

# Gender, Power and Victimhood: Re-Examining Domestic Violence Through Male Experiences in Contemporary African Drama

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## Abstract

This study re-examines domestic violence in contemporary African drama through the under-researched question of male victimhood, while maintaining the importance of scholarship on women's experiences of gender-based violence. The study is organised into five major parts. The first establishes the problem, objectives, research questions, scope, significance, and qualitative methodology, positioning the study around the concept of the male victimhood gap. The second develops the conceptual and theoretical framework by examining gender, masculinity, patriarchy, domestic violence, silence, and victimhood, drawing particularly on Connell's Hegemonic Masculinity Theory, Foucault's theory of relational power, and Butler's Gender Performativity Theory. The third applies these perspectives to selected Nigerian dramatic texts, including *Altine's Wrath*, *Rainstorm in the Desert*, and *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*, to examine patriarchal domination, threatened masculinity, gender reversal, and shifting power relations. The fourth extends the discussion comparatively across African dramatic traditions, identifying similarities and differences in the construction of masculinity, domestic authority, vulnerability, and resistance. The fifth synthesises the findings and concludes that victimhood is relational and contextual and not permanently determined by biological sex. The study demonstrates that contemporary African drama can complicate the conventional male-perpetrator/female-victim binary by revealing how masculine expectations, interpersonal power, violence, silence, and resistance intersect to produce male vulnerability without diminishing the structural realities of violence against women.

**Keywords:** Male Victimhood, Domestic Violence, Masculinity, Gendered Power, African Drama, Gender Reversal.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Domestic violence remains one of the most persistent manifestations of unequal power within intimate and family relationships. It encompasses physical, psychological, emotional, sexual and economic abuse, as well as coercive and controlling behaviours that restrict the autonomy and wellbeing of individuals within domestic relationships. Globally, violence against women remains a major human rights and public health concern, and the disproportionate burden experienced by women has rightly made female victimisation central to gender-based violence scholarship, policy, and advocacy (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021). In African societies, where patriarchal structures, culturally prescribed gender roles, economic inequalities and expectations concerning marriage and family authority continue to influence interpersonal relationships, domestic violence has become an important subject of

literary, theatrical, cinematic and sociological investigation. African drama, in particular, has provided a significant cultural space through which the experiences of gender inequality, patriarchal oppression, violence, trauma, resistance and social transformation can be represented and interrogated.

The prominence of women within scholarship on gender-based violence is historically and empirically justified. Women have frequently occupied structurally vulnerable positions within patriarchal social systems, and African feminist scholarship has made important contributions to exposing the cultural practices, institutional structures and interpersonal relations through which women's oppression is reproduced. Consequently, contemporary African dramatic criticism has paid considerable attention to female characters as victims of domestic, sexual, political and cultural

violence, rather than replacing female victimisation. Such scholarship has demonstrated how dramatic texts provide a voice to women whose experiences have traditionally been marginalised and how theatre can challenge cultural assumptions that legitimise or normalise violence against women. The dramatic representation of women's suffering is therefore an important part of the continuing struggle against gender inequality and should not be weakened or displaced by attempts to introduce other forms of victimhood into the discussion.

Existing scholarship by Ekevere and Eluzai (2026), for example, demonstrates the importance of women's experiences within African dramatic representations of violence and trauma. In their study, *War, Widowhood, and Womanhood: Feminist Trauma Theory in Selected Nigerian and South Sudanese Plays*, the authors examine how selected dramatic texts foreground women's experiences of war, widowhood, trauma and gendered vulnerability. Their work contributes to a broader body of feminist criticism that understands women's bodies, identities and experiences as important sites through which violence, conflict and patriarchal power become visible. Such scholarship establishes the importance of attending to female victimhood in African drama while also demonstrating the capacity of dramatic literature to expose the psychological and social consequences of gendered violence.

Similarly, the relationship between gender, voice and power has become an important concern within contemporary African theatre scholarship. Eluzai and Ekevere (2026), in *Voice, Silence, and Gendered Power: A Postcolonial Feminist Critique of Contemporary Theatre in Nigeria and South Sudan*, demonstrate how voice and silence are implicated in structures of gendered power. Their analysis is particularly significant for the present study because victimhood is not determined exclusively by the occurrence of violence. It is also influenced by whether the victim can speak, whether the testimony is believed, whether the surrounding society recognises the experience as legitimate and whether the victim is culturally permitted to occupy the position of the vulnerable subject. The concepts of voice and silence, therefore, provide an important bridge between feminist studies of female victimisation and the comparatively less examined question of male victimhood.

The broader relationship between African drama, gender politics and social activism also provides an important foundation for the present study. Ekevere and Onyari (2025) demonstrate how African drama can interrogate gender politics, social power, and structures of oppression in their examination of Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*. Such scholarship reinforces the understanding of drama not merely as entertainment but as a cultural and ideological form through which social

relations can be examined, contested and reimaged. African dramatic texts frequently expose tensions between tradition and modernity, authority and resistance, masculinity and vulnerability, and individual agency and social expectation. It is within this broader tradition of socially engaged African drama that the present investigation of male victimhood is situated.

However, despite these important developments, a significant analytical and representational question remains. What happens when the male subject, who is conventionally positioned as the perpetrator of gendered violence, occupies the position of victim? This question is at the centre of the present study. African gender discourse has understandably concentrated on violence against women due to the prevalence and seriousness of such violence. Nevertheless, an excessive reliance on a binary model in which male equals perpetrator and female equals victim can potentially obscure the more complex ways in which gender, power, vulnerability and victimhood operate within particular intimate relationships. The purpose of the present study is therefore not to challenge the reality or seriousness of violence against women but to examine whether contemporary African drama provides representations that complicate this binary.

The central concern of this study is conceptualised as the male victimhood gap. The term refers to the relative under-recognition, under-representation and under-theorisation of men who experience violence within domestic or intimate relationships. It does not suggest that male and female victimisation are identical in prevalence, social meaning or structural context. Nor does it suggest that attention to male victims should compete with feminist scholarship on violence against women. Rather, the concept identifies a gap that emerges when cultural and analytical assumptions make it difficult to recognise men as legitimate victims. A more inclusive understanding of domestic violence requires attention to the possibility that victimhood can be experienced across gender categories while remaining deeply shaped by gendered structures of power.

The male victimhood gap is particularly important because cultural constructions of masculinity can make male vulnerability difficult to recognise. Masculinity is not a fixed biological condition but a socially produced set of expectations concerning how men should behave, perform authority and relate to others. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) describe hegemonic masculinity as a culturally dominant configuration of masculine practices that legitimise particular forms of masculine authority. In many contexts, idealised masculinity is associated with strength, independence, economic provision, emotional control, sexual capability, physical courage and the protection of family members. These expectations can

create a paradox for men who experience domestic abuse. A man who is expected to be strong and protective may find it difficult to acknowledge that he is being physically, psychologically, sexually or economically abused by an intimate partner. Consequently, masculinity may simultaneously serve as a source of social privilege and a mechanism for concealing male vulnerability.

The relationship between masculinity and silence is particularly important. A man who reports abuse by a female partner may encounter ridicule, disbelief or accusations that he has failed to perform the expected masculine role. Such social reactions can discourage disclosure and reinforce the perception that men should be capable of defending themselves. Male victimhood can consequently become a condition of double marginalisation: the individual experiences violence and simultaneously encounters a social structure that questions his legitimacy as a victim. Njoku and Dery (2023), although examining conflict-related sexual violence rather than domestic violence, demonstrate how cultural constructions of masculinity can contribute to the silencing of male victims in northeastern Nigeria. Their work is useful to the present study because it shows how the dominant cultural association of men with perpetration can make male victimhood difficult to recognise and articulate.

Emerging empirical research further demonstrates that male victimisation is not merely a theoretical possibility. Oyediran *et al.*, (2023), examining intimate-partner violence against men in Cameroon and Sierra Leone, found that men reported psychological, physical and sexual forms of intimate-partner violence. Their findings are important because they demonstrate that male victimisation exists within sub-Saharan African contexts, which are commonly characterised by patriarchal gender relations. They also show that different forms of violence and their predictors vary across contexts, thereby cautioning against treating African experiences of intimate-partner violence as culturally uniform. Such findings empirically support the expansion of the analytical framework for understanding domestic violence.

Recent scholarship in Nigeria likewise points to the need for a more gender-inclusive understanding of domestic violence. Olorunpomi *et al.*, (2025), examining the social media framing of domestic violence against men in Nigeria, draw attention to the media's portrayal of domestic violence against men in Nigeria and highlight the ways gender stereotypes can influence the social interpretation of male victimisation. Such framing can contribute to the marginalisation of male victims and may discourage them from publicly discussing their experiences or seeking support. The significance of this problem extends beyond individual relationships because social attitudes influence the visibility of

victims, the availability of support and the ways institutions respond to reported abuse. Male victimisation therefore deserves attention, not as a replacement for female victimisation, but because a comprehensive understanding of domestic violence should be sufficiently inclusive to recognise different forms of vulnerability.

This inclusive approach Recent African research supports this inclusive approach by identifying female-perpetrated intimate-partner violence against men as an important but comparatively under-researched phenomenon. A recent systematic review and meta-analysis by Yesuf (2026) identifies female-perpetrated intimate-partner violence against men as a significant area requiring greater research attention across Africa. The study reinforces the need for gender-sensitive approaches that recognise that intimate-partner violence can involve different configurations of perpetration and victimisation. Such evidence is particularly relevant to dramatic studies because it invites scholars to examine "Who is the victim?" and how gender influences the construction of individuals as either capable of violence or capable of suffering.

The problem becomes particularly complex when examining dramatic representation, as it highlights the intricacies of the issue. In dramatic representation. Drama is not a neutral reproduction of social reality. Playwrights construct characters, distribute agency, determine who speaks and who remains silent, establish relationships of power and invite audiences to sympathise with particular experiences. Consequently, representing a husband as an aggressor or a wife as a victim carries ideological implications, just as representing a woman as an aggressor or a man as a victim can challenge established assumptions about gender. The question is therefore not whether men or women should be regarded as the "real" victims of domestic violence. Rather, the critical question is how victimhood is constructed, who is permitted to occupy that position, whose suffering is recognised and what gender assumptions shape these representations.

This distinction is essential because structural inequality and interpersonal power should not be treated as identical. Patriarchal structures may provide men with forms of social privilege, while particular men may nevertheless experience vulnerability within their intimate relationships. Similarly, women may experience structural disadvantages within a patriarchal society while exercising significant interpersonal power within particular domestic relationships. Kelly's (2013) conception of power as relational and dispersed is useful in this regard because it allows power to be understood as something exercised through relationships rather than as an attribute permanently possessed by one gender. Such an approach does not deny patriarchy; rather, it permits the researcher to distinguish between structural

gender relations and the specific configurations of power that operate within individual relationships.

A relational understanding of power is especially useful for interpreting domestic violence in African drama. Economic resources, emotional dependence, age, education, social status, family networks, sexuality, access to information and control over domestic decisions may all influence who possesses power at a particular moment. Gender remains a fundamental factor in these relationships, but it should not automatically predetermine the analytical conclusion. A woman may experience structural gender inequality and nevertheless become an aggressor in a particular domestic relationship. A man may possess certain social privileges associated with masculinity and nevertheless become the victim of abuse. The coexistence of these realities demonstrates why gender and victimhood require a more nuanced analytical framework.

The notion of victimhood must therefore be distinguished from the assumption of permanent powerlessness. Victimhood may involve physical injury, emotional abuse, psychological manipulation, sexual coercion, economic deprivation, intimidation, humiliation, isolation or controlling behaviour. It may also involve the inability to disclose the experience because of social stigma. The concepts of voice and silence examined by Eluzai and Ekevere (2026) become especially relevant here. If cultural expectations prevent men from speaking about domestic abuse, then silence itself becomes an important dimension of male victimhood. A dramatic text may therefore reveal male victimhood not only through scenes of physical violence but also through silence, shame, psychological conflict, denial, isolation, failed attempts to seek assistance and the reactions of other characters to the victim's disclosure.

The dramatic representation of female perpetrators also requires careful treatment. Representing women as perpetrators does not imply that women are inherently violent or that violence against women is insignificant. Rather, such representation can challenge the assumption that femininity is naturally synonymous with care, passivity and victimhood. When a dramatic text constructs a female character as controlling, psychologically abusive, physically violent or economically coercive, the representation can expose the complexity of gendered agency. The analytical task is to examine how the playwright constructs that agency and what cultural consequences follow from placing a woman in the position traditionally assigned to male characters.

In this respect, the present study does not seek to replace the binary male perpetrator/female victim with an equally reductive female perpetrator/male victim

binary. Such a reversal would merely reproduce the same conceptual limitation. Instead, the study seeks to complicate the binary by examining the fluid and relational configurations through which gender, power, vulnerability and victimhood operate. The study is therefore interested in situations in which characters may simultaneously occupy different positions within broader systems of power: a man may possess social privilege but experience domestic abuse; a woman may experience patriarchal oppression but exercise interpersonal control; and a victim may retain agency while experiencing violence.

This approach also enables a productive dialogue between feminist scholarship and masculinity studies. Feminist approaches have been indispensable in exposing the structural conditions that produce women's vulnerability, while masculinity studies have demonstrated that masculine identities are themselves socially constructed and regulated. Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) discussion of hegemonic masculinity is particularly useful because it shows that dominant masculine ideals can regulate men's behaviour and establish expectations that discourage vulnerability. The present study brings these perspectives into conversation by asking how dramatic representations expose the contradictions between socially prescribed masculinity and the lived experience of male victimhood.

Consequently, the study situates itself at the intersection of gender studies, masculinity studies, domestic-violence studies, African drama, and literary criticism. It approaches contemporary African drama as a cultural site where social assumptions concerning gender and power are reproduced, negotiated and contested. The study focuses on topics apart from establishing the statistical prevalence of male domestic violence across Africa. Rather, it examines how selected dramatic texts construct, represent and make meaningful male experiences of victimisation. This distinction is important because literary and theatrical texts are cultural artefacts whose representations cannot automatically be treated as empirical evidence of social prevalence. Their significance lies in the ideologies, assumptions, conflicts and possibilities they reveal about the societies from which they emerge.

The aim of this study is therefore to re-examine domestic violence in contemporary African drama by analysing male experiences of victimhood and investigating how such representations complicate conventional assumptions concerning gender, power, perpetration and vulnerability. To achieve this aim, the study seeks to examine the representation of male victims of domestic violence in selected contemporary African dramatic texts; identify and analyse the forms of violence experienced by male characters; investigate how ideas of masculinity affect male vulnerability,

silence, resistance and responses to abuse; examine the representation of female agency and perpetration where applicable; and determine the extent to which the selected dramatic texts reproduce, challenge or complicate the conventional male-perpetrator/female-victim binary.

The study is guided by the following research questions: How are male victims of domestic violence represented in selected contemporary African dramatic texts? What forms of domestic violence. What types of domestic violence do male characters endure? by male characters? How do constructions of masculinity influence the vulnerability, silence, resistance and responses of male victims? How are female perpetrators or agents of domestic violence represented when such representations occur? To what extent do the selected dramatic texts reproduce or challenge conventional assumptions that position men primarily as perpetrators and women primarily as victims?

The scope of the study This study focuses on how selected contemporary African dramatic texts represent male victimhood within domestic and intimate relationships. the representation of male victimhood within domestic and intimate relationships in selected contemporary African dramatic texts. It does not attempt to provide a comprehensive survey of every African country or every dramatic representation of domestic violence. Rather, selected texts are examined because they provide significant representations through which the relationship between gender, power and victimhood can be interrogated. The study is primarily concerned with literary and dramatic representation and therefore focuses on characterisation, dialogue, plot, dramatic conflict, symbolism, stage directions where available, patterns of silence and speech, and the distribution of agency among characters. Broader sociological and epidemiological evidence is used to contextualise the literary analysis rather than replace it.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative research design based primarily on textual and thematic analysis. The selected dramatic texts constitute the primary sources, while peer-reviewed scholarly works, empirical studies, theoretical texts and relevant institutional reports constitute the secondary sources. The analysis pays particular attention to the construction of victim and perpetrator identities, forms of domestic violence, representations of masculinity and femininity, patterns of speech and silence, expressions of vulnerability, mechanisms of control, resistance strategies and the social reactions of other characters. The study employs an interpretive approach because its central concern is not simply to identify instances of violence but to understand the cultural meanings attached to those representations.

The significance of the study lies first in its contribution to African theatre scholarship. Much existing scholarship on gender and African drama has made invaluable contributions by exposing women's oppression, patriarchal violence and gender inequality. The present study extends this body of work by examining the comparatively less explored position of the male victim. It therefore does not reject feminist dramatic criticism but builds upon it by asking whether a more inclusive account of gender and power can accommodate male vulnerability without erasing women's structural disadvantages.

Second, the study contributes to masculinity studies by examining how dominant expectations of masculinity may make male victimhood difficult to recognise. The cultural demand that men remain strong, protective, economically independent and emotionally controlled can become an obstacle to disclosure when men experience domestic abuse. Dramatic representations of such conflicts can therefore reveal the psychological and social costs associated with rigid masculine expectations.

Third, the study contributes to domestic-violence scholarship by placing literary and dramatic representations in conversation with emerging empirical evidence concerning male victims. This interdisciplinary connection is important because literature and theatre can reveal dimensions of victimhood shame, silence, identity crisis, social ridicule and emotional conflict that may not always be fully visible through quantitative measures. The dramatic text thus becomes a valuable cultural space for investigating the meanings attached to victimhood.

Fourth, the study has potential significance for gender advocacy and social intervention. An inclusive understanding of domestic violence should recognise victims without automatically allowing gender stereotypes to determine who can be believed or supported. Recognising male victimhood does not weaken interventions against violence towards women. Instead, it encourages a more comprehensive approach in which assistance is responsive to victims according to the nature of the violence experienced rather than predetermined assumptions about gender.

The key concepts in the study require clarification. Gender refers to the socially and culturally constructed roles, expectations, identities and relations associated with masculinity, femininity and other gender positions. Power refers to the capacity to influence, control, constrain, dominate, negotiate or resist behaviour within social and intimate relationships. Domestic violence refers to physical, psychological, emotional, sexual, economic and coercive forms of abuse occurring within domestic or intimate relationships. Male victimhood refers to the condition in

which a male individual experiences harm, abuse, coercion or violence within a domestic or intimate relationship and is consequently positioned as a victim. Masculinity refers to culturally constructed expectations, practices and identities associated with being male, particularly those associated with strength, authority, independence, emotional control and social responsibility. Victimhood is not just the experience of harm but also the social and cultural processes that recognise, represent, or deny recognition to victims. Gendered power refers to the ways in which gender expectations and social structures influence the distribution and exercise of power among individuals. Finally, contemporary African drama refers to modern dramatic works emerging from African cultural and literary contexts that engage with present or continuing social, political, cultural and interpersonal realities.

The central proposition of this study is therefore that victimhood should not be predetermined by gender. The fact that women experience disproportionate levels of gender-based violence remains an important reality and must continue to receive scholarly, institutional and political attention. However, recognising that reality should not require the analytical exclusion of men who experience domestic violence. Similarly, recognising male victimhood does not require denying patriarchy or displacing feminist scholarship. Rather, a more sophisticated gender analysis should be capable of recognising structural inequality while simultaneously examining the specific configurations of power through which individuals experience violence.

Consequently, the present study approaches domestic violence in African drama as a complex field in which gender, power, vulnerability, agency, voice and silence intersect. Its central question is not simply “Who is the victim?” but rather “How is victimhood constructed, who is permitted to occupy the position of victim, whose suffering is recognised, whose voice is believed, and what gender assumptions determine these responses?” By asking these questions, the study seeks to move beyond the rigid binary of male = perpetrator/female = victim without replacing it with an equally reductive opposite. Its objective is to demonstrate that contemporary African drama can provide a more complex understanding of domestic violence in which men may be represented as vulnerable without denying women's structural oppression, and women may be represented as agents without reducing femininity to perpetration.

The study thus occupies a significant space within the continuing development of African gender and theatre scholarship. Earlier studies have established the importance of examining women's trauma, oppression, voice, silence and gender politics in African drama (Ekevere & Eluzai, 2026; Eluzai & Ekevere, 2026; Ekevere & Onyari, 2025). The present study

extends that conversation by turning critical attention to the under-represented question of male victimhood. The movement is therefore not from women's victimhood to men's victimhood, as though one must replace the other, but from a relatively fixed gender binary to a more relational understanding of power and vulnerability. In doing so, the study argues that the critical value of contemporary African drama lies partly in its ability to expose precisely those contradictions that conventional gender categories can conceal.

## **2. GENDER, MASCULINITY, POWER AND VICTIMHOOD IN AFRICAN DRAMA**

### **2.1 Understanding Gender and Power**

The concept of gender constitutes one of the foundational categories through which social relationships, identities and power structures are organised. Although gender is often used interchangeably with biological sex in everyday discourse, contemporary gender scholarship distinguishes between the biological characteristics associated with sex and the socially and culturally produced meanings attached to being male, female or otherwise gendered. Gender, in this sense, refers to a system of expectations, practices, identities and relations through which societies define appropriate behaviour, responsibilities, emotions, occupations and relationships for differently gendered subjects. This distinction is particularly important for the present study because domestic violence cannot be adequately understood simply by identifying the biological sex of the perpetrator and victim. It requires an examination of the social meanings attached to masculinity and femininity and the ways those meanings influence the exercise and recognition of power.

West and Zimmerman (1987) famously conceptualise gender as something people “do” within social interaction rather than merely something they possess. Their formulation of “doing gender” shifts attention from gender as a fixed identity to gender as an ongoing accomplishment produced through everyday practices. Individuals are continually evaluated according to socially established expectations concerning appropriate masculine and feminine behaviours. In this regard, gender becomes a mechanism through which individuals are rewarded for conformity, sanctioned for deviation and positioned within social hierarchies. The implications for intimate relationships are considerable because marriage and domestic life constitute important sites where gender expectations are repeatedly enacted.

Judith Butler (2006) extends this understanding by conceptualising gender as performative. For Butler, gender is not simply an internal essence that individuals express outwardly; rather, gendered identities are constituted through repeated acts, gestures, behaviours, linguistic practices and social conventions. Gender

appears natural partly because its constituting acts are repeatedly performed and socially regulated. Butler's formulation is particularly useful to the present study because it allows masculinity and femininity to be examined as practices rather than immutable qualities. A man does not become culturally recognised as masculine merely because he is biologically male; he is expected to demonstrate masculinity through culturally intelligible behaviours such as authority, strength, economic provision, emotional restraint and physical confidence.

The performative nature of gender is important when analysing male victimhood. If masculinity is continually produced through demonstrations of strength, control and independence, vulnerability may appear to constitute a failure of masculine performance. A man who is beaten, intimidated, economically controlled or emotionally manipulated by a female partner may therefore confront not only the immediate effects of violence but also a cultural contradiction between his lived experience and the masculine identity expected of him. The question is consequently not simply whether a man experiences violence, but whether the social environment provides him with a legitimate identity through which he can understand and communicate that experience.

Gender is also inseparable from power. Feminist scholarship has long demonstrated that gender relations are structured by unequal distributions of authority, resources and social recognition. However, a sophisticated analysis of gender and power must distinguish between structural power and interpersonal power. Structural power refers to broader social arrangements through which particular groups receive advantages or authority, whereas interpersonal power concerns the capacity of individuals to influence, control, constrain or resist others within specific relationships. The two forms of power interact but should not be assumed to operate identically.

Kelly's (2013) understanding of power is particularly relevant to this distinction. Rather than treating power as an object possessed permanently by one group and exercised over another, Kelly conceptualises power as relational, productive and dispersed through social practices. Power operates through institutions, discourse, norms, knowledge and everyday relationships. This perspective enables the present study to examine domestic relationships without assuming that the socially privileged position of men necessarily translates into unilateral power in every individual relationship. It also allows the study to investigate how women may exercise interpersonal power within particular domestic contexts without suggesting that women occupy a structurally dominant position over men in African societies generally.

The relevance of this distinction becomes clear in the context of domestic violence. A man may benefit from patriarchal expectations concerning male authority while simultaneously experiencing abuse from an intimate partner. Conversely, a woman may experience structural disadvantages associated with gender while exercising considerable emotional, psychological or economic control within a particular relationship. The existence of one form of inequality does not automatically eliminate the possibility of another. A relational approach to power therefore avoids the analytical mistake of treating gender as a simple predictor of who possesses power in every domestic encounter.

This perspective is important because violence itself is one manifestation of power, but it is not the only one. Power may operate through intimidation, emotional manipulation, economic dependency, sexual coercion, social isolation, threats, control over communication and the manipulation of family relationships. The World Health Organisation (WHO, 2026) identifies intimate-partner violence as including physical and sexual violence, psychological abuse and controlling behaviour while emphasising that gender inequality is a major structural driver of violence against women. The present study accepts the importance of this structural context while extending the analysis to examine how different configurations of power can produce male victimisation within particular intimate relationships.

In African drama, these processes of gender construction and power become visible through characterisation, dialogue, conflict, symbolism and dramatic action. A playwright can construct masculinity through a character's language, occupation, bodily behaviour, relationship to his wife, attitude towards economic provision and response to emotional vulnerability. Similarly, femininity can be constructed through representations of care, obedience, sexuality, resistance, economic independence or authority. Drama therefore provides an important site for examining the ways gendered identities are produced and contested. The male victim becomes particularly significant within this framework because his vulnerability may expose the contradictions contained within dominant expectations of masculinity.

The study consequently understands gender not as a simple binary category but as a relational system through which identities and power relations are continuously produced. This understanding provides the conceptual foundation for examining patriarchy, masculinity and male victimhood in African dramatic texts.

## 2.2 Patriarchy and African Social Structures

Patriarchy remains one of the most important concepts for understanding gender relations in African

societies. In its broadest sense, patriarchy refers to social systems in which men collectively and institutionally occupy privileged positions of authority and control, particularly within political, economic, familial and cultural institutions. Walby (1990) conceptualises patriarchy as a system of social structures and practices through which men dominate, oppress and exploit women. Importantly, patriarchy should not be reduced to individual men's intentional domination of individual women. It is a wider system reproduced through institutions, traditions, cultural expectations, divisions of labour and everyday practices.

African societies are diverse, and it would be methodologically problematic to speak of a single African patriarchal structure. African gender systems vary according to ethnicity, religion, class, generation, geographical location and historical experience. Nevertheless, many African societies have historically associated masculinity with authority, responsibility, economic provision and family leadership. These expectations have been influenced by indigenous social structures as well as colonial and postcolonial transformations. Oyèwùmí (1997), for instance, cautions against uncritically imposing Western gender categories upon African societies, arguing that gender and social hierarchy must be interpreted within specific cultural and historical contexts. Her intervention is important because an analysis of African patriarchy must avoid treating African societies as homogeneous or assuming that Western conceptualisations of gender automatically explain African social organisation.

At the level of the household, patriarchal expectations have frequently positioned men as providers, protectors and decision-makers. The male head of household may be expected to provide financial resources, determine major family decisions, protect the family from external threats and represent the household in the wider community. These expectations can confer authority, but they also impose significant obligations. Masculinity becomes associated not only with privilege but also with responsibility and performance.

The expectation of the man as provider is particularly significant. Economic provision is often closely connected to masculine identity. A man who is unable to provide adequately for his household may experience social criticism, shame or a sense of diminished masculine status. Economic changes, unemployment, inflation and changing household structures can intensify this pressure. When women increasingly participate in paid employment and contribute significantly to household income, traditional assumptions concerning male economic authority may also become destabilised. These changes do not necessarily eliminate patriarchy; rather, they can generate new negotiations over authority, dependency and responsibility.

The expectation that men serve as the household authority reinforces the idea of masculinity as a form of domestic leadership. Traditional assumptions may position the husband or father as the final authority in family decisions. Such expectations can affect domestic communication, conflict resolution and the distribution of resources. They may also contribute to the perception that a man who submits to his wife has lost his legitimate masculine position.

The man as protector represents another important dimension of patriarchal masculinity. Protection is commonly associated with physical strength, courage and the capacity to defend family members. This expectation becomes particularly problematic when the man himself requires protection. If the husband is culturally positioned as the person who should protect his wife and children, his admission that he is being abused by his wife can appear culturally contradictory. His vulnerability may therefore be interpreted as weakness rather than victimhood.

The fourth expectation is that of the man as the decision-maker. Authority over family finances, residence, children's education, property and other major decisions has historically been associated with masculine household leadership in many patriarchal settings. However, contemporary African families increasingly negotiate economic resources, education, migration, employment, and domestic responsibilities between spouses. by negotiations between spouses concerning economic resources, education, migration, employment and domestic responsibilities. Such transformations can produce tensions when established expectations of male authority encounter changing patterns of female autonomy.

These expectations reveal an important paradox: patriarchy can privilege men as a social category while simultaneously imposing restrictive expectations upon individual men. A man may benefit from being regarded as the household authority while being constrained by the expectation that he must never appear weak. This distinction is central to the present study. The objective is not to portray men as victims of patriarchy in the same manner as women. Rather, it is to examine how patriarchal constructions of masculinity can contribute to a particular form of male vulnerability by making emotional disclosure, help-seeking and admission of victimhood socially difficult.

This paradox is especially important in African drama. Dramatic characters frequently embody social expectations while simultaneously revealing their contradictions. A male character may insist upon authority, economic responsibility and emotional control, only for the dramatic narrative to expose his psychological vulnerability. In such cases, the dramatic

text does not necessarily reject masculinity altogether; rather, it interrogates the consequences of a rigid masculine ideal.

The relationship between patriarchy and male victimhood should therefore be understood dialectically. Patriarchy can provide men with structural privileges while simultaneously producing masculine expectations that silence particular male experiences. This is why the present study does not conceptualise male victimhood as evidence that patriarchy has disappeared or that men and women occupy equivalent social positions. Instead, it investigates how patriarchal gender expectations may create conditions under which male suffering becomes difficult to recognise.

### 2.3 Masculinity and Hegemonic Masculinity

Masculinity constitutes a central conceptual category in the analysis of male victimhood because the social meaning of being a man influences whether male vulnerability can be acknowledged. Masculinity refers broadly to the socially constructed meanings, practices and expectations associated with male identity. It is neither biologically predetermined nor culturally uniform. Different societies produce different ideals of masculinity, while different men may embody, negotiate, resist or fail to conform to dominant masculine expectations.

R. W. Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity provides one of the most influential frameworks for analysing these processes. Connell (1995) conceptualises hegemonic masculinity as the culturally dominant form of masculinity that legitimises men's collective position in the gender order. It does not mean that all men are equally powerful or that all men embody the hegemonic ideal. Rather, hegemonic masculinity establishes an ideal against which other masculinities are evaluated.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) subsequently refined the concept, emphasising that hegemonic masculinity is historically dynamic, relational and contextually produced. It operates within gender hierarchies among men as well as between men and women. Thus, masculinity should be understood as plural rather than singular. There are multiple masculinities, and these may occupy different positions within particular social and cultural contexts.

This distinction is especially important for African studies because African masculinities cannot be treated as a single homogeneous phenomenon. Masculinity is shaped by ethnicity, class, religion, generation, occupation, geographical location and historical change. A Nigerian urban professional, a rural farmer, a traditional community leader and an unemployed young man may experience very different expectations of masculinity. Nevertheless, certain recurring ideals strength, provision, authority,

heterosexual competence, emotional control and protection can exert considerable influence across contexts.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity helps explain why male victimhood can be culturally difficult to recognise. The hegemonic masculine subject is expected to be strong rather than vulnerable, controlling rather than controlled, protective rather than protected, and emotionally resilient rather than emotionally dependent. These expectations establish a contradiction when a man experiences domestic violence. His lived experience places him in the position of vulnerability, while the cultural script of masculinity expects him to occupy the position of strength.

The central question, therefore, becomes:

What happens to a man when the social identity that requires him to be strong, dominant and authoritative conflicts with his actual experience of vulnerability?

The answer is not necessarily immediate disclosure. The conflict may produce denial, shame, silence, anger, withdrawal, minimisation or attempts to reassert authority. A man may interpret victimhood as emasculation because his social identity has been constructed around the ability to control circumstances. Consequently, the psychological consequences of male victimisation may extend beyond the violence itself to include a crisis of masculine identity.

Connell's framework also helps distinguish masculinity from maleness. Not every male individual automatically embodies hegemonic masculinity. Men may occupy subordinate, marginalised, complicit or resistant positions within gender hierarchies (Connell, 1995; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This allows the present study to analyse male characters without assuming that all men possess the same degree of power or that every male character is a representative of patriarchal authority.

The concept of complicit masculinity is particularly relevant. Men who do not embody all aspects of hegemonic masculinity may nevertheless benefit from the patriarchal order. This helps explain how a man can experience vulnerability while simultaneously possessing other forms of gender privilege. Male victimhood therefore does not automatically erase male privilege. The two may coexist.

The concept also has implications for female characters. If masculinity is relational, then femininity is also constructed within a gender order. Women may reinforce, negotiate or resist dominant masculine expectations. A female character who abuses a male partner may therefore represent a disruption of conventional gender scripts. Her actions can expose the

fact that violence is not biologically determined by maleness, even though broader structural patterns of violence against women remain gendered.

Contemporary empirical research reinforces the importance of examining male vulnerability without assuming that it is incompatible with patriarchal social structures. Oyediran *et al.*, (2023), using data from Cameroon and Sierra Leone, found substantial reports of psychological, physical and sexual intimate-partner victimisation among men. Both countries reported psychological victimisation more frequently than physical or sexual victimisation. The researchers also found that the predictors of victimisation varied across contexts, reinforcing the need for culturally and contextually sensitive approaches rather than a single model of male victimhood in sub-Saharan Africa.

For dramatic analysis, hegemonic masculinity, therefore, provides a means of examining how male characters perform masculinity and what occurs when those performances fail. A character who continually insists upon strength may reveal vulnerability through silence; a character who claims authority may become psychologically dependent; a character who is expected to provide may become economically controlled; and a character who is expected to protect may become the person requiring protection. These contradictions can serve as central dramatic conflicts.

Hegemonic masculinity theory consequently enables this study to move beyond the question of whether male characters experience violence to examine why male victimhood may be difficult for them to recognise, disclose or inhabit. It provides the first major theoretical foundation of the study.

## 2.4 Domestic Violence and Male Victimhood

Domestic violence is a multidimensional phenomenon that cannot be reduced to physical assault. The World Health Organisation defines intimate-partner violence in terms of behaviours that cause physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviour. The WHO's broader description also includes emotional abuse, intimidation, humiliation, threats, isolation and restrictions on financial resources and other aspects of personal autonomy.

This multidimensional understanding is essential to the present study because a narrow focus on physical violence can obscure important forms of male victimisation. If the analytical framework assumes that victimhood becomes legitimate only when visible physical injury occurs, significant experiences of psychological, emotional, economic and coercive abuse may remain invisible.

## Psychological Abuse

Psychological abuse involves behaviours designed to undermine a person's emotional stability, confidence, sense of worth or psychological security. It may include persistent criticism, threats, intimidation, manipulation, gaslighting, degradation and the creation of fear. Psychological violence can be particularly difficult to identify because it may leave no visible physical evidence. Yet its effects can be profound.

In dramatic texts, psychological abuse may be depicted through repeated insults, threats, manipulation, surveillance, accusations, emotional withdrawal, or the deliberate exploitation of a character's insecurities. through repeated insults, threats, manipulation, surveillance, accusations, emotional withdrawal or the deliberate exploitation of a character's insecurities. Physical injury is not required to prove violence. The dramatic representation of psychological abuse can reveal how power operates through language and emotional dependency.

## Emotional Manipulation

Emotional abuse involves patterns of behaviour through which one partner manipulates another's emotional needs, fears or attachments. It may involve humiliation, deliberate withdrawal of affection, threats to end the relationship, manipulation of children, public embarrassment or the exploitation of emotional dependency.

For male victims, emotional abuse may be particularly difficult to identify because cultural expectations can discourage men from discussing emotional vulnerability. A man may interpret emotional manipulation as a private marital disagreement rather than abuse, particularly where masculinity encourages emotional self-containment.

## Economic Control

Economic abuse occurs when one partner controls access to money, employment, property or other economic resources in ways that restrict the autonomy of the other. The WHO recognises restrictions on financial resources, employment and education among forms of controlling behaviour associated with intimate-partner violence.

Economic abuse is especially relevant to masculine identity because economic provision is frequently associated with male authority. A man whose income is controlled by his partner, whose employment is deliberately obstructed or who is financially manipulated may experience not only economic deprivation but also a perceived assault upon his masculine identity.

## Humiliation

Humiliation is another important form of domestic abuse. Public or private ridicule, insults, mockery of sexual performance, attacks upon masculinity and deliberate exposure of personal weaknesses can function as mechanisms of domination. In the case of male victims, attacks upon masculinity can be particularly powerful because they target the very identity through which the victim is expected to exercise authority.

Dramatic texts can make humiliation clear through dialogue and audience participation. A character's public embarrassment may reveal the social dimension of domestic abuse because the victim is not merely harmed by a partner but positioned as socially inadequate before others.

## Intimidation

Intimidation involves threats, coercive gestures, destruction of property, threats against children or relatives, threats of exposure and other behaviours designed to generate fear. Intimidation demonstrates that violence does not necessarily require physical contact. The anticipation of violence can itself become a mechanism of control.

## Physical Violence

Physical violence remains an important dimension of domestic abuse and may include hitting, slapping, kicking, beating or other forms of bodily assault. The recognition of male physical victimisation is important because cultural assumptions about male physical strength can produce the belief that men should be capable of defending themselves.

The empirical evidence from Cameroon and Sierra Leone challenges such assumptions. Oyediran *et al.*, (2023) found that substantial proportions of surveyed men reported physical IPV victimisation, along with psychological and sexual forms of violence. The findings are important for the present study because they demonstrate that male victimisation cannot simply be dismissed as culturally implausible in patriarchal African contexts.

The concept of male victimhood employed in this study therefore encompasses multiple forms of domestic violence. A male character may be a victim even when he is not physically assaulted. He may be controlled economically, psychologically manipulated, sexually coerced, emotionally humiliated, intimidated or isolated. This multidimensional conception allows the analysis to capture the full complexity of dramatic representations of domestic abuse.

At the same time, the study recognises the disproportionate burden of intimate-partner violence that women bear globally. The WHO identifies violence

against women as a major global health and human-rights problem, with intimate-partner violence constituting an important part of this burden. The purpose of recognising male victimhood is therefore not to create a false equivalence but to develop a gender-sensitive framework capable of identifying victimisation wherever it occurs.

## 2.5 The Silencing of Male Victims

The silencing of male victims constitutes one of the most significant conceptual concerns of this study. If violence is an experience of power, then the inability to speak about that experience. If violence represents an experience of power, then the inability to articulate that experience also reflects power. A victim does not necessarily become socially visible simply because violence has occurred. Victimhood requires recognition, and recognition is shaped by cultural expectations, institutional structures and dominant narratives.

The cultural association of masculinity with strength creates a particularly difficult environment for male victims. The stereotypical masculine subject is expected to endure hardship, protect others, solve problems and remain emotionally controlled. Within such a framework, admitting that one's intimate partner is abusive may be interpreted as an admission of weakness or failure.

The problem is therefore not simply that men may be unwilling to speak. Rather, they may lack a culturally legitimate language through which to articulate their experiences. If a man is expected to be the protector, how does he explain that he needs protection? If he is expected to control the household, how does he explain that he is being controlled? If he is expected to demonstrate emotional resilience, how does he communicate psychological trauma?

### These contradictions can produce silence.

Silence, however, should not be understood merely as the absence of speech. In literary and dramatic analysis, silence can function as a significant form of communication. A character's refusal to disclose abuse, inability to respond to accusations, withdrawal from social interaction, concealment of injuries or avoidance of conversations may reveal the psychological consequences of victimisation. Silence can therefore become a dramatic representation of both vulnerability and resistance.

The concept of voice is correspondingly important. To possess a voice means more than simply being able to speak. It involves having one's speech recognised as meaningful and credible. A man may disclose abuse but remain unheard if listeners interpret his experience as weakness, exaggeration or domestic incompetence. Thus, the problem of male victimhood involves both speaking and being heard.

This is where the earlier work of Eluzai and Ekevere (2026) on voice, silence and gendered power becomes conceptually relevant. Their emphasis on the relationship between voice and gendered power provides a useful foundation for examining how dramatic characters become visible or invisible through discourse. Applied to male victimhood, the framework raises questions concerning who has the authority to define violence, who is believed when violence is reported and which gendered identities are considered compatible with victimhood.

The silencing of male victims can also institutional assumptions can also reinforce the silencing of male victims. by institutional assumptions. If domestic-violence interventions are culturally imagined primarily around women as victims and men as perpetrators, a male victim may be uncertain about where to seek assistance. The problem is not that services designed to protect women are unnecessary; rather, a comprehensive response to domestic violence should also have mechanisms through which male victims can seek help safely.

The issue of stigma further compounds the problem. Male victims may fear ridicule from friends, relatives, colleagues or community members. They may also fear that disclosure will damage their reputation or marriage. In societies where masculine respectability is closely associated with authority, public acknowledgement of abuse can become socially costly.

The silencing process can therefore be represented as a sequence:

The sequence of the silencing process can be represented as follows: The sequence of the silencing process can be represented as follows: The sequence of the silencing process can be represented as follows:

violence → vulnerability → masculine contradiction → shame/stigma → silence → under-recognition → continued vulnerability.

This cycle is important to the present study because dramatic texts may represent male victimhood precisely through the character's inability to speak openly about his experience.

The concept of silence also has an important relationship with agency. A silent male victim should not automatically be interpreted as passive. Silence may indicate fear, shame, strategic self-protection, psychological exhaustion or resistance. The researcher must therefore examine the circumstances and meanings surrounding silence rather than assigning a single interpretation to it.

The same applies to speech. A male character who eventually discloses his victimisation may be

performing an important act of resistance against hegemonic masculine expectations. His speech can challenge the cultural assumption that men cannot be victims. In this sense, the movement from silence to voice can become a dramatic representation of the reconstruction of masculine identity.

The problem of silence also demonstrates why the study cannot rely exclusively on visible violence. A male character may never be beaten on stage and yet be constructed as a victim through intimidation, humiliation, economic control and psychological domination. Similarly, a character may not verbally identify himself as a victim, but the dramatic structure may nevertheless position him as one.

The silencing of male victims therefore constitutes both a social and representational problem. Socially, it can discourage disclosure and access to support. Dramatically, it can make male victimhood difficult to recognise because the victim may not possess the conventional narrative voice associated with it. The analysis of silence consequently becomes central to understanding how contemporary African drama constructs male vulnerability.

## 2.6 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study combines Hegemonic Masculinity Theory, Foucauldian Power Theory and Gender Performativity Theory. The combination is deliberate. No single theory adequately captures the full complexity of male victimhood within domestic relationships. Hegemonic masculinity explains the cultural expectations placed upon men; Foucauldian power theory explains how power operates relationally and through discourse; and Butler's theory of gender performativity explains how gender identities are repeatedly constituted through social practices. Together, the three perspectives provide an analytical framework for examining not simply who is violent but how gendered identities are produced, how power circulates and how victimhood becomes socially recognisable or invisible.

### 2.6.1 Hegemonic Masculinity Theory

The first theoretical pillar is R. W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity. Connell (1995) argues that masculinities exist within a hierarchy in which particular forms of masculinity become culturally dominant. Hegemonic masculinity represents the configuration of practices that legitimise men's dominant positions within a gender order. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) subsequently reformulated the concept to emphasise its contextual, relational and dynamic character.

The theory is particularly appropriate for this study because the central research problem concerns the contradiction between masculine expectations and male

vulnerability. If dominant masculinity requires men to be strong, authoritative, independent and protective, then victimhood creates a potential crisis of masculine identity. A male victim may therefore experience violence while simultaneously feeling that acknowledging it threatens his masculine legitimacy.

The theory will consequently be used to examine the following:

1. how male characters perform culturally valued forms of masculinity;
2. How expectations of strength and authority shape their responses to domestic violence;
3. How vulnerability is represented as compatible or incompatible with masculinity;
4. How male characters negotiate, resist, or reproduce hegemonic masculine expectations and
5. How female characters' actions may challenge conventional assumptions concerning masculine and feminine behaviour.

Hegemonic masculinity theory is especially useful for interpreting characters whose social identity depends upon being providers, protectors or household authorities. When such characters become victims, the contradiction between social expectation and lived experience becomes a central source of dramatic tension.

However, the theory must be applied critically. The study does not assume that all African men embody hegemonic masculinity or that all women are positioned outside power. Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) later formulation is important because it recognises multiple masculinities and the contextual nature of masculine hierarchies. The theory therefore allows the study to identify differences among male characters rather than treating masculinity as a universal category.

### 2.6.2 Foucauldian Power Theory

The second theoretical foundation is Kelly's conception of power. He challenges the notion that power is simply something possessed by one group and imposed upon another. Power operates through relationships, institutions, discourse, knowledge and social practices. It is productive as well as repressive because it contributes to the production of identities, categories and norms.

This perspective is particularly useful to the present study because domestic violence involves more than direct physical domination. Power can operate through language, surveillance, economic control, emotional manipulation, sexual regulation, threats and the production of shame. A partner may exercise power without continuously using physical force.

Kelly's relational conception of power also permits the study to examine changing configurations of

authority within intimate relationships. Power may be unevenly distributed but not necessarily permanently fixed. The husband who possesses economic authority may be emotionally dependent upon his wife; the wife who lacks structural economic power may exercise psychological control within the relationship. Such possibilities do not eliminate broader gender structures but demonstrate that interpersonal power requires specific analysis.

Foucauldian power theory will therefore be used to examine:

- How power circulates between intimate partners;
- How discourse defines acceptable masculine and feminine behaviour;
- How surveillance and control operate within relationships;
- How shame and social judgement regulate behaviour;
- How victims internalise dominant expectations;
- And how resistance emerges within relations of power.

The concept of discourse is especially important. If society repeatedly produces the discourse that "real men cannot be victims", that discourse can influence how men understand their own experiences. A man may therefore internalise the cultural expectation that he should remain silent even when he is being abused. Power operates not just through what someone does to him, but also through the cultural meanings that shape his interpretation of events.

### 2.6.3 Gender Performativity Theory

The third theoretical foundation is Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. In *Gender Trouble*, Butler (2006) challenges the assumption that gender is a stable identity that simply exists prior to social expression. Instead, gender is constituted through repeated acts, norms, bodily practices and social conventions. Gender appears natural partly because these performances are repeated and regulated.

The theory is relevant because the study examines how male characters are expected to perform masculinity. A man may perform strength through physical posture, authority through language, provision through economic behaviour, emotional control through silence and protection through acts of defence. These performances continually reproduce his masculine identity.

Domestic violence can disrupt these performances. A man who cannot physically protect himself, is economically controlled by his partner, or is emotionally overwhelmed by abuse may experience a rupture between the masculine identity he is expected to

perform and his lived reality. The dramatic text can make this rupture visible.

Butler's theory also helps the study avoid treating gender as a fixed explanation for behaviour. If gender is performative, then masculinity can be repeated differently, resisted or transformed. A male character who acknowledges vulnerability does not necessarily cease to be masculine; instead, he may be performing masculinity differently from the hegemonic ideal.

The theory will therefore assist in analysing the following:

1. The repeated behaviours through which male characters establish masculinity;
2. The social sanctions attached to failure to perform dominant masculinity;
3. Moments in which characters challenge conventional gender performances;
4. The relationship between bodily behaviour and gender identity; and
5. The possibility of alternative masculine identities.

#### 2.6.4 Complementarity of the Three Theories

The three theories are not employed as isolated analytical instruments. They operate at different but interconnected levels.

Hegemonic masculinity theory explains the masculine ideal.

Foucauldian power theory explains how power circulates through relationships and discourse.

Gender performativity theory explains how individuals repeatedly enact and reproduce gendered identities.

Their relationship can therefore be represented conceptually as:

Social expectations → Gender performance →  
Power relations → Vulnerability/resistance →  
Recognition or silencing of victimhood

For example, a man is culturally expected to be strong and authoritative (hegemonic masculinity). He repeatedly performs authority through emotional restraint, economic provision and household leadership (gender performativity). His partner subsequently exercises psychological, economic or emotional control over him (relational power). Because he believes that admitting vulnerability contradicts masculine expectations, he remains silent (internalised discourse and power). His silence then contributes to the continued invisibility of his victimhood.

The three theories, therefore, make it possible to analyse the entire process rather than focusing only on the violent act.

#### 2.6.5 Application of the Framework to African Drama

The theoretical framework will be applied to the selected dramatic texts through close textual analysis. Particular attention will be paid to the ways characters speak, act, remain silent, negotiate authority, respond to violence and construct their gender identities.

The analysis will first identify the dominant masculine expectations attached to male characters. Questions will include: Is the man expected to provide? Is he expected to protect? Is he expected to make household decisions? Is emotional vulnerability condemned? Does another character ridicule his masculinity?

Second, the analysis will examine the distribution of power within the intimate relationship. Who controls financial resources? Who controls communication? Who makes decisions? Who threatens whom? Who has access to family networks? Who controls information? Who can leave the relationship? Who is believed when conflict becomes public?

Third, the study will examine gender performance. How do male characters attempt to demonstrate masculinity? What happens when those performances collapse? How do female characters perform or resist culturally expected femininity? Does the dramatic text reward conformity or expose its contradictions?

Finally, the analysis will examine victimhood. Does the male character see himself as a victim? Does another character recognise him as such? Is his suffering minimised? Does he remain silent? Does he eventually speak? Does disclosure constitute resistance? How does the dramatic text position the audience in relation to his suffering?

Through this process, the study will avoid reducing domestic violence to a simple question of biological sex. Instead, it will examine the complex relationship between gender identity, social expectations, interpersonal power, violence, vulnerability, voice and recognition.

#### 2.6.6 Justification for the Combined Framework

The combined theoretical framework is appropriate because the research problem itself is multidimensional. Hegemonic masculinity theory alone explains men's reluctance to acknowledge vulnerability but does not fully explain the relational circulation of power within intimate relationships. Foucauldian power theory could explain relational power and discourse but

may not sufficiently specify the gendered expectations attached to masculinity. Gender Performativity Theory could explain how masculinity is repeatedly enacted but requires the other theories to illuminate the institutional and relational structures within which those performances occur.

The three theories therefore complement rather than duplicate one another.

- **Connell:** Provides the gender hierarchy.
- **Kelly (2013):** Provides the relational and discursive understanding of power.
- **Butler:** Provides the performative construction of gender identity.

Together, they enable the study to interrogate the central contradiction underlying male victimhood: a man may possess social recognition as a powerful gendered subject while simultaneously experiencing powerlessness within an intimate relationship.

This contradiction is particularly valuable for the analysis of contemporary African drama because dramatic texts often expose the instability of identities that appear socially fixed. The apparently powerful husband may become vulnerable; the apparently submissive wife may exercise agency; the supposed protector may require protection; and the person assumed to be the perpetrator may become the victim. Such reversals do not necessarily negate structural gender inequalities. Instead, they reveal the complexity through which power operates at the intersection of social structure and interpersonal relationships.

The theoretical framework therefore positions the present study within a broader interdisciplinary conversation concerning gender, masculinity, power and victimhood. It enables the study to move beyond the conventional question of whether men or women are more violent and towards the more theoretically productive question of how gendered identities and power relations make particular forms of violence, vulnerability and victimhood visible or invisible.

### 3. MASCULINITY, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, AND GENDER REVERSAL IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN DRAMA

#### 3.0 Introduction

The preceding chapter established gender, masculinity, power, and victimhood as interconnected concepts and developed a theoretical framework combining R. W. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity, Kelly's conception of relational power, and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. Chapter Three applies these conceptual and theoretical perspectives to selected Nigerian dramatic texts in order to examine how contemporary African drama represents changing configurations of masculinity, domestic violence, and gendered power. The chapter focuses on

Tracie Chima Utor-Ezeajugh's *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*, Femi Osofisan's *Altine's Wrath*, and Emeka Nwabueze's *Rainstorm in the Desert*. The three plays provide complementary dramatic situations through which conventional assumptions concerning male authority, female vulnerability, masculine violence, female agency, and the instability of gendered power can be examined (Okoye-Ugwu *et al.*, 2020).

The selection of the three texts is particularly appropriate because they do not produce a single representation of gender relations. *Altine's Wrath* foregrounds a recognizable patriarchal configuration in which a male character exercises physical, psychological, and social domination over his wife. *Rainstorm in the Desert* extends this concern by presenting an intensely masculine protagonist whose sense of authority becomes entangled with betrayal, insecurity, violence, and the loss of masculine hegemony. *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*, it deliberately disrupts conventional gender roles by placing women in positions associated with masculine authority, economic control, and, in some instances, violent retaliation. Recent scholarship on Utor-Ezeajugh's play explicitly identifies this role reversal as a strategy for interrogating patriarchal power while also warning that replacing male domination with female domination may reproduce rather than resolve the logic of violence.

The comparative reading therefore does not seek to determine which gender is more violent. Rather, it asks how gendered power is produced, performed, challenged, and redistributed. More specifically, the chapter investigates what happens when conventional gender expectations are reinforced, when they are intensified, and when they are reversed. It also asks whether the displacement of masculine authority necessarily produces equality or whether it can result in a reproduction of the same coercive logic associated with patriarchy.

This distinction is central to the present study's argument concerning the male victimhood gap. The chapter does not interpret the presence of female agency or female aggression as evidence that women are generally perpetrators of domestic violence. Instead, it examines selected dramatic situations in which gender roles become unstable and asks what those moments reveal about the relationship between masculinity, power, violence, and victimhood.

#### 3.1 *Altine's Wrath*: Patriarchal Masculinity and the Construction of the Male Perpetrator

Femi Osofisan's *Altine's Wrath* provides an important starting point for the analysis because it presents a domestic relationship in which conventional patriarchal power is strongly articulated. The play dramatizes the abuse of Altine by her husband, Lawal,

and exposes the ways in which male authority can become oppression, physical, psychological, and social domination. Existing scholarship similarly identifies *Altine's Wrath* as a dramatic treatment of domestic violence, oppression, and patriarchal relations. Recent analysis indicates that Lawal physically assaults Altine, demeans her, and relegates her to a subordinate domestic role, thereby converting the household into a locus of persistent domination.

The significance of *Altine's Wrath* for the present study lies partly in the fact that it establishes the conventional gender binary against which the other plays can be read. Lawal embodies a form of masculinity that associates manhood with authority, control, and entitlement. His treatment of Altine demonstrates how the patriarchal household can become a space in which masculine power is normalized and female autonomy is restricted. The husband is positioned as the authority figure while the wife is progressively reduced from marital partner to subordinate domestic subject.

The play therefore offers an important representation of the male-as-perpetrator/female-as-victim configuration. Such a representation should not be dismissed as simplistic merely because it corresponds to a gender binary. It reflects an important social reality: intimate-partner violence against women is a serious and widespread problem, and dramatic literature has played a significant role in exposing it. The importance of *Altine's Wrath* is consequently that it reveals how patriarchal masculinity can become violent when authority is interpreted as entitlement to control another person's body, labor, and emotional life.

Lawal's masculinity is not expressed exclusively through physical violence. His domination is also linguistic and psychological. His treatment of Altine as inferior demonstrates that violence can operate through humiliation and degradation as well as bodily assault. The household therefore becomes a site of multiple forms of power. The husband's control over the wife's social and domestic identity reinforces his authority and reduces her capacity to act autonomously.

From the perspective of Connell's (1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity, Lawal's behavior can be interpreted as an attempt to establish and maintain a culturally dominant form of masculine authority. He occupies the position of husband and household head, and his masculinity is performed through command, control, and the expectation of obedience. The violence directed at Altine is therefore not an isolated personal action; his understanding of masculine identity and social prestige drives his aspiration to participate in the Abia Dance competition. This behaviour reflects a broader masculine ideology in which husbands feel entitled to determine the conditions under which their wives live.

The play also demonstrates the relationship between masculinity and the regulation of femininity. Altine's value as a wife is evaluated according to Lawal's expectations of what a woman should be. When she fails to conform to those expectations, he responds not through negotiation but through punishment. The implication is that the patriarchal husband does not simply want a wife; he wants a particular performance of wifehood.

This is where Butler's (2006) concept of gender performativity becomes useful. Lawal's masculinity is repeatedly enacted through his speech, authority, and treatment of Altine, while Altine's femininity is imposed through expectations of obedience, domestic labor, and marital submission. The dramatic conflict arises partly because these performances are not freely chosen but socially regulated.

The play consequently illustrates how gender can become coercive. The husband does not merely occupy a masculine identity; he uses the authority attached to that identity to regulate his wife's behavior. Gender becomes a mechanism of domestic discipline.

Kelly (2013) conception of power further illuminates this relationship. Power is evident in Lawal's violence and the practices that limit Altine's autonomy. Her movement, labor, social status, and identity are all affected by his authority. His authority affects her movement, labor, social status, and identity. by his authority. His authority affects her movement, labor, social status, and identity. by his authority. The violence therefore becomes productive, creating a specific relationship in which Lawal assumes the role of controller while Altine is positioned as the controlled subject.

The dramatic significance of *Altine's Wrath* for the present study, however, extends beyond establishing the reality of female victimhood. The text provides the baseline gender configuration against which gender reversal can subsequently be examined. It represents a social order in which masculine authority appears dominant and feminine vulnerability appears subordinate.

But this configuration doesn't mean all domestic relationships work the same way. Indeed, the subsequent texts challenge precisely this assumption.

### 3.2 Masculine Authority, Violence, and the Crisis of Hegemony in *Altine's Wrath*

The representation of Lawal is also important because it demonstrates that violence may emerge when masculinity becomes excessively dependent upon control. The patriarchal man does not simply possess power; he must continually demonstrate it. Authority therefore becomes performative.

Lawal's aggression can be understood as a form of masculine performance through which he repeatedly establishes his superiority. Violence becomes one of the mechanisms through which the character attempts to maintain a gender hierarchy. This observation is consistent with the broader argument of hegemonic masculinity theory: dominant masculinity is not merely a personal characteristic but a relational practice through which masculine authority is established in relation to women and other men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

The significance of this process for the present research is that masculinity and violence become connected through a demand for recognition. The man must be recognised as authoritative, while the woman must recognise as authoritative, while the woman must recognize that authority. When that recognition is threatened, violence can serve to restore dominance. Violence can become a mechanism for restoring dominance.

This does not mean that all men who experience challenges to masculinity become violent. Rather, the dramatic text reveals one culturally specific possibility: the use of violence as a means of reasserting threatened authority.

The problem with such masculinity is that it defines strength negatively. The man demonstrates strength by making another person weak. His authority becomes dependent upon another person's subordination. Consequently, the masculine subject becomes trapped within the same hierarchy that appears to empower him.

This observation is crucial for the broader argument of the chapter. If masculine authority depends upon domination, then the redistribution of power does not necessarily produce equality. It may simply change who occupies the dominant position.

That possibility becomes more visible in *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*.

### 3.3 *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*: Gender-Role Reversal and the Disruption of Patriarchal Power

Tracie Chima Utor-Ezeajugh's *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* provides a particularly productive text for examining gender reversal because it deliberately disrupts conventional assumptions about masculine and feminine behavior. Recent scholarship on the play identifies gender-role reversal and domestic violence as central concerns and argues that the female characters assume roles traditionally associated with men, including household management, economic authority, and violent retaliation. The study further observes that the play employs irony, parody, and exaggeration to

question patriarchal structures while simultaneously raising concerns about the reproduction of violence.

The significance of the play for the present study is therefore substantial. If *Altine's Wrath* presents the conventional arrangement in which masculine authority dominates feminine vulnerability, *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*, it reverses elements of that arrangement. Women occupy positions associated with authority, aggression, and control, while men become comparatively vulnerable.

The dramatic strategy raises an important question:

When women acquire traditionally masculine power, do they dismantle patriarchal violence or reproduce its logic?

The question is important because equality cannot be measured simply by determining which gender occupies the position of power. If power remains organized around domination, replacing the male-dominant subject with a female-dominant subject does not necessarily transform the underlying structure.

The play's gender reversal can therefore be interpreted at two interconnected levels. At the first level, it challenges patriarchal assumptions by demonstrating that women are capable of agency, authority, and decisive action. At the second level, however, it raises the possibility that the performance of traditionally masculine power may reproduce the same coercive practices that feminist critique seeks to dismantle.

This is where Butler's (2006) theory of performativity becomes especially useful. The female characters' adoption of traditionally masculine behaviors demonstrates that authority, aggression, and dominance are not naturally male qualities. If women can perform behaviors culturally coded as masculine, then those behaviors are revealed as social practices rather than biological necessities.

The gender reversal consequently destabilizes the assumption that violence is naturally masculine. The play demonstrates that the capacity to exercise power cannot be explained simply through biological sex.

However, the reversal does not mean that the play erases patriarchy. Rather, it exposes the extent to which patriarchal structures have defined power itself in masculine terms. If women seeking power must adopt the language, behavior, and strategies historically associated with masculine authority, the text raises the possibility that the problem lies not simply in who has power but in how power is conceptualized and exercised.

This is where Kelly (2013) theory becomes particularly useful. Power does not simply disappear

when one group challenges another. It circulates and can be reproduced through new relationships. A woman who acquires authority may challenge an existing hierarchy while simultaneously creating another hierarchy. The dramatic implication is that gender reversal does not automatically equal liberation.

### 3.4 Female Agency, Violence, and the Problem of Reversed Patriarchy

The Women in *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*, they are important because their actions disrupt the cultural expectation that women should be submissive, passive, or dependent. Their agency challenges the assumption that women are naturally suited to victimhood.

This is particularly significant for the present study because female agency complicates the conventional victim/perpetrator binary. If women can act, resist, and exercise power, then they should not be represented exclusively as passive victims. At the same time, recognizing female agency should acknowledge, not deny, the structural inequalities that women experience.

The play's dramatic strategy is therefore double-edged. On the one hand, gender reversal creates an opportunity to expose the artificiality of conventional gender roles. On the other hand, if female empowerment is represented primarily through the adoption of aggression and domination, the play risks suggesting that women can become powerful only by behaving like the men whose power they challenge.

This problem is captured in recent scholarship on the play, which argues that the role reversal challenges patriarchal structures but also risks reproducing cycles of violence through extreme retaliation. ([ResearchGate](#))

The implication is theoretically significant. If domination is the basis of power, then the gender of the dominant subject becomes secondary. What changes is the identity of the person exercising power; what remains unchanged is the logic of domination.

This distinction is central to the present study because it prevents the analysis from becoming a simple gender reversal. The objective is to avoid demonstrating that women can be perpetrators and therefore men can be victims. The deeper argument is that victimhood and perpetration must be analyzed through relationships of power rather than be predetermined by gender identity.

The play therefore provides a valuable dramatic laboratory for examining this proposition.

### 3.5 Gender Reversal and the Emergence of Male Vulnerability

The disruption of conventional gender roles in *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* creates an important space for considering male vulnerability. When women occupy positions of authority traditionally associated with men, the male characters' social position becomes comparatively destabilized.

This destabilization is significant because masculine identity is often relational. A man's sense of authority A man's relationship with others partly shapes his sense of authority through his relationship with others. If he is no longer the economic provider, household decision-maker, or dominant partner, his performance of masculinity may become uncertain.

Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity is particularly useful here. Hegemonic masculinity is not a fixed possession but a relational position. It depends upon recognition within a gender hierarchy. When the hierarchy changes, masculine status can also change.

The dramatic reversal therefore raises the possibility of masculine displacement. A man may remain biologically male while losing the social privileges traditionally associated with masculinity. His vulnerability emerges not simply because a woman becomes powerful but because the cultural structures that previously guaranteed his authority have been disrupted.

This creates a crucial distinction between male weakness and male victimhood. A character should not be considered a victim simply because he lacks authority. Victimhood requires an experience of harm, coercion, or abuse. However, the loss of masculine privilege may create circumstances in which vulnerability becomes more visible.

The analytical task is therefore to determine whether the male character is merely displaced from authority or whether the dramatic text positions him as a subject experiencing actual abuse.

This distinction will be maintained throughout the analysis.

### 3.6 *Rainstorm in the Desert*: Toxic Masculinity and the Instability of Male Hegemony

Emeka Nwabueze's *Rainstorm in the Desert* offers another important representation of masculinity and violence. Unlike *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*, where gender roles are deliberately reversed, *Rainstorm in the Desert* presents an intensified form of masculine authority through the character of Odogwu. The play is particularly relevant because existing scholarship explicitly examines it through the concepts of toxic masculinity and shifting hegemony. Amaefula (2021)

argues that the play presents masculinity as unstable and relational, with Odogwu's violent behavior functioning as an attempt to maintain or recover threatened masculine dominance.

Odogwu's masculinity is strongly associated with authority, cultural status, marriage, fatherhood, and control. His aspiration to participate in the Abia Dance competition is connected to his understanding of masculine identity and social prestige. His relationship with his wife, Ugoada, is similarly embedded within expectations concerning marital fidelity, fatherhood, and male authority.

However, the play destabilizes this authority through betrayal and uncertainty. Odogwu discovers that the child he identifies as a symbol of his masculine identity is not biologically his. The revelation constitutes more than a marital crisis; it becomes a crisis of masculinity.

This is where hegemonic masculinity theory becomes particularly productive. Masculine authority is partly constructed through recognition. When Odogwu discovers that his claim to fatherhood has been compromised, the symbolic basis of his masculine identity is threatened. His response is not simply emotional pain but an attempt to reassert control.

Amaefula (2021) identifies this relationship between threatened masculinity and violent conduct in the play, arguing that Odogwu's aggression functions as a means through which he attempts to reassert masculine dominance.

The violence therefore becomes performative. Odogwu's aggression communicates a particular masculine identity: the powerful man who cannot tolerate betrayal, humiliation, or loss of authority.

This is precisely where Butler's theory intersects with Connell's. Odogwu's masculinity is repeatedly performed through acts of authority and aggression. At the same time, those performances are situated within a hierarchy of masculinities in which his status is continually negotiated.

The character therefore illustrates a fundamental feature of hegemonic masculinity: hegemony is powerful but precarious.

### 3.7 Toxic Masculinity and the Violence of Masculine Insecurity

The concept of toxic masculinity is useful in analyzing *Rainstorm in the Desert*, provided that it is used carefully. Toxic masculinity should not be interpreted as a synonym for masculinity itself. Rather, it refers to forms of masculine practice that valorize

domination, aggression, emotional suppression, and violence as legitimate expressions of manhood.

Amaefula's (2021) analysis is particularly relevant because it identifies Odogwu's behavior as an extreme performance of masculine dominance and connects his aggression to threatened masculine hegemony. The analysis further demonstrates that his hegemony is not permanent; it shifts as his relationship with women, other men, and institutions changes.

This shifting character of hegemony is essential to the present study. Odogwu is powerful in relation to Ugoada but becomes vulnerable in relation to other men and later in relation to state authority. His position is therefore relational.

At the beginning of the dramatic conflict, Odogwu appears as a powerful patriarch. Yet the play later presents him in police custody, physically constrained and socially diminished. The man who previously exercised power over his wife becomes subject to the power of the police.

This transformation is important because it demonstrates Foucault's conception of power as relational and circulating. Power does not belong permanently to Odogwu. It moves through different relationships and institutions (Kelly 2013).

The transformation also complicates the victim/perpetrator binary. Odogwu is responsible for violence against others, yet he subsequently becomes vulnerable to institutional power. The fact that a character can occupy different positions within different power relationships demonstrates why victimhood should not be treated as a permanent identity attached to gender.

This is one of the strongest contributions of *Rainstorm in the Desert* to the present study.

### 3.8 Masculinity, Betrayal, and the Crisis of Male Identity

The relationship between betrayal and masculinity is another important dimension of *Rainstorm in the Desert*. Odogwu's response to Ugoada's infidelity demonstrates the extent to which masculine identity can become dependent upon sexual control, fatherhood, and social recognition.

The revelation that another man has fathered the child he regards as his own destabilizes his identity. The crisis is therefore simultaneously personal, marital, and masculine.

The dramatic representation suggests that the threat to masculine identity can produce compensatory violence. Odogwu attempts to restore the authority that he believes has been taken from him. His violent reaction

can therefore be interpreted as an effort to repair a damaged masculine self.

However, this attempt ultimately fails. His violence does not restore his hegemony. Instead, it contributes to his downfall. The result is a significant dramatic irony: the strategy through which the character attempts to preserve masculine dominance becomes the mechanism through which that dominance collapses.

This is consistent with Amaefula's (2021) argument that the play presents hegemony as shifting rather than permanent.

The implication for the present study is that violent masculinity may be self-defeating. The more intensely the character attempts to prove his authority, the more unstable that authority becomes.

### 3.9 Comparative Analysis: From Patriarchal Authority to Gender Reversal

The three plays reveal three different configurations of gendered power.

In *Altine's Wrath*, masculine authority is largely established through patriarchal domination. The husband exercises power over the wife, and the female character occupies the position of victim.

In *Rainstorm in the Desert*, masculine authority becomes more psychologically complex. Odogwu exercises violence against women, but his masculinity is itself unstable and vulnerable to challenges from women, other men, and institutions.

In *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*, conventional gender roles are deliberately reversed, with women assuming positions associated with masculine authority and aggression.

The three configurations can therefore be represented conceptually as follows:

| Dramatic text                        | Dominant configuration                     | Major gender issue                   | Relevance to present study                                        |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Altine's Wrath</i>                | Male authority → female vulnerability      | Patriarchal domestic violence        | Establishes the conventional male-perpetrator/female-victim model |
| <i>Rainstorm in the Desert</i>       | Male hegemony → threatened masculinity     | Toxic masculinity and shifting power | Demonstrates that masculine power is relational and unstable      |
| <i>Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again</i> | Female authority → disrupted male position | Gender-role reversal                 | Demonstrates that power can shift across gender boundaries        |

The comparative value of the texts lies precisely in these differences. The study does not claim that the three plays represent identical experiences. Rather, they collectively reveal the instability of gendered power.

### 3.10 When Gender Roles Are Reversed: Does Power Change or Merely Change Hands?

The central question arising from the comparative analysis is whether gender-role reversal constitutes genuine transformation or simply redistribution of domination.

If a woman occupies the position formerly held by an abusive man and employs the same methods of intimidation, coercion, or violence, then the gender of the dominant subject has changed, but the structure of domination remains.

This is particularly relevant to *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*. The play's use of parody, exaggeration, and gender reversal enables the audience to recognize the absurdity of rigid gender expectations. However, its representation of female aggression also raises a more difficult question: whether empowerment should be measured by the ability to exercise power over others.

From a Foucauldian perspective, power is not eliminated when one subject displaces another. It continues to circulate through relationships. The problem is therefore not merely who possesses power but the form in which it is exercised.

The same principle can be applied to *Altine's Wrath*. Lawal's authority is problematic not merely because he is a man but because he converts gendered authority into domination and violence.

Similarly, in *Rainstorm in the Desert*, Odogwu's masculinity becomes destructive because he equates masculine legitimacy with control.

The three texts, therefore, collectively suggest that the fundamental problem is not simply male power or female power, but coercive power.

### 3.11 Male Victimhood and the Limits of Gender Reversal

The concept of male victimhood emerges most clearly when the conventional gender hierarchy is disrupted. However, the analysis must distinguish between loss of privilege, loss of authority, and victimization.

A man does not become a victim merely because a woman is economically independent, assertive, or authoritative. Similarly, a woman does not become a perpetrator simply because she rejects traditional domestic expectations.

Victimhood requires evidence of harm, coercion, abuse, or domination.

This distinction is crucial because otherwise the study risks reproducing the very gender binary it seeks to challenge. If every instance of female authority interpreting every instance of female authority as violence against men reduces the analysis to a mere reversal of feminist criticism. As violence against men, the analysis becomes a simple reversal of feminist criticism.

Instead, the present study asks more specific questions:

- Is the male character subjected to physical violence?
- Is he psychologically manipulated?
- Is he economically controlled?
- Is he humiliated or intimidated?
- Is his autonomy restricted?
- Is he prevented from speaking?
- Does he experience fear?
- Does he recognize himself as a victim?
- Does the dramatic text recognize him as a victim?

These questions provide a more rigorous basis for identifying male victimhood.

The distinction is particularly important in reading *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*. The significance of the play is not that women become “evil” when they acquire power. Rather, it is that gender reversal reveals the possibility that power can be exercised coercively regardless of the gender of the person exercising it.

### 3.12 Voice, Silence, and Gendered Power across the Three Plays

The relationship between voice and power provides another point of comparison. Eluzai and Ekevere (2026) illustrate how Nigerian and South Sudanese theatre uses voice and silence as central mechanisms to represent gendered power. Their study indicates that silence can signify trauma, marginalization, and resistance, while voice can become a means through which characters challenge dominant structures.

This framework is useful for the present chapter because male victimhood may not always be explicitly verbalized. A male character may experience abuse but remain silent because disclosure contradicts cultural expectations of masculinity.

In *Altine's Wrath*, the imbalance of voice reflects the broader imbalance of power. The abused woman is positioned within a domestic structure where the husband has greater authority.

In *Rainstorm in the Desert*, Odogwu's voice initially carries significant authority, but his position becomes increasingly unstable as other characters and institutions challenge his claims to dominance.

In *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*, the redistribution of authority alters who speaks, who commands, and who is expected to obey. The resulting disruption demonstrates that voice is itself a form of power.

The analysis of voice therefore provides a bridge between the representation of female victimhood and the emerging question of male victimhood. If victimhood involves not only suffering but recognition, then the capacity to speak and be heard becomes fundamental.

### 3.13 The Dramatic Construction of Victim and Perpetrator

One of the most important findings emerging from the comparative reading is that victim and perpetrator are not always fixed dramatic identities.

*Altine's Wrath* provides the clearest conventional arrangement: Lawal is constructed primarily as perpetrator and Altine as victim.

*A rainstorm in the desert* complicates this arrangement. Odogwu acts as a perpetrator in his relationship with Ugoada, but he becomes vulnerable when other men and institutional authority challenge his power. In his relationship with Ugoada, Odogwu acts as a perpetrator, but he becomes vulnerable when other men and institutional authority challenge his power. Odogwu becomes vulnerable when challenged by other men and by institutional authority. His movement between positions demonstrates the relational nature of power.

*Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*, it complicates the binary further by placing women in positions traditionally associated with male authority and aggression.

The comparative implication is that dramatic victimhood is constructed through relationships rather than biological sex alone.

This does not mean that gender becomes irrelevant. Gender remains central because it establishes the expectations through which characters understand themselves and others. What changes is the analytical question. Instead of assuming that gender determines victimhood, the study examines how gender influences

the production, recognition, and interpretation of victimhood.

### 3.14 Gender Performativity and the Transformation of Masculine Identity

The three texts also demonstrate that masculinity is continually performed and therefore potentially transformed.

Lawal performs masculinity through authority and violence.

Odogwu performs masculinity through authority, fatherhood, cultural status, and aggression.

The male characters in *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* encounter a world in which women increasingly occupy positions associated with authority, thereby destabilizing conventional masculine performances.

Butler's (2006) theory helps explain these transformations. If gender is constituted through repeated acts, then changes in those acts can alter the social meanings of gender. A man who stops performing domination and embraces vulnerability does not necessarily abandon masculinity. He may be performing a different form of masculinity.

This possibility is important for the present study because it opens an alternative to the binary between hegemonic masculinity and emasculation. Male vulnerability does not have to mean masculine failure. It can instead become part of a reconstructed masculinity that permits emotional expression, help-seeking, and acknowledgement of harm.

Contemporary African drama can therefore be read as a space where alternative masculinities become imaginable.

### 3.15 Reconsidering Domestic Violence through Gender Reversal

The three texts collectively invite a reconsideration of domestic violence as a gendered but relational phenomenon.

The conventional model identifies male violence against women as the primary problem. *Altine's Wrath* powerfully represents this reality.

The second model recognizes that masculinity itself can become unstable and violent when threatened. *Rainstorm in the Desert* demonstrates this through Odogwu.

The third model examines what happens when women occupy traditionally masculine positions of power. *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* demonstrates

the possibility that gender reversal can expose the instability of traditional gender roles while also reproducing coercive practices.

Taken together, the plays suggest that domestic violence cannot be fully explained through a rigid male/female opposition. The plays collectively demonstrate that gender remains an essential category, but it must be examined alongside power, identity, social expectations, and interpersonal relationships.

This approach is precisely the analytical advantage of combining Connell, Foucault, and Butler.

Connell explains the masculine hierarchy.

Foucault explains the circulation of power.

Butler explains the performance and repetition of gender.

The dramatic texts reveal the consequences of these processes (Kelly 2013).

### 3.16 Relationship with Existing African Gender Scholarship

The analysis developed in this chapter also extends existing scholarship on African drama. Ekevere and Eluzai (2026), in their feminist trauma study of Nigerian and South Sudanese plays, demonstrate the importance of examining women's experiences of violence, trauma, widowhood, silence, and resilience. Their work establishes female vulnerability as an important dimension of African dramatic representation and provides a significant point of departure for the present study.

Similarly, Eluzai and Ekevere (2026) demonstrate the significance of voice, silence, and gendered power in Nigerian and South Sudanese theater. Their emphasis on the politics of voice is particularly useful for the present chapter because the recognition of victimhood depends partly upon the ability to speak and be heard.

Ekevere and Onyari (2025) further demonstrate the capacity of Nigerian drama to interrogate social power and gender politics through their analysis of gender politics and activism in Wole Soyinka's *The Strong Breed*. These studies collectively establish the importance of gender as a critical category in African dramatic scholarship.

The present chapter extends that conversation rather than rejecting it. The movement is from the established study of female oppression and gender politics to a more complex examination of how gendered power can produce multiple forms of vulnerability.

### 3.17 Comparative Findings from the Selected Plays

The comparative analysis produces several important findings.

First, masculinity is relational rather than absolute. Lawal's authority in *Altine's Wrath*, Odogwu's authority in *Rainstorm in the Desert*, and the destabilized masculinity associated with gender reversal in *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* demonstrate that masculine power depends upon relationships and recognition.

Second, violence can function as a performance of gender. Lawal's abuse of Altine and Odogwu's aggression demonstrate how violence can become a means through which masculine authority is asserted. Amaefula's (2021) analysis of *Rainstorm in the Desert* particularly supports this connection between toxic masculinity, violence, and threatened hegemony.

Third, gender-role reversal does not automatically produce equality. The evidence from *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* suggests that women may challenge patriarchal authority while simultaneously adopting practices that reproduce domination.

Fourth, hegemony is unstable. Odogwu's movement from domestic authority to institutional vulnerability demonstrates that power can shift between relationships.

Fifth, victimhood is relational and context-dependent. A character may occupy the position of perpetrator in one relationship and vulnerability in another. This is particularly significant for understanding male victimhood without denying male privilege.

Sixth, voice and silence are important indicators of power. Characters who control the narrative or command others possess a form of discursive authority, while characters whose experiences remain unheard occupy a more vulnerable position.

Finally, the three plays challenge the assumption that gender alone determines behavior. Masculinity and femininity provide culturally meaningful scripts, but characters can perform, resist, negotiate, and reverse those scripts.

### 3.18 Conclusion

The analysis of *Altine's Wrath*, *Rainstorm in the Desert*, and *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* demonstrates that contemporary Nigerian drama provides a complex field for examining masculinity, domestic violence, and gender reversal. The texts do not present a single or uniform model of gender relations. Instead, they move across a spectrum ranging from conventional patriarchal domination to threatened masculine authority and deliberate gender-role reversal.

*Altine's Wrath* establishes the conventional configuration in which masculine authority produces female vulnerability. It demonstrates the destructive

consequences of patriarchal masculinity when authority becomes entitlement to control and punish the female partner.

*Rainstorm in the Desert* complicates this model by demonstrating that masculine hegemony is unstable. Betrayal endangers Odogwu's authority, and other men challenge it, ultimately placing him under institutional power. His violence can therefore be understood partly as an attempt to recover a threatened masculine identity. Amaefula's (2021) reading of the play as a representation of toxic masculinity and shifting hegemony reinforces this interpretation.

*Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*, it takes the analysis further by reversing conventional gender roles. Its women occupy positions traditionally associated with male authority, thereby exposing the constructed nature of gender roles. Yet the play also demonstrates the danger of assuming that the transfer of power automatically produces liberation. Where domination remains the organising principle, the identity of the dominant subject may change without the underlying logic of domination disappearing. Recent scholarship on the play similarly argues that its gender reversal challenges patriarchal structures while potentially reproducing cycles of violence.

The central implication of the chapter is therefore that gender does not mechanically determine victimhood or perpetration. Rather, gender provides social scripts through which individuals understand and perform power, while specific relationships determine how those scripts are enacted, challenged, or transformed. This conclusion provides an important foundation for the subsequent analysis of male victimhood.

The section also confirms the value of the combined theoretical framework. Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity explains the cultural expectations surrounding masculine authority; Foucault's theory of power explains the relational circulation of authority, domination, and resistance; and Butler's theory of performativity explains how masculine and feminine identities are repeatedly produced through social practices. Together, these perspectives make it possible to move beyond the question of whether men or women are inherently violent and instead investigate the more complex question of how gendered power produces violence, vulnerability, silence, and resistance (Kelly, 2013).

Most importantly, the analysis demonstrates why the male victimhood gap deserves sustained attention. Recognizing male vulnerability does not invalidate the dramatic and social realities of violence against women. Rather, the selected plays demonstrate that gendered power is more complex than a fixed

opposition between male perpetrators and female victims. Contemporary African drama provides evidence of patriarchal violence, threatened masculinity, shifting hegemony, female agency, and gender-role reversal. These representations create an important critical space for examining men not only as agents of violence but, under particular configurations of power, as subjects capable of experiencing vulnerability and victimhood.

#### 4. COMPARATIVE AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON MALE VICTIMHOOD

##### 4.0 Introduction

The preceding chapter examined masculinity, domestic violence and gender reversal primarily through selected Nigerian dramatic texts. That analysis established that gendered violence cannot adequately be understood through a fixed binary in which men are exclusively positioned as perpetrators and women as victims. The dramatic representations examined demonstrated instead that power is relational, masculinity is socially constructed and performative, and victimhood may emerge in different configurations of intimate and social relationships. Chapter Four extends this argument beyond the Nigerian context to consider how comparable questions are represented across African dramatic traditions.

The geographical expansion is methodologically significant. The purpose is not to suggest that African societies possess a single understanding of masculinity, marriage, gender or domestic violence. Africa is culturally, linguistically, historically and politically heterogeneous. Masculinities are consequently produced through different religious traditions, kinship systems, colonial histories, economic structures and contemporary social transformations. At the same time, comparative African scholarship reveals recurring concerns with patriarchy, domestic authority, marriage, gender expectations, masculinity, violence and resistance. The value of an African comparative perspective, therefore, lies not in erasing differences but in identifying patterns of similarity and difference in the dramatic construction of gendered power.

The chapter adopts a thematic and regional rather than strictly country-by-country approach. West African drama provides the primary Nigerian foundation through Femi Osofisan's *Alaine's Wrath*. Tracie Chima Utor-Ezeajugh's play, *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*, focuses on reversing the gender hierarchy. *Wives Have Gone Mad Again*, Emeka Nwabueze's *Rainstorm in the Desert*, and Ahmed Yerima's *Little Drops* are also included. East African perspectives are considered through contemporary Kenyan and Ugandan dramatic representations of masculinity, family relations and gender expectations, while Southern African drama provides an additional comparative field through writers such as Fatima Dyke, Nadia Davids and Mthali Thulani. Central and Northern African perspectives are

approached more selectively, since geographical representation alone does not constitute a sufficient justification for textual inclusion (Azunwo, 2025).

The central argument is that male victimhood should be understood as a relational phenomenon produced within particular configurations of gender, power and vulnerability. This approach acknowledges the prevalence of violence against women and does not attempt to challenge it or establish a competing hierarchy of suffering. Rather, it interrogates the assumption that the male body necessarily represents power and the female body necessarily represents vulnerability. Contemporary African drama provides evidence that men may experience humiliation, emotional abuse, coercion, economic vulnerability, social isolation, betrayal and physical violence, even though cultural expectations may make it difficult for them to recognise or disclose such experiences.

The chapter therefore asks four interconnected questions: How do African dramatic texts construct masculinity? How do changing gender roles affect domestic power? Under what circumstances do male characters become vulnerable? And how effectively do these dramatic traditions disrupt the binary of male perpetrator/female victim?

##### 4.1 West African Drama: Masculinity, Domestic Authority and Gender Reversal

West African drama provides an especially productive starting point because Nigerian playwrights have consistently used drama to interrogate marriage, patriarchy, social hierarchy, and political authority and gender relations. The selected Nigerian texts examined in this study demonstrate different configurations of gendered power and consequently provide a strong basis for comparative African analysis.

The importance of these works is not simply geographical. Each text contributes a distinct dimension to the central problem of male victimhood. *Alaine's Wrath* presents patriarchal domestic authority and violence; *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* reverses conventional gender roles; *Rainstorm in the Desert* dramatises threatened masculine hegemony; while *Little Drops* provides a broader representation of gender, marriage, emotional conflict and domestic vulnerability.

##### 4.1.1 Femi Osofisan's *Alaine's Wrath*: The Conventional Patriarchal Configuration

Femi Osofisan's *Alaine's Wrath* represents one of the clearest examples of the conventional gender configuration in which the man occupies the position of domestic authority and the woman experiences violence and oppression. Lawal's relationship with Alaine demonstrates how patriarchal assumptions concerning husbandly authority can become mechanisms of domestic domination.

The importance of the play to this chapter lies partly in its establishment of a baseline against which the other texts can be compared. Lawal's masculinity is associated with authority, control and entitlement, while Altine is positioned as the vulnerable subject. The dramatic structure therefore corresponds to the familiar representation of male perpetrator/female victim.

This representation is important and should not be dismissed simply because the present study is concerned with male victimhood. Violence against women remains a major social and cultural concern, and African drama has an important role in exposing its consequences. Ekevere and Eluzai (2026), for instance, demonstrate the importance of examining women's experiences of trauma, violence, silence and resilience in Nigerian and South Sudanese dramatic traditions.

However, *Altine's Wrath* becomes particularly useful when it is placed alongside texts that disrupt gender configurations. alongside texts in which gender configurations are disrupted, *Altine's Wrath* proves particularly useful when placed alongside texts that disrupt gender configurations. Lawal's authority demonstrates that masculinity can become oppressive when social expectations of male leadership evolve into an entitlement to control another person.

Connell's (1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity provides an appropriate framework for understanding this representation. Lawal performs a culturally dominant form of masculinity in which being a husband means exercising authority over the wife. His masculinity is therefore relational: it gains meaning through his ability to establish himself as superior within the domestic hierarchy.

The text consequently illustrates the relationship between masculinity and power while simultaneously establishing a question that will become increasingly important throughout this chapter: What happens when the hierarchical relationship is reversed?

#### 4.1.2 Tracie Chima Utor-Ezeajugh's *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again*: Reversing the Gender Hierarchy

If *Altine's Wrath* establishes conventional patriarchal authority, Tracie Chima Utor-Ezeajugh's *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* deliberately disrupts it. Recent scholarship on the play specifically examines gender-role reversal and domestic violence, arguing that the female characters occupy roles traditionally associated with men and that irony, parody and exaggeration are used to challenge conventional gender relations.

The importance of the play for the present study is therefore considerable. The text provides an opportunity to examine whether gender reversal

produces genuine transformation or simply transfers the existing logic of domination from one gender to another.

The question can be formulated as follows:

When women acquire traditionally masculine power, does patriarchal violence disappear, or does the logic of domination survive under a different gendered subject?

This question is particularly important because power cannot be reduced to biological sex. Foucault (1978) conceptualises power as relational and circulating rather than as something permanently possessed by a single group. From this perspective, a reversal of gender roles may alter who occupies the dominant position without necessarily changing the structure through which domination operates.

Butler's (2006) concept of gender performativity also provides insight into the play's themes. The ability of women to perform authority, aggression and decisiveness traditionally coded as masculine demonstrates that such characteristics are not inherently male. They are culturally constructed behaviours.

The dramatic consequence is significant. If women can perform masculinity, then masculinity must be understood as a social practice rather than an exclusive biological property of men.

At the same time, the text raises an important qualification. Female empowerment should not be equated automatically with the exercise of power over others. If empowerment takes the form of intimidation, humiliation or violence, the structure of domination may remain intact.

This makes *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* especially valuable for the male victimhood argument. The text creates a dramatic space in which men can occupy positions of vulnerability without requiring the audience to deny women's historical experience of oppression.

#### 4.1.3 Emeka Nwabueze's *Rainstorm in the Desert*: Masculinity and Shifting Hegemony

Emeka Nwabueze's *Rainstorm in the Desert* provides another dimension of the West African perspective by focusing attention on threatened masculinity. The character of Odogwu demonstrates that masculine power is not necessarily permanent. His authority is constructed through fatherhood, marriage, social recognition and cultural status, but these sources of authority become destabilised when he discovers his wife's infidelity and questions the biological paternity of his child.

Amaefula (2021) specifically examines the play through the concepts of toxic masculinity and shifting hegemony. This interpretation is particularly relevant because it demonstrates that masculine dominance can become unstable when the cultural foundations of masculine identity are threatened.

Odogwu's response to betrayal illustrates the connection between masculine insecurity and violence. His aggression can be read as an attempt to restore an identity that he experiences as damaged. His actions therefore demonstrate how violence can become a performance through which a threatened man attempts to reassert authority.

Yet the dramatic irony is that this strategy ultimately contributes to the collapse of his authority.

The play consequently complicates the conventional victim/perpetrator distinction. Odogwu may function as a perpetrator in his relationship with women, but his position subsequently becomes vulnerable to institutional authority. His movement from domestic power to institutional vulnerability demonstrates Foucault's (1978) proposition that power circulates through relationships rather than remaining permanently attached to one individual.

The implication is important for the present study: a person may occupy different positions within different power relations.

This observation makes it possible to discuss male vulnerability without converting it into a denial of female victimhood.

#### 4.1.4 Ahmed Yerima's *Little Drops*: Marriage, Gender Conflict and Emotional Vulnerability

Ahmed Yerima's *Little Drops* provides an additional Nigerian perspective through its treatment of marriage, gender relations and emotional conflict. The

text is useful for broadening the discussion beyond physical violence to include the psychological and emotional dimensions of intimate relationships (Osanyemi. 2017).

This is particularly important because domestic violence is not restricted to physical assault. Stark (2007) argues that domestic abuse should also be understood through patterns of coercive control that can include intimidation, isolation, economic restriction, emotional abuse and other mechanisms through which one partner limits another's autonomy (Logan & Raphael, 2007).

Applying this broader understanding to African drama enables the researcher to identify forms of victimhood that might otherwise remain invisible. A male character does not necessarily need to be physically beaten before his experience becomes relevant to the study of domestic violence. Emotional manipulation, humiliation, threats, economic control and sustained psychological pressure may also constitute significant experiences of vulnerability.

This expanded framework is especially important for the male victimhood gap because men may be reluctant to describe emotional suffering as abuse. Cultural constructions of masculinity frequently privilege self-control, endurance and emotional restraint. Consequently, a man experiencing psychological abuse may interpret his suffering as personal weakness rather than as victimisation.

*Little Drops* is therefore valuable not simply for what it represents but for the analytical possibility it creates: the possibility of reading domestic conflict through emotional and psychological power, rather than restricting the analysis to physical violence.

#### 4.1.5 West African Patterns: From Male Authority to Relational Vulnerability

**The four Nigerian texts collectively reveal a movement across different configurations of gendered power**

| Text                                 | Dominant configuration               | Major concern                            | Relevance to male victimhood                       |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| <i>Altine's Wrath</i>                | Male authority over female subject   | Patriarchal violence                     | Establishes the conventional binary                |
| <i>Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again</i> | Female authority and gender reversal | Reversal of gender roles                 | Creates space for examining male vulnerability     |
| <i>Rainstorm in the Desert</i>       | Threatened masculine hegemony        | Masculinity and betrayal                 | Demonstrates unstable male authority               |
| <i>Little Drops</i>                  | Intimate emotional conflict          | Marriage and psychological vulnerability | Broadens domestic violence beyond physical assault |

The West African examples consequently demonstrate that the study of gender and domestic violence cannot stop at the question of who is physically violent. It must also investigate how authority is constructed, challenged, and negotiated.

The movement from *Altine's Wrath* to *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* is particularly revealing. The former presents male authority as dominant; the latter reverses that authority. *Rainstorm in the Desert* occupies an intermediate position in which male

authority is initially strong but subsequently destabilized.

Together, the texts establish a continuum:

The continuum progresses from patriarchal authority to threatened masculinity, then to gender reversal, and finally to relational vulnerability.

This continuum provides a useful basis for examining other African dramatic traditions.

#### **4.2 East African Drama: Masculinity, Family Relations, and Changing Gender Expectations**

East African dramatic traditions provide another important comparative context, particularly through contemporary Kenyan and Ugandan theater. Although these dramatic traditions emerge from distinct historical and cultural contexts, they similarly engage questions of masculinity, family, marriage, generational conflict, social change, and gender expectations.

The relevance of East African drama to the present study does not depend upon finding texts that reproduce exactly the Nigerian pattern. Comparative scholarship is more valuable when differences are retained. Retaining differences enhances the value of comparative scholarship. Retaining differences enhances the value of comparative scholarship. What matters is whether dramatic representations provide evidence that helps us understand masculinity and vulnerability in relation to changing social structures. The key question is whether dramatic representations offer evidence that helps us understand masculinity and vulnerability in relation to evolving social structures. in relation to changing social structures.

In many East African contexts, as elsewhere on the continent, the traditional conception of masculinity has been associated with provision, protection, authority, and social responsibility. However, economic transformation, urbanization, women's increased participation in formal employment, and changing family structures have challenged some of these expectations.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) emphasize that hegemonic masculinity changes historically and geographically. Masculinity is consequently not a universal category with one fixed meaning. Rather, dominant forms of masculinity are produced within particular social contexts.

This observation is important when reading Kenyan and Ugandan drama. A male character who fails to provide economically may experience a crisis of masculine identity, while a woman who becomes the principal economic provider may challenge conventional household hierarchies.

The resulting conflict may not necessarily involve physical violence. It may appear through resentment, emotional withdrawal, humiliation, infidelity, intimidation, or struggles over decision-making.

Thus, East African drama can contribute significantly to the present study by extending the concept of domestic violence from physical assault to the broader question of control within intimate relationships.

##### **4.2.1 Masculinity and the Provider Ideal**

One recurring feature of African constructions of masculinity is the expectation that men should provide for their families. This expectation can produce social prestige when successfully performed but can also create vulnerability when economic circumstances make fulfillment difficult.

Connell (1995) notes that masculinities are structured through relations of power and social expectations. The provider ideal is therefore not simply an economic responsibility; it can become part of a man's identity.

When a man loses employment, experiences economic dependence or becomes financially subordinate to his wife, his social identity may become unstable.

This does not mean that economic dependence itself constitutes victimhood. Rather, it creates a potential site of masculine vulnerability. The dramatic question becomes whether the character is able to renegotiate his identity or whether he responds to the loss of economic authority through aggression, withdrawal, or other forms of destructive behavior.

This issue is particularly relevant to contemporary East African drama, where changing economic structures increasingly complicate traditional gender roles.

##### **4.2.2 Family Authority and Negotiation**

The traditional African household's hierarchical models of authority have often been represented in contemporary discussions represented through hierarchical models of authority. However, contemporary theater increasingly dramatizes negotiation between husbands and wives rather than unquestioned male authority.

This transition is significant for the present study because negotiation itself can reveal the instability of traditional masculinity.

A man accustomed to being the final decision-maker may experience disagreement as a challenge to his authority. Conversely, a woman who has historically

been excluded from household decision-making may interpret participation as an assertion of equality.

The resulting conflict demonstrates that domestic power is negotiated continuously.

Foucault's (1978) theory is useful here because power exists not merely when one person commands another but also in the resistance generated against that command. The domestic relationship, therefore, becomes a field of negotiation, resistance, and counter-resistance.

East African dramatic representations of family conflict can consequently be read as sites where traditional masculinity encounters emerging models of gender equality.

#### 4.2.3 Male Silence and Emotional Vulnerability

One of the most important comparative issues is male silence. Men may experience emotional distress but avoid discussing it because cultural expectations encourage emotional control.

This issue connects directly with the findings of Eluzai and Ekevere (2026), whose analysis of contemporary Nigerian and South Sudanese theatre demonstrates the importance of voice and silence in the representation of gendered power.

Silence can therefore be interpreted in two ways.

- First, it can reinforce male authority when the man refuses to disclose emotional vulnerability.
- Second, it can conceal male victimization when a man is unable or unwilling to name himself as a victim.

The second possibility is especially important for the present research. A dramatic character who remains silent may be suffering as much as a character who speaks openly. His silence may itself be evidence of the cultural pressure surrounding masculinity.

The analytical task is, consequently, to examine not only dialogue but also pauses, withdrawal, avoidance, emotional suppression, and changes in behavior.

#### 4.3 Southern African Drama: Patriarchy, Gender-Based Violence, and Resistance

Southern African drama provides another significant comparative field because the region has produced extensive theatrical engagement with apartheid, post-apartheid transformation, gender inequality, family structures, and gender-based violence.

South African feminist and gender scholarship has repeatedly demonstrated that gender relations cannot be separated from wider structures of race, class,

colonialism, and political power. Consequently, Southern African dramatic representations can broaden the present study by showing that domestic relationships are embedded within larger social structures.

Writers such as Fatima Dike and Nadia Davids, among others, provide useful points of entry for examining the intersection of family, gender, social expectation, and power.

The significance of Southern African drama for the present study is not that it offers an entirely different gender system. Rather, it demonstrates how gendered power is shaped by historical experiences and social transformation.

##### 4.3.1 Fatima Dike: Gender, Family, and Social Power

Fatima Dike's dramatic work is important within the history of South African theater because of its engagement with marginalized experiences and social inequalities. Her theater demonstrates the capacity of drama to expose the relationship between private suffering and public structures of power.

This study emphasizes the importance of considering domestic violence within its social context. Economic insecurity, racialized inequality, social expectations, and unequal access to resources can affect the balance of power within intimate relationships.

The male victimhood question must therefore be approached carefully. A male character may possess gender privilege while simultaneously experiencing economic or emotional vulnerability. These positions are not mutually exclusive.

Intersectional approaches to gender are useful here because they resist the assumption that all men occupy the same social position or that all women experience oppression in identical ways.

Carbado *et al.*, (2013) concept of intersectionality provides a framework for understanding how multiple social categories interact in producing different experiences of power and vulnerability.

##### 4.3.2 Nadia Davids: Intimacy, Identity, and Changing Social Relations

Nadia Davids' dramatic work provides another useful Southern African perspective because of its engagement with family, identity, belonging, and changing social relations.

The significance of such drama for the present research is that intimate relationships are not isolated from identity. Characters enter marriages and families carrying cultural expectations concerning masculinity and femininity.

A male character may therefore experience conflict between the identity expected of him and the identity he is able to perform.

This is directly connected to Butler's (2006) concept of performativity. Gender becomes a repeated social performance, but performances can fail, change, or be contested.

The dramatic representation of male vulnerability can therefore emerge when a character's culturally expected performance of masculinity becomes impossible to sustain.

#### **4.3.3 Mthali Thulani and the Representation of Gendered Conflict**

The work of Mthali Thulani can similarly contribute to a Southern African comparative understanding of gendered conflict and domestic relations. The relevance of such representations lies in their capacity to show that gender violence is not necessarily a simple confrontation between two individuals.

Domestic conflict can involve cultural expectations, economic conditions, family pressure, and social perceptions of masculinity.

The comparative significance is therefore methodological: the study must distinguish between individual agency and structural conditions.

A male character who behaves violently remains responsible for his actions. However, understanding the cultural pressures surrounding his masculinity may explain not excuse the behavior.

Similarly, a male character who experiences abuse should not be dismissed simply because men as a social group may possess structural privileges.

#### **The two propositions can coexist:**

Men may benefit from patriarchal structures, while individual men may nevertheless experience victimization within particular relationships. This distinction is fundamental to an academically balanced study of male victimhood.

#### **4.3.4 South African Drama and the Politics of Resistance**

Southern African theater also provides an important framework for examining resistance. Victims of gendered violence may resist through speech, silence, physical action, economic independence, community support, or departure from abusive relationships.

Resistance is important because victimhood should not be equated with passivity.

This principle applies equally to male victims. A male character may experience abuse while simultaneously resisting it. Even if a victim couldn't successfully resist, their experience is still valid.

Foucault's (1978) conception of power is again relevant because it generates resistance. Wherever domination exists, counter-actions may emerge.

The study can therefore examine whether male characters respond to vulnerability through the following:

- \* Silence;
- \* Retaliation;
- \* Negotiation;
- \* Withdrawal;
- \* Emotional Breakdown;
- \* Help-Seeking;
- \* Escape;
- \* Acceptance; or
- \* Resistance.

These responses can reveal how masculinity shapes the ways victims respond to violence.

#### **4.4 Central and Northern African Perspectives**

Central and Northern African dramatic traditions can provide additional comparative perspectives, but geographical representation should not become an end in itself. The purpose of including another region is to strengthen the argument about masculinity, domestic power, and victimhood, not to create an artificial impression that every African region must be represented.

This methodological principle is important because Africa is too culturally diverse to support sweeping generalizations based on a small number of texts.

A text from North or Central Africa should, therefore, be included only where it provides substantial evidence of

1. Male Vulnerability;
2. Domestic Violence;
3. Changing Masculine Identities;
4. Marital Power Struggles;
5. Gender-Role Reversal;
6. Emotional or Psychological Abuse; or
7. The Silencing of Male Experience.

The text can strengthen the comparative argument by demonstrating that the male victimhood problem extends beyond Anglophone West Africa, where such evidence exists. The text can strengthen the comparative argument by demonstrating that the male victimhood problem is not limited to Anglophone West Africa.

However, where a text merely provides geographical coverage without advancing the research question, its inclusion would weaken rather than strengthen the chapter.

#### 4.5 Comparative African Masculinities

The regional discussion demonstrates that African masculinities cannot be treated as homogeneous. Connell's (1995) framework is particularly valuable because it conceptualizes masculinity as plural rather than singular.

There are therefore multiple masculinities:

1. Hegemonic Masculinity;
2. Subordinate Masculinities;
3. Marginalized Masculinities;
4. Complicit Masculinities; and
5. Alternative or Emerging Masculinities.

Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) subsequently refined the concept by emphasizing the contextual and relational character of hegemonic masculinity.

This framework is especially appropriate for comparative African drama because different dramatic characters occupy different positions within gender hierarchies.

Lawal represents a form of hegemonic domestic masculinity.

Odogwu represents a threatened and increasingly unstable masculine hegemony.

The male characters in *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* experience a disruption of conventional masculine privilege.

Other African dramatic characters may similarly experience changes resulting from women's economic independence, migration, education, urbanization, and changing family structures.

The comparison therefore suggests that African masculinity is undergoing negotiation.

#### 4.6 The African Provider, Protector, and Authority Ideal

Across the selected dramatic traditions, the ideal African man is frequently associated with three interconnected roles: provider, protector, and authority figure.

These roles are not inherently oppressive. A man who provides for his family or protects family members is not necessarily exercising domination.

The problem emerges when these roles become compulsory measures of masculine worth.

- A man who cannot provide may be labeled inadequate.
- A man who cannot protect may be considered weak.
- A man whose wife earns more money may feel that his authority has been displaced.
- A man who expresses fear or emotional pain may be considered insufficiently masculine.

Such expectations can produce psychological pressure.

The dramatic representation of this pressure is important because it provides a pathway to understanding male victimhood without reducing masculinity to mere victimhood.

The central argument is therefore not "Men are victims because masculinity is oppressive."

Rather,

The same gender system that grants men social authority can also impose expectations that make particular men vulnerable when they fail to conform to dominant masculine ideals.

This distinction is theoretically and ethically important.

#### 4.7 Gender Reversal across African Dramatic Traditions

Gender reversal emerges as one of the most productive comparative concepts in the study.

The reversal can occur in several ways:

1. Women Become Economic Providers;
2. Women Become Household Decision-Makers;
3. Women Exercise Sexual Autonomy;
4. Women Become Physically Aggressive;
5. Men Become Economically Dependent;
6. Men Become Emotionally Vulnerable;
7. Men Lose Household Authority; or
8. Men Become Subjects of Female Control.

However, not all reversals have the same meaning: some represent genuine emancipation, others represent retaliation, while still others expose the instability of gender categories. Butler's (2006) theory helps explain why these reversals matter. If gender identity is constituted through repeated acts, then changing those acts destabilizes the assumption that particular behaviours naturally belong to men or women. The dramatic consequence is that the audience is forced to reconsider conventional associations: strength does not necessarily equate with male identity; vulnerability does not necessarily equate with female identity; authority does not necessarily equate with male identity; care is not exclusively female; aggression does not

necessarily equate with male identity; and victimhood does not necessarily equate with female identity. This does not mean that these categories lack a gendered history; they clearly do. Rather, the dramatic texts demonstrate that the association between these characteristics and particular genders is culturally produced rather than biologically inevitable.

#### 4.8 Domestic Violence Beyond Physical Assault

The comparative African perspective also requires a broader understanding of domestic violence. Domestic abuse may include:

1. Physical Violence;
2. Psychological Abuse;
3. Emotional Abuse;
4. Sexual Coercion;
5. Economic Control;
6. Intimidation;
7. Humiliation;
8. Threats;
9. Isolation;
10. Manipulation; and
11. Coercive Control.

(Logan & Raphael, (2007) argues that coercive control should be understood as a pattern of behavior through which one intimate partner deprives another of liberty and autonomy. This broader conception is particularly valuable for the analysis of male victimhood.

African dramatic texts may not always label such behavior as "domestic violence." The researcher must therefore attend to the dramatic representation rather than rely solely on explicit terminology.

For example, a husband repeatedly humiliated by his wife may not describe himself as abused. A man financially controlled by his spouse may interpret the situation as personal failure. A male character subjected to emotional manipulation may remain silent because cultural expectations tell him that men should endure suffering.

The concept of male victimhood therefore requires an interpretive methodology capable of identifying both explicit and implicit forms of abuse.

#### 4.9 The Male Victimhood Gap in African Drama

The comparative evidence points towards what may be described as the male victimhood gap. The male victimhood gap does not mean that African scholarship entirely ignores men who experience violence; rather, it refers to the relative lack of sustained attention to male vulnerability within gender discourse and dramatic criticism. Several factors may contribute to this gap. First, the historical reality of patriarchal oppression has made violence against women an urgent scholarly concern. Second, men are often culturally constructed as stronger and less vulnerable. Third, male victims may be

reluctant to disclose abuse. Fourth, dramatic criticism may reproduce the conventional male-perpetrator/female-victim binary. Fifth, male vulnerability can be misunderstood as an attack on feminist scholarship. The present study rejects the last assumption. Recognizing male victimhood does not require abandoning feminist approaches. Ekevere and Eluzai (2026), for example, demonstrate the continuing importance of feminist trauma theory for understanding women's experiences of violence and loss. The present study builds upon rather than negates such scholarship by asking whether gendered analysis can also accommodate male vulnerability. The objective is therefore expansion rather than displacement.

#### 4.10 Voice, Silence, and the Recognition of Male Victimhood

The issue of voice is central to the recognition of victimhood. Eluzai and Ekevere (2026) demonstrate that voice and silence are significant components of gendered power in Nigerian and South Sudanese theatre. Their analysis is particularly relevant to male victimhood because cultural constructions of masculinity may silence men who experience abuse. A male victim may remain silent because he fears ridicule; he believes disclosure is unmanly; he fears losing social status; he fears that others will not believe him; he feels responsible for protecting the family; he interprets vulnerability as weakness; or he believes that a woman cannot legitimately be viewed as an abuser. The result is a paradox: the same cultural system that positions men as powerful may make it difficult for men who experience vulnerability to obtain recognition as victims. This is one of the most significant contributions of the African comparative perspective.

#### 4.11 Victimhood, Responsibility, and Moral Complexity

A major danger in studying male victimhood is the possibility of producing a false equivalence between men's and women's experiences. The present study therefore maintains an important distinction between recognition and equivalence. Recognizing male victims does not mean claiming that men and women experience domestic violence at identical rates, in identical forms, or with identical consequences. Similarly, recognizing that an individual man experiences abuse does not mean denying the existence of male privilege within broader patriarchal structures. Intersectionality is useful here. Carbado *et al.*, (2013) and Bastia *et al.*, (2022) demonstrate that social identities interact in complex ways. A man can simultaneously possess gender privilege and experience economic, emotional, racial, social, or relational vulnerability. This complexity should be preserved rather than simplified. The dramatic texts, consequently, need to be analysed at two levels: the structural level, which examines how patriarchy organizes gender relations, and the individual level, which examines how a particular character experiences

power within a particular relationship. This distinction prevents the study from treating either men or women as homogeneous categories.

#### 4.12 African Drama as a Space for Reimagining Masculinity

One of the most important possibilities emerging from the comparative analysis is the capacity of African drama to imagine alternative masculinities. If hegemonic masculinity requires men to be strong, emotionally controlled, economically independent, and authoritative, then alternative masculinities could permit emotional openness, vulnerability, cooperation, caregiving, non-violent conflict resolution, equality within marriage, shared economic responsibility, and help-seeking. Such masculinities would not necessarily eliminate male authority; rather, they would redefine masculinity away from domination and towards mutuality, responsibility, and relational equality. This is

where the present study moves beyond merely identifying male victims. The ultimate question is not simply, “Can men be victims?” The more significant question is: “What forms of masculinity can emerge when vulnerability, care, equality, and non-violence are accepted as legitimate dimensions of male identity?”

What forms of masculinity make it possible for men to acknowledge vulnerability without experiencing that vulnerability as a loss of identity?

African drama is particularly valuable for answering this question because theater makes social identities visible through dialogue, action, gesture, conflict, and performance.

#### 4.13 Comparative Synthesis of the African Dramatic Perspectives

The regional perspectives can be synthesised through the following analytical framework:

| Dimension           | West Africa                                             | East Africa                                | Southern Africa                                      | Comparative implication                         |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Masculine authority | Strongly represented in patriarchal domestic structures | Negotiated through changing family roles   | Complicated by historical and social structures      | Masculinity is relational                       |
| Provider role       | Frequently associated with male identity                | Increasingly challenged by economic change | Complicated by class and economic inequality         | Economic power affects masculine identity       |
| Domestic violence   | Physical and psychological forms                        | Family and relational conflict             | Gender-based violence and resistance                 | Violence extends beyond physical assault        |
| Gender reversal     | Explicit in <i>Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again</i>        | Emerging through changing family roles     | Reflected through resistance and changing identities | Gender roles are unstable                       |
| Male vulnerability  | Threatened authority and domestic vulnerability         | Emotional and economic vulnerability       | Identity, social and relational vulnerability        | Victimhood can occur within masculine privilege |
| Voice/silence       | Gendered authority and resistance                       | Emotional suppression                      | Resistance and marginalised voices                   | Silence may conceal victimhood                  |
| Power               | Patriarchal and domestic                                | Negotiated within changing families        | Intersecting social structures                       | Power is relational and circulating             |

The table demonstrates that the regions should not be treated as identical. Instead, they reveal different manifestations of a common analytical problem: how gender expectations influence the production and recognition of vulnerability.

#### 4.14 Discussion: Beyond the Male Perpetrator/Female Victim Binary

The central finding emerging from the comparative African perspective is that the binary of male perpetrator and female victim is insufficient as a complete analytical model.

It remains useful in contexts such as *Altine's Wrath*, where patriarchal violence against women is

explicitly represented. However, it becomes inadequate when applied universally.

*Rainstorm in the Desert* demonstrates that a man may exercise violence while simultaneously becoming vulnerable to other forms of power.

*Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* demonstrates that women may occupy positions traditionally coded as masculine and may exercise forms of authority and aggression.

Other African dramatic traditions demonstrate that masculinity can. Other African dramatic traditions illustrate how unemployment, economic dependency,

changing gender roles, emotional betrayal, and social transformation can destabilize masculinity. Other African dramatic traditions illustrate how factors such as unemployment, economic dependency, changing gender roles, emotional betrayal, and social transformation can destabilize masculinity.

The resulting picture is not one in which men and women simply exchange positions.

Rather, the texts suggest a more complex model:

Gender produces expectations; expectations organize power; power produces relationships; relationships can produce both domination and vulnerability.

This formulation allows the study to recognize female oppression while also investigating male victimhood.

#### 4.15 Implications for the Study of Contemporary African Drama

The comparative findings have important implications for African theatre scholarship. First, gender analysis should move beyond representation to examine **relations of power**. Second, masculinity should be treated as plural and historically changing rather than as a single, universal category. Third, domestic violence should be understood through multiple forms of abuse rather than physical violence alone. Fourth, male vulnerability should be examined without assuming that recognition of male victimhood negates female victimhood. Fifth, gender-role reversal should be interpreted critically rather than automatically celebrated as empowerment. Sixth, silence should be treated as potentially meaningful rather than automatically interpreted as the absence of suffering. Finally, African dramatic criticism should pay greater attention to the **nature and instability of masculine authority**. *Rainstorm in the Desert* demonstrates the instability of masculine hegemony, while *Little Drops* broadens the discussion by demonstrating how individuals can occupy multiple positions within systems of power. These implications strengthen the methodological foundation of the present research.

#### 4.16 Conclusion

This chapter has extended the study from Nigerian drama to a broader African comparative framework. The purpose of the expansion has not been to claim that African societies share identical gender systems but to demonstrate that different dramatic traditions provide valuable perspectives on masculinity, domestic violence, gender reversal, and victimhood.

The West African texts establish the most immediate foundation. *Altine's Wrath* presents patriarchal masculinity and female victimhood; *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* reverses conventional

gender roles and exposes the constructed character of masculine authority; *Rainstorm in the Desert* demonstrates the instability of masculine hegemony; and *Little Drops* broadens the discussion towards emotional and relational dimensions of domestic conflict.

East African dramatic perspectives demonstrate how masculinity is renegotiated through changing family structures, economic roles, and expectations concerning male provision and authority. Southern African drama further demonstrates that gender relations are embedded within broader structures of history, class, social inequality, and resistance. Central and Northern African perspectives, where textually appropriate, can extend this analysis without reducing comparative scholarship to geographical representation.

Across these traditions, one central pattern becomes visible: African masculinity is neither fixed nor uniformly powerful. Men may occupy socially privileged positions while simultaneously experiencing vulnerability within particular intimate relationships. Conversely, women may experience structural oppression while also exercising considerable power in specific relationships.

The most important conclusion is therefore that victimhood cannot be assigned permanently according to biological sex.

This conclusion does not undermine feminist scholarship or diminish the seriousness of violence against women. On the contrary, it produces a more nuanced gender analysis by recognizing that power operates relationally and that vulnerability can emerge in unexpected places.

The combined theoretical framework of Connell, Foucault, and Butler remains particularly useful. Connell explains the hierarchy of masculinities; Foucault demonstrates the circulation of power and resistance; and Butler reveals the performative construction of gender. Together, these perspectives demonstrate why the study of male victimhood must move beyond the question of whether men or women are generally more violent.

The more productive question is

How do African dramatic texts construct, distribute, challenge, and silence experiences of gendered vulnerability?

Answering this question makes it possible to place male victimhood within a broader African conversation about gender justice rather than treating it as an argument against women's rights.

## 5. COMPARATIVE FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.0 Introduction

The preceding chapters have examined the representation of gender, masculinity, power, domestic violence, and victimhood in selected contemporary African dramatic texts. The study began with the recognition that African gender discourse has, for understandable historical and social reasons, concentrated substantially on violence against women and the operation of patriarchal structures. While this emphasis remains necessary, the study has argued that an exclusive interpretive framework in which men are positioned primarily as perpetrators and women as victims can become insufficient when applied to the full range of dramatic representations of intimate relationships.

The central concern of this study has therefore been the male victimhood gap: the relative lack of sustained attention to the ways in which male characters may experience psychological, emotional, economic, social, and physical vulnerability within domestic relationships. The study does not seek to establish an equivalence between male and female experiences of domestic violence, nor does it contest the prevalence or seriousness of violence against women. Rather, it proposes that a comprehensive gender analysis should recognize that power is relational and that individuals can occupy different positions of authority and vulnerability within the same social and intimate structures.

The theoretical framework combining Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity, Foucault's (1978) theory of power, and Butler's (2006) theory of gender performativity has enabled the study to move beyond a simple perpetrator/victim binary. Connell demonstrates that masculinity is hierarchical and socially produced; Foucault conceptualizes power as relational and circulating, while Butler demonstrates that gender identities are constituted through repeated social performances. Taken together, these perspectives provide a framework through which the selected African dramatic texts can be understood as representations of unstable, negotiated, and sometimes contradictory gender identities.

The comparative analysis of West, East, and Southern African dramatic perspectives further demonstrates that African masculinities are neither homogeneous nor permanently associated with power. Rather, masculinity can simultaneously function as a source of social privilege and a source of personal vulnerability. The findings presented in this chapter therefore consolidate the major patterns identified across the study and consider their implications for African theater scholarship, gender studies, masculinity studies,

domestic-violence discourse, and contemporary African dramaturgy.

### 5.1 Patterns of Male Victimhood

One of the principal findings of the study is that male victimhood in African drama does not occur through one uniform pattern. Instead, male characters become vulnerable through different configurations of intimate, psychological, economic, social, and gendered power.

The first pattern is emotional victimhood. Male characters may experience betrayal, rejection, humiliation, emotional manipulation, or the collapse of intimate trust. Such experiences can be particularly significant because conventional masculinity often discourages men from expressing emotional pain. The cultural expectation that men should remain emotionally controlled may consequently make male suffering less visible.

The second pattern is psychological victimhood. A man may be subjected to intimidation, humiliation, threats, or sustained emotional pressure without necessarily experiencing physical assault. Stark's (2007) concept of coercive control is particularly useful here because it demonstrates that domestic abuse can involve systematic restrictions on autonomy rather than physical violence alone.

The third pattern is economic vulnerability. Traditional constructions of African masculinity frequently associate men with provision and economic responsibility. Consequently, unemployment, financial dependence, or the transfer of economic authority to a female partner may create a crisis of masculine identity. This does not mean that economic dependence automatically constitutes abuse. Rather, it becomes significant when economic circumstances are combined with humiliation, coercion, or manipulation.

The fourth pattern is domestic and relational vulnerability. A man may possess considerable authority outside the home while becoming vulnerable within an intimate relationship. This distinction is central to the study because it demonstrates that social privilege and individual victimhood can coexist.

The fifth pattern is physical victimhood. Although the study deliberately moves beyond physical violence, physical aggression against male characters remains significant. The dramatic representation of such violence challenges the assumption that the male body is inherently invulnerable.

The sixth pattern is social victimhood. Male characters may fear ridicule, loss of reputation, or accusations of weakness if they disclose abuse.

Consequently, the social consequences of victimhood may become as significant as the abuse itself.

These patterns suggest that male victimhood should be conceptualized as multidimensional rather than restricted to physical assault.

**Table 5.1: Major Patterns of Male Victimhood in the Selected African Dramatic Context**

| Pattern                  | Manifestation                                     | Effect on Masculine Identity                   |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Emotional victimhood     | Betrayal, rejection, humiliation, manipulation    | Produces emotional insecurity                  |
| Psychological victimhood | Intimidation, threats, coercive control           | Produces fear and loss of autonomy             |
| Economic vulnerability   | Financial dependence or economic control          | Challenges provider identity                   |
| Domestic vulnerability   | Loss of household authority or relational control | Destabilises masculine authority               |
| Physical victimhood      | Assault or physical intimidation                  | Challenges assumptions of male invulnerability |
| Social victimhood        | Ridicule, stigma and fear of disclosure           | Encourages silence                             |
| Identity vulnerability   | Failure to conform to masculine expectations      | Produces masculine crisis                      |

The table demonstrates that victimhood cannot be adequately measured solely through physical injury. The dramatic texts reveal that vulnerability may be psychological, emotional, relational or symbolic.

## 5.2 Masculinity as Both Power and Vulnerability

The most significant finding of this study is that **\*\*African masculinity can simultaneously confer privilege and produce vulnerability\*\***. This apparently contradictory proposition is central to understanding male victimhood. Traditional masculine expectations may position men as providers, protectors, household authorities, and decision-makers. These roles can provide men with social status and institutional advantages within patriarchal structures. However, the same expectations can create severe pressure when men are unable to perform them successfully. Connell's (1995) concept of hegemonic masculinity is particularly useful in explaining this contradiction. Hegemonic masculinity represents a culturally dominant configuration of masculine practices that legitimises particular forms of male authority. However, not every man can successfully embody this ideal. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005) subsequently emphasise the contextual and relational nature of hegemonic masculinity. Masculinity is therefore not simply something a man possesses; it is something that must be continually demonstrated and socially recognised. The African dramatic texts examined in this study illustrate this process repeatedly. A man may be expected to provide for his family; if he becomes economically dependent, he may experience shame. He may be expected to protect his family; if he becomes vulnerable, he may experience humiliation. He may be expected to control the household; if his wife becomes more economically or socially powerful, he may experience a crisis of identity. He may also be expected to suppress emotion; if he experiences emotional abuse, he may lack a culturally acceptable language through which to describe his suffering. The paradox can therefore be expressed as follows: **\*\*masculinity can provide social privilege while simultaneously creating conditions that conceal, intensify, or silence male vulnerability. \*\***

The privileges attached to hegemonic masculinity may coexist with pressures that make individual men vulnerable.

This finding is particularly evident in *Rainstorm in the Desert*, where masculine authority is destabilised. The character's response demonstrates how threats to masculine identity can produce emotional and behavioural consequences.

Similarly, *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* demonstrates that when women occupy positions traditionally coded as masculine, the assumption that authority naturally belongs to men is destabilised.

The implication is that masculinity should not be conceptualised simply as the opposite of vulnerability.

Rather.

Masculinity can produce authority, which in turn creates expectations; these expectations can lead to pressure, and that pressure can result in vulnerability.

This is one of the central theoretical contributions of the study.

## 5.3 Gender Reversal and the Redistribution of Power

The study further finds that **\*\*gender reversal is an important dramatic strategy\*\*** through which African playwrights challenge conventional assumptions about gender and authority. Tracie Chima Utor-Ezeajugh's *\*Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again\** is particularly significant because it places women in positions traditionally associated with masculine authority. This reversal disrupts the assumption that men are naturally dominant and women naturally subordinate. However, the analysis demonstrates that gender reversal does not automatically constitute liberation. The critical question is whether the reversal changes the underlying logic of domination or merely changes the identity of the person exercising power. Foucault's (1978) theory of power provides a useful explanation because power is not permanently owned by men or women; rather, it

circulates through relationships, institutions, discourse, and social practices. Consequently, when women acquire power, three possibilities may emerge: **(1)** they may use that power to challenge patriarchal domination; **(2)** they may negotiate a more egalitarian relationship; or **(3)** they may reproduce domination through a different gendered subject. The third possibility is particularly significant. If a female character uses intimidation, humiliation, or coercive control against a male character, the action cannot

automatically be considered emancipatory simply because the perpetrator is female. The analysis therefore demonstrates that **the identity of the person exercising power does not, by itself, determine whether that power is emancipatory or oppressive**.

The study therefore distinguishes between female empowerment and the reproduction of domination.

**Table 5.2: Gender Reversal and Power Redistribution**

| Dramatic configuration                | Possible interpretation              |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Woman challenges male authority       | Resistance to patriarchy             |
| Woman assumes household authority     | Gender-role transformation           |
| Woman exercises coercive control      | Reproduction of domination           |
| Man becomes economically dependent    | Disruption of provider masculinity   |
| Man expresses emotional vulnerability | Challenge to hegemonic masculinity   |
| Both partners negotiate authority     | Movement towards relational equality |

The findings consequently suggest that the objective of gender analysis should not be to determine which sex possesses power. Instead, the analysis should investigate how power is exercised and with what consequences.

#### 5.4 Silence and Stigma

Another major finding concerns the relationship between **male victimhood and silence**. The study demonstrates that silence may be one of the most important mechanisms through which male victimhood remains invisible. A man who experiences domestic abuse may hesitate to disclose his experience because disclosure can conflict with culturally dominant expectations of masculinity. The social script of masculinity frequently communicates that a man should be **strong, emotionally controlled, independent, protective, authoritative, resilient, and capable of solving his own problems**. Victimhood, however, appears to contradict several of these expectations. Consequently, admitting victimisation may be interpreted as admitting weakness. This creates what may be termed the **masculinity-silence paradox**: **the cultural expectations that construct men as strong and invulnerable may simultaneously make it difficult for men experiencing abuse to speak, seek help, or be recognised as victims**. Silence, therefore, should not automatically be interpreted as evidence that suffering is absent; rather, it may itself constitute an important expression of vulnerability and a consequence of gendered power.

The cultural expectation that men should be strong can make it difficult for men to speak about experiences that make them vulnerable.

Eluzai and Ekevere (2026) demonstrate the importance of **voice and silence** in the representation of gendered power in contemporary

Nigerian and South Sudanese theatre. Their work provides an important basis for understanding silence not merely as an absence of speech but as a potentially significant indicator of social and psychological pressure. In the context of male victimhood, silence can perform several functions. First, it can **conceal suffering**. Second, it can **preserve social reputation**. Third, it can **protect the family from public embarrassment**. Fourth, it can **prevent the victim from receiving assistance**. Fifth, it can **reinforce the very form of masculinity that makes disclosure difficult**. The study therefore concludes that dramatic analysis of male victimhood must attend not only to what male characters say but also to **what they refuse, are unable, or are socially discouraged from saying**. Silence should consequently be treated as a meaningful dimension of victimhood and gendered power rather than simply as the absence of testimony.

#### 5.5 Domestic Violence beyond the Male/Female Binary

The study's fifth major finding is that domestic violence should not be analysed exclusively through the binary:

##### **Men perpetrate → Women suffer.**

While this model accurately describes many situations and remains particularly important in understanding patriarchal violence against women, it cannot adequately explain every representation of domestic conflict in contemporary African drama.

##### **The alternative model proposed by this study is:**

Power operates within relationships → individuals occupy different positions of authority, vulnerability and victimhood.

This relational model does not deny gender.

Rather, it asks how gender interacts with other forms of power within specific relationships.

- A man may be socially privileged as a man but vulnerable as a husband.
- A woman may experience structural patriarchy but exercise significant authority within a particular domestic relationship.
- A man may perpetrate violence against his wife while experiencing emotional manipulation from another member of the family.
- A woman may resist patriarchal oppression while simultaneously exercising coercive control over a male partner.

These possibilities demonstrate the complexity of intimate relationships.

Foucault's (1978) conception of power is particularly valuable because it rejects the notion that power operates only from a single dominant subject to a permanently subordinate subject. Power circulates and generates resistance.

This does not mean that power is equally distributed. Structural inequalities remain important. Rather, it means that individual relationships require specific analysis.

The study therefore proposes a relational model of domestic victimhood.



**Figure 5.1: Relational Model of Domestic Victimhood**

This model offers a more flexible framework for interpreting African dramatic texts because it allows victimhood to emerge from specific relationships rather than assigning it automatically according to sex.

## 5.6 Comparative Findings

The comparative analysis across African dramatic traditions reveals both significant similarities and important differences.

### 5.6.1 Similarities across the Dramatic Traditions

The first major similarity is the **\*\*persistence of gendered expectations\*\***. Across the texts examined, masculinity is frequently associated with **\*\*authority, provision, protection, and emotional control\*\***. The second similarity is the **\*\*presence of changing gender**

roles**\*\***, as women increasingly occupy economic, social, and domestic positions previously associated primarily with men. The third similarity is the **\*\*persistence of gender conflict within intimate relationships\*\***. Marriage and family often serve as dramatic spaces for negotiating broader cultural changes and tensions surrounding gender roles and expectations. The fourth similarity is the **\*\*tension between traditional masculinity and contemporary realities\*\***, as established expectations of male authority and identity are challenged by changing social and relational circumstances. The fifth similarity is the **\*\*significance of silence\*\***. Characters may suppress their experiences because of social expectations surrounding gender, making silence an important dimension of vulnerability and power. The sixth similarity is that **\*\*domestic**

violence is represented through multiple forms\*\*, even when physical violence receives greater dramatic attention. These similarities demonstrate that the selected texts share important concerns with masculinity, changing gender relations, domestic conflict, and the complex relationship between gender expectations and experiences of vulnerability.

### 5.6.2 Differences across the Dramatic Traditions

Despite these similarities, the study identifies \*\*substantial differences\*\* across the selected African dramatic traditions. West African texts, particularly the Nigerian works, provide especially explicit representations of \*\*marriage, domestic authority, and gender-role reversal\*\*. East African perspectives place

stronger analytical emphasis on \*\*changing family relations, economic pressures, and the renegotiation of masculine roles\*\*. Southern African dramatic traditions provide an additional layer by connecting gender relations to broader \*\*historical, political, racial, class, and social structures\*\*. These differences demonstrate why the category \*\*\*“African masculinity”\*\*\* should be used cautiously. There is no single, uniform African masculinity; rather, there are \*\*African masculinities\*\*, shaped by different historical, cultural, social, and relational contexts. Connell’s (1995) plural understanding of masculinities is, therefore, particularly appropriate for the comparative analysis, as it allows masculinity to be understood as diverse, relational, and shaped by different configurations of power.

**Table 5.3: Comparative African Findings**

| Analytical category    | West Africa                                   | East Africa                           | Southern Africa                              |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| Masculine authority    | Strongly associated with household leadership | Increasingly negotiated               | Complicated by broader social inequalities   |
| Provider role          | Central to masculine identity                 | Challenged by economic transformation | Complicated by class and economic conditions |
| Gender reversal        | Explicitly dramatised                         | Emerging through social change        | Linked to resistance and transformation      |
| Male vulnerability     | Emotional, relational and identity-based      | Economic and emotional                | Social, economic and relational              |
| Silence                | Linked to masculine expectations              | Linked to emotional restraint         | Linked to stigma and social structures       |
| Domestic violence      | Physical and psychological                    | Relational and emotional              | Gender-based and structural dimensions       |
| Major analytical issue | Authority and reversal                        | Changing masculinity                  | Intersection of gender and social power      |

The comparative findings therefore confirm that African drama offers a complex field for examining male victimhood without reducing the continent to a single gender model.

### 5.7 Major Findings of the Study

Based on the analysis undertaken across Chapters Two, Three, and Four, the study establishes the following principal findings.

**Finding One:** Male victimhood exists within contemporary African dramatic representation.

The selected dramatic texts demonstrate that male characters can experience emotional, psychological, economic, social, and physical vulnerability.

**Finding Two:** Male victimhood is frequently obscured by hegemonic masculinity.

The cultural expectation that men should be strong, authoritative, and self-reliant can make male victimhood difficult to recognize.

**Finding Three:** Masculinity functions simultaneously as privilege and vulnerability.

Men may benefit from patriarchal structures, while individual men may experience victimization within intimate relationships.

**Finding Four:** Gender reversal does not necessarily eliminate domination.

The transfer of power from men to women does not automatically produce equality. Where coercive or abusive practices are reproduced, the underlying logic of domination remains.

**Finding Five:** Domestic violence must be understood beyond physical violence.

Psychological abuse, emotional manipulation, economic control, intimidation, humiliation, and coercive control are important dimensions of domestic victimhood.

**Finding Six:** Silence is a significant dimension of male victimhood.

Male characters may remain silent because victimhood conflicts with socially dominant expectations of masculinity.

**Finding Seven:** Victimhood is relational.

An individual may be powerful in one relationship or social context and vulnerable in another.

**Finding Eight:** African masculinities are plural.

The comparative analysis demonstrates that masculinity varies according to cultural, historical, economic, and social circumstances.

**Finding Nine:** African drama challenges fixed gender binaries

Contemporary playwrights increasingly complicate the distinction between male authority and female vulnerability.

**Finding Ten:** Recognition of male victimhood should complement rather than compete with feminist scholarship.

The study does not propose replacing women's victimhood with men's victimhood. Instead, it advocates a broader and more inclusive understanding of gendered vulnerability.

## 5.8 Theoretical Implications

The findings have important implications for the three theoretical perspectives adopted by the study.

### 5.8.1 Implications for Hegemonic Masculinity Theory

Connell's theory remains highly useful because it explains why particular forms of masculinity become culturally dominant.

However, the findings suggest that hegemonic masculinity should not be interpreted only as a source of male privilege. It can also generate pressures that produce vulnerability.

The study, therefore, extends the application of hegemonic masculinity theory by emphasizing its double effect:

Hegemonic masculinity can confer authority while simultaneously constraining emotional expression and vulnerability.

### 5.8.2 Implications for Foucault's Theory of Power

The findings strongly support Foucault's (1978) conception of power as relational.

Domestic relationships demonstrate that power cannot always be assigned permanently to one gender.

Power may move through:

- Economic resources;
- Emotional influence;
- Sexual relationships;
- Family authority;
- Social reputation;
- Communication;
- Physical strength; and
- Institutional support.

This confirms the usefulness of analyzing domestic violence as a relationship of power rather than simply a conflict between two genders.

### 5.8.3 Implications for Butler's Gender Performativity

The findings also support Butler's (2006) argument that gender is constituted through repeated performances.

The dramatic representation of women as authoritative and men as vulnerable demonstrates that behaviors commonly associated with masculinity or femininity are not naturally restricted to one sex.

Gender reversal therefore becomes a powerful theatrical strategy for exposing the constructed nature of gender.

## 5.9 CONCLUSION

This study set out to re-examine domestic violence in contemporary African drama by focusing on the relatively underexplored question of male victimhood. Its central argument has been that the conventional binary of male perpetrator/female victim, while historically and socially important, does not adequately capture the complexity of gendered power represented in contemporary African theater.

The analysis demonstrates that male characters can experience different forms of victimization, including emotional, psychological, economic, social, and physical abuse. However, cultural expectations of masculinity often obscure the experiences of male characters. by cultural expectations of masculinity.

The study's most important conclusion is therefore that African masculinity can simultaneously confer privilege and produce vulnerability.

This apparent contradiction is not a weakness in the concept of masculinity; it is central to understanding how gender operates.

A man may occupy a socially privileged position as a husband, father, or community member while experiencing humiliation, emotional abuse, or coercive control within his intimate relationship. Conversely, a woman may experience structural

disadvantage while exercising significant power in a particular interpersonal relationship.

Consequently, victimhood should not be assigned automatically according to biological sex.

The study further concludes that gender reversal in African drama should be approached critically. When women acquire authority, the development may represent resistance to patriarchy. However, where the new authority reproduces intimidation, humiliation, or coercive control, the structure of domination may simply have changed hands.

The central issue is, therefore, not who possesses power but how power is exercised, resisted, and negotiated.

The study also establishes the importance of silence. Male characters may hesitate to identify themselves as victims because cultural constructions of masculinity encourage strength, emotional restraint, and independence. Consequently, the absence of explicit disclosure should not automatically be interpreted as the absence of suffering.

Ultimately, the study proposes a shift from a gender-essentialist model of domestic violence towards a relational model of gendered power and victimhood:

Men are not always perpetrators. Women are not always victims. Power operates through relationships, and individuals may occupy changing positions of authority, vulnerability, and victimhood.

This formulation does not minimize violence against women. Rather, it creates a more comprehensive framework for comprehending the complexities of African gender relations. Instead, it establishes a more comprehensive framework for comprehending the complexities of African gender relations.

### 5.10 Recommendations

Based on the study's findings, the recommendations focus on broadening the understanding of gender, masculinity, domestic violence, and victimhood in African dramatic scholarship.

**1. African Theatre Scholarship:** Scholarship should broaden gender analysis to include male vulnerability while continuing to address women's experiences of oppression. Researchers should avoid automatically positioning male characters as perpetrators and should examine how characters move between positions of power and vulnerability.

**2. Gender Studies:** Gender studies should retain its focus on structural inequalities affecting women while creating analytical space for male vulnerability. Male victimhood should be incorporated into broader gender analysis rather than presented as an alternative to feminism.

**3. Masculinity Studies:** Researchers should examine the emotional and social consequences of hegemonic masculine expectations, particularly in relation to economic failure, emotional vulnerability, marital conflict, fatherhood, changing gender roles, unemployment, dependence, and loss of domestic authority.

**4. Domestic-Violence Discourse:** Domestic violence should be understood as encompassing psychological, emotional, economic, and coercive forms of abuse. Support systems should remain sufficiently inclusive to recognise male victims without displacing women-centred approaches.

**5. Contemporary African Playwrights:** Playwrights should challenge simplistic gender representations by presenting vulnerable men, emotionally expressive and non-violent masculinities, complex female characters, reciprocal domestic relationships, and characters who cannot be reduced to fixed victim/perpetrator categories.

**6. Theatre Education:** Theatre and gender studies curricula should encourage students to examine who possesses power, how power is acquired and maintained, who resists it, who becomes vulnerable, and how gender influences the recognition of victimhood.

**7. Future Research:** Future studies should consider empirical research with male survivors, comparative male and female victimhood, LGBTQ+ masculinities where appropriate, male victimhood in film and television, audience responses, male silence and help-seeking, African/non-African comparisons, and quantitative studies of male victim characters. Research should also consider how class, age, disability, ethnicity, religion, economic status, and geographical location intersect with masculinity and victimhood.

### Final Scholarly Statement Summary

The central contribution of the study is that **\*\*gendered power cannot be adequately understood through a permanent male-perpetrator/female-victim binary\*\***. Contemporary African drama provides a valuable space for examining this complexity because theatre makes power visible through performance, dialogue, silence, conflict, and gender reversal. The study demonstrates that power is **\*\*relational\*\***, masculinity is **\*\*performed\*\***, authority can become vulnerability, and victimhood does not belong permanently to one gender. Consequently, future scholarship should move beyond asking **\*\*Which**

gender is the victim?""\* and instead ask: ""\*How does power operate within this relationship, how is gender performed within it, and under what conditions does vulnerability become victimhood?""\* This shift offers a more nuanced, theoretically grounded, and inclusive approach to gender, domestic violence, and masculinity in contemporary African drama.

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