenance for all participants. The *priestesses oversee* availability of food and drink for the initiates, the drummers, and the young boys responsible for cleaning and maintaining the shrines throughout the

festival period. This act of communal care underscores the essential contributions of women to the festival's success.

Additionally, women assume the responsibility of preparing and distributing food to attendees. To accomplish this, they pool their resources, contributing fund to support the preparation of various delicacies. The *Ìyá Òṣun* oversees this process, coordinating with other *devotees* to ensure that the meals are meticulously prepared and adequately distributed. Once the food is ready, it is shared equitably among all attendees, regardless of gender, reinforcing principles of inclusivity and hospitality. The active involvement of women in cooking and distribution of food challenges certain stereotypes within segments of the Yorùbá community that perceive women as idle or dependent on men. On the contrary, their efforts during the festival exemplify their industriousness and capacity to fulfil roles traditionally associated to men. This aspect of the festival underscores the cultural expectation of women as nurturers and caretakers, while simultaneously highlighting their organisational skills and capacity to meet communal needs. Through these pivotal roles, it can be asserted that women not only preserve cultural traditions but also challenge and redefine perceptions of gender roles within the Yorùbá community.

Gender Dynamics and Power Negotiation in the *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Festival
In the *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Festival, gender dynamics and power negotiation are central to understanding the roles that women occupy within the cultural and spiritual framework of Yoruba society. The festival honours *Òṣun*, a powerful female deity who symbolises fertility, love, and water. She embodies feminine power in Yoruba cosmology, which recognises female deities as potent forces within the spiritual hierarchy. However, the festival's organisational structure, ritual practices, and leadership roles often reveal complex negotiations of gendered authority, as traditional Yoruba society operates within a largely patriarchal framework.

Fig.7: Some of the *Òṣun* priestesses and devotees

Women hold significant authority in the *Òṣun Òsogbo* Festival, primarily through roles such as priestesses and ritual performers. As spiritual leaders, they act as intermediaries between the community and the goddess *Òṣun*, preserving sacred knowledge and performing critical rituals. This spiritual authority grants women a recognised form of power that, while deeply respected, often operates within the boundaries established by male-dominated cultural norms. Their influence derives from religious duties rather than secular leadership, enabling them to navigate social spaces typically restricted for women in other aspects of Yoruba society.

While women play pivotal role in the festival, its administrative and organizational leadership remains predominantly male-dominated .This division reflects the broader gender hierarchy in Yoruba society, where men traditionally occupy higher-status roles in secular leadership. Women's religious roles provide a culturally sanctioned space for them to exercise power; however, their influence is often constrained by male leaders who oversee festival proceedings and decision-making processes. This power dynamic necessitates subtle negotiation, as women find ways to assert their spiritual authority while navigating the structural limitations imposed by patriarchal oversight.

The portrayal of women in the *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Festival also plays a significant role in power negotiation. Media and social narratives often emphasise the symbolic roles of women, portraying them as custodians of cultural and spiritual heritage. However, these representations sometimes romanticise their roles, focusing on traditional images of women as nurturers and caregivers without fully acknowledging their contributions to leadership or decision-making. Such representations risk reinforcing gender stereotypes, thereby limiting women's opportunity for more assertive participation in cultural preservation and leadership within the public sphere.

Women in the festival face challenges in asserting their roles beyond religious duties, particularly when seeking to expand their influence into secular or administrative positions. Resistance arises from both traditionalists, who perceive such shifts as a threat to cultural authenticity, and from societal norms that resist alterations to established gender roles. Despite these obstacles, women have strategically adapted their participation by expanding their influence through subtle forms of resistance. They achieve this by reinterpreting rituals, advocating for representation, and fostering community connections that empower future generations of women within the festival.

The *Òṣun Òsogbo* Festival exemplifies how women negotiate spiritual and social power within a framework that venerates feminine spirituality while often restricting secular authority. This dynamic highlights the complex interplay of gender, spirituality, and cultural heritage, illustrating how women navigate power structures to preserve their roles while contributing to the evolving discourse of gender in Yoruba culture.

The Impact of Modernisation on Women's Roles in the *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Festival
Modernisation and evolving gender expectations have reshaped how women's roles are perceived and enacted within the festival. With the advent of the new media with increasing global visibility through media coverage, women participating in the festival now encounter

both opportunities and pressures to reassert their roles. These shifts requires a careful balance between traditional expectations and modern forms of empowerment, such as advocating for greater visibility in leadership roles or challenging traditional gender norms that restrict their participation. For instance, some women leverage their positions as priestesses to advocate for gender inclusivity in the festival planning, illustrating a fusion of traditional values with contemporary gender equality movements.

Conclusion

The *Òṣun Òṣogbo* Festival serves as a profound intersection of gender, spirituality, and cultural heritage, encapsulating the dynamic role of women within Yoruba traditions. As custodians of sacred rituals and cultural performances, women actively embody and transmit the festival's spiritual significance while reinforcing the collective identity of the *Òṣun* worship community. Their roles extend beyond passive participation, encompassing leadership in spiritual practices, particularly through the pivotal figure of the *Arugba* (votary maid), *Iya Òṣun*, whose symbolic journeys reflect the community's aspirations and devotion. Women also serve as healers, seers, entertainers, and providers, underscoring their multifaceted contributions to the festival.

The festival's enduring relevance illustrates how gender roles in Yoruba spirituality are both projected and fluid, challenging simplistic binaries and fostering a collaborative dynamics between men and women. The *Òṣun Òṣogbo* festival not only preserves Yoruba cultural heritage but also serves as a platform for exploring the intersections of faith, identity, and modernity. This exploration highlights the festival as a living tradition that affirms the agency of women in spiritual and cultural spaces, emphasising their critical role in sustaining Yoruba heritage in an ever-evolving world. Future research could further examine how modern influences, including tourism and globalisation, continue to shape these gender dynamics and the festival's cultural expressions.

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Gender Relations and Fair Hearing: The 'New' in Ola Rotimi's '*Man Talk, Woman Talk*'.

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Abstract

Interests in gender relations, conflicts, and perhaps 'wars' have been sustained preoccupations in Nigerian literature since the arrival of the dissenting voices of female writers on the literary scene. As illustrated by robust scholarship within and outside the continent, several studies and attempts at providing learned responses to gender issues seem to have only generated more uncertainties in this field of study. Nevertheless, it is only in response to the lingering uncertainties that new approaches and perspectives on gender discourse and relations have emerged in literature and scholarship. This paper examines the new perspective in striking the balance between men and women in Ola Rotimi's Man Talk, Woman Talk. It is predicated on the legal concept of fair hearing. The paper reveals that Rotimi, by means of a theatrical mode laced with humour, pushes to 'better the balance, better the world' as he projects gender claims and counterclaims as serious intellectual discourse that must be attended to. It argues that, with a vibrant prototype of male and female voices, the play, couched in court proceedings, voices gender biases, misgivings, and sentiments that are silenced in due course. The study concludes that the play provides a premise for the mutual resolution of gender issues and also attests to the existence of a new perspective on gender equity in Nigeria. The paper has therefore argued that with actual attitudinal change in men and women alike, gender relations would exist devoid of provocation and conflicts.

Key words: *Fair hearing, gender relations, gender balance, equity, bias*

Introduction

Interests in gender relations, conflicts, and wars have been sustained preoccupations in Nigerian literature since the emergence of dissenting female voices on the literary scene. Robust scholarship both within and outside the continent illustrates that numerous studies and attempts to

address gender issues have only generated more uncertainties in this field. Nonetheless, this subject and related topics occupy a significant position in the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which were implemented globally in 2015 (UNDP). According to the United Nations, these goals are essential for sustainable development. Goal two, which focuses on gender equality, asserts that women must be granted equal rights in society, as this is crucial for a sustainable future. The issue of gender equality in relation to peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG Goal 16) remains significant to this study. In response to the ongoing uncertainties, new approaches and perspectives on gender discourse and relations have emerged in literature and scholarship.

This paper examines a new perspective on improving the balance between men and women in Ola Rotimi's *"Man Talk, Woman Talk,"* grounded in the legal concept of fair hearing. It reveals that Rotimi, through a theatrical mode infused with humour, employs the *kami suo toi* (a dramatic form in Ijaw land where mutual insults serve as entertainment and social commentary). Rotimi aims to 'better the balance, better the world' by presenting gender claims and counterclaims as an essential intellectual discourse that demands attention. The paper argues that, with a vibrant mix of male and female voices, the play, framed as court proceedings, articulates gender biases, misgivings, and sentiments that are often silenced. The study concludes that the play provides a foundation for the mutual resolution of gender issues and demonstrates a new perspective on gender equity in Nigeria. Ultimately, the paper posits that with genuine attitudinal change among both men and women, gender relations and equity can exist without provocation and conflict.

Conceptual Considerations: The Principle of Fair Hearing
This paper is based on the legal concept of fair hearing. It examines the significance of the right to fair hearing as dramatized in Rotimi's *"Man Talk, Woman Talk"* and explores the proposed solutions for resolving conflict and achieving sustainable gender equity in Nigeria and Africa.

Jhaveri asserts that the origin of the requirement for a fair hearing in administrative law can be traced back to historical constitutional documents and rights instruments, such as the Carta (1215), issued by King John of England (2). Jhaveri notes that the rationale behind the fair hearing is rooted in its capacity to enhance "the chances of a just outcome as decision-makers are presented with an optimal amount of information by all relevant persons." Additionally, it creates a fair and enabling environment that fosters respect for individuals affected by administrative decisions by treating them equitably from a procedural standpoint (2). The resolution of this issue largely depends on the specific source of the right to a fair hearing that an applicant relies upon. However, Oni argues that while the Carta significantly contributed to the English notion of fundamental human rights, various myths persist that seek to explain the origin of the concept of fair hearing. He further contends that:

> Indigenous Nigerian concept of fair hearing did not conform … with the United Kingdom concept, does not mean that fair hearing never existed in the indigenous Nigerian justice system. The indigenous justice system has its own traditionally unique concept of fair hearing that was premised on the culture of the individual indigenous society. There is no doubt that the concept of fair hearing possesses a long and rich history but it did not originate exclusively from any single legal system, from any single geographical region of the world or from any single country…(127).

Thus, fair hearing is derived from the principle of natural justice; it "means giving equal opportunity to the parties to be heard in the litigation before a court or tribunal, including an ad-hoc tribunal…" (Usman 2). Fair hearing is a fundamental right of all individuals. Oni corroborates this, but asserts that although fair hearing is a universal right, it is often abused globally. He insists that this abuse is not without consequences. While some of the resultant effects may be mild, others can be devastating with wide-ranging impacts (126). In the

context of fair hearing, parties are given equal opportunity to present their cases, and this principle is crucial because each individual should typically have the right to be heard without partiality. Ibingo Evans asserts that "fair hearing is a trial or determination of rights in which a party is granted a hearing showing no partiality, prejudice, and is therefore just, upright, and honest" (76). Similarly, Oni points out that "hearing can only be fair when all the parties to a dispute are given the opportunity to be heard regardless of status, age, race, religion, tribe, political affiliation, etc. If any party to a dispute is denied the opportunity to be heard, such a hearing is devoid of the principle of fair hearing; thus, everyone involved in a case must be assured that he or she will be given an opportunity to be heard" (126).

In the administration of justice, a person should have the opportunity to be heard. The right to fair hearing is enshrined in Section 36(1) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Citizens' rights and privileges are protected through the principle of fair hearing. Fair hearing can be applied in both judicial and non-judicial proceedings, and it includes:

> the broad idea that all parties should be heard: audialterampartem. The right to a fair hearing can include access to a court or tribunal (→administrative dispute in civil law jurisdictions); an oral hearing; a timely hearing; an opportunity to present evidence or information relating to the decision and have notice of information held by the executive with a chance to respond to such information; access to legal representation and the need for reasons on the making of an administrative decision (Jhaveri 2).

Although studies in Africa and Nigeria seem to argue for the universal existence of fair hearing, one wonders why it is readily muted in cases where women are involved and seem to crave opportunities to be heard or served justice in many societies and indigenous communities in Africa. Aiyedun and Ordor assert that "the dispute resolution process in African societies provided individuals with an opportunity

to air their grievances, an element which connotes fairness (158) and had appeal across indigenous communities, however, these traditional processes "are criticised for not adhering to international fair trial standards" thus, women suffer discrimination in their proceedings. (163) Olusegun and Oyelade state succinctly that women have limited access to justice…" and this is not without consequences (4). Perhaps it is safe to implicate patriarchy and its multifaceted dynamics in the abuse of fair hearing in cases involving especially women and men.

Gender Relations and Conflict Resolution

Gender can be described as an identity and the expectations associated with it, shaped by the roles assigned by society to men and women. Sikoska and Solomon points out that gender is a process individuals are born into, which connotes a "system of roles and relationships between women and men that are determined not by biology but by social, political, and economic context" (2). They further argue that gender and its patterns imply situations in which women are disadvantaged compared to men, and this disparity is a fundamental source of conflict between the genders in society. Metell contends that until responsibilities and opportunities are equally shared between men and women, gender equality will remain an elusive phenomenon (5).

Gender relations between men and women in Africa may appear cordial; however, when perceived otherwise, socio-cultural norms, expectations, and demands inherent in a community's way of life can become problematic. Dasi asserts that in African societies where male normativity is prioritized, gender norms have adversely affected women, as many of these norms "are far from ensuring protection and participation, particularly for women" (60). While African communities may pride themselves on indigenous principles of social justice and equity—especially in conflict resolution—Dasi's insights on male normativity challenge the effectiveness of these systems. She further claims that the system "both oppresses women and denies them equal rights and opportunities with men" (60). This perspective significantly accounts for the lack of cohesion between men and women in Africa,

where women's responses to these restrictive norms are often deemed unacceptable and become a source of considerable conflict. Sikoska and Solomon state that "if conflicts are about different needs, interests, and perceptions of needs and interests, then gender identity becomes an important determinant in creating, maintaining, and ending violent conflicts…" (2). This implies that understanding and conceptualizing gender norms and perspectives is crucial. Gender conflicts and tensions arise from gender dynamics, which warrant significant attention.

Gender balance: *'Woman Talk, Man Talk'*

'Man Talk, Woman Talk' is one of Ola Rotimi's plays published posthumously in 2007. It is set in a court scene in contemporary Nigeria. The play highlights the difficulties that could characterise gender relations in Nigeria. The stereotyping of gender roles and expectation. The different sensibilities of men and women in society are expressed through the two major characters, Boy and Girl who are given the privilege of fair hearing. In this play, Rotimi's characters are given the opportunity to voice their biases, misunderstandings and misconceptions of the opposite gender. This account for the title of Rotimi's play: *'Man talk, Woman talk!'* (*The Epilogue* 65). Men and women alike should voice lingering biases and grievances that have complicated their relationship, caused gender wars, inequality and bias up until modern times.

A number of issues are raised in the court proceedings where interestingly, Rotimi creates an environment where women in Africa can also be heard and not merely seen. With intermittent interjections from the Judge (who significantly goes by the personal name, Charles Nnolim) and the Counsellor (an assistant to the Judge, who goes by the name, Lara Ogunsipe), the gender representatives – BOY (Michael) and GIRL (Karina) do not shy away from raising issues in the courtroom that revolve around age long grievances between men and women. The issues raised are not based on religion or emotion, but 'logic' which provides a premise for each gender to uniquely demonstrate and build their cases in a manner that creates balance without either of the debaters emerging as 'victor' or 'vanquished.' Some of the notable

issues raised include: improper dressing; prostitution; artificiality and the concept of beauty; masculine fallacy/chauvinist notion; and the practice of morality by both genders.

As the play opens, the first gender bias pointed out by the male vibrant prototype is the concept of corruption. The corruption that is metaphorically referenced at the start of the court proceeding is the loss of integrity in dressing. Here, BOY accuses the women folk of indecent dressing as the basis of prostitution in society. Without denying the aforementioned fact, GIRL is quick to hinge the social menace (prostitution) on sexual solicitation by the male gender. This to her is often occasioned by the uncontrolled sensual urge/desire of men, who "in the context of campus socialising," are quick to "invade female hostels," waylay them "… on the way from classroom, or to the cafeteria, and start rattling verbiage on our eardrums". GIRL ends that argument on the note that it is men who solicit the women's attention for a fee (*The Epilogue* 11). Since the only way to prevent the miscarriage of justice is fair hearing, the judge makes his court room conducive for Karina to also have an opportunity to speak, and reply when a case is being made against her.

In taking the debate further, BOY anchors the solicitation on reaction. He holds that men simply react to the provocative dressing of women, who most times are near naked in the guise of fashion: "…you women are the initiators, the stimulators, the eternal facilitators of the 'soliciting' game" (*The Epilogue* 11). He adds that the game is "silently," "speechlessly," and "cunningly" unleashed on the men, who find the body language of the woman irresistible: "The way you people dress, for instance, it's getting more and more brazenly shameless! …. In short, your lordship, these days' girls dress to kill. 20th century fashion, they call it. Well, it's plain madness, you hear? What will you be wearing in the year 2000? Stark nakedness?" (*The Epilogue* 12). Even though couched in humour, it can be deduced from the aforementioned that the playwright, by means of invectives, aptly deployed by the character, BOY, denounces immodest dressing. This is suggested in expressions like: "shameless," "plain madness," and the rhetorical

question - "What will you be wearing in the year 2000? Stark nakedness?" (*The Epilogue* 12).

As the action in court unfolds, GIRL attempts to counter the aforementioned argument, she speaks in favour of the women folk by first acknowledging the reality of the issue raised. She views the assessment of her male counterpart as an expression of misplaced brains, which by implication indicates that "men's seat of thought is not in their heads … but between their thighs" (*The Epilogue* 14). To strike a balance with the male folk in the foregoing argument, Karina faults men, who under the guise of fashion expose their hairy chest by deliberately unbuttoning their shirts. With a sense of humour, she describes such provocativeness as the male intent to dress to kill hence, "exposing a jungle of dark fuzzy hair on a self-conscious plateau of macho chest?" (*The Epilogue 16*). She adds that such a display is nothing but "the verdant spread of dark Bermuda grass on the hypnotic landscape of their masculine thorax" (*The Epilogue 17*).

Artificiality and the concept of beauty is another age long grievance men hold against their women counterpart. In advancing the logic of their argument, BOY faults the female gender for embracing artificiality at the expense of their natural beauty. Put differently, women in the quest to enhance their physical appearance, tamper with their natural make-up – their hair and body alike. BOY laments the extent the women folk disregard their traditional or African hair styles in preference for European hair styles, which they straighten in salons where "…you all 'stampede' to have your hair mangled, pulled, wrestled and stretched to look the same" (*The Epilogue* 18). The picture BOY paints here is the seeming act of hair mutilation and the denial of their *Africanness*. This sequence is significantly reflective of the stance of the 20th century African American playwright – Lorraine Hansberry's – who in *A Raisin of the Sun* decries assimilationist attitude of some African American women who hide their *Africanness* by acting white. This is aptly portrayed through the character of Asagai, who as a Nigerian and proud of his African heritage criticises Beneatha (his African American Girl friend) for straightening her hair, persuading

her to rather cut it to enable her keep a more natural and African look. Accordingly, Ola Rotimi amplifies the necessity of retaining cultural identity and looks by challenging or criticising the application of foreign ointments, which through BOY, the male prototype, humorously dubs it as 'fumigation': "Next, you anoint it with – nonsense, what's anoint? Fumigate – that's what you fumigate your hair with, the same insecticide you call 'hair spray'" (*The Epilogue* 18).

Furthermore, with a sarcastic tone, BOY clamps down on women who bleach their skin to enhance their outlook. While elaborating on the artificiality of the modern-day woman, he argues that the application of "predictable" body creams/lotion, such as "Cocoa Butter," "Sliver Rose," "Movate Gell," amongst others, is capable of altering the complexion of the African woman's body, which "the good Lord made … beautiful in their shades of blackness " (*The Epilogue* 20). To drive home his point, BOY unequivocally describes such alteration of skin colour as a "lie" and pretence to be white:

> What lie is more sinister than pretension? …. You prefer to pretend, to lie – lie about them. Pretend to be white. Bleach upon bleach, and all colours of exotic make-up to transform yourselves into three – dimensional graffiti in motion: "Fanta face with Seven-Up lips on top of a Coca-Cola body." Such multicoloured patchwork – all in your desperation to dazzle the unwary jack-asses among the male folk. You pretentious, whited Sepulchers – shame on you all! (*The Epilogue* 20-21).

By inference, "whited Sepulchers" is a metaphorical reference to women who artificially lighten their skin, and a biblical allusion. The biblical Pharisees (i.e. Members of a Jewish sect), who with great strictness carried out every rite and ceremony of the Law, were on many occasions publicly condemned and labelled "whited Sepulchers" by Jesus for outwardly portraying themselves as righteous when inwardly were full of hypocrisy, rottenness, and deception (Mathew 23:23-28 KJV). Correspondingly, the deception of women claiming to be white when in actuality are created black, is decried by the playwright,

who through the character of BOY, underscores the dangers associated with such 'transformation.' One of such side effects is the ununiformed discolouration of the skin and body hence, such women go about displaying "Fanta face with Seven-Up lips on top of a Coca-Cola body" (*The Epilogue* 20). To draw a logical conclusion on the artificiality of the contemporary woman, BOY leaves no stone unturned by emphasising the adverse effects the afore mentioned treatments have on the women folk: monotony, and this to him has rendered such women "boring" and repelling to the male folk in Africa. With a tone of disgust, BOY is quick to aver: "These days, one can't even distinguish one woman from another. You all spray your bodies with the same kind of perfume; lubricate your limbs with the same predictable cream … At the end, every head, every skin comes out smelling the same. How monotonous can any creature be?" (*The Epilogue* 18).

When GIRL (Karina) is given the floor and right to be heard, she debunks the claim on monotonousness, as she insists that such perception of women by the male folk is borne out of misunderstanding and lies. She insists that the falsehood stems from the African men's mentality, and in this context, considers the judgmental stance of men surprising. This is because men, from her standpoint, are the stimulators of the monotonousness of the women folk: "Men are at fault. Why? Those kinds of commodities: women who go about displaying, "orange, Fanta face, on top of brown, Coca-Cola body ..." labelled with silver lipstick ... such women are merely responding to the demands of the mentality of men like you" (*The Epilogue* 22). In other words, the African man's preference for light-skinned ladies is the subtle motivation for body bleaching, which sadly has cobwebbed "the shallow minded, birdbrain's among us kill their skins and bury their bodies in bleach, all to please your mentality" (*The Epilogue* 22). Karina's bluntness and castigation does not only have the men as its object, but gullible women who have been trapped within the web of "perfumed liars" that parade themselves as men. It is not surprising, therefore, that her submission on this matter of monotony, attracts the attention and applause of the Judge, who impressed at her

defence of female folk announces: "Good counter logic: penetrating historicity, delicate nuance" (*The Epilogue* 22).

BOY presses another charge against the women: frequent illness. He views the frailty of their health as a consequence of abuse and misuse of their bodies, particularly due to living immorally. To vividly illustrate this accusation, he describes the women as "mobile clinics," "itinerant sick-bays," and "infirmaries on two legs" (The Epilogue 22). However, GIRL dismisses this position, considering the male assessment "prejudiced mouthings" and an outright fallacy aimed at sustaining their "bloated ego of moral superiority" (The Epilogue 26). She reinforces her point by relating this jaundiced generalization to the Hamlet Complex—a situation where men are inherently cynical towards their female counterparts. Using allusion, she underscores her argument with the character of Hamlet, the eponymous hero in William Shakespeare's play. Prince Hamlet confronts his mother, Gertrude, about her incestuous relationship with his paternal uncle, Claudius, who murdered the former king, old Hamlet, and married his brother's widow.

Furthering her critique of the use of the female body, BOY accuses female students of being playthings for businessmen, trading their bodies in pursuit of grades and exam questions from lecturers. He expresses his bias with the assertion: "... if you girls don't get money from running after them, what about exam questions or high grades?" (The Epilogue 37). In response, GIRL counters BOY's claims from two perspectives. First, the shortage of university lecturers in Nigeria has rendered many unfit "to polish a steady babe" (The Epilogue36). To her, this is evidenced by the rickety cars owned by such lecturers, who, like their male students, are financially inept and "depend on month-end crumbs!" (The Epilogue 36). By inference, male lecturers barely survive on their monthly salaries, which are often spent on "feeding wife, self, children, and the long assembly line of mouths in their extended family; do you think whatever is left goes to girlfriends?" (The Epilogue 36). The chuckles from the courtroom perhaps spur GIRL (Karina) to add that even what is left is often "surrendered" to those who repair

and service their cars, humorously described as "gwongworos," "Ancient Mariners," "Born-Again 'alupandugbe,'" "farioro number 1," and "puruku-puruku."

Secondly, male students actively participate in the game of 'sniffing' exam questions. Unlike the female students, who have been accused of having illicit affairs with lecturers in exchange for exam questions, Karina exposes the male students for breaking "into offices at night to steal exam questions" (37). While BOY seems to feign ignorance or live in denial in his attempt to salvage the image of men, he questions, "How d'you know, are you the night watchman?" (37). In response, GIRL is blunt and somewhat flippant as she alleges that this act of stealing makes them a "generation of armed robbers in training!" (37).

The court processes in the administration of justice allows BOY and GIRL, the major characters, the opportunity to vent these misgivings and grievances as representatives of both genders in society. Each gender demonstrates uniqueness in make-up and sensibility in the course of court proceedings where logic and counter-logic are employed to build their cases and demand for fairness subsequently. During the court proceeding and hearing, the Judge strives to maintain objectivity in sensibility and sensitivity and not interfere with the entire process. However, Rotimi projects this as a difficult task as the judge and other court officials take sides at times with their gender and compromise their neutrality in the course of the hearing. Rotimi's theatrical mode is laced with humour. It presents vibrant prototype male and female voices: this shrouds the personal names of the major characters. The play couched in court proceedings voices gender biases, misgivings and sentiments that are silenced in due course through the process of fair hearing. Thus, men are not presented eventually as superior to women and vice versa: they are just different in Rotimi's view and search for solution, perhaps an end to gender misunderstanding and imbalance.

Conclusion
The play dramatises a significant attempt by the author to "better the balance" in gender relations in Nigeria and Africa. It addresses gender

claims, counterclaims, biases, and stereotypes as serious intellectual subjects, all within a dramatic form that effectively incorporates humour, confrontations, and responses to complex social issues. The Judge does not deliver a verdict, as the power to do so lies with the jury—the audience: you and I—after being granted the opportunity for a fair hearing. This fair hearing presupposes an effective procedure in conflict analysis that allows for the clarification of complexities inherent in gender dynamics, which often trigger conflict, tension, and "wars" between women and men. The study highlights that the play serves as a foundation for the mutual resolution of gender issues. It also presents fair hearing as a sincere attempt to mitigate gender conflicts and attests to the emergence of a new perspective on gender equity in Nigeria. The study concludes that with genuine attitudinal changes in both men and women, alongside the sincere application of fair hearing principles, positive gender relations can exist free from provocation and conflict.

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An Assessment of Cultural and Socioeconomic Barriers to Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

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Abstract

Political participation is a fundamental pillar of democratic governance, allowing citizens to influence decision-making processes and ensuring inclusive and equitable representation. Despite global and national efforts to promote gender inclusivity, women in Nigeria remain significantly underrepresented in political leadership and decision-making roles. This study examines the cultural and socioeconomic barriers that hinder women's political participation in Nigeria, focusing on traditional norms, economic inequalities, and systemic structures that marginalise women. By synthesising existing literature and theoretical perspectives, the research develops a conceptual framework highlighting four critical dimensions: cultural determinants, economic conditions, systemic structures, and intersectional influences. The findings reveal that patriarchal norms, restrictive cultural attitudes, religious doctrines, and socioeconomic disparities collectively limit women's political engagement. The study also evaluates strategies to address these barriers, including legislative reforms, awareness campaigns, economic empowerment initiatives, and cultural reorientation. These recommendations aim to promote gender equity, enhance women's representation in governance, and advance democratic ideals. This research contributes to the discourse on gender equity and political representation, offering actionable insights to inform policy interventions and grassroots initiatives for fostering inclusive governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Women's Political Participation, Cultural Barriers, Socioeconomic Inequalities, Gender Equity, Inclusive Governance.*

1. Introduction

Political participation stands as a cornerstone of democratic governance, ensuring citizens' voices influence decision-making processes and fostering inclusive, accountable, and equitable representation. A key measure of democratic maturity is the active

involvement of diverse demographic groups, including women, in politics. Yet, despite notable advancements in global and national efforts to promote gender inclusivity, women remain disproportionately underrepresented in political leadership and decision-making roles. Persistent barriers, both structural and systemic, continue to hinder their political engagement.

In Nigeria, this gender gap is particularly pronounced. Although women constitute nearly half of the nation's population, their representation in political roles remains remarkably low. As of 2023, women hold less than 10% of seats in Nigeria's national parliament, placing the country among the lowest globally for female political representation (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023). This persistent underrepresentation highlights the interplay of entrenched cultural norms and socioeconomic inequalities that collectively marginalise women in the political sphere.

Cultural factors, deeply rooted in patriarchy and traditional gender roles, remain significant impediments to women's political participation. Patriarchal ideologies and practices, such as early marriage, polygamy, and societal expectations of domesticity, position women in subordinate roles within both the family and the community, limiting their agency. These cultural norms are further reinforced by religious beliefs that often intersect with traditional practices, exacerbating the challenges women face in pursuing political ambitions (Adedokun, 2021).

Compounding these cultural barriers are socioeconomic inequalities, including poverty and limited access to education and resources. Women in Nigeria disproportionately experience poverty, which undermines their ability to fund political campaigns or participate in electoral processes. Furthermore, gender disparities in educational attainment leave many women without the skills, confidence, or social capital necessary to navigate the political landscape effectively (UNESCO, 2022; World Bank, 2023). The financial demands of Nigeria's political culture further exclude economically disadvantaged women,

reinforcing the systemic barriers that inhibit their participation (Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2021).

While existing research has made strides in exploring cultural and socioeconomic factors as independent barriers, limited attention has been paid to their intersection. This research gap obscures the nuanced ways in which these dimensions interact to perpetuate gender inequality in politics. By addressing this gap, the present study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges Nigerian women face in accessing political roles.

The primary objective of this study is to examine how cultural and socioeconomic barriers jointly impede women's political participation in Nigeria. Specifically, it aims to explore the influence of traditional norms and practices on women's access to political roles, analyse the impact of socioeconomic inequalities on political opportunities, and propose actionable strategies for overcoming these barriers through a conceptual framework that captures the strategies for women's Political Participation in Nigeria was developed. Through this exploration, the research seeks to establish how cultural and socioeconomic constitute an impediment to women participation in politics in order to contribute to ongoing efforts to promote gender equity in Nigerian politics, as well as to offer an insight that can inform policy interventions and grassroots initiatives aimed at fostering inclusive governance.

By investigating the structural and systemic challenges faced by women in Nigerian politics, this study adds to the broader discourse on gender equity and political representation. In doing so, it provides a framework for addressing the root causes of women's underrepresentation, with the ultimate goal of advancing democratic ideals and achieving sustainable development through inclusive governance.

2. Conceptual Review
a. Cultural barriers
Women's political participation is integral to achieving inclusive governance and equitable decision-making processes. However, across the globe, women face significant challenges in engaging with and

succeeding in the political sphere. In Nigeria, these barriers are deeply rooted in cultural and socioeconomic structures, which perpetuate gender disparities and hinder progress towards gender parity in political representation. This review examines the cultural and socioeconomic barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria, offering insights into the multifaceted challenges that shape women's political experiences.

Patriarchy is a dominant cultural structure in Nigeria, shaping societal perceptions of gender roles. Women are often relegated to domestic and reproductive roles, with leadership and decision-making viewed as the exclusive domain of men. This patriarchal framework limits women's agency and discourages them from pursuing political ambitions (Adedayo, 2020). Gender roles are further reinforced by traditional practices such as early marriage and polygamy, which constrain women's opportunities for education, career advancement, and political engagement (Adedokun, 2021).

Religious beliefs and practices significantly influence gender dynamics in Nigerian politics. In many instances, religious teachings are interpreted in ways that reinforce patriarchal norms, restricting women's leadership opportunities. For example, interpretations of Islamic and Christian doctrines often emphasise women's roles within the home rather than in public life, thereby discouraging political involvement (Usman, 2021). These religious influences intersect with cultural norms to create a restrictive environment for women's political participation.

Women who challenge traditional norms by entering politics frequently face social stigma and discrimination. Politically active women are often labelled as being unfeminine or morally compromised, deterring many from pursuing political careers. Such stigmatisation is further compounded by media portrayals that trivialise women's political contributions or focus disproportionately on their personal lives rather than their competencies (Okafor & Duru, 2022).

b. Socioeconomic barriers

Economic inequalities and educational disparities further exacerbate the challenges faced by Nigerian women in politics.

Poverty is a pervasive issue in Nigeria, disproportionately affecting women. Economic hardship restricts women's ability to fund political campaigns or participate in financially demanding political activities. The cost of running for office in Nigeria is prohibitively high, creating significant barriers for women who lack the necessary financial resources (Akinola, 2018). This economic disparity leaves many women unable to compete effectively in the political arena.

Education plays a pivotal role in empowering individuals to participate in governance. However, Nigerian women often face significant educational disadvantages, particularly in rural areas where traditional norms and economic constraints limit girls' access to schooling. These disparities contribute to low levels of political literacy among women, leaving many without the skills or confidence to engage with the political system (UNESCO, 2022).

Economic dependence on male family members further restricts women's political aspirations. Women who rely on their spouses or relatives for financial support often face resistance when attempting to engage in politics, as their participation may be perceived as a challenge to male authority. This dependence undermines women's ability to assert themselves in political spaces and reinforces their exclusion from decision-making roles (World Bank, 2023).

c. Political participation
Political participation encompasses a wide range of activities, from voting and advocacy to contesting elections and holding public office. While voting remains the most common form of participation for Nigerian women, their involvement in higher levels of political leadership remains limited (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023). Efforts to measure political participation often focus on the proportion of women in legislative bodies, an area where Nigeria consistently ranks among the lowest globally.

Globally, women's representation in politics has improved in recent decades, with countries like Rwanda achieving near gender parity in parliament. However, Nigeria significantly lags behind, with women occupying less than 10% of seats in the national parliament (Inter-Parliamentary Union, 2023). Regionally, Nigeria's performance is also poor compared to other African nations, many of which have implemented affirmative action policies to boost women's representation (Okeke-Ihejirika & Franceschet, 2022).

The barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria are deeply embedded in cultural and socioeconomic structures. Patriarchal norms, religious influences, and social stigma intersect with economic and educational disadvantages to create formidable obstacles for women aspiring to political leadership. Addressing these challenges requires a multidimensional approach that includes policy interventions, public awareness campaigns, and efforts to enhance women's economic and educational opportunities. By dismantling these barriers, Nigeria can move closer to achieving gender parity in politics and fostering inclusive governance.

Types of Political Participation
Political participation encompasses actions aimed at influencing the allocation of societal resources and values (Willeck, & Mendelberg, 2022). Individuals engage in this process by voting for representatives who craft policies affecting taxes, social programmes, and other public matters. They may also participate in organisations that seek to influence policy decisions directly or communicate their interests, preferences, and needs through public discourse (Le & Nguyen, 2021). Such activities may support or challenge governmental institutions, officials, and policies. Although voting remains the most common form of political engagement, numerous other avenues exist, each requiring different levels of time, skill, and resources.

a) **Voting in Elections:** Voting is the cornerstone of political participation, enabling eligible citizens to elect representatives at local, regional, and national levels (Kersting, 2021). Beyond selecting candidates, voters often make decisions on referendums

involving issues such as budgetary priorities, constitutional amendments, and policy changes. This process provides a mechanism for citizens to shape governance and hold leaders accountable (Norris, 2022).

b) **Communicating with Representatives:** Engaging with elected representatives through letters, emails, phone calls, or personal meetings allows constituents to express concerns, seek clarifications, and offer policy suggestions. This form of interaction strengthens the connection between voters and decision-makers, ensuring that public officials remain responsive to societal needs (Henderson et al., 2023; Pitkin, 2021).

c) **Participating in Public Demonstrations and Protests:** Public demonstrations and protests offer citizens a platform to voice discontent and demand action on pressing issues. Peaceful protests, including marches and sit-ins, play a pivotal role in raising awareness and influencing policy. Movements like #EndSARS in Nigeria and Black Lives Matter globally exemplify the transformative power of collective action (Head, 2024; Tufekci, 2022).

d) **Joining Civil Society Organisations (CSOs):** Active participation in CSOs, such as advocacy groups, unions, and non-governmental organisations empowers individuals to address societal challenges. These organisations champion causes ranging from human rights to environmental conservation, providing platforms for meaningful engagement (Smith & Adams, 2023).

e) **Attending Political Rallies and Town Hall Meetings:** Political rallies and town hall meetings create opportunities for direct engagement with leaders, candidates, and other constituents. These events encourage dialogue, promote transparency, and allow citizens to express their views on key issues (Manning, 2020).

f) **Membership in Political Parties:** Becoming a member of a political party is a vital form of participation that involves attending meetings, voting in primaries, organising events, and fundraising.

This level of involvement enables individuals to influence party policies and contribute to national discourse (Barber, 2021; Rosenblum, 2021).

g) **Volunteering for Campaigns:** Volunteering in election campaigns allows citizens to actively support candidates or causes through canvassing, phone banking, and distributing materials. This grassroots participation fosters political awareness and strengthens community ties (Karpf, 2022).

h) **Social Media Advocacy:** The advent of digital platforms has revolutionised political participation, enabling citizens to share information, mobilise support, and raise awareness through social media. Hashtags, online petitions, and digital campaigns have proven especially effective in engaging younger demographics and amplifying grassroots causes (Adeyinka & Ijaiya, 2024; Chadwick, 2021).

i) **Running for Public Office:** Running for public office represents one of the most direct ways to engage in politics. While it requires significant commitment, it enables individuals to shape policy and governance directly. The increasing participation of women in leadership roles, such as Samia Suluhu Hassan's presidency in Tanzania, highlights progress towards inclusivity in political representation (Ndlovu & Sithole, 2023).

3. Trend of Political Participation in Nigeria

Political participation in Nigeria has evolved significantly over the decades, shaped by the country's colonial history, transitions between military and civilian rule, and the socio-economic and technological changes of the modern era. This participation includes voting, civil activism, protests, engagement in political party activities, and leveraging digital platforms for advocacy.

a) **Low Voter Turnout in Elections:** Despite periodic general elections, voter turnout in Nigeria has shown a declining trend, especially in recent years (Hassan, 2024). According to the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), turnout in the 2019 presidential

election was approximately 35%, one of the lowest in the country's democratic history. This decline is attributed to voter apathy, mistrust in the electoral process, insecurity, and logistical challenges during elections (Mohammed, Enganya, & Adi, 2024).

b) **Youth Activism and Engagement:** The youth population in Nigeria has increasingly turned to activism and digital platforms as means of political participation. Movements such as #EndSARS in 2020 illustrated the power of young Nigerians to mobilise on social media, highlighting police brutality and broader issues of governance and accountability. This trend reflects a shift towards non-traditional forms of participation, driven by dissatisfaction with conventional political structures (Kehinde et al., 2023).

c) **Role of Social Media:** Digital platforms have become central to political participation in Nigeria, with citizens using tools like Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp to debate policies, mobilise for protests, and campaign for candidates. The rise of hashtags such as #NotTooYoungToRun exemplifies how social media has fostered awareness and advocacy for inclusivity in governance (Imoka, 2023).

d) **Increased Women's Participation:** Although women remain underrepresented in Nigerian politics, recent years have seen efforts to enhance their participation (Ette, & Akpan-Obong, 2023). Initiatives like the "50-50 Action Women" project have worked to increase female representation in political offices. However, cultural, religious, and systemic barriers continue to limit women's involvement (Alokwu, Oranika-Umeasiegbu, & Udegbunam, 2024).

e) Political participation in Nigeria reflects a blend of traditional and modern dynamics, with growing youth activism, digital engagement, and diaspora contributions shaping the landscape. However, addressing systemic barriers and fostering inclusivity are crucial for ensuring a robust democratic process that reflects the diversity and aspirations of Nigerian society.

4. Theoretical Framework: Feminist Theory

This research on assessing cultural and socioeconomic barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria is grounded in Feminist Theory, specifically the intersectional feminist framework. It examines the complex interplay of cultural, socioeconomic, and political factors that hinder women's active involvement in Nigerian politics.

Feminist Theory, rooted in the work of scholars such as Simone de Beauvoir (1949), Judith Butler (1990), and bell hooks (1984), provides a lens to interrogate the power structures and systemic inequalities that reinforce gender disparities (Okpokwasili, 2024). Intersectional feminism, developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), focuses on how overlapping social identities such as gender, ethnicity, class, and religion create unique forms of discrimination and privilege.

In the Nigerian context, women's political participation is often shaped by entrenched cultural norms, patriarchal structures, and socioeconomic limitations (Ilodigwe, & Uzoh, 2024). Feminist Theory helps elucidate how these barriers operate in tandem, limiting women's access to leadership roles and decision-making processes.

Application to the Research

a) **Cultural Barriers:** Feminist Theory highlights the role of traditional norms and gender stereotypes in perpetuating discrimination against women (Stewart, Wright, Smith, Roberts, & Russell, 2021). In Nigeria, cultural expectations around domestic roles, early marriage, and obedience to male authority restrict women's capacity to pursue political ambitions (Mensah, 2023). These norms are often reinforced by religious and ethnic traditions, which marginalise women in public life.

b) **Socioeconomic Barriers:** Intersectional feminism examines how economic disparities intersect with gender to exclude women from political participation (Yildirim, 2022). High costs of political campaigns, financial dependence on male relatives, and limited access to education and resources disproportionately affect Nigerian women, making it difficult for them to contest elections or hold political office (Nazneen, 2023).

c) **Institutional and Structural Barriers:** Feminist Theory further critiques the male-dominated political structures that limit women's representation (Sapkota, & Dahal, 2022). Electoral violence, vote-buying, and a lack of supportive party mechanisms are institutional obstacles that discourage women's involvement in politics (Essien, & Oghuvbu, 2021).

By employing Feminist Theory and its intersectional framework, this study aims to uncover the layered and interconnected barriers that Nigerian women face in political participation. This theoretical grounding not only provides a comprehensive understanding of the issue but also informs strategies to dismantle systemic inequalities and promote gender equity in political representation.

5. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, analytical approach to examine the cultural and socioeconomic barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria. By synthesising existing literature, the research seeks to develop a conceptual framework that captures the strategies for women's Political Participation in Nigeria. This approach allows for an in-depth exploration of the structural and systemic factors that perpetuate gender inequality in Nigerian politics.

Data Sources: The research draws on a wide range of secondary data sources to ensure a comprehensive analysis of the topic. Scholarly articles from peer-reviewed journal articles provide critical insights into existing research on cultural and socioeconomic barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria.

Data Analysis: The data collected from secondary sources are thematically coded and categorised based on recurring patterns and key themes. This method facilitates the identification of the most significant cultural and socioeconomic barriers to women's political participation.

This methodology ensures a robust and holistic understanding of the barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria, providing a

foundation for actionable recommendations aimed at promoting gender equity and inclusive governance.

6. Findings

This is a qualitative content analysis exploring cultural and socioeconomic barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria. The study synthesises the existing literature and theoretical perspectives by identifying major themes and sub-themes.

Themes 1: Influence of traditional norms and practices on women's access to political roles

Cultural Barriers

Patriarchal Norms: Widespread patriarchal values restrict women's political agency by prioritising male leadership roles. Studies highlight how entrenched gender roles perpetuate these dynamics (Kelly, 2019; Orji et al., 2018). Cultural attitudes tie women's identities primarily to domestic responsibilities, limiting their political engagement opportunities (Pyeatt & Yanus, 2017).

Religious Practices: Religious doctrines, particularly in Muslim-dominated regions, often limit women's visibility in public and political spheres (Bhalotra et al., 2013; Isaksson et al., 2014). However, Christian-affiliated women demonstrate comparatively higher levels of political participation (Dim & Asomah, 2019).

Societal Expectations: Cultural perceptions confine women to ceremonial roles in political parties, marginalising them from decision-making processes (Orji et al., 2018).
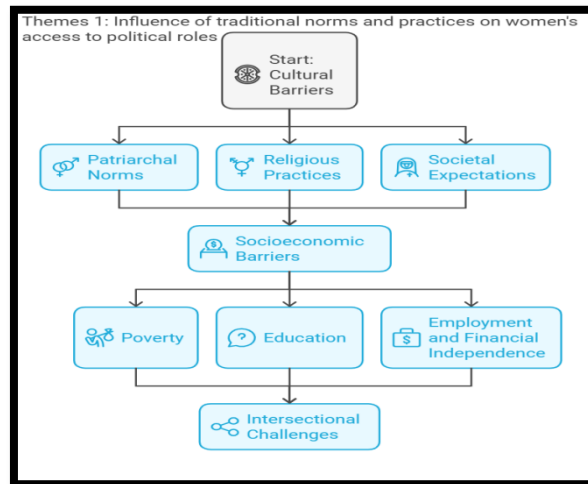
Figure 1. Graphical representation of theme one major findings: Influence of traditional norms and practices on women's access to political roles

Socioeconomic Barriers

Poverty: High poverty rates in northern Nigeria (72%) compared to the south (27%) exacerbate gender disparities in political representation (Herbert & Husaini, 2018).

Education: While education is positively correlated with women's political participation globally, the relationship is complex in Nigeria. Low education levels in northern regions (13.7%) contrast starkly with higher levels in the south (37.4%) (National Population Commission and ICF, 2019).

Women with lower education levels often face systemic barriers, despite regional examples like Rwanda where political representation is higher among undereducated women (Goetz, 2003).

Employment and Financial Independence: Access to employment and control over income are critical but not sufficient to ensure increased political participation, especially in patriarchal contexts where financial independence alone does not dismantle gender barriers (Isaksson et al., 2014).

Intersectional Challenges

The intersection of cultural and socioeconomic barriers often magnifies challenges. For instance: Women in northern Nigeria face compounding disadvantages of poverty, limited education, and restrictive cultural norms (Dim & Asomah, 2019).

Religious norms further inhibit women's access to education and employment, creating a cyclical barrier to political participation.

Theme 2: Impact of socioeconomic inequalities on political opportunities for women

The low level of women's political participation in Nigeria stems from a complex interplay of cultural, socioeconomic, and systemic barriers, each of which exerts a significant influence on their ability to engage meaningfully in political processes. By synthesising existing literature and theoretical perspectives, the proposed conceptual framework outlines four critical dimensions that underpin the structural and systemic factors perpetuating gender inequality in Nigerian politics. These dimensions as shown in Figure 2 and explained in the subsequent session are cultural determinants, economic conditions, systemic structures, and intersectional influences, offer a holistic lens to understand the challenges faced by women in attaining political representation.
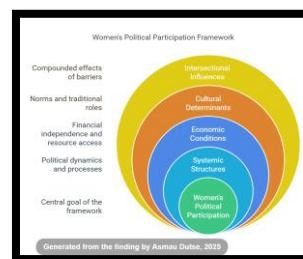

Figure 2. Graphical representation of theme two major findings: Impact of socioeconomic inequalities on political opportunities for women

Cultural Determinants

Cultural norms play a pervasive role in shaping women's political participation in Nigeria, as patriarchal ideologies, religious doctrines,

and societal expectations collectively limit women's access to leadership roles. Traditional roles often confine women to the domestic sphere, reinforcing the perception that politics is a male domain. This cultural framework is particularly evident in regions where religious practices, such as Sharia law in Northern Nigeria, further restrict women's public engagement. Scholars such as Orji et al. (2018) argue that political parties in Nigeria embed patriarchal values within their structures, relegating women to ceremonial and supportive roles rather than positions of power. While some Christian affiliations are associated with slightly higher levels of women's political engagement (Dim & Asomah, 2019), the overarching patriarchal culture continues to privilege men in leadership positions.

Economic Conditions
Economic inequality exacerbates women's exclusion from Nigerian politics, as financial independence is a critical enabler of political participation. Resource access, employment, and education levels significantly impact women's ability to engage politically. Studies highlight that region with higher levels of poverty, such as Northern Nigeria, show starkly lower female political engagement compared to relatively affluent Southern states (Herbert & Husaini, 2018). Education, in particular, emerges as both a barrier and an enabler. Dim and Asomah (2019) emphasise that low educational attainment among women in Northern Nigeria (13.7% with secondary education or above) undermines their participation in public life. Conversely, economic viability, as evidenced in states like Lagos, shows a correlation between financial independence and greater political activity. However, as noted in comparative studies, the relationship between economic factors and political participation is not linear, as other structural barriers continue to mediate these outcomes (Goetz, 2003).

Systemic Structures

Structural systems such as electoral processes, political party dynamics, and the implementation of gender quotas create systemic barriers that reinforce gender inequality in Nigerian politics. The male-dominated

nature of political parties marginalises women through exclusionary candidate recruitment processes and a lack of internal support for female candidates (Orji et al., 2018). While some countries have successfully increased female representation through quota systems, Nigeria has yet to adopt widespread measures that guarantee women's inclusion in governance. Goetz (2003) highlights that in countries with majority-plurality systems, such as Nigeria, the political environment often favours elite men, further disadvantaging women. Additionally, the lack of institutional frameworks to protect female candidates from electoral violence further discourages women from active participation (Kelly, 2019).

Intersectional Influences

The compounded effects of intersecting barriers present a particularly insidious challenge for Nigerian women. Cultural and economic disadvantages often overlap, exacerbating the marginalisation of women in politics. For instance, women in Northern Nigeria face the dual burden of patriarchal norms and economic deprivation, significantly reducing their political visibility. Intersectionality also highlights the influence of education and employment in shaping women's capacity to overcome structural barriers. However, studies suggest that even when women attain formal education or financial independence, cultural norms often neutralise these gains, restricting their participation in public life (Orji et al., 2018).

This conceptual framework underscores the multifaceted barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria. Cultural norms, economic conditions, systemic structures, and intersectional influences interact in ways that reinforce gender inequality and limit women's representation in governance. Addressing these barriers requires a multi-pronged approach, including the adoption of gender quotas, investment in female education, and cultural reorientation campaigns to challenge patriarchal norms. A holistic framework that considers these dimensions provides a comprehensive roadmap for fostering greater political inclusion for Nigerian women.

Theme 3: Conceptual Framework for Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

Women's underrepresentation in Nigerian politics stems from entrenched cultural norms, socioeconomic constraints, and systemic barriers. Addressing these challenges necessitates pragmatic strategies aimed at fostering inclusivity and gender equity. This section evaluates key strategies for overcoming these barriers.

The Role of Political Parties

Political parties are pivotal to enhancing women's political participation. Mlango and Kapingura (2019) highlight the importance of engaging political parties to include women on their candidate lists and to facilitate their involvement within party structures during election periods. However, Liu (2019) argues that achieving this requires recognising and addressing the unequal power structures within electoral institutions, political parties, and society at large. Gender stereotypes and the marginalisation of female politicians often stem from deeply ingrained societal power imbalances that influence perceptions of women's capabilities. By fostering equitable power distributions within party dynamics, political parties can become effective vehicles for gender parity in politics.

Provision of Funds to Female Politicians and Parties

A critical strategy for bridging gender gaps in political representation involves financial support for female politicians and parties with significant female representation. Wright (2019) notes the global momentum for incentivising party reforms to encourage the nomination and election of women. For instance, in Georgia, political parties receive additional funding for achieving gender quotas in their candidate lists (IDEA, 2018). Similar models could be adapted in Nigeria, where financial constraints often exclude women from competitive political processes. Incentivised funding could not only amplify women's representation but also promote a culture of gender inclusivity within political institutions.
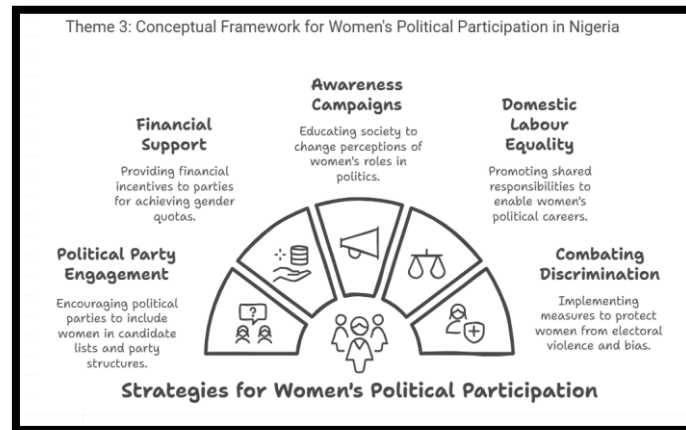
Figure 3. Graphical representation of the major findings in theme three: Conceptual Framework for Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

Awareness Creation

Transforming societal attitudes through awareness campaigns is indispensable for dismantling the perception that politics is exclusively a male domain. Educating women on their rights and roles in political processes is essential. Fox and Lawless (2010) demonstrate that young women are equally likely as men to consider public office when encouraged. This finding underscores the importance of mentorship programmes, leadership training, and campaigns aimed at redefining gender norms and empowering women to envision themselves as equal political actors. Public education initiatives should also target community leaders and media platforms to challenge stereotypes and promote gender-sensitive narratives.

Equal Contribution to Domestic Labour

Family responsibilities disproportionately hinder women's political participation. Research by Fox and Lawless (2010) reveals that women with familial obligations are significantly less likely to pursue political careers. Addressing this imbalance requires promoting shared domestic responsibilities between men and women. Policies supporting childcare, paid family leave, and flexible working conditions are critical enablers for women balancing family and political careers. Legislative

measures mandating family-friendly political environments, such as allowing breastfeeding or providing on-site childcare facilities, could further mitigate the barriers faced by female politicians.

Changing Perceptions and Combating Discrimination

The perception of women as incapable political actors remains a formidable obstacle. Societal change initiatives should focus on dismantling sexism and discrimination through education, policy reform, and advocacy. Preventing violence and harassment against women during elections is also paramount. As Bjarnegård and Zetterberg (2021) assert, electoral violence against women not only discourages their participation but also perpetuates the exclusionary nature of politics. Strengthening legal frameworks to protect women from violence, alongside building their skills and confidence through training programmes, could catalyse a shift toward gender-equitable political systems.

Overcoming the cultural and socioeconomic barriers to women's political participation in Nigeria requires a multidimensional approach encompassing reforms in political parties, financial incentives, awareness campaigns, equitable domestic labour policies, and efforts to combat discrimination. Implementing these strategies will not only elevate women's representation but also contribute to broader societal development by fostering inclusive governance.

7. Discussion of Major Findings
This study sheds light on the intricate cultural and socioeconomic barriers that restrict women's political participation in Nigeria. Through a qualitative content analysis, the research identifies critical themes and sub-themes that illustrate the persistent challenges and systemic inequalities faced by Nigerian women in politics.

Themes 1: Influence of traditional norms and practices on women's access to political roles
The findings highlight how traditional norms and practices significantly hinder women's access to political roles in Nigeria. Patriarchal values, deeply rooted in societal and cultural frameworks,

prioritise male leadership and confine women to domestic responsibilities, limiting their political agency. Religious doctrines, particularly in Muslim-majority regions, exacerbate these restrictions, though Christian women exhibit slightly higher political engagement. Societal expectations further marginalise women by relegating them to ceremonial roles within political parties. Additionally, the intersection of cultural and socioeconomic barriers amplifies these challenges, with poverty and limited education creating a cyclical disadvantage that restricts women's political participation.

Theme 2: Impact of socioeconomic inequalities on political opportunities for women

The findings reveal those socioeconomic inequalities significantly hinder women's political participation in Nigeria. Cultural norms, such as patriarchal ideologies and religious practices, limit women's access to leadership roles and confine them to domestic spheres. Economic disparities, including poverty and low educational attainment, further exacerbate these challenges, particularly in Northern Nigeria. Systemic structures, such as male-dominated political parties and the absence of gender quotas, reinforce gender inequality, while intersectional barriers magnify the disadvantages faced by women. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies, including gender-sensitive reforms, educational investments, and cultural reorientation campaigns to promote inclusivity in governance.

Theme 3: Conceptual Framework for Women's Political Participation in Nigeria

The findings highlight a conceptual framework for addressing women's underrepresentation in Nigerian politics through pragmatic and multidimensional strategies. Key measures include fostering gender equity within political parties, providing financial incentives for female politicians, and raising awareness to challenge cultural stereotypes. Promoting shared domestic responsibilities and combating discrimination through education, advocacy, and stronger legal protections are also essential. These interventions aim to dismantle

entrenched barriers, elevate women's political representation, and advance inclusive governance for broader societal progress.

8. Recommendations

Policy Initiatives: Advocate for legislative reforms that mandate gender quotas and ensure equitable representation in political structures.

Educational Programmes: Prioritise women's political literacy and leadership training to enhance their active participation.

Economic Empowerment: Develop strategies to improve women's access to resources, financial independence, and economic opportunities.

Cultural Reorientation: Launch campaigns to challenge traditional norms, dismantle stereotypes, and promote gender equality in society.

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Patriarchy and African Values: A Philosophical Inquiry into Gender Disparity in Nigerian Governance

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Abstract

The systematic marginalization of women from governance in Nigeria remains a persistent issue, often justified by appeals to traditional African values. This paper critically examines the philosophical and ethical dimensions of this disparity, challenging the notion that patriarchy is intrinsic to African traditions. It argues that traditional African values, such as communalism and Ubuntu, emphasize inclusivity, mutual respect, and shared responsibility, contrary to their patriarchal reinterpretations. Historical evidence highlights the leadership roles women held in pre-colonial African societies, demonstrating that gender equity aligns with the original ethos of these values. However, colonialism and religious influences distorted these traditions, embedding male dominance into governance systems. This research explores how patriarchal ideologies are perpetuated through cultural narratives, institutional structures, and societal norms, marginalizing women's contributions in both political and traditional governance settings. It employs a philosophical method of analysis to examine this systematic marginalization as a profound ethical failure that undermines principles of justice, equality, and social progress. Drawing on philosophical ideologies such as Rawls' theory of justice, Nussbaum's capabilities approach, and Ubuntu, it calls for a reevaluation of African values to dismantle patriarchal distortions. This paper advocates for policy reforms, cultural reorientation, and educational initiatives to foster gender equity in governance. It concludes by emphasizing that inclusive governance not only reflects the ethical core of African values but also enhances societal cohesion and progress, offering a transformative pathway toward justice and equality for all members of society.

Keywords: *patriarchy, African Values, Gender disparities, Governance, inclusivity.*

Introduction

African values, deeply rooted in communal living, mutual respect, and shared responsibility, are celebrated as the bedrock of societal harmony across the continent. In Nigeria, these values manifest in governance structures that prioritize collective welfare, often through hierarchical systems of authority. However, such systems have historically skewed toward male dominance, raising philosophical questions about the role of tradition in shaping gender roles. Governance, as a mirror of societal norms, reflects the values and ideologies upheld by a community. The persistent gender disparity within Nigerian leadership thus points to broader tensions between cultural traditions and the modern ideals of equity and inclusion.

Across Africa, similar trends highlight the entrenchment of patriarchal norms in governance. For example, in Ghana, traditional chieftaincy systems, which historically excluded women, continue to influence political participation. As Mba (2015) explains, "the cultural emphasis on male leadership in many African societies is less about inherent values and more about historical misinterpretations of tradition" (p. 78). This perspective highlights the critical distinction between African values and their patriarchal applications. Similarly, in South Africa, the post-apartheid era has seen efforts to balance cultural heritage with gender equity. As Dlamini (2018) notes, "cultural values are often manipulated to exclude women from leadership, even though there is evidence of their historical roles as community leaders" (p. 92). In Nigeria, gender disparity in governance is particularly pronounced. As of the 2023 elections, women occupy only 3% of Senate seats and 4% of House of Representatives seats, marking a 19% decline compared to the previous assembly (Carnegie Endowment, 2023). This drop reflects the ongoing systemic challenges faced by women in political leadership. While structural barriers such as limited access to education and economic resources play a role, cultural perceptions of gender are equally significant. Historical trends further illustrate this challenge. In 1999, women held 2.8% of Senate seats, which increased to 8.3% in 2007 but has since dropped back to 2.8% in 2023. Similarly, in the House of Representatives, women's representation was 3.3% in 1999, peaked at 7.2% in 2011, and has now declined to 4% in 2023 (Invictus Africa,

2023). These statistics highlight the fluctuating but overall limited progress of women's political participation in Nigeria. Scholars such as Aina and Adesanya (2016), Oyewumi (2016), and Chitando (2018) argue that patriarchal interpretations of African values often position women primarily as custodians of the home rather than as active participants in public life. Oyewumi (2016) highlights how colonial influences reinforced male dominance in African societies, while Chitando (2018) examines the role of cultural narratives in shaping gender hierarchies. These perspectives illustrate how traditional values have been reinterpreted in ways that limit women's roles in governance. This interaction between ideology and governance is not unique to Nigeria but is evident across the continent, where women face systemic exclusion despite their contributions to societal development. Globally, Nigeria ranks 184th out of 190 countries in terms of female political representation, demonstrating the stark gender imbalance in governance (CDD West Africa, 2023). This ranking solidifies Nigeria's position as one of the countries with the lowest levels of female political participation worldwide.

Philosophically, this debate centers on whether African values are inherently patriarchal or have been co-opted to serve patriarchal ends. Scholars such as Nyasani (2017) argue that "African values, when properly understood, emphasize **interdependence** rather than hierarchy, advocating for mutual respect and shared responsibility between genders." (p. 66). This interpretation challenges the notion that gender disparity is an unavoidable consequence of African traditions, suggesting instead that such disparities arise from historical distortions and colonial legacies. The objective of this paper is to analyse the role of patriarchy and misogyny in governance through the lens of African values, and philosophical foundations and proposing ethical reinterpretations. As Ndlovu (2019) asserts, "For governance to be truly reflective of African values, it must embrace inclusivity and reject the patriarchal distortions that undermine societal progress" (p. 103). This perspective aligns with the broader imperative to reconcile cultural heritage with the demands of justice and equality, ensuring that

African values serve as a foundation for inclusive governance rather than a justification for exclusion.

This paper employs philosophical analysis to examine the relationship between patriarchy and African values in Nigerian governance. The study engages in conceptual clarification by defining key terms such as patriarchy, African values, gender dynamics, and governance, establishing a clear framework for discussion. Additionally, a historical analysis is conducted to trace the evolution of gender roles in African societies, highlighting how colonial and religious influences contributed to reshaping traditional African values. This historical perspective helps to contextualize contemporary gender relations in governance. A normative ethical evaluation is also undertaken, drawing on philosophical theories such as Rawls' theory of justice, Nussbaum's capabilities approach, and *Ubuntu* to assess how African values can be interpreted in ways that promote fairness, representation, and social cohesion in governance. Furthermore, the paper incorporates policy analysis to explore potential reforms, cultural shifts, and educational strategies that can enhance women's participation in governance while aligning with African communal values. By adopting this approach, the study critically engages with both historical and philosophical perspectives to provide a well-rounded understanding of gender dynamics in Nigerian governance.

Conceptual Clarification

To critically analyse the intersection of African values, patriarchy, and gender disparity in governance, it is essential to establish a clear conceptual framework. The meanings of these terms are not static but have evolved due to cultural, historical, and socio-political influences. A precise understanding of these concepts will aid in examining how they interact within the context of governance in Nigeria. African Values and Patriarchy: African values are deeply rooted in the principles of communalism, mutual respect, and collective responsibility. These values traditionally emphasise interdependence, where each member of society plays a role in ensuring harmony and progress. However, with time, particularly due to colonial and

religious influences, these values were reinterpreted to support patriarchal structures that prioritize male authority over inclusivity. Patriarchy, in this sense, refers to a system where leadership and governance are largely dominated by men, shaping societal expectations in ways that limit women's access to political and decision-making roles. While African traditions historically recognized the importance of women in leadership evident in figures such as Queen Amina of Zazzau and the Igbo *Umuada* these roles have been diminished under contemporary patriarchal governance models. Thus, rather than being inherently exclusionary, African values have been distorted to justify male dominance in governance.

Gender Disparity in Governance: Gender disparity in governance is a reflection of the systemic inequalities that have developed over time, shaping perceptions of leadership and power. While women are not completely excluded from governance in Nigeria, they continue to face structural and cultural barriers that limit their full participation. Governance, as the process through which power and authority are exercised, should ideally reflect inclusivity and justice. However, in many African societies, gendered power relations dictate who holds authority, reinforcing social hierarchies that marginalize women. This disparity is not merely a political issue but a deeply philosophical one, as it challenges the ethical foundations of governance, justice, and equality. If African values are truly based on collective well-being, then a governance system that systematically limits women's participation contradicts its foundational principles.

Governance and Ethical Considerations: Governance, whether traditional or modern, is central to the organization of society and the distribution of power. In African societies, governance historically functioned within communal structures, where leadership was seen as a duty rather than a privilege. However, the infusion of patriarchal ideologies into governance structures has resulted in a leadership model that prioritizes hierarchy over inclusivity. Ethical considerations in governance require an interrogation of these structures, questioning whether they align with the fundamental principles of justice and

equity. If governance is to truly reflect African values, then it must move beyond its current exclusionary practices and embrace a model that recognizes the agency and contributions of all members of society, regardless of gender.

These clarifications provide the foundation for analysing the role of patriarchy in shaping governance and gender relations in Nigeria. By revisiting African values through an ethical and philosophical lens, this study seeks to demonstrate that governance, when properly aligned with the true essence of African traditions, should promote inclusivity rather than systematic exclusion.

African Values, Patriarchy, and Inclusive Governance
African values emphasize communal living, shared responsibility, and the structured organization of society to maintain harmony and collective well-being. These values formed the foundation of traditional African governance, where leadership was rooted in cooperation rather than competition. Communalism, *Ubuntu*, and the complementarity of gender roles were essential components of these governance structures. However, over time, these values were reinterpreted through a patriarchal lens, leading to rigid gender roles that restricted women's participation in leadership. The shift from inclusive governance to male centred authority was largely influenced by colonial and religious forces, which imposed Eurocentric gender norms that marginalized women (Oyewumi, 2016).

Communalism, a key African value, emphasizes cooperation, mutual respect, and the prioritization of collective welfare over individual aspirations. Traditional African societies were structured around group decision-making, where leadership was a shared responsibility rather than an exclusive privilege. As Gyekye (2010) argues, communalism fosters governance systems that rely on consensus rather than autocratic rule, ensuring that leadership serves the interests of the entire society. Despite its inclusive nature, communalism has often been misinterpreted to justify hierarchical structures that favour male dominance in governance. While African traditions historically acknowledged women's roles in decision-making, colonial systems

restructured governance models to reinforce male authority. This led to the exclusion of women from political power, despite historical evidence that women held complementary leadership roles in pre-colonial societies. As Amadiume (2015) observes, women such as the Yoruba *Iyalode* and the Igbo *Umuada* played critical roles in governance, ensuring that female voices were integral to community administration. However, colonial policies replaced these participatory structures with rigid patriarchal hierarchies, reinforcing the notion that leadership was the domain of men.

Ubuntu, another foundational African value, promotes human dignity, moral responsibility, and collective well-being. The philosophy of *Ubuntu*, captured in the phrase *"I am because we are,"* suggests that leadership should be guided by compassion, fairness, and a commitment to serving the community (Letseka, 2013). Within the context of governance, *Ubuntu* calls for inclusive leadership that values the contributions of all members of society, regardless of gender. However, contemporary governance structures have often failed to uphold these ethical principles, instead perpetuating exclusionary practices that limit women's participation in leadership roles. The erosion of *Ubuntu*'s ethical foundation in governance is evident in the systematic marginalization of women, often justified by cultural narratives that reinforce gender hierarchies. As Chitando (2018) explains, proverbs and myths that depict women as caretakers rather than decision-makers have been used to legitimize their exclusion from governance. This ideological shift contradicts the original essence of *Ubuntu*, which values equity, justice, and the recognition of every individual's contribution to society. If governance in Africa is to reflect the ethical foundations of *Ubuntu*, it must reject patriarchal distortions and embrace leadership structures that promote gender inclusivity and fairness.

A crucial but often overlooked African value in governance is complementarity, which emphasizes the balanced contribution of both genders to leadership and decision-making. Unlike the rigid gender hierarchies introduced by colonial and religious influences, traditional

African societies often recognized that men and women had distinct but equally significant roles in governance. According to Nzegwu (2017), the concept of complementarity ensured that leadership was not a privilege of one gender but a responsibility shared between men and women. The historical presence of female rulers, advisors, and political strategists in African societies strengthens the fact that governance was never intended to be exclusively male-dominated. However, the imposition of Western gender ideologies disrupted this balance, redefining power dynamics to favour male leadership while relegating women to subordinate roles (Oyewumi, 2016). The result has been a governance system that reinforces exclusionary practices, contradicting the foundational African values that once supported shared leadership. Addressing gender disparities in governance requires a return to the principle of complementarity, ensuring that leadership structures recognize the equal contributions of both men and women rather than sustaining systems of dominance and exclusion.

The philosophical significance of African values in governance lies in their ethical foundation, which prioritizes justice, fairness, and collective responsibility. However, governance structures that marginalize women contradict these values, reinforcing the need for critical re-evaluation. As Wiredu (1996) asserts, governance must be ethically grounded in principles that promote inclusivity rather than exclusion. The marginalization of women in governance is not just a political issue but a moral and philosophical failure, as it distorts values that originally emphasized balance and cooperation (Eze & Okonkwo, 2019). The challenge, therefore, is not that African values inherently support patriarchy but rather that they have been misinterpreted and manipulated to serve patriarchal interests. A governance model that genuinely reflects African values should not sustain male dominance but should instead embrace shared leadership, participatory governance, and ethical responsibility. By drawing from the principles of *Ubuntu*, communalism, and complementarity, governance in Africa can be reshaped to reflect the equitable and inclusive leadership structures that were once central to African societies.

Gender Disparity in Nigerian Governance

The political and traditional governance setting in Nigeria has long been characterized by the underrepresentation of women, a reality deeply rooted in patriarchal norms and cultural ideologies. Women's limited participation in governance is not merely incidental but a reflection of a systemic bias that has persisted over time. The structure of political representation in Nigeria remains dominated by male voices, pushing women to the margins of decision-making processes. Although political parties have introduced measures such as reduced nomination fees and exemptions from certain requirements to encourage female participation, these efforts have not yet translated into equal representation in leadership positions. Broader societal beliefs continue to position men as natural leaders, while women often face structural and cultural barriers that limit their full political involvement. The exclusion of women is not limited to formal political structures but extends to traditional governance systems, which are often regarded as the custodians of cultural values. In many Nigerian communities, traditional leadership positions are almost exclusively reserved for men, reinforcing the perception that governance is inherently male. Anunobi (2019) explains that "traditional institutions function as gatekeepers of patriarchal norms, systematically marginalizing women and preventing them from participating in key decision-making processes" (p. 41). Even in instances where women are granted nominal roles, these positions often lack substantive authority, effectively silencing their voices in critical deliberations. Such practices perpetuate a governance culture that devalues women's contributions and institutionalizes their exclusion. At the local level, governance structures are similarly shaped by the absence of women in community decision-making processes. In rural areas, where traditional norms are particularly influential, women are often excluded from councils or assemblies responsible for making decisions that directly affect their lives. Edeh and Ifemeje (2021) assert that "the systematic sidelining of women in local governance reflects deeply ingrained societal beliefs that view leadership as a male domain" (p. 312). This exclusion not only deprives women of the opportunity to contribute to governance

but also creates policies that fail to address their unique needs and challenges. The absence of women's perspectives in these structures perpetuates inequality, as decisions are made without considering the diverse experiences and insights that women bring to leadership. The barriers to women's participation in governance are also perpetuated by political party structures, which are often organized in ways that discourage female involvement. Political parties, as the primary vehicles for accessing formal political power, remain deeply gendered institutions that prioritize male participation. As Okuchukwu (2015) observes, 'Over the years, women in Nigeria have been relegated to the background and are circumscribed within the political arenas by structures, procedures, and ideologies that favour men, as well as the existence of an invisible "glass ceiling" that blocks their upward mobility and full participation.' This systematic exclusion is further reinforced by societal expectations that continue to frame leadership as incompatible with traditional gender roles for women.

The philosophical implications of this exclusion are significant, as they challenge the ethical foundations of governance. The systematic marginalization of women in governance contradicts the principles of justice, equity, and fairness that are central to social and political philosophy. Rawls (1971) argues that "a just society must ensure that all individuals have equal opportunities to participate in its institutions and decision-making processes" (p. 302). The exclusion of women from governance in Nigeria thus represents a profound ethical failure, as it denies them the opportunity to contribute to the shaping of society and perpetuates structures of inequality. Philosophers have long analysed and challenged systems of exclusion that deny certain groups equal representation in governance. Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach, for instance, emphasizes the importance of creating institutions that enable individuals to realize their full potential. Nussbaum (2000) contends that "a society that denies women equal participation in governance undermines their ability to exercise their capabilities and contribute meaningfully to the collective good" (p. 227). By excluding women from governance, Nigeria not only violates fundamental principles of justice but also deprives itself of the

transformative potential that inclusive leadership brings. The absence of women in governance also has broader social implications, as it reinforces stereotypes and societal expectations that limit women's roles in the private sphere. The exclusion of women from public leadership positions sends a message that governance is inherently male, perpetuating cycles of inequality that extend beyond the political realm. As Arowolo and Aluko (2020) observe, "the marginalization of women in governance reflects and reinforces societal beliefs about their inferiority, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of exclusion" (p. 57). These cultural narratives not only deny women the opportunity to lead but also shape societal attitudes that view their exclusion as natural and inevitable. The philosophical dimensions of this issue highlight the urgent need for a re-evaluation of governance structures and cultural norms in Nigeria. The marginalization of women is not merely a matter of individual discrimination but a systemic issue that reflects broader societal values and institutional practices. Addressing this disparity requires a fundamental shift in the way governance is conceptualized and practised, one that recognizes and values the contributions of all members of society. As Duflo (2012) explains, "inclusive governance is not only a matter of fairness but a prerequisite for effective decision-making and the creation of equitable policies" (p. 1060). The exclusion of women on this note represents not only an ethical failure but also a missed opportunity to harness the full potential of Nigeria's diverse population.

Reimagining African Values and Gender Representation in Nigerian Politics

The persistent underrepresentation of women in Nigerian governance presents a complex intersection of traditional African values, colonial legacies, and contemporary political structures. Despite constituting nearly half of Nigeria's population, women's participation in political leadership remains strikingly limited, with only three out of 109 Senate seats and 15 out of 360 House of Representatives positions held by women. This disparity emerges not from authentic African traditional values, which historically embraced female leadership through figures like Queen Amina of Zazzau, but rather from distorted interpretations

of these traditions that have been shaped by patriarchal ideologies. The philosophical concept of *Ubuntu*, emphasizing shared humanity and mutual reliance, provides a compelling basis for examining this disparity. As Mbiti (1969) articulates, 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am' (p. 108), suggesting that the marginalization of women fundamentally contradicts the communal principles underlying traditional African governance systems. This philosophical perspective aligns with historical evidence of female leadership in pre-colonial Africa, challenging contemporary justifications for women's exclusion that incorrectly invoke traditional values. While Nigerian women have demonstrated increasing political ambition, with 360 women contesting federal positions in the 2023 elections, structural barriers persist. These obstacles include patriarchal societal norms, prohibitive campaign costs, and institutional discrimination within political parties. Notable figures like Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala have made significant contributions to national development, yet their success stories remain exceptions rather than the norm. As Gyekye (2010) argues, "African communalism, far from promoting exclusion, highlights the connection of all individuals in the society, making the marginalization of women both unjustifiable and contrary to the core of these values" (p. 138). This critical examination reveals that the current gender disparity in Nigerian governance stems not from authentic African values but from their misinterpretation and distortion through patriarchal lenses. Addressing this imbalance requires not only policy reforms and institutional changes but also a philosophical re-engagement with traditional African values that emphasize inclusivity, communal well-being, and shared leadership responsibilities.

The Path to Change
The systematic marginalization of women in governance in Nigeria is not a fixed reality but a mutable construct that can and must be reshaped through deliberate action and philosophical reflection. The path to change requires a multifaceted approach that interrogates the philosophical foundations of governance, reorients cultural narratives, and lays the groundwork for an inclusive future. This transformation is not merely a political or social endeavour but a deeply ethical one

rooted in the principles of justice, equality, and shared humanity. Philosophy has always served as a powerful tool for questioning entrenched systems and envisioning alternatives. Social and political philosophy, in particular, provides a critical lens for interrogating the structures that perpetuate gender disparity. As Arendt (1958) argues, "philosophy's role is to dismantle the unquestioned assumptions of the status quo and open the door to new ways of thinking about human association" (p. 197). In the context of Nigerian governance, this means challenging the patriarchal norms that have come to define leadership and proposing alternative models rooted in inclusivity. Social contract theory, for example, emphasizes the idea that governance arises from the collective will of all members of society. By limiting women's participation, Nigeria fails to honour the fundamental principles of this contract, creating a governance structure that is neither representative nor just.

The ethics of care offers another critical philosophical perspective that underscores the importance of including female voices in governance. Developed by feminist philosophers such as Gilligan (1982) and Noddings (2003), the ethics of care emphasizes relationships, empathy, and the moral significance of attending to the needs of others. Noddings (2003) argues that "a governance system that neglects the ethics of care fails to address the mutual reliance of human lives and the moral obligation to consider diverse perspectives in decision-making" (p. 67). Women's perspectives, shaped by their unique social roles and experiences, are essential for creating governance systems that prioritize the well-being of all citizens. This ethical framework challenges the traditional, hierarchical models of governance and advocates for a more inclusive approach that values collaboration and mutual respect.

In the Nigerian context, education must go beyond formal instruction to include a deliberate effort to challenge cultural narratives that perpetuate gender inequality. This involves not only integrating gender equity into school curricula but also fostering public awareness campaigns that promote the values of inclusivity and shared humanity.

As Gyekye (1997) notes, "education must aim to transform not just knowledge but attitudes, creating a society in which justice and equality are recognized as non-negotiable ethical imperatives" (p. 204). The systematic marginalization of women in governance represents an ethical challenge that contradicts the principles of fairness and justice central to both African and Western ethical thought. Rawls (1971) argues that "justice as fairness requires the equal participation of all individuals in the institutions that shape their lives" (p. 302). In the same vein, African philosophy, as articulated by thinkers like Wiredu and Gyekye, emphasizes the interdependence and equal worth of all members of society. The underrepresentation of women in governance is thus a betrayal of both African communal values and universal principles of justice. An ethical re-interpretation of African values offers a pathway toward more inclusive governance. By drawing on the principles of *Ubuntu*, revisiting historical examples of female leadership, and critically examining cultural practices through an ethical lens, African societies can create governance systems that reflect the ideals of justice, equality and shared humanity. As Wiredu (1996) concludes, "A truly ethical society recognizes the contributions of all its members, embracing diversity as a source of strength rather than division" (p. 182). This vision requires a commitment to both cultural transformation and institutional reform, ensuring that the governance systems of tomorrow are not only inclusive but also just.

Cultural reorientation is equally critical to achieving gender equity in governance. African societies are deeply rooted in cultural traditions, which, when reinterpreted, can serve as powerful instruments for change. Traditional African values such as *Ubuntu* and communalism, as previously discussed, emphasize interdependence and collective well-being. These values can be leveraged to challenge the exclusionary practices that systematically marginalized women. As Gyekye (2010) notes, "the re-interpretation of tradition is not a rejection of the past but a necessary adaptation to ensure that cultural values remain relevant and just in contemporary society" (p. 140). This process requires a deliberate effort to disentangle African values from patriarchal interpretations and to highlight their potential for promoting

inclusivity. Storytelling, art, and community dialogue play a vital role in this cultural reorientation. Storytelling has long been a cornerstone of African societies, serving as a means of transmitting values, preserving history, and fostering social cohesion. By centering stories that highlight the contributions of women to governance and community life, societies can challenge the narratives that perpetuate gender inequality. Adichie (2009) eloquently states, "Stories have the power to create or destroy, to humanize or dehumanize, and to shift perceptions in profound ways" (p. 12). Similarly, art whether in the form of literature, music, or visual expression can serve as a medium for challenging stereotypes and imagining new possibilities for governance. Community dialogue, facilitated through town hall meetings, traditional councils, and other communal platforms, can provide spaces for critical reflection and collective re-imagination of cultural norms.

A vision for the future must involve not only philosophical and cultural shifts but also practical steps toward creating an inclusive governance system. This vision begins with the recognition that gender equity is not incompatible with African values but is, in fact, a natural extension of them. A governance system that integrates these values with principles of justice and equality will be more reflective of the diverse voices within society. Wiredu (1996) advocates for "a re-conceptualization of governance that balances tradition with modernity, ensuring that cultural heritage informs but does not constrain progress" (p. 183). This vision requires a commitment to both institutional reforms and cultural revolution, creating a governance structure that is inclusive, just, and effective.

Conclusion
The systematic marginalization of women from governance in Nigeria, often justified by appeals to tradition, is not an inherent feature of African values but rather a distortion of their ethical essence. When reinterpreted through a philosophical lens, African values such as *Ubuntu* and communalism reveal a deep commitment to inclusivity, shared responsibility, and the dignity of all members of society. The

strength of African communalism resides in its ability to evolve, adapting its principles to address the demands of justice and equality in a dynamic context and African values when critically re-examined, offer a framework for addressing gender bias and fostering equitable governance systems. Far from being obstacles to gender equity, African values can serve as powerful tools for reshaping governance to reflect justice and equality for all. Bridging the gap between tradition and progress requires collective action at every level of society. Policymakers must commit to institutional reforms that dismantle structural barriers to women's participation, while communities must engage in cultural reorientation efforts that challenge patriarchal norms. As Gyekye (2010) stresses that, "tradition must be subject to ethical scrutiny, ensuring that cultural practices align with the principles of justice and human flourishing" (p. 142). This collective effort must also include educational initiatives that promote gender equity from an early age and public awareness campaigns that highlight the ethical and practical benefits of inclusive governance. It is only through such concerted efforts that the vision of a just and inclusive society can be realized.

Finally, we must reflect on the lessons of history to guide our path forward. African societies once celebrated female leadership, as exemplified by figures like Queen Nzinga of Ndongo, Yaa Asantewaa of the Ashanti Kingdom and Queen Amina of Zazzau, whose legacies challenge the narrative that governance, is inherently patriarchal. If our ancestors could envision and embrace female leadership within their cultural circle, what prevents us from reclaiming that legacy today? As Chimakonam (2019) poignantly asks, "Is it not the duty of every generation to reinterpret tradition in ways that promote justice and inclusivity for all?" (p. 64). This question compels us to confront the barriers whether cultural, institutional, or psychological that sustains gender disparity in governance and to commit to their dismantling. In the words of Letseka (2013), "A society that values the principles of *Ubuntu* must recognize that the inclusion of all, particularly women, is essential to collective progress" (p. 155). If we are to honour the ethical foundations of African values and the universal principles of justice,

we must work collectively to build a future where gender equity is not an aspiration but a reality. The challenge is great, but so too is the potential for transformation when tradition is guided by the light of ethical reflection.

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Societal Expectations and Female Self-Assertion in Asare Konadu's *A Woman in Her Prime* and Bayo Adebowale's *Lonely Days*

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Abstract

In traditional African society, marriage and motherhood are central to a woman's life. Culturally, women are expected to marry and bear children, as it will ensure the community's survival and continuity. This paper examines the experiences of female characters in Asare Konadu's A Woman in Her Prime and Bayo Adebowale's Lonely Days, highlighting their struggles to assert their independence and self-determination in the face of the stifling cultural norms that seek to dictate their personal choices. The paper draws on feminist concepts like Catherine Acholonu's "motherism," which focuses on the significance of motherhood, particularly for women in traditional societies, and also explores Chikwenye Ogunyemi's "womanism," which emphasizes the importance of African women living life on their terms instead of conforming to societal expectations. The paper concludes that women are vital in society beyond their traditionally designated roles as mothers and wives. Furthermore, the decisions regarding marriage and childbearing ultimately reside with a woman and not society.

Keywords: *Tradition, marriage, motherhood, womanhood, self-assertion.*

Introduction

In African societies, culture profoundly influences the people's way of life, values, and belief systems. In many rural areas, patriarchal norms dictate roles for men and women, and the power structure tends to favour the interests of men over those of women. As Toyin Falola (2003) observes, "patriarchy has long been established in different parts of Africa, and its manifestations can be found in various aspects of gender relations" (251). The roles of men and women are typically defined within the cultural framework of society. Falola further notes that "men are regarded as the heads of households, while women's relevance is often limited to their roles as mothers and wives" (252). While men's relevance is not limited to their culturally assigned roles

as husbands and fathers, women's relevance is often tied to their roles as wives and mothers. Akachi Ezeigbo (2003) notes that, unlike men, "the female is always reminded of her so-called natural roles as a wife and a mother" (xv). Despite the numerous contributions that women have made to the development of society, the culturally designated roles of wife and mother take precedence over other significant ones. Charles Nnolin (2010) similarly observes that in the work of many male African writers, women are portrayed "as mere chattels recognizable only as mothers or wives" (176-177).

In many African societies, cultural norms dictate the lives of women, influencing their expectations and aspirations from a young age. Girls are made to believe that marriage is a vital component of a woman's life, and they are trained to prioritize the domestic duties or roles of a wife and mother above others. Ultimately, a woman's success is often determined by her ability to fulfil her roles as a wife and mother.

The cultural expectation that women will bear children has a great impact on the lives of women in Africa. This expectation is rooted in the assumption that a woman is not truly a woman if she is unable to bear a child. In Asare Konadu's *A Woman in Her Prime,* a childless woman is considered a male because, as the people of Brenhoma say, "there is no difference between a barren woman and a man" (116). This perspective aligns with Iniobong Uko's (2006) assertion that "womanhood is validated only through motherhood and procreation" (86) in many societies in Africa. Culture, therefore, influences women from an early age to embrace the idea that motherhood is central to a woman's fulfilment in life. According to Florence Orabueze (2010), traditional norms dictate that "motherhood must be the natural and biological quest of every woman" (87), an idea common not just in Nigeria but across the continent.

This paper, therefore, examines the experience of female characters burdened by the traditional demands of motherhood in Asare Konadu's *A Woman in Her Prime,* and marriage in Bayo Adebowale's *Lonely Days*. This study examines how the female characters in both novels assert their individuality and their right to self-fulfillment,

defying the stifling demands of their society. According to Ezeigbo (2012) "the woman must learn survival strategies to be able to overcome the impediments placed before her and live a good life. She has to be proactive and strong" (28). Indeed, the female protagonists in both novels devise strategies to survive and thrive.

The feminist theory is adopted to drive the analysis of the two African novels. According to Akachi Ezeigbo, feminism "posits that women should have equal rights and chances with men in every aspect of human experiences: political, legal, economic and social" (11). The paper draws on two sub-concepts of feminism: motherism and womanism. Catherine Acholonu's (1995) motherism denotes "motherhood, nature, and nurture" (110) and advocates for "love, tolerance, service, and cooperation of the sexes" (111). Acholonu's concept highlights the significance of motherhood and the various ways women contribute to the betterment of their communities in Africa. Womanism, on the other hand, according to Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1985), is a "philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom" (72). She further states that the concept highlights the peculiar burden of a woman deprived of her rights by "sexist attitudes in the black domestic domain" (79). Ogunyemi's concept addresses how women contend with patriarchal norms in Africa. Through the lens of Acholonu's motherism and Ogunyemi's womanism, the paper examines the experiences of two female characters as they strive to break free from societal expectations and forge their path within their patriarchal society.

Socio-cultural Expectations, Motherhood and the Female Experience in Asare Konadu's *A Woman in Her Prime*
Pokuwaa is the protagonist of Asare Konadu's *A Woman in Her Prime*. The story is set in a traditional Ashanti village, Brenhoma, in Ghana, where motherhood is highly valued. In Africa, motherhood is widely regarded as a vital aspect of every woman's life. According to Catherine Acholonu (1995), "Motherhood and childbearing are central to the life of African people. It is not an overstatement that motherhood

is the anchor, the matrix, the foundation on which all else rests in the African society, and especially the family" (37). Pokuwaa is a woman in her prime who is unable to conceive. Her inability to bear a child has resulted in the dissolution of two previous marriages.

When the novel begins, she is on her third matrimonial journey, desperately seeking a child to call her own. Kwadwo, Pokuwaa's present husband, has already established his virility with his other wife. Konadu's novel reflects the socio-cultural burden imposed on women struggling with infertility, a reality worsened by the widespread African cultural narrative that equates womanhood with motherhood, as Bibi Bakare-Yusuf (2003) notes, places "motherhood as the paradigmatic self-identity of African women" (5). While Yaremi in Bayo Adebowale's *Lonely Days* is compelled by the cultural demand of her society to get married after the death of her husband, in Pokuwaa's case, the pressure is on her to be a mother as Stephen Eugene Wilkinson and Lynn Clark Callister (2010) notes that "motherhood is a primary role for Ghanaian women" (8). Gracia Clark (1999) equally notes that for the Ashanti, motherhood is central to the female gender (717). Pokuwaa is a successful farmer and should be a worthy member of her village, but her inability to bear a child has consigned her to the margins of her society.

Pokuwaa's struggle to conceive is exacerbated by the societal pressure to bear children, as her opportunity to do so dwindles as she gets older. Wilkinson and Callister assert that in Ghana, as elsewhere in the world, "there are social expectations for women to have children at the right time" (9). Pokuwaa's prayer to "her ancestors and gods to bless her efforts to get a child" (8) and to "spare her the pain of not having a child of her own" (9) underscores the extent of societal pressure on her. The undue pressure society exerts on women struggling to conceive renders them emotionally distressed as depicted in the novel, and it confirms Orabueze's position that the "agony of a barren woman is indescribable" (88). The cultural burden of infertility makes Pokuwaa "afraid because of the people of Brenhoma. To them, to be barren was the worst that could happen to a woman. The approach of her time

caused her apprehension every month" (34). At this point in the story, Pokuwaa allows herself to be defined by the societal expectation that a woman without a child as her mother tells her is "like any boy in Brenhoma, for there is no difference between a barren woman and a man" (116) and a woman who does not want to give birth is "useless" (116). Pokuwaa's situation is not one of a woman who chooses not to have a child, but rather one who, despite her best efforts, is unable to conceive.

The author's position about the relevance of a woman struggling to conceive within a particular social set-up goes contrary to that of Pokuwaa's mother. Konadu does not portray Pokuwaa as useless because she is unable to conceive, but rather as one of the worthiest members of the community. She is beautiful, industrious, and quite intelligent. She contributes in several ways to the development of her immediate society despite her inability to conceive. The scene where Pokuwaa offers her suggestion through a man in the meeting of the elders, because as a woman she cannot partake, illustrates her relevance to her community as a problem solver. Again, it is quite telling that the authors of *A Woman in Her Prime* and *Lonely Days* are men, not women. The novel highlights the idea that many men like Pokuwaa's husband do not consider a woman irrelevant in society because she is childless.

The Intersection of Societal Expectation and Personal Choice in Konadu's *A Woman in Her Prime*
After years of fruitless efforts to have a child, Pokuwaa eventually decides to discontinue offering sacrifices to the god, Tano, in the hope of conceiving. Her decision to cease her sacrifices marks a significant departure from societal expectations. Pokuwaa informs her longtime friend Koramoa of her decision:

> 'I think I am going to have peace at last,' said Pokuwaa. 'I am going to give up crying inside me for that which I cannot get. I am not going to sacrifice anymore.' Koramoa felt unable to say anything. She looked at

> Pokuwaa, expecting to see tears, but she saw that she was calm. (111)

Pokuwaa's decision shows her growing self-awareness and determination to assert her individuality. While she does not erase the possibility of having her child, she is no longer open to being dictated to by anyone or society. She certainly no longer cares if she is branded a barren woman. Despite the pleas by her mother and her husband to rescind her decision, Pokuwaa demonstrates her commitment to her decision. She asserts her right as a woman to decide for herself. She tells her husband, "I am not asking you to agree with my decision,' Pokuwaa replied. 'What I want my own self to understand is that there is a force that knows what is good for me" (114). Pokuwaa makes it clear to Kwadwo that his position as her husband does not accord him the right to dictate to her. Her actions thereafter show that she intends to stick to her decision:

> Going into her room, Pokuwaa took off her clothes and slipped out of the talisman she had been wearing around her waist. A priestess in the next village had given it to her. She opened her brass bowl and took out another talisman. She brought the two into the yard, threw them into the fire, and sat down to watch them flare up and burn. When she stirred again, the fire was dying down. Inside her, she felt quite calm 'Kwadwo, come, let us sleep,' she said. It was the longest sleep she had been granted for a very long time. (114-115)

Pokuwaa's burning of the talisman is symbolic as it signifies her rejection of societal expectations. This act of defiance foregrounds a turning point in her journey toward defining herself. When her mother reminds her of the importance of offering sacrifices to the gods, she reiterates her decision, "I have stopped the sacrifices. Never again will I perform them. I am taking my mind off the fruitless efforts for a child,' (115). Pokuwaa's decision to take her mind off the quest to have a child brings a sort of calmness to her. Ogunyemi argues that when women decide to confront the power structure that subjugates them, they

experience a "dynamism of wholeness and self-healing" (72), which is evident when Pokuwa prioritizes self-fulfillment over what society expects of her. Rather than society dictating to women, Konadu's novel advocates the importance of allowing women to chart their paths and define their roles in society. Rather than exerting pressure on women struggling to conceive, the novel advocates that the people around them should show understanding and offer support, as illustrated in Pokuwaa's mother, Kwadwo and Koramoa coming to "an understanding and acceptance of the situation" (120).

Acholonu in motherism advocates the need for "male-female complementarity in ensuring the totality of human existence" (112), and that is what Kwadwo offers Pokuwaa when it becomes clear she is never going back to offering sacrifices to have a child. Acholonu further states that "when women and men work together in partnership and mutual respect, the equation of life is balanced and order is the result" (114). Kwadwo deepens his affection and respect for Pokuwaa by helping her on her farm, gifting her a whole antelope, and generally treating her as a new bride, and later on, "for three successive months she had not seen a flowing of her blood" (121).

In conclusion, Konadu's *A Woman in Her Prime* offers a nuanced portrayal of the experiences of women struggling to conceive in a society where motherhood is highly valued. The novel underscores the importance of allowing women to chart their path and not reduce them mainly to the roles of mother and wife.

Tradition, Marriage, and Female Experience in Adebowale's *Lonely Days*

In gender discourse, African writers often explore the predicaments of women as they navigate the tension between socio-cultural expectations and their freedom. Women encounter various issues, as seen in the case of Pokuwaa in Konadu's *A Woman in Her Prime*. Bayo Adebowale's *Lonely Days* interrogates whether traditional norms can compel a woman to remarry against her will.

Yaremi, the central character in Adebowale's novel, is a widow who must abide by traditional injunctions to remarry years after her

husband's death. Her right to decide whether to remarry is usurped by the long-held cultural practice of the 'cap picking ceremony' in Kufi, which symbolizes a woman choosing a new husband. Like Pokuwaa, Yaremi must abide by the cultural demands of her society.

Tradition and the Predicament of Widows in *Lonely Days*

Adebowale's *Lonely Days* shows how the rights of women are undermined within the cultural framework that privileges the interests of men over those of women. Lois Tyson (1999) avers that "patriarchy continually exerts a force that undermines women's self-confidence and self-assertiveness" (85). The traditional patriarchal power structure in the village of Kufi debases widows, aligning with Falola's assertion that "culture plays a role in many of the experiences of women, as well as the hardship they complain about" (251).

In many societies in Africa, when an individual dies, it is rarely attributed to natural causes. When Yaremi's husband, Ajumobi, dies, she is subjected to intense scrutiny and hostility:

> She was scanned by mourners in all directions. All eyes followed every footstep she took with hostile closeness. And all ears listened, ready to catch her every word in a set trap. These were not people merely sitting in silent sympathy in the presence of death, but people who were fully bent on humiliating her and destroying her reputation. (3)

Three other widows suffer emotional distress as they are subjected to harsh cultural practices when their husbands die, a situation that unites them in a shared experience of loss, including "the loss of dignity and status" (21). The traditional power structure in Kufi refrains from subjecting men to the same harsh treatment when they are bereaved of their spouse, as rules are applied along gender lines. Adebowale's novel exposes how culture perpetuates gender inequalities in many traditional African communities. Central to the issues that Yaremi encounters in Kufi is her non-conforming disposition to traditional gender roles. Falola points out that in Africa, men and women are expected to behave in certain ways (252). Tyson states that "traditional

gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protective and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing and submissive" (83).

Yaremi, however, defies these expectations. She is a successful businesswoman, industrious and assertive. Her two daughters are married, and her son is doing well as a carpenter far away from Kufi. Yaremi is financially buoyant and able to give to everyone. Tyson argues that a woman who refuses to accept a patriarchal gender role is regarded as a "monster" (88) as reflected in the men's response to Yaremi's decision to float the conventional gender roles:

> Yaremi had gradually maneuvered her way into a position of reckoning in village affairs, spreading her influence and asserting her personality in pleasant and subtle ways. But such a development had never gone down well with the men of Kufi. They always felt insulted. No woman of the land had ever been allowed to worm her way into a position of prominence in village matters. Men liked their women to be patient and passive, shy, bashful, and timid. They liked them to hesitate to ask questions and be reluctant to make requests…. The tenant's shaky voice must never get into the big ears of the landlord. Their women were to be manageable and be long-suffering, complacent and apathetic, forever on the defensive. (89-90)

By defying traditional and societal norms, Yaremi demonstrates that women can transcend the confines of patriarchal categorization that restricts them to roles as wives and mothers. Her refusal to conform to the exigencies of traditional norms is not tolerated in her deeply patriarchal society, as Pumla Dineo Gqola (2022) notes, "there is a cost to challenging patriarchy" (130). It is therefore not surprising that the men of Kufi view Yaremi as "one woman who should be kept at arm's length and be dealt with decisively" (90). Adebowale's *Lonely Days* underscores the inherent challenges that women face when they

challenge traditional norms that attempt to stifle their right to make their own decisions.

The Intersection of Tradition and Marriage: Personal Choice in Adebowale's *Lonely Days*

Yaremi, a beautiful middle-aged woman, is considered irresistible by some men in the village, despite others' resolve to keep her at arm's length. By avoiding romantic entanglements with the men of Kufi, Yaremi demonstrates her devotion to her late husband and indicates her resolve not to submit to the traditional practice of compulsory remarriage for widows. According to Helen Chukwuma (1991), "A woman ultimately has to stand up and make a choice and her success and failure in that choice lies with her" (35). However, in many traditional African societies, men often usurp women's right to make decisions about their own lives. This is evident when the elders decide that it is time for Yaremi to remarry, as captured in the following statement:

> Time was ripe now for Yaremi to choose a new cap to wear. Time now for her to cast off the robes of widowhood and settle down finally with a new husband, according to the demands of tradition. "Purification later, for Yaremi," the elders argued, "but choosing a new cap to replace the old one is now! Now! (107-108)

Adebowale's novel highlights the gender inequality prevalent in a patriarchal society, where men compel widows to remarry. Penaewazibiou Dadja-Tiou (2022) notes that in *Lonely Days*, marriage is "essentially based on patriarchal assumptions. Only men's interest is taken into account and women are supposed to be the executors of men's decisions" (357). Dadja-Tiou's observation supports Falola's view that in many African societies, women are required to "accept a husband chosen on their behalf (253). Adebowale's *Lonely Days* argues that the right to marry or not is solely that of the woman, not of some elders or the dictates of tradition.

Furthermore, the novel critiques the idea of coercing women into marriage, emphasizing that the choice resides with women. As

Ogunyemi posits, women should have a clear "understanding of the choices open to them" (65). Yaremi's rejection of her suitors' proposal shows her determination to assert the right to make her own decision. She informs one of the suitors:

> "And, by the way, Lanwa, you must stop preaching the sermon of our people's old custom and tradition …. I reserve the right to choose the type of life I want to lead. It could be that of a woman deliberately aloof in self-contentment, untouched by the victimization and oppression of the man; or that of a woman sulking the anger of an injury, protesting humiliations heaped on her, over the years by the man …. Not your business, Lanwa, how I want to live my life." (103-104)

While Yaremi is not against marriage, having been married to Ajumobi before his death, she insists that any future marriage must be on her terms. This stance is in contrast to the three other ex-widows, Dedewe, Fayoyin and Radeke, who believe that "no woman's life is ever complete without a man to prop her on in the arduous journey of this world …. It is the law of nature. A bird does not fly with one arm of its wings" and they also believe that women should "learn to be humble, meek and submissive, and be ready, at all times to accommodate our men" (111). The ex-widows are enablers of the chauvinistic tendencies of men and the cultural practices that demean and subvert the rights of women. In contrast to the timid and weak women, Yaremi stands out as courageous and assertive. Unlike them, she can unilaterally challenge the cultural practice that denies them their right to self-realization. However, Yaremi shows that challenging patriarchal tyranny does not necessarily require a collective effort. Defying traditional norms,

> Yaremi turned round and bowed to the elders who sat speechless and overwhelmed. She grimaced at the three widows with a hesitating countenance and began picking her way back to the house, leaving everybody under the *odan* tree gazing in petrified stupidity … The angry

> murmur of the crowd followed her, vibrating like the discordant note of a distant music. (116)

Yaremi's refusal to pick a cap amounts to a revolutionary act because no woman has ever declined to do so. As Acholonu notes, women should embrace "new, even revolutionary ideas" (113). By doing so, Yaremi becomes an agent of change, resolute in her determination to break free from tradition.

Her resolve to defy traditional norms of remarriage results in the elders ostracizing and labelling her "an unusual woman" (118). This outcome supports Gqula's view that a key feature of patriarchal ideology is to render anything hostile to it "as strange, abnormal, and illegitimate" (42). Indeed, Yaremi is an unusual woman, remaining undaunted in asserting her right to make her own decisions. According to Ogunyemi, the womanist novel articulates the struggle of a "rebel against patriarchal institutions represented by domineering men" (65), However, Ogunyemi also cautions that "in fighting the establishment, the black woman must not be so mad as to destroy herself with patriarchy" (66). Adebowale's novel reflects the experience of a woman who is determined to assert her identity and break free from the stifling hold of men and tradition. Yaremi, like Pokuwaa, embodies Orabueze's assertion, "It is only by raising her voice in protest that she can gain her freedom" (101). Recognizing the challenges of defying traditional widowhood injunctions, Yaremi is determined to forge her path within her society.

Conclusion
The authors of the two novels examined in this paper are male writers who effectively captured the experiences of women in a deeply patriarchal African society. Notably, their novels reveal a shared disapproval of cultural practices that undermine women's rights to self-realization and self-fulfillment.

The paper examined how traditional society exerts undue pressure on women to fulfill their culturally assigned roles as wives and mothers. Through the experiences of the female protagonists in Asare Konadu's

A Woman in Her Prime and Bayo Adebowale's *Lonely Days*, this paper revealed the various ways society controls women's choices by preventing them from making their own decisions.

Konadu's novel highlights the need for a woman struggling to conceive to resist undue societal pressure and instead explore alternative paths to self-fulfillment. Similarly, Adebowale's work reveals that the decision to marry should rest solely with the woman, free from the influence of domineering men and the dictates of tradition.

In conclusion, both novels underscore the notion that the role of a woman in society transcends her traditionally defined roles as a wife and mother. Asare Konadu's and Bayo Adebowale's works challenge the societal norm of reducing the relevance of women to merely domestic roles. Through the experiences of Pokuwaa and Yaremi, the novels emphasize the importance of allowing women to define their paths and make decisions free from societal pressure.

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Public Perception of the Consequences of Domestic Violence on the Victims in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The consequences of domestic violence are profound, affecting not only the health and happiness of the victim but also the broader community. This descriptive survey study examined the perceived consequences of domestic violence against women in the Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria. Anchored in Victim Blaming Theory, the study addresses the tendency to hold victims partly responsible for their misfortunes. Using a questionnaire and in-depth interviews, data were collected from 398 participants. The data gathered through these methods were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, and content analysis. The findings reveal that the majority of respondents identified death as a consequence of domestic violence, while others cited unwanted pregnancy, physical injury, suicide attempts, depression, and job loss. The study concludes that domestic violence is a significant social problem that must be addressed promptly to prevent it from escalating. It recommends, among other actions, a more vigorous advocacy campaign against domestic violence through mass media, family, community, and religious organizations. Additionally, government and non-governmental organizations should enhance efforts to provide free education, community-based educational programs, vocational training, and life-skills development centers to empower the most vulnerable individuals in the communities.

Keywords: public, perception, women, domestic violence, consequence, victim.

Introduction

Domestic violence against women is a pervasive issue that has far-reaching consequences for both the individual victims and society as a whole. The World Health Organization (2019) revealed that between 15% and 71% of women and children in its 10-country study, which

includes nations like Japan, Ethiopia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Brazil, have experienced domestic violence. The widespread prevalence of domestic violence is not limited to a particular country or region; it is a global phenomenon. A survey conducted by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (2014) estimated that an average of 22% of European women have been victims of physical or sexual violence, and 33% of women have experienced physical or sexual violence across countries since the age of 15 (George, 2020).

According to MacGregor, Wathen and MacQuarrie (2019), in Nigeria, reports revealed high level of violence against women. The recent death of Nigeria's leading gospel music artistes, Osinachi Nwachukwu, who was allegedly battered to death by her husband, has elicited nationwide outcry. Christian leaders have risen in outright condemnation of the act, with many calling for her husband to face the law (Ibekwe et.al 2022).

According to the Challenged Parenthood Initiative (2020), the organization received several reports of domestic violence and other crimes ranging from rape, sexual molestation, coercion, female circumcision and forceful ejection from home within six months in Kogi State. It also explained that other gender based violence reported during the COVID-19 lockdown included verbal abuse, psychological abuse, harmful widowhood practices, spousal battery, harmful traditional practices and abandonment of spouse, children and other dependents without sustenance, and concluded that girls and women in Kogi State are no longer safe in the hands of abusers, who they reside with, and cannot come out over fear of intimidation and stigmatization.

Fawole, Okedare and Reed (2021), major consequences of domestic violence victimization include psychological/mental health issues and chronic physical health problems. A victim's overwhelming lack of resources can lead to homelessness and poverty (Sifat, 2020). Bruises, broken bones, head injuries, lacerations and internal bleeding are some of the acute effects of a domestic violence incident that require medical attention and hospitalization (Fawole, 2018). Some chronic health

conditions that have been linked to victims of domestic violence are arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome (Campbell, 2020). The aim of this study, therefore, was to determine the perceived consequences of Domestic Violence on the victims in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria.

Literature Review
Conceptual Clarification
Etter and Birzer (2017), stated that domestic violence is an aggressive behaviour, where the perpetrator uses his or her own body as an object, including a weapon to inflict injury or discomfort upon another individual. The aggressive behaviour is conducted by an individual or group against another.

Oti, Paul and Duru (2017), defined domestic violence as a physical or sexual violence within the family, which includes sexual abuse of children and physical abuse of elderly parents. In the same vein, Aihie (2019), observed that in a United Nation's publication, domestic violence can be narrowly interpreted to mean incidents of physical attack, which may take the form of physical and sexual violations such as pushing, pinching, spitting, kicking, hitting, punching, choking, stabbing, throwing boiling water or acid and setting on fire. The result of such physical violence can range from bruising to killing. According to George, (2020), domestic violence also includes psychological or mental violence consisting of constant verbal insults, harassment, denouncement by spouses of one another, confinement, child abuse or neglect etc. such that it gives rise to wife battering which is a prominent feature of domestic violence. This gives credence to

Hamby, (2017), who saw domestic violence as a constellation of abusive and controlling behaviours, including psychological abuse, sexual coercion, financial abuse, isolation, threats, stalking, and physical violence to create a climate of fear and intimidation that maintain one partner in a position of domination and control, with the other partner in a position of subordination and compliance.

A review of North American social science literature by Black (2020) identified several demographic, personal history, and personality

factors consistently associated with a man's likelihood of physically assaulting an intimate partner. These factors include young age and a history of husbands who were either beaten as children or witnessed their mothers being beaten. According to Ibekwe et al. (2022), alcohol use among husbands is a significant factor linked to the likelihood of committing physical violence against a partner. In contrast, risk factors for female perpetrators of abuse include witnessing a mother hit a father, alcohol use, neuroticism, and a history of perpetrating partner abuse. Furthermore, Millward (2021) noted a connection between poverty and mental health challenges, such as stress, depression, and anxiety, all of which are risk factors for engaging in domestic violence.

Consequences of Domestic Violence on the Victims
Research conducted by Oyedokun, (2020) has shown that violence possess much more health hazards to women than cancer, malaria and road traffic accident combined. Sometimes women ignorantly endure persistent abuse and violence from their husbands till they get ill and die without dictating the fundamental cause of illness and death. Consequences or effects of domestic violence can be seen in the following ways:

Consequences on Children: There has been an increase in acknowledgement that a child who is exposed to domestic abuse during his upbringing will suffer in his development and psychological welfare (Roesch, et al.,2020). Some emotional and behavioural problems that can result due to domestic violence include increased aggressiveness, anxiety, and changes in how a child socializes with friends, family and authorities (Umana, Fawole & Adeoye, 2020).

Physical Consequences: Bruises, broken bones, head injuries, lacerations and internal bleeding are some of the acute effects of a domestic violence incident that require medical attention and hospitalization (Fawole, 2018). Some chronic health conditions that have been linked to victims of domestic violence are arthritis, irritable bowel syndrome (Campbell, 2020).

Psychological Consequences: According to Fedina, et.al. (2020), among victims who are still living with their perpetrators, high amounts of

stress, fear and anxiety are commonly reported. Gulati and Kelly, (2020), observed that depression is also common, as victims are made to feel guilty for provoking the abuse and are frequently subjected to intense criticism.

Financial Consequences: According to Fawole, (2018), once victims leave their perpetrator, they can be stunned with the reality of the extent to which the abuse has taken away their autonomy. Campbell, (2020), also opined that due to economic abuse and isolation, the victims usually have very little money of their own and few people on whom they can rely when seeking help. This has been shown to be one of the greatest obstacles facing victims of domestic violence, and the strongest fact that can discourage them from leaving their perpetrators (Barnett, 2021).

Long-term Consequences: Fawole, Okedare and Reed, (2021), observed that domestic violence can trigger many different responses in victims, all of which are very relevant for a professional working with a victim. Major consequences of domestic violence victimization include psychological/mental health issues and chronic physical health problems. A victim's overwhelming lack of resources can lead to homelessness and poverty. Additionally, victim might lose confidence in social and personal roles due to the constant undermining by their abuser (Sifat, 2020).

From the above literature reviewed, it is seen that the consequences of domestic violence do not only affect the victims, but the family as a whole; they affect children's education, family businesses, and economic growth of a nation as a whole.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Victim Blaming Theory. In 1965, social psychologist Melvin Lerner coined the term 'just world' to reflect the belief that individuals have a need to believe that they live in a world where people generally get what they deserve and deserve what they get'' (Lerner, 1978 cited by Agarwal & Panda, 2019, pp. 359–388). Meanwhile, Psychologist William Ryan coined the phrase blaming the

victim in his 1971 book of that title. Victim Blaming Theory describes the practice of holding victims partly responsible for their misfortune. It represents the faulting of individuals who have endured the suffering of crimes, hardships, or other misfortunes with either part or whole responsibility for the event (Saudino, 2020). Often, victim-blaming theories rely on the premise that individuals should recognize the dangers that exist in society and therefore should take the necessary precautions to maintain a certain level of safety. Those who do not take such precautions are perceived as blameworthy for their demise even if they have not acted carelessly. These perceptions in effect shift the culpability away from the perpetrator of the crime onto the victim. (Zawitz, 2019).

Victim-blaming theories have received considerable attention from social psychologists, yet little has been done to end the practice of shifting the culpability of unfortunate events from the offenders to the victims. Taking responsibility for one's safety may ensure a specific level of protection, yet it does not provide a guarantee that no bad events will take place. Until the populace gains an awareness of the harm caused by the simple act of blaming victims, victims will continue to suffer needlessly.

Applying the theory to issues of family violence, violence against women, or sexual assault, one often hears victim-blaming statements such as, ''Why didn't she leave?'' or ''She was asking for it.'' Within the context of family violence, victim blaming often includes condemnation of the victim for staying in an abusive relationship.

Methods
The study made use of descriptive survey research design, which employed questionnaire and in-depth interview to collect data from the study population across the selected communities.

Study Area: Ofu Local Government is one of the twenty-one Local Government Areas in Kogi State, Nigeria. It was initially created by the Shehu Shagari's Administration on 2nd December 1980, and later scrapped by General Buhari's Administration in 1983. It was again re-created on the 11th May, 1989 when the military government of

President Ibrahim Babangida created six additional local governments in Benue State. Ofu local government at creation had only three gazetted districts. In June 1991, however, eleven wards were created. The people are predominantly engaged in agriculture with a sizeable proportion engaged in government employment and business (Independent National Electoral Commission, 2012).

There are limited researches or data on consequences of domestic violence against women in the study area, addressing this gap would provide an opportunity to contribute to localized interventions.

As this research has been conducted for examining the consequences of domestic violence against women in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State, Nigeria. The survey has been conducted among males and females of adult age, who were resident within the selected communities of the Local Government Area.

The study recruited participants through a multi-stage sampling technique. The first stage involved a purposive selection of five (5) wards in Ofu Local Government Area namely: Ugwolawo Ward 1, Alloma Ward, Ochadamu Ward, Aloji ward, and Ejule/Alla Ward, while the second stage involved selection of two (2) communities from each of the selected five (5) wards. This was done using simple random sampling technique via balloting. The selected communities were: Ugwolawo, Atoda, Iboko, Okula, Ochadamu, Umomi, Aloji, Ogbabo, Ejule, and Alla. Questionnaires were administered to respondents who are relative to victims or victims themselves using systematic sampling techniques to select eligible adult males and females of 18 years and above, beginning from the 1st, 3rd, 5th, 7th, 9th,11th… etc houses of each street or road in the five chosen communities where domestic violence has been reported or suspected.

The principle of informed consent ensured that respondents are informed about their rights to participate in the research, and are also free to withdraw from the research question whenever they feel liked. The participant informed consent was sought for before the study. All the participants were aware of the purpose of the study. Consequently, ethical clearance with certificate number CHSREC/2022/0003 was

obtained from the College of Health Science Research Ethics Committee in Prince Audu Abubakar University before the study was conducted, thereby ensuring that information gotten were treated with utmost confidentiality and that the participants would not be harmed.

A total number of three hundred and ninety eight (398) copies of the questionnaire were administered of which all the copies were retrieved, yielding a response rate of 100%. It was possible to get all the copies of questionnaire back because the researcher adopted a face to face administration of questionnaire, which afforded an opportunity to explain any point of confusion or misunderstanding to the respondents.

Data generated through the questionnaire were sifted, coded and analyzed with the use of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0, it is valued for its ease of use, versatility and comprehensive statistical capabilities, while data generated through in-depth interviews were transcribed and analysed using content analysis, because it offers a structured and systematic approach to interpreting diverse forms of content.

Results
The results in table 1 show the socio demographic characteristics of the respondents in the study area, in which 200(50.3%) of the total respondents were female, while 198(49.8%) were male. This indicated a near proportionate selection of respondents, which greatly reduced gender bias between the female and the male respondents in the study. The results also show that 65(16.3%) of the total respondents were within the age bracket of 18-27 years, 82(20.6%) within the age bracket of 28-37 years, majority 102 (25.6%) within the age bracket of 38-47 years, 78 (19.6%) within the age of 48-57 years, while 71(17.8%) of the total respondents were within the age bracket of 58 years and above. This indicated that majority of the respondents were within the age bracket of 38 - 47 years. Results on the educational background of respondents show that 53(13.3%) of the total respondents selected none, which means that they had no formal education, 72 (18.1%)

selected primary, 151(37.9%) selected secondary, and 122(30.65%) selected tertiary.

In terms of marital status, the result shows that majority of the respondents were married women which is important because, married women are better placed to say their minds on what they perceive as domestic violence in their environment. Results also show that majority of the respondents are from monogamous homes, which could be a reason why it was easy to know when domestic violence has taken place as domestic violence in their environment. Results also show that majority of the respondents are from monogamous homes, which could be a reason why it was easy to know when domestic violence has taken place.

Socio Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents
Table 1: Percentage Distribution of Socio Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variables	Category	Frequency (N=398)	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	198	49.8
	Female	200	50.3
Age in years	18-27	65	16.3
	28-37	82	20.6
	38-47	102	25.6
	48-57	78	19.6
	58 and above	71	17.8

Educational background	None	53	13.3
	Primary	72	18.1
	Secondary	151	37.9
	Tertiary	122	30.7
Marital status	Married	297	74.6
	Single	0	0
	Divorced	35	8.8
	Separated	25	6.3
	Widowed	41	10.3
Type of marriage	Monogamy	273	68.6
	Polygamy	125	31.4
Length of marriage	Less than1 year	39	9.8
	1- 10 years	74	18.6
	11-20 years	120	30.2
	21-30 years	42	10.6
	31 -40 years	65	16.3
	41 and above	58	14.6
Number of Children	None	58	14.6
	1 -2	58	14.6
	3	126	31.7

	4	72	18.1
	5 and above	84	21.1
Religion	Christianity	163	40.9
	Islam	190	48
Occupation	Traditionalist	45	11.3
	Farming	66	16.6
	Petty trading	105	26.4
	Civil service	175	43.9
	Politician	52	13.1
Average monthly income	Below minimum wage of ₦30,000	125	31.4
	Minimum wage of ₦30,000	171	43
	Above minimum wage of ₦30,000	102	26

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Consequences of Domestic Violence on the victims

Table 2 shows the perceived consequences of domestic violence against women. It shows that 94(23.6%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that death can result from domestic violence against women; 187(46.9%) of the total respondents also agreed that death can result from domestic violence against women. Others, 56(14.1%) of the total respondents were neutral on the subject matter, while 61(15.3%) of the total respondents disagreed. These results indicate that majority of the

respondents agreed that death can be a consequence of domestic violence against women. The result was corroborated during an in-depth interview conducted with an aged man during the session. The man had this to say:

> *Violence against women can put most women in a traumatic stage and no woman prays to end up in a home where the husband turns the wife to a punching bag; physical abuse like using of belt or any hard object on a woman can lead to bruises, fractures and even death, if it becomes an everyday beating.*

(Male, 65years old, Ochadamu community respondent May 19th 2024)

Results also show that 55(13.8%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that unwanted pregnancy or diseases are consequences of domestic violence against women; 27(68.3%) of the total respondents also agreed that this is true. 59(14.8%) of the total respondents were neutral, while 12(3.0%) of the total respondents disagreed. This indicated that majority of the respondents were not certain or sure, that unwanted pregnancy or diseases can be a consequence of domestic violence against women. This margin of difference is however comparable to the 55(13.8%), that strongly agreed that unwanted pregnancy or diseases are consequences of domestic violence against women

The results further show that, 298(74.9%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that physical injury is a consequence of domestic violence against women, and 100(25.1%) of the respondents agreed. The result thus show that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that physical injury can be inflicted on a woman who is in an abusive marriage.

Suicide attempts are also seen to be a consequence of domestic violence against women in the study area. The results show that 58(14.6%) of the total respondents strongly agreed to this position. While 132(33.3%) of the total respondents agreed that this is true, 102(25.7%) were neutral, 50(12.6%) strongly disagreed and 55(13.9%) of the total respondents

disagreed. This indicated that majority of the respondents agreed to suicide attempts to be a major consequences of domestic violence against women.

The table also shows that 160(40.2%) of the total respondents strongly agreed to depression as a consequence of domestic violence and 129(32.4%) of the total respondents agreed to this. However, 32(8.0%) of the total respondents were neutral while 77(19.4) of the total respondents disagreed. The result thus showed that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that depression is a major consequence of domestic violence against women.

Furthermore, 94(23.6%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that permanent disability can be a consequence of domestic violence against women, and 146(36.7%) of the total respondents also agreed; 67(16.8%) of the total respondents were neutral, while 91(22.9%) of the respondents disagreed. This indicated that majority of the respondents agreed to permanent disability as a major consequence of domestic violence against women.

Low self-esteem as a consequence of domestic violence was selected by 70(17.6%) of the total respondents who strongly agreed that it can cause domestic violence, while 327(82.2%) of the total respondents agreed; 1(0.2%) person out of the total respondents disagreed. This showed that majority of the respondents agreed that low self-esteem is a major consequence of domestic violence against women. This is corroborated with a response from a respondent during an in-depth interview session:

> *If the abuse happens every day or all the time, neighbours will know and the woman will be ashamed to walk in public places. It also has emotional implication; the wife is not safe in her house, as she is always afraid of her husband* (Female, 28years old, Ugwolawo community, May 21st 2024).

Finally, 110(27.6%) of the total respondents strongly agreed that loss of job can be a consequence of domestic violence, and 112(28.1%) of the total respondents also agreed. However, 81(20.4%) of the total

respondents were neutral, 41(10.3%) strongly disagreed and 54(13.6%) disagreed that loss of job can be a consequence of domestic violence. This showed that majority of the respondents agreed that loss of job can be a consequence of domestic violence against women. This is in tandem with a response from an interviewee during an in-depth interview session who said:

> *If the source of income is business and the woman does no business, then there will be no money for her to take care of her children* (Female, 44years old, Alla community, 21st May 2024)

Another respondent opined that:

> *Abusive partners work very hard to keep victims trapped in the relationship. They may try to isolate the victim from friends and family, thereby reducing the people and places where the survivor can go for support* (Female, 50years old, 21st May 2024)

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Respondents on Determining the Perceived Consequences of Domestic Violence Against Women in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State

S/N	Items	Strongly Agreed 5	Agreed 4	Neutral 3	Strongly Disagreed 2	Disgreed 1
1	Death	94(23.6%)	187(46.9%)	56(14.1)		61(15.3%)
2	Unwanted pregnancy or diseases	55(13.8%)	272(68.3%)	59(14.8%)		12(3.0%)
3	Physical injury	298(74.9%)	100(25.1%)			
4	Suicide attempts	58(14.6%)	132(33.3%)	102(25.7%)	50(12.6%)	55(13.9%)
5	Depression	160(40.2%)	129(32.4%)	32(8.0%)		77(19.4)
6	Permanent disability	94(23.6%)	146(36.7%)	67(16.8%)		91(22.9%)
7	Low self esteem	70(17.6%)	327(82.2%)			1(0.2%)
8	Loss of job	110(27.6%)	112(28.1%)	81(20.4%)	41(10.3%)	54(13.6%)

Source: Field Survey (2024)

Discussion of findings

The perceived consequences of domestic violence on the victims in the study area shows that, 187(46.9%) of the total respondents selected death, while 132(33.3%) selected suicide attempts as consequences of domestic violence, respectively. According to Ibekwe et al. (2022), in Nigeria, many women have died, brutalized or maimed for life, by their violent male counterparts. Very recently this year, a Nigerian female musician by name Osinachi died as a result of injuries she sustained through domestic violence by her intimate partner. This

means that domestic violence is a silent killer of women; sometimes the victim endures persistent abuse and violence from the husband till they get ill and die, without anyone dictating the fundamental cause of illness and death among the women.

The results show that, 272(68.3%) of the total respondents selected unwanted pregnancy or diseases as a consequence of domestic violence. This is in line with Fawole, Okedare, and Reed (2021), who observed that domestic violence can trigger many different responses in victims; major consequences of domestic violence victimization according to them include psychological/mental health issues and chronic physical health problems. Results of this study further show that, 298(74.9%) of the total respondents strongly agreed to physical injury as a consequence of domestic violence, and 146(36.7%) of the total respondents agreed to permanent disability as a consequence of domestic violence. According to Fawole (2018), bruises, broken bones, head injuries, lacerations and internal bleeding are some of the acute effects of a domestic violence incident that require medical attention and hospitalization.

The results also show that 160(40.2%) agreed that depression is a consequence of domestic violence, while 327(82.2%) agreed to low self-esteem. This corroborates with Gulati and Kelly, (2020), who observed that depression is common, as victims are made to feel guilty for provoking the abuse, and are frequently subjected to intense criticism. It is reported that 60% of victims meet the diagnostic criteria for depression, either during or after termination of the relationship (Gulati & Kelly, 2020).

Finally, the result showed that 112(28.1%) of the total respondents agreed to loss of job. This is in line with Ibekwe, Abiodun and Ayodele (2022), who observed that (126%) of the total respondents selected lack of concentration at work as an effects of abuse on the victim. This is in line with Sifat (2020), who stated that victims of domestic violence often lack specialized skills, education, and training that are necessary to find gainful employment, and capital to support the children.

Conclusion

Domestic violence is a social issue that must be addressed promptly to prevent it from escalating. Women's lives are at risk when they live with individuals who may threaten their safety over trivial matters.

Violence against women affects not only the victims but also their children. Women who endure constant violence are unable to contribute positively to society; they cannot effectively lead in their homes, businesses, or government. Victims of domestic violence and other forms of abuse experience diminished concentration and effectiveness in their work and personal lives. Furthermore, they are often unable to support other women who have been widowed or are less privileged.

Education is crucial for girls. It fosters knowledge and awareness of domestic violence while reducing tolerance for its negative effects in the community. While girls are often taught to be submissive and obedient, boys should also be educated to respect and love women, particularly their wives. The culture of silence surrounding domestic violence can be diminished when victims are encouraged to speak out and when society holds offenders accountable.

Domestic violence is a significant social and psychological burden that victims cannot bear alone. Family and friends, along with religious organizations, can offer essential social and emotional support, enabling victims to speak out and seek justice without facing stigmatization. Most respondents in the study area did not view police intervention as the most effective strategy for addressing domestic violence against women. Therefore, in cases where some men refuse to respect women's dignity, appropriate strategies should be implemented to address this issue and promote a just, fair, and equitable society.

Recommendations

In order to tackle the problem of domestic violence against women in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State Nigeria, collective effort is required to create awareness and ensure that the society has an in-depth knowledge about it, to prevent further crisis. The following

recommendations are hereby made as a result of the findings from this study.

1. There should be continuous awareness creation about domestic violence against women in Ofu Local Government Area of Kogi State through the mass media, especially radio and television.
2. Religious and community leaders in Ofu Local Government Area should continue to help in creating awareness of social vices among their subjects, and publicly condemn domestic violence in the area to reduce, if not eliminate domestic violence against women, generally.
3. Ofu local government, as a government at the grass root, should seriously embark on mass mobilization of the populace to campaign against domestic violence in order to reduce the prevalence of domestic violence in the area.
4. Ofu Local Government should as a matter of urgency, set up guidance and counseling centers on family matters, where experts can educate and counsel partners in marriage to live peacefully, for improved family relationship.
5. Gender should not be a disadvantage; the law must reiterate this and bring perpetrators to book.

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Girl Child Education: Importance, Barriers and the Way Forward

Ummah Usaini

Abstract

This paper examines the education of the girl child as a fundamental right recognized globally and enshrined in the Nigerian constitution. It discusses the role of education in the social, moral, political, and economic development of individuals and society. The paper highlights the significance of girl-child education and its potential benefits. It also addresses the consequences of denying girls access to education, emphasizing the gender disparity in school enrollment in Northern Nigeria, where the ratio of boys to girls in some states reaches as high as 2:1 or even 3:1. Additionally, the paper explores barriers to girl-child education and proposes measures that, if implemented by parents and policymakers, could reverse the trend of female educational disadvantage. The role of stakeholders in addressing this issue is examined, with a focus on participatory strategies.

Introduction

The importance of education in the overall development of an individual—socially, economically, morally, and politically in both developed and developing nations cannot be overemphasized. The education of individuals in every society provides the impetus for social, economic, and political development. Education empowers individuals to fulfill their duties toward societal development and participate in informed decision-making processes that enhance the well-being of their families, immediate communities, and the larger society.

The overall aim of education is to equip members of society with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values to function as responsible and productive citizens. Imhabekhai (1980) views education as a process through which individuals are prepared to integrate into the social system in which they live. Euphoria maintains that the primary goal of education is to provide individuals with opportunities to acquire and develop the skills, knowledge, and

attitudes required for successful participation in socio-economic and political programs.

Similarly, Shuaibu (2010) reiterates that education is a process of training and instruction designed to provide knowledge and develop skills. It strengthens both the body and mind through careful nurturing.

Education, therefore, is meant to equip, empower, and liberate people, irrespective of gender, especially since it is a fundamental right of every individual in society.

Girl Child Education
The education of the girl child is as important as the education of the male child—not in competition, but as an equal right accorded to both sexes. However, the education of the girl child has never been given the same priority as that of the male child. According to a report by UNICEF, the gender gap between boys and girls attending school in Nigeria, particularly in northern Nigeria, is as high as 1:2 or even 1:3 in some states. This rate of enrollment continues to decline, and even those who are enrolled are not guaranteed completion of their education.

Girl-child education extends to women's education, and it is a well-known fact that women's education is often marked by misconceptions, misinterpretations, and gender-role stereotyping. The issue of unequal access to educational opportunities between males and females is more pronounced in developing countries, but it remains a global phenomenon.

Despite the fact that girls and women constitute half of the world's population, their societal roles have often been confined to that of a wife, mother, or caregiver rather than individuals with equal intellect and potential capable of attaining the highest levels of education and career advancement, just like their male counterparts. Bulama (2004), cited in Nguru and Jimbo (2009), argues that for education to achieve its objectives, it must be provided not only universally but also equitably. This approach is the only way to ensure social justice and fairness.

Importance of Girl-Child Education

The significance of girl-child education can be observed in the achievements of the few women who have had the opportunity to be educated. There is an adage that states, "Behind every successful man, there is a woman." Women are the backbone of every society, influencing their families' major decisions. Educated girls and women become better mothers, leaders, and professionals. However, inequality in educational access has placed girls at a disadvantage socially, economically, and politically, limiting their opportunities.

Mukhtar (2009) rightly states that women constitute the majority of the illiterate population worldwide, including in developed countries where education is, in principle, universally accessible. This disparity has created inequality in access to education, which is recognized as a basic human right necessary for moral, spiritual, and intellectual development. The preference for male child education and the gender roles assigned to men and women have further marginalized girls. Macca (1976) found that the roles traditionally assigned to women confined them to the home as wives and mothers in domestic solitude, whereas men were placed in positions of control and authority. Consequently, women's status has been made inferior to that of men.

Cultural perceptions contribute significantly to this disparity. Many societies hold the belief that investing in a girl's education is a waste because she will eventually marry and leave her family, whereas a male child remains part of the household. As a result, parents often prioritize their sons' education over their daughters'. However, most of these reasons are cultural rather than religious, as both Islam and Christianity emphasize the importance of seeking knowledge without gender segregation.

Wali (2004) supports this view, asserting that in patriarchal societies where girls and women are undervalued, the education of the girl child is given little or no importance. The conservative nature of such societies contributes to challenges such as early marriage, misconceptions about women's roles, preference for boys' education, and the discontinuation of girls' education. Cludebehu (2009), cited in

Mustapha et al. (2002), further maintains that education is a fundamental right of every child. Unfortunately, girls have been denied this right for many years, adversely affecting national development.

Benefits of Girl-Child Education

The education of the girl child has always been important, and its significance continues to grow. Educated women, when placed in appropriate roles, demonstrate expertise and professionalism, contributing significantly to their families, communities, and society at large. The World Bank, cited in Okebi (2009), states that "a country with more educated girls and women is not only healthier but also wealthier." The importance of girl-child education can be seen in the following key areas:

1. **Improvement of Living Standards**: Educated women manage households effectively, ensuring better family health, education, and economic stability. They serve as nurses, dietitians, teachers, mentors, and role models, fostering societal development.

2. **Influence on Society**: Educated women inspire and influence others through their actions and contributions, serving as role models for younger generations.

3. **Reduction of Early Marriages and Maternal Mortality**: Education provides girls with knowledge about reproductive health, enabling them to make informed decisions about pregnancy and maternal care, thereby reducing maternal and child mortality rates.

4. **Lower Divorce Rates**: Communication is essential in marriage. Education enhances individuals' ability to express their feelings and resolve conflicts amicably, reducing divorce rates.

5. **Reduction in Illiteracy Rates**: Educated women prioritize their children's education, helping to break the cycle of illiteracy in society.

6. **Crime Reduction**: A lack of education contributes to crime. Educated mothers can positively influence their children and communities, reducing delinquency and crime rates.

7. **Poverty Alleviation**: Education equips individuals with knowledge and skills to secure employment or become entrepreneurs, reducing poverty and destitution.

These and many other factors underscore the need to prioritize girl-child education to promote equality at all levels of society and achieve sustainable development. Hyldgaard et al. (2007) emphasize that women's knowledge must be taken seriously and their learning must be supported.

Ensuring that girls receive equal educational opportunities is not just a moral obligation but a critical investment in the future of societies worldwide.

Barriers to Girl-Child Education
Barriers to girl-child education refer to the factors that hinder a girl's access to educational opportunities—factors from which the male child is often exempt. As Indabawa (2009) outlines, nine socio-cultural factors impede girls' education, including:

1. Early marriage
2. Girl hawking practices
3. Poverty levels of families
4. Poor parental support for girl-child education
5. Misinterpretation of Islam's stance on girl-child education
6. Society's poor attitude towards girl-child education
7. Irrelevance of the curriculum
8. Poor self-concept among females
9. Weak linkage between education and employment

Early Marriage
Early marriage, especially prevalent in northern Nigeria, is unfortunately perceived by many parents as a fulfillment of religious duty. This practice significantly limits girls' enrollment, retention, and completion of educational programs. Few schools accommodate married girls to ensure continuity in education. Additionally, cultural norms and parental concerns about security often lead to early marriages despite Islam making knowledge acquisition obligatory for

both males and females. Indabawa (2009) asserts that the impact of early marriage is a significant concern for those advocating for equitable female participation in modern education, noting that "when girls are married at ages 10 to 14, their educational careers are disrupted, especially if avenues for second-chance learning are not provided."

Girl Hawking Practices

The socio-economic status of many parents, coupled with the high cost of education, forces them to send their daughters to hawk goods rather than attend school, as it provides immediate financial benefits. Hawking is particularly common in rural areas, where it is viewed as a means for parents to accumulate resources for their daughters' future marriages, such as household utensils, rather than investing in their education. This practice limits girls' intellectual development compared to their male counterparts. UNICEF (2007) observes that "as few as 20% of women in the North-West and North-East of Nigeria are literate and have attended school."

Poverty Levels of Families

Many families live below the poverty line, surviving on as little as $1 per day while supporting multiple wives and children. Consequently, educating girls is often deemed an unnecessary financial burden, with families prioritizing boys' education instead. Many households in northern Nigeria have limited access to employment opportunities due to illiteracy. According to an International Monetary Fund (IMF) study cited in (2007), only 30% of Northerners attend school. Without adequate education, employment opportunities remain scarce.

Poor Parental Support for Girl-Child Education

Yusuf (2005), cited in Sani (2007), argues that resource constraints in poor families often lead to prioritization of male children's education over female children. The rationale is that sons will carry on the family name, while daughters will eventually marry into other families. This preference continues to widen the gender gap in education.

Misinterpretation of Islam's Stance on Girl-Child Education
As noted earlier, gender disparities in education exist globally but vary across regions. In Nigeria, for example, the disparity is more pronounced in the North than in the South. In some northern communities, educating girls beyond culturally accepted limits is erroneously viewed as conflicting with religious principles. However, Islam not only encourages the pursuit of knowledge regardless of gender but also mandates it. Therefore, restricting girls' education is based on cultural misconceptions rather than religious teachings.

Society's Poor Attitude Toward Girl-Child Education
Generally, societal attitudes toward girls' education remain unsupportive. Many leaders, parents, and guardians disapprove of it, often due to misconceptions about its benefits. Indabawa (2009) notes that these societal perceptions contribute significantly to gender-based educational discrimination.

Irrelevance of the Curriculum
The curriculum in many educational institutions often fails to align with the expectations and needs of parents and students. Many educational programs lack relevance to students' aspirations, leading to disinterest. Additionally, a shortage of qualified female role models further weakens girls' motivation to pursue education.

Poor Self-Concept among Females
Many girls perceive themselves as subordinate to males, believing that they do not need education or self-development. This self-perception discourages them from striving for academic or professional success. Unless this mindset is actively challenged, the goal of achieving equitable education for girls will remain elusive.

Weak Linkage between Education and Employment
Participation in education is often motivated by the expected outcomes, such as securing employment. However, due to high unemployment rates, many families, especially those in the middle and lower-income brackets, perceive education as an uncertain investment. The expectation that education will guarantee a white-collar job is no longer a reality, further discouraging investment in girls' education. The

educational disadvantage faced by girls is rooted more in cultural practices than religious beliefs. The socio-cultural and religious backgrounds of Nigerian society, particularly in the North, afford men more opportunities in education and economic advancement than women (Isara, 2012).

The Way Forward for Girl-child education
The challenges facing girl-child education can be overcome through the collective efforts of all stakeholders. If the barriers preventing girls from accessing education are removed, the following measures can be implemented to ensure that girls attain the same educational level as boys:

1. **Discouraging Early Marriage:** Early marriage significantly hinders girls' education. Legal frameworks should be strengthened to enforce the minimum age for marriage, and awareness campaigns should be conducted to highlight the long-term benefits of educating girls. Empirical studies indicate that girls who complete secondary education have lower child mortality rates and contribute more to economic growth (UNESCO, 2019).

2. **Regulating Hawking by Girls:** Street hawking often prevents girls from attending school regularly. To address this, alternative sources of livelihood should be provided for families to ensure that girls remain in school. Data from UNICEF (2021) show that financial assistance programs have effectively increased school retention rates among girls in low-income families.

3. **Implementing Favorable Economic Policies:** Governments should introduce economic policies that enhance the financial stability of parents, enabling them to provide equal educational opportunities for girls and boys. Studies indicate that conditional cash transfers significantly improve girls' school attendance (World Bank, 2020).

4. **Conducting Awareness Campaigns:** Governments and non-governmental organizations should launch extensive sensitization and advocacy programs to educate parents and the general public on the importance of girl-child education. Research findings suggest that

community-based awareness programs can shift societal attitudes towards female education (Jones & Chant, 2018).

5. **Leveraging Religious Teachings:** The two dominant religions in Nigeria strongly support girl-child education. Religious leaders should emphasize these teachings through sermons in mosques and churches to counter misconceptions that deny girls access to education due to cultural biases rather than religious directives.

6. **Changing Societal Narratives:** Societal perceptions that undermine girl-child education should be corrected through a coordinated effort by stakeholders. This can be achieved through media campaigns, social gatherings, community-based seminars, and religious sermons. Additionally, government agencies and community-based organizations should incorporate the issue into their programs to intensify sensitization.

7. **Redesigning School Curricula:** Educational curricula should be revised to include locally relevant content with an emphasis on entrepreneurship. This approach would equip girls with skills and crafts that provide economic sustenance, reducing their dependence on street hawking. Empirical studies indicate that entrepreneurship education fosters financial independence among women (Ahmed & Olaniyan, 2021).

8. **Encouraging Self-Realization among Girls:** Girls should be enlightened on their dignity, potential, and ability to achieve great things. Role models, particularly successful female professionals, should visit schools to inspire young girls and encourage them to pursue education.

9. **Expanding Employment Opportunities:** Political leaders should create job opportunities in both public and private sectors to absorb graduates, particularly females, and encourage more enrollments, retention, and completion of educational programs.

These interventions can only be successful if there is strong political will to improve the condition of the girl child and to change the disheartening statistics on the boy-to-girl enrollment ratio. Rufai (2003)

notes that baseline data show more boys than girls are enrolled in primary schools across the 19 northern states of Nigeria.

Conclusion

The status of girl-child education in Nigeria, particularly in the North, remains critical. Addressing this issue requires a participatory approach involving the government, religious institutions, and civil society. As Shekarau (2006) states, "Community members must be actively involved in educational interventions through planning, implementation, and evaluation." Ensuring equal access to education for all children, regardless of gender, is essential for sustainable national development.

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Timely Completion of Post-Graduate Studies among Nigerian Female Students: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

Timely completion of postgraduate studies is crucial for academic and professional advancement; however, female students in Nigeria face unique challenges that often lead to delays. Most studies focus on the difficulties encountered by women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), with less attention given to those in other disciplines. Similar delays also affect women in non-STEM fields, which prompted the interest of this study. This research explores the prospects for timely postgraduate completion among female students, emphasizing institutional, socio-cultural, and personal factors. Using a qualitative method, the study conducted and analyzed 10 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with participants purposively selected from four departments at Kaduna State University. The Intersectionality theory was employed to analyze the collected data. Key barriers identified include delayed supervisory feedback, inadequate research funding, gender biases, and the dual burden of academic and domestic responsibilities. Additionally, systemic issues such as academic strikes and limited access to research resources further hinder progress.Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for improvement through gender-responsive academic policies, increased funding support, mentorship programs, and flexible learning structures that accommodate family responsibilities. The study recommends that universities and policymakers implement targeted interventions to promote gender equity in academia, ensuring female postgraduate students have equal opportunities for timely completion. Addressing these issues will not only enhance female students' academic experiences but also contribute to the broader goal of gender inclusivity in higher education. This study provides valuable insights for stakeholders in education, government, and advocacy groups working to improve postgraduate education and development for women in Nigeria.

Keywords: *supervisor-supervisee, postgraduate education, timely completion*

Introduction

Postgraduate (PG) programs train students in understanding existing knowledge and practice, and in creating new knowledge, communicating complex ideas, networking, problem-solving, project management, research governance, and organization, among others (Japheth et al., 2023). These skills are too significant for any institution of learning, academic body, organization, and country to ignore. This justifies the need to improve postgraduate education (Stevens, 2021). Master's and doctoral degree programs in universities introduce students to the world of independent research so that through their studies, they are able to generate new knowledge which, in turn, contributes to personal, professional, and national development (Amani et al., 2022). Hence, the quest for knowledge and development has created a huge demand on the postgraduate study system where women are not left out of this need for development.

Despite the efforts of universities in conducting these postgraduate programmes, there have been challenges of delayed completion or even abandonment by the students. Whitehouse (2019) showed the importance of undertaking a research on timely Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) completion by exploring its geographical spread. Although, the associated areas of coverage indicate a tilting towards the Anglosphere (Australia, Canada, UK and USA) and Commonwealth countries with strong educational ties to the UK (Nigeria and Malaysia). It still suggests that the period for PhD completion is a research problem worthy of investigation in several countries and thus constitutes an international research phenomenon since the 1960's.Several international organisations have conducted studies on postgraduate duration and completion with its impact on world economies (Botha, 2016). These studies revealed a challenge of poor students' completion of postgraduate studies, especially in Africa where 85% fail to complete in the allocated time (Motseke, 2016; Rong'uno; 2016; Waswa et al., 2020). Many postgraduate students in Africa take at least double the minimum required years to complete their programmes, which continuously places challenges on universities and the development of the economy (Aina, 2015; Japheth, 2023).

This study, therefore, seeks to examine the factors affecting the timely completion of postgraduate studies among female students in Nigeria. It aims to identify the key institutional, socio-cultural, and personal barriers contributing to delays and explore possible solutions for improving female students' academic experiences and outcomes.

Although, several studies have examined problems experienced by Postgraduate candidates, much has not been investigated on the prospects of timely completion of female PG students in Nigeria.

Literature review
Challenges of timely completion among Nigerian female Post Graduate students
Research into timely PhD completion has taken many forms and achieved greater sophistication in its approaches since the 1960s (Whitehouse, 2019). Existing literature has revealed that timely completion of postgraduate studies is a problem in various countries and the hindrances could differ by university and country (Ndayambaje, 2018). Previous studies have also shown an understanding of postgraduate studies completion challenges with a focus on perspectives from various postgraduate students in either one faculty and/or discipline (Motseke, 2016; Van de Schoot et al., 2013). It is considered an international problem, even though the educational systems for PhD differ substantially across countries.

Timely completion of postgraduate studies is a critical issue in Nigeria, with many students facing prolonged study durations due to institutional, financial, and socio-cultural challenges (Aina, 2015). However, female postgraduate students encounter unique obstacles that further delay their completion rates. These challenges include balancing academic work with family responsibilities, gender biases in academia, limited access to funding opportunities, and delays in supervision and research processes (Ahmed, 2024). According to Mbonyiryivuze et al, (2023) other barriers preventing women from timely completion of their studies and earning their doctorates is a lack of female motivation including shortage of female leaders, female lecturers, female research project supervisors and administrators in

science-related departments, and a lack of social, emotional, and financial support. They equally stated that Doctoral degrees are widely acknowledged to be expensive, hence the reason for enrolment later in life, at a time when family responsibilities are greater. Thus, while family sacrifices are necessary, they put strain on the family. As a result, dropping out is typically a deliberate decision made by some students after weighing the costs and rewards.

This supports the position that completing a thesis in time in Nigeria has continued to be a challenge because it requires considerable skills, knowledge, determination and is dependent on many interacting factors. Literature shows that this has remained a challenge with less number of candidates completing their doctoral and masters programs in time (see Botha, 2018; Eyangu et al., 2014; Daramola, 2021; Hadi & Muhammad, 2019 ;Japheth et al., 2021; Motseke, 2016; Skopek et al., 2020; Wamala et al., 2012). Reports of low study completion rates abound, some with less than 10% of postgraduate students graduating annually, leading to prolonged years of study (see Agu & Odumegwu,2014; Eyiuche, et al., 2015). Interaction with postgraduate students in some tertiary institutions shows that they hardly graduate within the stipulated time. It is more worrisome when their residency period in the university expires, and students are expected to reapply for fresh university admission (Musa & Ibrahim, 2017). This a frustrating situation that sometimes leads to the abandonment of the program. Research indicates that a significant percentage of Nigerian postgraduate students, particularly women, struggle to complete their programs within the stipulated timeframe (Ndayambaje, 2018). Supervisory bottlenecks, academic strikes, and inadequate research facilities further exacerbate the problem, making it difficult for female students to meet deadlines. Some schools refuse to provide on-campus day care, maternity leave, sick leave, and other basic human rights to PhD students and researchers, citing low STEM enrollment as an excuse (Bondarescu et al., 2018). In addition, by observation, societal expectations often place a heavier domestic burden on women, reducing the time available for research and coursework.

This confirms the fact that completing a post graduate research in time, has continued to be a challenge and a topic investigated by researchers. Despite various interventions such as scholarships,funding initiatives, incentives and mentorship programs aimed at supporting female postgraduate students, the issue of prolonged study duration persists even in developed countries (Japheth et al., 2023; Whitehouse, 2019). This also implies that there are silent areas of gender equity in institutions that need to be sorted to enhance the timely completion of postgraduate studies among female students.

Studies by Masterman (2014) suggest that the academic ability of doctoral students at the start of the program, which is measured by high grade point average (GPA), does not determine PG degree completion. According to the study, those who started off their doctoral journey with academic prowess and ability did not determine who would complete or not complete their doctoral degree. These findings clearly suggest that academic ability cannot explain or predict variations in doctoral degree completion, thereby indicating the role of multifaceted factors for delays in research completion.

Post Graduate Completion rates by Women
In a study by (Abedi & Benkin, 1987), gender was found to be a factor responsible for timely completion, where it took women more than a year longer than men to complete the degree, however this was determined by field of study. More recent findings document that women are less likely to complete the doctoral degree than men across all disciplines (55% of women vs. 58% of men), and within STEM disciplines (Bamgboje-Ayodele et al., 2016). This is corroborated by Bondarescu et al., (2018) who revealed that women have a systematically higher rate of drop out in more male- dominated STEM fields. Even though this spans across non STEM disciplines as well, due to other factors. Work by Kube et al, (2024) showed that across STEM disciplines, the stereotypical beliefs about women, heteronomous gender roles, gender workload, sexism, and structural power relations are significant factors for hindering female success in STEM careers in higher education.

The issue of lack of knowledge of the system and PG processes is another reason for drop out cases or delays, not necessarily due to lack of intelligence. This equally affects most female PG students in other disciplines as poor understanding of the academic processes can impede timely completion, coupled with other factors. A challenge that was observed is the inability of women to earn at their full potential while in graduate school, notwithstanding the expectation of better remuneration upon completion of doctoral studies. This could be due to family or job related interferences.

The consequence of delays in degree progress, leads to skill loss in fields where competent women with terminal degrees are in limited supply and therefore, leading to low contribution by females in professional roles (Mbonyiryivuze et al, 2023; Moghadam et al., 2017).

Theoretical framework
Intersectionality Theory by Kimberlie Crenshaw is employed as the theoritical framework for this study. This theory is considered suitable because it provides a comprehensive framework which supports and analyses the prospects and challenges of timely completion of Post Graduate studies among female students in Nigeria. Intersectionality is the complex, cumulative manner in which the effects of different forms of discrimination combine, overlap, or intersect. For those who embody different marginalised identities, these often overlap and amplify each other to create a unique experience of discrimination which allows us to view the world outside of our own experience and better understand how different forms of marginalisation can deepen and amplify each other to create unique vulnerabilities (IWDA, 2018).

This theory recognizes that gender is not the only factor affecting female postgraduate students, factors like class, marital status, and financial background intersect to shape their experiences. For instance, Women from lower-income backgrounds face greater financial struggles, while married women and mothers face double

responsibilities of academia and household duties (Crenshaw, 1989). It also highlights how academic institutions fail to accommodate the complex challenges faced by women from different backgrounds.

Methodology

The study used a qualitative inquiry in order to elicit in depth knowledge of the challenges female postgraduate students encounter and how this influences their ability to graduate on time. This technique allowed the researcher to disclose the reality of the occurrence based on participants actual experiences (Cohen et al., 2010). The study was conducted in Kaduna State University (KASU), Kaduna state. Participants were purposively drawn from four departments namely Sociology, History, Mass Communication and Political science, who were all post graduate students either running an MSc or PhD program. The essence of this selection is because these departments have a number of PG applicants enrolling yearly and they are non STEM discipline. Through snowball and convenientce sampling techniques, 10 postgraduate students were recruited. Participants selected for data gathering were women between the ages of 26 and 50 years, since the study is concerned with female PG students. A total of 10 In depth Interviews (IDI) were conducted.

The Socio demographic characteristics revealed that the prominent age (80%) of the participantsnts was 34-45 years. This exposes that women tend to pursue higher degrees when they are both working and can afford to pay and also while raising families. There were 50% Christian and 50% Moslem women. 90% were married, out of which 20% were widowed and 10% unmarried.

In this study, the researchers sought oral informed consent from all participants and maintain confidentiality throughout the research process. Data was collected face-to-face using semi structured interviews with female postgraduate students at different times. Information was analysed employing the thematic approach through organizing, reducing and synthesizing the data, including searching for common patterns/themes.

Data Analysis

Based on the responses from ten female postgraduate students from the Departments of Sociology, History, Political science and Mass communication in Kaduna State University Nigeria, the key findings were categorized into three major themes. Academic, Socio- cultural and personal factors, with accompanying sub themes.

Academic Factors and Barriers
The academic factors influencing postgraduate research include the gender-inclusive academic environment, supervisor workload, strikes, and financial considerations. Research has established the prevalence of gender bias, with female students often feeling overlooked in classroom discussions and academic opportunities. However, efforts have been made to address these biases (Kube et al., 2024; Thasniya, 2022). A gender-inclusive academic environment allows female postgraduate students to feel free from discrimination and harassment, ensuring that all students are respected and valued. Findings highlight the challenge of limited access to female mentors for postgraduate female students. The lack of role models who understand their unique challenges can hinder guidance throughout the research process. This situation may contribute to gender bias in supervision, as some male supervisors may not take female students as seriously as their male counterparts, leading to discouragement and delays.

Having a female professor who supports me has been very encouraging, but there are not many women in senior positions in my department (PG student, 1).

Observations made on gender stereotypes, witnessed by the researcher as a PG student disclosed cases where PG Lecturers and Supervisors told their pregnant or nursing mother students how unprepared they were for the Postgraduate program as it was not mandatory for them to be in school, instead they should seek the alternative of taking care of their motherhood responsibilities instead of being in school. It is only when gender bias is curtailed in the academia that more females would be encouraged to enrol and an increased number of female students would graduate in time. This is what some participants had to say:

Some supervisors don't take female students seriously, they assume we won't pursue our degree to the end. (PG student, 10)

Male supervisors sometimes treat us differently from the male students, and female supervisors are too few to provide enough mentorship (PG student, 4).

Participants expressed concern that effective postgraduate studies require a research environment conducive to learning. This includes equipping modern libraries with solar energy and efficient internet access, enabling them to access recent and relevant online journals. To address the ongoing electricity challenges, the installation of solar energy is necessary to mitigate this issue. A PhD student made the following statement:

Many of us struggle with accessing relevant academic materials, especially recent books and journals that add to new knowledge, coupled with the regular power grid collapse or the recent strike action by electricity workers, not to mention academic strikes. These add to make achieving a PhD in time very difficult (PG student, 3).

Studies have shown the disconnect in the role of proper research supervision. It has been identified in various studies as the key contributor in the timely completion of postgraduate studies in terms of the number of meetings with the students, quality and timely feedback on students' work, and clarity of the supervision norms and expectations (see Abiddin & Ismail, 2011; Cekiso et al., 2019; Kaur & Kaur, 2013;Wu et al., 2024). This is corroborated by Ngozi and Kayode (2013) who reported that the way the supervision process is handled by the supervisors is most important, but the students and universities have a role to play in determining the students completion phase.

Findings indicated Supervisory delays is a common occurrence as many female students experience delays in feedback from their supervisors, as this delay extends to fieldwork especially if the population of study can be accessed during particular seasons or events. A statement by a participant revealed this:

The heavy workload saddled on these supervisors makes it difficult for them to concentrate on their supervisees work. I was unable to go to the field as at

when due because my supervisor could not make out time to properly review my research questions. This in turn slows down research progress tremendously. (PG student, 7)

Aside supervisors' having a heavy workload, low level of commitment was also reported to affect timely completion of postgraduate studies. One student shared the following:

We have cases of Supervisors hurriedly glancing through a supervisees work and concluding that the student does not know anything or is incapable of the PG degree, thereby causing frustrations and discouragement. Additionally, the supervisor does not impact the knowledge as expected in the course of academic guiding, coupled with our research being very theoretical and meeting deadlines becomes difficult (PG student, 2).

Limited funding availability is also another issue that was identified. Financial problems were reported as one among the challenges hindering early completion of postgraduate studies. Most students were private-sponsored hence were utilizing part of their study time to work and earn money for managing their tuition fees, upkeep, and academic expenses.

Socio-Cultural and Gender-Related Challenges
Socio- Cultural expectations often pressure women to prioritize family and marriage over academic achievements, making it difficult for female students to focus on their studies. Findings revealed that in the eventuality of the death of a child or spouse and without support systems, the student may abandon the program or delay completion. This supports the position of the intersectionality theory where other factors like socio- cultural norms influences timely completion of female students.

Lack of social support where families and communities sometimes see postgraduate education as unnecessary for women, as they are expected to submit to husbands by way of not being more educated than him. As a matter of fact, some women are seen as a threat and being in competition with the husband especially when he is not supportive of her decision to further her education. Hence, reducing

the women's motivation to complete their studies. It is usually the resilience of the female that enables her to overcome these challenges.

Personal factors
Balancing Academic, Family, and Financial Responsibilities
Post Graduate women experience financial struggles due to limited access to financial support. Many female students must work to fund their studies, which affects their ability to focus on research. Also limited research funding options unlike STEM fields, tends to affect them by having fewer scholarships and research grants, making it difficult for students to finance their projects.

Family responsibilities associated with Married female students, especially mothers, who face additional task of child and adult care giving, making it difficult to meet deadlines. Including the pressure from family members to prioritise domestic duties over academic responsibilities.

There is also the emotional and psychological pressure of remaining motivated by devising coping strategies like: resting, attending social events, watching movies and reassuring oneself of the bigger picture.

Findings and Discussion
Prospects of Timely Postgraduate Completion in Nigeria: A Female Student's Perspective
Postgraduate education in Nigeria presents significant opportunities and challenges, particularly for female students who often navigate additional societal and institutional barriers. Timely completion of postgraduate studies is essential for career advancement, academic progression, and personal development. Regarding gender dynamics, it has often been assumed that female students are disadvantaged regarding graduation rates attributable to research challenges as women face barriers that are either personal or institutional or both, and to succeed, they had to pay a high price to climb up (Ahmed et al.,2024). Though this may apply to men as well, it is obvious that the challenges and feelings of guilt for women weigh them down making it extremely hard for them to be successful and complete their program (Mbonyiryivuze et al, 2023).

Many women have encountered cultural, social, emotional, psychological and physical hurdles in the course of post graduate pursuit. The issues ranged from permission from husbands to further education, raising funds to finance education and the bottlenecks involved in gaining admission to the mental burnout and juggling roles as a mother wife and career person (Ahmed et al., 2024; Mbonyiryivuze et al, 2023).

There are several factors that influence the ability of female students to complete their studies within the stipulated time frame.

Institutional Factors
Supervision is a significant determinant of timely postgraduate degree completion (Aina, 2015). From the outset, both the supervisee and supervisor should establish an effective working relationship and discuss ways to optimize research progress (Japheth et al., 2020). When this relationship is not established, misunderstandings can arise, leading to frustration. In this study, several supervisor-related factors contribute to delays in female postgraduate students' completion of their research work. These include the supervisor's unavailability when needed, delayed feedback on submitted work, insufficient knowledge of the subjects undertaken by students, frequent changes to research topics, imposition of topics on supervisees, failure to adhere to scheduled discussions, gender discrimination, unconstructive criticism, refusal to adopt modern supervision methods, setting unrealistic expectations, undermining students' self-esteem through mockery, and subtly requesting money or threatening to fail students. These factors negatively impact timely graduation, as corroborated by Eyiuche et al. (2015), Jergussen (2022), Ndayambaje (2018), Ngozi & Kayode (2013), and Nnebedum & Obuegbe (2020).

Lack of Mentorship and Support Networks is an area of great challenge among female postgraduate students. They often lack access to strong academic and female mentorship and peer support, which are crucial for research motivation and career growth (Berry,2017;Masterman, 2014).

Inconsistent Academic Calendar due to strikes by the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) have historically disrupted academic programs, causing delays in research work and coursework, delayed graduation . Extended periods without active research engagement can cause Loss of momentum, thereby negatively affecting their academic research output (Ntiasagwe, 2020).

Limited resource availability like access to adequate research materials, internet and energy source is a huge challenge, which can delay or hinder female students from graduation (see Ndayambaje, 2018). Gender bias could be exposed when some schools refuse to provide on-campus day care, maternity leave, sick leave, and other basic human rights to PG students and researchers, citing low female enrollment as an excuse (Mbonyiryivuze et al, 2023).

Financial Constraints are experienced by many female PG students, since they self-fund their education or rely on family support for tuition and research costs, which may be unstable. Inadequate funding affects data collection, conference participation, and thesis completion. This is supported by Ndayambaje (2018) as she highlights this view strongly.

Despite scholarship schemes like Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND), there are limited scholarship opportunities attributed specifically for female postgraduate students. They often face competition and a lack of tailored funding opportunities, prolonging their study period.

Socio-Cultural and Gender-Related Challenges
Findings showed how gender stereotypes and traditional expectations tend to prioritize domestic roles over academic achievements, indicating how this can affect female students' confidence and commitment to timely completion. This is validated by a published dissertation which used qualitative methods, concluded that although women doctoral students in Psychology, Education, and Sociology agreed that they had access to important socialization opportunities

such as research, publication, and frequent interactions with faculty advisor, however, their experiences of these socialization moments were qualitatively less impacting due to stereotypes (Watford, 2007). Specifically, women perceived that opportunities to participate in research projects, and receive career guidance and job search support was less available to them than their male doctoral student peers (Masterman, 2014).

Personal Factors

The female PG experience is an emotional and multifaceted journey toward becoming a scholar, furthermore, worry, anxiety, burnout, uncertainty, social isolation, and loneliness may occur at various phases while completing a PG degree (Janta et al., 2014). This may affect female students disproportionately due to additional responsibilities.

The need to multi-task is an important strength every female PG student must possess. When faced with some situations, motherhood roles earned priority as they had to choose their homes and children over their academics (Mbonyiryivuze et al, 2023).

A major hurdle of every participant of this study is being able to balancing family and Academic responsibilities. Many female postgraduate students juggle academic work with family responsibilities. Married women and mothers have to get the approval of the husbands before enrolling in school. They also often face time constraints, making it difficult to meet deadlines (Ahmed 2024; Masterman, 2014).

Conclusion

Timely postgraduate completion in Nigeria remains a challenge, especially for female students who face unique socio-cultural, financial, and institutional barriers. However, with the proper support systems, improved policies, and gender-sensitive academic reforms, female students can navigate these challenges effectively. Addressing these issues will contribute to a more inclusive and efficient postgraduate education system in Nigeria.

Recommendations

Promoting Gender Inclusion in Academia through mentorship programs, female-led research groups, and workshops on academic survival skills can help female students stay motivated. There have to be gender-responsive policies that address the unique struggles female postgraduate students face which limits their research productivity and engagement in academic networks. Where necessary, female PG students should be mentored by same-gender faculty and in departments with more female faculty which will encourage mentorship and make the supervisors more empathic towards the supervisees.

During orientation programs, women enrolled into PG programs should be encouraged, confident and should be provided assistance through counselling, whenever needed. Formalized student support systems developed by institutions are recommended to help female PhD candidates receive academic updates, social, and psychological support from their peers. Through these mentoring arrangements, experienced PhD students who are making good progress in the program can share their expertise and experience with colleagues who are experiencing problems and delays.

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