

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE DEPICTION OF WOMEN
IN SIFISO NYATHI'S *GOD OF WOMEN* AND WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
OTHELLO

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a comparative analysis of the depiction of women characters in the plays *God of Women* by Nyathi and *Othello* by Shakespeare. The main purpose of the study was to find out how Nyathi and Shakespeare depict women characters in their plays. The researcher evaluated the use of literary techniques the authors use in their portrayal of the female characters in the plays. The researcher employed the feminist literary theory in this study. The study revealed that both Nyathi and Shakespeare use a gender bias style of writing in depicting women characters in their plays. Nyathi's depictions portray women as sex objects for their husband's sexual pleasures in a polygamous marriage, and also as exchange materials for wealth. Women also have been portrayed as destitute who have to stay in subservient conditions at the mercy of their husbands. The study also revealed that Nyathi makes use of a wide number of metaphors which carry connotations in his depictions of women to instil superiority over them. Shakespeare also portrays women characters negatively as dependent on their fathers in *Othello*. He portrays women characters as sex goddesses who would compel men to murder their women out of love. Conversely, Nyathi and Shakespeare depict women as intelligent and rational thinkers. Desdemona in *Othello* defends her position in her choice for Othello before her father. In *God of Women* the wives of Chief Lewanika embrace MaInonge in a gesture of solidarity of the oppressed sisters when she collapses after Joyce reveals her secret that MaInonge had a son out of wedlock with Chief Lewanika. The study concluded that both Nyathi and Shakespeare largely portray women characters negatively in their works albeit in different ways that are typical of the cultures and epochs in which the authors lived.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is a dedication to my two daughters, Noku and Naluca, my family, parents, friends:

Judith, Laetitia and Allen Tycoon. I love you all!!!

DECLARATION

I, Christopher Mujiwa Masule, declare hereby that this study is a true reflection of my own research, and that this work, or part thereof has not been submitted for a degree in any other institution of higher education.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

1.1. Introduction

This chapter introduces the study by providing the orientation of the study, the statement of the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study, limitations of the study, definition of terms used in the study; and organisation of the study.

1.2. Orientation of the study

In fiction, comparative and contrasting studies are carried out on some themes that tend to be universal in different cultural settings, whereas others transcend over epochs. To the literary critic, the purpose of the enquiry is to determine how different authors succeed in developing these themes in the context of different cultural settings and times. It is, therefore, in this light that the study was carried out.

This study was based on a comparative analysis of how Sifiso Nyathi and William Shakespeare depict women characters in their plays *God of Women* and *Othello* respectively. Before going into discussing the depiction of women in the literary works of Nyathi's *God of Women* and Shakespeare's *Othello*, it is imperative to first critique the general portrayal of women in society and literature, so as to understand the direction of the discussion in this study.

Davies and Schleifer (1991, p. viii) state:

The task of "English" – both as a body of professional knowledge and as a collection of texts – has come to be no less than a global redefinition of literary studies according to

the “critical” element in literary criticism. Such a task includes examining the role and significance of “critique” in philosophy from the eighteenth century through to the present.

Davies and Schleifer (1991, pp. viii – ix) conclude that examination of criticism and critique presents us with a new understanding of literary criticism which consists of different modes of cultural critique that facilitate engagement with literary studies within larger spheres such as psychological criticism, structuralism and semiotics, philosophical criticism, historical criticism, as well as feminism, which includes the focus of the study.

Stralton (as cited in Peter, 2010), states that female characters in literature have been presented in a variety of ways, ranging from gender stereotypes to gender inferiors. Stralton continues to say that female characters are depicted as mothers and caretakers of homes, their children and their husbands. For example, in Nyathi’s *The Other Presence* (2008), women characters are sitting separate from men at the funeral of Akapelwa (Nyathi, 2008, p. 5). Nyathi illustrates how women are portrayed as homemakers and caregivers, when a dog feeding on meat that was intended to feed the mourners is left to be warded off by women while men remain seated during the funeral wake.

Besides their conventional portrayal as homemakers, women are also depicted as subservient to their male counterparts. Lilemba, in *Power is Sweet* (2003) writes about a woman, Munte Kamwikalwa, who is in a traditional African marriage with Katonga Mwinke. Katonga Mwinke does not contribute to the matrimonial home in any way, leaving his wife to fend for herself, including looking after children all on her own. After she reports the matter of her husband not playing any paternal and spousal role to elders of her family and his, no solution is reached to

help Munte Kamwikalwa in her marital plight. This is due to the societal and traditional relegation of women to a lower level as ascribed by patriarchal society. The case is not discussed as is expected in traditional settings where reported issues of concern are usually heard and presided over by elders.

Lilemba (2003) continues to show the weakness, ignorance and submissiveness of women through Munte Kamwikalwa who is still visited by her derelict husband, and who continues to bear his children although he has failed to provide or care for her.

Besides being accorded subservient positions in literature, women are still portrayed as powerless, or as not having any choice in matters pertaining to marriage. In *Power is Sweet*, Lilemba (2003), tells the story of Chibinda, a young woman who is forced to marry against her wishes. As she could not openly reject the marriage arrangements as dictated according to the patriarchal society she lives in, Chibinda eventually succumbs to death as a result of her silent rebellion against her forced marriage. According to the tradition of the community in the story, the widowed husband is supposed to be given another bride to replace the deceased wife. Katonga Mwinke as husband to Chibinda therefore had to be given another wife from the family of Chibinda – a custom that had to be allowed to continue in spite of what was seen as having led to Chibinda's death.

Lilemba (2003) narrates how a girl (no age given, however presumed to be a minor) was forcefully handed over to the widower after being pursued as the girls in the village did not want to be married. The young girls were targeted like animals being forced into quarantine. It did not matter who would be caught; as long as she was a woman and belonged to the family of the deceased. What one would consider as baffling is the fact that the girls' parents were neither

concerned nor was their permission sought to marry their daughter off. This further illustrates how women's voices are silenced by the traditions of culture.

Sol Plaatje (as cited in Mhudi, 1978, p. 25) depicts women as ever busy serving their male domineering community or as otherwise occupied with work or domestic chores throughout the season. Plaatje (1978, p. 25) says:

Childless marriages were as rare as freaks so, early and late in summer and all winter, during the years of drought and of plenty, every mother had to nourish her growing brood, besides fattening and beautifying her daughters for the competition of eligible swains.

Peter (2010) claims that it is certainly clear that many male writers purposefully use stereotypes to portray female characters in their works rather than in a manner that represents their true potential. Is this scenario to be interpreted that men want to indoctrinate both their male and female readership with the message that they are superior to women? It is a political ideology that is intended to keep women subordinate, according to feminists who say that 'for the feminist reader there is no innocent or neutral approach to literature: all interpretation is political' (Belsey and Moore, 1997, p. 1). In an essay on women who produce literature in order to bring a counter image to what is portrayed of them, Showalter (1986, p. 13) declares:

It is important to understand the female subculture not only as what Cynthia Ozick calls "custodial" – a set of opinions, prejudices, tastes, and values prescribed for a subordinate group to perpetuate its subordination – but also as a thriving and positive entity.

Showalter (1986) continues by saying that the women's subculture is intended not only to align itself to the dominant culture, but also to invoke strengths that would throw away the traditional

picture of the ideology that the middle class woman was content with “being a Perfect lady, an Angel in the House, contentedly submissive to men, but strong in her inner purity and religiosity, queen in her own realm of the Home” (p. 13).

1.3. Statement of the problem

The aim of this study was to investigate and analyse how Nyathi and Shakespeare depict women characters in their plays. The researcher used a comparative analysis of the depictions of the female characters in *God of Women* (1998) and *Othello* (1993). In *God of Women*, the focus is on the main female characters: MaInonge (first and most senior wife to Chief Lewanika); MaLenge (second wife to Chief Lewanika); Nsala (third wife to Chief Lewanika); and Joyce (fourth and youngest wife to Chief Lewanika).

In *Othello*, the focus was on the female characters: Desdemona (daughter of Brabantio, and wife of Othello); Emilia (wife of Iago); and Bianca (mistress of Cassio). The central issue in this study was, therefore, to compare and analyse how women’s roles in these plays created by male authors are characterised.

In this study the researcher appraised Nyathi’s *God of Women* and Shakespeare’s *Othello* with special attention to how women characters are portrayed. The analysis focused on the role women characters play in the development of the story line as well as how they are portrayed within society through the interpretation of characters. For example, in *God of Women*, Chief Lewanika, a polygamist, insults his wives for their failure to bear him a son who would inherit his throne when he dies. With the use of insults and lack of respect toward his wives who should instead be appreciated as esteemed and revered members of the royal house, the Chief is seen

laying the blame on his wives for failing to produce an heir to the throne, as though they were the ones solely at fault.

In *Othello*, an example is that of Desdemona, wife to Othello the Moor and commander of the Venetian army, who is falsely accused of adultery by both her husband and Iago the villain, when she voices her appeal for the reinstatement of Cassio to his position of lieutenant.

The study also interprets the use of literary techniques which the authors, Nyathi and Shakespeare, use in their portrayal of female characters in the plays. Manifestatworkbook.org declares that metaphors help to convey complex information, as they create a discourse that can run parallel to the discussion of the text. It is further said that metaphors help to project the sensory perception of what is said in greater detail. Nyathi (1995) uses metaphors in *God of Women* when Chief Lewanika calls MaInonge to summon her counterparts for information – sharing meeting. In her response, MaInonge says that she is not on duty this day as she thinks the Chief wants “his daily food” referring to sexual intercourse. Now, such use of literary device could result in MaInonge be perceived as someone preoccupied with sex related issues, let alone her age and status in the royal household.

In *Othello*, Shakespeare craftily uses Brabantio, Desdemona’s father, to surmise her supposed infidelity when Brabantio warns Othello to beware of her, as she is capable of disrespecting her own father. This is interpreted as blackmail by her father, in that she is equally capable of doing the same or even worse to her black husband.

1.4. Research questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How do Nyathi and Shakespeare depict women characters in their plays?
2. How are literary devices incorporated by the authors to depict women in the two plays to reflect patriarchal bias?
3. How applicable is the feminist literary theory in analysing the depiction of women characters in *God of Women* and *Othello*?

1.5. Significance of the study

Women have often been assigned subordinate roles in most writings, where characters are confined to stereotypical representations of housekeeper, wife, and mother. At times, the roles even extend to being subjects of sexual stereotypes and sex objects. These days, when gender equality is at the forefront of society's preoccupation, it is anticipated that this study would contribute to literature as the comparative analysis may draw out both similarities and differences that would be significant in changing the perspectives and minds of readers when reading *God of Women* (Nyathi) and *Othello* (Shakespeare).

1.6. Limitations of the study

The study was limited to one play by Nyathi, *God of Women* (1998) and one play by Shakespeare, *Othello* (1993).

1.7. Definition of terms used in the study

In a study such as this that examines a comparative analysis of the depiction of women in literary texts such as plays, it is important to highlight some of the most prominent terms in order to facilitate an understanding by the reader as to how the discussion develops. The following terms are defined hereunder: culture, values, stereotypes, gender, patriarchy, and feminism.

1.7.1. Culture

Culture is an integral part of every society that encompasses the different behavioural traits and norms that its members carry and practice and may be in the form of feelings and expressions that have been learnt all throughout their lives; inherited customs that have been passed down from one generation to another. Hofstede (as cited in Peter, 2010, p. 13) defines culture as follows:

Culture is always a collective phenomenon, because it is at least partly shared with people who live within the same social environment which is where it is learned. It is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another.

The Oxford Advanced learner's Dictionary (1991, p. 291) defines culture as "Customs, arts, social institutions, etc. of a particular group or people." From these two definitions, one could therefore safely conclude that the culture of a people or group is not something inherent or inborn, rather it is learnt within the environment of one's upbringing. There is also a broad spectrum of preferences of individual societies since some may not be known by societies that are supposed to observe them. The emphasis here should thus be that there also exist subcultures

such as those of men, women, etc. And these, in the context of this study, explain why women characters are depicted as subordinate by male writers as they are a result of patriarchal culture.

1.7.2. Values

Values are constituted in the practice of culture. These are the qualities that society attaches to their behavioural norms. Peter (2010, p. 14) claims that “values are abstract evaluations shared by members of a society.” The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (1991) defines values as morals or standards which a group or profession ascribes to such as behaviour or deeds. Lyle et al. (as cited in Peter, 2010) state that values dictate how a group or society should behave, and identify what is acceptable to their belief system.

Adler (2013) avows that values may be understood as absolutes, inherent within objects that are present in human beings and relate to their behaviour and conduct. Adler thus mentions four types of values: Type A, which refers to those existing in the mind of God as absolutes; Type B, which are considered to be found in material or non-material objects; Type C, are values originating in man’s biological needs and minds such as those reflected in societal, cultural, group values, and; Type D values which are those that refer to actions. The types of values relevant for this discussion are those referred to as Type C values.

From the above, it should therefore be understood in the context of this study that values as ascribed by culture will determine how men or women may be perceived by the members in their group such as having low morals, being gossips, etc.

1.7.3. Gender

Some people use the term gender and sex interchangeably; however, the two are distinct terms. The National Gender Study Volume 1 (2000, p. 1) provides the following definition: “Gender is a social construct that denotes cultural and social differences between men and women as opposed to biological differences.” Geetha (as cited in Ray, 2013, p. 1) states gender to be “considered a social construction – it grants meaning to the fact of sex. Conversely, it could be said that only after specific meanings came to be attached to the sexes, did sex differences become pertinent.”

Cherry (2013) posits that gender refers to an individual’s sexual identity, regardless of the person’s biological sex. Cherry goes on to say that people’s definition of masculinity or femininity varies within the context of an individual’s culture or background. Gender as a term should therefore be understood as a man – made construct referring to socially – defined and accepted gender – assigned roles according to a patriarchal society.

Peter (2010, p. 16) says “Gender is, in most cases, characterised by unequal power which sometimes assigns specific entitlements and responsibilities to men only.” In relation to this study, the term *gender* should closely relate to stereotyping of others (females) as a means to lower their social standing.

1.7.4. Stereotypes

Nittle (2013, p. 1) asserts that “stereotypes are characteristics ascribed to groups of people involving gender, race, national origin, and social factors. These characteristics tend to be oversimplifications of the groups involved, however.” In other words, a stereotype according to the above definition infers that stereotypes in most cases carry a negative connotation.

According to Peter (2010), stereotypes compromise social and psychological identities of members of a group in relation to where they fall or belong. It is thus through such stereotypes that this study looks at the labels women are given, which are in most cases negative and create psychological effects on women.

1.7.5. Patriarchy

Patriarchy is a term that is associated with male dominance in social structures. Peter (2010, p. 16) asserts thus: “Patriarchy shows that men have social power in every important structure of society and that women do not have any real access to such structure.” Hooks (2013, p. 1) adds: “Patriarchy is a political – social system that insists that males are inherently dominating, superior to everything and everyone deemed weak, especially females.” As both definitions infer that patriarchy is a system put in place by males in order to dominate over females, it should be understood that it is an interpretation based on feminist perspectives.

In *A Historical Approach to Patriarchy* where the literal meaning of patriarchy is defined by Marshal (as cited in Alavi, 2013, p. 3) as “rule of the father, the term was originally used to describe social systems based on the authority of male heads of household.”

Ritz (as cited in Alavi, 2013, p. 5) elaborates on patriarchy:

The relational basis for women's subordination lies in the family, an institution aptly named from the Latin word for servant, because the family as it exists in complex societies is overwhelmingly a system of dominant and subordinate roles. Key features of the family in Western societies are that it centres on a mating pair and its offspring, typically located within a single household; it is patrilineal with descent and property passing through the male line, patriarchal, with authority invested in the male household and monogamous at least in the enforcement of the rule that the wife has sexual relations only with her husband. The double standards allow men far greater freedom. Within such an institution, particularly when, as in the middle class family, the woman has no job outside the house and any economic independence, women are in fact the chattels or possessions of their husbands.

Based on the above quote from Alavi (2013), one should therefore understand that patriarchy as a political, or a social institution is designed to entrench oppression or dominance of women by men. Patriarchy should thus be understood as a system that puts males in a dominant position. This often relegates women to social classes or positions where they have no influential power equal to men in society.

1.7.6. Feminism

Feminism is a philosophy that seeks to redress the injustices and imbalances that feminists believe women undergo at the hands of a patriarchal society. Alavi (2013, p. 4) posits that based on the notes obtained from Karl Marx in the years shortly before his death: "Women's subordination results not from her biology, which is presumably immutable, but from social arrangements that have a clear and traceable history, arrangements that presumably may be

changed.” This, Alavi states, is the central argument of feminists in order to address the issue of their oppressed position.

In literature, feminists question the representation of female characters in works written by male authors. Belsey and Moore (1997, p. 1) state that “The feminist reader might ask, among other questions, how the text represents women, what it says about gender relations, how it defines sexual differences.” Using this quote, one could therefore understand that feminism is not a philosophy that it may sound radical to be like in the layman’s ear, though there is a subtype of radical feminism as will be discussed in Chapter 2, but rather it is a philosophy that tries to redress the oppression and discrimination that women face.

According to Ray (2013, p. 4):

Feminism is an awareness of patriarchal control, exploitation and oppression at the material and ideological levels of women’s labour, fertility and sexuality, in the family, at the place of work and in society in general, and conscious action by women and men to transform the present situation.

It is a movement that calls for the equal treatment of both men and women in all spheres of life.

Kramarae and Treichler (as cited in Peter 2010, p. 18) define feminism as:

A movement seeking the reorganization of the world upon a basis of gender equality in all human relations; a movement which would reject every differentiation between individuals upon the grounds of gender, that would abolish all gender privileges and burdens.

Based on the above, it should therefore be understood that feminism is a movement that seeks to redress the unequal distribution of social and political responsibilities between men and women.

1.8. Organisation of the study

This study consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 gives the introduction of this study; orientation of the study; statement of the problem; significance of the study; limitations of the study; and definition of terms used in the study. Chapter 2 provides the literature review and theoretical framework where the feminist literary theory and the sub disciplines of feminism are discussed. Among the sub disciplines discussed are: Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, Marxist feminism, and African feminism. Chapter 3 gives the research methodology employed for the study. In Chapter 4, the portrayal of women in *God of Women* and the portrayal of women in *Othello* and discussion are elaborated following a summary of both plays. Finally, Chapter 5 contains the conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a look at the broad knowledge of literature that has been produced on the topic under research. It may be established, though, that there is a vast amount of work done on the topic under study, but still one would use literature review to identify gaps that may have been overlooked by previous studies. This chapter consists of two main sections – one is on the various depictions of women in literature preceded by an introduction looking at how women were treated in early societies of both the African and European cultures. The other section comprises a discussion on the Feminist literary theory, Feminism and its sub - disciplines which will enable the reader to understand the development of the discussion in this thesis. The purpose of this discussion is as Peter (2010, p. 22) puts it, “to use the necessary literary theories as a means for analysis in order to facilitate the practical reading of the contexts, and also to assist in revealing the true meaning of the literary texts.”

Culler (as cited in Peter, 2010, p. 22) declares: “literary theories are used not only for enriching and deepening the understanding of the research work, but also to assist in demonstrating the new approach to literary analysis.” This “new” approach has been around for some time, and it is this literary analysis that I used in analysing the depiction of women characters in Nyathi’s *God of Women* (1995) and Shakespeare’s *Othello* (1993).

2.2. How women were treated in early societies of both the African and European cultures

This section examines the treatment of women in early societies and it was found to be relevant on the grounds of providing the reader with some idea as to whether the depictions of women in literature written by males is resultant of culture inherited from previous generations. It is possible to understand that writers of literature draw inspiration to write from the environment that surrounds them.

2.2.1. Treatment of women in early African cultures

African women are said to have been accorded great respect in pre – colonial Africa. African Women in African Civilisation (2007, p.2) states that in ancient Egypt, women were respected for their role as mothers and as such the children born to them took their mothers' surname. Women also had the authority over the households and crop fields. The respect women received led the societies they lived in to be matrilineal, thus resulting in them performing great functions and possessing great power. This is said to have changed with the advent of the early invasions by foreign settlers of European (African Women in African Civilisation 2007, p. 2).

In regard to matrimonial matters, in pre – colonial Africa, Msafropolitan (2013) states that a bride price was paid for the women in exchange for marriage. This bride price gave women some economic leverage as it was kept by the women to support them. Msafropolitan (2013) said, however, that when colonialism set in with capitalist men at the helm, the wealth and power women had possessed eroded. African Women in African Civilisation (2007) state this happened because of the heavy tax system that colonialists exacted from the male members of the colonies they controlled. The men and husbands therefore had to use women's and wives' bride wealth in

order to pay the taxes exacted on them by the colonial administrations. As such, women started losing control of the economy, their wealth, and their power with respect to men.

Okome (2013) reports on Nigerian women and discrimination, that in pre – colonial Nigeria, men’s and women’s social functions were not defined by discriminatory practices but by gender roles. It is said that being male did not determine a superior status to a female within a family. What mattered in Yorub culture was seniority where older sisters outranked junior brothers.

The Yorub culture that protected and respected the position of women within their society started eroding with the arrival of Western colonialists into Africa. These people came with Victorian influences which relegated women to the confines of the household. As a result, African men slowly emulated what they saw from the foreigners as benefitting them and thus took over the privileged position of the public sphere where they held positions of power while the women were confined to household duty.

Within the Lozi culture, which has similar cultural characteristics as those from the region Nyathi originates, Swanson (2013) says the salient aspect is that of division of labour within the family. A predominantly subsistence society, their division of labour was determined according to gender. Men were largely responsible for livestock, hunting, fishing, and labour – intensive agricultural tasks, while the women performed domestic chores, agricultural production, and collected wild foods. Women possessed their own tracts of crop fields which they tended, enabling them to provide sustenance for their families. Polygamy was also practiced by choice and where such was done; the women procured their own food supplies and also received a share from the husband’s produce.

The Lozi men according to Swanson (2013), had many sexual partners in their lifetime, and although divorce was discouraged, it was practiced. Swanson further states that the Lozis were a patrilineal society where men held political and administrative authority. This by inference interprets that the women within this society were excluded from systems of administration and were thus responsible for the household.

2.2.2. Treatment of women in early European cultures

Women in the early European cultures received treatment that is worse than that of their African counterparts at the hands of their society. In Medieval English times, History Learning Site (2013) reports that women had little or no 'say' within the socio – political administration of their societies. Women were regarded as inferior to men and as such, were subject to beatings if they disobeyed men within the family. Indeed women were in a situation of bondage. Their primary role was to tend to domestic chores coupled with manual paid work as per societal dictates, which limited their freedom. Where they were employed in paid jobs undertaking equal work with men, women received far less wages than their men counterparts.

In the Elizabethan era, women of both the upper and lower class were discriminated against by the patriarchal English society (Elizabethan Women, 2013). They had no other choice than to be dependent on their male relatives for support, where marriages of convenience were arranged for them as a way for their families to form alliances with influential persons within society. Women were taught to be subservient and were raised to believe they were inferior to men.

In regard to education during this period, Elizabethan Women (2013) states that women from the upper class could attend home schooling from the age of five, and were later sent off to relatives who taught them subjects that emphasised good manners and social graces. This was a way of

training the upper class girls to be married in luxury to persons of social or political influence. Women of the lower classes however, were instead taught to obey men, even family members. They were also groomed for domestic chores so as to prepare for their own home and family when they would later be married. These women would not attend school. As all Victorian women were expected to be married, those who remained single were considered witches. Appearance was also emphasised in Victorian women; they were compelled to use face powder in order to look beautiful and attractive for their husbands, as they had to bear many children for their husbands. The child – bearing practice instead made them age quickly and thus the need to maintain their beauty.

The article *Victorian Women: The Gender of Oppression* (2003) states that the Victorian era seemed to be the period that entrenched woman into an ever worse subservient role. During the period between 1837 and 1901, what was termed the ideology of spheres was coined so as to define the different functions of men and women within society; indeed, women were assigned a position that completely removed them from the public domain. Their position was thus pronounced to be in the home where they were limited to being wives and mothers to their husbands' children. By law women had to cede all their possessions, including their identity to their husbands upon marriage. Women in the Victorian era were thus seen predominantly as vehicles for producing children for their husbands, making the homes for them, and also to be available to quench their husbands' sexual desires. Those women who could not marry were shunned.

2.3. How women are depicted in African literature

Women are found to be depicted negatively in some African literature. Mutiso (as cited in Machaba 2011, p. 12) for example says women in African literature are among others portrayed as city dwellers with loose morals. These women are in most cases depicted as prostitutes who make a living in the city by selling their bodies. Nyathi in *The Other Presence* (2008) writes about Kachana, a woman character who is depicted as of loose morals. Kachana is known to drink excessively and keeps company with men, unlike her female counterparts who restrict their company to women. This portrayal demeans women, as the author does not make mention of the men who keep Kachana company as being equally bad or unbecoming as they were also supposed to take the blame for being in each other's company.

Soyinka (1963), in his satirical play, *The Lion and the Jewel* shows a caring attitude for women in the approach used by Lakunle (a school teacher), who is courting Sidi (a beautiful village girl). Lakunle regards Sidi as his princess, does not want her carry heavy loads, typical of the African woman, more for her protection from weights that could cause a physical deformity to her body structure from the repeated carrying of heavy objects such as carrying buckets of water on her head, as is common in rural and poor African settlements. Soyinka (1963, p. 2) shows Lakunle reproaching Sidi:

No. I told you not to carry loads

On your head. But you are stubborn

As an illiterate goat. It is bad for your spine.

And it shortens your neck, so that very soon

You will have no neck at all. Do you wish to look

Squashed like my pupils' drawings?

Though Lakunle may have had good intentions in his speech to Sidi, but careful analysis of the utterance first puts Lakunle in a position of someone lacking scientific knowledge. It is so as heavy loads carried by women on their heads have not been evidenced anywhere to push the neck inwards. The statement also infers that Soyinka is instead sarcastic where it is suggested that women are ignorant and lack foresight that they cannot recognise good intentions meant for their benefit. The rest of the conversation, however, instead shows how difficult it is to convince Sidi due to her ignorance because she, like other women in her setting, is used to carrying buckets of water on her head. What Sidi does instead is to scorn Lakunle by repeating the words he promised her of his undying love for her irrespective of the physical deformities she may experience:

Why should that worry me? Haven't you sworn?

That my looks do not affect your love?

Yesterday, dragging your knees in the dust

You said, Sidi, if you were crooked or fat,

And your skin was scaly, like a . . . (Soyinka, p. 2)

It is only after careful interpretation that one could conclude that Soyinka is portraying the stereotype of women in Africa labelled as being selfish or ignorant even in regard to issues that

concern their welfare. Lakunle in Soyinka (1963) is shown to regard women as having smaller brains through his reference to Sidi when Lakunle states:

Please, don't be angry with me.

I didn't mean you in particular.

And anyway, it isn't what I say.

The scientists have proved it. It's in my books.

Women have a smaller brain than men

That's why they are called the weaker sex (Soyinka, 1963, p. 4)

The above portrayal of women in *The Lion and the Jewel* (Soyinka) is in contrast with the assertion that Machaba (2011, p. 13) uses of Jones that writers like Soyinka, among others, depict women for who they are such as their resourcefulness, determination, and resilience, and that they can break through the barriers imposed by the patriarchal tradition. The above example is demeaning to women when one takes into consideration the choice of language men (Lakunle) use, for example "illiterate goat" and "women have a smaller brain than men" in reference to women. The use of figurative language carries a strong connotation in instilling the patriarchal stereotyping of women in literature.

After being warned about the intentions of the elderly chief of the village, Sidi went ahead and challenged the chief after she had featured in a magazine as a model. Through Sidi, Soyinka portrays women as actually stupid or ignorant. Sidi had been warned that the chief wanted to marry her all for the sake of using her as a sex object. She instead defied all advice and went on to dine with the chief. She later ended up having sex with him after she had been warned of his

intentions. Could one thus conclude that it is Sidi who voluntarily makes herself victim to the chief or is it another of male writing that shows the shallow mindedness of women in literature? Obviously, Sidi, after winning such acclaim as a model, should have heeded the advice from her suitor, Lakunle, and use the opportunity to defy what is seen as using women as sex objects. She instead makes herself a willing victim.

Similar situations on the negative portrayal of women characters are present in *The Oracle of Cidino* (2003), another play by Nyathi. A girl is nearly raped by a village boy and she reports the incident of attempted rape to the elders. She is instead accused by the King of having seduced the boy. The King accusingly says to Mbeha, the girl's father:

Mbeha, I find your daughter guilty of the following felony. She deliberately wore that rag to expose her lavish forbidden part of herself. That is seduction, which is worse a crime than the reaction of the young man (pointing at the boy). I know the extent a woman can go to create trouble for a man. She is guilty. (Nyathi 2003, p. 5)

This representation is in contradiction to what the innocent girl and victim sees as a violation of her rights in choosing what to wear, or freedom of expression. In other words, the author (Nyathi) could be understood as insinuating that women's dress code as in the case of the girl, encourages men to rape them or sexually molest them. This same scenario could also be perceived as evidenced in Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* (1963, pp. 2 – 3) when Lakunle admonishes Sidi on her dressing which he sees as being naked as the dress does not cover her shoulders.

In his satirical comedy the *Blinkards*, Sekyi (1974) provides another example of an African author who depicts women characters negatively. Sekyi uses Mrs Brof to portray how women abandon their own cultures after being exposed to a foreign one. The characterisation of Mrs Brof is so negative that she even forces her husband to behave “English.” However, Sekyi, inclined to demonstrate how weak women are at adopting foreign mannerisms, shows Mr Brof regretting the first time his wife ever set foot in England due to the disorder this brought into his life. Sekyi (1974, p. 21) shows Mr Brof complaining:

I heartily curse the day my wife decided England
 for a while. Ever since then, I have nothing but *we*
must do, because it is done in England, *we musn't* do
 that because it is not done by English people and so on *ad*
nauseam

To be sure, this is a negative portrayal of women by Sekyi. The author goes on to illustrate Mr Brof as a resolute man representing the rigidity of men and their resistance to abandon their old and accustomed ways of life, unlike women. Sekyi (1974, p. 23 – 24) demonstrates Mr Brof's further complaints:

It serves us
 jolly well for allowing ourselves to be dazzled by all this
 flimsy foreign flippery.
 The worst of it is that some of us got into

these foreign ways through no fault of our own. We were
born into a world of imitators, worse luck, ... and blind
imitators.

In the above excerpt, we observe the author satirically playing husband and wife against each other. Mrs Brof is seen as a modern woman who adapts to the changing world. She is used to portray the type of woman who can manipulate a man to become what his wife would have him be. However, this is done through a negative portrayal of how powerful a woman can be to mould a man according to her will. This is one of the portrayals of women characters by male authors in Medieval literature of Europe as will be discussed in the portrayal of women characters in Western literature. By contrast, the author then demonstrates the steadfastness of men to not easily waver or be corrupted by controlling women. The portrayal is positive for men as is seen in Mr Brof who is refusing to accept the English mannerisms as is noticeable in his complaint above.

Mr Ony is another character who is juxtaposed with Mrs Brof's lifestyle of abandoning one's culture. Though the former has also been schooled and exposed to English culture, he refuses to completely abandon his African culture. This juxtaposition is seen when Mrs Brof pays Mr Ony a visit. While discussing issues, Mrs Brof wishes the Ghanaian girls could take waitressing jobs serving the wealthy and famous of Ghana as she saw in Western restaurants. Mr Ony, on the other hand, thinks it would be better if they kept to domestic chores like cooking instead.

The two characters both feel they are intending well for the womenfolk of Ghana, but the author is trying to show weaknesses of both men and women. While Mrs Brof sees waitressing as better than a life of debauchery where young ladies work on the streets, Mr Ony sees it as exploitation

of the poor by the rich. Yet he suggests domestic chores for the girls – an age old, entrenched patriarchal notion that a woman's place is in the kitchen.

In the preceding paragraphs, literature has showed how African male writers can write in a manner depicting women characters negatively.

2.4. How women are depicted in Western literature

This study analyses how women are depicted in the plays *God of Women* (Nyathi) and *Othello* (Shakespeare). Neha (2013) states that women in British literature were depicted in stereotypes that suited men's superiority over them, stemming from the Anglo- Saxon period and continuing through to the Renaissance period. Neha says that among the common stereotypes, women were depicted as sweet heroines; weak, deceitful, flirtatious, and immoral to extent that they have been associated with the downfall of great men in history such as King Solomon, Samson, and David, to mention a few from the Bible.

Lawrence (2013, p. 1) declares: "Women are often the subject of literary works, seen as an object to behold or an earthly link to God, however, in the works of early British literature, the image of women ranged from political peacekeeper to anti-beauty." Lawrence continues to say that the importance of female characters in literature goes beyond physical beauty and sexuality, and shows women as symbols of power, strength, and godliness personified. This statement suggests that women characters have formed an integral part of characterisation by male writers from Beowulf to Shakespeare.

Lawrence (2013) continues to shed light on how women characters have been used in male writings. She explains that, throughout the Middle Ages, women's characters were used as the instruments to illustrate how superficiality and wicked temptation lead to men's downfall.

Examples of this are the works of male writers such as Christopher Marlowe's *Faustus* and Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (1993) is another literary work that depicts women characters negatively. The three witches who keep tricking Macbeth are, in the first place, women. Their characterisation is that of evil and power through sorcery. This shows how women are portrayed as evil conjurers. Shakespeare uses the character of Lady Macbeth to portray the hunger for power in women. Macbeth is depicted as content with his position, until his wife starts to encourage him to rise to power, through the odious means of murder. With this, Shakespeare meant to illustrate how a man can be provoked to commit the most evil of crimes at the behest of a woman, when he is in love with her.

In an article by Kent (2013) that focuses on women in Florence during the Renaissance period, the author states that art historians had reassessed the representation of women by male writers and artists of the renaissance period and found that the negative depictions men used were done to put men in privileged positions over women. One would thus conclude that the culture that was practiced then looked at women as belonging to the domestic setting and not in a socio – political setup.

In the play *Women Beware* by Middleton (1995), the author seems to have centred more on love and deceit. Middleton, who wrote in the Jacobean Era, used the characters of Bianca and Livia to portray women who are looking for love and attention. Bianca, a young Florentine maid marries Leantio after she runs away from a wealthy home where she was to enter a forced marriage. One would therefore conclude that this was typical of Florentine society where husbands had to be approved and marriages arranged for the daughters as is depicted in Shakespeare's *Merchant of*

Venice, when Portia's father prepares three caskets to decide who marries her. Bianca returns to Florence with a husband following her self-imposed exile, but subsequently leaves him for the Duke. In Act II Scene II, Middleton depicts Bianca and the Duke meeting, where the Duke proposes marriage to her. She at first says the Duke's proposal is late as she is already a married woman. She is depicted however as trembling with love for the Duke who has promised her a life of luxury if she marries him:

But I give better in exchange: wealth, honour.

She that is fortunate in a duke's favour

Lights on a tree that bears women's wishes (Middleton 1995, p. 49)

What the author depicts in women infers that they are materialistic and are more easily attracted to wealth than true love. Livia is another woman whose depiction by Middleton (1995) portrays unhappy women who are wealthy but lead solitary and unsatisfying lives. These women use their wealth in order to seduce men to marry them in the hope of finding happiness. Livia who is widowed and left with wealth lives a lonely life. She uses the wealth to buy love to satisfy her material or sexual desires. This weakness is clearly illustrated through Livia's character in Act III Scene II when she makes her intentions known to Leantio:

Nay, a gentlewoman, and one able

To reward good things, ay, and bears a conscience to't.

Could'st thou love such a one, that – blow all fortunes –

Would never see thee want?

Nay more, maintain thee to thine enemy's envy?

And shalt not spend a care for't, stir a thought,

Nor break a sleep, unless love's music waked thee; (Middleton 1995, p. 78)

In his portrayal of women the characters of Bianca and Livia above, the author shows that women were either materialistic or became weak-minded when exposed to wealth, that they could be inferred to become engrossed with material issues such as sex and wealth. In turn, the power of this wealth has turned Bianca into easy prey to satisfy a man's sexual pleasure (the Duke). Livia, on the other hand, at her age uses wealth to buy sexual gratification from dejected Leantio who was abandoned by a wife who followed wealth rather than love.

The Romantic age, the period identified as the first third of the eighteenth century, has poets who gave praises to the beauty of women. Among them is William Wordsworth who sings praises of his wife in his poem. The qualities of beauty are emphasised in the poem *She was a Phantom of Delight*:

She was a phantom of delight

When first she gleaned upon my sight

A lovely apparition, sent

To be a moment's ornament;

Her eyes as stars of twilight fair;

Like twilight's, too, her dusky hair;

But all things else about her drawn;

From Maytime and the cheerful dawn;

A dancing shape, an image gay,

To haunt, to startle, and waylay

(Connolly, Richard, Marie Theresa and Anna Mercedes, 1961, p. 350)

In the above poem, Wordsworth depicts his wife as beautiful and serene. An almost similar poem praising women is from Robert Louis Stevenson who also praises his wife:

Trusty, dusky, vivid, true,

With eyes of gold and bramble – dew,

Steel – true and blade – straight,

The great artificer

Made my mate.

The two poets show that not all male writers have a negative portrayal of women characters in their works. Some male writers have a positive attitude to portray women characters in an objective manner. They did not look at women as objects of sexual gratification or as weak members of society, but as people who were worth adoring and praising for the beauty in appearance as well as the qualities they exude.

The Victorian era shows Thomas Hardy depicting women as dependent on men for love and affection. In a short story, *Tony Kytes, The Arch deceiver*, Tony is attracted to three women who he gives a ride in his wagon. When he gives a lift to Unity, his former lover, she is despondent toward him over being left for another and implores Tony as to why he had left her for Milly. As if looks were the prime determining factor in a relationship, Unity asks Tony, “Why did you desert me for that other one? In what is she better than I?” (Allingham, 2013, p.4). Hardy is revealing the insecure side of women who react despondently because they feel inferior when left by a man for another woman. Through the characterisation of Unity, the author illustrates women’s dependency on men for emotional fulfilment. Unity is the embodiment of women who must concern themselves with their appearance in order to remain “competitive.” Unity agrees to hide under the tarpaulin after Tony says that he does not want his Milly to see him riding with her seated next to him. He tricks her into believing that it was a request to avoid an embarrassing scenario, suggesting that Milly could resort to attacking Unity, or both. Poor Unity, probably out of false hope that Tony may take her back as a lover, she agrees and hides under the tarpaulin, unsuspectingly making space for Milly. After Milly embarks on the couch, Tony sees Hannah, and he asks Milly to hide from Hannah as he had asked Unity earlier.

Instead of showing Tony as a selfish man who is fooled by the beauty of the women he has proposed to and fails to decide on whom to marry, the author gives a portrayal of the three women as so attracted to Tony that they feel their lives revolve around him. The two first women who went under the tarpaulin could have asked exactly what he was hiding from when he instructed they hide and obeyed without curiosity. The portrayal is of women who can be so unsuspectingly submissive even in situations where they should sense deceit very easily.

2.5. The Feminist Literary Theory

The Feminist literary theory is an important tool used in analysing literary texts in order to ascertain the way women characters are featured in such texts. The purpose of this discussion looking at Feminist literary theory according to Peter (2010, p. 22), is “to use the necessary literary theories as a means for analysis in order to facilitate the practical reading of the contexts and also to assist in revealing the true meaning of the literary texts.” Culler (as cited in Peter, 2010, p. 22) says “literary theories are used not only for enriching and deepening the understanding of the research work, but also to assist in demonstrating the new approach to literary analysis.”

Based on the above explanations, the feminist literary theory should therefore be understood as a theory very well suited to use in analysing and critiquing literature in order to determine how women characters are portrayed in such literature irrespective of by who it is written.

2.6. The Feminist theory

Followers of the Feminist Theory are called feminists. According to them “there is no innocent or neutral approach to literature: all interpretation is political” (Belsey and Moore, 1997, p. 1). Feminists look at issues that deal with male / female relations through feminist lenses and interpret them with political reasoning.

The Feminist Theory was born in the belief of having social, political and economic equality among males and females. Lord, Greiter and Turnunovic (2013) posit that the Feminist Theory is part of the movement aimed at empowering women worldwide. They define feminism as a

recognition and critique of male supremacy combined with efforts to change it and bring about equality between men and women in all spheres of life.

According to Lord, Greiter and Tursunovic (2013), the feminist movement originates in the abolitionist movement of the 1830's in America which focused on the social, civil, and religious conditions of women in America. Showalter (1986, p. 5) says that both feminist criticism and feminist theory in the United States was started by literate women and women academics who took part in the women's liberation movement of the 1960s. Showalter (p. 5) continues:

In its earliest years, feminist criticism concentrated on exposing the misogyny of literary practice: the stereotyped images of women in literature as angels or monsters, the literary abuse or textual harassment of women in classic and popular male literature, and the exclusion of women from literary history.

This feminist movement or criticism of the 1960s was so strong and had a strong influence over women that it leads to different sub – disciplines of feminism. Ray (2013, p. 4) says that as a theory, feminism focuses its struggle on the fight to achieve among many others, equality, dignity, rights of women to have a control over all spheres of their lives, and equal access to resources.

There is, however, a debate over whether there is a universally accepted definition of feminism. Machaba (2011, p. 17) in her doctoral thesis, writes, “There is a lack of a universally accepted definition for feminism which forms the basis of all women's studies.” Evans (as cited in Machaba, p. 10) writes on the lack of a uniform definition of feminism in an attempt to analyse the term “feminist literary criticism”:

I shall not begin, as I probably should, by offering to define my terms. Instead I shall acknowledge that I have brought three concepts admitted on all sides to be well – nigh indefinable. Or if they are definable, they are so only by references to a particular thinker's usage.

Based on the people's perceptions regarding feminism, some people have created their own definitions to suit their needs. Hence, feminism has different branches or sub – disciplines.

2.6.1. Liberal Feminism

Bryson (as cited in Machaba, 1994, p. 21) states that liberal theories arose during the 17th century when individuals wanted to have a right to own property, sell their labour and go about their lives within a legal framework that protected them from interference by governments or other individuals. However, it is claimed that women were excluded from these rights on the assumption that mentally, they were not fully developed due to their biology.

Women did not leave this assertion unchallenged, and argued that their mental faculties were equal to those of their male counterparts. This led to the formation of the feminist movement that advocated for social, economic and political equality of both men and women. This movement recognises Abigail Adams and Mary Wollstonecraft as proponents who were propounding the equality of women and women in America. Liberal feminism therefore focuses its concern on the individual autonomy, rights, liberty, independence, and diversity for both males and females, though these are primarily female oriented. It is further said that Liberal feminists tend to include men in the struggle regarding the barriers both male and female face as a result of their gender.

2.6.2. Radical Feminism

This theory, according to Machaba (1994, pp. 22) argues that women have been oppressed through history and therefore want a reverse order in which they seek autonomy in areas of sexuality and procreation. Machaba cites Ashton and Whitting (1987) who say they rebel against what they refer to as “forced motherhood” and “sexual slavery.” According to Machaba, Radical feminists believe all the social ills they experience are a direct result of male oppression. They therefore claim to have the same rights and freedoms as men in all spheres of life.

Radical feminism has been referred to as revolutionary in intention thus leading to the rising of different ideas that arose from feminism. Radical feminists view all forms of oppression against women of all races, cultures and economic class as unjust. The prime focus of Radical feminism is to do away with the discrimination between men and women based on gender, and biologically and culturally determined behaviours, as they question why women must adopt certain roles based on their biological makeup.

2.6.3. Marxist Feminism

Marxist feminists believe that women are oppressed as a result of the capitalist system which excludes women from mainstream economic opportunities, and look at the gendered differences between men and women as a result of the economic drive in a capitalistic society. Clarke (2013) says that Marxist feminists use the Marx base of society to argue against the gender differences and believe that women are denied equal opportunities because of the patriarchal society that was only interested to use women for their labour in the means of production while they owned the other means of production.

Clarke (2013) therefore says that Marxist feminists advocate that in order to eliminate the discrimination and gender oppression they face, there should be a change in the economic base so as to allow for equal opportunities for men and women in the economy of any society.

In literary criticism, Marxist feminists focus on how male writers depict women characters in their works. Clarke (2013, p. 3) says there are two extremes in which women characters should fall when portrayed by male writers: sinner / whore and saint / virgin.

2.6.4. African Feminism

African feminism is understood as a sub – discipline of the mainstream feminist movement; however, what African feminism advocates for is somewhat different. Steady (as cited in Megwe, 2008, p. 16) defines African feminism as a movement “emphasising female autonomy and corporation: nature over culture; the centrality of children, multiple mothering, and kinship.” What Steady says with this definition is that African feminism does not fight against men per se, but advocates for equality between men and women within society. African feminism says it wants cooperation with men and needs men in the fight against discriminatory patriarchal practices.

Megwe (2008, p. 17) emphasises that African feminism is not a movement that fights or opposes men, but needs men and so challenges the men to be cognisant of the different forms of subjugation the African woman goes through as a result of the patriarchal culture. African feminism supports the fight against colonial and racial oppression of African people. The advocates of African feminism thus express the sentiment that though they may be female and see the flaws African culture exposes them to, they do not support the stance of western feminism which would distance them from their African customs.

MAfropolitan (2013) states, in a debate, that feminism can be seen as African, and that yes, it is a result of the global feminist consensus. African feminism should thus be seen to address issues affecting African women. Among such issues which African feminists are concerned with are domestic imbalance and gender roles, poverty reduction, violence against women, and health and reproductive rights which affect the African woman.

2.6.5. Black Feminism

Black feminism is another of the sub – disciplines of feminism. Black feminism is a movement that grew in the United States of America. Black American women felt they were racially oppressed by the other women in the Women’s movement, and also sexually oppressed by fellow blacks in the Black Liberation Movement. Black women felt discriminated in both worlds as when referring to “black” it was felt as though one was referring to black men in politics, and “woman” also was felt as though one was referring to white women. It is thus on this basis that the Black Feminists emerged.

The black Feminist Movement was formed with the belief that black women were outrageous, audacious, and courageous, loved other women, appreciated women’s culture and strength, and were committed to the survival and equality of all people, regardless whether they were male or female. For the feminist readership, one should therefore understand that Black Feminism fought against the discrimination that black women faced both from the Black Liberation Movement and from the Women’s Movement in the United States of America.

In her paper on *Black Feminist Thought*, Collins (2013) says that there is power in the Black Feminist movement to act as agents of knowledge to improve the conditions of Afrocentricism and feminism. Black Feminists are critical of how black culture has for long oppressed women.

Conditions that Black feminists fight to address include early motherhood among adolescent girls, emotional and physical abuse that Black women experience from their families and spouses, as well as concerns over working double shifts, which is employment in the home followed by domestic work in the home.

2.7. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed some of the portrayals of women characters in literature as authored by men. Texts in both African and Western literature were reviewed using the feminist literary theory to arrive at the portrayal of women characters in the male authored literature. Based on the literature reviewed, not all male authors depict women characters negatively in order to promote their superior patriarchal ego. Some authors portrayed women characters as they see them. This chapter has also discussed the feminist theory and some of its sub – disciplines, namely Liberal feminism, Radical feminism, Marxist feminism, Black American feminism, and African feminism. The differences in ideology and approach of each of the sub – disciplines have also been discussed.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

This chapter describes the research approach undertaken for this study. Research is defined as a scientific way of collecting information for scientific or study purposes. Bless and Higson – Smith (1995, p. 12) state: “Scientific research can be defined as the translation into practice of the relationship between facts and theory and the endeavour of acquiring knowledge.” This chapter therefore posits that all work that is scientifically organised to produce results on a study is considered research. This study adopts the qualitative research approach which is one that does not involve the use of questionnaires.

3.2. Research Design

In this study, the qualitative, desk top comparative research method was used where the plays *God of Women* (Nyathi) and *Othello* (Shakespeare) were analysed. Since it is a desk top based study, no field work was involved.

3.3 Population

Bless and Higson – Smith (1995, p. 85) explain population thus: “The entire set of objects and events or groups of people which is the object of research and about which the researcher wants to determine some characteristics.” In this study, the population was the tragedies written by Nyathi and Shakespeare.

3.4. Sample

Research on a population is a cumbersome and lengthy process. Therefore, in order to conduct research properly, scientists use the sampling method. According to Bless and Higson – Smith (1995), a sample is a portion of the total group earmarked for research as it is representative of the total area under study. In this study, the two plays, *God of Women* (1995) by Nyathi and *Othello* (1993) by Shakespeare form the sample.

3.5. Procedure

Since the study is based on critical reading of literary works related to the topic, the data were collected through reading the selected plays, *God of Women* (1995) and *Othello* (1993). The literary analysis was based on the feminist literary theory in order to interpret the depictions of women characters as portrayed in the two plays. The feminist theory focuses, among other aspects, on issues that relate to analysing women's status in society with a view to improving their position.

Content analysis was used as an approach to the study of the two plays, *God of Women* and *Othello*. Content analysis is broadly defined thus: “A technique for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages” (Holsti as cited in Stemler, 2001, p. 1).

Berelson (2013, p. 1) defines content analysis as “a research technique for the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest content of communications.” Berelson (2013, p. 1) elaborates that content analysis “is used to determine the presence of certain words,

concepts, themes, phrases, characters, or sentences within texts and to quantify this presence in an objective manner.” In this study, content analysis was used to identify portrayals that were pertinent to the research in both *God of Women* and *Othello* in regard to the portrayal of women characters in the two plays.

3.6. Data Analysis

Data analysis is the interpretation of the collected data in a study. The research used content and thematic data analysis of the plays to interpret and analyse the women representations and depictions in order to arrive at the results of the study. The interpretation of data was done by way of the Feminist literary theory. The feminist literary theory is oriented at critiquing the past and male oriented writing in order to expose how men depict women in their works. Conclusions were thus drawn from the interpretations and analysis, as will be presented in narrative form in Chapter 5 of this study.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter has elaborated on the research design of the study. The qualitative desk top comparative study was adopted in comparing the two plays which formed the sample of the study. The population of the study was all the tragedies written by Nyathi and Shakespeare from which the sample of the study *God of Women* (1995) and *Othello* (1993) respectively, were chosen. The procedure followed in the study is also elaborated; and data analysis was conducted by using the feminist literary theory. Ethical considerations of the study were observed by acknowledging all sources consulted and used in the study.

CHAPTER 4

DEPICTION OF WOMEN CHARACTERS IN *GOD OF WOMEN* AND

OTHELLO AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

This chapter focuses on the general perceptions regarding the way women characters are portrayed in the plays *God of Women* by Nyathi, and *Othello* by Shakespeare. This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section studies the depictions of women characters in *God of Women*, the second section examines the portrayal of women characters in *Othello*, and the third section is a discussion.

4.2. Summary of *God of Women*

The play *God of Women* is centred on a polygamous Chief Lewanika who has failed to have the customary heir to his throne, in spite of having his four wives. As a result, he marries one wife after another, adding to his harem in the hope that one of them would finally bear him a son – the heir to his throne.

Chief Lewanika is, however, an abusive husband who is disrespectful to his wives. As his clan is ailing, Chief Lewanika summons the divine service of a seer to find the origin and cause of the curse, and also to cleanse the clan from further affliction. The seer prophesies and reveals that the affliction is caused by lust, which involved father and son eating from the same fruit. The actual translation of the seer's prophecy is that a father and his son within Chief Lewanika's clan had shared the same woman, in other words, had sexual relations with the same woman. His

fourth and youngest wife, Joyce, later announces she is pregnant, but she is confused as to who the father of the unborn is. In a dramatic turn of events with the revelations and fulfilment of the seer's prophecy, Chief Lewanika commits suicide.

4.3. Depiction of women characters in *God of Women*

This section examines the depiction of women characters in *God of Women* as interpreted by the researcher. The discussion is focused on the following:

- Women as easily engaging in sex or used as sex objects;
- Women as exchange material for marriage;
- Women as submissive and voiceless in marriages;
- Women as destitute and objects of punishment / insults;
- Women as homemakers and domestic service providers;
- Women as intelligent and perseverant;
- Women as easily engaging in petty rivalry fights.

4.3.1. Women as easily engaging in sex or used as sex objects

Women are sometimes portrayed as easy going regarding sex. The author has failed to hide the traditional patriarchal mentality of looking at women as “loose” or who easily engage in sexual relations. An opening example is found in Act I Scene I when Chief Lewanika summons a seer to cleanse his clan of a curse that has been persistent. The voice of the ancestors accuses the people of Chief Lewanika of having “danced to the chorus of the owl behind the compound.”

The act of dancing behind the compound is seen as engaging in a secret affair within the village or compound by members of the same community. What one could say here is that people

involved in this sexual affair are of some prominent positions within the clan, even spouses engaging in adulterous or amorous affairs. The author uses this opening scene to infer that the culprit is a woman (Joyce, fourth wife of Chief Lewanika), who is found hugging John behind the compound by Neo, the chief's best friend.

This act suggests that Joyce, though a married woman, is of loose morals and engages in sexual relations with a young man, John. Nyathi (1995) made use of foregrounding as a literary device in Act I Scene I through Neo, who on one of his visits, had suggested to his best friend, Chief Lewanika that the young woman the Chief had married was of loose morals. This foregrounding as literary device worked well as Joyce is later found by Neo hugging John behind the compound fulfilling his and the seer's prophecy. Clearly, this points to Joyce as being responsible for the affliction that the clan is engrossed in. Nyathi, the author, accuses Joyce of the curse through the voice of the seer:

You shall all perish by lust

Lust

Lust

Lust

Lust

Lust, oh seeds of the soil . . . Lust.

Father shall eat with son. Eating with greed the abominable fruit

Of the son. Oh Lust, where do you lead these souls?

(Act I Scene I)

What should be noted here is that, though ‘father and son’ will share the same woman (“abominable fruit”), the one at the receiving end is the woman who slept with both (father and son), yet in reality the father (Chief Lewanika) was given the daughter (Joyce) as a wife by her parents to free them from hunger. The younger woman, Joyce had no choice but to obey cultural practice of the Subiya who practiced arranged marriages, though this should not be regarded as one since it involved Joyce being exchanged for some commodity such as in barter trade.

Joyce did not love the Chief to whom she was forcefully married, and it could also be construed that the Chief also, on the other hand, did not love Joyce. All he wanted was for her to bear him a son as he stated it clearly before his other wives, “In her I shall plant a seed” (Nyathi, 1995, p. 5).

One clear distinction to be observed here is that Joyce could be said to represent a loose woman or prostitute in the eye of the author because of her presumed adulterous affair. She knew that she had been married as per custom to the Chief who paid bride price to her parents and was therefore supposed to abandon all her other love relations (though she may have married unwillingly as an individual) if she had any. She should thus have kept her head level, and behaved as a married woman, especially out of respect for the royal house. But she continued to see her one time lover, John, behind the Chief’s back, and as a result did not know which of the two, was the father of her unborn child.

The Chief, on the other hand, as leader, should take the blame in the first place. It should be so because as a Chief and elderly person who everyone looks up to should be exemplary and not engage in “indiscriminate” sexual relations for personal gain, whether for want of an heir to his throne or sexual gratification, especially with one who was fit to be his own grandchild (minor).

The author, however, depicts the typical patriarchal society that only concerns itself with matters that benefit men over women. It may thus be construed that even if the women knew that they were used as objects, they had no right to refuse or resist. It was regarded to be understood as traditional obligation for the wife to avail herself for sex to her husband, even in situations where she did not wish to have sex for as long as the husband wanted to. The aspect of knowing that women were married for sexual entertainment by Chief Lewanika is expressed in Joyce when she is in conversation with MaInonge in Act I Scene III:

Look, this man does not love me. He just wants a son out of me and
thereafter he will treat me as he treats you. You know very well,

MaInonge that love is not found in the market. (Nyathi 1995, p. 15)

The same line of argument as above would appear to show how women become powerless in matters of sex through the same discussion between Joyce and MaInonge in Act I Scene III. MaInonge confides in Joyce that she does not like the idea of having had sex with Chief Lewanika before he became chief during his youthful years. But Nyathi (1995) infers that MaInonge, as a girl like all the other girls who were coming of age, should accept sexual advances from male suitors. She therefore relates that though she did not wish to have sex with the young Lewanika, rather, she was made for it when she says, “I don’t know whether I like this either, but I was meant for it. I feel so . . .” (Nyathi 1995, p. 14).

What is implied by the words of MaInonge above is that she did not wish to have sex with the young Lewanika and she detests the idea if it, but as a woman she had to avail her sexual readiness to a man to prove her womanhood. This is literally to say that women are seen as sex objects, and at the same time have no say over their sexuality, let alone apply a mature decision

in regard to sex. They have to simply comply, even in situations when they do not wish to have sex.

In this same play, another example of depicting women who appear preoccupied with sexual matters is evident in Chief Lewanika who, after his consultation with the seer, summons MaInonge, his most senior wife to call her counterparts to a meeting where he wants to share with them the revelation of the seer. MaInonge responds by saying, “I am not on duty today, my lord. Please consult your roster” (Act I Scene I). She continues: “I am sorry, my lord, I thought you wanted your daily food.” It appears from MaInonge’s reply to her husband that he should consult his “roster” that there was such a roster drawn indicating the days she should be on call for sex with her husband, also probably showing who had to prepare food.

However, the suggestion in MaInonge’s answer in the preceding paragraph infers that whenever a woman is called by her husband, she is called for sexual intercourse “daily food” within the traditional setup. That is why MaInonge is heard responding that she is not on duty, to which the Chief reacts: “Don’t reach your destination before you arrive at it, woman” (Nyathi 1995, p. 3). The author exonerates the men from the constant preoccupation with sexual matters and places it squarely on the women, as suggested by the Chief’s response that she was too concerned about sex, yet there are other issues a husband can seek attention for in his wife.

The play seems to have more innuendos that suggest women cannot have a say in matters regarding sex. Chief Lewanika, after insulting and belittling his wives at the time he informs them of the seer’s words, continues to instruct them to “update your huts for my visit” implying that all he would want from them is sexual gratification (Nyathi 1995, p. 5). The statement by Chief Lewanika in essence suggests that though he is still pursuant of his mission of seeing the

wives pregnant so that one of them produces an heir, he still wants “his traditional food” from his wives irrespective of whether they are prepared or hurt by his insults. It is their duty as wives to avail themselves to his sexual demands.

It may seem an exaggeration, but the author seems to involve women characters in matters of sex more than he does with the male characters in *God of Women*. In Act II Scene III, the author presents Nsala and Mallenge discussing sex. Mallenge confides in Nsala that she had sexual relations with a priest when she worked as maid at the chapel. Interestingly, she is put in a position of an innocent person where she could not exercise her conscience to decide not to be seduced into sex, especially as an unmarried woman, worse of all, to have sex with a priest (Father Thomas) given that priests are known to have vowed to celibacy. Mallenge says, “He did it again and again” and “I too was becoming fond of it . . .” (Nyathi 1995, p. 25).

The author depicts women through Mallenge who, though knowing that having sex without being married is not acceptable, still has it, as lovers of sex. This is implied by Mallenge’s words, “I was becoming fond of it,” suggesting an innocent person beginning to gradually enjoy sex after being introduced to it.

However, the author suggests with this depiction that, as opposed to men who would in most instances be depicted discussing matters of politics, administration or business, women instead engage in petty discussions such as about sex, denoting the patriarchal notion of women’s shortsightedness regarding worldly matters.

4.3.2. Women characters as exchange material for marriage

Women are in some literature depicted as commodities that can be traded in exchange for material possession such as being married off by their parents or family as entrenched by the patriarchal society they live in. Peter (2010) states that arranged marriage is one of the social aspects that explains the status of women in literature.

In *God of Women*, the same scenario is evident where the author suggests that it is the norm or customary for patriarchal societies to sell off their daughters to wealthy husbands, especially in situations where the parents are poor. The author uses the voice of Joyce to show that women were sometimes considered as trade goods to redeem the family from poverty. Joyce tells John that she was married to Chief Lewanika by her parents, not because she loved him or wanted to marry him out of consent, but because it was her parents' wish to marry her off to him as chief. She says: "What choice did I have when my people decided to exchange me for a handsome herd of cattle?" and "He has paid my family fifteen cattle in exchange for me . . . He saved them from hunger" (Nyathi 1995, p.11). Joyce suggests that she was a prize commodity sold to the Chief as suggested by the words "handsome herd of cattle" inferring a good price for sacrificing her youth and happiness for a life of bondage in marriage where she would merely be another addition to the collection of wives.

The above tells us that women having been accorded a lower status in a patriarchal society were voiceless victims at the receiving end of discriminating and oppressive patriarchal dictates. Joyce shows that she did not wish to marry the Chief, probably still in waiting for her betrothed John, but unfortunately she could not go against her parents' wishes, especially in a situation where she would be the salvation to their rescue from a life of hunger and poverty.

The aspect of women being used by their parents and or family as exchange material for marriage is further depicted by Nyathi (1995). The author uses Chief Lewanika to suggest that indeed, during those times, women were acquired for marriage to redeem them and their families from a life of destitution. This is clearly suggested in the words of Chief Lewanika:

You all crept here as destitutes. I sliced my land for you. I traded you
 for half my stock. I fed you. None of you standing here can claim
 hunger (Nyathi 1995, p. 17).

This statement ties in appropriately with the preceding paragraph in which Joyce is exchanged for cattle which makes women vulnerable to a variety of abuses at the hands of their husbands. Both suggest that women are assets or possessions of the buyer (husband in this case) as it is not love that is involved in such a context, but material interests that include both sexual chattel and production labour in a patriarchal society.

4.3.3. Women characters as submissive and voiceless in marriages

As has been demonstrated in the preceding paragraph women have been used as chattel by their parents and family to obtain wealth or relief from poverty. This practice has resulted in women becoming voiceless victims of abuse in marriages. It also shows how women's status is lowered in society whereas they should be regarded as equals in society.

In *God of Women* (1995), Nyathi shows women in a patriarchal African community as submissive and voiceless in their marriages. To start with, women in the book have no say in the affairs of the household. The first wife, MaInonge, is not consulted for her permission to allow her husband take a second wife when Chief Lewanika realises that his wife cannot bear him a

son. The Chief proceeds to marry a second wife who equally fails to bear him a son, then he takes a third wife, Nsala, who unfortunately fails to conceive. Finally, Chief Lewanika marries a fourth wife, young Joyce in whom he has the last hope. It is typical that he does not need a wife's (woman's) permission to enter into a polygamous marriage as demonstrated in his speech in Act I Scene I. In this act, Chief Lewanika introduces the reason he marries Joyce as fourth wife to his other three wives:

You must treat her as one of you. I know that

this has upset some of you, but you know yourselves why it happened”

(Nyathi 1995, p. 5)

The wives had no option but to accept the coming in of their counterparts as they did with Joyce, as it is the norm in a traditional African setup in polygamous marriages. This is reflective of the Subiya culture where a wife is expected to remain submissive and allow the husband, as head of household to have a final decision in household affairs. This is suggested that wives do not have the power to question decisions of the husband in serious matters that benefit him as reflected in Ipinge, Shitundeni and Masule (1999) in a report investigating initiation practices in the Kavango and Caprivi regions.

God of Women (1995) shows in different aspects how women are kept as submissive partners in domestic and matrimonial relations in African settings. In Act I Scene I we are introduced to a situation where serious rivalry between the Chief's wives is brewing into a fight. Instead of finding out what the problem is and mediating as husband and leader, Lewanika shouts a command,

You will seal your mouth when I

say so. You will obey instructions in this house. You will do as I say,

woman” (Nyathi 1995, p. 7)

This is to show that he, as male, is the only authority in the household. It does not matter to him as to who started the quarrel or who is wronged. In such situations women or wives realise who is more favoured among them. However, to save themselves from punishment they have to do as instructed.

Chief Lewanika further shows how men feel superior over their wives at the end of Act I Scene I while drinking beer with his best friend, Neo. Lewanika says:

We culture them . . .

We give them a little civilization . . .

We domesticate them . . .

They are ours . . .

The above utterance suggests that women do not have equal status as men in the African setting. It further implies that women are like beings brought in from outside society where they have to be taught how to be submissive and loyal to the men’s authority. The picture that forms in one’s mind in regard to this utterance is that of the ancient civilization when humans started domesticating wild animals. How can one culture a people that live within society? It is the patriarchal doctrine that is taught through culture on what is taught during initiation into womanhood in preparation for marriage. During this initiation course, the initiates learn about

sex education, female hygiene, traditional gynaecological medicines, and social graces, including pain endurance through beatings (Ipinge, Shitundeni and Masule 1999, p. 29). The main reason they undergo beatings is to teach them submissiveness and pain endurance.

The words “They are ours” (Nyathi 1995, p. 9) which the author uses to characterise Lewanika, carry a powerful connotation that suggests that women do not have any sense of individual existence and as such are reared by men according to the men’s culture (patriarchy), and thus depend on men in order to have meaning to their existence in society according to the dictates of men.

Women are further shown to be labourers who have no say in marriage as can be found in the speech in which Nsala who has hurt her thumb while preparing food for her husband, is asked by her counterpart, Mallenge, to rest and attend to her thumb. Nsala, for fear of punishment if the food she is preparing for the husband is not ready on time refuses to do so in fear, declaring:

What about the meal? He is about to come and I have to complete
my duty on time” (Nyathi, 1995, p. 24).

This demonstrates the voicelessness of a wife, irrespective of how difficult the circumstances are that she may find herself in as a wife; her wifely tasks have to be completed without any excuse. One could therefore interpret this as bondage of wives or, marital slaves.

4.3.4. Women as destitute and as objects of punishment and insults

The story in this play shows another theme of women’s plight at the hands of the patriarchal society. Nyathi (1995) carefully depicts women as powerless in a sense that they entirely depend on men for survival, or are tied to men in order to have a “decent” form of living. Women are

portrayed as destitute as can be seen in Joyce, the young and fourth wife to Chief Lewanika, who says that she was given a piece of land to till and produce food for herself and a hut as a home. This is found in her conversation with her childhood boyfriend, John, who had wanted to marry her.

In her speech she says, “He has given me a piece of land and a hut” (Nyathi 1995, p. 11) which could suggest that, had it not been for Chief Lewanika allocating land and shelter to her, she would probably have perished as result of hunger and poverty. So, in other words, she has to abide by the dictates of tradition and endure all the inhumane treatment she may be exposed to, and be a wife to the man she does not love because she owes him her survival from the hardships of a destitute life he saved her from through marriage.

Nyathi (1995, p. 16) uses Neo, Chief Lewanika’s best friend to show how women are subjected to brutal punishment, and no action is taken against such men. Neo, in pleading with Chief Lewanika not to exercise punishment on his wives shares a brutal picture of how his own mother died at the hands of her husband:

I heard and saw in my youth the frailty of her ribs crushed by the
merciless fists of a father I have since denied fatherhood. Killed
for not warming him water for a bath . . .

It appears that punishment was used as a means to run households. The author, whether intentionally or accidentally uses the character of Neo’s mother as a vehicle to show how heartless men can be that women’s lives could be lost for petty issues such as failing to warm

water for bathing. Chief Lewanika is heard using abusive language towards his wives when they are afraid of his anger in his quarrel with Neo. He says,

You all crept here as destitutes (Nyathi 1995, p. 17).

When one analyses the choice of words used in this utterance, one would conclude that the Chief does not love his wives but uses them for his own gain. The word “crept” suggests that they were truly despondent and he stands in the position of their saviour, and does what he wishes with them. This is psychological abuse of the wives, and yet they stay because according to Lewanika they are destitute and have nowhere to go. The author does not actually say that they have nowhere else to go, but it can be felt through the choice of words used.

Another aspect worth mentioning here is that of insults hurled by husbands at their wives. Chief Lewanika verbally abuses his wives to an extent that he does not choose where this takes place. In Act I Scene I he is heard trying to find out whether any of his wives had a son before he married them. Chief Lewanika asks the senior wife, MaInonge:

It does not ring in my memory that you were still untouched when

I first met you. Did you have a son before?

MaInonge replies in anger as the interrogation takes place before the other wives:

Ah, father of my children, where is your respect?

How dare you malign me before these young girls? (Nyathi 1995, p. 4)

Instead of apologising, the chief continues with his interrogation as though he has not done anything reproachable. He continues to insult the wives by addressing all:

You, MaInonge, your granary has been depleted. Mallenge, your traditional dish has lost its delicacy; and you, Nsala. All my hopes lay on you until you proved yourself barren beyond an ordinary desert. (Nyathi 1995, p. 5)

The language of abuse which Chief Lewanika uses on his wives in public shows the ways in which men can be disrespectful toward their wives. The wives remain silent as they have nowhere to report such abuse.

In this instance, beside insults levelled at the wives, there is also a very careful selection of words used by the author to show the gravity of the insults. Nyathi (1995, p. 5) uses metaphors to refer to the Chief's wives' state of barrenness and womanhood. MaInonge's womb is compared to an empty granary indicating that she is beyond child bearing stage. Mallenge's vagina is said to have lost flavour or taste (referring to sexual excitement / feeling when engaging in sex) in the utterance directed at her as, "Mallenge, your traditional dish has lost its delicacy"; while Nsala's barren womb is compared to a desert (a land mass that has very little or no vegetation at all).

4.3.5. Women as homemakers and domestic service providers

Instead of being seen and treated as equals in relationships and marriages, women are sometimes seen as quasi – servants whose role is to keep the home and perform domestic chores for the husband and family. In *God of Woman*, such depictions of women as home makers and domestics are common. When visitors arrive at homes to visit as guests the wives are expected to prepare welcome food for the guests as a gesture of hospitality. The author shows this when Neo comes to visit his friend, the Chief. The chief calls for his wife to prepare an alcoholic beverage for the guest. This is brought and the two men entertain themselves. This is also demonstrated

when more guests arrive at the royal residence when Inonge informs her father of their arrival. The chief instead instructs the daughter to tell her mother, MaInonge to provide them with a calabash of alcohol as a gesture of welcome while he is still engaged with his other guest (Act I Scene I).

Such services are provided by women irrespective of how busy they may be with other chores while the husband is unoccupied. It is the patriarchal culture that suggests that women are suited for such services while men engage in social and political issues (regarded as men's domain). In Act II Scene I, the above is illustrated when the troubled Chief Lewanika summons his senior wife, MaInonge, for his loneliness since parting with Neo following a quarrel. MaInonge suggests that they call a witchdoctor to come and scrutinise what was forthcoming. The chief instead angrily scoffs her off that no woman is in a position to suggest or even think on behalf of a man (or husband as in this case). He says,

Since when has a woman thought on behalf of a man? (Nyathi 1995, p. 22)

In Act I Scene II, the author shows how men use women as service providers who are only needed for such services. After the Chief sends MaInonge to find out who among his other wives is pregnant, he tells her to prepare for his visit, which in actual sense refers to visiting for sexual intercourse as he says,

Make a meal for me and dust your blanket (Nyathi 1995, p. 23)

This is said following his outbursts at her when she is giving suggestions about his troubled state. The author does not show that the man has asked for an apology for his unruly behavior towards his willing-to-help wife, or implies that men forget easily, before Chief Lewanika suggests his sexual visit to her. He instead shows that the man has power to do whatever he pleases when he

wishes as a result of the traditional patriarchal mentality of looking at women as weak subjects who are there to serve men's needs.

The idea of using women as service providers and domestics for men is further evident in the utterance of one of the Chief's wives, Mallenge, who is advising MaInonge not to look at the Chief as the one who feeds them, but that they do it themselves from tilling the land to harvesting. Mallenge says:

Listen to me, mother of the children.

Lewanika does not till the field – you and your children do it.

he does not help with the harvesting, neither does he help with

mending your granary when termites destroy it (Nyathi 1995, p. 29)

In the above quote, it is spelled out that men marry women in order for them to labour and create wealth for their husbands through working for them, which indirectly reveals what is reflected in Chief Lewania's speech to Nsala, another of his wives, when he says:

Nsala, you were the last to bring your first harvest at the start of the

previous season – this should not repeat itself (Nyathi 1995, p. 5)

4.3.6. Women as intelligent and perseverant

As this study looks at the depiction of women in Nyathi's *God of Women* and Shakespeare's *Othello*, the researcher does not only focus on the negative portrayals, but also on the positive ones. In *God of Women*, the author creates scenes in which women are positively portrayed. One such positive portrayal is where women are shown as being able to employ their mental faculties

intelligently. In Act I Scene II, John and Joyce are engaged in conversation when John learns that Joyce is married to the Chief. She calms his temper by assuring him that she was forced to marry the Chief, but hopes to marry the one she loves in the future. She says:

Weep not John. The gods shall soothe our souls. We are both denied our aspired virtues. I am married to one who already has three wives. He has offered me a piece of land and a hut. He has paid my family fifteen cattle in exchange for me . . . He has saved them from hunger . . . But still, I don't love him.

(Nyathi 1995, p. 11)

The type of language that Joyce uses in her speech to John shows a mature and intelligent person speaking. She does not simply accept fate that she marries the Chief and it is the end. She, however, still has hope of completing her life with happiness by hoping to marry John, irrespective of the material wealth and status she receives as wife of the Chief.

Joyce is heard again in the same talk showing still an intelligent and mature person who is perseverant to wait and marry John in the end. She seeks his reassurance by looking at how age can change people and whether he would still love her then. Joyce enquires from John:

When my mouth yields its teeth and my skin dries and wrinkles, will you drop your tear and then say you love me as you did at the scene of the serpent of venom? (Nyathi 1995, p. 11)

This speech with carefully chosen words such as “mouth yields its teeth” and “skin dries and wrinkles” shows a very wise person speaking after critically thinking over the issue such as the

one for the young lovers, Joyce and John. She is shown looking at how people change when they grow old, and for her the question is whether John's love is undying and can wait. If his love for her is true, then both should persevere and wait until the right moment arrives before compromising the situation while she is still married to someone.

Joyce is again used in Act I Scene III to show women's mature intelligence when she is in conversation with MaInonge, the senior wife to Chief Lewanika. The conversation centres on how MaInonge slept with Lewanika before he became chief, and Joyce learns that she gave birth to a son. Because MaInonge was reluctant to reveal more information, Joyce at her young age advises MaInonge that it is pointless to keep protecting the Chief. She says:

Look, this man does not love me. He just wants a son out of me and
thereafter he will treat me as he treats you. You know very well, Ma
Inonge, that love is not found in the market (Nyathi 1995, p. 15)

Nyathi depicts Joyce as a wise and mature woman in an effort to portray women as equally intelligent when she probes to find out where MaInonge's son is. Joyce does the enquiry by allowing MaInonge to see Joyce as an equal and in a vulnerable state as the other wives once she gives birth.

In Act II Scene III we are now brought to the point where the author shows us that though men may regard women as weak brained or less intelligent, all the wives of Lewanika, who had enemy camps before coming together in solidarity, finally make peace. This happens after MaInonge faints upon learning that Joyce has revealed her secret to John. After reviving

MaInonge, the other wives also learn that John is the Chief's son with MaInonge. Mallenge tells the colleagues:

We are all the same: women who have fallen prey to a cunning beast

(Nyathi 1995, p. 29)

Nsala adds,

We must join hands and make man out of his vanity" (p. 29)

What is depicted here with these words are women who seem to have grown up, matured and exhibiting some degree of intelligence. The women who were previously engaged in fights against each other in the end find solace and solidarity in each other as companions.

4.3.7. Women characters engaging in petty rivalry fights

This play has different depictions of women prevalent in the negative portrayal of women. Another depiction that the author uses in *God of Women* is to show how women engage in petty fights that could easily be avoided by a sane society.

The petty fights start with Mallenge and MaInonge, the two most senior wives of Chief Lewanika. MaInonge seems to have been provoked by Mallenge's gesture of giving food to Inonge, MaInonge's daughter. She claims the second wife and arch rival in marriage, Mallenge, should not have given her daughter food because she is a poor cook (Nyathi 1995, p. 7). The actual issue that the author gives the reader is that of rivalry in marriage, disguised as food related. It is MaInonge who seems still angry and has not forgiven Mallenge for coming into her marriage as second wife.

The two women continue with their fight again in Act II Scene III when MaInonge asks Mallenge to hurry with the cooking as she also wants to use the fireplace. The two rival wives of Chief Lewanika exchange words until Nsala, the third wife and ally of Mallenge intervenes (Nyathi 1995, p. 27).

4.4. Summary of *Othello*

Othello is a play that derives its title from a Venetian army commander who marries and later murders his wife, Desdemona, daughter of a Venetian senator. A wealthy Venetian gentleman, Roderigo, is in love with Desdemona before she elopes and marries Othello, a Moor and commander of the Venetian army. Roderigo befriends Iago, an officer in the army under the command of Othello. Iago promises to woo Desdemona for Roderigo – for a fee. Iago, on the other hand, covertly takes the lieutenant's position occupied by Michael Cassio. After the Moor and Desdemona elope, Iago stirs noise by waking Brabantio, a senator and father to Desdemona, thinking that the news would hurt the senator to the extent that he would call for Othello's arrest.

After the elopement, a Turkish enemy attack is detected and the Duke of Venice calls Othello to ready the army for defence. To the battle front, Othello goes with his wife Desdemona, whom he is falsely accused of bewitching to fall in love with him because he is black and could not be seen fit to win Desdemona's love under normal circumstances. Iago thus schemes to make Cassio drunk, which he succeeds in doing. Cassio becomes embroiled in a drunken brawl, and is relieved of his post. The opportunity arrives for Iago to enmesh Cassio in an alleged adulterous affair with Desdemona. The scheme works well, but unfortunately ends in the tragic death of Desdemona at the hands of jealous Othello, who kills her on false accusations concocted by Iago.

4.5. Depiction of women characters in *Othello*

This section discusses the depiction of women characters in *Othello* as interpreted by the researcher. The discussion is based on the following:

- Women depicted as dependent on their fathers;
- Women depicted as having uncontrollable sexual appetites;
- Women depicted as sex goddesses and having power to break men;
- Women depicted as pragmatic and mature rational thinkers;
- Women depicted as ignorant; and
- Women depicted as submissive and obedient.

4.5.1. Women depicted as dependent on fathers

In his play *Othello*, Shakespeare depicts women as nonentities who still have to be under the control of their parents. This is irrespective of whether they are adults, as long as they still reside in their parents' homes. This is evident in the portrayal of Desdemona, daughter of senator Brabantio, who lives with her father. When Roderigo proposes to pursue marriage to Desdemona, her father is against allowing him to ever approach the senator's house to propose her. This is, in essence, an indication that fathers have a say in who is suitable in their eyes for the daughter's hand in marriage. Shakespeare shows this in the speech by Roderigo and Iago who come to inform the senator that his daughter has eloped with Othello. When he recognises Roderigo in the night outside his house, Brabantio says:

The worser welcome:

I have charg'd thee not to haunt about my

doors:

in honest plainness thou hast heard me say

my daughter is not for thee . . . (Shakespeare 1993, p. 944).

Another scenario that supports the claim that women are depicted as daughters who should seek approval before they can enter into marriage, especially that of their father if he has chosen a husband for her, is demonstrated by Brabantio's accusatory speech to Othello. Brabantio claims that, had it not been for Othello's use of magic on her, Desdemona would not have left her father's house to elope with him. Brabantio (1993, p. 946) declares:

O thou foul thief! Where hast thou

stow'd my daughter?

Damn'd as thou art, thou hast enchanted her;

For I'll refer me to all things of sense,

If she claims of magic were not bound,

Where a maid so tender, fair and happy,

She opposite to marriage that she shunn'd

The wealthy darlings of our nation,

Would ever have, to incur a general mock,

Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom

Of such a thing as thou; to fear, not to delight.

What Shakespeare suggests here is that Desdemona is an innocent and happy beautiful obedient daughter who would not disrespect her father's authority and abandon the safety and luxury of her father's home to marry a man as despicable in Venetian society as Othello, over the wealthy members of the elite Venetian society who would meet the approval of the father. He alleges that daughters respect and await their father's decision and approval in marriage, but in Desdemona's case, a spell was cast on her. In his speech, Brabantio says that his house was a place of safety in which his daughter should have all she would need until the father gives her away in marriage. What is also interesting in Shakespeare's writing in this play is that Desdemona seems not to have a mother, or it should be inferred that daughters belonged to their fathers, making mothers insignificant in the Venetian patriarchal society where the play is set.

4.5.2. Women depicted as having uncontrollable sexual appetite

This is another form of depiction of women characters in *Othello*. It is predominantly perpetrated by a scheming male character, Iago, who seems to have a degrading attitude towards the women in the play. There are in fact only three women characters, Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca. Desdemona, as previously mentioned in this study, is the daughter to Senator Brabantio and wife to the Venetian army commander, Othello, the Moor. Emilia is wife of Iago, and Bianca is Cassio's mistress.

Shakespeare uses the character of Iago to infer that women are promiscuous and have ravenous sexual desires. In Act II Scene I, Iago finds his wife Emilia, Desdemona and Cassio in conversation, and Cassio welcomes him on their sitting. Iago suggests that Emilia is a loose woman who could easily have an affair when he says to Cassio:

Sir, would she give you so much of her

Lips

As of her tongue she oft bestows on me,

You'd have enough (Shakespeare 1993, p. 951)

This speech by Iago is quite out of context because Cassio only extended his good manners in welcoming him to the conversation, but he (Iago) instead responded by suggesting that there was some form of courtship between Cassio and Emilia. So, he says that if Emilia could give herself in love to Cassio the way she speaks a lot to her husband, Cassio would have failed to satisfy her lust as she speaks a lot (which is equated to the sexual intercourse she would have with Cassio).

Desdemona refutes Iago's allegation saying that Emilia does not speak too much as she is a quiet person, which Iago disputes. He says:

In faith, too much;

I find it still when I have list to sleep:

Marry, before your ladyship, I grant,

She puts her tongue a little in her heart,

And chides with thinking (Shakespeare 1993, p. 951)

Iago tries to influence Desdemona into believing that although Emilia may be quiet, she has in her mind thoughts of sex – related issues. He thus suggests that her mind is rather occupied with thoughts of sex, contrary to the image of innocence that she outwardly projects to others.

Iago goes on to accuse women of harbouring ill thoughts regarding sex, and that they are actually great pretenders who give a false picture about themselves although they are actually preoccupied with sex. Iago shows this when he responds to Emilia's comment on the accusations he levels against her:

Come on, come on; you are pictures
 out of doors,
 Bells in your parlours, wild cats in your kitchens,
 Saints in your injuries, devils being offended,
 Players in your wifery, and housewives in
 your beds (Shakespeare 1993, p. 951)

Iago goes on accusing women of doing opposite to themselves than what they present in public life. One could thus infer that author is using the character of Iago to belittle women and portray them as engrossed in sex, irrespective of their marital status.

4.5.3. Women depicted as sex goddesses and having power to break men

Women in *Othello* have been depicted as playing the role of sex goddesses with power to weaken even the strongest man. Particularly so in Desdemona's case, Othello, a valiant and very strong military commander, falls in love and elopes with Desdemona. But as the story unfolds, it is said that Othello becomes weak and lacks objective reasoning because of the love he has for his wife. Cassio leaves Desdemona's presence after coming to plead with her to request Othello to restore him to his position.

When Othello sees him leave in Act III Scene III, he interprets it to mean Cassio was avoiding to be noticed for having been in company with Desdemona. This stems from Iago's plot of lying to Othello that he suspected Cassio to have an affair with Desdemona. Desdemona pleads for Cassio to be heard by Othello, but he refuses giving excuses of prearranged commitments. Aside, Othello is heard expressing his confusion:

Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my

Soul

But I love thee! And when I love thee not,

Chaos is come again (Shakespeare 1993, p. 958)

The picture given of Othello by the author foreshadows how he becomes entangled in a web of jealous love for his wife, and the lies about her infidelity as conjured by Iago. He says that he loves her too much and at the same time does not trust her, referring to her as an "excellent wretch" who would bring confusion to his life if he were to stop loving her, thus indicating the influence of the power of love for her.

Iago goes on to put his evil scheme into practice when he starts indirectly suggesting to Othello that Desdemona and Cassio are in an illicit relationship that is why she is pleading for his restoration. Once Othello tries to defend his wife as not being capable of committing adultery, Iago reminds him that she once deceived her own father. If she was capable of deceiving her own father, what would stop her from doing the same to him, a black man, and go back to her own kind - white men? These words are an echo which Brabantio used after Desdemona was asked to explain how she fell in love with Othello. After convincing those in attendance, Brabantio warns

Othello that his daughter may not be as faithful as she seems because if she had deceived her own father, she could easily deceive him as her husband (Shakespeare 1993, p. 949).

Because of the strong power of love Othello has for his wife, he fails to think rationally over what he hears from Iago. He instead is filled with hatred for her. Iago puts suspicion in Othello:

O! beware my loed, of jealousy;

It is a green – ey'd monster which doth mock

The meat it feeds on; that cuckold lives in bliss

Who, certain of his fate, loves not is wronger;

But, O! What damned minutes tells he o'er

Who dotes, yet doubts; suspects, yet soundly

Loves! (Shakespeare 1993, p. 959)

As the conversation of spiting Desdemona continues, Othello responds to show that he is now buying into the scheme of Iago without having applied rational thinking:

Why, why is this?

Think'st thou I'd make a life of jealousy,

To follow still the changes of the moon

With fresh suspicions?

No; to be once in doubt

Is once to be resolved. Exchange me for a goat

When I shall turn the business of my soul

To such exsufflicate and blown surmises,

Matching they inference. 'Tis not to make me

Jealous

To say that my wife is fair, feeds well, loves

Company . . . (Shakespeare 1993, p. 959)

Shakespeare shows us a man whose sane mind is confused because of his love for his wife. Thoughts of a very beautiful and loving wife cheating on him weaken his objective thinking. Othello asks for his handkerchief from Desdemona in Act III Scene IV. This handkerchief has Egyptian embroidery and is claimed to possess powers to subdue men and control or command them to do as the woman who possesses it would wish. The request for the handkerchief happens after Iago has his wife steal it and thereafter allege that Desdemona gave it to Cassio, her lover.

Double play of a woman's power is noticeable here. The first one is of the strong love that a man has for his wife to the point that he loses rational thinking and weakens mentally, like Othello softening before Desdemona. The second one we are shown is the power of the handkerchief which Othello says comes from his grandmother; it possesses the power to break a man and even be able to have power over men. This infers that women are powerful and manipulative goddesses who can use love, beauty and sex to destroy men.

4.5.4. Women depicted as ignorant

Shakespeare has depicted women as ignorant. This has been primarily done through the characterisation of Emilia, Iago's wife. Emilia knows very well that her husband has repeatedly asked her to get him the handkerchief which Othello gave to Desdemona. Besides, she knows how much Desdemona values the handkerchief, but out of loyalty to her husband who she knows is a schemer, or out of ignorance, she manages to get it for him. The aspect of Emilia knowing how the handkerchief was given to Desdemona and its symbolism is reflected in Act III Scene III when she comes across the dropped handkerchief

I am glad I have found this napkin;

This was her first remembrance from the Moor;

My wayward husband hath a hundred times

Woo'd me to steal it, but she so loves the token,

For he conjur'd her she should keep it,

That she reserves it evermore about her

To kiss and talk to. I'll have the work ta'en out,

And give't Iago:

What he will do with it heaven knows, not I;

If nothing but to please his fantasy (Shakespeare 1993, p. 960)

From Emilia's speech, it is evident that she knows the meaning and symbolism of the handkerchief Othello gave his wife. But it is unfortunate that Emilia acts ignorant about the fact of the value of the cloth and gives it to her husband, who she refers to as "my wayward husband" saying only he knows what he would do with it. It is like she does not care about the consequences of the disappearance of the handkerchief to Desdemona, the woman she is employed to serve. What is depicted here is a woman who, out of ignorance, fails to detect foul play from the repeated need to have the handkerchief. However, the author uses Emilia to achieve the idea of accusing Desdemona of being secretly in love with Cassio by getting the handkerchief to Iago.

Shakespeare continues to portray women as ignorant through Emilia. In Act IV Scene I, Emilia is approached by Othello who seeks confirmation from her as to whether Desdemona and Cassio have a secret love affair. In her response, Emilia denies knowledge of the two being in an illicit relationship. What is surprising is that Emilia fails to inform Desdemona of Othello's enquiries.

In Act IV Scene III, Desdemona and Emilia spend some time together after Othello displays violent temper, but Emilia still does not inform Desdemona that her husband suspects her of adultery. The same Emilia who has previously been depicted as an intelligent woman is now depicted as ignorant, failing to notice and inform Desdemona of the signs of danger befalling her. She instead says there are women that are adulterous, and it is men who lead them into adultery because they have failed to satisfy their wives' needs as they are also human and have feelings as men do.

4.5.5. Women depicted as realistic and mature rational thinkers

As Shakespeare brings out different depictions of women characters in his plays, this presentation shows women as realistic and mature thinkers. To show this, the author uses Desdemona and Emilia in *Othello*. At the start of the play, Desdemona elopes with her lover, Othello, the Moor. When she is called to explain how a beautiful and loyal daughter would love a black man without sorcery, Desdemona tells those in attendance in a mature manner as opposed to what men and patriarchal society expected. She responds thus:

My noble father, I do perceive here a divided duty:

To you I am bound for life and education;

My life and education both learn me

How to respect you; you are the lord of duty,

I am hitherto your daughter: but here's my

Husband;

And so much duty as my mother show'd

To you, preferring you before her father,

So much I challenge that I may profess

Due to the Moor my lord (Shakespeare 1993, p. 948)

Desdemona shows that she is an independent thinker who has a mature mind and has carefully thought and decided to take her husband without her father's involvement in the choice as was

culturally practiced in the patriarchal society of the English culture of those times. Listening to her speech all in attendance were convinced that she had applied her mind correctly without external influence, thus the author managed to portray women as capable persons who could think rationally.

Though Shakespeare tries to portray women as mature and rational through the speech of Desdemona before the elders, he fails to achieve the same portrayal with the depiction of Emilia when Iago insists she steals Desdemona's handkerchief which she received as a present and token of love for her from Othello, her husband. Emilia is seen as performing her duty to her husband when she picks the handkerchief after Desdemona drops it. She, however, applies a reasoned thinking when she enquires what Iago wants to use it for. She asks:

What will you do with't, that you have

been so earnest

To have me filch it? (Shakespeare 1993, p. 960)

Probing for an answer, Emilia continued:

If it be not for some purpose of

Import

Give't me; poor lady! She'll run mad

When she shall lack it (Shakespeare 1993, p. 960)

Shakespeare now brings out a rational minded Emilia to present women as thoughtful and caring for others as she says if Desdemona should miss the handkerchief, she will be very sad as it may

put her husband's love for her at stake. She also requests the purpose Iago wants the handkerchief for, as she lately may have felt Iago wanted the cloth for devious intentions. She may have suspected probably because as his wife, she would be in a position to know of his treacherous intentions.

Emilia has taken a pivotal role in Shakespeare's depiction of women as strong rational persons. In Act IV Scene II, Shakespeare depicts Emilia in conversation with Othello, who is trying to solicit information from Emilia about Desdemona's adulterous relationship with Cassio. Emilia refutes the adulterous allegations and says to Othello:

I durst, my lord, to wager she is
honest,
Lay down my soul at stake; if you think other,
Remove your thought; it doth abuse your
bosom.
If any wretch have put this in your head,
Let heaven requite it with the serpent's curse!
For, if she be not honest, chaste, and true,
There's no man happy; the purest of their wives
Is foul to slander (Shakespeare 1993, p. 967)

Shakespeare has put Emilia thus in the position supporting the theorists that believe women are equally capable of thinking intelligently over world affairs in contrast to what some patriarchal proponents say that women should be confined to domestic affairs only. She tells Othello that what he has been told by some people regarding Desdemona's infidelity is a fabrication and slander because Desdemona is a chaste and honest wife.

Shakespeare further shows the intellect of women again through Emilia when she is in conversation with Desdemona after Othello angrily enquires about the handkerchief which Desdemona fails to produce as requested. Because of the fury that Othello displays, she says that men use women for their material pursuits but after getting satisfied they lose their interest in them and show hostility instead. Emilia soothes the hurt Desdemona with the words,

Tis not a year or two shows us a man;

They are all but stomachs, and we all but food;

They eat us hungerly, and when they are full

They belch us (Shakespeare 1993, p. 963)

Emilia is trying to soothe Desdemona by generalizing that men are basically the same. They may seem sweet and caring, but soon after reaching the point of satiation, they tend to look down on their women. She thus likens women to being food which is eaten by a hungry stomach, referring to men. This is, in other words, to tell Desdemona that many women are experiencing the same and should see it as a pattern of women's life.

Emilia is again showing intelligence women possess as mature persons in Shakespeare's depiction of her in the conversation she has with Desdemona and Iago after Othello insults his

wife calling her a whore (Act IV Scene II). She says Othello's mind has been poisoned by someone seeking his own promotion. This person has falsely accused Desdemona and Cassio of an adulterous affair. In an outburst of anger Emilia says:

Why should he call her whore? Who keeps her

Company?

What place? what time? what form? What likely

hood?

The Moor's abused by some most villainous

Knave,

Some base notorious knave, some scurvy fellow (Shakespeare 1993, p. 969)

It is as though she speaks to expose Iago as the source of this insinuation or she indirectly seeks some reaction from Iago whom she may suspect to have lied to Othello about this illicit affair. With this, Shakespeare portrays women as mature by showing a well thought reasoning from a member of society regarded by patriarchal society as weak or "small brained".

4.6. Discussion

This section gives a comparative analysis of how Nyathi and Shakespeare depict women in their plays *God of Women* (1995) and *Othello* (1993) respectively. It is in this section where the questions raised in Chapter 1 of this study are answered: How do Nyathi and Shakespeare depict women characters in their plays? How are literary devices incorporated by the authors to depict

women in the two plays to reflect patriarchal bias? How applicable is the feminist literary theory in analysing the depiction of women characters in *God of Women* and *Othello*?

The approach adopted in this chapter is to compare and contrast how the discussed thematic depictions in both *God of Women* and *Othello* are similar and different, and thereafter give an analytical discussion. Though the depictions in both plays differ significantly probably due to cultural differences and the period of time the two playwrights live in, it is of essence to note that literature draws its topics and themes from real life situations.

Using a feminist perspective, Belsey and Moore (1997, p. 1) say, “A feminist does not necessarily read in order to praise or to blame, to judge or to censor, more commonly she sets out to assess how the text invites its readers, as members of a specific culture, to understand what it means to be a woman or a man.” It is therefore, necessary to note that though these portrayals may not have been intentionally meant to reflect patriarchal bias by the authors, the reader with a feminist perspective may find them inferring patriarchal bias.

The Harvard University Writing Centre suggests that writing a compare and contrast essay can be done by way of point-by-point discussion or text-by-text discussion. This study adopts the latter approach. In the context of this study it would be said to be play-by-play contrasting discussion where the researcher started by elaborating on the findings the study revealed in Nyathi (1995) and thereafter those the study revealed in Shakespeare (1993) before finally concluding the discussion.

4.6.1. Discussion of the portrayals of women characters in *God of Women*

It has been observed that Nyathi (1995) predominantly portrays his women characters negatively, showing a patriarchal bias. Using the feminist analytical perspective, it is evident that the author, using the cultural perceptions of women's position in the male dominated society has portrayed women as sex objects. Besides engaging in a polygamous relationship with his wives where he wants a male heir to his throne, Chief Lewanika is portrayed as using his wives for sex. This is clearly depicted in Act I Scene I when MaInonge is summoned to call her counterparts in marriage to the Chief. MaInonge responds that she is not on duty. This aspect on its own shows how the Chief's wives are always thinking of being used for sex. It is apparent that whenever they are called, sex has to take place. So, in the case of MaInonge saying, 'I am sorry, my lord, I thought you wanted your daily food' which refers to sex, Nyathi shows us that women in Chief Lewanika's compound are primarily kept for sex.

Nyathi uses the metaphor to indicate the extremity of how sex has been prevalent in Lewanika's compound as it is referred to as "daily food" as if it was had daily like meals of a day. However, close scrutiny of the statement leading to "your daily food" gives an impression that the women may not have willingly wanted to engage in sex, but as wives, it is their duty to avail themselves whenever he wants sex.

More belittling of women as objects of sex is inferred in Act I Scene I, when the Chief after the briefing of the seer's prophecy dismisses them and requests them to prepare for his visits. The author uses a metaphor, "update your huts for my visit" (Nyathi 1995, p. 5). The statement suggests that they should be waiting for his sexual visit.

The study also observes the bias in Nyathi (1995) according to the way he depicts women by further accusing them of paying too much attention to matters relating to sex. In Act II Scene II, Nyathi presents Mallenga and Nsala discussing their sexual encounters when Mallenga tells Nsala that she repeatedly had sex with a priest. In African culture, it is despicable for women to engage in discussions about sex. Women who are found or known to be talking about sex are labelled prostitutes and are of loose morals. This portrayal is seen as morally degrading for women to allow them to be used as sex objects and at the same time it suggests that women do not choose who to engage in sex.

The study also found the depiction of women characters as exchange material for marriage very negatively degrading for women. Women in traditional Africa have been seen as a source of wealth by the patriarchal society. Nyathi (1995) uses the depiction of Joyce to portray merchandise used in exchange for wealth. Her parents literally sell her to Chief Lewanika to acquire some cattle in order to escape poverty. Joyce is heard telling John that she does not love the Chief but had to allow her parents wed her to the Chief in exchange for wealth (Nyathi, 1995, p. 11).

This issue of presenting women characters as marriage material in exchange for wealth in Nyathi (1995) seems to have been some cultural practice among the Shona people of Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe's culture though not directly related to the Subiya and Lozi cultures to which the author has cultural relations, practiced this system. In their paper, Gudhlanga and Makaudze (2012) use an African Feminist perspective to show that the Shona people had a practice known as "kudvarira / kuputsa" which translates as daughter pledging. This practice was used by some families that were not economically secure. They arranged with wealthy families, where elders in the family approach the elders of a wealthy family to offer a daughter. The wealthy family would

also meet after the offer and decide which of their sons would marry the offered girl. The intention was to use the daughter pledging as a means to escape poverty.

This is also reflected in the utterance of Chief Lewanika when he is angry and insults the wives saying they had come to his compound as destitutes who had to be given land to live off. What this suggests is that they were married off by their family in order to be exchanged for lobola which the family would survive on. The use of this metaphor in the speech by the Chief suggests that women come from very destitute conditions and may be trodden on by men the way they wish. The inference is that he bought them to use them to satisfy his sexual desires. The portrayal is demeaning in the sense that women are seen as a powerless member of the patriarchal society.

The study also revealed the depiction of women characters as submissive and voiceless in marriage. This portrays women to be in subservient positions to men in a society where feminists feel they were supposed to be equals with their male counterparts. The portrayal of submissiveness is showed through MaInonge, who as senior wife is not approached to request permission to allow the husband to take a second wife. The failure to mention this part in the story suggests that men overrule women. It is only shown in Act I Scene I when Chief Lewanika call all three wives to inform them the reason he married a fourth wife. None of the wives objects to this, inferring that they have to accept the situation as it is to please the husband.

The issue of women's submissiveness in the play may have been used by Nyathi to present women characters as such as a result of cultural orientation of the region which is very patriarchal. It is mentioned that the cultures of the people from where the author originates require women to keep subservient positions and it is taboo for women to engage in open talk about sex related matters.

The study also revealed that wives do not have any say in the marriage as demonstrated by the way the Chief would insult his wives albeit they still have to serve his sexual exploits. Among the many examples that one can pick to demonstrate the submissiveness of women in the household is that of Nsala who blisters her thumb when she and Mallenge are preparing food for their husband. Mallenge tells Nsala to rest, but she refuses for fear that her husband would beat her, despite her inability to continue with the chores due to injury.

It is a sad state of affairs to see how wives are insulted by their husbands as in *God of Women*. The study showed that women are subject to ridicule and insults whenever their husband, Chief Lewanika, wishes to. Chief Lewanika called his wives to confirm who among them had a child before he married them. He uses very rude insults to MaInonge, the most senior wife, when he says to her that her granary was depleted meaning that she has reached the state of barrenness. If MaInonge's granary was depleted, by who was it depleted, or is he not party to the depletion of the granary? The author seems to shift the blame of her losing fertility onto the woman, and therefore she should be rendered useless. Mallenge is compared to a traditional dish that has lost its delicacy, and Nsala, on the other hand, is compared with a desert. Using such powerful metaphors, we should understand that the author used women characters in the play as objects that can be ridiculed and insulted as they are powerless, often reminded that they are destitute.

The researcher observed that the study shows a lot of violence that women are exposed to at the hands of men or husbands. Neo's mother was killed by her husband for failing only to warm bathing water for him. The women as wives of Chief Lewanika have been threatened with the rod of correction, indicative of rule of terror in the home.

The study also revealed women characters as being depicted as intelligent and perseverant in *God of Women*. This is, however, on a light note, when all wives show support to MaInonge after she is revived from her fainting spell upon learning that the other wives had heard of her secret that she was mother to John in Act II Scene III. All the wives tell MaInonge they love her and it is time they stand together in solidarity and fight for recognition.

Another female, Joyce has also been depicted as an intelligent young woman who engages John in a mature discussion. She tells John that though she was married to the Chief, she was not in love with him. She is also shown to have grown when she tells MaInonge that Chief Lewanika will treat her like the rest of the wives after she produces a son for him. She sees Lewanika as a person who does not care for women's social welfare. The study has thus revealed that not every portrayal of women by Nyathi in *God of Women* is negative.

4.6.3. Discussion of the portrayal of women characters in *Othello*

The study revealed that Shakespeare, like Nyathi, has depicted women characters in negative images. Though not as negative as Nyathi's *God of Women* characters, the bottom line is negative portrayal. To start with, the study has revealed that Shakespeare has failed to show Desdemona's mother to the reader. Desdemona has been known to live with her father, Senator Brabantio. It seems the father takes centre stage in raising his daughter single handedly, or did Desdemona lose her mother, as one may ask. What is typical is that all other characters in *Othello* do not have mother figures, except for Othello, who mentions the handkerchief which was passed on to him from his grandmother, to his mother. What one could, therefore, deduce is that, mothers do not have much significance in this work.

As has been mentioned in the preceding paragraph, women have been depicted as dependent on their fathers as portrayed through Desdemona. Desdemona has suitors who would want to marry her; however, her father decides who the eligible marriage partner for her is. This in itself, has given a picture that women characters as in the case of Desdemona, have acquired a status of a dependent irrespective of her mature age. The same Desdemona is portrayed as mentally inferior by Shakespeare, when Othello is accused of having used charms on her. The inference here is, as the study finds out, that she is incapable of using her developed mental faculty in choosing what she wants, as in the case of choosing Othello over Roderigo and other male suitors.

Another negative portrayal of women characters by Shakespeare in *Othello* is when they are presented as craving sex. This, Shakespeare manages to show through Iago, who accuses Desdemona of having an adulterous affair with Cassio. Iago is heard also denigrating Emilia as a loose woman in Act II Scene I, when he suggests that even Cassio would not satisfy Emilia's sexual desire were she given to him. When Desdemona comes to defend Emilia, Iago continues to say that indeed she may not talk much, but her sexual hunger is too much to satisfy. This lady in question is Iago's own wife. What is inferred by the author is that Iago as her husband knows her better, and so what he says is true (regarding her sexual desires).

The study also reveals Shakespeare as going an extra mile to denigrate women characters with his portrayal of them as being strong enough to influence a man to do good or bad. This is in the portrayal of Othello, who is depicted earlier as a strong military commander who has won many battles by using wise decisions. It changes when he takes Desdemona as a wife. Because of too much love for her, Othello appears to be transformed into a man who suddenly acts out of impulse, overpowered by love and unable to distinguish reason from deceit when Iago poisons his mind with lies about Desdemona having an affair with Cassio.

The use of charms by women also portrays them as cunningly getting men using powers of charms. Othello says the handkerchief he received from his mother has power to turn a man's mind. So, the portrayal here is of women being able to win men's hearts with charms, where in reality without the use of charms they would not manage to do so.

Shakespeare has managed, like Nyathi, to also depict women characters positively. Desdemona and Emilia portray realists and mature women in *Othello*. When Desdemona elopes with Othello, Brabantio and the Venetian community accuse Othello of having used some love potion on her. She, however, tells her father and people in attendance that she loved the Moor, Othello, after the valiant escapades she heard him recount. What the study reveals is a mature young woman who speaks as an adult to convince all who are listening that she is indeed mature and wise.

Emilia, who has been depicted as a weak person who cannot judge for herself when she is being used by Iago, suddenly becomes strong and asks Iago whether he intends to use the handkerchief for evil intentions since he has repeatedly been asking her to steal it for him. Another strong point qualifying Emilia as a positively portrayed mature woman is when, in Act IV Scene II she defends Desdemona as a woman who is in love with Othello, and not as alleged by Iago.

Emilia, the study reveals, is a strong character. She soothes Desdemona who is repeatedly attacked by Othello accusing her of infidelity. Emilia tells Desdemona that men are like stomachs which know the significance of food when they are hungry. Immediately their hunger is satisfied, the food becomes meaningless and is ejected out of the body as excreta. Women are the food in this metaphoric speech. This, in a nutshell, should be seen as positive portrayal of women from a predominantly patriarchal sector of society.

The study has also revealed that Shakespeare depicts women as ignorant by not taking issues seriously. This is done in the way Shakespeare depicts Emilia after she remains unconcerned with the way Iago has been asking for Desdemona's handkerchief. If she had known of Iago's scheming, she would, however, have not given the handkerchief to him.

The results of the study revealed that there is use of literary devices in both *God of Women* and *Othello*. In *God of Women*, the author's use of figurative language is extensive. For example, in Act I Scene I, the author uses an idiomatic expression, "You danced to the chorus of the owl . . ." (Nyathi 1995, p. 1) to refer to the gross sexual exploits of Chief Lewanika and his subjects leading to the curse on the community. Another very strong idiom is, "Father shall eat with son. Eating the abominable fruit of the son" (Nyathi 1995, p. 2) in reference to Chief Lewanika taking over the son's girlfriend as wife.

The use of other literary devices for example is that of foregrounding. In Act I Scene I Nyathi presents the Voice to prophecy the act of Chief Lewanika marrying Joyce, who was John's girlfriend. John was an illegitimate and unknown son of Chief Lewanika with MaInonge. The words prophesied are

Your very unknown and yet known son shall rival you for one of your
spouses (Nyathi 1995, p. 2)

This prophecy is fulfilled when John comes back from his schooling and continues with his relationship with Joyce until she falls pregnant. Joyce implies that she had sexual relations with both her husband and John, and thus could not tell who the father of the unborn child is in Act III Scene I.

Joyce is accused of being a woman of weak morals in Act I Scene I. The clever use of this as foregrounding takes the reader back to the opening of the Voice which says,

You have danced to the chorus of the owl on the branch

behind your compound (Nyathi 1995, p. 1)

Neo finds Joyce, as wife to Chief Lewanika and girlfriend to John, with John hugging behind the compound shortly after the owl hoots. The owl in most African cultures is associated with bad luck and witchcraft.

In Shakespeare's *Othello*, use of literary devices has been found to be extensively used. Shakespeare refers to Othello's elopement by suggesting to Brabantio, the father to Desdemona that the daughter that he so much protected and raised so well is now spoiled as she is having sexual intercourse with a black person (regarded as dirty or inferior in Venetian society where racial discrimination was practiced). The simile says:

Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul;

Even now, now, very now, an old black ram

is tupping your white ewe (Shakespeare 1993, p. 944)

Another simile that Shakespeare uses to refer to the disapproved relationship between Othello and Desdemona is:

You'll have your daughter covered with

a Barbary horse; you'll have your nephews neigh

to you; you'll have coursers for cousins and

gennets for germans (Shakespeare 1993, p. 944)

The study thus revealed that both authors used a range of literary devices in their plays. The literary devices used are predominantly metaphors and similes.

This study has thus revealed that the feminist literary theory is effective in the analysis of the two plays so as to detect aspects of gender bias and discrimination in male authors' work. To a lay reader, whether a fan of African or European literature or scholar of literature, one may read and find the plays interesting and humorous. But when employing the feminist literary theory in reading these plays, it becomes easy to see the flaws that male writers commit in order to portray their women characters in negative, and sometimes degrading manner. The feminist literary theory as cited in Chapter 2 uses feminist lenses in reading literature in order to find out how women have been presented in such works of art.

Compared to the depiction of male characters in the development of the plots in *God of Women* and *Othello*, one can see that the roles male characters occupied are positive as opposed to the roles given to women where they are more on the receiving end.

4.6.4. Conclusion

This chapter discusses the portrayal of women characters in both *God of Women* and *Othello*. The study revealed more negative portrayals of women characters by both authors. It is, however, interesting to note that though both authors portrayed women negatively, both also have in some instances given a positive portrayal of women characters, though not as widely as the negative depictions.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

5.1. Introduction

The study made a comparative analysis of the depictions of women characters in the plays *God of Women* (1995) by Sifiso Nyathi and *Othello* (1993) by William Shakespeare respectively. The focus of the study was to compare how male authors portray their women characters over different cultures and epochs. The study used the feminist literary theory in analysing the depiction of women characters through content analysis.

The major questions of the study were:

- How do Nyathi and Shakespeare depict women characters in their plays?
- How are literary devices incorporated by the authors to depict women in the two plays to reflect patriarchal bias?
- How applicable is the feminist literary theory in analysing the depiction of women characters in *God of Women* and *Othello*?

The theoretical framework focused on the feminist literary theory where the sub disciplines of feminism were discussed so as to aid the reader in understanding the comparative perspective of the study. The study adopted the qualitative, desk top comparative approach to the study as it was based on a comparative analysis of two plays, *God of Women* and *Othello* which did not require field work. The study was limited to the two plays *God of Women* and *Othello* where the feminist literary theory was used to do the interpretation of the texts through content analysis.

5.2. Conclusion

The study revealed that both authors were biased in the portrayal of the women characters in their two plays. Nyathi (1995) predominantly uses crude and abusive language in reference to his depiction of Chief Lewanika, the main male character, who insults and physically beats his wives into submission as a way of patriarchal control. This has been evidenced more in Act I Scenes I and II when Chief Lewanika enquired from his wives as to whom among them had a child before they were married to him.

In his enquiries, Chief Lewanika uses metaphors that carry strong connotations that could be understood as demeaning, not only to his wives, but to any sane society as well. The Chief continues to inform his wives why he marries the fourth wife, insulting the first three wives as inferior with fertility beyond repair. In some insults referring to the wives' fertility, the author equates them to a 'granary depleted' and 'barren beyond an ordinary desert' to show how low women can be brought in (an African) patriarchal society.

This study has revealed that women are sometimes seen as sources of income generation or wealth, especially by poor families. In Nyathi (1995), the author shows how Joyce was exchanged for fifteen heads of cattle by her family in order to save them from poverty. The study also reveals in both Nyathi and Shakespeare that women can become the property of their husbands who keep them in subservient conditions such as powerlessness or voicelessness in marriage irrespective of the harsh treatment they receive. The women stay on despite these conditions which may be both psychologically and physically degrading as in the case of the wives of Chief Lewanika. It is also evident in Emilia who has been insulted in front of Cassio and Desdemona by her husband, Iago, yet she stays and continues to serve him.

In Shakespeare's *Othello*, negative portrayals of women characters are evident. It is, however, with the use of villain Iago that much of the negative portrayal of women characters is more greatly felt in *Othello*. Though both authors portray women negatively, the study shows that there were instances where both used positive portrayal of women characters. Both Nyathi and Shakespeare portray women as strong, intelligent and mature when exposed to extreme hate and suffering at the hands of their men counterparts. The women come together, comforting each other in solidarity. The study exhibits the rich use of literary devices by both authors predominantly metaphors and similes to enhance the effect of the plays on the audience as well as to project superiority of males over females.

To conclude, however, the study through the feminist literary analysis found that the two authors, Nyathi and Shakespeare, irrespective of the epoch live in and culture they belong to, demonstrate the presence of the patriarchal induced inclination to depict women characters negatively in their works. This is despite the less significant portrayal of women characters as strong and mature by both authors. The above discussion shows a discriminatory portrayal of women characters in both *God of Women* and *Othello*.

The feminist literary theory in literature is used to investigate how the presentation of female characters in the works written by male authors is done by querying how the text presents women as cited in Chapter 2.

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