

A CROSS ANTHROPOLOGICO-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF SELECTED AFRICAN PROVERBS AS EVIDENCE OF A CULTURE OF VIOLENCE

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ABSTRACT

Proverbs are short, pithy sayings that contain the treasures of traditional wisdom which are passed down from one generation to another. In some concrete way, they are the bedrock upon which societies build their civilization. Stone (2006: xiii) defines proverbs as ‘bits of ancient wisdom’ that represents words of critical wisdom based on the tested experience of ancestors. As an integral part of language, proverbs reflect the patterns and structures of culture and consequently influence human thinking, psyche, world view, social practices and power relations in society (Djite, 2008). Employing Lakoff and Turner’s (1989) theory of ethnography of proverbs and Lazar’s (2005) approach to Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), this paper examines selected proverbs from different African societies in order to determine if the African society has a history of patriarchy and violence that ultimately promotes a culture of gender-based violence (GBV). Research reveals that proverbs with violent overtones are found in several African societies. These proverbs have the power to subtly influence speakers’ attitudes and behaviours towards women, especially when it comes to upholding patriarchal hegemony.

Keywords: *Gender, Patriarchy, Culture, Gender-Based Violence, Proverbs*

INTRODUCTION

It has been argued that generally, society tends to underestimate the power of women which often leads to the false assumption that women have no power of their own or if they do, then it is inferior to men’s power (Wodak, 2008). Proverbs, a cultural tool employed by society to extract guided behaviour, is not exempt from the elaborate and pervasive social infrastructure society engages in giving credence to the above notion. They are considered to provide advice and life lessons on how men and women behave in a society and may

have an impact on individuals’ social and emotional health. Proverbs project cultural and societal expectations because they are age-old and are still valued in current times. Mieder (2007:18) believes that proverbs pass judgment and prescribe what people should do in the future. Mulaudzi (2013:154) also asserts that proverbs are cultural and as such dictate’s values and norms for both men and women.

According to Hussein (2005), language is a symbolic act of both representing and valuing things. Just

as a dance is inseparable from its performer, our attitudes towards things and the things we say about them are inextricably linked. Put another way, a society's perception of men and women is expressed through the proverbs that surround them. In many African societies, as in most societies around the world, gender power relations tend to be expressed in proverbs with the consequence of exacerbating the subordination of women and worsening their condition in their respective societies. Many African proverbs contain messages that sustain African male supremacy both in private and public domains. The influence of proverbs on African thought is gripping to the extent that even the construction of gender as a social concept admits the idea of male superiority and female subordination. And African proverbs are the bearers of this imbalance. For the purpose of clarity and guidance, three key concepts – Proverb, Patriarchy and Gender Based Violence (henceforth referred to as GBV)– as used in this paper, need to be briefly defined.

KEY TERMS

Proverbs

A proverb is a phrase, saying, sentence, statement or expression of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, experience, lessons and advice concerning life in a metaphysical, fixed and memorable form and which has been handed down from generation to generation. It is a tool in the philosophical search for knowledge, reality and or wisdom. (Etta & Mogu, 2012). A proverb is a widely accepted phrase that has

educational, warning, or advisory purposes among a population. When wielded skilfully, they may be extremely potent tools that can either separate, destroy, and disperse, or they can bring people together, build, and strengthen. According to Esen (1982), proverbs are the verbal archives of a community's ideas and philosophy, serving as an oral museum. Similarly, Akporobaro and Emovon (1994:1) opine that “the proverbs of a community or nation is in a real sense an ethnography of the people which if systematized can give a penetrating picture of the people's way of life, their philosophy, their criticism of life, moral truths and social values. It is through the help of proverbs expressed in an indigenous language, that the knowledge claim of a people is defined, clarified, expressed and used. The world of the people can be accessed through the indigenous language. In other words, proverbs serve as a window into the mindset, worldview, way of thinking, and beliefs of a community. The elders are revered in traditional African society as the guardians of the way of thinking. Oftentimes, this elder is projected as a dominant male figure representative of the power elite in the community. Thus, the epistemic agency in proverbs tends to be situated in elitism, masculinity and even patriarchy. Elders usually make use of proverbs to drive home their points. This is why it is said that proverb is the oil with which words are eaten. It is believed that such elders are closest to the divine force or source of knowledge and possess detailed knowledge of their languages, hence

they are able, and are likely to speak the truth as a result of their in-depth knowledge of their culture. Proverbs then serve as a means of passing along what is regarded as traditional African knowledge, serving as a tool for people—especially men—to try and dominate and control their surroundings and social relationships. According to Uduigwomen (2002), proverbs serve as tools for socialisation and formal education in several African civilizations. They also serve as a means of transmitting cultural traditions.

Patriarchy

In the context of this study, patriarchy is identified as institutionalization of the dynamics of power and male supremacy (Lakoff 2004). Women's interests are marginalized and subjugated in this way. Whether it be through overt or covert examples of men's social, political, and economic domination over women, or by limitations on women's mobility, access to education, and opportunities for personal growth, patriarchal systems privilege males over women.

Gender-Based Violence (GBV)

When a person or group is targeted for violence because of their gender, it's referred to as gender-based violence (GBV). While it was once thought to be limited to acts of violence committed by men against women, it is now more widely understood to include hostilities based on sexual identity and orientation, including some types of violence against men who do not conform to the dominant forms of masculinity (Collins, 2014).

Broadly speaking, it includes “any interpersonal, organisational or politically orientated violation perpetrated against people due to their gender identity, sexual orientation, or location in the hierarchy of male-dominated social systems such as family, military, organisations, or the labour force” (O’Toole and Schiffman, 1997: xii). Collins (2014) contends that the rise of Western feminism in the 1970s, which brought attention to pervasive violence against women, was a major factor in the present interest in gender-based violence. High rates of sexual assault against women were not only made public, but this behaviour was also theorised to be a fundamental feature of patriarchy. For instance, it was argued that rape was the means by which men as a social group maintained their dominance over women. Even though present-day narratives are less conspiratorial, they nevertheless harbour the unmasked thought that gender-based violence is inextricably linked to social structures of gender inequality.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A number of studies have been conducted from different perspectives on gender-related proverbs by different scholars. Hussein (2005) examines how African proverbs contribute to the formation and maintenance of gendered culture. In order to investigate the effects of gender stereotypes, the author looks at a few African sexist proverbs within the framework of the post-modern theory of power dynamics between social groups and the function of

language in mediating these connections. According to the report, African proverbs reinforce gender stereotypes and ideologies by equating maleness with strength, firmness, or respect and femaleness with weakness, indignity, inconsistency, and meekness. Hussein also adds that the proverbs under analysis illustrate the idea that males are the role models for humanity and women are secondary, reflecting an expressive contrast between male and female. It is implied that men typically utilise these prejudices as justification for maintaining their dominance over women. Men and women have distinct yet overlapping relationships, as seen by the patriarchal society's denigration of femininity and its positive constructs. Therefore, it is not surprising that men's vested interests and conspiracy to restrict women to specific secondary social positions can be found at the core of proverbs that appear to communicate a society's adoration of women.

Phiri, Mulaudzi and Heyns (2015) explore and describe the impact of the indigenous proverb *lebitla la mosadi ke bogadi* on women's mental health. 57 participants married, divorced, widowed, and single women who frequented social clubs or networks in Tshwane and Johannesburg—were chosen through the use of the Snowball and purposive sampling techniques. Eight focus group sessions and five in-person interviews were held. The results show that women's mental health is impacted by the adverse impacts that may result in mortality as well as the oppression and

stigmatisation of women and their families. A few women disclosed that they faced multiple forms of oppression. They also worried about being stigmatised if they decided to have a divorce. They always lived in terror of their husbands killing them or doing them harm. The outcome also shows that the proverb highlights the immense value of marriage and the need for women to put in a lot of effort to make their marriages work. For these individuals, the proverb represented oppression because it implied that being married meant caring for one's spouse and his extended family.

Gyan, Abbey & Baffoe (2020) attempt the analysis of the representation of women in sampled Akan proverbs and the ways in which these proverbs institutionalize the position, identity, and roles of women in traditional Akan communities of Ghana. The agency of oral traditions in the systematic perpetuation of patriarchal culture, gender inequities and inequality are suggested in the paper and it recommends a radical overhaul of oral traditions in order to break down the constructed framework that promotes the prevailing patriarchal discourses and culture in traditional Akan communities of Ghana.

According to some research on Zulu proverbs, which aims to offer both interpretive and descriptive interpretations, the proverbs uphold patriarchal norms that prohibit women from exercising their human rights to the fullest extent possible (Nyembezi, 1990). Numerous Zulu proverbs

outline expectations for women that impede their personal growth, such as the institution of marriage and holding a position of leadership in the community (Baloyi, 2017). According to Chiliza and Masuku's (2020) analysis of gender inequality in a few Zulu proverbs, men in the Zulu cultural setting patriarchally dominate women. According to the paper, the lessons in the chosen proverbs offer enduring representations of women as people who are devalued and reduced to the status of objects of subordination.

The conclusions of Adegbola's (2021) study on the representations of women in Yoruba proverbs and Balogun's (2010) study on the proverbial oppression of women in Yoruba African culture are quite similar to those of Baloyi (2017) and Chiliza and Masuku (2020). They contend that numerous Yoruba proverbs infringe upon the rights and dignity of women, and that some of them contain derogatory metaphors that can inadvertently influence the attitudes and behaviours of those who utter them, especially upholding masculine hegemony. The papers contend that proverbs and other cultural instruments have served as vehicles for the widespread subjugation and oppression of women in Yoruba society, and they consequently advocate for the replacement of negative gender post-proverbs with positive ones.

Numerous studies on gender-related topics and proverbs have also been carried out in various parts of

Ethiopia. Assefa's (2016) research focuses on linguistic violence against women as manifested in sexist Amharic proverbs, Gebeyehu (2019) examines the negative representation of women in the language of Awngi proverbs, whereas Jobo (2015) analyses the prejudiced negative images of femininity in Wolaita proverbs.

According to Baataar et al.'s (2023) analysis of proverbs and sayings from Ghana regarding gender relations in the Frafra traditional area of Ghana, proverbs or wise sayings have a significant impact on gender relations. A few of the proverbs place a great deal of cultural duty on males, which may put them in danger, by depicting men as courageous, strong, resilient, protectors, and providers for women and families. However, stereotypes about women portray them as helpless and reliant on their husbands. Proverbs and wise sayings from the frafra community also depict women as harassed, kind, nurturing, and industrious.

The aforementioned makes it clear that several researches have critically investigated African proverbs that, as a result of a patriarchal societal structure, distort, oppress, mistreat, discredit, and belittle women. However, very little thought has been given to African proverbs that might incite or trigger violence against women, despite the fact that proverbs are thought to "constitute a powerful rhetorical device for the shaping of moral consciousness, opinions, and beliefs" (Akporbaro and Emovon,

1994). Additionally, a gender research that relies only on the proverbs of one community is unable to fully comprehend the ethnocultural foundations of the proverbial oppression of women in Africa. Thus, the purpose of the current study is to close the gap.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The African proverbs considered in this study were collected from various published and unpublished sources. Since a single proverb can have divergent meanings used under varied circumstances, proverbs about GBV were selected based on their most obvious superficial meanings. This study uses secondary sources as its source of data. Secondary source materials can be articles in newspapers or popular magazines, book or movie reviews, or articles found in scholarly journals that discuss or evaluate someone else's original research. According to Haralambos (2013), secondary sources describe, discuss, interpret, comment upon, analyse, evaluate, summarize, and process primary sources.

The best material on "African proverbs that encourage violence against women" were found through desk research using search engines like Google, MSN, Lycos, and Yahoo. The search terms were examined and then refined to look for synonyms and variations. Other search terms such as "African proverbs that encourage beating women," "Proverbs that support oppression of women" were also used. The bulk of the pieces that

made it past the screening process addressed how gender is constructed and how women are portrayed in various African proverbs. These resources are where the proverbs that discuss violence against women were taken from. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) was used to analyse the proverbs. The main principles of CDA, according to Phillips and Jørgensen (2006:61-65) are that "discursive practices contribute to the construction of social identities and relations, discourse constitutes the social world and is constituted by other social practices, and language should be analysed within its social context, also discursive practices create and reproduce unequal power relations" Sustaining hierarchically gendered social arrangements, which puts the woman at a disadvantage can easily be accomplished employing proverbs. The nuances might be subtle but the effects are deep and far reaching. CDA serves to explain how proverbs are accessories to the heinous continued subordination of women in Africa and suggests ideas to drive a desired positive outcome as discourse is a social action hence its employability as a tool for social change (Wetherell 2001; Richardson 2007).

Since this paper is concerned with African proverbs that encourage violence against women, it also adopts Lazar's (2005) approach to Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA), an approach that focuses on critiquing discourses which sustain a patriarchal social order: that is, relations of power that systematically privilege men and

disempower women (Lazar, 2005). FCDA highlights the ‘complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities’ (Lazar, 2007:142). Hegemonic masculinity and femininity are two ideas that are helpful to take into account in patriarchal society when analysing gender inequality, as FCDA aims to accomplish. It is well known that patriarchal systems encourage male dominance and female subjugation, or the dominion of males over women. Men are perceived as having authority and power, which is either accepted as natural or mostly innate (Connell, 1987, 1995). Hegemonic ideas of masculinity and femininity are deeply ingrained in patriarchal society. Connell (1995) defined hegemonic masculinity as the arrangement of gender practices that represents the prevailing solution to the legitimacy of patriarchy issue, and that is seen to ensure (or be assumed to ensure) men's dominance and women's subjugation.

DATA PRESENTATION

It may be safe to assume that in Africa, proverbs are largely the linguistic tools of patriarchy going by the empirically demonstrated language tendency that makes nothing of the woman and glorifies the male. Africa's oral literature is replete with an abundance of nuanced sayings that uphold the imbalanced power structure between men and women,

chasing the woman several rungs down the ladder of relevance and awarding the male top of the ladder significance. Here are some of the proverbs from different parts of Africa that inherently promote violence towards the female gender

1. Pashan ta fi na yale, oun be laja fun 'yawo

The whip that was used to beat the first wife is kept for the second wife (Yoruba; Balogun, 2010)

The underlying assumption of this proverb is that a woman is regarded as a child, to be disciplined anytime she errs, and that a man has the right to beat his wife (wives).

The proverb also presupposes that a man has the right to marry more than one wife, a practice which tends to see the female as an item for acquisition. It also suggests that the second wife should not expect preferential treatment over the first wife. A similar proverb is found among the Frafra Traditional Area in the Upper East Region in Ghana:

2. Doseka n gme pogi keema la, n gme'ere pogsariga.

The stick that is used to beat the first wife will be the same stick that will be used on the second wife.

(Baataar et al., 2023)

3. Nwaanyi na-dighi anuru di ya okwu, itali ka e ji ezi ya ihe.

A woman that is disobedient to her husband must be taught obedience with the cane. (Igbo; Agbedo, Obiora & Ahamefula, 2016)

It is stated that Igbo society uses the Igbo proverb in (3) frequently. It is sexist because men frequently use it to diminish the worth and dignity of women. Males utilise it to demonstrate the chauvinistic value that men place above women. It implies that using violence is the best way to teach a lady to obey. Similarly, Hussein (2005:66) cites an Igbo narrative proverb:

4. An Ugwuta (Oguta) girl told her mother that as she was going on her way, a man came and threw her down and sexed (raped) her. Her mother told her to go and retaliate. She went, and was sexed (raped) again.

According to Hussein, these proverbs illustrate how women are sexually vulnerable to men in interpersonal interactions and emphasize how commonplace sexual violence is in sexist societies, where "the female prerogative (sex) is infringed upon by force." The proverb also illustrates how men's collective and individual assumption of authority over women and women's sexual humiliation are both expressions of and reinforcements for women's gender-based oppression (Disch, 1997:564-565). Moreover, it is thought that the adage in (4), which depicts men displaying their sexual prowess over women, is an example of how traditionally African men are socialized into a dominant role (Tlou, 2002). This reprehensible leaning of society has perpetuated an oppressive hold on womenfolk to the extent of loss of will, dignity and human pride.

5. What annoys the red mongoose most are insults, but you still insult it mentioning how red his lips are. (Lunda; Mutunda, 2016)

Here, a wife who has been physically assaulted by her husband is made fun of. This proverb's underlying presumptions are that a man has the right to beat his wife and that a woman is treated like a kid who needs to be corrected if she misbehaves. This proverb's key point is that physically abusing women is accepted as normal behaviour and is a tried-and-true method of coercing spouses into being subservient. But in my opinion, this adage permits the obvious brainwashing of women in order to make them believe that they are less valuable than men. Here is another proverb that inspires men to violence towards their wives:

chanunantunū("A roof remover"). This proverb speaks to a situation where a woman always gets under her husband's skin with the aim of inviting his blows on herself. Inherent in such a proverb is sufficient persuasion for the husband to unleash physical terror on his wife in order to subdue her. Another proverb that aligns with the notion of this irreverent subjugation and dehumanization of the woman is the West African proverb that urges:

5. Beat your wife regularly; if you don't know why, she will.

The Tarikas of Ethiopia claim:

6. If you really love your wife, you have to beat her. (Kiiru, 1999)

Here, it is accepted that mental and physical abuse is the standard for women; it is one tactic a man might take to establish his dominance and manly strength over his spouse. He feels that since he is a man, it is his duty to rule, dominate, and control women. The idea being conveyed here is that marriage can serve as a rehabilitation facility for assertive, outspoken, and provocative women, helping them find their proper position in society. Marriage is taken to be a place of submission, where women learn to become "good wives," obedient to male dominance and authority (Ncube & Moyo, 2014:132). It is curious that this woman-degrading, woman subjugating proverbs such as the one in (5) emanates from a society that is matrilineal and consequently should ordinarily be championing female protection. The reality however is that the patriarchal ideology that puts men above women holds sway.

7. Eyaapa Nabulobe, eliipa Nabukelema. That which was used to beat the rejected one (wife) will be used to beat the loved one. (Bukusu)

This proverb actually cautions against one feeling complacent and looking down on others because the misfortunes that befell them will also one day catch up with the proud. On the surface, this sounds harmless whereas it is actually making veiled

reference to women. It is in the same space as the proverb about the first wife's cane being reserved for the second or the new wife.

8. Okhayiya khubalebe nga namulekhwa tawe.

Do not wander about among the relatives like a widow (Bukusu)

This proverb tends to pick on the female figure and singles her out for contemptuous commentary. As if the calamity of widowhood was not grave enough, the proverb mindlessly isolates the female person and makes her the butt of a joke. In depersonalizing the female, a ground is created for subsequent abuse.

According to Barasa and Opande (2017), proverbs like the one mentioned in (8) above demonstrate the prevalence of polygamy and domestic violence among the Bukusu, where husbands beat their wives, force them to leave their married homes, and then marry other spouses who receive the same abuse. A "real" man would be expected to have multiple wives. Men thus exert control over women by beating them and engaging in polygamy; KDHS (2014) cited in Barasa and Opande (2017), has already noted that 45 percent of women report experiencing physical violence.

10. Beat your wife regularly; if you don't know why, she will know why (West Africa; Schipper, 2006)

11. If you really love your wife you

have to beat her (Tigrinya, Eritrea; Schipper, 2006)

12. Now the marriage is going to begin, as the neglected wife said, when she was flogged with thorns. (Hausa; Schipper, 2006)

As warped and as mentally vacuous as these linguistic weapons are, they have been the compass of several human communities in navigating the male-female relationship situation. This inhumane and dastardly approach to disciplining women and making them compliant by beating them is quite pervasive. It's not limited to Africa; proverbs from a wide range of non-African countries, many of which are geographically and culturally isolated from one another, demonstrate how men's views on hitting women are essentially universal. These proverbs regard hitting a woman as a normal everyday activity, much like eating, drinking, and sleeping. In addition, they support and even encourage this behaviour as a requirement for a woman to have a strong emotional bond with her husband. Furthermore, it is portrayed as a crucial symbol of masculinity.

These proverbs demonstrate how little consideration is given to the feelings of the women who are being beaten. Furthermore, the beating injures the relationship and does not force the victim to change in the way that is intended. Instead, it creates a host of negative feelings like resentment, hatred, fury, and retaliation. It is difficult for a woman who has been a victim of spousal abuse to move on

from the incident and thereafter feel a loving connection to him. Those who experienced abuse as children—whether from parents, instructors, or other individuals—know that the suffering it causes in our souls lasts a lifetime. While the physical scars could heal, the emotional and psychological ones might not go away. The anguish in the victim's spirit returns each time the violent person comes into contact with them (Tatar, 2022:44).

Additionally, Assefa (2016) offers a number of misogynistic Amharic proverbs that dehumanize or oppress women and condone the abuse of women in the home. Assefa claims that women are susceptible to domestic abuse in the target sociocultural context and presumably in many other cultures as well. In addition to performing arduous physical labor, they endure beatings from their spouses when arguments occur at home. In order to prevent people including women from viewing this behaviour as criminal or abusive, society has normalized it and made it accepted. The data below demonstrates the pervasiveness of domestic violence against women. (13)

- a. ሴትና አሀያ የማችሉት የለማ
setanna ahayya yamayt/əlut yällämm
'A woman and a donkey can tolerate everything'
- b. የድንጋይን ጦርነት፣ የሸሮን ቀለብነት፣ የሚስትን ባርነት
yädəngayən t'orənnät yäfəron
k'alläbännät yämistən barənnät
'Conflict using stone is analogous to supplies of mush and slavery of a wife'
- c. አሀያና ሴት ቢረግጥዋት አይከፋት

- ahəyyanna set birägət 'wat aykäfat*
 'A woman and a donkey do not refuse being trampled'
 d. እናት ትረገጣለች እንደመሬት
annat tarräggät 'allätj/əndämäret
 'A mother is trampled like the earth'
 e. ሴትና አሀያ በዱላ
setənnā ahəyya bādulla
 'A woman and a donkey are controlled by a stick'
 f. ከሸንጎ ቢረታ ከቤት ሚስቱን መታ
käfāngo birräta käbet mistun mätta
 'When a man was beaten in a forum, he went home and beat his wife'
 g. ማንን ታሸንፋለህ ቢሉት ሚስቱን አለ
mannəntaffännəfalläh bilut misten alä
 'When a man is asked over whom he enjoys victory, he said, "my wife"
 h. አማቱን ምታ ቢባል ሚስቱን በየት አልፎ አለ
amatun mēta bilut misten bāyät alləfe alä
 'When a man is ordered to hit his mother-in-law, he said "how can I skip over my wife"
 i. የምታሸንፈውን ምታ ቢባል ወደሚስቱ ሮጦ
yāmmättāffännəfāwən mēta bilut wädemistu rot'ä

When a man is ordered to hit the person over whom he has won, he runs to his wife'

Assefa (2016) argues that women are susceptible to domestic abuse in the target sociocultural context and presumably in many other cultures as well. In addition to performing arduous physical labour, they endure beatings from their spouses when arguments occur at home. Women and other individuals do not view this occurrence as abuse or criminal activity since society has normalised it and socialised it. Women are seen as servants in society, as the proverbs in (13a) and (13b) reveal. Despite the

enormous hardship they bear in providing for their family, women are perceived as whiners without merit. Even worse, women are viewed as resources of mush, the most widely used (and abused) food in society, and are treated as slaves. Proverb (13c) makes the assumption that women like to be beaten, especially by their husbands. Men who subscribe to this philosophy think that the only way to make women change their bad behaviour is by physically punishing them. To send the notion that women are deserving of being beaten, they are contrasted to the ground, which people constantly step on. Even worse, women are viewed as being no smarter than donkeys, who are regarded as the most foolish animal in society and who, like women, are expected to withstand abuse. Proverb (13f), according to Assefa, seems to imply that there are instances in which a husband puts his failure to succeed in a public matter onto his wife once he returns home. This suggests that women are physically punished in order to control the troubled emotions of men. In society, women especially wives are seen as inferior to men, or husbands. Husbands, in particular, think they can beat their spouses, to the point where, when they are seeking for someone to beat, they think of their wives first. The proverbs in (13f) – (13i) represent this socially constructed reality; they completely deviate from the marriage ethos, which encourages unity and togetherness. Furthermore, Assefa (2016) argues that the Amharic proverbs in (13a) – (13i) demonstrate how the target speech community has

long constructed a reality that requires women to be victims of domestic abuse. Wives in particular experience many forms of domestic abuse, with beatings being the most severe form. The society's proverbs, in particular, and its long-standing folk literature, in general, externalize this truth. The target proverbs are written in such a way as to encourage the necessity and continuation of violence against women in the home. Thus, this is interpreted as just another blatant instance of how sexist proverbs are used to devalue women.

Hussein (2005:) contends that proverbs that reinforce the masculine ego, like "The husband returned home and whipped his wife when he was allowed to whip whomever he can," can lead some rigidly stereotyped men to adopt a false sense of manhood by controlling women or hurting their partners physically and psychologically.

As earlier stated, linguistically induced violence against women is not exclusive to Africa. Several cultures and societies have proverbs that encourage violence against women. The following proverbs are featured in Fernández's (2022) paper on the persistence of sexism in Martínez Kleiser's *Refranero General Ideológico Español's* compilation of proverbs: (14)

- a. To a woman and a dog, a stick in a hand and bread in the other.
- b. To a woman and a candle, twist their neck if you want them to be good.

- c. The woman and the pavement, always want to be trod on.
- d. The ass and the woman, with sticks must be beaten.

Fernández (2022) asserts that, even in jest, these kinds of expressions which imply contemptuous vituperation continue to unwittingly support domestic terrorism. As a result, they still defend the exploitation of violence and force to oppress women. The given examples not only illustrate this shameless use of violence against women, but they also encourage it. Furthermore, the parallels drawn between women and objects and animals especially beasts of burden are consistent and not coincidental in the paremiology surrounding them. Some proverbs that encourage the use of violence against women attempt to rationalise this use of violence by drawing comparisons between women and various beasts.

Presenting some cross-cultural proverbs from Schipper (2006), Tartar (2022) notes that numerous proverbs from other cultures suggest beating a woman as a special means of obtaining her obedience:

15. The man who cannot slaughter his sheep or beat his wife [when she deserves it], it is better for him to die than to live (An Arabic proverb from the Maghreb).
16. To keep your wife on the rails, beat her – and if she goes off the rails, beat her (Spanish, Puerto Rico).
17. Women, like gongs, should be beaten regularly (English, USA).

18. A bad woman and a good woman both need the rod (Spanish, Argentina).
19. Good horses and bad horses need the spurs, good women and bad women need the whip (Many variants in both Europe and the Americas).
20. Do not spare a bullock or a wife (Burmese).
21. Caulk a new boat; beat a new wife (Khiongha).
22. Clubbing produces virtuous wives (Chinese).
23. A woman who is beaten is going to be a better wife (Korean).
24. The nails of a cart and the head of a woman, they only work when they are hit hard (Rajasthani).
25. For who beats up his wife, God improves the food (Russian).
26. A nut, a stockfish, and a young wife should be beaten, in order to be good (Polish).
27. A woman, a dog and a walnut tree, the harder you beat them, the better they be (English, UK/USA).
28. Women, like dogs: the more you beat them, the more they love you (Spanish, Argentina).
29. Women and steaks, the more you beat them, the better they'll be (German).
30. Wring a wife's and a hen's neck, if you want them good (Europe and both Americas).
31. If you don't thrash your wife, she might think she's already a widow (Armenian).

CONCLUSION

The advertised goal of proverbs is their utility for guidance and wise counsel in private and public matters

through the social norms and beliefs presented. Having examined some selected African proverbs, the discovery does not comprehensively accord with the above-mentioned goal. While there are proverbs that deliver on the goal of offering wisdom and guidance for life, there are others that are strung together by the beads of gender discrimination and stereotypes. These hang on the neck of the African society as both a moral burden and a human blight that calls to question the belief in true humanity. Along the corridors of our history are strewn women who have suffered victimization and violence engineered by reverentially canonized oral literature and proverbs that promote inordinate male domination and female subjugation and subservience. Within this framework lies the male sense of entitlement to superior treatment and opportunities while the female gender is schooled to embrace equality with beasts, as suggested by the consistent comparison made between her and animals. If she is regarded as sub-human, there lies the justification for her to be so treated, hence the violence directed in her direction to maintain the warped social balance created by patriarchy. Africa is not an exception to the global oppression of women. Gender parity has not yet been achieved, even in regions of the world where racial and gender disparities in educational and other social achievements are believed to have all but vanished (Hussein, 2005).

The examples given, drawn from a variety of ethnic groups, show how

proverbs are employed in African social and cultural organisation to express the deeply ingrained patriarchal structures. They depict how women are oppressed and subjugated in many African nations. African-style proverbs form the basis of African epistemology. This is because general epistemology, African epistemology and proverbs are concerned about creating knowledge for the betterment of human existence. Proverbs play an important role in supporting historical assertions because of their connection to pressing existential issues and the belief that their meanings do not easily alter over time (Etta & Mogu, 2012). It is safe to presume that a skewed and disparaging picture of African women is being projected across the continent if proverbs are indeed thought of as a set of unchanging social rules. Due to these deeply ingrained cultural ideas, significant life decisions are frequently made using the principles that are thought to be implicit in the proverbs. Proverbs are Africa's open gallery of knowledge. Ultimately, it is about control and the imposition of a given view of life as sacrosanct and accepted. As a result, proverbs often serve to uphold patriarchy in society from generation to generation by portraying its meaning as an unchanging, stable aspect of social order that includes male domination (Kamwendo and Kaya, 2016).

Goheen (1996) contends that proverbs can serve as a vehicle for the dissemination of powerful ideologies, upholding the supremacy of particular groups by giving preference to ideas

and customs that discriminate against people based on their gender, age, race, social class, ability, and other characteristics. Similar to this, Gyan (2018) contends that attitudes, judgements, and thoughts about women—both positive and negative—are internalised and learned through a combination of direct instruction, patterns of behaviour, songs, proverbs, wise sayings, and folktales. What are internalised results in similar behavioural habits.

In line with von Bülow's (1992) analysis, Hussein (2005) proposes that gender stereotypes should be constantly redefined and reinterpreted for the benefit of both men and women in order to free the gender psyche from its confines. Reconstructing proverbs to dissuade all types of violence against women is necessary if they are to maintain their standing as a concise and universal distillation of common knowledge. A healthy number of scholars (Raji-Oyelade, 1999; Balogun, 2010; Adegbola, 2021) have advocated for a reconstruction of oppressive proverbs while putting up a strong resistance to them through proper education and consistent pursuit of the feminist agenda. This entails reinterpreting some African proverbs that are thought to be outdated. In a similar vein, a South African women's shelter demanded in 2021 that African proverbs be reconstructed in order to change public perception of gender-based violence. The shelter partnered with other organisations to use a public relations, influencer, and billboard campaign to actively cancel,

edit, and promote a new perspective on traditional women's proverbs. This approach effectively disempowers outdated, toxic phrases and proverbs and shifts the conversation towards equality and respect. It is thought that by altering how society perceives a woman's worth, we can start to mend deeply ingrained beliefs that eventually support the cycle of gender-based violence. A deliberate reconstruction of discriminatory proverbs is thought to have a positive effect on men's attitudes towards women and GBV. If the wisest written works full of misogyny have negatively affected many men's perspectives towards women and have turned women's history into a history of pain, tears, and cruelty (Chollet, 2020; Holland, 2006), putting in place an elaborate collaborative effort of government, non-governmental organizations and the academic community to create awareness programmes that let the men see women as equals and complements would go a long way in curbing the menace of violence against women. This kind of arrangement should incorporate both men and women, particularly young people, as they explore the imperative demand for a healthy gender relation. To spur the advancement of society as a whole, male youngsters must begin cultivating good attitudes and dispositions towards their female counterparts.

In the final analysis, we have a personal responsibility to interrogate and question the body of popular knowledge that has amassed into

canonical expressions. According to Kerschen (2000:68), "We risk fostering animosity, miscommunication, and prejudice if we don't carefully analyse what we've been taught by proverbs to determine what we really believe and discard the rest in our personal use." Furthermore, according to Nisrane and Tizazu (2019:342), "Efforts should be made to educate society about the damaging expressions while maintaining and supplementing the positive practice." A crucial component of this is giving up on references to harmful ideas, even when made in jest (Martínez Garrido, 2001:95). Additionally, strategies of subverting negative gender ideologies through creative appropriation or production of new positive discourses should be adopted (Lomotey, 2019:336) and the prejudices embodied in sexist proverbs must acknowledged as "blatant lies" (Presbey, 1999:178). It is believed that a development that could help whittle down the negative effects of proverbs on the society is the emergence of female paremiographers.

United Nations puts the figures at an estimated 736 millions of women who have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both, at least once in their life. This translates to about one in three women, globally. Violence against women and girls remains one of the most prevalent and pervasive human rights violations in the world. The reason for this and the solution to it are not far-fetched. Generations of humans in Africa and elsewhere have been fed the diet of

hegemonic patriarchy which is the festering ground for misogynistic views and sexist ideologies. The solution lies in the commitment of African nations and societies to take the hard edge of patriarchy off by embracing equality of the sexes and committing to a regime of mass indoctrination to systematically undo the damage that had been done through the propagation of harmful content found in some of our proverbs. For Africa and the other nations of the world to stop grappling with the issue of gender violence, the academic community, non-governmental organizations and governments must show commitment. Government must lead the way by imposing thriving consequences and have them enshrined in the constitutions. Although the solution lies in robust responses, including investment in prevention, alarmingly, data on how much nations are committing to counteract violence against women and girls remains glaringly sparse. The academic

community should engage in the rigorous act of reviewing existing cultural and linguistic properties to align them to contemporary use while the NGOs embark on an elaborate campaign to correct the wrong views that wrong culture has perpetuated over the years. Finally, it is important to use the good side of society to heal its bad side. By engaging wholesome proverbs, songs, playlets and such other cultural appurtenances to educate the people, the society will gain mileage in its quest to stop the violence. Igbolekwu, et al. (2021) suggest that it is important to support the creation of songs, playlets and proverbs in native tongues to help communities understand the effects of domestic abuse on women while indigenous language jingles concerning cultural customs harmful to women should be played on local radio and television channels to raise public awareness of these detrimental cultural norms and practices.

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