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A Disinterment of Hushed Male-Gendered Experiences: A Study of Festus Iyayi's Violence

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Abstract: ***This research delves into the often-silenced tribulations, struggles, and internal conflicts faced by men which remain concealed due to prevailing masculinity norms. The study critically examines the nuanced portrayal of male struggles within the cultural and traditional context of Nigeria, as depicted in the novel, Violence by Festus Iyayi. Through a meticulous application of gender normativity theory, within qualitative research framework, the work unveils the complex layers of male experiences that are typically muted by societal expectations. It interrogates the intricate dynamics of gender roles, shedding light on the silent battles against emotional repression and the quest for identity amidst rigid masculine archetypes, through an examination of the male characters experiences as depicted by the author. The research finds that societal, cultural and traditional expectations, and stereotypes placed on men contribute to their silent battles and affects their mental health in diverse ways, therefore, this study calls for relaxed and flexible male gender norms. This analysis not only contributes to a deeper understanding of male psychosocial challenges but also calls for a re-evaluation of gender constructs that dictate emotional expression and resilience.***

Keywords: Masculinity, Gender Normativity, Male Experiences, Gender Roles, Gender Norms.

1. INTRODUCTION

A common theme in African literature has been gender problems. Nevertheless, most of the negative feedbacks have been directed at how women are portrayed and their fights for

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freedom, equality, and strength. The experiences and perspectives of men, especially those who do not conform to the dominant or hegemonic models of masculinity, have been largely overlooked or neglected.

One way in which male-gendered experiences are explored in African literature is through the lens of its inability to conform to traditional gender roles. For example, men, in many African societies, are expected to be the breadwinners and providers for their families and to be tough and strong. They are not expected to show emotion or vulnerability, and they are often discouraged from expressing themselves in ways that are seen as feminine. As a result, men feel pressure to conform to these expectations, even if it means repressing their true feelings and desires. This leads to feelings of isolation and disconnection and contributes to mental health issues such as depression and anxiety.

For this study, the researchers will explore this concept of hushed male-gendered experiences in Festus Iyayi's Violence, a Nigerian writer. The term hushed male-gendered experiences in this work refers to the challenges and difficulties that men face in their personal and social lives but are often silenced, ignored, or denied by society, the state, and the self. These experiences include physical, emotional, psychological, economic, or cultural forms of oppression, discrimination, violence, or trauma. They also stem from the pressure and expectation to conform to certain norms and standards of masculinity, such as strength, courage, dominance, stoicism, and success. These rules and norms are different depending on the period, culture, or ideology, but they usually make it hard to define and judge what it means to be a man. Men who don't meet these requirements or who question or fight them are left out, punished, or pushed to the edges. As men, they may also feel alone, frustrated, and not good enough, and they may lose their identity, dignity, and happiness.

The novel presents a nuanced and complex portrayal of male characters who are caught in the web of socio-economic, political, and cultural forces that shape their lives. It challenges the stereotypes and expectations of masculinity that are often imposed by society, the state, and the self. It also reveals the vulnerabilities, anxieties, and dilemmas that men face in their quest for survival, dignity, and happiness. By doing so, it offers a critical and creative insight into the gender dynamics and human rights issues that affect contemporary African society.

The problem that this study addresses is the lack of adequate attention and recognition of the hushed male-gendered experiences in African literature and society. Despite the prevalence and significance of these experiences, they are often silenced, ignored, or denied by the dominant discourses and practices of gender, power, and culture. While existing literature often focuses on power dynamics and hegemonic norms, it often overlooks the complexities of how men navigate and express their emotions within these structures. This creates a gap in the understanding and appreciation of the diverse and complex experiences and perspectives of men, especially those who do not conform to the hegemonic models of masculinity. It also limits the potential for dialogue, empathy, and solidarity among different genders and groups in the context of human rights and social justice.

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2. RELATED WORKS

A study by Ogundipe-Leslie [1], "The Politics of Gender in African Literature: A Study of Festus Iyayi's Violence," investigates Festus Iyayi's Violence as gender politics. The study examines how the novel's male characters face social norms and gender roles. The study shows how society expects males to behave and the effects of that pressure. Self-discovery and identity are also examined in the study and it illuminates Nigerian male characters and their struggles to conform to social norms. The study shows how societal expectations affect men and the pressure they feel to conform.

Scholars Ezeugwu, Remigious, and Oluyinka [2] in "Masculine Norms and Mental Health of African Men: What Can Psychology Do?" demonstrates how ingrained masculinity stereotypes affect African men's mental health. It stresses that these conventions make men more susceptible to mental health issues and create restrictive emotionality, making it hard to express feelings. The essay proposes an inclusive mental health treatment strategy that addresses men's traditional values.

Pheza [3] in "Men Are Suffering in Silence" examines men's troubles in Africa, particularly South Africa, and how cultural expectations and traditional beliefs prevent them from seeking treatment. The findings show how societal pressures on males to give financial support, follow masculine values, and not show vulnerability affect them. The article sheds light on men's suffering in silence, which can lead to suicide. It also cites the stigma of masculine emotional expressiveness and the absence of psychological help as contributory causes. The article calls for normalising and supporting suffering men, redefining male standards, and creating a more accepting environment for men to express their emotions and seek treatment.

The Significance of Male-Gendered Experiences in Literature

Zala argues that literature is a powerful tool for understanding the experiences of men in different contexts [4]. The relevance of male-gendered experiences in literature lies in their ability to show how complicated masculinity, social expectations, and life in general are. In literature, male characters and the things that happen to them often represent the cultural, social, and historical times in which they are set. Literature enables humanity to look at the effects of gender roles, power dynamics, and the problems men face in different countries by showing the struggles, feelings, and identities of male characters [5].

Reading about male-gendered experiences can teach others how men handle relationships, family, and self. It can also demonstrate how masculinity can lead to vulnerabilities, tensions, and inner struggles. Writing contributes to the discussion of gender, identity and fighting masculine stereotypes by presenting male perspectives. Male-gendered experiences in literature help spark critical conversations about gender norms and reflect on what it means to be a man. Readers can challenge social standards and get a deeper knowledge of gender and relationships by relating to masculine characters and their problems. Male-gendered experiences in literature demonstrate the complexity of masculinity, how social standards influence men, and how they can help individuals understand and empathise with other genders.

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Historical Perspectives on Male Silence

Male silence was often seen as a good thing in ancient literature, especially works that were influenced by Stoic thought. Stoicism stressed self-control and emotional restraint as ways to find inner peace and knowledge [6]. In old works like Homer's "Odyssey" or Plato's talks, this ideal of stoic silence was exemplified by male characters. These people always kept a calm attitude, even when things were going badly or going well. They rarely showed their inner turmoil or weaknesses [7]. Instead, they lived by the Stoic principle of bearing suffering with grace and strength, even when the odds were against them.

Also, Manzoor stated that chivalry shaped masculinity and honour in medieval literature [8]. The chivalric code centred on the quiet knight, who showed strength, courage, and loyalty through his actions. In Arthurian stories and the "Song of Roland," knights characterised themselves by stoic silence. The knights' quiet spoke volumes when they were fighting or faced moral difficulties. Silence symbolized bravery, dignity, and unflinching duty and honour.

Up to the 20th century, literature struggled with masculine crises caused by war, industrialization, and societal upheaval throughout the 20th century [9]. Modernist and postmodernist male characters, like Hemingway's disillusioned protagonists or Kafka's alienated antiheroes, battled to express their innermost ideas and feelings, stuck in existential torment and alienation. In this environment, silence symbolized male weakness and existential anguish, representing identity fragmentation in a fractured society [9]. Male characters struggled to find purpose in a world without assurance and security, silenced by external forces and the existential abyss within.

However, in old African oral traditions, stories were an important way to pass on culture and ideas about what it means to be a man and how to act. Male figures in oral epics and folktales often kept quiet as a sign of how wise and strong they were. The way these characters dealt with life's problems was through their actions and deeds, not their words. This shows how African cultures value strength, courage, and self-control. As a reflection of the unstable political and social situation on the continent, African writing went through huge changes when colonialism arrived. In colonial and post-colonial stories, male characters often had to deal with the silence that oppressive colonial governments and patriarchal structures put on them. Whether they were fighting against colonial rule or trying to find their identities after freedom, these characters had to deal with the silence that could have taken away their voices and power. Therefore, there has been more and more focus in modern African writing on breaking down traditional ideas of masculinity and speaking out against the silence that surrounds male experiences. In modern literature, male characters deal with the complicated problems of identity, including sexuality, mental health, and what it means to be a man. Through their stories, these characters try to break out of the silence that has kept them down for a long time, claiming their rights and showing that they are human in a world that is changing quickly.

Theoretical Framework

This study employed the gender normativity theory. According to scholar Rowland, "Gender normativity" is a theoretical notion that emphasises the expectations and social norms related to gender roles and conduct. It refers to the collection of guidelines and customs that specify

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how people are expected to exhibit their gender identification in relation to their perceived biological sex [10].
In the research, gender normativity is used to analyse male characters' struggles in African literature. The inability to meet cultural masculinity standards makes these characters feel inadequate, isolated, and disconnected. Therefore, the theory of gender normativity provides a framework for understanding the social, cultural, and psychological dynamics of male characters in African literature, allowing us to examine gender identity and expression in diverse contexts.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is based on a qualitative research method. The researchers use a Nigerian novel as the topic of discourse, focusing on in-depth analysis of the text. Festus Iyayi's Violence serve as a primary source of data. Secondary materials shall include textbooks, journal articles, essays, and the internet. All these forms the basis for drawing inferences and conclusions on the research findings.

Textual Analysis of Violence by Festus Iyayi
Synopsis
The novel, Violence, revolves around the life of Idemudia, a poor, jobless man who faces hardship and struggles to make a living. Idemudia is strong, determined and hardworking, endowed with strength and dignity. A kind-hearted man from a polygamous poor background who was unlucky with his ungrateful father, fought for the right of his mother, that led to him, his mother and siblings being chased out of their father's house. The desperate need for Idemudia to fend for himself and his wife, Adisa, often pushes him to extremes such as selling his blood and labouring under harsh conditions just to put food on the table. As the family's breadwinner, Idemudia feels an intense pressure to provide for Adisa, but faces the harsh reality of unemployment and limited opportunities. He engages in back-breaking manual labour, highlighting the desperation and vulnerability experienced by men forced into such extremes to fulfill their societal role as providers. Unfortunately, all he ever gets is temporary relief as poverty refuses to release its tight grip on him. When he gets a menial job as a labourer, he clutches onto it like a drowning man would only to work himself into a coma. Confined to his sick bed, life seems very unfair to Idemudia. He concludes that "his unfinished education, his joblessness, his hunger, his poverty, all these … were different forms on violence" exerting themselves on him [11, p243].

Similarly, in her desperate bid to save her husband from the grip of death and offset the mounting hospital bill, Adisa commits adultery. This act of desperation threatens the couple's marital life until Idemudia recognises the depth of sacrifice both of them have had to make to survive the 'violence' of forces that Queen, Obofun and the society at large have wielded on them. Though the novel portrays the life of a poor, jobless man in Nigeria of the 70s, it equally mirrors the struggles and hardship thousands of jobless youth face today.

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Male-Gendered Experiences in Violence

Traditional Gender Role of Men

Traditionally, men's gender roles include breadwinner, leader and protector. Men's gender role as breadwinner refers to the expectation that men should be the main or sole providers of economic resources for their families. This role is often associated with traditional views of masculinity, family structure, and division of labour. Some studies have suggested that men's breadwinner role can have negative effects on their health and wellbeing, as well as their attitudes toward gender equality. For example, men who are the primary breadwinners in their marriages may experience more psychological stress, hard labour, and negative health effects which reports on their wellbeing. Although men are expected to be breadwinners yet providing for one's family with little or no help can have negative repercussions on their health and this raises the yet unanswered question on why men most times dies before their spouses.

On the other hand, men who share the provider role with their partners goes through less stress, but in the case of Idemudia, Adisa is a full-time house wife, the sole responsibility of providing for the family rests on Idemudia's already heavy and burdened shoulders and any day he fails to put food on the table, they go hungry.

When he fails to fulfil his traditional role of providing food for the family Adisa nags at him, "You go out each day and return each day…. With what? Is the coming back any better than the going away? Look at me! I am getting leaner and thinner and yet when I married you God knows I was fatter…" [11, p3].

Women nag their men when they fail to fulfill their traditional role of providing for their family. Some women may feel frustrated, disappointed, or insecure when their partners do not meet the societal standards of being the primary breadwinner of the family. Some men may feel ashamed or inadequate when they are unable to live up to the traditional masculine ideals of success, competence, and dominance. This can lead to a cycle of criticism, defensiveness, and withdrawal that damages the relationship and the wellbeing of both partners. To Adisa, Idemudia's inability to bring in money is because he isn't trying hard enough. Yet, her husband goes out each day, engaging in all kinds of labour just for them to eat. This sparks a form of defense from Idemudia who argues that he is trying hard enough to provide food. He tries to convince Adisa by pointing out to her that he does not go out each day to labour just for the fun of it.

In order to fulfill these traditional roles of a provider, Idemudia pushes beyond the limit his already weak and exhausted body could carry. He feels ashamed and guilty that he could not provide for Adisa and their only child whom he sent to the village to go be with his aged mother [11, p10]. He feels like a failed man because a man must provide for his family in order to defend his manhood, therefore he struggles to fulfil his traditional gender role.

Jobs are difficult to get but he goes out each day hoping to at least, have something to bring back home at the end of the day. He and his friends who were also faced with the role of providing for their families, offloaded three trailers load of cement under the rain for only five naira! The men are desperate to earn money no matter how little so they don't go home empty, after all, Idemudia was previously looking for whom to borrow one naira from to feed his wife. Idemudia did this tedious job on an empty stomach and all the while he worked. He was deeply worried about his wife who threatened to go out to look for another man that would provide

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her needs, based on counsels from her aunt who is always pushing her to leave Idemudia. But he struggled regardless to provide for her because traditional gender role has placed it upon his shoulder to provide for his family in order to be regarded as a real man, and he feels fulfilled to fulfil that role as a man. Iyayi, created a vivid picture of male suffering and what it takes to be a man through the portrayal of these male characters, especially the protagonist, Idemudia.

Men Dealing with Societal Expectations: The Stereotypes

According to Collins Dictionary, a stereotype is a fixed general image or set of characteristics that a lot of people believe represent a particular type of person or thing [12]. Traditional gender roles and stereotypes have shaped the expectations for men to be providers, protectors, and decision makers [13]. The society often impose certain expectations on men such as being strong, emotionless, and independent. Societal expectations placed on men are the norms and standards that society imposes on men based on their gender. These expectations can vary across cultures. Societal expectations on men are not fixed or natural, but rather socially constructed and influenced by various factors, such as media, culture, religion, and history. Some expectations the society places on men are being strong, independent, resilient, confident, decisive, emotionally stoic, physically fit, successful, protective and responsible for their families. Men are also expected to avoid anything considered feminine such as expressing emotions or showing vulnerability, these expectations show the various ways men are stereotyped.

These stereotypes can affect their mental health by making them feel ashamed, guilty, or inadequate when they do not conform to them. They can also prevent them from seeking help for their mental health issues, as they may fear being seen as weak or vulnerable. Therefore, it is important to challenge and reduce the stigma around men, and to encourage them to express their emotions and seek support when they need it.

Some common stereotypes men face in African society are: men are leaders and providers, they are strong, tough, and aggressive, men are sexually dominant and promiscuous, men are not supposed to cry, show vulnerability, or seek help for their mental health issues. As the protagonist of the novel, these stereotypes affect Idemudia's character and personality. Idemudia is poor and jobless yet he struggles to provide for himself and his wife, Adisa. He faces various stereotypes that affect his life and mental health. He is expected to be the leader and provider of his family, but he is unable to find stable and dignified work. He resorts to working as a casual labourer, selling his blood any day he could not get someone to hire him for a job. Every day, he joins hundreds of other men to sit under the scorching sun at Iyaro to wait for jobs [11, p153]. Some days, he is lucky to get a job and other times he gets nothing and goes home to his wife empty and on such days, they go to bed hungry. This affects his ego and dignity as a man, and his feels ashamed that he cannot meet up with his responsibilities as a man. Dealing with the shame of his failure to meet up with the expectations that society places on him, he sells his blood to people in need of blood to save their loved ones.

This is the plight of Idemudia and the other men at Iyaro. They have to prove themselves as men, the providers for their families. They must meet up with the expectations placed on them by their gender, culture, and the society. Some of these men risk their lives by selling their blood more than once a month which is disastrous to their health, and they don't feed well

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which puts them at more risks. On one of the occasions when Idemudia is left with the only option of selling his blood, he lied to the attendant that he has not visited the hospital within that month because he knows that telling the truth would disqualify him and he needed the money.

Each time he had sold his blood, he returns subdued and for reasons he could not understand, ashamed. Iyayi portrays what men go through in order to meet up with societal expectations and how it affects them. Because men are stereotyped not to cry, show pain and vulnerability, Idemudia bears all these silently. These stereotypes affect Idemudia negatively and he loses his hope and dignity. These stereotypes can have negative effects on men's self-esteem, identity, relationships, and wellbeing. Therefore, it is important to challenge and change these stereotypes, and to promote more diverse and inclusive views of masculinity.

Masculinity Does Not Preclude the Shedding of Tears

There is a question that has remained unanswered for ages or maybe there is indeed an answer to that age long question, but masculinity ideals and stereotypes have been suppressing that answer. Do men cry? Yes, men cry because they are normal human beings and not superhumans. They are not immune to tears because they have emotions, neither are they immune to pains because they are humans. Crying is a human experience, not limited to any gender, so men feel pain and they express it when they feel it. The last chapter of this novel shows that there is more a man's strong heart could bear. Idemudia could not bear the thought that Adisa slept with Obofun. He swore to kill her as he rushes home filled with rage and anger, but when he confronts Adisa and she could not deny it, it dawns on him that she did what she did because of him and his emotions betrayed him.

He could not ask her why she did it because he understood she did it to save his life when he was sick. He understood that Adisa did that as a sacrifice, after all, has he not been selling pints of his blood so they would not starve, and that was a sacrifice too. He cried, forgave Adisa and together they healed from the situation that poverty put them into.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Male-gendered experiences as depicted in literature involves considering the broader societal and cultural contexts, and this study delved deeper into excavating these experiences that affect the male gender. In the novel Violence, the portrayal of men grappling with their personal and societal roles serves as a mirror to the real-world dynamics of gender expectations. This narrative provides a platform to examine how men navigate the pressures of conforming to traditional masculine norms, often characterized by stoicism and strength, and the internal conflicts that arise when these norms are at odds with their personal experiences of vulnerability and emotion. The study discussed and analyzed themes such as gender roles which tradition places on men, men's tears that are silenced, societal expectations and stereotypes placed on them and how it affects their behaviours and emotions. All these help us understand more about men's internal struggles while fulfilling certain roles expected of their gender.

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This study fills in gaps in masculinity research in literature. It sheds light on male-gendered experiences in literature that are overlooked because it concerns the male gender. Men are seen as strong and tough, and as such, they are not expected to show emotions or vulnerability in times of pain or difficulties but rather they are expected to subdue such emotions to conform to certain masculinity norms that guide their gender. Also, tradition, culture and society expect them to be providers of their families especially in African society. The literary explorations of Violence challenges readers to question and redefine what it means to be a man in contemporary society. By highlighting the struggles and inner turmoil of the male characters, the novel invites discourses on the consequences of rigid gender roles and the importance of fostering an environment where men can express a full range of emotions and vulnerabilities without fear of judgment or stigma. This if applied, can lead to a more empathetic understanding that recognizes the complexity of male identities and experiences, paving way for more inclusive and supportive social structures.

The Gender normativity theory has been used to analyses this study. It often explores the expectations placed upon individuals based on their assigned gender at birth, focusing on how societal norms dictate behaviors deemed appropriate for men and women. In this novel, the male characters' experiences are framed by these norms, which dictate stoicism or emotional restraint as part of their masculine identity. The characters' struggles and conflicts are seen as a response to these pressures, providing a critical lens through which to view the impact of gender normativity on men's psyches and relationships.

It is recommended to consider actionable steps that can be taken to mitigate the negative impacts of rigid male gender norms. One approach is to advocate for societal and cultural shifts that allow for a broader spectrum of acceptable male behaviors and emotions. This could involve educational programmes that teach young men about emotional intelligence and resilience, providing them with the tools to express themselves authentically without fear of judgment. Additionally, media representation plays a crucial role in shaping perceptions; thus, promoting narratives that showcase diverse male experiences and vulnerabilities can help normalise these conversations and reduce stigma. Furthermore, on an institutional level, policies and support systems need to be established to address the specific needs of men affected by these issues. Mental health services should be tailored to be more accessible and appealing to men, encouraging them to seek help when needed. Community support groups and online platforms can also provide safe spaces for men to share their experiences and find solidarity with others facing similar challenges. By implementing these solutions, we can work towards a society where the well-being of men is prioritized, and where they are free to defy certain traditional norms without repercussions, leading to healthier and more fulfilling lives for all individuals, regardless of gender.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has illuminated the intricate tapestry of male identity as portrayed in Violence, unraveling the threads of societal expectations that often bind and constrain. Through the lens of gender normativity theory, we have witnessed the silent battles fought within the confines of prescribed roles, and the quiet resilience that characterises the male protagonist's journey.

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Literature, in its profound capacity to reflect and challenge, has, once again, proven to be an invaluable ally in the quest for understanding the multifaceted nature of masculinity. The researchers hope that the insights gleaned from this narrative will echo beyond the pages, instigating conversations that lead to a more compassionate and inclusive world where every individual, regardless of gender, can freely express their vulnerabilities and strength.

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