

## Gender and Culture Dialogue in Jones' *Dutchman* and Sofola's *The Showers*

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### Abstract

Literary creations are gendered discourses which reflect socio-political trends. These trends are often designed by the background of the writers. This work utilizes Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism which sees every literary discourse as an "utterance" that can interact across cultures and historical settings to explore paradigms for dialogue between continental Africans and Africans in diaspora by analyzing LeRoi Jones' *Dutchman* and Zulu Sofola's *The Showers*. It identifies the Africanness of these playwrights as the bridge between them, though the experience of each is shaped by the realities of his/her gender as well as society.

The Afro American nation and its people as an oppressed nationality... is oppressed by imperialism, and its liberation and self-determinism, can only be gained through revolution.

LEROI JONES (1997, 251)

SOMETHING LIKE A WHIRLWIND IS SWEEPING ACROSS OUR planet and this time, it is feminine ... there is no doubt that a wind of change is blowing strong across our human landscape and it is female. ZULU SOFOLA (Author's Emphasis 1998, 51)

### I. INTRODUCTION

LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka's) and 'Zulu Sofola's perspectives as writers are designed by the exigencies of their societies. This is why *Dutchman* shows Jones' reaction to the problem of racial injustice in America. Being a descendant of slaves, he confesses in "The Revolutionary Tradition" that he was "

raised up in literature too often on right-wing anthologies, and right-wing critics, pushing conservative and reactionary literature, playing down the progressive and revolutionary forces ..." (1997, 243). This "white filter approach" to use Okon Uya's (1982, 77) phraseology accords secondary status to the black experience so it was either given a footnote or

ignored completely before the 1960s in preference for the Anglo-Saxon culture.

With a career which spans over three decades, Jones has consistently espoused revolution as the panacea for racial injustice despite the contradictory modes he adopt in his search for functional identity in America. He has received public acclaim as a celebrated poet-dramatist of distinction in Black America. When *Dutchman* (1964) opened, it won Obie Award for the best American play of the 1964 season. *Dutchman* was followed in the same year by *The Toilet*, *The System of Dante's Hell*, *The Baptism* and *The Slave*. As a Black Muslim, he spoke primarily to blacks through *Experimental Death Unit NO. 1* (1965), *Jello* (1965), *A Black Mass* (1966), *Mad Heart* (1967), *ArmYrself or Harm Yrself* and *Slave Ship* (1967), but as a Marxist-Leninist, he wrote *The Motion of History* (1977), *Autobiography of LeRoi Jones* (1984), "Why's/Wise" (1985)– an epic poem and *The Music : Reflections on Jazz and Blues* (1987) with his wife, Amina Baraka.

In the same way national chauvinism isolated the African-American experience from mainstream culture; patriarchal monologism justified the neglect of women's writing in Africa for decades. It is a credit to Sofola's legacy as the first woman playwright in Nigeria and the first female professor of theatre in Africa that she invaded a supposedly male genre (as a dramatist and a director), disrupted the monologicistic discourses of male

playwrights like Soyinka, Clark, Osofisan, Sowande, among many others and deposited powerful women on the African stage. As a "woman writing about women" - in Ajayi's (1983, 24) words, she questions the choice of spouses in *Wedlock of the Gods* (1972); shows polygamy as a conflict situation for women in *King Emene* (1974); frowns against marriage as a social obligation in *Memories in the Moonlight* (1986), unravels the negative impacts of European culture in *The Sweet Trap* (1977); ridicules the moral bankruptcy of the elite in *Song of a Maiden*; celebrates the power of courageous women in *Queen Omu-Ako* and raises an alarm on the exploitation of women in *The Showers* and *Lost Dreams*, two unpublished plays at the time of her death.

With Jones' vigor but without the racial tension that produces his revolutionary insight, Sofola's artistic creations as Mary Kolawole (1999, 32) reveals in the essay, "Zulu Sofola's Cyclic Aesthetics..." begins from "a modernist-traditionalist" perspective where she interrogates tradition as a means of social integration. Although she confesses to "always questioning something" in an interview with Adeola James (1990, 143), she upholds the sustaining power of tradition and condemns female assertion outside the African cultural context as we see in *The Sweet Trap*. This is the focus of her theory on the "de-womanization of African womanhood" which has "produced the contemporary African

women who are to a large extent disoriented, weakened, and rendered ineffective and irrelevant" ("Feminism..." 1998, 52). The historical play *Queen Omu-Ako* is set to counter this spineless and passive presentation of African women.

In exploring gender and culture dialogue in Jones' *Dutchman* and Sofola's *The Showers*, we accept Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981, 291) perception of literary language as an "utterance" which though set in different socio-cultural contexts can attract reactions and counter responses. As he states in *The Dialogic Imagination*,

Language...represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past and between different socio-ideological groups in the present...

This implies that literary language (poem, drama or novel) is infused with the writer's ideology which is inextricably linked with the context of his/her experience. This work uses gender and culture as paradigms for dialogue between LeRoi Jones' *Dutchman* and Zulu Sofola's *The Showers* as well as identify the African heritage shared by both playwrights as a natural link between continental Africans and African-Americans.

## II Gender Dialogue in *Dutchman* and *The Showers*

The bifurcation of divine essence into male and female implies that both sexes are heirs of the grace of God (See Fubara-Manuel, 1992) but the society in its insistence on sex difference has certain attributes for the male and female. The result, as Emenyi (2001, 1) posits, is that "Human life is structured in relation to the aspirations and expectations or constraints which the society designs for the two sexes". And because male values are positively valued, the female has been condemned to meet his needs. This is the point Simone Beauvoir (1953) has made in *The Second Sex* where she undertakes a multi-generic dissection of patriarchy.

Since men writers are pioneers of the literary enterprise, their status symbol in the intellectual space is the objectification of women. This is why women are configured primarily as wives, mothers, prostitutes, courtesans and schizophrenics. LeRoi Jones utilizes this position but locates it within his larger vision which is the use of art to teach the African-American how to react to the reality of his/her existence in the United States. He presents his vision most vividly in this startling revelation:

When I die, the consciousness I carry I will to black people. May they pick me apart and take the useful parts, the sweet meat of my feelings. And leave the bitter bullshit rotten white parts alone (Schneck 1970, 196).

The consciousness Jones gives in *Dutchman* is an insight into the four

centuries of sexual confrontation between Anglo-Americans and African-Americans and how the latter have been pushed to the margin of existence in the United States.

Behind the myth of the big city conjured in the subway car in *Dutchman* is an archetypal journey through black history because Jones is persuaded about the irrevocability of that history. This is why he insists that the African-American writer should be "committed to what is real, and not to the sanctity of his feelings" (Bigsby 2000, 1); for as Julianne Malveaux (1995, XV) puts it, "the power of race and gender myths and ... the lens of class" have conspired against blacks in America.

This is because the racial memory of America abhors African-American male sexuality and in the words of Robert Bone (1958, 59) stigmatizes him as the "unspoiled child of nature, the noble-savage, carefree, spontaneous and sexually uninhibited". Thus, he is always seen as the assailant in every sexual encounter between an African-American man and a white woman. But if the encounter is between an African-American woman and a white man, the former still takes the blame for her insatiable sexual appetite because as Adele Alexander (1995, 17) reports, "Slavery made [the Negro woman] the only woman in America for whom virtue was not an ornament and a necessity".

This legacy of slavery is the focal point

of Lula's interaction with Clay in *Dutchman*. But, unknown to Clay, she does not see him as a human being; rather, he is a creation of the white imagination. It is for this reason that Clay's diatribe on Lula violates the collective conscience of America; and as such, attracts the kind of terrorism that the African-American male has always experienced from the white society since the era of slavery. Jones' *Dutchman* shows how the denigration of the African-American people through slavery and racism are exploited to emasculate African-American manhood.

Interestingly, Lula's singular task in the subway car is to destroy Clay. As the stage direction shows: she comes in with "bright, skimpy summer clothes and sandals ... wearing only loud lipstick in somebody's good taste" and eating apples (Jones 1971, 216). The white lady has always being a trap and the symbol of the black man's castration. White women, according to Stephanie Athey's (1996, 13-14) remark are "female rulers, 'queens of the drawing room' who maintain a caste system that provides a 'network of perfect subordination' in the lives of blacks". This is because the ideology of white womanhood anchors on the fact that she has always "required a cast of numerous supporting persons who were exploited in various ways".

By exposing the spirit of America in the person of Lula, Jones shows the problem of African-American manhood which is sustained by America's

investment in black servitude. Maxwell Geismar (1958, 36) offers an insightful comment on this:

The immense wealth of the American continent became the devil's trap for the American conscience. The true voice of national conscience was...once again suppressed and in its place a mercantile conscience emerged.

That "mercantile conscience" made race a major factor in Africa's encounter with the West and a determinant of power and subservience.

This readily explains why Clay is invisible to Lula despite his middle-class personality. He is a phenomenon: a myth in America's racial memory, a boy and a nigger. W.E.B. DuBois (1965, 20) has identified the dehumanization of blacks in America as the historical circumstance in which the word "Negro was used for the first time ... to tie color to race and blackness to slavery and degradation" – a situation which provided an opportunity for the world to make a huge investment from racial prejudice. Therefore, Lula represents the force which controls Clay's existence; she is an all knowing being who manipulates the African-American people through institutionalized falsehood. She is the symbol of evil and the corrupter of the innocent man from Africa which is why Jones paints her as the "great liberated whore" of Anglo-American culture.

But Sofola's *The Showers* debunks the privileging of one gender at the

expense of the other and gives voice to her female characters having herself "broken the veil of silence" through her stupendous achievements in a male-centred profession. As she (1998, 52) shows in "Feminism and African Womanhood", psyche which is "the element that makes all human beings equal in essence" is genderless. This is reflected in the Igbo idea of "Mo Ndu" and the Yoruba concept of "Emi" which forms the basis of her dialogue with African tradition. *The Showers* is a dramatization of gender conflict over the negligence women receive as the life-giving and nurturing forces in the human society.

Looking beyond the politics of race, Sofola deconstructs Jones' archetypal portraiture of the woman as the symbol of evil in *Dutchman* by re-inscribing her story as the symbol of life in *The Showers*. The suggestion is that neglecting women is just like destroying humanity in general and Nigeria in particular. Sofola makes this categorically clear in the "Director's Note" to the premiere of *The Showers* in Africa Hall, UNILORIN on 24 September, 1991 when she states that: "As no bird can fly effectively, if at all with one wing, so also it is that a nation cannot grow and develop effectively with only one wing." In other words, Nigeria will be engaging in self-destruction if she continues to perpetrate the exploitation of her female population.

With the Shasha Hospital as a microcosm of contemporary Nigeria, she

divulges the moral bankruptcy, the professional ineptitude and non-charlance, the materialist ethic, the inhuman decrees of our leaders and the poor state of social amenities which are aspects of the national psyche. As a result of Sofola's conviction that "it is the hand that rocks the cradle that builds the nation" as she states in the "Production Leaflet" to *The Showers*, she shows the impacts of gender exploitation on women. Using Mrs Adebekun and Mrs Oteri, the playwright portrays the neglect of women by their husbands during childbirth as well as reflects how "fathers literarily hawk their daughters for the highest bidder" in marriage transactions.

Yet, Sofola locates these negative attitudes within a larger framework such that *The Showers* is not just an expose on female exploitation but a protest meant to sensitize the public on the need to avert an impending national crisis. The readiness of the health personnel at the Shasha Hospital to attend to emergencies castigates the health institution which like other essential institutions in Nigeria has lost public relevance—especially when the ambulance driver must be "located" and Sister Odigie cannot inform the doctor on duty of an emergency despite advance notice. Above all, "the new hospital regulations forbid an emergency blood transfusion for any patient whose people do not have the needed replacement for what the patient borrows from the Blood Bank" (Sofola 1991, 8). The lackadaisical approach of the health officers to their

work and the inhuman decrees from the establishment pose one simple question: are the health workers meant to protect or destroy human life? In other words, what does a people do when their live-wire becomes a death-hole though with vestiges of past glory?

Within this larger framework, Sofola develops a female viewpoint which shows her commitment "as a writer, as a woman and as a Third World person" (Ogundipe-Leslie 1992, 10). Thus, the malfunctioning of the Shasha Hospital represents a male conspiracy against women. This point is buttressed by the fact that Mrs Adebekun is brought to the hospital unconscious as a result of prolonged labour which occurs in her husband's absence. The interaction between the medical personnel and Mr Adebekun confirms that he abandoned his wife at a critical time in her life. Incidentally, Sister Odigie reports that "it is always when their wives need them most that [Husbands] are conveniently absent" (Sofola 1991, 1).

But as Mrs Adebekun battles with life in Theatre I, Mrs Oteri (another emergency case) is rushed into Theatre II and there are scarcely enough personnel to help. Again, this woman's difficult relationship with her husband is not in doubt. In the ensuing confusion, Sarah, her co-wife shouts in hysteria "Make she no die", making the reality of their lives more obvious because she cannot imagine staying in "that house" alone. In Africa, fertility is a continental flag so childlessness is like a terrible curse. This

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is why Zifa's impotence in J.P. Clark's *Song of a Goat* breaks the cosmic cycle and Amaka's childlessness in Nwapa's *One is Enough* makes her useless before her mother-in-law.

It is surprising that Mr Oteri chooses to abandon his wife with a pregnancy though not without a reason – adultery in this case. Judith Steiham provides a useful dimension to this situation when she divulges that in most cultures "male honour is closely linked to female purity: this requires virginity for the unmarried, fidelity for the married, and continence for the divorced or widowed" (Opara 1994, 93). However, this moral code is not applicable to men or else how can a society that detests adultery for women be permissive over men's sexual escapades outside marriage? "Morality," Emilia Oko (1983, 68) argues, "is not the narrow code of social expectations but that truth to self that at the same time does not deny the autonomy of the other".

The situation where African writers (or Nigerian men in the case of Mr Oteri) condemn female adultery but sanction male sexual gregariousness breeds "narrow morality". Kate Millett (1968, 31) attributes this differential treatment to the fact that patriarchy thrives on inequities and negates the supposedly inferior human being – woman. This same tradition empowers fathers to justify the sale of their daughters for financial gains as Obinna's disagreement with her father, Mr Chukwura portrays. In anger, she narrates:

... I watched him give out three sisters virtually to the highest bidder without as much as a spoon accompanying any of them to their new homes. He shamelessly banked the thousands and was loudly heard to boast among his peers of his riches. He will not add me to the number (Sofola 1991, 5).

What redeems her is the knowledge of what tradition stipulates the imagination to apply this to her situation and the will to confront her father's materialist ethic.

Positive self-assertion is indigenous to African women. But in *The Showers*, Sofola makes it inclusive in nature such that Feminique Internationale, the group which fights for the rights of women, is open to both sexes. Why does she do this? Sofola's position is that just as Ogwoma in *Wedlock of the Gods* cannot single-handedly redress the injustice which the society enforces on members of her sex, women alone cannot destroy negative aspects of African culture (Kolawole 1999 30-31). This is because as long as "the power of life and death" lies in the hands of men, there is almost nothing that women can do to reverse the oppressive machinery in the society without engaging the attention of men. Perhaps, this will debunk the perception that female assertion "is a disorder, a deviation, an extremism associated with misguided, frustrated or disgruntled women" (Chukwuma 1994, ix).

By speaking vehemently against female exploitation, the women in

Feminique Internationale have proved that "silence is not a female virtue" but rather a covert way of destroying humanity. This is the point Sofola has made in the maiden production of this play when she remarks that "the nation and indeed the man, is as good as the female component of the nation makes it" ("Synopsis of the play"). Yet, since female exploitation is entrenched in the society, women should be the first people to speak against it; not because they advocate confrontation between the sexes but because they need maximum protection in order to effectively undertake what men cannot do - childbirth.

### III Culture Dialogue in *Dutchman* and *The Showers*

The creative spirit is a product of social conditioning even though Africa's encounter with the West has resulted in major shifts in social organizations which have problematised human relations. For the African-American people most of who experience a Third World situation within a developed society, the search for identity is always characterized by "double consciousness" – the type of love-hate attitude towards Africa and America which DuBois analyses in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Since America will not yield its possibilities to the African American people except it is forced to do so, LeRoi Jones' only means of dialoguing with America is revolution. It is understandable, therefore, when George Piggford (1997, 9) declares that *Dutchman*

"functions as a warning both to 'heretical' blacks like Clay who help support the nightmare of black oppression through inaction and to whites – that the revolution is coming".

Eventually, Clay comes to recognize the relationship between him and Lula as an Anglo-American imposition because in actual fact, racial classification has erected a mighty gulf between them. This realization culminates in the awareness that "even the most liberal white man in America does not want to see the existing system really changed" (Ralph 1985, 1). The real issue is that Clay's mentality is a product of choice and Lula exploits it to her advantage. As a result of the burden of blackness, Clay as Carole Hamilton (1998, 4) posits has been "molded" by white society to accept Lula's hostility in an effort "to accomplish what can never be achieved - to be completely accepted into white culture".

Since culture empowers and defines people, Clay's middle-class disposition makes him a victim in the hands of "Lula the Hyena." This is because "for the black man, acquisition of a white woman always signified some special power the black man had managed to obtain ... within white society" (Piggford 1997, 7). Therefore, Clay's repressed psyche which is manifestly shown in his "narrowed shouldered" coat represents the black bourgeoisie's false hope of being fully integrated into white Anglo-American culture. This hope courts passivity and supports the oppressor which explains



Jones' objection to Martin Luther King, Jr.'s adoption of non-violence in his Civil Rights struggles.

Jones' position, according to Hamilton (1998, 4) is that integration "supported an unacceptable status quo" when in actual fact "a society that takes advantage of its people must be destroyed". Lula's seduction of Clay and his initial co-operation reveal the attraction which the African-American has for mainstream values. But most importantly, this attraction goes with physical and intellectual slavery as the encounter between Lula and Clay shows. Lula has absolute knowledge of Clay (based on lies) but she assumes that Clay does not know her because the society holds up the white woman as something beyond the reach of the African-American man.

But as her attack becomes more vitriolic, Clay's suppressed psyche regains consciousness so he tries to discard the mentality of the genteel tradition by refusing to play the well known "Buster" or Uncle Tom. Rather, he chooses to shatter Lula's mythopoeic conception of Africa-American manhood and the veneration of the "White thing." The destruction of Lula's illusion about Clay's manhood offends the conscience of his society, for as Stephanie Athey (1996, 17) reveals, "any threat to white women's sovereign power was tantamount to a threat against the nation and the white race itself".

The clash of consciousness between

Lula and Clay re-enacts the conflict between monopoly capitalism in United States and its oppressed people. Consequently, *Dutchman* shows the birth of revolution as a tool for self-defense because of Jones' (1997, 250 - 251) belief that art must motivate the oppressed to confront the oppressor. It explains his insistence in "The Revolutionary Tradition ..." that African-American literature "must be a weapon of revolutionary struggle, that it must serve the black revolution (Jones 1997, 150-151). This explains why the Black Arts Theatre was an angry or a revolutionary theatre whose plays spoke to the "deepest souls" of the African-American people and called out ignorant blacks to destroy the white culture.

In the confrontation which follows, Clay assumes the role of a revolutionary and wishes to murder Lula, her white father for sustaining racial injustice and other white passengers who represent the collective conscience of America. This is because the perfidy in white culture is perpetrated by "A whole people of neurotics, struggling to keep from being sane" and only Lula's murder will enable the white people to confront their neurosis (LeRoi Jones 1997, 230). But for all his rage, Clay gets a casual "You fool" from Lula who understands that his vision of overthrowing the dominant culture is a self-destructive venture because he is a castrated "half-white trustee."

Having identified with the Anglo-American culture as a middle-class

person, revolution means destroying a major aspect of his life. This latest realization wearies his revolutionary spirit and incapacitates his will for action. All he now says is: "Ahhh. Shit. But who needs it? I'd rather be a fool. Insane. Safe with my words, and no deaths, and clean, hard thoughts, urging me to new conquest" (LeRoi Jones 1997, 230). The fact is that he finds it difficult to abandon the white culture that he has laboured so much to cultivate.

But the agenda of destroying the dominant culture is necessitated by the persistent exploitation of African-Americans and the tendency to give them an outsider status. Yet Morrison (1992, XII) has argued lucidly for a strong Africanist presence in the last four centuries of American literature which cannot be ignored although "until very recently, and regardless of the race of the author, the readers of virtually all of American fiction have been positioned as white". This means that the dominant Anglo-American culture has exerted a firm control over literary production in order to maintain a status quo which protects literary whiteness. In this scenario, dissenting voices are accredited with madness, which confirms Schneck's (1970, 214) description of Jones' vision as "so hate-ridden that it is insane".

However, Hamilton's (1998: 2) comment gives an interesting dimension to this phenomenon when he remarks that: "Defining nonconformists as mad makes it easier to ignore them, even to

lock them up or have them 'cured' .... This is how LeRoi Jones, the radical and controversial writer: "a poet, a playwright, a conscience, a consciousness" (to adopt Schneck's words 1970: 201) came to be known as the madman of the sixties in American literature and politics because he spoke vehemently against integration. But decades after his rantings, the outsider status accorded to African-Americans in the United States has attested to the white chauvinism in American culture.

The thematisation of race, gender and sex in *Dutchman* recalls the politics of the sixties<sup>1</sup> with the race riots and the assassination of prominent blacks like Malcom X, Martin Luther King Jr. and Richard Wright. The issues at stake then were: was it possible to be black and also an American and yet receive public respect? Was it possible to be racially committed without seeking for political rights? What was the future of the black man in America? Is America truly a democratic nation or is the emphasis on equality a façade? For Jones and most blacks, these questions explode past assumptions about America and culminate in the indictment of American democracy because it does not accommodate the African-American on equal status with the Anglo-American. It is against this framework that Clay's consciousness receives a quick reprisal when Lula kills him and orders that his body be thrown out of the subway car, on the margin of American life where the

African-American has remained for centuries.

But writing from the womanist tradition, Sofola unravels the problems which affect women in Africa while also celebrating Africa's positive values. Coined by Alice Walker, a prominent African-American writer, womanists accept black men as partners in the task of dismantling social structures which restrict women's lives. In Chikwenye Ogunyemi's (1988, 63) explanation:

Womanism is black centred, it is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism; unlike radical feminist, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand.

Black feminists do not regard men as the only source of women's oppression; rather, they attack the culture which denies women their basic human rights even though men and some women sustain the fundamental structures of negative traditional practices.

But "SOMETHING LIKE A WHIRLWIND is SWEEPING ACROSS OUR planet and this time it is feminine" as Sofola (1998, 50) laments in her essay. This whirlwind is shaking the basis of tradition and Sofola in spite of herself is affected because she seems to graduate from the role of a "cultural apostle" -to use Kolawole's (1999, 32) apt description -

in her earlier plays to a gender ideologue in her later works, especially *The Showers*. Her dialogue with tradition avoids a complete deconstruction of same but brings under scrutiny aspects of it that constrain women's possibilities. Tradition is exploited by wicked men like Mr Adebekun, Mr Oteri and Mr Chukwura to suppress women. Mr Oteri, for instance represents the power of tradition to define, control, judge and sentence some of its inhabitants (the womenfolk) to the periphery of existence, particularly those who have not discovered "how quickly man's desire turns itself out" as Mariama Ba (1985, 159) says in *Scarlet Song*.

But then, it is Sarah's hysteria which serves as the loudest commentary on Mr Oteri's life as a husband. But, the medical workers ignore her because they think that she is mad. According to Hamilton (1998, 2), "Society will often define as mad those whose speech and actions do not conform to the standards and conventions of acceptable messages and modes of behaviour". However, the awareness that the "interior colonization" displayed by their husband does not favour any of them results in the development of the kind of female bonding which enables them to survive the pangs of patriarchal suppression. This is generally true of women who can articulate their exploitation just as Aissatou and Ramatoulaye in Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1981).

But by evading his involvement in his wife's pregnancy, Mr. Oteri transfers his

responsibility to her, apart from the emotional crisis she undergoes as an abandoned woman. One impact of men abandoning their responsibilities to their wives as D. Pearce and H. McAdoo (1981, 17) identify is poverty. Commenting on this, they intimate that:

Men generally do not become poor because of divorce, sex-role socialization, sexism or, of course pregnancy. Indeed, some may lift themselves out of poverty by same means that plunge women into it. The same divorce that frees a man from financial burdens of a family may result in poverty for his ex-wife and children.

Thus, Mrs Oteri is a victim of the male power politics which forms the basic component of patriarchy.

But since Sofola's interrogation of tradition is also an affirmation of Africa's positive values, she makes Obinna's awareness of traditional expectations in marriage the basis of her assertion. Obinna's argument is that the amount her father collected from her fiancé is too big for the bride price. This suggests that he is indirectly charged for bride wealth which the government had abolished.

Since Obinna is armed with these information, she refuses to be a prey in the hands of her father and other members of the family.

Consequently, she ignores Dr Okozie's remark that "The family comes first ..." since the future of most daughters has been destroyed. This is

why she tells her family that "the hawk that carries away the earth is a bad hawk" (Sofola 1991, 6). What does a family get if in the attempt to sell their daughters for personal gain, there are no young men with high economic power to purchase them? The only option may be to marry them off to old men just as Rosemary is given to Mr Ogiame. But, the most interesting thing about Obinna's situation is the conspiracy to suppress the truth which goes with the "vicious collusion" of the elite. The elite in Sofola's aesthetics are the source of Africa's problem because of their uncritical acceptance of Western modes. However, Sofola is not against formal Western education which appears to be the distinguishing feature between Obinna and other women who are oppressed in this work.

Unlike Obinna, Mrs Adebekun and Mrs Oteri engage in no constructive action despite the crude realities of their lives. Rosemary is content marrying an old man who wants a young girl to test his virility while Sarah just goes berserk. Each of these women abandons herself to a fate that oppresses her yet Rose Acholonu (1994, 207) has intimated that a "woman abandoned by her husband cannot afford to abandon herself, because self-abandonment is the worst calamity to befall such a woman". It is in realization of this fact that Feminique Internationale organizes "the showers" to sensitize the public on the plight of women, raise funds for the support of the fractured women in the Funtua Home for Dispossessed

Mothers as well as pursue the legal battle for the recognition of women's rights. This association is moved by the conviction that "the system that dehumanizes womanhood" must give way. But by identifying the limitations which the traditional society imposes on women and proffering solutions to them, Sofola is not motivated by procedures of radical Western Feminism. Rather, she seeks to protect the human society by advocating the rights of women.

#### IV CONCLUSION

Jones' *Dutchman* dialogues with Sofola's *The Showers* in order to present the male viewpoint on gender relations. Using a series of reversals, like the association of evil with whiteness and the white woman with evil, Jones explodes the mythic conception of African-American history and redeems black manhood as well. This mythic conception of reality portrays the ability of myths both to constrain and express social mores. Being an aspect of culture, myth has positive and negative values, depending on the circumstances of use. Consequently, a correct assessment of culture must reflect its impact on group interaction, particularly, among the sexes and the consciousness reflected by each.

The assumption here is that culture with its mythic paradigm has mostly been used to protect the interest of men because a woman as the *Beti* proverb says "has no mouth". But women writers and critics have deconstructed this patriarchal viewpoint. The implication of this for the

definition of male and female spaces is a dialogic imperative which as Dale Bauer and Susan McKinstry remark critiques through a discursive resistance to male and female voices. This is because "speech is not always a sign of power, or silence a sign of weakness" but the context of both reflects "gendered relations" (3). Therefore, dialogue is the connecting link between the male and female voices in social context and has disrupted the patriarchal monologism occasioned by the privileging of male discourse. But most importantly, Jones' and Sofola's different gendered positions which are culture bound reflect their separate histories as well as illustrate that neither of them can adequately understand each other's sexual politics.

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