

**A MALE DECONSTRUCTION OF THE PATRIARCHAL WORLDVIEW IN
FESTUS OKWEKWE'S
*OUR MOTHER IS NOT A WOMAN and SECONDCLASS BREEDS***

BY

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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND
LITERATURE, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT FOR THE REQUIREMENT OF BACHELOR OF ARTS
(HONS) DEGREE IN ENGLISH AND LITERATURE.**

FEBRUARY, 2025

Certification

I certify that this study was carried out by Gloria Ngozi MORDI (MISS) in the Department of English and Literature, University of Benin, Benin City, under my supervision.

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Date

Dedication

To God, the source of all knowledge and wisdom, this project is dedicated.

Acknowledgements

I sincerely thank God almighty for the strength and direction, my parents Mr and Mrs Mordi , for their sacrifices, love and support throughout my journey . I also appreciate my supervisor Ideavbor Bello, PhD for his patience and guidance throughout the this project.

Additionally, I thank my friends for their support and encouragement.

Abstract

This study delves into Festus Okwekwe's poetry collections, *Our Mother Is Not a Woman* and *Second Class Breeds*, which serve as a powerful critiques of the patriarchal worldview prevalent within Igbo society and across Nigeria. These works expose the multifaceted nature of gender inequality, highlighting the subjugation of women, the rigid enforcement of traditional gender roles, and the resulting imbalances of power. Through a combination of stark realism and evocative imagery, Okwekwe's poems depict the consequences of patriarchal dominance, focusing on women's experiences of marginalization, exploitation, and violence. The collections challenge the notion of women as mere objects or possessions, disrupting the prevailing narratives that define women solely through their reproductive capacity and domestic roles. The collections employ a range of poetic techniques, including metaphor, symbolism, and narrative voice, to deconstruct oppressive structures and expose their inherent contradictions. Okwekwe's poetry doesn't merely represent the struggles of women; it actively engages with the sources of their oppression, offering a platform for resistance and the envisioning of more equitable gender relations.

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Purpose of study

Our Mother is not a Woman and *Second Class breeds* are two volumes of poetry written by Festus Okwekwe. The objective of this study is to conduct an in-depth analysis of the deconstruction of the patriarchal worldview that is presented in both collections. This study aims to examine the ways in which Okwekwe uses language, imagery, and symbolism to challenge patriarchal norms and to analyze the representation of women in Okwekwe's poetry, highlighting the ways in which they are portrayed as agents of change and resistance.

1.2 Scope of study

The scope of this study is to analyze how Okwekwe's work challenges patriarchal norms and offers a deconstruction of male identity. It aims to highlight the implications of his poetry for understanding gender dynamics in society.

1.3 Methodology

This study focuses on the deconstruction of the patriarchal worldview in Festus Okwekwe's poetry collections, *Our Mother is not a Woman* and *Second Class breeds*. The research will adopt a qualitative approach, utilizing textual analysis as the primary method. The poems will be closely read to identify key themes, symbols, and literary devices. Additionally, secondary sources, including scholarly

articles and critiques of critiques of Okewwe's work, will be reviewed to provide a broader context for the analysis.

1.4 About the Poet

Festus Okwekwe is a poet, a teacher and a student of Literature. His interpersonal skills with younger learners have given him a special place as an educator. His passion to help them achieve all round development has left him endeared in the minds of his students and other youths . In 2017, he was voted by students as the Educator of the Year, an exercise conducted by the school's management in celebration of World Teachers' Day.

He is Passionate about giving voice to the voiceless, he advocates for social well-being and justice. With every instrument of creativity at his disposal, he voices out for reforms and calls out for changes that are for the advancement of the collective society. This collection is one of his works within the landscape of African poetry and literature in general on social, environmental and patriarchal injustice. An advocator for quality education, he has pioneered an educational foundation, a channel through which to reach the needy and less privileged, especially in Nigeria.

Festus is a strong believer of the gospel and with it preaches peace and love for humanity. He is notable for some of his work like *Our Mother is not a woman* published in 2015, *second class breeds* and *Let me not speak before I Diie* in 2021 .

His publications include *Our Mother is not a woman* 2015, *Second Class breeds* 2019 amongst others.

1.5 Theoretical Background

This research adopts a Feminist Theory. Feminist Theory is a critical framework that seeks to understand and address the inequalities faced by women in the society. It comprises a variety of perspectives and ideologies, all aiming to analyze the ways in which gender influences social structures, power dynamics, and individual experiences. At its core, feminist theory challenges the traditional notions of gender roles and advocates for the empowerment and rights of women. One of the central themes of feminist theory is the critique of patriarchy, which refers to a social system where men hold major power and dominate in various aspects of life, including politics, economics, and culture. Feminist theorists argue that this patriarchal system not only oppresses women but also perpetuates harmful stereotypes that limit their opportunities and freedoms. By examining the historical and cultural contexts that sustain patriarchy, feminist theory seeks to dismantle these oppressive structures and promote gender equality.

Feminism since the 1960s has developed a number of unique perspectives. The approaches range from liberal to radical to postmodern. All of the perspectives share a deep concern for personal and social growth, as well as a linking of the personal and the political. Some approaches recognize basic gender differences in conceptualizing

and acting in the world, contesting a dominant male perspective. Most feminist theories suggest ways to help eliminate sexual inequalities, restrictions, and oppression faced by women.

Although different researchers frequently characterise the four theories of feminism, a common framework consists of:

1. **Liberal Feminism:** This school of thought champions women's rights within established social structures and focusses on attaining gender equality through political and legal reforms
2. **Radical Feminism:** This perspective believes that patriarchy is the primary source of women's oppression and emphasises the need to confront and eradicate it.
3. **Socialist Feminism:** This ideology integrates feminist and Marxist ideas to contend that patriarchy and capitalism are intertwined oppressive structures that require joint attention.
4. **Intersectional Feminism:** This emphasises the significance of taking into account the ways in which different social identities—like sexual orientation, class, and race—intersect and influence women's oppressive experiences. These ideas offer several perspectives for examining and addressing issues related to women's rights and gender inequality.

Simone de Beauvoir's advocate's feminism through her 1949 book "The Second Sex" examines how women's identities are constructed and the types of

oppression they face. "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," as de Beauvoir memorably puts it in the book, emphasises how gender is a social construct rather than a biological trait. De Beauvoir studies women's sexuality, relationships, and social roles, among other facets of their existence. She criticises the historical marginalisation of women and makes the case for their equality and liberty.

Judith Butler's work "Gender Trouble" (1990) explores the concept of gender performativity, which is central to her understanding of gender roles. According to Butler, gender is a set of acts that people perform in accordance with social norms and expectations rather than an innate identity. Butler argues that although these performances give the appearance of a consistent gender identity, they are actually flexible and can change depending on the situation. She stresses that people can question conventional gender roles and conventions by viewing gender as a performance, creating opportunities for more expression and identity outside of the male/ female dichotomy.

John Stoltenberg In his book "Refusing to Be a Man," Stoltenberg critiques traditional masculinity and advocates for a feminist perspective that challenges harmful gender norms.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, whose writing emphasises how gender, culture, and identity are intertwined. In her essay "We Should All Be Feminists," Adichie makes the case for a broader definition of feminism that takes into account the varied

experiences of women in various cultural contexts. She advocates for a group effort to overthrow patriarchal systems and highlights the importance of men participating in the feminist cause.

Egyptian feminist author and activist Nawal El Saadawi in her writings, including "Woman at Point Zero," examine the ways in which colonialism, class, and gender connect and highlight the ways in which these elements fuel the subjugation of women in African countries. She contends that tackling not only gender inequality but also the political and socioeconomic systems that support oppression is necessary for real women's freedom.

This theory will aid in the deconstruction of the patriarchal worldview in Festus Okwekwe's *Our mother is not a woman and second class breeds*.

1.6 Literature Review

In respect to feminist literature, numerous writers just like Festus Okwekwe have made significant contributions that have shaped the discourse surrounding gender equality, women's rights, and the complexities of oppression. This literature review will highlight several key figures and their influential works, illustrating the evolution of feminist thought and its relevance in contemporary society.

Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of Rights of Women* (1792) is often regarded as one of the foundational texts of feminist philosophy. In this groundbreaking work, Wollstonecraft argues for women's education and rationality,

challenging the deeply ingrained societal beliefs that positioned women as inferior to men. She calls marriage a “legal prostitution,” since it was only by marriage that women could acquire a secure economic future for themselves and their children, as their inadequate education prepared them for nothing other than being wives. Her advocacy for intellectual empowerment laid the groundwork for subsequent feminist movements, emphasizing the necessity of education in achieving gender equality.

Audre Lorde's *Sister Outsider* (1984) further enriches the feminist discourse by addressing the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. Through a collection of essays and speeches, Lorde articulates the importance of understanding the multifaceted nature of oppression. She emphasizes that experiences of discrimination cannot be understood in isolation; rather, they are shaped by the interplay of various identities. This work has been instrumental in promoting intersectionality within feminist thought, highlighting the need for an inclusive approach to activism. In her essay “The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House “ she writes extensively on the need for gender co-dependency and female autonomy no matter the color.” Interdependency between women is the only way to the freedom which allows the T to "be", not in order to be used, but in order to be cre-ative “ pg 111

Angela Davis's *Women, Race and Class* (1981) offers a critical historical analysis of the women's movement in the United States, examining how race and class intersect with gender. Davis challenges the predominantly white narrative of feminism,

bringing attention to the contributions and struggles of women of color. Her work emphasizes the importance of recognizing diverse experiences within the feminist movement, advocating for a more holistic understanding of women's rights.

Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at point zero* (1975) presents a powerful narrative that explores the harsh realities faced by women in patriarchal societies, particularly in Egypt. Through the story of Firdaus, a woman who confronts systemic oppression, El Saadawi sheds light on the global dimensions of feminist struggles. Her work serves as a poignant reminder of the need to address gender-based violence and discrimination on a worldwide scale, urging readers to consider the cultural contexts of women's experiences.

Rebecca Solnit's *Men Explain Things to me* (2014) critiques the phenomenon of "mansplaining," a term that encapsulates the condescending explanations men often give to women. Solnit's essays illuminate the broader implications of gender dynamics and the subtle ways in which sexism permeates everyday interactions. By addressing these issues, she invites readers to reflect on the pervasive nature of gender inequality and the necessity of feminist discourse in challenging societal norms.

Together, these authors create a rich tapestry of feminist thought, each contributing unique perspectives that challenge systemic inequalities and advocate for the dismantling of patriarchal structures. Their works not only illuminate the complexities of gender but also inspire ongoing dialogue about the necessity of feminism in

achieving true equality. As the feminist movement continues to evolve, the insights provided by these writers remain crucial in the fight for women's rights and social justice.

1.7 Thesis Statement

This project posits that Festus Okwekwe's poems *Our Mother is Not a Woman* and *Second Class Breeds* serve as powerful critiques of the patriarchal worldview, employing literary devices and thematic explorations that challenge traditional gender roles and advocate for a re-examination of societal norms regarding identity and femininity. Through a deconstructive lens, this analysis will reveal how Okwekwe's work contributes to the ongoing discourse on gender equality and the dismantling of patriarchal structures.

Chapter Two

Patriarchal Signifier's in Festus Okwekwe Poetry

2.0 Introduction

The poems of Festus Okwekwe, especially *Our Mother Is Not a Woman* and *Second Class Breeds* provides a detailed analysis of patriarchal systems. Okwekwe uses literary strategies to depict, critique, or disrupt established gender roles and power dynamics. This research looks at the textual evidence in these poems to identify and analyse important patriarchal signifiers. In many cultures, patriarchal structures have had a significant impact on how society views gender and authority. The society has make the women voiceless and unable to express themselves even when being abused. This study looks into how Festus Okwekwe's poetry reflects and possibly challenges these frameworks.

2.1 Male privileges

Festus Okwekwe's *Our mother is not a woman and Second class breeds* explores and exposes the male privileges in a patriarchal society. The male genders are not ruled upon. They have a right to make their own decisions without any interference unlike the female gender who are coerced into submission. The male gender are not controlled in the family or society but in a woman's case she is told when to speak and how to speak ,she is even told how to react to situations , whether it is a good or bad

situation. She does not have the right choose whom to marry as seen in the poem
 “Blessed are you daughters “

In those days, our fathers/ Gave out daughters/ Without their consents. pg 74

This line reflects a historical context where men held significant power over women's lives, particularly in matters of the family. This practice highlights how men enjoyed privileges in society by making decisions that directly impacted women's futures without considering their desire. Fathers, as male figures, often acted as gatekeepers of their daughters' fates, reinforcing the notion that women were property or assets to be exchanged.

A son's friend, a brother's friend / Or a friend's brother, she'll be easier won.

The line highlights the ease with which a woman can be pursued by a man connected to another male figure (father or brother) suggests that her identity and desires are tied to the suitors associations rather than the suitors personal qualities. This commodification of women reinforces patriarchal norms, where their worth is measured by their availability to men and their roles within male-dominated networks. Such attitudes contribute to the ongoing objectification of women, perpetuating a cycle where their autonomy is undermine. This dynamics underscores the systemic inequality present in many cultures, where women's voices and choices were marginalized in favor of male authority. Even today, remnants of these practices can be seen in various forms, emphasizing the ongoing need to challenge and dismantle

patriarchal structures that continue to privilege men while limiting women's rights and freedoms.

They are treated like second class citizens which implies that they had no access to education.

In those days, sons went to school /Daughters told to take it cool Pg 74. This line clearly illustrate the disparity in educational opportunities afforded to boys and girls, highlighting male privileges in society. This contrast emphasizes how sons were encouraged to pursue education and self development, which were seen as essential for their future success, while daughters were often relegated to a more passive role, expected to accept their circumstances without the same opportunities for growth and development. This dynamic reinforces traditional gender roles, where men are prepared for leadership and independence, while women are expected to conform to domestic responsibilities. The phrase "take it cool" suggests a resignation to societal expectations, indicating that girls were not only denied access to education but were also conditioned to accept a limited role in life. When a woman decides to bold to speak out for herself she is seen as not being submissive and labeled Ill mannered as they are raised not speak up because they are women this is seen in the poem “scars of hatred “ in *Our Mother is not a Woman*.

She is daring/Because she looks up at you/ And you look down on her/With the disdains meant for shits.pg 35

The lines vividly portray the power dynamics at play within patriarchal structures, showcasing how women are subdued and devalued in society. The imagery of a woman being daring simply for looking up at a man underscores the oppressive nature of patriarchy, where women are expected to remain submissive and deferential to men. The lines also highlights the contempt and disrespect often directed towards women by those who hold power and privilege in a patriarchal system. This conveys how women are marginalized and belittled, their perspectives and contributions dismissed or devalued solely based on their gender. Such attitudes perpetuate a culture of oppression where women are consistently undermined and treated as inferior, reinforcing the societal norms that uphold male dominance and female subordination.

If she runs away/You pronounce her dead/If she stays/You approach her with the violence of storm. Pg 35

The first line illustrate the harsh realities of male privileges and the limited choices available to women in a patriarchal society. The first part suggests that a woman's desire for autonomy or escape is met with fatal consequences, symbolizing how society often punishes women for seeking freedom or defying expectations. This reflects a systemic oppression where the mere act of wanting to break free is viewed as a threat.

The second and third line reveals that if a woman chooses to remain, she is subjected to aggression and control, represented by "the violence of storm." This indicates that

her presence does not guarantee safety or respect; instead, it exposes her to the potential for emotional or physical violence from men who feel entitled to assert their dominance. Together, these lines women's experiences under patriarchal rule, where they are trapped in a cycle of oppression, revealing the privileges that men hold in dictating the terms of women's existence and choices.

In the poem "THE MAN" in *Our Mother is not a woman* pg 34 shows how the male gender takes all glory and are excused .

THE MAN IS THE HEAD OF THE HOME
 Even if there is nothing in his head?
 THE MAN IS THE GLORY OF THE WOMAN
 Even if he is worse than an infidel?
 HE IS THE BREADWINNER OF THE HOME
 What if he brings home no bread ?

The idea that "the man is the head of the home, even if there is nothing in his head" speaks to the traditional gender roles and how the society assigns power and authority to men simply based on their gender. Similarly, the notion that "the man is the glory of the woman, even if he is worse than an infidel" highlights the belief that men are superior by implying that a woman's value or status is somehow connected to the guy she is with. It suggests that men are admired regardless of their true nature or behaviour. Adding "even if he is worse than an infidel" calls into question the idea that a man's value should be determined by his moral or ethical disposition. It highlights the ridiculousness of giving a man value based only on his gender, even if he doesn't

exhibit the traits that are usually connected to respect or honour. This demonstrates how social norms can support male privilege by enabling males to maintain their position of authority and status in spite of their actions.

The line "he is the breadwinner of the home, what if he brings home no bread" shows how males can still benefit from privileges even when they don't carry out their assigned duties. Despite the expectation in the society that males should be the primary breadwinners, men frequently maintain their position and respect in the home and community even when they fail to live up to this expectation. Men might not be subjected to the same criticism or scrutiny as women if they were in a comparable predicament of not being able to support themselves. Because of societal conventions that prioritise their authority and status within the family, men might occasionally avoid the penalties despite their inaction.

2.2 Male Dominance

Festus Okwekwe's *Our Mother is not a Woman and Second Class breeds* explores the extent of male dominance over women in the society. The men hold higher authority within the families, communities and the wider society. They show their authority by being controlling and domineering. A poignant example of this is portrayed in the poem "A letter" in *Our Mother is not a Woman*

It is not weakness that makes us love—
Tell my sole brother
Who thinks he's a man because he tramples
on a woman.

Tell who thinks he's a warrior when he
pounces on her And feels strong when he makes her cry. Pg 40

This poem is a powerful censure of toxic masculinity and a celebration of the importance of love and respect in relationships. The speaker directly addresses a "sole brother," a man who equates strength with violence and domination of women.

The poet criticizes Toxic Masculinity by directly challenges the brother's distorted view of manhood. He believes strength lies in subjugating women - "trampling," "pouncing," and making them cry. The speaker refutes this, arguing that such actions are not "African" (a cultural reference implying a rejection of harmful traditional norms), nor are they indicative of true strength. The poem dismantles several common tropes associated with toxic masculinity. The brother's actions are seen as violent and abusive. The speaker subverts this by emphasizing that genuine strength resides in love and compassion. The brother's actions demonstrate an inability to express or understand intelligence and sensitivity.

Finally, the brother's treatment of women dehumanizes them, which reduces them as objects of his dominance.

Also, in Festus Okwekwe's book *Second Class breeds* in the poem "Nwoke"

If your desire is /to clasp me /with a hard fist, Pg 36

The lines depict a disturbing image of male violence and dominance in relationships. The mention of "a hard fist" conveys physical aggression and control, symbolizing a form of abuse where power is exerted through force and intimidation. This imagery

underscores the unequal power dynamics that exist within patriarchal structures, where men often use violence to assert dominance and maintain control over women.

This implies a sense of possession and coercion, suggesting that the individual's desire is expressed through physical force rather than mutual respect or consent. This behavior reflects a toxic masculinity that values aggression and control over empathy and partnership, perpetuating harmful stereotypes of male dominance and female subordination. Such actions reinforce the cycle of violence and oppression that many women face in relationships, highlighting the need to challenge and dismantle these harmful norms to create a more equitable and safe society for all genders.

The exploration of dominance, pain, and the quest for respect makes the poem a poignant reflection on the complexities of human connection.

Furthermore, we can see how women are being dominated and maltreated in the poem “scars of hatred “ in *Our Mother is not a Woman*

Must she bear the scars of hatred/ And have marks to show for your
bitterness?/Will submission strangle one out of life/ Or is it a crime to be a weaker
vessel? Pg 35

These lines delve into the themes of suffering and the consequences of patriarchy . The question

"Must she bear the scars of hatred "by poet explores the emotional and physical toll and bitterness can inflicted on women . This implies that the scars are not just trivial but represent deeper wounds caused by the other person's actions.

The line "Will submission strangle one out of life" raises a critical point about the dangers of submission in a relationship. It questions whether yielding to another's will can lead to a loss of identity and vitality, suggesting that submission may ultimately be detrimental to one's wellbeing.

The line "is it a crime to be a weaker vessel?" challenges societal norms that often view vulnerability as a weakness. It points to the unfairness of judging someone for their perceived fragility, questioning why being "weaker" should be seen negatively and used against them.

Overall, the poem express a powerful critique of the dynamics of power and submission in relationships, emphasizing the need for respect and understanding rather than dominance and bitterness.

2.3 Gender roles and expectations

Festus Okwekwe's poetry exposes how the female gender is perceived in the society. Women are expected to conform to traditional gender roles, such as childcare and domestic work , while men are expected to be the breadwinners and decision-makers.They often have limited access to education, employment, and economic resources, making them dependent on men for financial support. Women are

disproportionately affected by violence, including domestic violence, sexual assault. They are seen as *Second class breeds* as seen in the title of one of the books. A good woman is one who is self sacrificing and submissive.

A woman is seen as tool for comfort as seen in the poem “To be a woman “
 “To be a woman/Is to be A blanket/ In cold night” pg 21 reveals a lot about societal expectations and the traditional roles assigned to women.

The comparison of a woman to a blanket suggests that women are expected to provide comfort and support to others. This aligns with the nurturing stereotype often associated with femininity, where women are seen as caretakers who offer emotional and physical warmth to those around them. The imagery of a "cold night" can symbolize challenging or difficult times, reinforcing the idea that women are relied upon to provide solace during hardships.

The poem generally reflects the broader societal expectation that women should be selfless and prioritize the needs of others, often at the expense of their own comfort. It emphasizes the importance placed on emotional labor and caregiving roles, which are traditionally associated with women.

Also, the poem highlights the strength and the burdens that come with being a woman in society.

2.4 Female subordination and rights violations

The silenced voices of women often resonate most powerfully through art . Festus Okwekwe's uses his works *Our Mother Is Not a Woman* and *Second Class Breeds*, to give a voice to the women who have enduring subordination and right violation in a patriarchal society. This study delves into the poems' exploring female rights violations, highlighting the subtle and ways in which societal structures perpetuate inequality and deny women of their rights. In the poem "Blessed are your daughters" "in *Our mother is not a woman*" pg 74

The lines "In those days, our fathers / Gave out daughters / Without their consents" highlights the subordination of women and the violation of their rights. This practice reflects a patriarchal society where daughters are treated as property or an object for bargain, rather than individuals with their own autonomy and desires. They have no right to make a decision of their own . They always do as they instructed by their fathers or in males in the household.

The contrast in the lines, "In those days, sons went to school / Daughters told to take it cool," further emphasizes gender inequality. While sons are encouraged to go to school and gain personal development, daughters are advised to "take it cool." This line shows that women were expected to accept their circumstances without question or ambition, reinforcing the idea that their primary role was to conform to societal expectations rather than to seek their own aspirations.

Also, in the poem "Nwoke" in *Second class breed*.

If all you crave for is /to grind my flesh /with zigzagged teeth /over and over /not minding my agony pg 36

The lines shows a lack of empathy, respect, and fundamental human decency by showing a situation in which a woman's suffering are disregarded . This portrays how a woman's right is violated .The gravity of the violation and the extreme disrespect for the women rights and wellbeing are showcased by the use of violent and explicit imagery. Overall, this analysis highlights the critical necessity to confront detrimental attitudes and behaviours giving women a voice .

Furthermore, in the poem "The thing with Nwokem" in *Second Class breeds* He wants me to swallow the putrid shit like a pit latrine;/ Sit still, voiceless and vacant, and gulp the urine. pg27

The lines "He wants me to swallow the putrid shit like a pit latrine; Sit still, voiceless and vacant, and gulp the urine" vividly shows a disturbing scenario of degradation and oppression, showcasing an extreme forms of female subordination and rights violation. The swallowing putrid waste and urine represents a dehumanizing act, where the woman is forced to endure humiliating and degrading situations.

A woman is expected to passively accept her mistreatment without protest or resistance. The line "sit still, voiceless and vacant" further emphasize the silencing and erasure of the woman's voice and agency, highlighting the systemic suppression of women's rights.

Overall, these lines explores the themes of female subordination and the violation of rights, shedding light on the harsh treatments faced by many women in a patriarchal society .

Chapter Three

The Dismantled Patriarchal Stance in Okwekwe's Poetry

3.0 Introduction

While many African literary works address the implications of patriarchy, Festus Okwekwe's poetry provides a distinctive viewpoint on how to subvert it. In contrast to more direct criticism, Okwekwe's method is frequently subtle and complex, utilising imagery, symbolism, and sarcastic representations. The purpose of this study is to analyse Okwekwe's unique contribution to the discourse on gender and power and how women can be empowered to be able to speak for themselves in the society.

3.1 Exposing patriarchal ideologies

Festus Okwekwe's in his works *Our Mother is not a woman* and *Second Class breeds* the delves into the complexities of gender dynamics and the influence of patriarchal ideologies in society. Through evocative imagery and powerful language, Okwekwe critiques the systemic oppression faced by women, highlighting the cultural and social constructs that diminish their identities and roles. The poems serve as a exploration of how patriarchal norms not only devalue and dehumanize women but also foster a cycle of inequality that affects generations. By examining of gender, identity, and societal expectations, Okwekwe confront the harsh realities of female oppression and to recognize the urgent need for change in a world where women are often relegated to “second-class breed”. To do this, he challenges traditional notions of masculinity and

femininity, advocating for a reimagining of societal values that embrace equality and respect for all individuals. In the poem “lawmaker” in *Our Mother is not a woman*.

If you make lawless laws To defend/yourlawlessness/ Because you are the lawmaker

The lines "If you make lawless laws To defend your lawlessness Because you are the lawmaker" critique the hypocrisy and inherent power dynamics within a patriarchal society . The phrase "lawless laws" suggests a manipulation of legal systems to justify immoral or unethical behavior, particularly by those in power, often reflecting how patriarchal structures operate to maintain control and dominance over women.

This lines exposes the idea that those who create laws—often men in patriarchal societies—can act without accountability, establishing rules that serve their own interests while disregarding the rights and well-being of women.

Also in the poem “Blessed are you daughters “ in *Our Mother is not a Woman*.

Our sisters married Nnaife, the pot-bellied/ Ogwube and Ogbuinyi, the women beaters
/Blessed are you daughters / This will not be so with us. pg74

The lines "Our sisters married Nnaife, the pot-bellied Ogwube and Ogbuinyi, the women beaters Blessed are you daughters This will not be so with us" highlight the damaging effects of patriarchal ideologies on women's lives and relationships. The mention of "women beaters" directly addresses the violence and abuse that women often endure in a patriarchal society, where male dominance is normalized and accepted by all.

The line "Blessed are you daughters" suggests a sense of hope or a break from the cycle of oppression that previous generations endured . It implies that the current generation of daughters will not endure such suffering as their sisters, who married abusive men. This reflects a desire for empowerment and a rejection of the patriarchal norms that dictate women's roles and choices.

3.2 promoting gender co-dependence

Okwekwe's works, *Our Mother Is Not a Woman and Second Class Breeds* offer a complex lens to explore the dynamics of gender relationships. He analyzes the extent to which these works portray and potentially promote gender co-dependence, exploring how character relationships, narrative structures, and thematic elements contribute to an understanding of interdependence .

In the poem "A woman is a man " in *Our Mother is not a Woman* pg 19

Man is the tree of the woman

Woman is the branch of the man both are and have one body. Because man is somebody

Okwekwe challenges traditional gender roles by stating that both men and women are "somebody." It emphasizes that neither gender is superior or inferior, but rather equal in their humanity. The line "A man is somebody/ A woman is somebody" reinforces the idea that both genders possess intrinsic value. He uses imagery of "man is the tree

of the woman/ Woman is the branch of the man" suggests a symbiotic relationship between men and women, where each relies on the other for support and growth.

This metaphor indicates that while they may have different roles, they are part of a single entity, reflecting the interconnectedness of human experience.

He concludes the poem with the idea that

"Thank God every wo-man has man/ Like everybody has body," which suggests a universal need for connection and belonging. It reflects on the human condition as one of shared existence and co-existence.

Also in the poem "second-class Breeds "in *Second Class breeds* pg 34

A man may sire many sons
 But those are the sons of a woman
 What do you think?
 If your sons are fruits of me
 And you rate me inferior,
 What will you rate your sons?
 Second-class wombs
 Womb what class of sons?
 Can a fig tree produce olives Or vine produce figs?

The lines "A man may sire many sons But those are the sons of a woman" Okwekwe emphasizes the essential role women play in the continuation of lineage and the creation of life. This statement highlights the interdependence between men and women, illustrating that while men may contribute to procreation, it is women who nurture and bring forth children.

The rhetorical question "If your sons are fruits of me and you rate me inferior, what will you rate your sons?" challenges the notion of male superiority by pointing out the absurdity of devaluing women while simultaneously benefiting from their contributions. It suggests that if women are seen as inferior, then the sons born from them must also be viewed as inferior too, thus questioning the patriarchal belief in male supremacy.

The line "Second-class wombs" further critiques the idea that women are merely vessels for reproduction, reducing their identity and worth to their biological function. The subsequent questions "Womb what class of sons? Can a fig tree produce olives Or vine produce figs?" reinforce the concept of inherent qualities and capabilities. Just as a fig tree cannot produce olives, the implication is that the value and potential of children are directly tied to the value placed on their mothers.

In the poem "Man and Woman in *Our Mother is not a Woman*

"Man, abuse not your woman / There you are in her / Lest you abuse yourself" Pg 73

This conveys a powerful message about gender co-dependence and the interconnectedness of relationships. The first part serves as a direct admonition against male violence, emphasizing that abusing a woman is not only an act of aggression towards her but also a reflection of the man's own character and well-being. This suggests that the health of a relationship is tied to mutual respect and care, where harming one partner also harms the other.

The line "There you are in her" implies a deep emotional and psychological connection between partners, suggesting that one's identity is intertwined with the other. This highlights the idea that the actions taken within the relationship have reciprocal effects, reinforcing the notion that both partners are co-dependent. If one partner engages in abusive behavior, it not only damages the victim but also degrades the abuser's own humanity and integrity.

"Woman, despise not your man/ Without him you are wo/ Lest you despise yourself"
pg 73

The lines also reflect a complex notion on gender co-dependence, emphasizing the interconnectedness of partners in a relationship. The line "Without him you are wo" suggests that a woman's identity and worth are tied to her relationship with a man, implying that her value is diminished in his absence. This notion perpetuates traditional gender roles where women's identities are often defined in relation to men, reinforcing the idea of dependency. The admonition "Lest you despise yourself" indicates that harboring negative feelings towards a partner can lead to self-loathing, suggesting that the emotional state of one partner can significantly impact the other's self-perception. This highlights the reciprocal nature of relationships, where the feelings and attitudes of one partner can affect the mental and emotional well-being of the other.

Overall, the poem underscores the societal expectation of co-dependence between genders, where both partners may feel that their identities and self-worth are intertwined. It calls for reflection on these dynamics, emphasizing the need for mutual respect and independence within relationships to foster healthier connections.

3.3 challenging female Oppression

Okwekwe's poetry serves as an exploration of gender dynamics and the systemic oppression faced by women in a patriarchal society. In his works such as *Our Mother is Not a Woman and Second Class Breeds*, Okwekwe confronts the patriarchal norms that dictate the roles and identities of women.

Through the use imagery and compelling language, he challenges traditional perceptions of femininity, highlighting the strength and resilience of women while exposing the injustices they endure. By critiquing societal structures that marginalize women, Okwekwe not only helps give them a voice but also calls for a reevaluation of the values that foster gender inequality. His poems stand as powerful testaments to the urgent need for social change and the recognition of women's rights, urging readers to reflect on their own complicity in these dynamics and to advocate for a more equitable world.

In the poem “if you dare” in *Our Mother is not a woman* pg 45

If you dare
 Fix your proboscis to her skin, unaccepted,
 Suck her bliss with your terrifying straw And deposit
 your bitterness You will be taken unaware.

If you dare
 Scare her peace with your horrifying claws
 Make her night disquieting with sleepless
 sleeping And replace her sound laugh with a loud
 cry It will be demanded back from you.

If you dare
 Choke breath out of her
 And munch your jaws with her flesh
 You will be reminded she is a man's born.

If you think you can squeeze life out of her
 Unquestioned, because you are a strong man
 You lie, because your freedom will be cut short.

Okwekwe's use of aggressive imagery-such as "fix your proboscis," "scare her peace," and "choke breath out of her"-highlights the violent actions often perpetrated against women. By depicting these acts, the poem draws attention to the harsh realities of female oppression and the physical and emotional harm that can result from it. He addresses the oppressor, using phrases like "If you dare." This confrontational tone challenges the typical power dynamics where women are often passive victims. Instead, the speaker positions herself as someone who will not be silenced or subjugated, suggesting that there will be consequences for oppressive actions. Okwekwe most importantly, uses this poem to confronts female oppression by using vivid imagery to depict violence, challenging power dynamics, asserting women's identities, critiquing toxic masculinity, and calling for accountability. It serves as a powerful reminder that oppression has consequences and that women will not passively accept their subjugation.

Okwekwe in the poem "I will not dance to your tune " in *Our Mother is not a Woman*.

I will not sing your war songs
 Or chorus your chants

If you render them against women.
 I will not follow your drums
 If the sticks will end on a woman's skin. Pg 39

This poem seeks to empower women by asserting a strong stance against violence and oppression. The lines "I will not sing your war songs / Or chorus your chants" indicate a refusal to participate in any form of celebration or support that endorses violence against women. This rejection highlights the importance of solidarity among women and the necessity of standing against patriarchal norms that glorify aggression and conflict.

The line "If you render them against women" emphasizes the speaker's awareness of how traditional narratives often marginalize women's experiences and promote harmful ideologies. By stating "I will not follow your drums," the speaker is asserting autonomy and agency, making it clear that they will not condone or support actions that lead to the suffering of women. This act of defiance empowers women by promoting the idea that they have the right to refuse complicity in systems that oppress them.

You could pierce me if you please /Or pull the trigger if you choose./ I will not hear
 your call /To lay siege for a woman /I will not dance to your tune pg 39

Okwekwe uses these lines to demonstrate a powerful resistance to physical harm and a refusal to be silenced by threats of violence. This defiance conveys a message of

courage and resilience in the face of danger, empowering women to stand up against aggression and abuse

The line "I will not hear your call / To lay siege for a woman" underscores the writer's commitment to resisting any attempts to harm or subjugate women. By refusing to comply with demands that endanger women, the writer asserts the importance of protecting their rights and well-being. Additionally, the line "I will not dance to your tune" symbolizes a rejection of societal expectations and gender norms that seek to control and limit women's autonomy.

Overall Okwekwe uses the poem to send a message of empowerment and protection to women, advocating for their freedom, safety, and agency in the face of adversity. It encourages women to assert their rights, resist oppression, and strive for a world where they can live without fear of violence or discrimination.

3.4 Women Empowerment

In a world defined by patriarchal narratives, Festus okwekwe's *Our Mother Is Not a Woman and Second Class Breeds* offer a counter-narrative, celebrating the strength and agency of women. Through carefully crafted characters and insightful thematic explorations, okwekwe's work challenges the oppression and limitations imposed on women.

In the poem "if you dare" in "our mother is not a woman" pg 45

If you dare
Choke breath out of her

And munch your jaws with her flesh
 You will be reminded she is a man's born.
 If you think you can squeeze life out of her
 Unquestioned, because you are a strong man
 You lie, because your freedom will be cut short.

Okwekwe uses violent and disturbing imagery, to presents a powerful argument for female empowerment through the stark depiction of the consequences faced by anyone who dares to oppress a woman. It doesn't celebrate female empowerment in a gentle or celebratory way; instead, it highlights the inherent strength and resilience of women by showing the inevitable backlash against those who try to exploit or subjugate them. The poem uses a series of "if you dare" conditional statements, each presenting a progressively more violent act against a woman - from Subtle violation ("suck her bliss with your terrifying straw") to brutal assault ("munch your jaws with her flesh"). Each act, however, is met with a consequence. This structure emphasizes the interconnectedness of action and retribution.

Also, in the poem “oghale” in the book *second class breeds* pg 70

If now, morning flowers Are clad in evening masks
 And at sunrise, wrinkle with sunset
 And now, springing sprouts
 Droop with dry leaves
 As shooting fruits are sucked unripe,
 Your petals in your prime
 Smile with the blooming sun;
 You're a flower to be shown to the world.

This poem uses the metaphor of a flower to represent a woman, and contrasts the expected natural progression of a flower's life cycle with an unnatural, distorted one. This contrast is key to understanding how the poem subtly shows female empowerment. The first stanza paints a picture of a world turned upside down: "morning flowers...clad in evening masks," "sunrise...wrinkle with sunset," "springing sprouts...droop with dry leaves." This imagery represents the societal pressures and expectations that attempt to wither, or distort a woman's life, preventing her from reaching her full potential. These pressures try to force her into a state of decay before her time.

The second stanza introduces a crucial shift.

While the world around her is distorted, the speaker states: "Your petals in your prime / Smile with the blooming sun." This "flower" - representing the empowered woman - remains unaffected by the unnatural world. She blooms despite the attempts to stunt her growth. Her "smile" suggests resilience, joy, and a refusal to conform to the twisted reality presented in the first stanza.

The final line, "You're a flower to be shown to the world," is the culmination of this subtle empowerment. It's not merely a statement of beauty; it's a declaration of defiance. The poem is not suggesting the woman passively accepts the distorted world; she chooses to bloom and be

seen in spite of it. She is asserting her right to exist authentically, fully, and beautifully, irrespective of the obstacles and unnatural expectations placed upon her.

Chapter Four

Conclusion

Festus Okwekwe's poetry collections, *Our Mother is Not a Woman* and *Second Class Breeds*, are a powerful condemnation of the patriarchal norms that foster female subordination and right violation in the society. Through his poetry, Okwekwe challenges the way women are marginalized, oppressed, and silenced, and to question the traditional notions of masculinity and femininity that underpin these injustices.

One of the primary concerns of Okwekwe's poetry and this project is the exposure ways in which patriarchal norms are internalized and perpetuated by both men and women.

The research deployed the Feminist Theory to discuss the topic. Approaching it from the idea which argues the promotion of the rights of the working class in the society. The research adopts the qualitative method of data finding in its explanations stacked with citations from the recommended texts for further understanding written in simple languages to aid comprehension .

The First Chapter comprises of the purpose of the study which emphasizing the importance of exploring gender dynamics and the pervasive influence of patriarchal structures in society. The scope of the study delineates the specific areas of focus, ensuring a comprehensive examination of the issues at hand. The methodology section outlines the research methods employed, providing transparency regarding how data

was collected and analyzed. The theoretical background offers a foundation for understanding the complexities of gender relations, while the literature review critically assesses existing research, identifying gaps that this study intends to fill. The thesis statement serves as a guiding assertion, encapsulating the central argument and setting the stage for the exploration of male privileges and gender roles in subsequent chapters.

The Second Chapter provides an in-depth analysis of male privileges and the concept of male dominance within societal structures. It discusses how these privileges manifest in various aspects of life, from professional environments to personal relationships, often leading to the marginalization of women. The chapter further explores societal expectations surrounding gender roles, highlighting how these norms not only reinforce male dominance but also contribute to the subordination of women. By examining the systemic nature of these issues, the chapter argues for the necessity of recognizing and addressing the privileges that men enjoy, regardless of whether they conform to traditional roles, thereby fostering a deeper understanding of the inequalities present in contemporary society.

The Third Chapter focuses critically exposes the patriarchal ideologies that sustain gender inequality. It discusses the ways in which these ideologies permeate cultural narratives, institutional practices, and social expectations, reinforcing harmful stereotypes and limiting opportunities for women. The chapter advocates for the

promotion of gender co-dependence, emphasizing the importance of collaboration and mutual respect between genders as a pathway toward equality. Furthermore, it challenges the traditional narratives that perpetuate female oppression and highlights various strategies for women empowerment, encouraging a collective movement to dismantle patriarchal structures. By fostering awareness and advocacy, the chapter aims to inspire action toward achieving gender equity.

This study suggests the importance of empowering women and challenging the ideologies that underpin oppression, advocating for a comprehensive approach to dismantling patriarchal structures. By recognizing and addressing male privileges and dominance, promoting gender codependence, and empowering women, the research calls for a transformative shift in societal attitudes and practices. Ultimately, the study envisions a more just and equitable society, where individuals of all genders can thrive and exercise their rights without the constraints of traditional gender roles. The findings advocate for sustained efforts in education, policy reform, and community engagement as essential components in the journey toward gender equality.

In conclusion, curbing patriarchy in African society requires a comprehensive approach that includes education, empowerment, engagement, legal reform, community involvement, and media representation. By addressing these areas, we can work towards dismantling patriarchal structures and fostering a more equitable environment for all genders. This collective effort is essential for creating a society

where everyone can thrive, free from the constraints of traditional gender roles and expectations.

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