

Culture and Self-Actualisation in Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii's *I will Marry When I Want*

***Helen Kokei BASSEY (Ph.D.)**
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS,
AKOKA, LAGOS,
NIGERIA

EMAIL: kokispark@gmail.com | PHONE NUMBER: +2347030093797

Owoicho Ikpegwa ODIHI (Ph.D.)
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS,
AKOKA, LAGOS,
NIGERIA

EMAIL: owoicho2k19@gmail.com | PHONE NUMBER: +2348035848685

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Abstract

*This paper examines how cultural norms shape and sometimes hinder self-actualisation in African societies, using Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii's *I Will Marry When I Want*. Through African feminist theory; the study highlights how characters challenge patriarchal and neocolonial constraints in pursuit of identity and agency. Many times, characters adapt radical approaches as they strive for the pursuit of self-actualisation and personal fulfillment defiantly. It argues that culture acts as both an anchor of identity and a barrier to personal growth, calling for a critical review of cultural practices in light of evolving human rights and gender equity.*

Keywords: culture, self-actualisation and self-fulfillment, defiance, patriarchy, resistance, conflicts

Introduction

From time immemorial, both males and females have always resisted, and still resist cultural norms and practices that limit their personal desires for self-actualisation, self-expression, self-fulfillment, and self-definition. This rebellious impulse manifests in myriad frameworks and theoretical foundations that foreground most of the social or literary theories we have today. Thus, this study examines how two main characters – Ogwoma in Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and Gathoni in wa Thiong'o and wa Mirii's *I Will Marry When I Want* challenge and revolt against traditional norms and neocolonial constraints that limit and hinder their quest for agency and self-actualisation. African feminists, like others, continually critique existing traditional norms and patriarchal structures that perpetuate gender inequality and oppression, including traditional institutions. Their aim is to raise awareness about women's oppression and exploitation as well as a call for socio-cultural changes for harmonious gender coexistence through practical and theoretical frameworks in literature.

Literature Review

The intersectionality of gender, culture and emancipation in African literature exposes deeply and highly established male-dominated systems that inhibit women's self-actualisation. This study investigates how African feminist theory reveals the struggles of female characters in Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* and wa Thiong'o and wa Mirii's *I Will Marry When I Want*. The two plays not only examine the cultural practices that suppress women but they also interrogate instances of resistance and protests, thereby disrupting the predominant narratives of submission and silence. Both plays give insights into how culture shapes and frequently obstruct female autonomy, self-realisation and self-actualisation.

Essentially, wa Thiong'o and wa Marri's *I Will Marry When I Want* has been examined by many scholars from many perspectives, particularly within the larger framework of Ngugi's resistant dramatic works like *The Trial of Didan Kimathi*, where colonialism and neocolonial exploitations of the Kenyans take center stage (Afolayan and Odihi 112-115;). Relevant as these studies are,

individual female characters' struggles for self-actualisation or personhood and the tensions and conflicts often generated as the result of cultural norms/expectations are often eclipsed by obvious authorial thematic concentration on colonial and neocolonial exploitations. This study therefore, focuses on this often-glossed over aspect- which is how the text explores how female characters struggle to exert themselves (as individualised self) in male-dominated societies and limiting cultural norms and practices. Our premise finds further validity in the fact that according to Sophia Obiajulu Ogwude, women exhibit different personalities and individuality (2).

Similarly, Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* has been largely seen from the tragic defiance or revolt against traditional norms/cultural beliefs and/or practices and their consequences. Theoretically, attempts by feminists to fight women's oppression and subordination engendered by patriarchy find their passionate expressions in Feminism which advocates for women's emancipation: freedom, fairness, equity and an improved agency. Emeka Nwabueze puts it thus:

Feminism is [a theory that pays] the concept of paying attention to women's rights as well as their position in the society. It advocates equality between men and women especially with regard to political, social, and economic considerations (140).

Of course, this premise does not seek to essentialise feminist agitations into any simplistic categorisation.

What is apparent in the genealogical enterprises of all the various feminist movements is the uppermost desire to not only fight for the afore-mentioned but also to obliterate patriarchal forces and strictures that limit or engender any form of limitation based on gender. Thus, all forms of feminist thoughts- liberal or radical, motherism, Africanism or African Feminism, though milder in their advocacy paradigms, share the feminist emancipatory dreams: women's liberation, equality, and improved lots for the women in the society. Martin Stephen affirms that this passionate advocacy by feminist critics has been based on the belief that social odds have been stacked against women in the society (362).

Raman Selden sums up women's position thus: "man defines the human, not woman". Selden argues that 'this imbalance goes back to the Old Testament' in bible (135). T. Akachi Ezeigbo in *Gender Issues in Nigeria - a feminist perspective* agrees with Stephen and Selden that women, particularly in Africa are "handicapped by economic, socio-cultural and religious constraints, many women in Nigeria cannot bring themselves to aspire to a political career or to leadership at any level" (xvii). Corroborating these critics, Mobolanle Ebunoluwa Sotunsa records that, feminism as a social, political movement focuses on women's issues with emphasis on the eradication of their oppression in male-dominated societies (14). As Sotunsa rightly contends, feminist agitations have created, and still create 'awareness of the women oppression of women' (15).

For Sotunsa, even womanism as an African women's brand of feminism, aims to achieve self-definition and self-actualisation for black women and women generally (19). It suffices then, that the desire for self-actualisation and fulfilment for the women against patriarchal ideologies and practices remain the focal point of the feminist theory irrespective of specific area of discourse. In fact, Ogundipe-Leslie's STIWANISM (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa) emphasise not only gender equality but also contextual relevance which has to do with advocating for women's rights without alienating cultural identities. In the same vein, Nnaemeka's concept of "nego-feminism" or negotiation-based feminism, acknowledges the strategic actions that African women take in dealing with oppressive systems.

Similarly, according to Al Chukwuma Okoli, Amina Mama conceives feminism as the "struggle for the liberation of women [which], and encompasses epistemologies, theories, and modes of activism that seek to bring an end to the oppression and subordination of women by men" (126). Mama's feminist energy focuses on "challenging patriarchy and liberating women" (127) beyond continental limitations. Hence, she challenges the idea of feminism as alien to African women. For her, in spite of the myriad forms of feminism, the concept of feminism itself has been used by African women for mobilising and resisting patriarchy and limiting cultural norms. That is why

Amina Mama sees feminism as ‘an international, political and intellectual movement to challenge the subordination of women’ (qtd in Okoli 127).

Mama observes that “Feminism is diverse because it arises in response to the myriad manifestations of patriarchy and gender oppression” (39). Chioma Opara’s model of African feminism called ‘femalism’ also focuses on women liberation from patriarchal limitations (Albert Queen 206). In her theory, Opara “describes the female body as a site of patriarchal abuse, and violence on the African continent as the bearer of European colonialism,” Albert concludes. Opara submits that exploited or oppressed women must take courageous steps to free themselves from the male-dominated society and seek means necessary for self-fulfillment. In summary, all feminists work for the betterment of the women.

Fundamentally, these theoretical frameworks are highly valuable in analysing African dramatic literature, where female characters are entangled frequently between individual autonomy and societal expectations. To this end, Sofola, in *Wedlock of the Gods* evaluates the patriarchal tradition of levirate marriage, where women are passed to male relatives as property. Nevertheless, Ogwoma, the female protagonist, reclaims her right to love and self-determination by violently resisting this cultural expectation. On the other hand, a comprehensive analysis of capitalist and neocolonial structures that establish female oppression is revealed in *I Will Marry When I Want*. Even Wanjiku, who, originally is unengaged, gets a heightening awareness of the ingrained patterns hindering her and this represents a resurgence of social consciousness or a collective awakening.

In these studies, the idea of the women as appendages to men and restrained personhood without recourse to their emotional and psychological realities is apparent. Some critics like Nwabueze argue that the above portraiture, gender role or gender designation is primarily a Western or colonial conceptual abnormality (142). However, what is never in doubt is the fact that traditional African societies were largely patriarchal and had specific roles and expectations for the women.

Thus, women's desire for assertive self-actualisation and personhood, have been both silent and loud cries by female characters in dramatic works. Sotunsa, in *Feminism Gender Discourse: The African Experience* contends that the desire to correct these social anomalies led to some female feminist writers to portray strong female characters who prevail against all odds to emerge liberated and individualised beings in the society (84). Also, there is need for a comparative study of the texts for fresher intertextual insights on how female characters navigate the claustrophobic orbits of the male-dominated, patriarchal norms/cultural practices, or colonial/neocolonial exploitations depicted in the two plays.

Synopsis of *Wedlock of the Gods* by Zulu Sofola

Wedlock of the Gods is a powerful and tragic dramatic exploration of the tension between traditional customs and individual desires within a patriarchal African society. Set in a postcolonial Nigerian village, the play is centred on Ogwoma, a young widow coerced by custom into marrying her deceased husband's brother in accordance with levirate tradition. However, Ogwoma, still deeply in love with her childhood sweetheart, Uloko, ignores the societal expectations and remains emotionally and spiritually bound to her first love with whom she had been forcefully separated by her family's insistence on a more materially advantageous marriage. The narrative unfolds as a tragic conflict between personal desire and communal obligation. In fact, Ogwoma's blunt refusal to consent completely to the institution of levirate marriage is seen not only as an act of a daring rebellion but also as a symbolic resistance against the patriarchal domination and control enshrined in cultural mores.

Her surreptitious reunion with Uloko is regarded as both a radical reclamation of love and a revolt against a system that nullify female autonomy. However, Ogwoma's act of defiance culminates in tragic consequences such as her catastrophic violent death and that of Uloko and the eventual confirmation of the society's allegiance to tradition over the individual. Thus, while this painful and devastating framework is used by Sofola to critique the inflexibility of inherited customs and their role in the enslavement of women, she concurrently uses it to investigate both the spiritual

and supernatural consequences of defying societal taboos. The play's imploration of ancestral authority, ritual obligation and collective retribution highlights the complex interplay between culture, gender and power in African societies that navigate the convergence of tradition and modernity.

Synopsis of *I Will Marry When I Want* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Ngugi wa Mirii

I Will Marry When I Want is both a politically motivated and didactic play that highlights the dichotomies and progressions of postcolonial Kenya. Written in Gikuyu dialect but later translated into English, the play is set in post-independence Kenya and it critiques neo-imperialism that upholds class exploitation, cultural alienation and economic inequality as a consequence of independence. Through the experiences of Kiguunda and his wife Wangeci, a peasant couple whose aspirations for social advancement are slowly phased out by exploitation and dispossession, the play exposes the intrigues of capitalist elites, international relations and religious organisations which sustain social stratification and gender-based discrimination.

Through an analysis of Christian hypocrisy, land alienation and economic exploitation, the play depicts the ways in which colonialism persists under the pretext of independence. The protagonists' confidence and absolute trust in the church and state suddenly gets destroyed as their actual reality or factual existence reveals the exploitative logic sustaining post-independence Kenya. Symbolically, Kiguunda's only assertion to dignity and autonomy, his one-acre plot of land becomes a contentious location of struggle exposing the delusion of redistribution and the treachery of the Mau Mau ideology. Characterised by its Brechtian aesthetics, the play utilises songs, direct audience address and communal performance to create a critical consciousness among its viewers. For dramatic effect, dialogue between the characters is conversational and direct, allowing for proper audience engagement and participation.

Also, Ngugi's Post-1970s commitment to theatre as an instrument for mobilisation through political awareness and civic engagement is clearly demonstrated in the play. Finally, the play investigates the fake promises of liberation by unveiling the harsh reality of how independence only

substituted colonialists with co-opted black bourgeoisie in persistent injustice, discrimination and tyranny. Essentially, the play's title, being an assertion of self-determination and cultural independence is ironically subverted within the play's structure, emphasising the system-wide restrictions that frustrate autonomy in a quasi-sovereign state.

Intertextual Analysis of the Texts

As mentioned from the outset, the study focuses on how traditional cultural practices, societal expectations, and patriarchal structures or norms hinder women's agency and their pursuit of self-actualisation and fulfilment. Thus, the study argues and demonstrates that some traditional cultural norms and practices hinder and limit women's desires for self-actualisation and women, like men, have always resisted such oppressive forces by challenging established norms as depicted in the two texts. Our analysis would unravel how culture, gender, and individual agency intersect and the conflicts their impacts often generate both on individual and collective levels as demonstrated by the characters.

Both Sofola, wa Thiong'o and wa Mirii are giant literary writers with razor-sharp interests in colonial and postcolonial experiences in Africa. Incidentally, these texts explore cultural issues and conflicts they often generate, particularly the tensions between individual pursuits of self-actualisation and self-fulfilment and established cultural practices engendered by traditional African cultures and Western culture (cultural syncretism). Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* is a tragic play that explores traditional cultural practices in a fictional Igbo society such as customary marriage, levirate custom, widowhood, mourning practices, love, societal norms and expectations. Through Ogwoma, Sofola reveals the plight of women and how they become victims of rigid cultural practices or norms, and how they inhibit and limit their personal pursuit of self-actualisation and fulfilment.

As depicted in the play, Ogwoma, in particular, is forced to marry the affluent Adigwu against her wishes and will even though she is in love with Uloko (18). Of course, the marriage is necessitated by economic exigency as her poor parents relied on the bride price for her brother's treatment from a life-threatening illness. This precarious situation pitches Ogwoma, who waits for

the husband to die so she can marry her real lover, Uloko, as a scapegoat of tradition and parental authority. Sofola's recourse to moral dilemma is suspect of her ambivalent position on women's emancipation. The tragic outcome of Ogwoma's revolution seems to affirm this position as Ogwoma's failed attempt at self-reinvention presents and re-echoes the established patriarchal belief of women as docile and helpless beings with no control over their fate.

Adigwu dies and Ogwoma refuses to mourn. Rather than mourn, she sees the death as punitive and expresses a sense of freedom and liberation from the forced marriage. Ogwoma's behaviour violates and distorts traditional solemnity. Her defiance and refusal to observe expected funeral rites and rituals is strongly frowned at. This is because those rituals are meant for cleansing that would send the spirit of the dead to the world of the gods. Her strange act sends Odibei, the mother-in-law, into ruthless revenge as she believes Ogwoma and Uloko killed her son. To add salt to injury, Ogwoma becomes pregnant for her lover while the community is still mourning Adigwu. By this act, Ogwoma breaks traditional taboos and courts shame and disdain from the entire community.

Anwasia sums the community's apprehension for Ogwoma thus: "it has never been heard that a woman in mourning has done what you have done," (8). For them, Ogwoma has become a scum, a shameless woman unworthy of living since 'a woman's honour lies in her name and sense of shame' (8). She goes further to tell Ogwoma that "it is not a sign of good sense to look dry-eyed and clear-faced after such a forbidden act" (9). In response, Ogwoma tells Anwasia, "you do not understand how my heart beats. Because you were not tied like a goat and whipped along the road to a man you hated, you are not able to understand..." (9). In her defiance, Ogwoma also says: "it is one who has never loved who thinks that way...My prayers were answered and nothing can stop me this time. Let the moon turn into blood; let the rain become fire; Ogwoma loves and Ogwoma will do it again"! (10).

Quite obviously, Ogwoma fights against social hierarchies that serve as obstacles to self-actualisation. Her vehement resistance to marrying for tradition's sake highlights the clash between tradition and personal choice. In Act 1, Nneka, Ogwoma's mother accuses her of bringing shame and disgrace upon her family and tells her: "You are a man's wife, not a harlot...Adigwu has a brother...You have violated the worst taboos in the land. Do you know what that means?" (19). Nneka's accusation is a reflection of the cultural mandate to remain devoted to a dead husband's lineage, and, this, of course, is an emblematic obliteration of Ogwoma's autonomy. In fact, Ogwoma's rejection of the traditional duty epitomises a woman asserting her individual will against collective tradition. It also demonstrates African feminist concerns with women's agency in tyrannical systems.

In the same vein, in *I Will Marry When I Want*, Kiguunda and Wangeci are ensnared by the Christian and colonial regulation of integrity. Kiguunda's declaration, "I will never sell the piece of land. I just wanted..." (88) is a clear demonstration of his defiance of economic and cultural systems that reinvestigate tradition under deceptive claims. Wangeci, who initially appears inactive, develops greater awareness of the underlying forces working against her, indicating the awakening of collective opposition and self-assertion. Both Kiguunda and Wangeci's exploitation align with Opara's theory of 'femalism,' where she compares the African woman's body with that of the African continent that has been ruthlessly exploited by the colonial masters.

The play depicts Wangeci and Jezebel as dynamic female characters whose roles evolve in relation to the play's theme of class betrayal, religious hypocrisy and capitalist exploitation. For instance, in Act 1, Wangeci initially seems to be a conventional, passive peasant woman. Being apprehensive, she warns Gicaamba and Kiguunda against talking politics or agitating for land rights. She embodies the silenced rural woman internalising fear. She tells them, "Do not speak like that; it is dangerous to say such things aloud" (41). Also, Wangeci is manipulated by religion and class aspirations. In other words, she is lured by class mobility and influenced by Jezebel's Christianised

values. This is seen when Jezebel visits with a proposal for Kiguunda to sell his land and hold a church wedding (48-49).

Wangeeci, obviously enticed and displaying her internal conflict tells her husband, “You heard what they said...if we had a church wedding, our daughter might find a husband among the rich” (Act 1). It is noteworthy that Wangeeci’s later evolving role is that of awakening and resistance. This is clearly depicted in Act 3 when after the huge betrayal by the Kioi family, Wangeeci becomes aware of the church’s complicity in exploitation (111). Therefore, she aligns with Gicaamba and Kiguunda in rebuffing foreign religion and economic exploitation. And, of course, this marks her shift from passivity to political awakening and solidarity with the working class. She says, “They only brought the Bible so they could take our land” (Act 3).

In sharp contrast, Jezebel’s early evolving role is that of a Colonial-Christian bourgeois enforcer. She epitomises Western religion and bourgeois values. She tells Kiguunda and Wangeeci, “It is unclean to live together without a church wedding” (48-49). Jezebel’s role is that of the converted African elite enforcing Western Christian values. Another role of Jezebel is that of a manipulator of cultural superiority. In Act 2, she urges Gathoni to abandon traditional ways and adopt a Christian, ‘honourable’ identity to attract a wealthy suitor. Nevertheless, her tone is condescending. She uses class and Christian respectability as tools of control. Jezebel’s later role is that of an agent of betrayal. In Act 3, Jezebel becomes aggressive when Kiguunda declines to sign away his land. She champions the forceful eviction of Kiguunda from the Kioi home, demonstrating her loyalty to capitalist interests. Jezebel transforms into a fully complicit agent of elite’s violence.

The fictional Igbo society of *Wedlock of the Gods* is male-dominated: patriarchal realities reign supreme - men hold power and dominate socially, economically, and politically. Also, men hold moral authority, social privilege, control, including women. Conversely, the women are seen as either extensions or appendages to the men. They are viewed as property to be owned, transferred, and re-transferred as the need arises. These views and practices are products of patriarchy that have

been culturally ingrained. Women's agency and desire for self-actualisation and self-fulfilments are perpetually limited. Uloko, Ogwoma's unrestrained lover, represents patriarchy, masculinity, and virility. Thus, while Ogwoma bears the brunt of the pregnancy, the society appears silent on Uloko, except for the time and location of the erotic enterprise- Adigwu's house (15).

Likewise, in wa Thiong'o and wa Mirii's *I Will Marry When I want*, the British colonial laws and elites excluded women from the scheme of things. Not only were they placed in the periphery, they were further thrown to the margins, only to be seen through their husbands, if in positions of authority. These neocolonial stooges were largely educated Kenyan men, whose wives can only be relevant through spousal prominence like the Elizabethan women as portrayed by Ikuua wa Nditika, Kioi wa Kanoru, Gicamba, Njooku (30). Consequently, social, economic, and political mobility rely heavily on one's spouse and their positions. Hence, the closer one's husband to political power, the more visible their wives and vice versa.

Invariably, self-actualisation and fulfilment are class-dependent. Like the traditional Igbo society in Sofola's play, Kenyan postcolonial society retains its patriarchal imprints, mingled with neocolonial realities with even harsher social, economic, and political practices that further hinder women's quest for self-actualisation. As mentioned earlier, women's personhood and ability for self-actualisation are culturally tied and defined within the strict walls of culture and patriarchy. Because culture expects women to behave and live within certain male-dominated frameworks, resistant behaviours are severely censored and, most times, severely punished via public shame, sharp rebuke, ostracism, and excommunication.

For instance, in *I Will Marry When I Want*, Gathoni, Kiguunda's daughter, is castigated for her public display of erotic relationship with John Muhuuni Kioi (51), including her father, Kiguunda, who threatens to disown her. The father describes the exotic clothes and luxury gifts from John Muhuuni as "all the fineries of a whore" (51). However, while these people view Gathoni's apparent revolt and resistance against social limitations which affect her and parents as moral failings, she

views herself as rejecting her socially inherited limitation and poverty: her inability to go to school like her mates, inability to wear the good things she desires (52). Gathoni notes that, “it’s poverty and not riches// that forces a woman to go without perfume” (52). Left with limited options, she sees her beauty as the shortest and surest route to social mobility, class, and wealth. She believes flirting and getting married to the son of the rich capitalist could grant her the opportunity for upward mobility and escape poverty (52).

Her choice, though naively short-sighted, is pragmatic and it aligns with Nnaemeka’s concept of negotiation within patriarchal structures. She fails to understand that marriage is an extension of social class and cultural ideology reinforced by capitalist doctrine of class and its benefits: only the rich marries the rich? The Kiois reject her marriage entanglement, which further reinforces this capitalist belief that capitalism is all about gains, including marriage. Thus, while Gathoni’s Kenyan society labels her a wayward child, she views herself as a redefinition of womanhood – an expression of the “new woman,” and determination for a change, both socially and materially. She is desperate to flee from her poverty and penury. Thus, to her, eloping with John holds the magic wand for her intended social integration and acceptance.

This grand delusional illusion of class mobility still holds even today: people use inter-class marriage as a rope to climb the social ladder with minimal success. Gicaamba is the only character in the play that appears to understand Gathoni’s plight:

Let’s not call our children prostitutes.
A hyena is greed, but she does not eat her young
Our children are not to blame....
We the parents have not put much effort in the
education of our girls
Even before colonialism
We oppressed women
Giving ourselves numerous justifications (104-105).

From Gicaamba, gender discriminations of all kinds are brought to the fore. These gender-based discriminations are also perpetuated by patriarchy. As Gicaamba remonstrates, women have not received equal educational opportunity like men, though that practice has changed drastically.

Men still hold sway in most African societies. Gathoni's resolve demonstrates that self-actualisation or fulfilment goes beyond mere physical individual cravings. It includes psychological and social desires to overcome all forms of barriers. Her miscalculated marital suicide and failed strategy were meant to gain agency and perhaps, chart a better social platform for her and family. She is fully aware that pre-marital sex and elopement are social taboos which are condemnable. Yet, she is less perturbed. However, her rejection by the Kiois demonstrates that social class is a cultural reality in societies. Not only does class define and determine one's place, it molds people's understanding, acceptance, and admittance of other people.

It is noteworthy that, while Ogwoma's quest for erotic fulfilment as a form of self-actualisation is primarily driven by passionate love, Gathoni's love is largely driven by wealth and the desire to escape poverty and social mobility. In any case, both Ogwoma and Gathoni seek self-actualisation and fulfilment differently against the dictates of their society's cultural codes. As Ogwoma's travails reveal, she is both denied her personhood in form of denying her the chance to marry the man she loves (17-18), forced marriage (18), and forced to embrace the levirate customary practice, where she must marry the brother of her deceased husband or any available person from the deceased husband's lineage. These practices strip her of authentic self and being. These strict and perhaps obnoxious norms not only deny her agency, they also hinder her psycho-emotional essences. This is because, in all of this, she is treated as a property to be possessed and sold.

In both worlds of these plays, the characters are expected to conform militarily to the traditional codes and expectations without questioning. Interestingly, some of the characters – Ogwoma, Uloko, and Gathoni stand out in their quest for self-actualisation and fulfilment. Prejudiced and in bondage because of 'inimical' cultural beliefs as mentioned earlier, they revolted. This study argues that, rather than viewing their actions as mere revolution, they should be seen as a determination to exert personhood and agency. For them, passive appeal to patriarchy is suicidal and ineffective, hence the frontal attack on established cultural and societal expectations. Tragically, their

botched enterprises demonstrate that culture is usually deep-rooted. Consequently, any attempt to dismantle its practices takes time and efforts.

Quite obviously, in Ogwoma, Uloko, Gathoni, Kiguunda, Wangeci, and others, we encounter bruised characters that are disproportionately limited one way or the other by cultural, societal practices, and expectations. These limitations are caused by the interaction of culture and social dynamics and expectations, which are also products of culture itself. For instance, in *I Will Marry When I Want*, Kiguunda cloaks his desire for a White wedding as a benign religious observation, while the real desire is self-recognition and class which is a form of self-actualisation and fulfilment (62). This explains their frustration when, after performing the ceremonial church wedding, they could not be integrated or fully accepted into the class cult of the rich. Their yearnings clearly indicate that all human beings crave recognition and self-actualisation and will stop at nothing to seek it anywhere, anyhow, and all the time.

Beyond wa Thiong'o, wa Mirii and Sofola's exploration of colonialism, neocolonial exploitations, and traditional practices, the plays under study invite the readers and audiences to interrogate the subtle (but more importantly) conflicts often generated in African societies due to some cultural beliefs and societal expectations that make life's actualisation difficult for the women. In other words, the authors want us to question the propriety or impropriety of some of these cultural norms and practices. By doing that, aspects of our culture that lead to inclusive and harmonious coexistence of the sexes could be retained for social reengineering and progress while obsolete and discriminatory practices should be jettisoned. This is because traditional African culture is not altogether obnoxious. There are aspects of it that teach virtues, instill moral discipline, respectability, love, hard work, and justice to mention but a few.

Conclusion

As we conclude, the plays demonstrate how Sofola, wa Thiong'o and wa Mirii blend geographical and cultural realities – Nigeria and Kenya, to demonstrate the impacts of culture on the characters' quest for self-actualisation and self-fulfilment. Ogwoma and Uloko's tragic adventure and downfall reveal that not only do human beings strive for agency and self-actualisation, but also can go to any length to achieve it, even if it means paying the ultimate price. People do not only revolt against obstacles to their self-actualisation and fulfilment, they deploy all means: some use self-destructive paths as demonstrated by Ogwoma and Uloko (56) while others adopt milder, yet resolute strategies like Gathoni. Of all the characters in both plays, Wangeci appears to have a nuanced understanding of how to strive for and achieve self-actualisation. She is firm, resolute, self-sufficient and cautionary. Notwithstanding, passion determines strategies as the characters demonstrated in the two dramatic texts.

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