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Man as Axe in Black South African Society: Contextualising Masculinity and Radical Feminism in Tyelele's *Shwele Bawo!*

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ABSTRACT: *South African society, like other patriarchal societies, upholds a gender structure that places the man at the apex of the patriarchal ladder but denigrates women to the subordinate lower rung of the ladder. Gender-sensitive female writers have risen to challenge the multifaceted gender oppression prevalent in the South African patriarchal order. In Motshabi Tyelele's play, Shwele Bawo! (Grave Injustice!), the worth of men is privileged by the metaphor of an axe, which is a tool women need (to borrow) to stand a chance at survival. The text identifies the centrality of masculinity to gender-based violence and casts men as sexual maniacs that should be eliminated to free women from oppression. Tyelele's text is selected through purposive sampling based on its portrayal of gender relations in South African society. From the prisms of Black masculinity and radical feminism, this paper accentuates the tropes of manliness, and entitled masculinity as well as the attitude of women to those tropes, within the context of South African patriarchy. This paper concludes that in Shwele Bawo, the author inverts the image of the man to a beast to unsettle the privileged position of masculinity in the Bantu cultural system of South Africa.*

KEYWORDS: Black Masculinity, Gender Oppression, Radical Feminism, Patriarchy, South Africa.

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Introduction

Most African societies are patriarchal, and patriarchy is a well-established social order in which the feminine gender is regarded as inferior to the masculine gender. The African social system positions the man at the top of the power hierarchy, while women are relegated to the bottom of the hierarchical order (Abeda, 2010). Thus, the prevailing order subjects women to gender oppression and subjugation in society. Based on the polarity in gender treatment as codified by and entombed in patriarchy, a significant push has been witnessed in African women's quest to gain gender equality and deconstruct male-created cultures that are detrimental to their self-worth and self-actualisation.

One of the female writers committed to rethinking and rewriting the subservient portraiture of female characters within the male-dominated literary space is Motshabi Tyelele; an award-winning playwright, better known for her steady interest and focus on issues around the oppressive treatment of women in African society. Her play, *Shwele Bawo!* (*Grave Injustice*) is a narrative about degrading familial situations that showcase women's voicelessness in patriarchal societies especially South Africa.

Shwele Bawo is a dramatic narration of the reality of child abuse and subservient treatment of women in South Africa. According to the observation of Naidoo (2019):

> […] the family is the site of extremely violent incidents in South African society; particularly women and children. Gender-based violent crimes within families, communities and society at large have been increasing at an alarming rate. The statistics are grim, with one in two women predicted to experience some forms of violence within their lifetime. (p. 101)

The familial situation of the Dikeledi, the protagonist in Tyelele's *Shwele Bawo!* validates Naidoo's (2019) position, while it also demonstrates the extent as well as the strength of familial abuses against the female gender in a patriarchal setup. Quite instructive is the fact that Tyelele seems to be deliberate in the agenda of using her theatre "to emphasize the issues that black South African women suffer as a result of male dominance in not only their personal lives but also in broader society" (Amonyeze, 2016, p. 193).

In a demonstration of the ordeals that women endure within the far-reaching and overbearing patriarchal structure of South African society, the female character is made to launch a head-on attack against the male gender by imagining the man as a sexual pervert. The man's brutish nature is seen as beyond redemption and primed for elimination. It is against this background and extant realities that this paper examines the nature and privileges of being a black South African man and the inversion of that image through the artistic acumen of Tyelele in *Shwele Bawo!*

Theory and Praxis of Black Masculinity

Masculinity extends beyond the physical and physiological structure of the male genitalia to the inherent socio-cultural recognition of the man as embodying traits sanctioned that are by societal codes and norms. Beynon (2002) supports this claim that men do not biologically identify with "masculinity as part of their genetic make-up; rather, it is something into which they are culturally shaped and which is composed of social norms that they learn to reproduce in culturally appropriate ways" (p. 13). In that light, masculinity as an idea and theoretical paradigm reveals and interrogates the constructions and dynamics of gender to establish what it means to be a man in various social, cultural, and historical contexts. According to Connell (2005, p. 71), masculinity to the extent that the ideology can be concisely defined in gender relations is actively revealed in practices by which men and women mark gender identity, and the repercussions of these practices on bodily experience, personality, and culture. The ideology of masculinity deals with the holistic conception of who a man is within the socio-cultural sphere(s) with nuanced implications across world societies. Of the variants of masculinity that have percolated over the years (such as hegemonic, complicit, subordinate, and marginalised masculinity), hegemonic masculinity is the most popular and dominant. In character and deployment, it is the most acknowledged and culturally valued due to its "architecture of gender behavior that contains the currently accepted answer to the problem of legitimacy in patriarchy" (Connell, 2005, p. 77). Therefore, it is not surprising that hegemonic masculinity

further leads to black masculinity, and both are characterised by physical strength, male supremacist ideology, arrogance, suppression of emotion, and strong heterosexuality.

Black masculinity, on its part, is reinforced by race, nation, and, by extension, colonialism. It is a product of colonialism, especially concerning colonialism's character and commitment to disempowering black men and reducing their status within a cultural milieu that places them at the apex of power and domination. Placing the issue in context, Ngoh (2016) opines:

> Colonialism also feminized and infantilized the colonized man, not only through notions of sexual excess, but by reordering society in ways that affected traditional men's work. Colonialism, then, not only stripped African men of their ability to achieve manhood through work, but when making work available to African men, relegated them to positions that were considered feminine, thereby reinforcing their perceived lack of manhood. (p. 30)

Colonialism altered native productivity in agrarian African communities by dispossessing the natives of their lands. Thus, African men were disempowered by land dispossession, thereby forcing them to become dependent on the jobs provided by the colonialists to make ends meet.

Invariably, the subordinate form of masculinity which was subtly forced on blacks by colonialism made black men subservient to white colonial rulers, with the latter being characterised as the epitome of civilisation, self-control, manliness, and intelligence. On the other hand, the colonised black man is portrayed as being sexually aberrant, weak, effeminate, without self-control, wicked, and immoral. In a reversal of fortune brought about by colonialism, the once powerful black man is cast within the tropes of brawn without brain and as a sexual pervert. Accordingly, in the colonised society, black men are constructed as subordinate to the white in masculinity, while they are also marginalised and denied full access to patriarchal dividends. The scenario resonates with the fate and place of black South African men during the Apartheid period of racial segregation, discrimination, dispossession, disempowerment, and marginalisation. Morrell's (2001) view on the second-class status and the treatment of black South African men by their white counterparts during Apartheid is appropriate here:

> [..]whites' use of the word 'boy'... The use of the term "black men" represented a workplace reality in which African males performed menial labor that required muscular, energetic, and powerful bodies... The usage of the diminutive implies emasculation in the connection between white colonizer and black colonized. The term evoked condescension, a failure to recognise the possibility of growth and manhood among African males. (p. 616)

As a result, it is undeniable that colonialism deprived African men of the customary authority they possessed before the epochal intrusion of white men. The new order emasculated and pushed black males to the bottom of the masculine hierarchy, forcing them to perform submissive chores like cooking, driving, and housekeeping. Black men were demoted to a lower position within the masculinity space, whereas their white counterparts held a greater status.

The reconfiguration of masculinity through colonialism together with the extant reality of Apartheid as a discriminatory system creates a significant psychological impact on the common partnership between men and women in Africa. When the African man lost his position and power in the public domain, he increased both in private settings to regain lost ground. Thus, the victimisation of African women intensified within the private space, complicating rather than completing the gender system. The pre-colonial African community's tradition of complementary gender roles is largely disturbed by the colonial epoch as black men assume domestic duties and women suffer a reduction of influence and power within that space. The reaction of African men was to recoil from the assault of white masculinity by reasserting themselves through high masculinity directed at women. Contributing to this discourse, Ngoh (2016) submits that "central to the process of anticolonial struggle in Africa was the reification and (re)articulation of a (new) African male identity that challenged colonial discourse and demanded the necessary space for African men to define themselves" (39).

As a result, the accompanying anticolonial struggles helped to recreate black masculinity by enabling African males to reclaim their physical and mental dominance. Responding to the reshaping of the black male identity, Reeser (2010) avers that it represents:

> an effort to turn the tables and re-masculinize a group that dominant cultural norms have made appear sissy. Reconstructing the colonized as more masculine than the colonizer in order to resist a colonizing authority is one form of resistance. (191)

In essence, colonialism birthed different forms of masculinity ranging from subordinate to hegemonic, which cuts across the colonial, early postcolonial, and modern eras. Various dominating types of masculinity operate simultaneously in the public and private realms in Africa at any given time. Whatever the forms or classifications, they show how masculinities are created, negotiated, and used in different contexts. Therefore, it is determined that masculinity is a configuration of gender practices that establishes men's domination over women in gender relations. The ideology of black masculinity serves as an appropriate platform for the interrogation of what it means to be a man within the South African patriarchy, particularly the characterisation of Solly, the male protagonist in *Shwele Bawo!*

Radical Feminism

This paper's theoretical paradigm of choice is radical feminism as it aligns with Tyelele's *Shwele Bawo!* head-on attack on masculinity. Feminism is a broad ideology that incorporates multifaceted approaches geared toward the emancipation of women from all forms of patriarchal oppression. Historically, as an advocacy against gender inequality and the struggle for women's social and political rights, it can be traced to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). Feminism is concerned with the eradication of sexist oppression in the patriarchal system, and the nullification of all kinds of prejudice towards women. Feminists' worldview is that patriarchy is the unbalanced social structure that oppresses the female gender and induces unequal power distribution between the sexes to the advantage of men (Abeda, 2010).

The early 1960s marked the examination of "literature through a feminist lens" (Dobie, 2012, p. 102) as feminism began to examine the experiences of female characters in literary works. As a gender-sensitive theory, feminism analyses "different concepts of gender and how they affect how literary works are written, read, discussed, and evaluated" (Abrams and Harpham, 2012, p. 146). Despite the core agenda of all feminists to combat shades of women marginalisation and patriarchal oppression, the socio-political and cultural diversity among feminists necessitates different approaches to women's issues in alignment with the historical and cultural specificity of communities. Therefore, the emergence of waves and strands of feminism is central to discourses on its theoretical and ideological standing. In recognition of these extant realities, Evwierhoma (2002:41) posits that:

> The new feminism manifests as several interconnected movements, including black feminism, which encourages women to frequently act out, lesbian feminism, which focuses on ending gender inequality, and radical feminism, which views men's oppression of women as a major historical event. Cultural feminism aims to embody a unique, enhancing female sensibility. But they all have a unique way of blending politics and culture.

Radical feminism, a quite popular strand, is both reactionary and revolutionary as it advocates for the radical re-ordering of society to unsettle male supremacist ideology and the attendant oppression of women. The strand's foremost agenda is to destroy patriarchy and as it is with all shades of feminism, the concepts of power struggle between the sexes which accentuates the oppression of women and men's position of dominance under patriarchal order, forms the underlying bedrock of radical feminism. Foregrounding the conceptualisation of power in patriarchy, French (1980) explains that:

> […] power is the process of the dynamic interaction. To have the power, in fact, means having access to the network of relations in which an individual can influence, threaten, or persuade others to do what he wants or what he needs…The individual has no power. It is given to the dominant person by a huge number of other people, and this allocation is final. (p. 509)

Considering the foregoing, it is instructive to add that the unequal distribution of power within the social system serves patriarchy well by granting men the power to repress women. Buttressing this assertion, French (1985) submits that "The construction and maintenance of control for its own sake serve as the basic principles of the patriarchal system, and males serve as its agents" (p. 509).

As a counter-narrative paradigm and reaction to the oppression of women, radical feminism provides "techniques for challenging the patriarchal mentality of 'raising the awareness' and failing to cooperate with the system" (Vukoicic, 2017:47). Hence, the works of radical feminists like Kate Millet, Grace Atkinson, Ellen Wills, Andrea Rita Dworkin, and Alice Echols depict the core tenets of the strand, which is encapsulated in its determination to combat patriarchal domination through non-cooperation with the existing social norms, while seeking the removal of male/female gender dichotomy to free the caged spirits of women. Thus, radical feminism views the varied oppression of women as being rooted in patriarchy; in fact, it concentrates attention and attacks on men as the perpetrators of gender oppression and as operators of patriarchal institutions. The ideas of subjugated women, stereotypical gender roles, sexual objectification of women, gender-based violence, and other forms of patriarchal oppression are rejected by radical feminists.

Therefore, this paper appropriates the manifestations of heightened masculinity, aggressive anti-patriarchy resistance, and radical feminist posturing in Tyelele's *Shwele Bawo!* to foreground familial ordeals that women are subjected to in overtly patriarchal societies. The paper also privileges the actions taken by the play's female protagonist to undermine the patriarchal order and ultimately free herself from oppression.

METHOD

In the examination and interrogation of the tropes of manliness, entitled masculinity, and the attitude of the female gender to the manifestations of these tropes within the South African patriarchal structure, this paper employs an interpretative qualitative approach to analyse Tyelele's *Shwele Bawo*! The play is purposively selected to unveil multifaceted gender oppression in South African society. Through the deployment of the masculinity theory, the text demonstrates how the man is metaphorically seen as an axe to be lent and borrowed by women; based on the African man's polygamist instinct within and outside the marriage space in South Africa. In the same vein, the appropriateness of the interpretive qualitative approach to this study unveils the counteraction of women to the patriarchal image of the man, who is identified as an unrepentant sexual maniac that should be eliminated.

The juxtaposition of black masculinity and radical feminism as theoretical standpoints in the play seeks to explicate the familial construction of the male and female genders within the South African patriarchal landscape. The close reading of *Shwele Bawo*! is expedient to bring to the fore the experiences of the central character, Dekeledi, who emblematises the marital ordeals of women and the tendency for a deadly reaction by women to spousal oppression. To this end, this paper commits to the objective of interrogating the manifestations of black masculinity by deploying radical feminism in *Shwele Bawo!* as a deconstruction tool.

Man as an Axe: Black Masculinity in South African Patriarchy

Quite like the colonial experiences in Africa, black South African men were dehumanised under the Apartheid system, which ultimately engendered in these men a form of masculinity founded on black identity. Apartheid is reputed to have consciously stripped black South African males of their dignity and relegated them to the lowest rung of the masculine hierarchy. Because of the complex effects of Apartheid's

experiences on black men especially in the public realm, psychologically devasted men pursued aggressive masculinity within the family cycle under strong patriarchal influence.

In *Shwele Bawo*!, Tyelele examines the challenges of being a woman in the South African Bantu tribe through her artistic vision. The playwright dramatises Dikeledi's ordeals under the structure of patriarchy, highlighting how as a teenager she is encouraged to entrap a rich man. Sadly, she ends up marrying Solly, her nemesis. The play opens after Dikeledi has served two years in jail for killing her husband, Solly. She narrates her marital experience and the events leading to her incarceration for murder.

Dikeledi marries Solly, a wealthy socialite in her teenage years. She is faithful to her husband, but he is promiscuous, brutish, and beats her as occasion demands. Dikeledi's resistance is restrained by the dogmas of traditions which stipulate that women should do everything to keep their marriages irrespective of their unpleasant experiences. However, with the benefits of introspection and soul searching that prison affords her, Dikeledi reveals the many injustices done to her as a wife and South African woman. The play successfully casts Dikeledi as the archetypal oppressed woman by exposing the imbalance in gender relations within marital space. These imbalances manifest in domestic and sexual violence, child abuse, incest, and the disintegration of family structures. As the play develops, it is revealed that Dikeledi is wrongly accused of Solly's murder, though she plans to kill him for sexually defiling their teenage daughter. In many ways, the play tells the stories of other South African silent women; therefore, it is not simply about Dikeledi's experiences, but that of all women, who are constantly confronted with challenges thrown up by masculinity and patriarchy within the marital space.

Being an ethnic Bantu and based on her people's patriarchal culture, Great Aunt lectures Dikeledi on how society imagines and places the man. In the Bantu culture, the man is "an axe and should be lent and borrowed" (p. 119) by women. Thus, the man is at liberty to display his masculinity, use his penis power without restriction, and he can be borrowed by other women. Therefore, the cultural charge and expectation is that every wife should be ready to lend their husbands to others. So, the woman is indoctrinated from childhood to accept the superiority of masculinity and her position at the lower rung of the patriarchal ladder. Great Aunt intones:

> […] if he doesn't sleep at home, you ask him nothing, he will tell you if he wants to. When he says A, don't say B! Not good, my child, not good. Listen to your husband and don't think when you have problems you'll come running here, you have to persevere! (119)

Great Aunt"s advice is a good example of how traditions are use in promoting patriarchy in gender relations. It also points to how women are expected to be voiceless and never query the traditional sanctions of masculinity. Reacting to Great Aunt's traditional doctrinal stance on the metaphoric identification of the man as an axe, Dikeledi traces her travails to what she fittingly identifies as "twisted indoctrination! (A man is an axe)!" (p. 120). She queries: "What does that make me if he is an axe? A piece of wood to be chopped and burnt? No, really!" (p. 120)

Emboldened by the dictates of a patriarchal society and indoctrinated from birth with a sense of entitlement, Solly wields his manliness in multiple ways. Because he is rich, he has the means to pay a hefty bride price on Dikeledi. In traditional societies, a man's capacity to pay an expensive bride price is an important factor in the objectification, commodification, and subjugation of women. The payment of bride price reduces a woman to a mere commodity that is purchased for indiscriminate use by the husband. Mindful of this ugly reality, Dikeledi's surmises the tripartite responsibilities which marriage expects from a woman in South Africa and all patriarchal societies: "Housewife in the kitchen, a lady in the dining room and a bitch in the bedroom" (p. 120). There is no denying that in traditional civilisations, paying a fair bride price is regarded as the marriage seal. However, the identitarian signification and implication of the bride price make marriage transactional and reduce the woman to a mere commodity being purchased. Within that existential reality, women like Dikeledi are expected to be docile and submissive to their husbands since they are purchased for a price. More telling and striking is the fact that in almost all traditional societies, women are married off at a young age; sometimes into wealth with no personal means

of empowerment than being solely dependent on their husbands for everything. Thus, married women are most vulnerable and disempowered in marriages contracted under traditional norms. Dekeledi's testimony suffices here:

> Look, Solly was in his forties and I was only sixteen! I was his Cinderella and he was my Prince Charming! I went overseas like I was going to the toilet! Visited all the romantic places in the world! [...] I moved from a matchbox house with no electricity, to a seven-bedroom palace, with a Jacuzzi, ban, sauna… but that had its price. It wasn't free love! I was materially wealthy, spiritually under-nourished and culturally very poor! (p. 118 - 119).

The marriage is skewed against Dikeledi from the beginning as her pre-existing poverty together with her vulnerable status creates a huge socio-economic disparity between her and Solly, which the latter exploits with devastating consequences. Social feminists argue that the advantage men have over women in terms of economic production is commonly deployed for the exploitation and subjugation of women in society (Hartmanm, 1981). The man is well-known in society and rules the economy leveraging on the privileges conferred by patriarchy. This extant reality is behind Hartmann's (1981) position that the African man's instinct for polygamy is accentuated by his skill and capacity to dominate the economy. Going by cultural dictates and social norms, Solly is an axe that can be lent and borrowed; a privilege he enjoys but which puts the woman at the receiving end of virulent masculinity and misogyny.

In that light, Dikeledi is denied a platform to question her husband's promiscuity and reckless sexual predilection. With an oversized sense of entitlement gifted him by the patriarchal Bantu society, Solly becomes a beast and sexual pervert who sexually abuses his daughter. Until that critical and life-altering point, Dikeledi is willing to lend out "the axe" (Solly) and many women are willing to borrow it (him) for their use without resistance. White Bitch, Dikeledi's neighbor who criticises the loud music at Solly's burial, explains the customary polygamous instinct ingrained in black masculinity. In her address to her husband, White Bitch says:

> You don't think there are other women fighting over the body, do you? No, she's the only wife but you never know with these black men. They've got women all over the show! It's a black thing and the women understand (mockingly). And just look at how they are dying of AIDs. It's shocking! (p. 131-132).

In Africa, the proclivity to have several partners both inside and outside of marriage is traditionally regarded as a sign of masculinity. Women are expected to show understanding for the waywardness of their partners or in the alternative, they are forced to accept the idea of man as an axe that can be borrowed by any interested person as exemplified by the marriage of Dikeledi and Solly.

Buttressing the elements of masculinity's social construct, Connell (2005) posits that "Men and women are expected to exhibit different traits. Men have a tendency to be confrontational and tough-minded, while women are expected to be nurturing, suggestible, chatty, sexually devoted and promiscuous" (p. 40). With Connell's (2005) position in mind, the playwright casts Dikeledi as being faithful, while Solly is aggressive and debauched. The social outlook on masculinity in African patriarchy accommodates aggression. A typical African man, especially the one who is born, bred, and who lives in the traditional setup, likes to exert physical power on his wife as punishment for an offence, or for the audacity to question his hegemonic masculinity. In line with the foregoing, Dikeledi is accused of flirting with Solly's friend, and he batters her over the false accusation.

The patriarchal society in which the couple lives expects Dikeledi to bear spousal abuses without complaints or resistance but with perseverance. The woman is often blamed for being the cause or site of her husband's anger in patriarchal societies. Dikeledi's in-laws blame her for making Solly angry and she is advised to keep silent so as not to degrade the image of the family in public. Her complaints, let alone resistance to her husband's failings, are not considered legitimate or deserving of arbitration within the

cultural milieu. Being a man and the head of his family, Solly is culturally vested with all the powers which he uses without restraint as he is all-seeing, all-knowing, and unquestionable.

The textual portrayal of Solly's masculinity is deliberately couched to illustrate his overt insensitive, arrogant, sexually pervasive, and violent nature; all of which are vested in him by the endemic patriarchy favoured by culture and society. Solly, and other male characters in the play, are portrayed as the beneficiaries of patriarchal guaranteed power, and the vile oppression of women in South Africa.

Radical Reprisal on Masculinity

In a bid to showcase the significantly overt and covert role that patriarchy plays in fostering masculinity and advancing women's debasement, African female playwrights like Tyelele frequently project their male characters as created symbols and sites of weakness and vices. Male gender identity is frequently inverted because male characters are frequently portrayed as manly devils while female characters are typically portrayed as strong, independent women. Tyelele casts an all-encompassing masculinity in the text, challenging male cruelty, female voicelessness, and fragility in South African culture. The man is portrayed as a sexual pervert who must be destroyed to unsettle patriarchy. Death is the only penalty for Solly's demonstration of "male chauvinism and sexist violence among men" (Katunda, 2010, p. 81). His masculinity is privileged for being excessively weak, onerous, and one that must be terminated. To put an end to the representation of hegemonic masculinity which Solly stands for, Dikeledi plans his death away from prying eyes. Fortunately for her and in a twist of fate and poetic justice, Solly is killed in a bar brawl; thus, bringing a fitting end to his reign of terror, and saving Dikeledi from the ordeal of having blood on her hands. However, Dikeledi is blamed for the death of her abusive husband in a macabre turn of events that underscores the far-reaching influence of patriarchy in South African society.

At this juncture, it is noteworthy to state that Dikeledi's marriage begins well with the luxuries of life until Solly becomes intoxicated with masculinity and gives in to the allure of promiscuity as engendered by culture and tradition. Seen as the weaker partner or mere commodity in the marriage, Dikeledi is expected to be submissive and persevere despite the overwhelming disadvantages that underline the abusive and oppressive marriage in which she is trapped. Even her kind (women) do not show her the understanding and empathy she deserves as a victim of hegemonic masculinity. Instead, she is treated with disdain and morbid hostility by some of the women with whom she unintentionally shares her husband:

> My husband, being a man about town, had made me an enemy of women, both married and single, young and old, black and white! To most of them, I was the obstacle to their comfort, to some I was the stupid wife they could ignore and share his wealth with…and to those in my neighborhood, I was competition that invaded 'their' territory. (p. 131)

Dikeledi's experience with other women validates Lorde's (1984) position on how women hurt other women under the shadow and influence of patriarchy and hegemonic masculinity. Lorde (1984) posits that in the face of patriarchal standards and societal conditioning, women, like other disadvantaged minorities, are frequently coerced into unleashing physical and mental wounds on one another. She suggests that women learn to "be gentle with each other" in order to avoid these sometimes-subtle patriarchal conditionings (Lorde, 1984, p. 175); and they should cooperate to dismount patriarchy from its high horse. The playwright also casts Dikeledi as the archetypal voiceless South African woman, who has been acculturated to accept her subordinate position in the familial domain. Her experience echoes the tales of all subjugated women in South African patriarchal society. Dikeledi proclaims that her story is:

> [...] the story of all those women who have kept their anger burning slowly on a black burner. Women with no voice…(117). Who came crying to me when her AIDs test came out positive, yet she had not been sleeping around? Who got beaten black and blue for standing up to the bitches that slept with her husband? Almost all of us! Who miscarried their babies because of constant physical abuse? Who had to rear illegitimate children by their husbands and bear the humiliation? Whose child was raped? (p. 136)

Dikeledi's life chronicles the woes of black women in South Africa. Like other voiceless women, she bears all obnoxious treatments from her husband until he rapes her daughter. The ugly incident marks the proverbial last straw and being unable to stand the psychological trauma of her daughter's ordeal, Dikeledi decides to defy the patriarchal parametres that endow masculinity with unbridled privileges, wherein rape and other forms of gender-based violence are entombed. She refutes traditional masculinity dominance, which she undermines through actionable resistance: "It's because of that twisted indoctrination! (A man is an axe)! What does that make me if he is an axe? A piece of wood to be chopped and burnt? No, really!" (p. 120). Addressing the perpetrators and promoters of patriarchy, Dikeledi declares with lucidity and defiance:

> You taught me to lie about my beatings, my sufferings. Today I refuse! (p.123).
> When Solly started beating me up and sleeping out it was my battle alone…When Solly got that first kid pregnant bought her a house without me knowing, I was told he is a man and it's tradition! Hau! Am I not supposed to decide, or at least be consulted as to which next piece of wood to chop! He's some bloody fucking axe that should be lent and borrowed! Lent and borrowed! Give me a break! (p.124)

Therefore, when a woman like Dikeledi decides to break free from the status quo, she is classed as a deviant because she opposes patriarchy's dominating structure of gender relations. Ideally, social standards want the woman to maintain her composure, stay in an abusive relationship, and conform to the patriarchal structure of her cultural domain. However, Dikeledi is pushed to her limits and sees Solly as her chief enemy, whose punishment is death. Her desire to kill her husband is part of a deliberate plan to combat hegemonic masculinity and male dominance. The modern African woman differs from the traditional model of an African woman, who is depicted in most male works as a symbol of resilience, patience, and stillness. However, Dikeledi, a modern woman is "symbolized here as someone who is filled with flaming anger and ready to fight back, even beyond what can be imagined" (Kussouhon et al, 2015, p. 319).

Some feminists consider anger as the first condition and central to the emancipation of women from all forms of patriarchal oppression; most radical feminists are known to hold that view. In her contribution to the issue of anger and its centrality to the freedom of women from oppression, Lorde (1984) calls for the appropriation of anger instead of a turn away from it by women who seek to end patriarchy. According to Lorde (1984), when women avoid using fury in their battle for equal rights for all women, they are merely avoiding insight "saying they will only accept designs that are well-known, lethal, and safely familiar" (p. 131). She proceeds to situate the transformative power of feminine anger by submitting succinctly in the same breath that women's rages can transform difference into power.

In that sense, Dikeledi's plan to kill her husband is an appropriation of anger and the validation of the same within feminist discourse. Her anger conceives a murderous plan, while her nonchalant attitude about the death of Solly also emanates from that nadir. Despite culture's demand that whether a marriage is blissful or not, the wife should express grief when her husband passes away, Dikeledi is unmoved by her husband's death and openly refuses to follow traditional widowhood ceremonies. The press is astonished to find her watching television instead of mourning the loss of her husband when she was visited:

> The newspaper people who've seen the worst in human nature are shocked that I watched television when I was supposed to be mourning for my husband!... so what's wrong in me watching the news, when my husband is dead, when my husband is the very news (p. 125).

Not done with her deployment of anger to shock a patriarchal society, for Solly's funeral, which she treats as the largest celebration of her life, Dikeledi orders exclusive designer ready-to-wear clothing and footwear: "So make sure the shoes you choose are the only pair in the country! Barbara, I don't want to be there crying and suddenly see some tart wearing the same shoes as mine and thinking that she is in my league" (p. 128). She defies cultural expectations by going outside at will during the morning period, rather than sitting on the ground inside her house as would be expected. She aggressively dances with tremendous

enthusiasm at the funeral reception, she proclaims: "I was dancing my sorrows away ... widow celebrates hubby's death" (122). Dikeledi's initial desire to kill her husband, together with her subsequent actions and inactions, highlights the depth of her rage and show that she is prepared to destroy the structure of patriarchy and its vestiges.

Tyelele's anti-patriarchal agenda in *Shwele Bawo!* seeks to deconstruct female 'muledom' and muteness in oppressive marriage by imbuing Dikeledi with courage and the spirit of resistance to a physically brutish and sexually perverse Solly. The playwright presents the man as a sexual pervert and sends a clear signal to other men who epitomise "physically grotesque as well as evil spouses and fathers, in order to construct a new social order in which women manage their shared destiny" (Ugwanyi 2017, p. 55). Tylele's protagonist, Dikeledi showcases the feminine effort at changing the prevailing gender narrative in such a way that, the role of the man as husband and father is reversed to that of a brutish father and a sexually reprobate husband, to account for the realities of familial relationship in post-apartheid South Africa. Thus, the core of the female emancipation agenda is to highlight the necessity of releasing women from oppressive cultures and traditions that have rendered them powerless and silenced in a patriarchal society.

In light of the foregoing, writing becomes an opportunity for female playwrights who are attentive to gender issues to portray the inequality in the socio-cultural structure of South African and African society. Female authors employ their artistic acumen and zeal to elevate multiple oppressions of women under the weight of masculinity and patriarchy. Some female playwrights purposely present masculine stereotypes while using their artistic talent to undermine patriarchy in its signifying glory. Following this trend, Tyelele depicts familial circumstances in the text that show Dikeledi's suffering due to her husband's unrestrained sexual antics. Solly is presented as a reprobate and licentious father who abuses his authority over his daughter; a beast of a man who cannot control his sexual desire; and a man who makes the marital space a living hell and psychological prison for his wife and child. Consequently, the text holds men like Solly solely liable for the disintegration of the family through the introduction of a dysfunctional family setup that permits violence, child abuse, promiscuity, and incest.

The tendency towards negative stereotypical portraiture of the dichotomy of incarceration and liberation that Dikeledi alludes to at the play's opening and conclusion emphasises the role of the male gender in exposing the oppression of the female gender inside the patriarchal system. Dikeledi overlooks Solly's promiscuity and violence for over twelve years by submitting to traditional injunctions and social norms that cast Solly as an axe to be borrowed, with the implied injunction that he is free to engage in extramarital affairs. However, it soon reaches a point when Dikeledi can no longer hold her peace after she discovers that her daughter has been raped by her father and her husband. Her plan to kill Solly does not materialise before he is killed in a brawl, and Dikeledi is incarcerated for murder in patriarchal revenge over the way she conducts herself following the death of her husband. Regardless of the grave injustice done to her, Dikeledi accepts her imprisonment as a metaphorical freedom from years of abuse and also from an institution (marriage) contrived to enslave women:

> I've already spent two years of my life sentence but you know what? I was sentenced to life imprisonment long before coming to jail! The only difference is I've been deployed from a Tuscan palace to a toilet-size cell, with many others like me (p.118)
>
> To tell the truth, I didn't care much for my house. The old lady was right
> It was cold, like a cave!
> I feel more at home in my cell, truly! (p.129)
>
> ….Free woman at last free!
> Free from slavery in the kitchen
> Where I walked back and forth strained

and squalid among cooking pots
My brutal husband ranked me lower
that the shade he sat in (p.137)

A scenario in which jail is desired and cherished more than the comfort of home is painted in the playwright's commitment to degrade the masculine gender and weaken masculinity's power to oppress women in familial realms. Solly's display of hegemonic masculinity denigrates and represses Dikeledi into voicelessness. In the counterattack launched against hegemonic masculinity by the playwright through Dikeledi, the man is adjudged a beast that must face death.

Conclusion

Masculinity in *Shwele Bawo!* carries dimensional portrayal as the site of sexual reprobation and maniacal tendencies. The polarised gender qualities of masculinity and femininity imply a binary coding that keeps male and female in a perpetual state of gender war. Gender polarisation exposes each gender to stereotypical characterisation and labeling. Dikeledi's resistance to patriarchal oppression through the desire to kill her husband represents both resistance and a reprisal attack that underscore the vision of radical feminism. Solly, on the other hand, engenders the stereotypical portrayal of a privileged male, an irresponsible husband, a sexual pervert, and philanderer.

Hence, it can be concluded that the conflict in the play underscores the playwright's gender vision and the propensity to present conceptions of the male gender to repudiate oppression and the dominance of women in South Africa's patriarchal society. The image of Solly in *Shwele Bawol!* aligns with Tyelele's feminist vision to demonstrate that a typical black South African male is a competent agent of patriarchy in its most virulent form, and someone whose masculinity exists to victimise and oppress women through the instrumentality of his manhood.

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