
**FROM EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE TO SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISPOSSESSION:
GENDERED OPPRESSION AND THE CRISIS OF PEACE IN ISOKEN
ORONSAYE-SALAMI'S SWEET REVENGE**

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how gender-based oppression, emotional abuse, socio-economic and political exploitation undermine peace and justice in postcolonial African societies. It uses Irene Isoken Oronsaye-Salami's *Sweet Revenge* as a case study to explore how patriarchal and capitalist structures intersect to marginalize women, appropriate their labour, restrict their autonomy, and undermine their dignity. The study adopts a combined Marxist-feminist and semiotic approach and employs qualitative textual analysis of dialogue, metaphor, and symbolism. The findings reveal that women are systematically dehumanized and reduced to their reproductive, domestic, economic, and sexual functions despite their essential contributions to family and society. Through Sota's treatment of Aisosa, the play exposes how emotional abuse, sexual objectification, economic dependence, unpaid domestic labour, and unequal access to resources reinforce gender inequality. The analysis further shows that socio-economic dispossession extends beyond the household, as women's exclusion from political decision-making perpetuates structural injustice, weakens social cohesion and obstructs sustainable peace. However, Aisosa's transformation from an oppressed wife into an economically independent and politically influential woman highlights women's capacity to resist, exercise agency, and participate meaningful in public life. The study argues that sustainable peace requires gender justice, economic empowerment, political inclusion, and structural reform. It therefore calls for legal, economic, and cultural measures that protect women's rights and strengthen their participation in decision-making. The study concludes that lasting peace remains unattainable when women are excluded, exploited, and silenced.

Keywords: Postcolonial Africa, Gender Oppression, Emotional and Economic Exploitation, Sustainable Peace.

1. INTRODUCTION

In many societies, particularly in postcolonial Africa, gender inequality remains deeply rooted. This persists despite women's significant historical contributions to the family, economy, and nation-building. Patriarchal norms, reinforced by colonial legacies and contemporary socio-economic structures, continue to marginalize women through emotional abuse, economic exploitation, and restricted access to power and resources.

These forms of oppression are not merely private or domestic concerns. They have profound implications for peace and social stability. Peace is often misconceived as the mere absence of armed conflict. Meanwhile, women's everyday experiences of socio-economic oppression, emotional abuse, and exclusion from power and resources are treated as "private" or "cultural"

issues rather than threats to social stability. Yet, philosophical perspectives suggest that peace is not merely the absence of war. It is also a condition rooted in virtue and a state of mind. Authentic peace, therefore, depends on the moral and psychological fabric of society. It also depends on whether its institutions, norms, and relationships enable all members, including women, to flourish.

In this respect, Galtung (1969) argues that “violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations” (p. 168). This definition highlights how structural inequalities, including gender injustice, constitute forms of violence that undermine peace. In other words, gender inequality, emotional abuse, socio-economic exploitation, exclusion from resources, and systematic oppression can all constitute violence. Genuine peace, consequently, cannot be reduced to the absence of war.

In this regard, the absence of justice within households can translate into wider societal instability. Sustainable peace is difficult to achieve where women are systematically marginalized, dehumanized, or deprived of economic opportunities. This is particularly significant because women contribute substantially to social cohesion and development. Their contributions extend across family life, economic activities, community initiatives, and political processes.

Within this context, African literature, particularly drama and literary criticism, offers vital platforms for interrogating socio-political and economic realities. It also provides a significant space for examining how gendered oppression undermines peace at both familial and societal levels. In *Sweet Revenge*, Irene Isoken Oronsaye-Salami portrays Aisosa’s experiences to reveal how patriarchal domination progresses from emotional violence to socio-economic marginalization. Her exclusion and disempowerment extend beyond the domestic sphere, undermining familial stability and social cohesion. Hence, the play presents gendered oppression as a structural obstacle to peace and sustainable development.

Gendered oppression remains a significant concern in African literary and socio-political studies. Women’s marginalization is sustained through interpersonal relations as well as entrenched patriarchal and economic structures. This literature review synthesizes key scholarly contributions that establish the relevance of examining emotional violence and socio-economic dispossession as barriers to peace in the play. In light of this, feminist literary criticism provides a useful perspective for examining gender relations in African drama. It is particularly relevant where domestic experiences intersect with questions of power, inequality, and justice. Ogunyemi and Motseki (2024) explain that feminist criticism seeks to reconsider women’s position in both “the public and the private spheres” (p. 67). This perspective is particularly relevant to *Sweet Revenge*, where women’s experiences within the household reveal more extensive structures of gendered domination.

Against this background, previous studies have examined gender equality in Irene Isoken Oronsaye-Salami’s dramaturgy. Badeji and Baoku (2020) contend that women’s agitation in the play is not a rejection of traditional roles but a demand for “equal rights for both sexes in the developmental process of the nation” (p. 158). In short, they advocate women’s equal participation in socio-political development without necessarily rejecting their familial responsibilities. They further observe that women become conscious of being “oppressed, sidelined, marginalized” and confined to stereotypical roles (Badeji & Baoku, 2020, p. 165). This observation is significant because it demonstrates how patriarchal expectations restrict women’s agency and participation. However, their study primarily focuses on gender equality and women’s socio-political participation. It does not fully examine the relationship between emotional violence, economic exploitation, and peace. The present study extends this

perspective by examining how oppression develops across emotional and socio-economic dimensions.

Similarly, Eziechine and Esene (2023) examine *Sweet Revenge* within a broader endeavour by female Nigerian playwrights to challenge conventional representations of women. They argue that women in earlier male-authored Nigerian drama were often represented as “weak, inferior, and unimportant” (p. 63). Female playwrights, by contrast, create alternative narratives that foreground women’s dignity and agency. Their study is consequently useful for understanding Salami-Agunloye’s feminist intervention. Nevertheless, its emphasis remains largely on representation rather than on the material and psychological consequences of patriarchal domination. Further investigation is consequently needed into how negative gender relations affect women’s emotional well-being, economic autonomy, and social stability.

The theoretical frameworks employed in analysing the play further illuminate its relevance to this study. In particular, Ogunyemi and Motseki (2024) underscore the significance of feminist literary criticism, rooted in the 1960s women’s movement. This movement sought “to redefine the role of women in society and to create conditions for equality” (p. 67). This trajectory is crucial for re-evaluating gender and social themes in postcolonial Africa. Likewise, Igbokwe et al. (2021) assert that “most cultures have instituted patriarchal structures that place men on a higher pedestal than women,” resulting in oppression, exploitation, and marginalization that have become “internalized in the lives of African women” (p. 1). They subsequently commend Salami-Agunloye for succeeding “in dismantling the age-old unhealthy patriarchal systems that inhibit women from having fulfilled lives” (Igbokwe et al., 2021, p. 10). These insights support the use of Marxist-feminist and semiotic approaches to examine how ideology and symbolism reinforce women’s subordination.

Importantly, scholarship on *Sweet Revenge* has also highlighted women’s resistance. Ose-Agbo and Dekera (2025), for example, examine female solidarity and agency. They show how Salami’s female characters negotiate and challenge patriarchal norms. While this perspective is valuable, it does not fully explore the oppressive processes that precede resistance. It is precisely at this point that the present study situates its contribution. By linking emotional violence to economic exploitation and socio-economic dispossession, the study examines how gendered oppression destabilizes familial relations and extends into broader social instability. Consequently, *Sweet Revenge* deserves closer examination, because the play demonstrates how gender inequality, when reinforced by patriarchal and economic structures, can undermine social cohesion and obstruct the conditions necessary for sustainable peace and development.

The central aim is to investigate how *Sweet Revenge* exposes the relationship between gendered oppression, socio-economic dispossession, and the crisis of peace in postcolonial African societies. More precisely, it examines how emotional violence and economic exploitation, reinforced by patriarchal and capitalist structures, marginalize women, appropriate their labour, and undermine their autonomy and dignity. The study further demonstrates how such intersecting forms of oppression extend beyond the domestic sphere to affect social cohesion, justice, and stability. In this sense, the research contributes to a critical understanding of gendered oppression as a structural barrier to peace and justice. It also highlights the need for greater gender equity, women resistance and socio-economic empowerment in postcolonial African societies.

Since the interpretation of literary texts is influenced by the theoretical lens and critical perspective through which they are examined, this study draws on Marxist feminism and

semiotics as its principal analytical frameworks. Developed from the works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and further advanced by feminist scholars such as Clara Zetkin, Alexandra Kollontai, and Silvia Federici, Marxist feminism examines the intersection of patriarchy, class relations, labour, and capitalism in the production of women's oppression. In this study, Marxist feminism is applied to *Sweet Revenge* to analyse how patriarchal authority and economic relations generate emotional violence, appropriate women's labour, and produce financial dependence and socio-economic dispossession. It also helps reveal how gendered and class-based inequalities undermine women's autonomy and contribute to the crisis of peace and justice that call for women resistance and visibility as represented in the play.

Semiotics, developed principally through the works of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, examines how signs and symbols produce and communicate meaning. In this study, semiotics is applied to *Sweet Revenge* to identify and interpret the language, actions, symbols, and other dramatic signs through which the play represents patriarchal domination, emotional violence, socio-economic dispossession, and women's resistance. In addition, the study draws on secondary sources, including scholarly books and articles on gender, patriarchy, capitalism, emotional violence, and women's socio-economic marginalization. These sources contextualize the textual analysis within broader debates on gender justice and peace in postcolonial Africa.

2. EMOTIONAL VIOLENCE, SEXUAL OPPRESSION AND OBJECTIFICATION PATRIARCHAL DOMINATION AND THE CRISIS OF PEACE

To contextualise the study, it is useful to begin with a brief overview of *Sweet Revenge* to highlight how the play critically engages with and reflects the central concerns of the research. Irene Isoken Oronsaye-Salami portrays the progressive effects of patriarchal domination through the experiences of Aisosa, whose marginalization illustrates how emotional violence can develop into broader forms of socio-economic dispossession. Her subordination within the domestic sphere is not limited to psychological suffering; it also reflects the denial of agency, recognition, and access to resources necessary for personal and social autonomy. Consequently, the play establishes a connection between the oppression of women within the family and the wider structures of inequality that destabilize social relations. Through Aisosa's experience, Oronsaye-Salami thus demonstrates that gendered violence is not merely a private or interpersonal matter but a structural obstacle to peace, as the systematic exclusion and disempowerment of women weaken familial stability, social cohesion, and the prospects for sustainable peace.

The playwright, through the use of dialogue, imagery, and symbolism, critiques the dehumanization of women in African societies. The reactions and interactions of the dramatic personae expose how women are reduced to objects, stereotypes, and roles that strip them of their full humanity. This, in turn, reflects the deeply rooted gender oppression within patriarchal structures.

To begin with, Sota's treatment of his wife, Aisosa, upon his return from England demonstrates a profound disregard for her emotional well-being, dignity, and personal agency. Rather than recognizing her as an equal partner, he reduces her identity to her physical appearance and perceived usefulness within the domestic and marital sphere. His attitude reflects a patriarchal conception of womanhood in which a wife is valued primarily for her reproductive, domestic, and sexual functions. This dehumanizing attitude is particularly evident in his derogatory comments about Aisosa's body: "Sota: Aisosa, why are you sweating like a Christmas goat?"

Look at your body you have developed folds everywhere. Your breasts are saggy, and you've put on weight. Your sight irritates me, your body does not appeal to me at all." (Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, p. 29).

Sota's comparison of Aisosa to a "Christmas goat" is a dehumanizing metaphor that reduces her to an object of ridicule. By comparing her body to that of an animal, he denies her dignity and reinforces a patriarchal power relation in which he assumes the authority to judge her physical worth. Dery et al. (2020) support this interpretation by observing that the treatment of women as "possessions" constitutes "pervasive emotional violence against women" (p. 9). Thus, Sota's derogatory language, accordingly, signifies not merely personal contempt but a broader patriarchal logic of domination. Within this logic, the woman's body becomes a site of male control. Likewise, the references to her "saggy" breasts and bodily "folds" signify patriarchal standards that define women through physical appearance and sexual value. These signs therefore encode emotional violence and gendered domination.

From a Marxist-feminist perspective, this language reveals how patriarchal ideology reduces women to their perceived usefulness within marriage, particularly as objects of sexual and reproductive value. Aisosa's worth is assessed according to Sota's expectations rather than her humanity, agency, or contribution to the household. Such emotional violence extends beyond the individual relationship. It produces humiliation, insecurity, resentment, and unequal power relations within the family. It also weakens trust and mutual respect. Since the family constitutes a fundamental social unit, persistent gender-based violence can reproduce wider patterns of domination and injustice. The play suggests, consequently, that peace cannot be sustained where intimate relationships are structured by humiliation, inequality, and the systematic denial of women's dignity.

The dehumanization and oppression of women in patriarchal and postcolonial African societies are also illustrated through Sota's remarks. They reduce Aisosa to an object meant to satisfy his aesthetic and emotional desires. The language in the following passage vividly encapsulates this dehumanization:

Sota: what is this you are wearing? You look 60 years old for God's sake. Why can't you wear pants?

Aisosa: [*shouting*] Sota Ojo, stop harassing my wife, I've had enough. What do you take me for? I am a woman and not a girl, Sota.

Sota: I am not harassing you. You're my wife for heaven's sake; you have to dress to please me and not society. You are married to me, not society. Your attitude and reasoning must be aimed at pleasing me. (Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, p. 31)

The exchange reveals a subtler form of emotional violence through verbal control, possessive language, and the denial of Aisosa's autonomy. Sota's assertion that she is "married to me, not society" frames marriage as a relationship of ownership rather than partnership. Such ownership undermines peace. In fact, true peace cannot exist without autonomy. Notably, Sota's demand that her "attitude and reasoning" be directed towards pleasing him further suppresses her capacity to make independent choices. It reinforces patriarchal authority. Moreover, his insistence that he is not "harassing" her is deeply ironic, for it attempts to normalize and conceal the coercive nature of his behaviour. At the family level, such control breeds resentment, frustration, and unequal power relations. It weakens mutual respect and peaceful coexistence. At the societal level, the normalization of male authority over women

reproduces patriarchal inequalities and undermines the principles of justice and social cohesion necessary for sustainable peace in African societies.

Viewed through Marxist-feminist theory, Sota's assertion that Aisosa is "married to me, not society" illustrates how patriarchal authority regulates women's bodies, choices, and behaviour within the private sphere. This resonates with Davis's (1981) argument that women's oppression is reinforced when "housework is women's work" (p. 9). Such an assumption naturalizes women's subordination within the family. More broadly, the passage shows that gender inequality is sustained not only through economic dependence but also through everyday forms of control and domination. As a result, these unequal relations undermine women's dignity and agency within the household. When reproduced within society, they perpetuate structural injustice and obstruct sustainable peace.

Irene Isoken Oronsaye-Salami also depicts women's sexual oppression and objectification. She shows how these forms of oppression impede peace in postcolonial Africa. This dynamic unfolds in the following exchange:

Sota: [*shouting*] will you come back here?

Aisosa: Come back where?

Sota: To bed, my bed of course.....

Aisosa: Sorry, I am sleeping in the guest room. I'm sure you don't want this fat, old flabby bodied, saggy-breasted woman beside you ...(Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, 29-30)

The exchange presents sexual oppression as a form of patriarchal control over the female body. Sota's imperative, "will you come back here?", followed by the possessive phrase "my bed", uses commanding and possessive language to construct Aisosa as subject to his sexual authority. The bed consequently becomes a symbol of marital entitlement. It suggests that her body is treated as an object to which he has automatic access. The dialogue is also significant from a semiotic perspective. The bed functions as a sign of marital intimacy. However, Sota's possessive formulation transforms it into a sign of domination. Similarly, the repeated bodily descriptors signify the reduction of female identity to physical and sexual attributes. The intimate space of the bedroom consequently becomes a symbolic site where affection is displaced by power and coercion. Genuine love, by contrast, is based on mutual respect, freedom, trust, care, and consent. It does not seek to possess or control the other partner. Rather, it recognizes their dignity, autonomy, and equal worth.

Furthermore, Aisosa's response is significant because she ironically reproduces Sota's earlier body-shaming language, "fat, old flabby bodied, saggy-breasted woman". This reveals how sustained humiliation has been internalized. The irony exposes the psychological consequences of his verbal abuse. The passage also reveals Aisosa's internalized insecurity. It shows how patriarchal beauty standards can become internalized and compel women to evaluate themselves through externally imposed ideals. As hooks (2000) observes, "judging females of all ages on the basis of how we look was never completely eliminated. It continues to grip our cultural imagination" (p. 33). This persistent judgment reinforces sexist conceptions of female beauty and deepens women's psychological oppression.

Clearly, this exchange illustrates how patriarchy transforms the female body into a site of male control and sexual entitlement. Aisosa's value is implicitly measured according to her desirability and conformity to Sota's expectations. This resonates with the *World Health Organization's* understanding of intimate-partner violence as including "sexual coercion, psychological abuse and controlling behaviours" (World Health Organization [WHO], 2012,

p. 1). When such gendered power relations become normalized, they reproduce inequality and weaken social cohesion. The play consequently suggests that peace cannot be separated from justice within intimate relationships. Where one partner exercises control through humiliation and sexual entitlement, the family becomes a site of conflict rather than a foundation for peaceful coexistence.

Likewise, when such violence becomes widespread within families, its consequences extend beyond individual women. A woman who lives in fear, humiliation, or emotional distress may struggle to provide the emotional stability and care expected within the household, particularly when she is a mother. As a result, children may also experience anxiety and insecurity. They may even learn to normalize violent gender relations. Such violence can be transmitted across generations and reproduce patterns of domination and conflict. When the peace of women is systematically undermined across numerous households, family instability can accumulate into wider social instability. Gender justice consequently becomes an essential foundation for sustainable national peace.

Surprisingly, when Aisosa rejects Sota's request and chooses to sleep in the guest room, Aisosa responds:

Aisosa: Too late, Sota. Words are like water when poured on the ground, cannot be retrieved, sweet dreams.

Sota: How can my dreams be sweet without you by my side? (Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, p. 29-30)

This exchange reveals a complex interplay between emotional violence, sexual manipulation, and resistance. Aisosa's metaphor, "Words are like water when poured on the ground, cannot be retrieved," compares hurtful speech to spilled water. Once released, it cannot be recovered. The metaphor therefore emphasizes the irreversibility of emotional injury. Significantly, Teicher et al. (2006) affirm that "verbal aggression was a potent form of maltreatment" (p. 993). In other words, verbal aggression is not merely unpleasant speech. It can have serious psychological consequences. Sota's earlier humiliating language, consequently, functions as more than a momentary insult. It leaves an emotional wound that continues to shape Aisosa's response. Her refusal to return to the bedroom signals that Sota's previous humiliation has damaged the intimacy he now seeks. It also represents emotional self-protection and resistance to sexual manipulation. Aisosa's resistance challenges patriarchal power by rejecting the transformation of intimacy into a form of entitlement. It asserts that emotional or sexual intimacy cannot be demanded as a marital right.

Sota's question, "How can my dreams be sweet without you by my side?", employs rhetorical questioning and irony. After degrading Aisosa, he suddenly presents her absence as a source of emotional deprivation. This shift can be interpreted as a form of sexual and emotional manipulation. Affection is invoked after humiliation, as though intimacy could erase the violence that preceded it. His desire for her presence consequently appears less as mutual affection than as an attempt to regain access to the intimacy he expects from marriage. Clearly, words have immense power. They shape relationships, influence peace, and reflect deeper gendered dynamics. Just as physical violence can break bones, spoken words can shatter emotional peace. In this sense, Sartre's assertion that "Words are 'loaded pistols'" (1949, p. 24) reinforces the idea that language can wound and produce consequences beyond the moment of utterance. Aisosa's words signify an emotional wound that Sota's subsequent appeal for intimacy cannot simply erase. In short, the scene suggests that peace within the family requires more than physical coexistence. It requires respect, emotional security, and consent.

The playwright reveals how emotional violence, sexualized objectification, and a double layer of oppression can affect peace in postcolonial African societies. This oppression is reinforced in the following passage:

Aisosa: Thanks, Mr. Been-To. You have come too late. There is nothing wrong with my looks; rather you are the one with a problem. If you are so bent on changing my looks, why didn't you make it a point of duty to buy me new clothes when you were returning from England? I won't become indebted simply because I want to please you my long lost husband. Since you returned, how much have you given the children and myself to buy clothes? Tell me how much?

Sota: How much does it cost to look good Aisosa? Look at you; from your head to your toes, you are ugly. You nauseate me. Your hair is always hidden in scarves. You ties wrappers all the time like a village woman." (Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, p. 32)

Aisosa's opening irony, "Thanks, Mr. Been-To," is particularly significant. The expression "Been-To" is a sarcastic epithet that exposes the distance created by Sota's return from England. Her rhetorical question, "how much have you given the children and myself?", shifts the conversation from appearance to responsibility. She implicitly challenges his authority by questioning his failure to provide for the family while expecting her to satisfy his aesthetic demands. Her statement, "I won't become indebted simply because I want to please you," also introduces an economic dimension. It suggests that pleasing Sota would require her to bear a financial burden created by his expectations. The passage consequently illustrates double oppression. Aisosa experiences patriarchal domination through Sota's attempt to regulate her body. At the same time, she faces socio-economic neglect and cultural devaluation. Her lack of access to new clothes is not simply material deprivation. It becomes a basis for further humiliation. Such psychological abuse, sexual coercion, and physical violence can contribute to body shame and self-objectification.

Sota's response reverses this assertion of agency. His rhetorical question, "How much does it cost to look good Aisosa?", reduces feminine worth to appearance and treats beauty as an obligation. The subsequent catalogue, "from your head to your toes, you are ugly," uses hyperbole and bodily enumeration to subject Aisosa to a totalizing judgment. The metaphor, "You nauseate me," intensifies the humiliation by presenting her body as physically repulsive. As Awino and Ngutu (2022) point out, "emotional violence reduces an individual's self-concept, and independence. It reduces a woman's ability to carry out her roles as a caretaker in the family, and to participate in the work force" (p. 232). Hence, for the household to function as a foundation of peace, emotional violence must consequently be confronted.

Moreover, Sota's comparison of Aisosa to "a village woman" carries classed and cultural connotations. It simply means that urbanity and Westernized appearance are elevated, while traditional African femininity is constructed as inferior. Westernized beauty standards can, consequently, be understood as a cultural form of domination. They create a conflict between indigenous conceptions of beauty and imported aesthetic ideals. This conception of beauty also suggests that colonialism and globalization have contributed to the devaluation of African hair and traditional beauty practices. At the same time, Eurocentric features have been elevated as desirable.

Visibly, the problem is not cultural exchange itself but the hierarchy of values it creates. When Western appearance becomes the measure of beauty, African women may begin to reject features historically associated with cultural identity, dignity, and belonging. As a result, such

devaluation can produce insecurity, resentment, alienation, and conflict within the family. When repeated across society, the rejection of indigenous identities can weaken cultural cohesion and reproduce feelings of inferiority. The play suggests, consequently, that peace requires not only freedom from physical violence but also freedom from cultural and psychological forms of domination.

The text also explores the holistic nature of lovemaking and the link between familial peace and social harmony. The interactions in the following excerpt underscores power imbalances and inadequate understanding of emotional intimacy:

Sota:...You cannot even meet my sexual needs. Sexually, you are dumb. Of what use are you as a wife?

Aisosa: I expected that from you, it has become your slogan. Sota, the sooner you learn that lovemaking is not jumping into bed with a woman at night, the better. My dear, it is a process and this process starts from the beginning of each new day. It is a holistic process. It involves your attitude, your mind, your mood, your physical being... everything. (Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, p. 33)

This excerpt shows that dialogue is the primary vehicle of dramatic tension. It exposes a distorted conception of lovemaking in which sexual satisfaction is separated from emotional intimacy. In fact, Sota's question, "Of what use are you as a wife?", reduces Aisosa to a sexual function. It constitutes both emotional violence and patriarchal objectification. Aisosa's response presents a metaphorical contrast between lovemaking and "jumping into bed". It distinguishes genuine intimacy from sexual entitlement. She presents intimacy as a holistic process grounded in everyday affection, communication, and mutual understanding. Semiotically, these elements signify that the body alone cannot sustain intimacy when the emotional and psychological dimensions of the relationship have been neglected.

Indeed, holistic lovemaking should be understood as a whole-person experience rather than merely a physical or sexual act. It encompasses emotional intimacy, psychological connection, open communication, physical affection, mutual consent, trust, respect, and everyday care. Genuine intimacy develops not only in the bedroom but also through the attitudes, words, and behaviours that sustain affection between partners. This view is consistent with Fromm's conception of mature love as an active relationship rather than passive possession: "Love is an activity, not a passive affect" (Fromm, 1956, p. 22). The contrast is crucial. Sota approaches intimacy through entitlement, whereas Aisosa associates it with reciprocity. Obviously, when affection is replaced by entitlement, communication by dismissal, and partnership by utility, the family becomes a site of conflict. Since the family constitutes a fundamental social unit, the normalization of such unequal relations can reproduce wider patterns of domination. It can also undermine the conditions required for social harmony and sustainable peace.

Persistent emotional disconnection within family life can give way to resentment and conflict, as seen in the following excerpt:

Sota: Enough of that, I am sick and tired of you, Aisosa. For your information I am filing for a divorce

Aisosa: Well, I expected it earlier than now. I saw it coming; I am not surprised at all. In any case, what have I done to warrant a divorce? (Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, p. 33)

These actions and reactions reveal the breakdown of marital peace through emotional violence and accumulated resentment. Sota's declaration, "I am sick and tired of you," signals deep emotional exhaustion and the collapse of communication. His decision to divorce demonstrates how unresolved conflict within the family can escalate into permanent rupture. Moreover, Aisosa's response, "I saw it coming," suggests that the marriage has long been characterized

by tension and insecurity. The exchange consequently presents the family as a microcosm of social peace. Actually, when love, dialogue, respect, and emotional security deteriorate at the domestic level, the foundations of social harmony are also weakened.

The analysis in this subsection has demonstrated that gender oppression in *Sweet Revenge* extends beyond physical or overt forms of violence. It also includes emotional manipulation, marital conflict, and the gradual erosion of mutual respect and intimacy. The dialogue between Sota and Aisosa illustrates how unresolved emotional tensions can destroy marital cohesion. It transforms the family into a site of psychological suffering. Since the family constitutes a fundamental unit of social life, its internal instability has wider implications for peace and social harmony. More importantly, these manifestations of emotional violence are not isolated from the material conditions that sustain gender inequality. They intersect with unequal access to economic resources, social opportunities, and decision-making power. These inequalities reinforce women's vulnerability within patriarchal structures. The second subsection examines the socio-economic dimensions of gender oppression and women resistance. It focuses on economic marginalization, dependency, dispossession, and their contribution to the crisis of peace.

3. GENDERED SOCIO-ECONOMIC DISPOSSESSION AND THE CRISIS OF PEACE IN SWEET REVENGE

The play portrays women's socio-economic marginalization as a structural form of oppression that extends beyond material deprivation. Through Aisosa's experience, it demonstrates how economic dependence, unpaid domestic responsibilities, and gendered expectations generate emotional distress and familial conflict that affect peace in postcolonial African societies.

Irene Isoken Oronsaye-Salami connects women's socio-economic dispossession with the deterioration of familial peace. This relationship becomes evident when Aisosa confronts Sota with the material hardships and domestic burdens that have shaped her condition:

Sota: Sosa, I must be frank with you, you no longer excite me. You are too dull and drab. The spark that used to be in your life is no longer there.

Aisosa: No doubt, it's gone. What did you expect? Abandoned by a husband, no job, on a meagre allowance of N10000 a month lost my dear parents who were so supportive, struggling to build a house for you and saddled with four children, did you expect to return home to meet a model? If you did, wouldn't you have been surprised? (Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, p. 32)

The sarcastic tone in Aisosa's reaction in the dialogue above carries a distinct note of bitterness, particularly through her rhetorical questions. These questions express her frustration and emotional exhaustion. They highlight the psychological toll of her situation. The excerpt powerfully exposes gendered socio-economic dispossession as a source of emotional and familial instability. Sota's description of Aisosa as "dull and drab" and his claim that "the spark that used to be in your life is no longer there" employ metaphor and imagery to represent her diminished vitality. Yet, his judgment ignores the material conditions that have produced her exhaustion. Aisosa's response challenges this perspective by linking her emotional state to abandonment, unemployment, poverty, bereavement, and the burden of raising four children. More precisely, the phrase "no job, on a meagre allowance of N10,000 a month" provides a concrete sign of her economic vulnerability. Likewise, the accumulation of "struggling to build a house for you" and "saddled with four children" creates a sense of overwhelming responsibility. The metaphor "saddled" is particularly significant because it evokes the image of an animal burdened with a heavy load. It symbolizes how unpaid domestic responsibilities and economic insecurity constrain Aisosa's agency. Her labour sustains the household, yet it

remains largely unrecognized. This illustrates the intersection of patriarchy and material deprivation in postcolonial African societies. It shows that women's economic marginalization increases their dependence, while their reproductive and domestic labour is appropriated without corresponding recognition or support. In this context, Sota's judgment of Aisosa's appearance conceals the structural conditions behind women's suffering.

Over and beyond that, Aisosa's account of unemployment, inadequate financial support, and the burden of raising four children reveals how economic vulnerability intersects with gendered domestic responsibilities. Her experience resonates with Federici's observation that "capital feeds on an immense amount of unpaid labor; above all, it feeds on the systematic devaluation of reproductive work" (2011, p. 72). This observation directly addresses the invisibility and devaluation of women's domestic and reproductive labour. At the family level, this unequal distribution of responsibility generates resentment, emotional exhaustion, and conflict. At the societal level, similar inequalities are reproduced across households when women's labour is undervalued and their economic autonomy restricted. Thus, *Sweet Revenge* suggests that peace cannot be sustained where women are economically dispossessed, overburdened, and emotionally devalued.

Socio-economic oppression is fully expressed through Sota's failure to fulfil his financial promises. This becomes even more evident in Aisosa's complaint in the following excerpt:

Aisosa: How was I to perform that magic, Mr. Fairy Godfather? You left here eight years ago for a PhD abroad, with a promise that you will send me money from your salary that was paid back home. Instead of four years, you ended up spending eight years and instead of the N40,000 monthly allowances you promised us, all you made available to us was N10,000 each month. And you have returned without a pin from Britain. So how am I to meet up with your standard, Sota Ojo? (Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, p. 20)

In this excerpt, Aisosa's rhetorical questions expose the economic inequalities underlying the marital crisis. Her ironic address, "Mr. Fairy Godfather," functions as a sarcastic metaphor that contrasts Sota's promises with his failure to provide adequate support. The expression "perform that magic" further suggests the impossibility of meeting household expectations without sufficient material resources. The text also evokes the saying that "beauty needs money." Aisosa's inability to maintain her former physical appeal is linked to her economic situation. This highlights how financial resources, or the lack thereof, affect perceptions of beauty and social worth, particularly in African societies influenced by Western ideals. These cultures often tie a woman's value to her appearance, even though beauty is natural, relative, evolving, and culturally constructed.

Likewise, the repeated contrast between four years and eight years, and between N40,000 and N10,000, creates a sharp numerical opposition. It signifies broken promises and economic deprivation. These contrasts reveal Aisosa's gendered socio-economic dispossession. She is expected to maintain the household and satisfy Sota's standards while having limited economic means. Her dependence is consequently not simply personal. It is rooted in unequal access to resources and power. Symbolically, money becomes a sign of authority. The difference between N40,000 and N10,000 represents the unequal distribution of economic power within the marriage.

From a similar perspective, Awesso et al. (2021) note that "The domestic instabilities are the result of frustrations emanating from dreams not accomplished" (p. 207). This observation underscores how Aisosa's frustration reflects a deeper structural failure. Her unfulfilled dreams and Sota's broken economic promises generate instability and emotional turmoil within a patriarchal setting. This reflects a broader pattern across African societies. Women are often

sidelined in access to financial services, land and property ownership, and support for entrepreneurial ventures. They also bear a disproportionate share of unpaid domestic and caregiving duties. At the same time, they face barriers to education, vocational training, and formal employment. Such gendered inequalities generate frustration, resentment, and insecurity. These conditions weaken social cohesion and peace.

Moreover, the play symbolically explores themes of socioeconomic oppression, ingratitude, and the absence of peace. It reflects the larger issue of women's subjugation within patriarchal family structures in postcolonial Africa. This is evident in the dialogue below:

Sota: ... when I married you, you were so full of life, so much fun to be with. What has happened to you, Aisosa? Tell me, what happened to that Aisosa?

Aisosa: Sota, you murdered her. Of course, I was full of life; I was young, married to a visible person. My children had a father, your mother had a son and I had a husband, but for the past eight years... I have been a father, a mother, doctor, driver, tailor, nurse, extra lesson teacher, researcher, daughter in law, sister-in-law, hair weaver and all others. All these took their toil on me as you can see.

Sota: Stop that, Aisosa, you drive me crazy; you are an absolute failure. You have failed as a wife; you have failed too as a mother...(Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, p. 33)

This dialogue illustrates socio-economic oppression through Aisosa's long list of responsibilities. She has been compelled to take on multiple roles far beyond those traditionally expected of a wife. Her extensive list, "father, mother, doctor, driver...", uses exaggeration to convey the overwhelming weight of her unpaid and unacknowledged labour. It symbolically critiques how women's contributions within households are devalued in African cultures. This dynamic mirrors systemic economic inequality. Women often bear the heaviest burden of invisible labour, which remains unrecognized within both the family and wider society.

Davis (1983) demonstrates that women's domestic labour is systematically rendered invisible and undervalued despite its essential contribution to social and economic reproduction. For example, she observes that "housework, after all, is virtually invisible: 'No one noticed it until it isn't done-we notice the unmade bed, not the scrubbed and polished floor'. Invisible, repetitive, exhausting, unproductive- these are the adjectives which most perfectly capture the nature of housework" (p. 128). This quotation emphasizes that Aisosa's overwhelming unpaid labour, though vital, is systematically ignored. It highlights the entrenched economic and gender inequalities that underlie her oppression.

Despite Aisosa's exhaustive efforts to maintain the family, her husband, Sota, still calls her an "absolute failure." He ignores her sacrifices and emotional labour. This reveals deep ingratitude. The irony in his accusation reflects how some men in African societies refuse to acknowledge the strength, capability, and resilience of women who hold families together. Such ingratitude intensifies disharmony within relationships. It fosters an environment of non-peace characterized by blame, conflict, and emotional disconnection. The absence of mutual respect and appreciation underscores how these dynamics contribute to discord within families and, by extension, African societies.

The play further reveals how socio-economic dispossession persists after marital breakdown, threatening family stability and undermining the foundations of peace. This is evident when Sota decides to divorce Aisosa and dispossess her and their children of their home:

Aisosa: Well, since your mind is made up there is very little I can do. So be it then. When are you moving out?

Sota: Moving out? No, you are the one moving out with the children. I need my space. I am going to remodel this house to befit my new status.

Aisosa: Oh! Which house? My house? Sota. Where do you expect us to move to? To the street?

Sota: What do I care? It's between you and your God

Aisosa: Okay. I am sure God will take up as a challenge. (Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, p. 34-35)

These actions, reactions and interactions present how economic dispossession continues into divorce. In effect, Sota's declaration, "you are the one moving out with the children," is particularly significant because he attempts to transfer the consequences of the marital breakdown onto Aisosa while retaining control over the house. Even his statement, "I need my space," contrasts sharply with his earlier expectation that Aisosa should accommodate his needs. The house consequently becomes a symbol of economic power and exclusion. Significantly, the metaphor of "the house" represents Aisosa's hard work, dedication, efforts, and sacrifices; elements Sota attempts to claim without acknowledgment. This is evident through dramatic irony, as Aisosa is being evicted from her own home, underscoring the paradox in which women's economic contributions are ignored once male authority is asserted. Besides, Aisosa reminds Sota: "but you gave my car to one of your political supporters." (Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, p. 36). How can peace reign in a society where men can snatch their wives' properties, including houses and cars? Visibly, the house and car serve as symbols of Aisosa's labor and investments, which Sota dismisses as his own possessions. This situation mirrors certain African societal structures where men, empowered by cultural norms, manipulate legal and social systems to control property and resources.

Moreover, Aisosa's rhetorical question, "My house? ... Where do you expect us to move to? To the street?", exposes the material insecurity produced by the divorce. Her reference to "the street" is hyperbolic, yet it conveys a genuine fear of homelessness and deprivation. From a Marxist-feminist perspective, the scene demonstrates how patriarchal power operates through control of material resources. Aisosa has contributed to the household, raised the children, and supported Sota's social advancement, yet she faces displacement when the relationship ends. This reflects the material dimension of women's oppression, since unequal access to property and economic resources reinforces dependence and vulnerability. Marxist-feminist scholarship specifically connects women's oppression with the organisation of production and social reproduction and with the unequal valuation of women's labour.

Since "marital dissolution has the potential to create considerable turmoil in people's lives" (Amato, 2000, p. 1269), the displacement of a mother and her children can generate economic insecurity, emotional trauma, and fractured family relationships. Obviously, the consequences extend beyond the couple. For, divorce under such unequal conditions generate instability for children, particularly when housing and parental responsibilities become contested. The family, instead of functioning as a space of security, becomes a site of struggle. At the societal level, the repetition of such gendered inequalities in African communities can reproduce resentment, vulnerability, and social fragmentation. Sweet Revenge consequently presents the crisis of marital peace as inseparable from economic justice, because where one partner can dispossess the other of security, peace within the family becomes fragile, and the instability of the household can echo into the wider social order.

The playwright portrays a movement from economic and emotional dependence to social and political agency. Quite aware that there is a need for leadership in favour of accountability,

peace, and development in Africa, the women take an active role in identifying and supporting competent leaders. In Movement 14 of the play, they approach Aisosa Ojo, who has become a distinguished professional following her divorce from Sota. The delegation encourages her to contest the recently vacated senatorial seat. Although she enjoys significant professional achievements and public support, Aisosa initially reacts with hesitation, asking, "Aisosa: lye mwen! You mean Dr. Sota Ojo's seat? What?" (Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, p. 80). Her reluctance stems from her satisfaction with her present position, concerns about public perceptions, and fears of possible backlash following the recall of Dr. Sota Ojo, her former husband. Nevertheless, the women emphasize her competence and present political participation as both a civic responsibility and a strategic necessity for protecting the community's interests. Their determination is reinforced by the assertion, "You better brace up because we have no other alternative" (Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, p. 81).

These actions symbolically mark women's awakening from private oppression to collective agency. Aisosa's transformation from a woman economically and emotionally constrained within marriage into a respected professional signifies a recovery of autonomy and self-worth. Her hesitation about occupying Sota's former senatorial seat is not simply personal uncertainty. It reflects the psychological weight of a patriarchal society in which a woman's public identity can remain entangled with that of her former husband. Her question, "You mean Dr. Sota Ojo's seat? What?" (Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, p. 80), signals both surprise and an emerging awareness that she can occupy a space once associated with male authority.

More significantly, the women's delegation transforms individual resistance into collective political consciousness. Their insistence, "You better brace up because we have no other alternative" (Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, p. 81), functions as a metaphorical call to action. The expression "brace up" signifies psychological preparation for confronting structures that have historically excluded women from decision-making. At the same time, "no other alternative" suggests that women are no longer willing to remain passive observers of political affairs. Symbolically, the vacant senatorial seat becomes more than a political position. It represents a contested space of power. By encouraging Aisosa to occupy it, the women symbolically reclaim a space previously controlled by a man who had oppressed her.

Although initially resistant, Aisosa ultimately rises to political prominence. She is later celebrated for securing a second term as Senate President, which symbolizes her significant contribution to national governance. This is evident in Ede's congratulatory remarks: "Aisosa. Congratulations once again. I am so happy for you. To become a Senate President a second time in Nigeria is a great achievement. This party by the President for you is well deserved" (Oronsaye-Salami, 2007, p. 96).

The above scenario serves as a poignant allegory for the reversal of entrenched patriarchal structures and the rise of women's emancipation in postcolonial Africa. It presents Aisosa's political emergence as a symbol of women's resistance, visibility, and capacity to transform structures that previously marginalized them. Her movement from an emotionally and economically oppressive marriage to professional and political prominence represents a shift from dependence to agency. The women themselves identify her as a suitable candidate. Their collective intervention challenges the assumption that political authority is naturally a male domain.

Furthermore, Aisosa becomes a model of possibility for women in postcolonial African societies. Her trajectory demonstrates that oppression does not have to determine a woman's future. By reclaiming professional and political space, she makes women's competence visible. She also provides an alternative image of African womanhood: not merely as a wife, mother, or dependent, but as a citizen, professional, decision-maker, and potential leader. As Meagher

et al. (2023) establish, women's leadership has "an instrumental relationship ... with peace building" (p. 7). Aisosa's political visibility consequently symbolizes more than personal emancipation. It represents the possibility of replacing exclusion with participation and domination with inclusive leadership. More importantly, her political candidacy symbolizes peace through inclusion and justice. The women's insistence that Aisosa should serve the community transforms political participation into an instrument of social repair. Their action suggests that peace cannot be secured through male-dominated authority alone. It requires women's voices in decision-making.

In sum, the analysis of *Sweet Revenge* in this subsection demonstrates that gendered socio-economic dispossession is a major source of the crisis of peace. Through Aisosa's experiences of emotional abuse, economic dependence, domestic burdens, and eventual displacement, the play reveals how patriarchal structures undermine women's security and dignity. Her professional and political transformation, however, marks a movement from victimhood to agency. Her emergence as a political leader, supported by other women, symbolizes resistance, visibility, and the reclamation of socio-economic and political power. The play ultimately suggests that sustainable peace requires gender equality, economic justice, and women's meaningful participation in public life.

3. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Irene Isoken Oronsaye-Salami's *Sweet Revenge* presents gendered oppression as a structural obstacle to peace in postcolonial African societies. In a nutshell, drawing on Marxist-feminist and semiotic perspectives, the analysis demonstrates how Aisosa's experiences expose the interconnected forms of emotional violence, sexual oppression, objectification, economic exploitation, and socio-economic dispossession portrayed in the play. These forms of oppression are not confined to the private sphere. Rather, they reflect patriarchal and material structures that regulate women's bodies, appropriate their labour, restrict their autonomy, and limit their access to resources and decision-making.

Furthermore, the analysis has shown that emotional and sexual violence undermine dignity, trust, intimacy, and familial stability. Similarly, economic dependence, unpaid domestic labour, inadequate financial support, and dispossession intensify women's vulnerability and generate conflict within the household. Consequently, family instability can extend into wider social relations, weakening justice, social cohesion, and sustainable peace. Nevertheless, the play does not portray women merely as victims. Aisosa's transformation from an economically and emotionally constrained wife into a respected professional and political figure symbolizes women's awakening, resistance, and recovery of agency. Her political visibility therefore presents women's participation and empowerment as essential dimensions of peace building.

The study contributes to scholarship by connecting emotional, sexual, socio-economic, and political dimensions of gendered oppression and demonstrating their collective implications for peace. Its findings should be implemented through gender-responsive education, economic empowerment initiatives, stronger protection of women's property and labour rights, and increased opportunities for women's participation in leadership and decision-making. Further research could examine other African plays, literary genres, and socio-cultural contexts to identify comparable representations of gender, dispossession, resistance, and peace.

Finally, *Sweet Revenge* suggests that sustainable peace cannot exist without gender justice. It requires not only freedom from overt violence but also women's dignity, economic autonomy, equal participation, and meaningful representation in decision-making. Peace begins when women are no longer merely protected by society, but empowered to transform it. The play

thus opens reflections on how African literature can contribute to imagining more inclusive, equitable, and peaceful societies.

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