

**THE PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN SELECTED SHAKESPEAREAN PLAYS:  
LESSONS FOR WOMEN EMANCIPATION ACTIVISM IN UGANDA**

**TUKAMUSHABA DENIS**

**BAED**

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**OCTOBER, 2024**

## **DECLARATION**

I, Denis Tukamushaba, declare that this study, entitled, The Portrayal of Women in Selected Shakespearean Plays Lessons for Women Emancipation Activism in Uganda. Is a product of my effort, and that it has never been submitted to any institution of higher learning for any formal award. All the cited sources have been duly acknowledged.

SIGNATURE: .....

DATE: .....

TUKAMUSHABA DENIS

19/U/GMAL/18991/PD

**APPROVAL**

I, the undersigned, confirm that this dissertation, titled, “The Portrayal of Women in Selected Shakespearean Plays: Lessons for Women Emancipation Activism in Uganda was done under my supervision.

Signature: .....

Date: .....

SR. FRANCES NAKIWALA (PhD)

(PRINCIPLE SUPERVISOR)

I, the undersigned, confirm that this dissertation, titled, “The Portrayal of Women in Selected Shakespearean Plays: Lessons for Women Emancipation Activism in Uganda was done under my supervision.

Signature: .....

Date: .....

DR. RONALD MUSANJE (PhD)

(SECOND SUPERVISOR)

## **DEDICATION**

This research is dedicated to my family: my lovely wife, Ariho Maria Pearl, and children, Tukashaba Christian Charbel, Ave Maria Kim, Mugabekazi Maria Callixta, and Good Luck Marcus, in addition to my parents, Twesigomwe Anakereti and Tumusiime Jacenta, and all the rest of my family members. I am eternally grateful for all your efforts and sacrifices throughout the study.

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## ABSTRACT

This study set out to critically examine the relevance of Shakespearean works to the contemporary Ugandan setting by specifically examining the lessons that the Ugandan world could draw from the portrayal of women in selected plays by William Shakespeare. The major contention of the study was whether Shakespearean selected works adhere or deviate from the patriarchal stance of his time there by determine whether these selected works could inform the gender equality and women emancipation struggle of our time. The study had three specific objectives, namely: examination of Shakespeare's presentation of Elizabethan women as victims of English patriarchy; analysis of the presentation of women as challengers of the oppressive English patriarchal norms; and identification of the key lessons that activists for women equality and emancipation in contemporary Ugandan society can draw from the bard's depiction of women. The study used a qualitative research design and the analysis was informed by literary theories; sexual politics and reader response. The selected Shakespearean texts, included; *King Lear*, *Hamlet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *Julius Caesar*. The findings indicated instances of women oppressed by English patriarchal system. Contrary to the view that the Elizabethan and Jacobean society where Shakespeare lived was remote to the inception of feminism, a close reading of these texts reveal that there are Shakespearean women who dared to challenge certain English patriarchal norms that were very common during the reign of Elizabethan 1. In this way, the study contributes to critical scholarship that aims to bring to the fore such remarkable feminine exploits in a predominantly patriarchal society that always oppressed women and the lessons that could be drawn by contemporary Ugandan society.

The findings also indicate that the selected texts represent Elizabethan women grappling with repressive patriarchal norms. The eventual protest offers vital lessons for activism, equality and emancipation of women in Uganda. As victims of English patriarchy, Elizabethan women

grappled with untold male-centric violence and subjugation that impeded their socio-economic and political stature. The study recommends that given the numerous key lessons that can be drawn from Shakespearean drama texts in the quest for women equality and emancipation, Shakespearean drama should be a major component of the curriculum on Gender Studies in universities and other institutions of higher learning.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

This study offers a critical examination of the continued relevance of selected Shakespearean drama texts in regard to his representation of women in Elizabethan England, and the major lessons that contemporary Ugandan advocates for both women emancipation and gender equality can draw from such a literary depiction, given the pertinence of the women emancipation question in the contemporary Ugandan society. Using the Sexual politics theory, as drawn from the Second Wave of feminism, the study mainly centres its analysis on a threefold lens, namely: the portrayal of Elizabethan English women as victims of English patriarchy; presentation of the Elizabethan women's protest against repressive patriarchal norms in their quest for emancipation; and finally, the key lessons to be drawn by contemporary Ugandan activists for gender equality and women emancipation.

A study of this nature not only uncovers parallels in patriarchal configurations that existed in Elizabethan society but also shows how Shakespeare portrays women who design strategies to resist patriarchal structures that inhibit them. Like the Elizabethan society, contemporary Ugandan society has patriarchal structures that continue to confound women in spaces of oppression. It is on this note that a study of this kind is warranted precisely because it can provide lenses that contemporary gender activists, especially those working within the disciplines of literary criticism, can draw from to advance the liberation and emancipation of women from patriarchal oppression in the context of Uganda.

In the context of this study, and adopting definition from Paul, Mutume. *Women's Emancipation in Africa-Reality or Illusion? A case study of Mbarara, Western Uganda*.

Women emancipation is understood as the process of liberating women from traditional constraints and empowering them with freedoms, rights and opportunities for social political and economic progress. (1) It is a process, strategy and myriad efforts by which women have been striving to liberate themselves from the authority and control of men and traditional power structures, as well as to secure equal rights for women, remove gender discrimination from laws, institutions and behavioral patterns, and set legal standards that shall promote their full equality with me.

### **1.1 Background to the Study**

Despite his worldwide fame, thanks to the sublimity, both thematically and stylistically, of his rich literary corpus, William Shakespeare's life remains shrouded in mystery and has continued to be a subject of raging debate and speculation. Basing on the existing sketchy account of the Bard's life, Henes Park Poets book commentary notes pretty much like other commentators on the playwright, argue that William Shakespeare was born in 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon, Warwickshire, England, to John Shakespeare, a burgess of the borough. Shakespeare is, by critical consensus, regarded as the greatest writer in the English language, indeed the "literary genius par excellence" (par.1), whose creative production ranges from some collaborations that consist of around thirty-eight (38) drama texts to a commendable collection of sonnets and four (4) narrative poems, although the authorship of some of the works has attracted debate and contestation. Although his early works were mainly sonnets, narrative poems, comedies, and histories, the plays are regarded as some of the best works ever produced in these genres. The Elizabethan playwright wrote mainly tragedies until about 1608, some of which include, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*—considered some of the finest works

in the English language. In the last phase of his career, the dramatist wrote tragi-comedies, also known as romances. His plays have been translated into many current world languages and are performed more often than those of any other playwright who ever wrote.

Despite his death, four hundred years, or so, William Shakespeare, arguably remains relevant in mainstream literary discourse across the globe, as his stories and words continue to resonate around the world, transcending both language and borders. Awestruck by Shakespeare's perennial literary ingenuity, his close associate, Ben Johnson—commenting in the First Folio of the plays of Shakespeare, extols him as “not being of an age, but for all time” (223) by which he meant to prophetically assert both the immortality and universality of Shakespeare as a playwright. Indeed, one of the things that augment Shakespeare's genius as a writer is his dexterous ability to dramatize almost everything under the sun, and so the question of women's representation and the advocacy for their emancipation profusely figure in many of his drama texts. It should, however, be noted that despite writing in the sixteenth century in which Britain was under a female monarch, Queen Elizabeth I, the plight of the English women was ironically dire as the society was predominantly patriarchal to the socio-economic and political detriment of womenfolk.

The crux of this research is to examine the relevance of the selected Shakespearean drama texts to contemporary Ugandan Society, especially regarding the bard's representation of Elizabethan women in the plays, and how this portrayal resonates with the plight of contemporary Ugandan women, given the pertinence of the women question, regarding gender emancipation, in the current Ugandan milieu. Moreover, since the 1980's, the Ugandan women have been struggling to free themselves from the bondage of patriarchy, pretty much like the Elizabethan women that Shakespeare dramatizes in the selected plays. As a consequence, the feminist activists—through FEMRITE—have managed to produce a plethora of literary works

and other publications that delve deeper into the gender equality discourse by challenging the norms of patriarchy. The study, therefore, argues that the move to have gender-sensitive literature and the subsequent elevation of the literature written by (and about) women has been part of the parallels drawn from dramatist's depiction of women. Essentially, the movement of female writers has engendered the production of substantial literature about and for women to champion the fair representation of women for purposes of gender emancipation.

In their struggle to emancipate and empower Ugandan women, the gender-emancipation advocates do not only draw in spiration from role models of contemporary activism for emancipation but also greatly learn from models exhibited in the selected Shakespearean plays.

### **1.2.1 The Global Feminist Movement**

It can be argued that the Shakespearean representation of women forms a major basis for the gender-emancipation activism and the feminist movements in both Europe and North America. Most of the studies and feminist activism in Europe, specifically, and the world over, generally, were sparked off by the playwright's portrayal, or better, misrepresentation, of women during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. By feminism, this study probes into the various cultural, political and literary struggles whose major aim have always been the eradication of all forms of discrimination and suppression of women in patriarchal societies, the world over, by agitating for the economic, cultural and political emancipation of womenfolk. According to Francisca, Daskalova, et al. "Front Matter." *Biographical Dictionary of Women's Movements and Feminisms: Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, 19th and 20th Centuries*. There is a continuous evolution of modern feminism, across both time and space, raising fundamental questions regarding sex, gender, sexuality, power, and communication. This continuous evolution of the movement is what is popularly known as the "waves" of feminism, and the three major waves in which it manifests are summarized as follows: the first wave of feminism

emerged in the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century, triggered by flourished industrialization and a more liberalized political climate in both the United States of America and Europe. The major concern of the first wave strand was to strive for equal opportunities for both men and women, chief among them was the right to vote—subsequently granted by the US Congress in 1920, although the right to vote was granted to only white women, much to the disappointment of women of colour. The second wave, on the other hand, gained popularity in postwar Europe and North America in the late 1960s and early 1970s, especially with the rise of the “New Left” that sought to define other marginalised groups of people, notably the Blacks, and homosexuals. Important to note is that this strand was initiated by both women of colour and third-world women that gave a radicalized voice in the activism for women's emancipation from patriarchal oppression. Finally, the third wave flourished in the first half of the 1990s and onwards, gaining impetus from postcolonial and post-socialist world orders, information and technological advancement, and neoliberal and global politics. (1-15)

Key aspects that preoccupied the third-wave strand of feminism were, among others, equity or difference, political evolution or revolution, and the idea of a universalized womanhood that greatly censured women's desire to freely express their sexual orientations and lifestyles. Key advocates of this wave include influential figures, such as Kimberly Crenshaw, Eve Ensler, and Rebecca Walker, among others, who were intent on confronting questions of womanhood, gender, sex, inclusivity, and the general plight of a woman in a predominantly patriarchal social, political and cultural paradigm.

### **1.2.2 Women and Gender Background in Uganda**

Like most African countries, Uganda has a very conspicuous history riddled by a patriarchal setup that has always sustained male dominance over women in the socio-cultural, economic, and political aspects of life. Traditionally, women in Uganda were designated domestic work,

such as looking after children, cooking, general cleanliness around the home, and digging, among other “feminine” responsibilities in traditional Africa. The same system (patriarchy), however, has always nurtured men and boys into privileged positions, such as being family heads, heirs, leaders, and vital decision-makers—often to the detriment of women. Given the oppressive nature of the undue male dominance over females, Uganda has, over the years, continued to witness an increased drive for the respect and protection of the rights of women and the girl-child, also known as, women's emancipation.

Iris, Berger. *African Women’s Movements in the Twentieth Century: A Hidden Story*, traces the momentum for women's emancipation across the African continent in the 1991 African National Congress (ANC) meeting in the South African city of Durban following the release of Nelson Mandela and other anti-Apartheid activists. It was in this meeting that women proposed a thirty percent membership of women in the leadership of the ANC. Although the proposal was promptly rejected by the men, the increased international demand for democratic governance and the need for a wider space for women renewed the impetus for the women's cause across the African continent (1-19). Important to note is that the first democratic South African election (1994) witnessed a remarkable situation in which women won 106 out of the 400 seats in South Africa’s new National Assembly, and as a consequence, the country ranked seventh internationally in her representation of women in democratic national governance, an inspiration of women emancipation drives across the entire continent.

Tripp, argues that the struggle for women emancipation in Uganda dates as far back as the colonial period where the “females” in the missionary, colonial administration and education enterprises, notably British, and in some instances, American women, who viewed the existing (indigenous) cultural-structure and the colonial apparatus as being great impediments to the emancipation of the Ugandan woman. As a result, they started the drive for the liberation of women through their fervent support for girl-child education and the setting up of clubs for women where they would meet and

strategize on the numerous issues that affected them in as members of society. Although the provision of education to Ugandan women was primarily meant to improve their responsibilities at home, the women who received this education became aware of their contribution to society through formal public service. This led to their realization that an educated woman was both a good wife, mother, and productive citizen with a lot to offer to public life, especially through political leadership (543-564).

Perhaps more intriguing in sowing the seed for the eventual women's emancipation drive in Uganda is the multi-racial women mobilization in Uganda between 1945 and 1962. Tripp Aili Mari in "Women's Mobilization in Uganda: Nonracial Ideologies in European-African-Asian Encounters, 1945-1962", highlights the active challenge of racialist ideas by all women, despite their races, in their passion for a liberated Ugandan woman. Notably, this mobilization involved the coming together of African, Asian, and European women in a non-racial ideology with a remarkably sustained spirit of togetherness that Ugandans and their colonial counterparts had failed to achieve. Although multi-racial co-operations were very hard to forge, thanks to the racial segregation sustained by colonialism, education had played a major role as the African, and indeed, Ugandan women, who had attained their education in universities in Britain, were able to share some cultural kinships their British female counterparts. This eased the social interactions and cohesion among women across the racial divide and made the cause for a Ugandan woman gain momentum at a time when the country was grappling with colonial oppression, and the clamor for independence even much louder.

Rosalind, Boyd. *Empowerment of Women in Contemporary Uganda: Real or Symbolic*. Views the National Resistance Movement government as a major player in the quest for women's liberation in Uganda. Shortly after assuming the mantle of leadership, following his six (6) years of guerrilla war, President Museveni was credited as a great champion for the women's cause. In his maiden direct address to women on International Women's Day (1986), he decried the peripheral status of

Ugandan women, despite the numerous sacrifices and contributions to Uganda, especially in the agricultural sector, and promised to create a political environment that would enable all women in Uganda to fully participate in national building. The NRM's support for the liberation of women in Uganda manifests in different programmes, such as women's representations in political positions, affirmative action for all female students joining public universities in Uganda, and various campaigns for girl-child education(n.pag).

Although women in Uganda still face many challenges in their struggle for gender equality and full emancipation, as is the case with many African countries, Shakespearean works make a serious case for women emancipation activism in Uganda. Shakespeare's portrayal of women as both victims of a patriarchal English social order and as victors offers vitally important lessons to the society of Ugandan activism for gender emancipation. His portrayal of the Sixteenth Century Elizabethan women offers a serious relevance to the Ugandan contemporary society as the subsequent analysis highlights.

### **1.2.3 The Status of Women During the Reign of Queen Elizabethan I**

Leacock, *Women's Status in Egalitarian Society: Implications for Social Evolution*, stresses the plight of women during the Elizabethan English society by comparing both wealthy and poor womenfolk.(249) Accordingly, whereas the wealthy class women enjoyed some level of independence, the poor, classless women had, in most cases, more freedom to move and do as they pleased, compared to their wealthy women counterparts, whose limitations were due to the insecurity their inherited property created around them and the target suitors from the same wealthy classes of society. Basically, the position and general image of English women during the late Sixteenth and early Seventeenth century was one of great marginalisation, devoid of prospects to the extent that even women who had acquired some formal education were denied the opportunity to work in a more formal public office, other than always looking forward to

marriage, homemaking and the upbringing of children. It is ironic and perhaps inconceivable how highly patriarchal the English society was and the limited prospects for womenfolk it sustained, even though a woman monarch was at the helm.

Vuorinen, “The Gender Role of Queen Elizabeth I as Reflected by her Language”, contends that when Elizabeth Tudor assumed her monarchical responsibilities as the tender age of twenty-five years in 1558, the existing English society was highly masculine and with a conspicuous tendency to malign women by undermining their natural attributes, such as intelligence, virtuosity and judgment on the mere basis of being women. Conversely, though, the same society sustained a culture that privileged their male foils. Moreover, much as the queen went on to be successful in the execution of her royal mandate as head of government, she was initially a victim of male bigotry just because of being a woman (n.pag). Vuorinen, further, argues that serving as both king and queen at the same time, Elizabeth I had a very uniquely complicated responsibility that often caused a conflict between biological and social realities regarding the English society’s view of man and woman. Hence, in her attempt to assert her authority as head of state in a predominantly male-controlled society, she adopted a masculine demeanor (perhaps as a strategy to be accepted as the nation’s leader by men) in her actions and even in her speech. Her use of language, both verbally and in writing, suggests that she probably drastically changed in terms of gender roles, as acknowledged by Cecil Rhodes who thought that she was more than a man than she was a woman.

Allison, “Queen Elizabeth I and the Persistence of Patriarchy”, expresses wonder and bafflement as to why Elizabeth I, despite her powerful position and great success as head of state, did not impact much on the betterment of the English women at the time of her reign. However, through an elaborate analysis of the existing patriarchal structure that seems to oppress women, she makes it clear that in as much as Elizabeth I was privileged to be the monarch at the time, she was probably

not viewed any different from any other woman in as far as according respect for personal decisions was concerned. For instance, as soon as she convened parliament in 1555, the House of Commons immediately presented a petition pestering her to get married so that, through her marriage, a new heir (or heiress) would be produced to continue steering the commonwealth. Although she makes it clear that she is married to the English throne (to the service of her nation), the men in her Privy Council see her first as a woman, and a potential wife and mother for that matter. As an enlightened female leader, she understood well the complexity of her mandate in a predominantly male-centric society. Although she managed to establish herself as a very successful leader, she never wanted to contravene the male's view on how the English society was to be organised, lest it draws more rage and resistance from the men. As a consequence, she could not offer much to better the position of her fellow females (6-10).

Although it is bizarre that English women continued to grapple with untold patriarchal subjugation, even when a fellow female was at the helm of the throne, the queen was trying as much as possible to question some of the existing aspects of patriarchal bigotry. Suffice to stress, further, much as many women had attained education and other training in the early Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century, the existing patriarchal structure continued to impede women from participating in public life and more formal occupations. For instance, in as much as women would somehow be allowed to write, they had to ensure that the subject matter was deemed appropriate to the patriarchal society. Women, of course, were barred from engaging in theatrical performances (acting) and their supposed roles were, instead, performed by men. In the rare circumstances where they could be given the opportunity to act, women would take on roles as men so as to be taken seriously by society. The gender-based limitations pressed against women notwithstanding, it can be argued that the female gender had more rights during Elizabeth I's rule than in previous regimes, except for poor women whose financial constraints

impeded their access to education and other privileges enjoyed by women from opulent families.

Shakespeare, also, seems to have had a better understanding of women as he portrays them widely according to various categories, such as: the bawdy women who are sexualized, cheeky and flirtatious—this particular category includes the educated and working class that represent hardworking women of the world, whose destiny can only be shaped by sweat. The tragic, but innocent category includes virtuous women who, in most cases have little exposure to the daily life challenges: they are usually the most affected women by forces of patriarchy and violence. The scheming-femme fatal women who usually use their prowess to dominate the spheres of their world, albeit ending up dying tragically. The crafty category includes women who adapt to the male-centric world through maneuvers and sometimes, in disguise, challenge the odds of patriarchy. Another classification of women by Shakespeare are nobles, who like the bawdy category, have little exposure to the daily life challenges, and are, in some cases, also the most affected women by the forces of patriarchy and violence against women. Finally, those falsely accused of marital disloyalty and the devastating consequences of the false charges. Important to note, however, that all these categories of women have suffered abuse, violence and exclusion under patriarchal forces, many of them offer resistance by agitating for their emancipation. The contemporary Ugandan woman needs to understand how social class and stratification contribute to how women suffer human rights violations.

#### **1.2.4 Shakespearean Portrayal of Women Characters**

Shakespeare is often lauded by many critics for his ingenuous creation of life-like personalities that make his drama texts a true reflection of nature. Important to note, also, is the fact that the patriarchal English society of the time, much like patriarchy elsewhere in the world, perpetrated an unfair social structure that offered undue privileges on the mere basis of being male and

male. Although the participation of women on the early modern professional English stage was highly limited.

Greer, Conley. *To Be a Woman: Shakespeare's Patriarchal Viewpoint*, argues that Shakespearean drama offers an uncanny perspective into the various social challenges that affected womenfolk in Elizabethan England. Accordingly, the female characters take on different roles and modes of behaviour, as dictated by the genre of the performance. For instance, in a Shakespearean comedy, Greer argues further, that women are, to some extent, in control, and as a consequence, create an interesting situation for men, especially in matters to do with love. The tragedies and romances, on the other hand, dramatise the women's struggles with more complex and philosophical aspects of life (135-140).

As already mentioned, Shakespearean drama offers a varied representation of women as represented in many ways: the soiled, unchaste female personalities who are usually rude and obscene. This is followed by the innocent, but tragic woman whose loss of innocence leads to her death, as well as the crafty "femme fatale", an attractive and seductive, but ultimately dangerous woman—other women are portrayed as both intelligent and manipulative.

Rose, Beth. "A Challenging Study of Gender in Shakespeare", offers her feminist perspective regarding Shakespeare's handling of the controversial issues of gender and sexuality in his drama texts. Drawing from Linda Bamber she argues that the playwright treats the subjects (gender and sexuality) from an aesthetic (as opposed to ideological) point of view. Accordingly, the plays of William Shakespeare depict a clear-cut distinction between the "Self" (manliness/masculinity) and the "Other" (femininity/womanhood), whereby the former is characterised by a functional consciousness with a demonstrable capability to discern things, decide his own identity and mentally develop with time. The feminine "Other", on the other hand, is the antithesis of the self: devoid of consciousness, external to the self, and unpossessed. Although she is very skeptical of the

reconciliation between Shakespeare and feminism, Rose applauds the bard's persistent, various, and wholehearted employment of female personages in his drama, stressing that the playwright was closely associated with women characters so that they could challenge their male counterparts. (135)

Much as Shakespearean English society was masculine and very constraining to women in all aspects of life, the bard also portrays presents aberrantly powerful, sly and scandalous womenfolk who, nonetheless, superseded the expectations of the average English woman of the day through bizarre maneuvers that gave them power and influence on the socio-political matters of the English society. The study, therefore, argues that although Shakespeare has been at the receiving end of radical feminist criticism for his apparent male-chauvinism and lack of regard for the female gender, a broader analysis of his drama texts offers his efficiency in depicting women who dare and effectively challenge the women-oppressive patriarchal system that pervaded the Elizabethan period. The affront of the English women on patriarchy offers vital lessons to activists for gender equality and emancipation in a society like Uganda where the gender question remains a major talking point.

I am inspired to do this research because Shakespeare has been "immortalized" and "globalized" as a dramatist and poet in mainstream literary debates. Despite the apparent "unease" that his Elizabethan English makes to the contemporary reader. He continues to be a core component of any worthy literary curriculum at any level of study including both O and A level and university education (in Uganda's case). As a literary student, I have always been fascinated by Shakespeare's never-ending relevance to almost every aspect of human life across the globe. This study is therefore my attempt at contributing to the wider Shakespearean critical scope.

#### **1.4 Statement of the Problem**

As noted by Greer, Conley. *To Be a Woman: Shakespeare's Patriarchal Viewpoint*, that Shakespeare's Elizabethan and Jacobean societies were remote to the advent of the feminist movement in Europe (135). Although it suffices to argue that, much of Shakespearean drama is a quintessential mirror of his English society and time. This is because of its faithful reflection on the salient patriarchal paradigm of the time, such as stereotyping of the female gender (women), a close reading of selected Shakespearean drama texts shows instances of women daringly questioning and challenging certain patriarchal norms that were prevalent in the Elizabethan reign. Even when such actions of these wise, intelligent, and daring womenfolk went contrary to the expectations of the English women of the time, there is no substantial critical scholarship to highlight such remarkable feminine exploits in a predominantly patriarchal society renowned for its marginalisation of women. The current study, therefore, offers a new perspective on William Shakespeare's representation of women by analyzing this unique deviation from the norm by women in selected drama texts, and the implications of such a representation to the activism for gender equality and women emancipation in the contemporary Ugandan milieu.

## **1.5 Objectives of the Study**

### **1.5.1 The General Objective**

To examine the portrayal of women in selected Shakespearean plays and the lessons for women emancipation activism in Uganda.

### **1.5.2 Specific Objectives**

1. To discuss the Shakespearean representation of women as victims of patriarchy in the selected drama texts.
2. To analyze Shakespeare's portrayal of women as challengers of the norms of English patriarchy in selected drama texts.
3. To examine the lessons that Ugandan gender-emancipation activists can draw from Shakespeare's representation of women in the selected drama texts.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

The research investigates three fundamental questions, namely:

1. How does Shakespeare represent women as victims of patriarchy in the selected drama texts?
2. How do the Shakespearean women challenge the norms of English patriarchy in the selected drama texts?
3. 3. What lessons could be drawn from the portrayal of the categories of women in the selected drama texts?

## **1.7 Significance of the Study**

This study is significant in that it adds to the existing scholarship on the relevance and universality of Shakespeare as a dramatist. Specifically, the study offers a new perspective on the Shakespearean presentation of women in his drama texts that gives pertinent lessons to activists for gender equality and women emancipation in contemporary Ugandan society. Whereas a plethora of existing scholarship on feminine representation in Shakespearean drama heavily focuses on the bard's stereotypical and misogynistic depiction of the female gender. The current study focuses on Shakespeare's positive image of female characters daring patriarchy to achieve gender equality and Women emancipation that can inspire the emancipation quest in many parts of the world, such as Uganda, where patriarchy still reigns supreme. The study, thus, argues that despite the predominant patriarchal attitudes of the Elizabethan English society, women themselves can indeed challenge patriarchy and that emancipation can be achieved.

The fact that the victimization and eventual protest of English women against the dictates of the English patriarchal system in the selected Shakespearean drama texts resonate with the contemporary struggles for gender equality and women's emancipation in Uganda, is an additional indicator of Shakespeare's universality and timelessness as playwright. The study, therefore, offers the Ugandan viewpoint of the dramatist's ingenuity as a global storyteller, especially in the context of the contemporary gender equality and women emancipation debate.

The study also highlights key lessons that can inspire the emancipation quest in many parts of the world, such as Uganda, where patriarchy still reigns supreme.

## **1.8 Scope of the Study**

In this study, I undertake a critical investigation of Shakespeare's portrayal of women in selected drama texts and the lessons that can be drawn from these great English women of the Elizabethan era to the quest for women emancipation and equality in Uganda. The selected texts include *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *Julius Caesar*. The selection of the above drama texts was based on their effective depiction of the unique womenfolk who dare, albeit with enormous challenges, to confront, question, and challenge the age-long patriarchal tradition of the Elizabethan period, and how such a portrayal offers pertinent lessons that inform contemporary global activism for gender equality and emancipation, which is the crux of the research.

## **1.9 Theoretical Framework**

In undertaking this study, I am informed by the theory of sexual politics as formulated in her book, Millet, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. Sexual politics is a strand of feminism that is rooted in History, Literature, Psychoanalysis, Sociology, and other areas. In this theory, Kate Millett argues that literature is riddled with patriarchal structures with a firm preference for heterosexual orientation as the norm, with men having unmerited supremacy over women on the mere basis of gender inequalities as socially constructed (23).

The theory is mainly concerned with ideological indoctrination and economic inequality as causes of human oppression, no wonder Kate Millet pronounces her view on patriarchy as a political institution and demands its overhaul, since, in her view, patriarchy makes the female inferior to the male, hence creating grounds for female subjugation in both domestic and public environments (25). Despite the flourishing of democratic governance in the modern world, the woman continues to suffer from patriarchal oppression, characterized by stereotypical gender roles that are superimposed on her right from childhood (43).

Millett, particularly, is against the social-scientists' dismissal of culturally-enforced women attributes and passivity as normal. She, however, thinks that this tendency is affected by both men and women themselves, especially in women publications, and at family levels (178). She clarifies that she does not mean *politics* in the narrow sense of political parties and elections. Instead, politics describes any situation in which one group of people has power over another (23). In the society around her, the military, the police, almost exclusively men populate political office, science, etc. Even the concept of God is male. Because men hold all these positions of power they dominate the relationship between the sexes; women are subordinate. Men are rewarded in life for adopting an attitude of dominance, whereas women are encouraged to be passive and ignorant. This training makes patriarchy appear natural, as though it were determined by biology, when in fact it is a social convention or a political relationship. Romantic love disguises the mismatch in power between men and women, but it leaves women vulnerable to emotional exploitation. Women have less economic power than men, and make less income. Millett says we don't often consider the ways that outright force is used to uphold patriarchy, yet this is the purpose of sexual violence, which is common. Millett often critiques the sexual revolution of the 1960s, arguing that it did not bring about true liberation for women. She explores how traditional gender roles persisted despite changes in sexual behavior and norms. As well as this, she later delves into the history and politics of sexuality, which is where she discusses how sexual pleasure has been defined and controlled throughout history by men and their expectations for women (24).

Throughout the book, Millett consistently examines the connection between sexuality, power, and societal expectations. Adding on to this she discusses the social construction of femininity and how women's bodies have been objectified and commodified. She discusses the impact of societal expectations on women's self-perception and relationships and examines how, due to the socialization of children, gender roles are often ingrained from an early age. She discusses

how societal expectations shape children's understanding of gender and sexuality. She touches upon and analyses Freudian ideas to explain her points. Kate Millet's sexual politics theory is relevant to this study because patriarchy has been, and continues to be, one major concern in gender and women emancipation studies since it presents patriarchy as the main reason for the subjugation of women. From the literary perspective, I find it relevant to cross-fertilize my analysis with reader-response theory. The theory argues that a literary text is incomplete until it is read; the idea that each reader brings something to the text that completes it and which makes each reading different; that the author always leaves something unsaid, and thus, invites readers to fill the gaps with their imaginative construct; and finally, the rejection of the post-cultural claim that texts are meaningless. Moreover, Seldon, Widdowson, et al. *A Reader's Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*, opine that it is the reading that makes a text meaningful because "reading makes a text potentially reflective of the real world" (3).

As its name implies, reader-response criticism focuses on readers' responses to literary texts. Reader-response criticism is a broad, exciting, evolving domain of literary studies that can help us learn about our reading processes and how they relate to, among other things, specific elements in the texts we read, our life experiences, and the intellectual community of which we are a member (Tyson 153). Reader-response criticism covers a good deal of diverse ground such as psychoanalytic criticism. (when it investigates the psychological motives for certain kinds of interpretations of a literary text), feminist criticism (when it analyzes how patriarchy teaches us to interpret texts in a sexist manner), and structuralist criticism (when it examines the literary conventions a reader must have consciously or unconsciously internalized to be able to read a particular literary text) (Tyson 153-154).

Reader-response theory, which did not receive much attention until the 1970s, maintains that what a text is cannot be separated from what it does. For despite their divergent views of the reading process, reader-response theorists share two beliefs:

1. That the role of the reader cannot be omitted from our understanding of literature.
2. That readers do not passively consume the meaning presented to them by an objective literary text; rather they actively make the meaning they find in literature. The reading of Shakespearean selected texts and the portrayal of these female characters make this theory a worthy underpinning of this research. In my response to the salient elements of these texts , I concur with Ben, Johnson Shakespeare's associate and scholars who say that Shakespeare was indeed an ageless writer who should not have been misunderstood by some literary critics as a misogynist. In fact a close reading of these selected texts shows Shakespeare as a feminist, who fought for women rights, and possibly who sparked the women emancipation movement even before the advent of the term feminist movement and women emancipation became very popular movements.

Therefore, this second belief, that readers actively make meaning, suggests that different readers may read the same text quite differently (Tyson 154). This makes Reader-response theory an informed choice of the best literary theory for this study. The combination of sexual politics which theory was a key mover of women emancipation movement across Europe and Africa at large in the 1970s, combined with Reader response literary criticism theory which informs the world of the misconceptions about Shakespeare and brings out the fact that he fore told of the women emancipation movement before long before its inception. The study was thus informed by the combination of Reader response theory and Sexual politics as the theoretical underpinning to give this study the sublimity and essence that is worth undertaking.

### **1.9 Review of the Related Literature**

Sarah Beckwith, *Are There Any Women in Shakespeare's Plays Fiction, Representation, and Reality in Feminist Criticism*, cites Callaghan's book, *Shakespeare with Women*, whose argument that Shakespeare's tendency to appropriate male actors for female (women) roles is problematic to the

question of gender representation as it leads to an absence of a genuine female voice on the Shakespearean stage. The fact that members of the female gender were considered less appropriate for representation like, for instance, kings and servants, poses a great puzzle for Sarah as she thinks this creates a conundrum for “masculine impersonation” of women. Specifically, her view of Callaghan’s critique of Shakespeare’s depiction of women—or its absence—in some of his drama texts is more inclined to the question of language in theatre, arguing that stagecraft (acting) is in its right a “grammatical” (language) form of the representation conundrum in Shakespearean drama. The insightful views of Sarah Beckwith and Callaghan notwithstanding, the current study, however, offers a new perspective in which selected drama works of Shakespeare depict the playwright’s portrayal of a certain category of Elizabethan English women who dared to challenge the oppressive norms of the patriarchal regime of the time and achieved power and authority that can be inspirational to the gender equality and women emancipation drive in the contemporary Ugandan society.

McEachern, Clair. *Fathering Herself: A Source Study of Shakespeare’s Feminism*”, highlights the greatly contestable and certainly outdated feministic sentiments in Shakespearean drama works, arguing that any attempt to analyze the pre-eminent dramatist’s motivation for his socio-cultural and political view of a woman as not being of any significance. She argues, further, that the remarkable women’s presentation in Shakespearean works is due to the usually implicit view of the bard’s enviable passion for his English cultural background, stressing the dexterous mutuality between Shakespeare and the source materials for his works that informs the playwright’s acceptance and rejection of the cultural-ingredients and notions for the plot, characterisation, themes and stylistic devices in his drama texts. Worth mentioning, also, is Claire’s highlight of the recent and more radicalized twofold split in the feminist reading of the Shakespearean canon in which the earlier feministic critique of Shakespearean drama works set to make up for their biased analysis that had put more emphasis on the works’ apparent masculinity and maleness. This has been done by the

feminists' eventual appreciation of the "womanistic" aspect of Shakespeare and their recognition of the bard's depiction of liberation-conscious and strong women, both in speech and deeds, that validates Shakespeare as an activist for a culturally-emancipated renaissance English woman. Later feminists, however, castigate their predecessors' naivety-idealization of Shakespeare, and instead, lay premium on the prevalent patriarchal notions that heavily impeded the rights and freedoms of the English women of the time. Although Claire makes an insightful perspective on the multifaceted feministic nuances on Shakespeare's portrayal of women in his works, she does not delve further on how certain representations, such as the case of a strong and liberation-motivated woman, offer inspiration (and lessons) for the drive for women emancipation in the world. The current study fills the lacuna by analyzing the lessons that Ugandan activists for gender equality and women's emancipation gain from such a Shakespearean rendition of women challenging patriarchal culture.

Kelly, Philippa. See *What Breeds about Her Heart: 'King Lear', Feminism, and Performance*. stresses the ease with which the summation of the place and status of the English women in Shakespearean drama, particularly *King Lear*, is made possible by asserting that the society of the play completely erases mothers as women, for instance, for any serious discussion—except in some instances where, both in derision and elation, male characters, such as Lear and Gloucester, bastardize their very humanity and existence. She, however, argues further, that the three daughters of Lear (Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia) are not merely "cameos", but well-developed characters with the ability to dominate the dramatic action and offer a rich feministic perspective to Goneril's and Regan's relation with, and, indeed, treatment of their father, Lear. For instance, Regan's so-called "filial ingratitude" is viewed as emanating from the domestic and parental dictatorship, and Goneril's femininity is a sort of protest against this tyranny. Although the two daughters' treatment of their father can qualify (in many ways) as resistance to the patriarchal oppression of English womenfolk, the study falls short of highlighting the impact of such a protest to patriarchal tyranny on the global women's emancipation struggle. This study, therefore, addresses such a critical gap by

examining the relevance of the English women's protest against patriarchy to the contemporary struggle for gender equality and women's emancipation in Uganda.

Mwaka, Victoria M. *Women's Studies In Uganda*, makes a very insightful enumeration of the many challenges that impede the socio-economic, cultural, and political development of a woman in Uganda due to the predominance of a patriarchal structure. Accordingly, Ugandan women grapple with such things as poverty, inadequate safe-drinking water, lack of health education for a hygienic life, and limited sources of energy, such as charcoals and firewood, whose collection forces women to trek long distances, in addition to health problems such as contractions of deadly diseases and infections, some of which include, STDs, malaria, hypertension, and tuberculosis, among others. Economically, Mwaka contends, further, Ugandan women do not own and control land and other factors (means) of production due to Uganda's rigid patriarchal system that only privileges men—at the expense of women—in terms of resource ownership and control. Also, the high rate of girl-child school drop-up (52%) as compared to the boy-child (48%) means that women have a very high rate of illiteracy in the country. Moreover, domestically, women are overburdened with duties and responsibilities, such as child upbringing, agriculture (peasantry), and the so-called keeping of the home. All these, according to Mwaka, hinder women's ability to gain functional education, training, and literacy, as well as engagement in substantial income-generation programmes. However, Mwaka applauds the current political goodwill of the government of Uganda which has initiated programmes that support women's emancipation and gender equality by involving women in managerial and high-level decision-making appointments and political participation. Although Mwaka offers a passionate and insightful feministic view of the predicament of the Ugandan woman since independence and commendably highlights the progress so far made, in as far as gender equality and women's emancipation are concerned, she either ignores or is simply unaware of the role of literature in advancing the course of gender equality and women emancipation in a patriarchal society like Uganda. The current study, therefore, through a critical analysis of selected plays by

William Shakespeare in the context of the Elizabethan women's protest against patriarchy offers a detailed illustration of the lessons that such a literary representation can offer to the Ugandan gender equality and women emancipation advocacy.

Deb Johnson, et al. in "Women in Ugandan Local Government: The Impact of Affirmative Action", commend the inclusion of the "Affirmative Action" clause in the Uganda Constitution (1995, as amended) as a step in the right direction, as far as the protection and enforcement of the rights, freedoms, and welfare of the marginalised groups of people in Uganda, generally, and women, specifically, are concerned. The Uganda Constitution, Deb pursues, further, details the rights of women, among other rights of marginalized groups of people in the country, as a pledge for Uganda's attempt to redress the previous forms of discrimination and imbalances that had curtailed women's quest for socio-economic, cultural and political emancipations. Although the Uganda Constitution (1995, as amended) should be commended for enshrining the rights, freedoms and welfare of Ugandan women, it is important to argue that the constitution itself is a form of literature—legal literature. Moreover, Deb worries that the 1995 constitution does not provide clear mechanisms for the practical implementation of the rights of women in Uganda. Given that most women in Uganda are both writers and students (readers) of Literature as an academic discipline (compared to the few of them who may be grounded in mainstream constitutional legalese), it suffices to argue that they are aware of the integral role and position of literature in promoting gender equality and women emancipation in the contemporary Ugandan society—which is, of course, not the subject matter of both Deb and Mwaka, unfortunately. The current study, therefore, centres on how fiction, especially drama, can inspire activism for an egalitarian society using women's protest against English patriarchy in selected Shakespearean drama texts.

## **1.10 Research Methodology**

### **1.10.1 Research Design**

This is a library-based study that employs qualitative approaches in both the collection and analysis of data. The approaches used include close reading and textual analysis of both primary and secondary sources of data, such as literary texts, books, journals, articles, periodicals, magazines, and other scholarly publications. Close reading and textual analysis of both primary and secondary sources enabled the identification and discussion of Shakespeare's the portrayal of women in selected drama texts and the key lessons to the Ugandan drive for gender equality and women emancipation in Uganda.

### **1.10.2 Sources of Data**

In this research, both primary and secondary sources were scrutinized: primary sources are from the Norton Shakespeare Complete Works of the selected plays where female characters were selected depending on the research topic. These characters include Goneril, Regan and Cordelia in *King Lear*; Desdemona and Emilia in *Othello*; Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*; Lady Macbeth and the Three Witches in *Macbeth*; Olivia and Maria in *Twelfth Night*; Ophelia in *Hamlet*; Portia in *Venice*; Viola and Maria in *Twelfth Night*; and Calpurnia in *Julius Caesar*. The selection of these characters was based on the fact that they all portray women characters as plot movers and heroines.

Secondary data was also used in this study and it was mainly obtained from book reviews, articles, reports, and journals. Also to note, the researcher scrutinized and critically read other plays with the portrayal of inspirational female characters. The secondary sources were aimed at enhancing the researcher's interpretation of the portrayal of women characters in the primary sources.

### 1.10.3 Procedure for Data Processing and Analysis

In this study, data was processed and analyzed using literary theories; sexual politics and reader response. This examined the inspirational women characters in the selected Shakespearean plays. The researcher was guided by the research objectives to make a thorough analysis of Shakespeare portrayal of women characters in the selected plays and draw comparisons and lessons for Ugandan gender equality and women emancipation activism. Both direct and indirect arguments were made to ably illustrate the findings raised in the study.

Bucks County community college editorial, *Close Reading*. Notes that Close reading is a method of literary analysis, which focuses on the specific details of a passage or text in order to discern some deeper meaning present in it. The meaning derived from the close reading is the reader's interpretation of the passage or text. "There is no such thing as the one "true" meaning behind a text, so any interpretation which can be supported by the text's specific details is valid. Don't worry about arguing for the "correct" interpretation of a text or passage and don't be afraid to be creative in your analysis." Close reading tends to rely on the principle that no details are present in a text by "accident." The author's conscious intentions in writing are often insignificant, as unconscious layers of meaning or even prejudices may be sublimated into literary works. Regardless of whether an author consciously or unconsciously constructs a particular meaning in a text, if details are present which support that interpretation, it is valid. (BCCC ASC Rev. 3/2019)

The analysed was presented and arranged in five chapters as explained: Chapter One is The Introduction and Background to the Study; Chapter Two centres on Shakespearean English Women as Victims of Patriarchy; Chapter Three focuses on Shakespearean Women as Challengers of English Patriarchy; Chapter Four offers an analysis of the Key Lessons for the Ugandan Activism for Gender Equality and Women Emancipation; and Chapter Five provides The Conclusion and Recommendations of the Study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### SHAKESPEAREAN WOMEN AS VICTIMS OF PATRIARCHY

#### 2.1 Introduction

As already seen (in the definition of key terms), patriarchy refers to the socio-economic, cultural and political structure that perpetrates an unmerited regard for maleness, while at the same time subjugating womanhood. Subjecting women to violence by men, through patriarchal chauvinism, figures profusely in much of Shakespearean drama texts, pretty much like it is the case in Uganda and Africa as a whole. In fact, in the United Nations Development Fund for Women's report (2006), Kofi Annan, the erstwhile chief of the United Nations, decries the rampant and globalized oppression of womenfolk, citing untold physical beatings, forms of sexual-coercion and general abuse that women grapple with in the modern world. It suffices, therefore, to argue that patriarchal repression of women is not limited to contemporary Uganda or Africa: the violation of women's rights, globally, is as old as the history of mankind itself, albeit with striking variations, both in form and magnitude, and depending on the socio-cultural, economic and political structure of a given society. Such patriarchal oppression of women has is attributed to such factors as: the unmerited sense of entitlement by men, misogyny and superiority-complexness, among others, that relegate women to the periphery of the social structure.

This chapter, therefore, offer a critical analysis of selected Shakespearean female characters that are tremendously affected by the patriarchal tyranny during the Elizabethan era. The study mainly engages with selected Elizabethan society women to identify gender related abuses that parallel those in the Ugandan society. Hence, the study argues that the social issues afflicting the contemporary Ugandan society, specifically, and Africa, generally, once plagued the Sixteenth Century Shakespearean English society. Writers, generally, and dramatists,

specifically, often present the existing state of affairs to propose a remedy for the future. Therefore, Shakespeare, through his depiction of women grappling with patriarchal oppression and how they challenge it to achieve some freedom, rights and liberation in the selected drama texts, can be a very important inspiration for contemporary activism for gender equality and women emancipation in Uganda.

In the analysis of patriarchal subjugation of Elizabethan English womenfolk, the study focuses on four critical issues, namely: the acts of violence (crimes) perpetrated against the victims (women); the motivations for the crimes (repression) against women; the women's response to this patriarchal repression in an attempt to achieve redress; and the key lessons from these situations in Ugandan pertaining the drive for gender equality and emancipation, as this and subsequent chapters clearly highlight. The prototypes of Elizabethan women that represent gender-based violence and marginalisation include: Cordelia, Ophelia, Gertrude, Desdemona and Juliet.

## **2.2 Cordelia as a Victim of Patriarchal Oppression in *King Lear***

In the play, *King Lear*, Cordelia is Lear's youngest and initially most loved and favored of the three daughters, other than Goneril and Regan. Her depiction as a victim of the rigid English patriarchal system starts as early as in Act 1, Scene 1, of the play during the so-called "Love-Contest" arranged by the king. As both a king and father, Lear demonizes and even banishes his once favorite daughter, Cordelia, for her refusal to flatter (lie) his male-ego in his weird demand for a public expression of love from his daughters as a condition for giving out the best portion (share) of his kingdom to any of them, even when the reader knows that the best share had already been gazetted for the youngest, Cordelia. In juxtaposition, Lear's other "Pelican" daughters, Goneril and Regan wittingly, and rather unashamedly, succeed in their "confession" of their love for their father, Lear, which Cordelia, in her dead-sincerity has declined to do. She refuses to exaggerating her love for her father, as she is astounded by her sisters' profession of

all their love to their father, even when they have husbands to love, too. Cordelia tells Lear. Cordelia's argument is that since she may (one day) get married, she would be duty-bound to love her spouse as well. She, therefore, finds the idea that her two sisters—moreover with husbands already: Albany and Cornwall—love only their father, and nothing else (including their own dear lives) as not only deceitful, but too shocking for even Lear's own good.

Despite being honest to her feelings, as opposed to playing on her father's whims, Cordelia pays a huge price: in utter rage, rash and disgrace, she is disinherited and banished from the kingdom. Her initial ('opulent') share given to her two scheming sisters, Goneril and Regan. Although the king's first speech after Cordelia's failure of the so-called love-contest wrongly depicts her as an unloving and ungrateful daughter. It also brings out the irony of the play: Lear, a king and parent who foolishly pesters his own daughters to show how much they love him, not essentially for what he is, but for what they can gain in return for such flattery. On the other hand, the play also exposes Goneril and Regan's true characters, especially in the way they turn against their father, Lear. They are outright liars, schemers, ingrates and monstrous who continue to degenerate into evil as the action rises. (Act 1 scene 1)

King Lear's refusal to give Cordelia any share of the kingdom just because she could not flatter him like her other two sisters, Goneril and Regan, manifests a very shocking defiance by a king to the English sanctity of parenthood where we witness a bizarrely ruthless decision to disinherit and banish a legitimate and profoundly sincere child. In a way, Lear forces Cordelia into bastardy just because the latter is too sincere to "Mend her speech a little" (Act 1 Scene 1)

Suffice to argue, therefore, that the king's love for flattery and the subsequent oppression for the sincere ones (as this is the case for Cordelia) is a typical example of the patriarchy and male chauvinism. This patriarchy did not only befall the Elizabethan era, but has continued to oppress women across the globe, little wonder the continuous relevance of Shakespearean drama texts to the world over, generally, and the contemporary Ugandan society, specifically.

Cordelia is presented as a daughter true to her father, one who fulfills her duty to the father by being both obedient and compassionate to King Lear. Even after he is rejected by the two daughters, Goneril and Regan, Cordelia is still willing to help her father. Despite the mistreatment she had from Lear, as a dutiful daughter, she offers sympathy to him.

Furthermore, she risks her life in her attempt to restore her father (Lear) on the throne by requesting her husband, the King of France, to use the French military to invade Britain due to the unmerited injustices meted on her father by her two wicked sisters, Goneril and Regan. Moreover, Cordelia continues to assist King Lear even when the latter runs mad. In Act 4, Scene 7, Cordelia impatiently commands the Doctor to heal Lear's madness caused by filial betrayal:

“Cure this great breach in his abused nature!  
Th' untuned and jarring senses, O, wind up  
Of this child-changed father!” (Act 4, Scene 7).

Little wonder that by the conclusion of this tragic action, King Lear is very appreciative of Cordelia. Perhaps viewing all the assistance at the time he has been abandoned by the very people he had given all the kingdom as a manifestation of a child's redemption from earlier “mistake” of not pleasing the father during the love-contest.

The above shows clearly, how Shakespeare's depiction of Patriarchy through victimization of women. Just as the English society of Elizabethan era, Ugandan society women who have been victimized and exploited over the years. Cordelia continues to suffer violence imposed by men in the play, *King Lear*. For instance, it is important to note that much as she asks the husband, France, to call the French army for an English invasion so that Lear could return on his throne, it is ironic that she receives the most brutal of punishment of death by hanging—even when the English invasion is actually masterminded by France. Furthermore, Cordelia suffers due to the patriarchal victimization of women in an attempt to satisfy the chauvinistic ego. Therefore,

it can rightly be deduced that Cordelia suffers due to male victimization of women. Edmund, being male-chauvinistic, creates a confusion that ends into the murder of Lear's three daughters: Goneril and Regan kill each other over their lust and jealous for Edmund, while Edmund poisons Cordelia in prison to please his two lovers. In this regard, the dramatist portrays Cordelia as a virtuous woman whose confession of the father's love is genuine and not just mere flattery and greed driven like that of her sisters, Goneril and Regan. The numerous trials and tribulations that Cordelia encounters in the play, *King Lear*, are simply due to the patriarchal misjudgment of her true character and humanity—pure sincerity—which serves as a cautionary tale that sometimes virtue (goodness) may not triumph over evil (vice), as it may wrongly be punished. While her sisters' reward for the kingdom, despite their treacherous characters, serves as a reminder that vice (evil) may sometimes triumph over virtue. The Ugandan women in their quest for emancipation and gender equality must prepare to maneuver to challenge patriarchy but also avoid flattering the male ego in the quest for emancipation, which has disastrous effects.

### **2.3. Ophelia's Patriarchal Oppression in *Hamlet***

Ophelia, the daughter of Polonius and sister to Laertes, is another innocent Shakespearean female character consumed by the excesses of patriarchal English norms. In her mental disturbance, Ophelia cites "Rue" as one of the plants that were renown for easing pain, especially internally-felt discomfort, and although 'Rue' symbolically means regret, the flower-herb was used for treating pain, bruises and abortion. However, towards the end of the play, *Hamlet*, its inability to give comfort to a troubled-mind (as is the case of Ophelia due to unrequited affections for Hamlet) is indicative of the inevitability of Ophelia's tragic end. But what are the circumstances that lead to this situation? It all starts with Ophelia's innocent confession of her true love for Hamlet to both her father, Polonius, and brother, Laertes. Both father and sibling, however, sneer at the idea arguing that Hamlet would not marry Ophelia

because the former is socially-superior than the latter: that he (princes Hamlet) would just take Ophelia's virginity and throw it away. In saying this, their real concern is not Ophelia's future, but their honor of having a perpetual virgin daughter and sister respectively. In the minds of both Polonius and Laertes, and in the context of the strict English patriarchal code, Ophelia must preserve her sexual-purity (virginity) until the opportune moment of marriage and motherhood. Ironically, Polonius has another goal for protecting Ophelia's virginity. He has already made a proposition that Hamlet is mad because he is in love with Ophelia. Therefore, by ordering Ophelia to return the love letters to Hamlet, he wants Hamlet to go crazy so he (Polonius) may prove his theory to King Claudius. Hamlet truly loves Ophelia but because he is aware that Polonius is spying on him he pretends to be mad and Ophelia becomes the victim.

There is, definitely, substantial evidence in the play that demonstrates Hamlet's love for Ophelia, for instance, in the graveyard scene where the prince jumps into the grave, lamenting about Ophelia's death. In addition, queen Gertrude makes a praiseworthy and poetic announcement of the Ophelia's death, and her sprinkling of flowers on the grave of Ophelia, wishing that the dead maiden had married her son, Hamlet, is indicative of the fact that the prince was actually in love with Polonius' daughter, and that the relationship was probably impeded because of the strict demands and pressures that were hallmarks of both British patriarchy and royalty. Despite this and other evidences in the play, *Hamlet*, Ophelia implements her father's order of returning the love letters to Hamlet, and coincidentally, the letter falls into the wrathful hands of Hamlet. Hamlet, who is already angry with King Claudius and his spy, Polonius, vents his anger on Ophelia.

Ophelia's victimization by the excesses of English patriarchy echoes that of many a man in Uganda. First, men vent their anger on innocent wives when they get frustrated at places of work. Second, men are prejudiced against women in that when things go wrong, there is a

woman somewhere who is responsible. When Ophelia reports the matter to her father, she definitely expects at least some understanding, justice and even sympathy. All she receives, however, is a mere half-hearted apology from her father, Polonius, which is indicative of the prevailing male-centric biases and callousness against females, as is the case with Ugandan men whose patriarchal privileges have entitled them to think that whenever a man mistreats a woman, it is the woman who is at fault. Moreover, Polonius confirms this bias against women by extenuating Hamlet's mistreatment of Ophelia. In short, Polonius does not look beyond patriarchy and royalty, and he seems to suggest that the two did not have a place for a young woman like his daughter. Ophelia's situation confirms the triple victimization of women by men: Hamlet the lover makes her the punch bag, on the one hand, while her father and brother lack the understanding that Ophelia is a woman who has the right to marry a man she loves. The most important indicator of Ophelia's victimization is her death. Like King Lear, Ophelia dies of grief, only that hers is in a threefold: she initially suffers great psychological distress due to Hamlet's egocentricity; then excessively is emotionally strained by the death of her father, Polonius; and finally, the eventual descent into unmitigated evil by prince Hamlet add to her misery to the extent that she draws the reader's sympathy. Ophelia's tragic ending is simply an epitome of the complexities that befell young females, specifically, and women, generally, during the English renaissance period.

In essence, the play, *Hamlet*, offers an insightful dramatisation of the patriarchal intricacies of the English renaissance period in which a man's decision was incontrovertible, however oppressive it was to the female gender.

This is the sad reality that young females, like Ophelia, had to contend with—even when a woman, Queen Elizabeth I, was the enthroned monarch. Indeed, it was impossible to reconcile obedience to a parent and lover at the same time: patriarchal norms dictated a woman's choice, pretty much to the detriment of womenfolk. Hence, it can be argued that at all times, patriarchy

has been instituted over time to haunt the woman. If it's not from a father it's from a lover but a woman has many a time become a victim of this norm and the feminist activists in Uganda need to understand the Shakespeare women portrayal of women victims of patriarchy as a basis for the struggle for gender equality. Ophelia becomes a victim of patriarchy and end up losing her life because she was being confronted at all fronts from her father, brother and her lover, Hamlet. Men everywhere surrounded her and to flatter their ego, made her loose her sanity.

#### **2.4 Gertrude's Patriarchal Oppression in *Hamlet***

Queen Gertrude is another victim of the male ego perpetrated by a strict patriarchal code in Elizabethan English society. First she is victimized by Claudius who kills her husband and marries her even when the husband is hardly buried. Although her marriage to Claudius draws her son, Hamlet's disdain for her, it is fair to say that in such a rigidly patriarchal society, Gertrude had no option, except giving in to Claudius's advances, lest she (too) be killed. In act 3, Scene 4, King Claudius confesses that he cannot repent because he still loves Gertrude the object of his crime. By this statement, Claudius is reducing Gertrude to an object of pleasure. That is equivalent to victimization of a woman. Claudius no matter his appearance took on Gertrude as wife by trick because Gertrude as a woman pleased him. In act 3, Scene..., when Hamlet comes into his mother's bedroom, he attacks Gertrude for marrying Claudius whom he describes as a Satyr compared to his father, Hamlet 'senior', whom he likens with Helios Hyperion, a classical character who is supposed to be the god of the sun. He was handsome and perfect in every way. Claudius' male ego made him marry Gertrude, thus, victimizing her.

Gertrude is further victimized by her own son who uses very harsh and rude words to condemn and despise her for rushing to marry a "satyr" when he had a "Hyperion" for a husband before. Hamlet describes his mother as one with insatiable sexual appetite, echoing the age-old

patriarchal bias against women by castigating his own mother and all women as follows: “Let me not think on’t/frailty, thy name is woman-A little month, or ere those shoes were old/With which she followed my poor father’s body, / O most wicked speed, to post/With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!” (Act 1, Scene 2). But when one thinks about it, Gertrude did not have a choice but to marry Claudius. Hamlet’s invasion of his mother’s privacy by entering into her bedroom is based on the assumption that he is a man and can do anything. He torments his mother for having married Claudius whom he compares to a satyr, instead of King Hamlet, compared as the classical Helios Hyperion. Hamlet has the audacity to order his mother to abstain from sex and if she cannot she should assume holiness. As a woman under patriarchy, Gertrude has to endure all this nonsense. Patriarchal violence and victimization are allowed to take charge of a woman’s life. Hamlet even suggests that her mother would rather live without a husband or sex just to please his male ego. This is form of victimization and is common among many Ugandan young men who stop their mothers from marrying again after the demise of their husbands. Ugandans need to learn that this is a form of victimization. Queen Gertrude seems almost subdued into this male victimization as she even ponders on living a life that would merely please Hamlet, pretty much against her own wishes and desires.

Patriarchy makes Gertrude to passively accept what the men decide. For instance, when Claudius condemns Hamlet for continuing to wear “black” when the burial of his father is over, Gertrude does not say anything. When she learns about the plot to kill Hamlet, she does not use her power as queen to stop the plot; when she learns that Claudius is using Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to spy on Hamlet, she does not stop it. Instead, we hear her interchanging their names Guildenstern and Rosencrantz—she cannot tell one from the other. She finally loses her life in the act of pleasing men. In Act 5, Scene 2, Gertrude, thinking that the son would triumph in the sword-fight, drinks a poisoned toast that Claudius had prepared to have

Hamlet killed. Despite her husband's warning, Gertrude drinks from the poisoned chalice. It can, therefore, be argued that Gertrude dies for trying to flatter the male ego.

Through Gertrude and Ophelia, it suffices to contend that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* dramatizes how the male ego's victimization of women is often tragic. In his pursuit for revenge, Hamlet harasses his own mother by condemning her marriage to Claudius as foul incest. Also due to male ego he harasses Ophelia and thereafter kills her father, thus, leading to Ophelia's psychological depression—as she is overcome by both Hamlet's mental incapacitation and the death of a father that she so much loved, Polonius. In a complex web of trying to satisfy male ego and believing that it is normal for a woman to be victimized by the patriarchy, Gertrude dies in her desire to please her son, Hamlet. The Ugandan feminist activist needs to learn from the portrayal of these victimized women characters, male ego has to be tamed and women trained to avoid being victims of such circumstances.

## **2.5. Desdemona's Patriarchal Oppression in *Othello***

Desdemona is, perhaps, the most pitiable of all the female victims of English patriarchy in Shakespearean drama. Her natural tendency for true love and faithfulness is demonstrated by her unwavering affection for Othello, even when the latter resorts to the use of abusive language towards her. Through Desdemona's murder by her husband just because of jealousy, Shakespeare makes an indictment of the ruthless oppression of the English patriarchal structure to even the most devoted and loving of women. She is, therefore, dramatized as an inevitable victim of circumstance whose mettle and independence are, ironically, not enough to shield her from the jaws of the ego-centric and supremely entitled men around her. Conversely, Iago is dramatized as the quintessential Shakespearean villain, given the fervor with which he goes about the destruction of humanity. The complex nature of Iago is that others, such as Othello, Desdemona and Cassio even mistake him for an honest and straight-dealing person, yet underneath, he possesses unrivaled viciousness, hypocrisy and craftiness. Unfortunately,

Desdemona, ironically seeks his help about her marriage row (Act 4, Scene 2). In this scene we get knowledge of women victimization by patriarchy as Desdemona confides in Iago about her husband's mistreatment and jealousy attacks and her decision to keep her dear love unshaken.

Male victimization and violence become intense and Desdemona is determined to fight up to death. This is unacceptable for women to endure violence and victimization by the forces of patriarchy up to the point of death. Although Desdemona could be aware of her imminent death, she remains steadfast and willing to face her inevitable demise with sheer courage. She, for instance, requests her attendant, Emilia, to make her bed, and makes a personal appeal to her to be buried in her bridal sheets in case of death. Indeed, before she is killed in cold blood by her jealousy husband, Othello, Desdemona recites the "Willow Song" that she had learnt from Barbary, her mother's maid, which recounts the devastating cruelty from her lover and literally drove her to insanity and left her dead in lament. Although she is woman in grappling with the repressive patriarchal English code, Desdemona is not much shaken by her eminent death. She is only perplexed by the extent to which her husband, Othello, is driven to such rage (madness) on the mere ground of jealousy. In an admirable demonstration of courage and the virtuosity of womanhood, Desdemona maintains her unwavering love for Othello and reiterates her innocence at all her husband's accusations of infidelity. She, even forgives Othello, perhaps hoping that differences can be sorted. Her forgiveness of Othello makes her an icon of pure love, who despite her husband's ill judgment, her nobility is manifested in that love that transcends to and beyond the metaphysical world.

It can, therefore, be argued that Shakespeare's dramatization of Desdemona, especially her unwavering love and courage, despite the patriarchal-instituted precarious life that she leads up to her eventual demise, is a challenge to the contemporary feminist society. As a charmingly beautiful young female in a predominantly male-world, she is a battleground for male suitors,

and her father takes the patriarchal responsibility of dictating her life—under the guise of parenthood. She, however, is equally depicted as being astute enough to realise the oppressive nature of patriarchy, and her decision to defy her father's dictates by going for Othello, the man she genuinely loves, remains admirable. Modern feminists would definitely admire her for defiance, but her response to Othello—her tenderness and obedience, coupled with fidelity to the marriage bond and true love—manifest her tender-heartedness and unwavering empathy that enable her to forgive her misled husband. The modern feminist would, therefore, find her a challenging, but compelling woman with a lot to offer as lessons for the quest for gender equality and emancipation in contemporary Uganda.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

Although he has been at the receiving end of heavy condemnation from overzealous gender activists, William Shakespeare should also be applauded for his faithful depiction of the devastating effects of the unrestrained male dominance over their female counterparts, despite the fact that a woman, Queen Elizabeth I, was the monarch on the English throne. The selected literary texts, in a way, castigate the gross inequalities between men and women due to a strict patriarchal system that sustained the repression of all women, irrespective of where they were born. Moreover, Shakespeare depicts patriarchy as so ruthless in its oppression of women that even the well-intentioned ones are not spared.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SHAKESPEAREAN WOMEN AS CHALLENGERS OF PATRIARCHY

#### 3.1 Introduction

As has already been highlighted in the sub-section, “Definition of Key Terms”, patriarchy gives males (men and boys) unmerited privileges that culminate into an unequal social-structure that perpetrate the subjugation of the members from the female gender—women and girls, as well as those who do not want to conform to any of the two mainstream genders. Important to stress, however, is that in as much as the word, Patriarchy (especially in its conventional usage), promptly presupposes male-supremacy, on one hand, and women subjugation, quite on the other, the patriarchal system has always been broad-based and complex. As Chapter 2 has already stressed, severe violence against women due to gender inequality was one of the major issues of the renaissance English society that has stretched to the contemporary global society, generally, and the Ugandan society, specifically.

However, it is important to note that although the selected Shakespearean drama texts depict numerous instances of patriarchal-led oppression of women. These women suffered silently, and some die due to the excesses of gender inequality. The selected Shakespearean plays also reveal instances in which English women dared to challenge such a repressive social system by dramatizing two categories of women who acted as controllers of men’s lives: on one hand, there are awfully terrible women whose influence on men is disastrous and yielding negative results, such as, the Three Witches and Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*, and Goneril and Regan in *King Lear*. In contrast, there are good ‘controllers’ whose influence yields positive changes in men. These include, Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*; Portia and Calpurnia in *Julius Caesar*, and Viola and Olivia in *Twelfth Night*. These prototypes of Elizabethan women offer many lessons that Ugandan activists for gender equality and women emancipation can refer to in their

quest for women empowerment. The lessons to be drawn from the discussion of the above selected women form an argument for Shakespeare's relevance to Uganda with regard to the struggle for gender equality.

Utley, Tom. *It is a fact that women are much more controlling than men*, runs the argument that male supremacy is a social-construct, and that the world has always been "bossed" by women, including in societies, which are presumed to traditionally appropriate submissive responsibilities to females. Citing the biblical story in which Eve listens to the serpent and contravenes God's instructions and orders by eating the "forbidden fruit" and thereafter ordering her husband, Adam, to also eat the fruit, to his own personal experience at home, a whooping thirty-eight years in marriage, he views women as being more authoritative (powerful), bossy and controlling over their male counterparts, especially husbands, and strangely fathers. Women, for instance, Utley contends further, dictate the dress codes of their husbands, and daughters back at (order) their fathers for ice-creams and other sweet goodies that children love. Accordingly, although men appear to control the world, the real controllers are women. Hence, he dismisses the notions of sexual equality and the allegations of male supremacy being merely social constructs, and that women are the archetypal controllers of the world. This chapter, therefore, offers an examination of the various instances in which Shakespeare use his plays to depict female personages challenge the repressive English patriarchal system by controlling males, and this is dramatized in a twofold: women as bad-controllers, and good controllers of men.

### **3.2 The Three Witches as Controllers of Men in *Macbeth***

Albright, Daniel. *The Witches and the Witch: Verdi's Macbeth*. Offers a compelling view about "witches" by discussing the context in which the play, *Macbeth*, was written and published. Accordingly, after the demise of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603, a new monarch, King James VI of Scotland ascended to the English throne as King James I. The new King was very

passionate about and keenly grounded in witchcraft as his publication, *Deamonologie*, demonstrates. Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* in 1606 as a literary commemoration of the new king's ascension to the English throne—no wonder, therefore, of the inclusion of certain aspects of the new leader's favorite subject, "Witches". Daniel views witches as ordinary poor old women with insatiable greed and always yearning for revenge that they are in league with the devil (Satan) so that they can achieve whatever they crave for. The witches in *Macbeth* are however, viewed in a twofold dimension: they are either despicably malicious old women, or outright agents of the devil (Satan) whose very appearance, especially their possession of beards, is so perplexing to even the tragic hero, Macbeth, himself.

Important to note also is that the three witches in *Macbeth* are given numerous descriptions in line with their mysterious nature: they are, for instance, also known as the 'weird sisters', 'wayward sisters', "servants of Hecate", and the "three black and midnight hags". In general terms, they represent the tendency of women to be bad controllers of men's lives, almost in resonance with the 'Three Fates' (Furies) of the classical period. Although multiple factors arguably account for the tragic end of Macbeth, the role of the three witches cannot be side-stepped when analyzing the protagonist's tragedy. Macbeth first encounter with the witches is after winning the battle, giving a prediction that he would be thane of Cowdar, and king thereafter. Macbeth stands wrapped up in thought as soon as he received this poisonous message that he would one day become a king. His companion, General Banquo, would beget kings. When the first prophesy comes to pass, Macbeth seriously begins to consider usurping the throne of Scotland before even his wife urges him to do so. Little wonder, therefore, that as soon as King Duncan assigns Malcolm as Cumberland's new prince, and by extension, his successor, Macbeth reveals (through an aside) that he has to use the fastest means to get to the throne, or else he will never be king. Hence, it suffices to argue that the witches, sort of set a spider's web in which Macbeth is entrapped and never to get out. Rather than directly tell

Macbeth to kill the king, the witches subtly tempt him in their seeming prophecy that he is destined to be the next king. He develops vaunting ambition for the throne and in pursuit of this kingly ambition, he (unfortunately) undertakes mission that leaves him utterly decimated. In respect to what the three witches lure Macbeth into and the devastating outcome of their temptation for Macbeth, it can be deduced that the witches in *Macbeth* are presented as the devil-incarnate that whose lures prove too catastrophic for humanity.

The witches, further, served as an important role in the downfall of Macbeth by their equivocation. In Act 4, Scene 1, when Macbeth consults the witches about the tenure of his position, as king, the witches confuse him with prevarication. First, they bid him be “aware of Macduff”, which Macbeth has already assumed. So he pays no attention to that bit. Secondly, the witches assure, or rather give Macbeth false hope of his invincibility in combat before any mortal (man), a puzzle that the power-desperate Macbeth remarkably fails to construe. Lastly, the witches say, “Macbeth cannot be defeated until Great Birnam Wood moves to Dunsinane Hill” (Act 4 scene ll.90-94). This is next to impossible as no forest has ever moved, Macbeth takes the message at face value, thinking the false prophesy makes him indestructible. Consequently, he starts killing whoever comes in opposition to him. However, Macbeth learns, to his dismay that Macduff and Malcolm were on their way to wrestle against him. When in the first fight Macbeth fights and kills Milward, the incidence fulfills the witches’ prophecies that none born of a woman will ever destroy Macbeth. However, Macbeth learns later, perhaps too late, that Macduff’s birth through a cesarean section equivocally differentiates him from normal child birth (delivery), and his eventual defeat by Macduff offers the bizarre fulfilment of the witches’ prophecies. Macduff beheads Macbeth at the time he least expects because he is still hanging on the false prophecies of the women. Strong as he is, Macbeth fails to see through the equivocation of the women. The witches’ influence on Macbeth is a typical example of how women can have a skillset for controlling the life of men through their subtlety. This

Shakespearean choice of characters who direct and control the lives of men, through their words, provides an eye opener to the Ugandans. Women have the potential, they just have to utilize women power of the tongue to control and influence the choices and decisions of men in society.

### **3.3 Lady Macbeth in Macbeth**

Lady Macbeth is the wife of protagonist, Macbeth, and her motives and actions offer as another example of a woman's control over a man, quite contrary to how women in Elizabethan England were expected to behave under patriarchy. Although it was uncommon that women would help their husbands to attain power, Lady Macbeth defies this old age patriarchal view by bizarrely engaging in a series of actions that ultimately lure her husband, Macbeth, to execute Duncan in bid for the throne. Through Lady Macbeth's manipulation of her husband and the disastrous consequences of such manipulations demonstrate the evil power that women possess, especially if they decide to achieve a mission. Such a Shakespearean presentation of Lady Macbeth would make an interesting call for all women and gender activists in Uganda to embrace the zeal and courage portrayed by Macbeth as she is generally depicted to have used her feminine charm and sexuality to seduce and influence her husband to undertake such a mission. Perhaps she is right about Macbeth's lack of the courage to achieve goals at all costs. Indeed, without her urgings, the tragedy would have probably taken a different dimension.

Although Lady Macbeth is a villain, she, nonetheless stands out as one of Shakespeare's inspirational female characters in as far the activism for women emancipation in a predominantly patriarchal society is concerned. She is depicted as an unwavering woman in her pursuit of her goals. In Act 1, Scene 7, when Macbeth finally agrees to kill King Duncan, but is not sure of his success, Lady Macbeth advises him to "screw up his courage to the sticking point", that way he would not fail. Her dauntless nature is seen in her determination beyond any reasonable argument. For instance, in Act 1, Scene 7, Macbeth declines from

killing Duncan, giving lofty reasons like: he (Macbeth) is the host, so he cannot kill his guest. Moreover, Duncan has no fault that merits being killed. But Lady Macbeth, lion-hearted woman, outwits him by using many methods. First, she absolutely ignores her husband's awe-inspiring arguments for not killing Duncan. Second, she challenges his manhood by reducing him to a "no man" if he refuses to kill Duncan. In Act 1, Scene 7, when Macbeth hesitates, equivocates and falters about executing the king (Duncan) in order to get the throne, Lady Macbeth mocks Macbeth as a coward who always has ambition for the kingship, but does not have the courage to win what his heart desires. Lady Macbeth uses mockery to steer her husband, Macbeth, into action and fulfill her ambition to have him crowned king. She compares her husband to a proverbial cat to explain Macbeth's situation. For instance, just as the cat that wanted to eat fish but did not want to make its feet wet so is Macbeth: he wants to be king, yet he does not want his hands to be bloody by seizing the quickest means. Macbeth counters the challenge on his manhood with yet a higher argument,

"I dare do whatever becomes a man /He who dare do more is no man." (Act 1 scene 7)

By this lofty argument, Macbeth says killing Duncan does not make him a man. It is being human to fellow human being that makes one powerful. Lofty as the argument, Lady Macbeth ignores it and instead launches another assault. She asserts that she is so resolute that she would kill her own child for the sake of her ambition, an assertion that obviously stirs the general into action. It propels Macbeth to eat his own good reasons for not killing Duncan and resolves to execute the murder.

Shakespeare portrays Lady Macbeth as an ambitious woman who has no limits when it comes to taking control of her husband and influencing the course of events. The comparison she makes is too bizarre for an ordinary woman whose ambition goes beyond the mother's love for her child. She is too determined to the extent of being capable of killing her own child to

achieve her ambition. This overwhelming ambition, bizarre as it may be, is what makes her inspirational to Ugandan women who often fail in their quest and pursuit of their goals. However, for all her inspirational character traits and exceptional strength, Lady Macbeth's ambition eventually becomes an illusion. She is isolated by her husband who before described her as "my dearest partner in greatness" when Macbeth plans to kill Banquo, his wife does not get to know. When he goes to the weird sisters to consult about the longevity of his tenure as king, his wife does not get the details and when he returns again his wife is left out of the plan.

Furthermore, Lady Macbeth develops a strange disease called insomnia due to psychological guilt for shedding innocent blood. She walks in her sleep and is unable to control her secrets. Lady Macbeth lacks the will-power to continue living. She becomes a nervous wreck who experiences nightmares on a daily basis and eventually commits suicide. It can, therefore, be inferred from this set of circumstances that too much ambition kills. In this regard, this Shakespearean play has a lot of relevance to the Ugandan feminist activists by depicting women who screw up their courage to accomplish their ambitions but warns the fact that excess ambition kills. Lady Macbeth is determined, firm, manipulative, provocative, critical and like the witches, she is eloquent, albeit to a dead end, and by the end of the play, Shakespeare shows that Lady Macbeth is one of the female characters not to be admired at all. No sooner had her husband ascended on the throne than she started wrecking, all for "daring to be more than a man".

### **3.4 Goneril and Regan as Controllers of Men (Husbands)**

In *King Lear*, Goneril and Regan are Lear's daughters who excel in their flattery of their father during the love contest and are rewarded with the kingdom, including the opulent portion that was initially meant for Cordelia. In essence, *King Lear* dramatizes the folly of stooping to flattery and pride. Burdened by old age and aware that death would strike any time soon, Lear,

the fictitious king of Britain, decides to divide his kingdom among his three daughters, Goneril, Regan and Cordelia. Instead of dividing the kingdom in a rational way, the king intended to give the biggest portion of the kingdom to the one who professed the highest level of love for him. This is also strange in that it is evident that he liked Cordelia more than the other two daughters, and the more “opulent” share of the kingdom had been reserved for her, anyway, invalidating the so-called love-test right from its very conception.

Both Goneril and Regan are married women who control both their father and husbands (and lover). In Act 1, Scene 1, they control their father by predicting his male ego, given that Lear is an old king. In this scene Lear confesses he is “every inch a king.” When they learn that the criteria for getting the best parts of his kingdom is declaration of their love for the father through flattery, they are quick to pick the tip and flatter the old man’s ego beyond compare. Regan confesses in the same way, after hearing the confession of love by Goneril, she even doubles the flattery to Cordelia’s dismay who sees through the insincere speeches given that the two elder sisters have husbands (Albany and Cornwall) to love, too. Lear, won over by this confession, loses his senses. Under their control he even disinherits and even banishes his once beloved daughter, Cordelia. But gives away the best parts of the kingdom and in addition gives them what he had preserved for Cordelia. His loyal palace aide, Kent, tries to advise Lear against the move, but Lear tells him not to intervene in his kingly affairs. Lear does not listen to, or heed any advice, and this makes him very easy to be controlled by his two pelican daughters, Goneril and Regan.

As soon as the two pelican daughters get their thrones through flatter and deceit, they control Lear beyond his liking, and proving to Lear the morally unscrupulous (Machiavellian) adage that the end justifies the means: they had confessed their love to him to get the throne and now that they are there, they can show their true colours. The two daughters rudely recommend that

Lear reduce his train, a symbol of his power, a decision hurts the power-conscious Lear to the bone because the bigger the train, the greater the power. As if that is not even enough, the two daughter imprison Lear's messenger, Kent, in the stocks. This is equivalent to putting Lear himself in prison. Finally, the two daughters send their father in a raging storm. No wonder this deranges him. In his madness, he recites the ingratitude of his girls to whom he had given all. The daughters do not only control Lear, but also control his men. For instance, on hearing that Gloucester has helped King Lear to escape to France, the two daughters order the cruelest of punishments for Gloucester and to be done by beloved son, Edmund. Gloucester loses his sight on Goneril's order to have his eyes taken out as an example to other people to stop them from helping Lear.

It, should, however, be argued that despite Goneril's and Regan's cruelty towards different characters throughout the entire action, Lear himself is not a saintly-victim, either. As a king and parent, he spectacularly fails to create a good relationship between himself and his children, and instead chose (unwittingly, though) to engage in a very divisive act of a love competition in which the daughters become rivals in the pursuit of their father's favour. The daughters, Goneril and Regan, are depicted as controllers of the patriarchy and male chauvinism exhibited by King Lear, but more importantly, they are challengers of the social norms. Much as King Lear, to a larger extent, deserved what happened to him for raising a dysfunctional family except for Cordelia, the modern feminist has inspiration from inversed role the women assume to challenge the social norms in the quest for gender equality.

### **3.5 Women as Good Controllers of Men**

Whereas Lady Macbeth and the Three Witches represent Shakespearean female character portrayal of bad influence, the other category of men-controllers, such as Portia, Portia, Viola

and Desdemona, are good. They are rich, independent, intelligent and loving. In this regard, they use their potential to make their husbands and lovers better people.

### **3.5.1 Portia in *the Merchant of Venice***

In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia is depicted as a good controller of men's sphere of life. She is portrayed as a good, strong-willed and courageous woman, capable of pulling strings in a patriarchal society. For instance, she helps men around her, Antonio and Bassanio, using her intelligent maneuvers around the crisis that these men are faced with. Bassanio is a handsome, but penniless man because of his spendthrift tendencies. He plans to marry for two major reasons: to improve his economic status, as well as to earn himself a beautiful wife. Portia's intelligence is exhibited in her ability to circumvent her father's will to help Bassanio to pick the right casket without necessarily going against her father's will. In Act 3, Scene 2, when Bassanio comes to pick the casket, Portia makes a statement which suggests to Bassanio how to interpret the inscriptions on the caskets. It must be noted that, although, she does not violate the father's order, she finds a way of getting herself the right husband and the one she loves. This means that Portia is a strong woman who manages to do a task that is presumably left for the men and male children. She sets her record straight that against all odds, she will manage just like the men or even better. From the onset she poses a serious lesson and challenge to most Ugandan women who think that a woman needs to marry in order to manage her resources well. She shows her abilities and courage as an orphaned daughter. Moreover, she is on her own, fatherless and without a brother to offer assistance in such an intricate affair. She, therefore, has to be everything, including performing the roles and duties that would be traditionally ascribed to males so that the wealth left behind for her after the death of her father is effectively managed.

In another shocking encounter, Portia exercises her true unfaltering loyalty and wisdom by insisting on the method and style set by her father to choose a suitor. For instance: Much as it was her father's will to have the daughter's suitors go through a rigorous test to determine whether the suitors actually had true love for her daughter, or just opportunists who were just trying to take advantage of her wealthy inheritance. Although the men who come from very various corners of the world to woo her seem very wealthy and powerful, they nonetheless have to undertake the test by ensuring that they have chosen the right casket containing the authorization to marry Portia. It is from this background that those suitors were interested in her wealth lost the contest to the genuine suitor. This is a very big challenge to the average Ugandan young women who choose to elope with men against their fathers will that there is more luck in the parents' blessings than simply following lustful emotions of the adolescence.

Portia again, in a striking execution and practice of her intelligence and wisdom, disguises as a judge at the very time when one is required by the Duke of Venice to investigate Shylock's case against Antonio. Shylock insists on getting his revenge by cutting a pound of flesh from Antonio's heart since he has failed to return the money he borrowed from Shylock. After all, calls and pleas, to make Shylock forgive Antonio or double his interest, fall on deaf ears, Portia, in disguise as a young judge, steps forward and demonstrates commendable legal expertise that eventually acquits Antonio, and by extension saves his life. In Act 4, Scene 1, Portia allows Shylock to get the pound of flesh from the place near Antonio's heart. He is to do so in the name of justice. However, he tells Shylock that he must cut the pound of flesh one and it must not contain the blood. This is so because the agreement/bond did not mention blood and it spelt out a pound of flesh, no more no less. Portia is saying in this quotation from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* that Shylock will not receive his principal amount of money, but just the forfeiture, which is the punishment for failing to comply with the conditions of the loan agreement. She also tells Shylock that he will face terrible consequences or "peril"

if he does not agree to the stipulations. In her disguise as a male judge, dazzles with great wisdom in her handling of the case against Antonio to the admiration of all those around her, albeit unaware that she is a woman. In a real sense, she exercises power over everyone present and everyone is surprised by the caliber of a wise young “handsome” judge that she is. She saves Antonio’s life, rewards Jessica who had been disinherited and proves to everyone that revenge is futile. She defies and challenges patriarchy. She is depicted as a challenger of men and a controller of men’s lives. She challenges the feminists with her inspirational traits and calls upon them to go an extra mile and make sure that one uses intellect to save society from the excesses of human behavior. Shakespeare seems ageless to the modern society and the Uganda feminist society has a lot to learn from his portrayal of Portia. The feminist in Uganda can draw inspiration from such a woman.

### **3.5.2 Portia in *Julius Caesar***

Born in an aristocratic family (daughter of a patrician), Portia is the wife to Brutus, an ancient Roman legislator. Although the strict patriarchal code of the time demanded that women maintain a low status in society, women like Portia, by virtue of their noble-birth and marriage to men of a high social stature like Brutus, had the privilege and influence on matters in society. She is depicted as a woman who dares to control her husband Brutus and have an influence in matters that troubled her husband. She appeals to all charm and sexual prowess to the extent of inflicting pain on her body just to win her husband’s trust, albeit sometimes in vain.

Act 2, Scene 1 occurs at Brutus’s house in the middle of the night. Brutus decides to participate in the assassination of Caesar, and the other conspirators arrive to plan the assassination. Eventually, everyone, but Brutus leaves. Portia then enters, and although advised to get back to bed, given her fragile health conditions lately, she is persuasive enough to her husband stay. Kneeling down, she cunningly entreats Brutus to tell her what if there was something bothering him, arguing that she had noticed a sudden change in her husband’s recent state of mind. She

asks if he thinks it is proper that she knows nothing, and demands to know the secrets that bother her husband lately. Her demand to know about what could be bothering Brutus is essentially a scheme to have a stake (say) in Brutus' affairs, and cunningly asks why Brutus treats her more as a harlot, instead of a wife. Detailing how she has always been there for the husband, especially by revealing the self-inflicted act of stoicism by having a wound on one of her thighs which she never revealed to any other person, except Brutus, who falls to the wife's craftiness and reveals all that is going on between Brutus, Caesar and the other senators.

Worth noting also is that Portia's power comes also from her eloquence in speech. In the aforementioned dialogue with her husband, Brutus, she manipulates the husband into revealing all his secrets to her, calling herself as being so dear to Brutus that she would do anything for him, including guarding the secret. She acknowledges that being a woman gives her an inferior societal status to Brutus, but also reminds him of her constancy, and stabs herself in the leg to prove it—to which Brutus expresses gratitude to the Roman gods for having given him such a noble wife. On hearing a knock on the door, he commissions Portia to go in, promising that he would tell her his secrets later. Perhaps the women activists in Uganda should master such vigor and courage as Portia in their bid to change the status quo and confront the challenges they face in their attempt to exert themselves in a patriarchal society. Insisting that she is disturbed by her husband's situation and demanding to fully be told what was wrong so that she could offer help and support the husband, Portia is simply hiding under submissiveness to the husband so that she can have an equal say in their marriage.

In Act 2, Scene 4, Portia has an emissary sent to the senate to keep an eye on both her husband and Caesar and report back to her. She also interacts with the Soothsayer who tried to warn Caesar of the "Ides of March". She interests herself in finding out whether Caesar has gone to the senate and if the soothsayer is aware of any impending harm to Caesar. She once again curses her position in society and hopes that Brutus will succeed at his enterprise. Although

Portia does not appear again in the play, Brutus later tells Cassius of his wife's death by suicide because he (Brutus) had taken so long to return back to her at home, and also due to the much political clout that both Mark Antony and Octavius had garnered. Therefore, Portia's primary role, both in the play and in the Roman society, is being Brutus' wife. Brutus and Portia are portrayed as having a very loving and loyal marriage. In particular, Portia's loyalty to her husband is unquestionable throughout the play. Portia's loyalty to her husband may explain both his hesitation to participate in the assassination, knowing that it could negatively affect her, and also his decision to go through with it, knowing that she will be loyal no matter what. Brutus states that he does not feel worthy of Portia in Act 2, Scene 1.

However, in spite of the love and loyalty between Portia and Brutus, there is a notable difference in their behavior. Portia prioritizes Brutus over everything else; Brutus prioritizes politics over Portia. For instance, after the successful assassination of Caesar, Brutus does not return to his wife, Portia, choosing, instead, to build a strong military that would be used against Mark Antony and Octavius. Suffice to opine, therefore, that if Portia was Brutus' top priority, he might not have left her, and he might not have participated in the assassination of Caesar at all. Portia's eventual suicide is attributed to her unrequited affection for Brutus who seems preoccupied by power and not love. The argument is based on the fact that Portia is depicted as a tough woman against all odds. The feminist struggle that the Ugandan women need to embrace is the tough approach amidst challenges they face in a male dominated society. The feminist activists in Uganda need to stand out and challenge the gender related challenges. Portia is depicted as intelligent and inquisitive in matters of her relationship with Brutus. It is not that she just wants to control Brutus but at least she needs to be in charge of her husband's life. Shakespeare challenges the women in Uganda to be vigilant and keen on their pursuit for gender equality and also in exercising their gender roles and responsibilities. Therefore, Portia, in *Julius Caesar*, is a big inspiration to all feminists in their attempt to challenge the odds to

pursue their ideals and beliefs against all odds. She inspires women to have a men's heart in feminine body.

### **3.5.3 Juliet and the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet***

Juliet and her nurse are two women that challenge patriarchy. Juliet is expected to accept a marriage arrangement with Paris; however, she plans a marriage arrangement with Romeo, the true love of her life. She even plans to escape with him even if the plan flops. When she finds Romeo dead, she shows her commitment by taking her own life. It is important to note that prior to her marriage, Juliet had vehemently rejected her parent's idea by marrying a man of her choice. Her hungry father insults her, calling her a "young baggage!" and a "disobedient wretch!" Juliet's nurse also equally challenges patriarchy by answering back to Juliet's father in defense of Juliet. She says that the father is to blame for neglecting his daughter. This was out of order for a maid to challenge her boss on his roles. The fact that Juliet dies in the process of defying the patriarchal dictate that a girl has no say in the choice of a spouse, and yet such a death spurs a reconciliation between the Montagues and Capulets is testament of how female protest against patriarchal oppression can lead to social harmony and cohesion. Ugandan women can build a foundation from Juliet's and her nurse's defiance, albeit with tragic consequences, to challenge the norms of patriarchy with serious resilience.

### **3.5.4 Emilia and Desdemona in *Othello***

Although the two are pretty much different in terms of social status, with Desdemona being a gentle woman, and Emilia being an attendant of the former, the two embody an unrivaled friendship between females, augmented by a shared experience of male abuse and violence in a predominantly male-centric society, which can only be contrasted with the friendship between the men in the play. Both Desdemona and Emilia challenge the norms of patriarchy

in *Othello* through their spirited fight and a steep challenge to gender roles and patriarchy, although with devastating consequences. For instance, Desdemona defies against her father by choosing Othello, a moor, for a marriage partner, much to the chagrin of her father. And Emilia offers numerous advice to Desdemona, especially, her insistence that the latter should rid herself of the idealistic view about life, generally, and marriage, specifically, in a society where men are entitled to dictate proceedings. Even though her death becomes imminent, she remains courageous and bravely tells her Othello of her fidelity and innocence of all the false charges of infidelity that Iago had hatched to set the pair on a serious collision path. Her decision to allow Othello to kill her without much struggle shows her utmost courage and self-sacrifice even in the face of death. This is a very strong and motivating virtue to majority women who lack the courage to confront situations. This is how Shakespeare's tragic heroine, Desdemona, is particularly portrayed as resilient, but vulnerable to the patriarchal oppression of the time.

Even before her death in cold blood, Desdemona is depicted as grappling with a lot violence from her husband, Othello. The husband has no respect for her and treats her almost as her property, and in great distress about her marital predicament, she ironically turns to crafty Iago hoping for help and counsel, unaware that the Iago is very cause of all her trials and tribulations in marriage. Desdemona's tragic end is an embodiment of the unfairness of patriarchy in which well-intentioned and pure women were always victims of the prevailing sexism and male-ego. The oppression of women also manifested in the verbal and degrading comments from Othello to Desdemona, such as calling her "strumpet" and "whore". It is sad that Desdemona's brutal murder does not vindicate her tough and resolute and brave arguments in defence of her chosen husband, Othello, against her raging father who heavily ostracizes her for such a disagreeable choice. Despite her tragic end, her resilience and courage to question the norms of English patriarchy is admirable. She is, therefore, a great inspiration to women grappling with unmitigated abuse and violence in a relationship.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

Although the English society of the Elizabethan period that the selected drama texts present was predominantly patriarchal, characterized by misogyny and male bigotry that oppressed women, Shakespeare also presents women who dared to confront the unfair patriarchal dictates that sustained the captivity of womenfolk. These women are presented in two ways: there are women, such as Lady Macbeth and Lear's two "pelican" daughters, Goneril and Regan, whose infuriation by the oppressive regime of patriarchy developed in them the steel of monstrosity to humanity in their pursuit of survival. The other category of women includes those with good intentions for their emancipation drive. These include Ophelia, Desdemona and Emilia who remain exceptionally well-intentioned, even though their virtuosity is repaid. Shakespeare also depicts matriarchy as another form of patriarchy that is equally bad. Therefore the contemporary Ugandan gender emancipation activist needs to avoid excesses of gender activism that would create matriarchy as another form of male subjugation.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### KEY LESSONS FOR UGANDAN ACTIVISM FOR WOMAN EMANCIPATION

#### 4.1 Introduction

The fifth objective of this study is to discern the key lessons that activists for gender equality and emancipation in contemporary Uganda could learn from the Shakespearean representation of the three categories of women in the selected drama texts. Although Shakespeare may not be called a feminist in the modern sense of the word, he was, nonetheless, a humanist writer who glorified humanity as the sublime creation. It is also natural that as a writer he could not have escaped the biases of his time, the influence of his age and social milieu. Hence, in as much as the plays offer a faithful reflection of the socio-cultural environment of the English society of his time, he also, in many instances, able to rise above the injustices of the time and protest some of the excesses of patriarchy and matriarchy of his time which sustained gender inequality and oppression to humanity, especially women. The selected drama takes are, therefore, vital guide-books that offer important lessons on how contemporary patriarchy and gender inequality can be confronted in the quest for emancipation. As the previous chapters have highlighted, the study argues that each different category of Elizabethan women have a lesson to offer in one way or the other as presented before.

Cuddon, J.A. *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, defines a lesson as an insight gained by a learner into previously unfamiliar subject-matter. Such a lesson can either be planned or accidental, enjoyable or painful. The contemporary Ugandan society, like the rest of the world, is today preoccupied with gender issues. Unaware that women are human beings just as they are, the men act as though they were the owners of the world and women are their subjects, thwarting the women's freedom, including their right to exist. Similarly, the women

in their demand for their rights tend to forget that men are human beings as well. The women focus so much on the victimization and retaliate by exacting excessive control over the men. Women rightfully seek to be independent persons or human beings but in the process of liberating themselves and in revenging some women vilify the men. Ugandan women Literature is awash with cases of vindication against men as well as vilification of men. According to Nimavat, Sunita B. *Shakespeare's Concern about Women: Feminist Perspectives in Shakespeare's Plays*. It is stated by this scholar that Shakespeare, in his representation of human society he left no aspect of human existence untouched. It further notes that Shakespeare's greatness lies in the fact that he left no subject untouched. His plays reflect all the issues and perspectives of the contemporary England and the world in general. Shakespeare has relevance to this hot subject of the modern world and scholars could find a lot of information pertaining to gender studies.

Shakespearean contribution to feminist concerns are reflected in his drama and manifested by the female characters; Lady Macbeth and The three witches, in *Macbeth*, Olivia, Viola and Maria in *Twelfth Night*, Ophelia, in *Hamlet*, Portia, in *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia in *Julius Caesar*, Desdemona in *Othello*. The plays cited above portray strong evidence of the dramatist condemnation of patriarchal domination as well as an emerging protest against it.

Dusinbere, Juliet. *Shakespeare and the Nature of women*, argues that feminist militancy started during the Elizabethan period when women put on men's clothes as protests against patriarchy and male supremacy. Considering the overwhelming evidence of condemnation of patriarchy one can argue that perhaps Shakespeare foresaw the emerging feminist ideology and took side with fighters for gender equality.

Zerar, Sabrina. *William Shakespeare: Patriarchal faces Feminist Faces*. Contends that in Shakespeare, we find his ambivalent attitude towards gender and gender bias. He catered to the needs of his contemporary audience and therefore could not openly crusade against patriarchal

domination. However, there are red signals of resistance against domination of men over women. There is a clear cut paradigm shift in his attitude towards women as we move from his society, men were often influenced by women- mother, grandmother, sister, wife or daughter. Freedom of expression, choice and feminist protest of male dominance and patriarchal supremacy is strongly condemned by William Shakespeare.

Kumari, Rekha. *A Critical Study of Women Portrayed in Shakespearian Plays*. Notes that Shakespeare's powerful women characters display their inner strength, intelligence, rational attitude and pragmatic approach to problems of life. Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*, Beatrice in *Much ado about Nothing*, Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Viola in *Twelfth Night*, Hermia in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can be cited as examples of women of substance in one way or the other way. Rani, Ritu. *Female Characters in Shakespearean Tragedies*. In this journal, it is noted that Shakespeare is the writer who made his writings transparent and free of any personal vices for delineating the women characters in his tragedies. Shakespeare with his extraordinary genius for portraying human behavior depicts the condition of women in a patriarchal society and his women characters who in their richness, transcend the limitations of time and Shakespearean theme becomes timeless. Considering the classification of Shakespearean women showed above chapters, each Ugandan woman finds a category where they belong: the maneuvers and challenges these women faced in each category are the lessons for the Uganda feminist society as follows bellow.

#### **4.2 Categories of Women in the Selected Shakespearean Drama Texts**

The above categories of women as presented by Shakespeare portray and depict a sample society for women of Elizabethan model of women in society.

Johnson, Samuel. *Miscellaneous Observations on the Tragedy of Macbeth*. Notes that Shakespeare held up to his readers a 'faithful mirror of manners and of life. Besides the contemporary society finds a lot of relevance in Shakespeare as well as historical society since Shakespeare was referred to as an ageless play wright. The most victims of patriarchy include; the falsely accused women and the Tragic Innocent Woman: a pure woman who tragically dies once her innocence is lost. These include, Cordelia, Desdemona, Emilia and Ophelia. The controllers of men's lives include the Scheming Fatal Female (femme fatale), an attractive and seductive but ultimately dangerous woman, who manipulates men only to die a fatal death and the intelligent/witty/cunning and manipulative women. These include, Lady Macbeth and The three witches in *Macbeth*, These have negatively impacted on the men around them and their influence is disastrous, while Portia, in *The Merchant of Venice* and Rosalind, in *As You Like It*, and Calpurnia in *Julius Caesar*, positively impact on the men around them and their control was aimed to solve the impasse and crisis that the society where they lived was faced.

The last category according to this research are the challengers of the norms of patriarchy; the women in this category include the women who dress as men or disguise as men to maneuver the forces of Patriarchy. The intelligent/witty /cunning and manipulative women. The bawdy women who are single- un married and control their time all fall under this category of challengers of patriarchy. These include; Goneril and Regan in *King Lear*, Juliet and her nurse, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Olivia, viola and Maria in *Twelfth Night*, Portia, in *The Merchant of Venice*. These women supersede the expectations of Shakespeare's Elizabethan model of women in society. We see some influential, sometimes scandalous, women who set tongues wagging. They sometimes have political influence behind the scenes, working on their husbands to bring about some political result. The aberrant Shakespearean woman defy the odds of an ordinary woman often challenging the patriarchal ideal. All the above categories

of women form a basis for a variety of lessons that the Ugandan feminist activists can make parallels and draw inspiration from.

Whatever the category of women Shakespeare presented, whether considered good, submissive and subservient or challenging the patriarchal ideal breaking away from this stereotype designed by patriarchy and those who refusing to marry, seek freedom from binds of purity and chastity set by their fathers, or take it one step further and dress as a man for greater opportunities—Shakespeare’s plays offered a literal stage to challenge the patriarchal form of a woman’s place in society. Based on the above assertions, the Uganda ferminist activists have several inspirations and lessons to draw from Shakespearean women.

#### **4.3 Key Lessons for Ugandan Gender Equality and Emancipation Activism**

The first lesson from the intelligent and witty women who are categorised as good controllers of men teach us that women are intelligent, and can, therefore, can liberate themselves and other people from danger. This is exemplified by portia, who through her craftiness and intelligence sails through the huddles of patriarchy at that time. In Act 1, Scene 11, portia outwits the numerous romantic patnrers all of whom are high class men from all over the europe and Africa. This woman is bound to get married to a partner by a rottery set forth in her father’s will. This is a condition which draws potential suitors all they liberate themselves Lessons to be learned from the intelligent and witty Women; The intellent and witty women fall under the category of “controllers” of men. Women who are intelligent can get men out of danger. Shakespeare potrays this trait through one pivotal character, Portia in his play *The Merchant of Venice*. As discussed before, Portia, Shakespeare potrays this woman as having a cunning, intelligent, and of quick-witted nature to sail through the Challenges of patriarchal society. Portia is beautiful, gracious, rich and with a luxurious lifestyle. Her beauty and wealth has attracted suitors across the globe. In Act I, Scene 2, potential romantic partners are listed and

they are high class men from all over Europe and Africa. Unfortunately, this woman has no choice of the man she loves for she is bound by the lottery set forth in her father's will, which gives potential suitors the chance to choose between three caskets composed of gold, silver and lead. If they choose the right casket – the casket containing Portia's portrait and a scroll – they win her hand in marriage. This means the poor girl will go with anybody even one against her will even if she may be opposed to this arrangement. If they choose the incorrect casket, they must leave and never seek another woman in marriage. Portia is glad when two suitors, one driven by greed and another by vanity, fail to choose correctly, although she demonstrates tact to the Princes of Morocco and Aragon, who unsuccessfully seek her hand.

Portia is further portrayed as a very intelligent woman who can circumvent the patriarchal law set by her father and use it to her advantage and the good of solving the crisis in her society. The Ugandan feminist activist learns that women need power to discern the choice of marriage partners set by their patriarchal society. When she identifies Bassanio, the man she loves, she advises him not to rush but to think through the situation. Then she gives some hints that can enable him to choose the right casket. However, although she favours Bassanio, a young Venetian noble, she is still witty enough to make Bassanio figure out the meaning of the song that guides Bassanio to choose the right casket. She does not offer herself on a silver platter but circumvents events to favour her choice of marriage. This situation depicts her as an intellectually and emotionally independent woman. Later in the play, Portia disguises herself as a man and then assumes the role of a lawyer's apprentice (named Balthazar) whereby she saves the life of Bassanio's friend, Antonio, in court. She further plays a prank on Bassanio and Gratiano to prove whether they are true to their wives. In the court scene, Portia demonstrates her genius nature, a lesson to all women in Uganda to embrace acting with wisdom. She breaks through the impasse of the bond by a technicality of playing around the law and words used in the bond to bring justice thereby outwitting the

staunch Jewish moneylender Shylock who is bent on killing Antonio. After realizing that Shylock wants the bond which stipulates that a pound of flesh must be cut at a place near the heart. Portia plays with the words of the bond by telling Shylock to stick to the bond which demands just flesh and no blood and to cut exactly one pound no more and no less. This wisdom is demonstrated by Portia when everyone else including the Duke presiding as judge and Antonio himself have failed to silence Shylock.

Shylock is ruined by his failure to listen to the wisdom of the woman. He loses the case and he loses the money and is on the blink of losing his life when Portia through the word play designs a ruse to save him. Thus Shakespeare demonstrates that women have the answers to so many problems. Despite Portia's lack of formal legal training, she wins her case by referring to the details of the exact language of the law. Her success involves prevailing on technicalities rather than the merits of the situation. Women brain power and intelligence is a trait portrayed by William Shakespeare and a major lesson to learn from his works. Portia is intelligent and rational in her attitude, she saves Antonio's life and her marriage. Her role as a lawyer Balthazar displays her argumentative skills and wisdom. She says to Shylock the Jew that mercy is a higher order than justice. Both the giver and the taker are blessed in mercy. These traits exhibited by Portia are to show a great lesson that women are not what many people take them to be. They are eloquent, imaginative, and intelligent. This discovery is a big lesson to Ugandan feminist activists. They can use it to challenge the rampant stereotyping of Ugandan women. The Brain power of a woman is further portrayed as another key lesson of Shakespeare in the tragedy of *King Lear*. Cordelia displays her wisdom, independence and clarity of thinking. She reverses her role as a daughter to that of mother in *King Lear*, Cordelia loves her father but she tells him that she loves him as a daughter should. Lear is enraged and he banishes her without any share in his property. He gives away all his property to his other two daughters who finally reject him and imprison him in a dungeon. Cordelia helps her father showing the

true bond between father and daughter. Lear is unable to recognize her but she forgives him for banishing her and nurses him like a mother. However, even when the play ends tragically, Edmund sends Lear to prison and Cordelia is hanged, the lesson from Cordelia's virtuous heart has been learnt. The Ugandan feminists are called upon to exhibit high levels of brain power and cherish mercy and forgiveness over revenge and intrigue which leads to self-destruction. The third lesson learned from the Shakespearean presentation of Elizabethan women is the importance of freedom and power of choice. Shakespearean plays repeatedly deal with the theme of woman's rights to choose her husband through love and not through arranged marriage. *Romeo and Juliet* is a romantic tragedy of star-crossed lovers where Juliet as a pivotal female character is portrayed as exquisitely beautiful, who falls in love with Romeo, the young man from the enemy family. She was only fourteen years old girl, the only child of the Capulets. She is innocent and gentle but once she falls in love, she becomes bold and courageous. Even at the age of fourteen, love makes her mature in emotions and thoughts. Juliet represents the profound passion and emotion. *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy of love and Juliet's inner strength shows the greatness of a woman who rises above caste, creed or race. Uganda feminist activists are inspired to be powerful and independent using the portrayal of Juliet. Shakespeare highlights the fact that love is not a mere passion for woman, it is life for her.

The fourth lesson is the danger of Patriarchal dominance and male chauvinism. William Shakespeare represents Ophelia in *Hamlet* as a young, naive and innocent girl. She is the daughter of Polonius, the Lord Chamberlain in the court of Claudius. She was raised by her father who taught her to be obedient, meek and chaste. She blindly followed her father's dictates. Her brother Laertes always discouraged her to keep away from Hamlet's company. Here, Shakespeare presents futurist ideas of gender equality where by Ophelia obeys her father and brother and keeps away from the obsessive prince of Denmark. Polonius fears that his daughter would be seduced and abused by Hamlet. Ophelia suffers as she is torn between her

father and her lover Hamlet. She becomes mad and drowns herself in a stream. She is the victim of patriarchal domination which leaves her torn into pieces and suicide is her only option as she drowns in a brook. The feminist movement in Uganda learns from the death of Ophelia that patriarchy dominance is disastrous to society and especially the female gender. It is a lesson about one following his heart instead of dictates from the traditional norms and dictates of patriarchy.

The fifth lesson to the Ugandan feminist activist is the universality of humanity through love. The feminist activists need to learn that racial segregation and colour discrimination is a violation of human right much like patriarchy. It goes beyond racial prejudice, color and cultural background. Shakespeare portrays this through *Othello*, a tragedy that deals with cross racial theme as Othello was a moor and Desdemona a white woman. All the white people exhibit discrimination save Desdemona who recognizes that Othello, despite his colour, is a human being. She falls in love with Othello, the black moor. She is a daughter of Venetian senator called Brabantio. In Act 1, Scene 3, Desdemona who has been previously vapid, looking shy and modest as is expected of a woman, becomes alive all over a sudden when she speaks about her love for Othello. She vehemently denies the charge that Othello had seduced her.

The sixth lesson is the blindness of patriarchy in which the promoters of women suffrage can learn from the Desdemona and Othello tragedy that Patriarchy is a very cruel and insensitive culture. Despite that great love for Othello, the latter insensitively strangles Desdemona to death. Othello who is suspicious of her infidelity, he shuts his ears to the inner voice and the past experiences of all the love that they shared. Desdemona dies a brave death trying to prove her innocence and purity. Here, we find cruelty of patriarchal system that suppresses women in different ways- through fatherly domination to husband's jealousy. To sum up, we can say that Shakespeare did not claim to be a feminist in modern sense but his concerns about women

display his belief in human rights and freedom of living in a free world that is not full of prejudice.

The Seventh lesson is that men lose rather than gain in practicing insubordination. The feminist activists need to preach to men that although their ego is flattered when men exercise control over women, they lose a lot by suppressing the women's creativity. Shakespearean works show that women are frequently underestimated in Shakespeare's plays. The Bard demonstrated how women can influence the men around them, despite being limited by their social roles. Julius Caesar undermines Calpurnia's advice which leads to his murder. Caesar wanders through his house in his dressing gown, kept awake by his wife Calpurnia's nightmares. Three times she has called out in her sleep about Caesar's murder. He sends a servant to bid the priests to offer a sacrifice and tell him the results. Calpurnia enters and insists that Caesar not leave the house after so many bad signs. Caesar rebuffs her, refusing to give in to fear. But Calpurnia, who has never heeded omens before, speaks of what happened in the city earlier that night: dead men walked, ghosts wandered the city, a lioness gave birth in the street, and lightning shattered the skies. These signs portend true danger that Caesar cannot afford to ignore them. Caesar counters that nothing can change the plans of the gods. He deems the signs to apply to the world in general and refuses to believe that they bode ill for him personally. Calpurnia says that the heavens proclaim the death of only great men, so the omens must have to do with him. Caesar replies that while cowards imagine their death frequently, thus dying in their minds several times over, brave men, refusing to dwell on death, die only once. He cannot understand why men fear death, which must come eventually to all.

The eighth lesson is that both the top and bottom class women are all victims of patriarchy. Highborn women and lowborn are shown as "possessions" between husbands and fathers. In the majority of situations, the world around them without exposure is socially limited and unable to explore. Many of these women in their lives have been compelled and dominated by

men who end up violating their rights because they are just subordinates. In their lives freedom to live free is limited and they are limited in their social interactions as compared to less unfortunate women who have freedom to freely interact and express themselves. The gender activist need to advocate for freedom of such categories who seem to be lucky by right of birth but whose freedom is limited and only used as pets by the patriarchy norms around them as “mere Possessions.”

The ninth lesson from the plays and perhaps the greatest lesson is that Limitless ambition is both wasteful and self-destructive is another great lesson learnt from Shakespearean work. The Ugandan feminist activists have a task to train the women that although they should seek freedom, exploit all their potentials to capacity, they should avoid overwhelming ambition. Overwhelming ambition kills thinking and can lead to self-destructive. Lady Macbeth is one of Shakespeare’s most famous and frightening female characters. When we first see her, she is already plotting Duncan’s murder, to get the throne she is stronger, more ruthless, and more ambitious than her husband. She seems fully aware of this and knows that she will have to push Macbeth into committing murder. At one point, she wishes that she were not a woman so that she could do it herself. Lady Macbeth and the three witches as craftily used by Shakespeare portray how women who have overwhelming ambition are manipulative. These crafty women use female methods of achieving power—that is, manipulation—to further their supposedly male ambitions. Women, the play implies, can be as ambitious and cruel as men, yet social constraints deny them the means to pursue these ambitions on their own. Lady Macbeth manipulates her husband with remarkable effectiveness, overriding all his objections; when he hesitates to murder, she repeatedly questions his manhood until he feels that he must commit murder to prove himself. Lady Macbeth’s remarkable strength of will persists through the murder of the king—it is she who steadies her husband’s nerves immediately after the crime has been perpetrated. There is a sad end to this ambition as madness and death are depicted as

an end to overwhelming ambition. The Ugandan feminist activists find themselves with a duty to control their ambitious endeavors rather than die or lose themselves in pursuit of unending worldly desires.

The tenth lesson is women purity and innocence are both virtues and vices, and one character used to enhance this trait is Ophelia who demonstrates purity, the innocence and virtue of women. Whereas it's very important for a woman to be virtuous, naivety and innocence which is exhibited in limited understanding and inability to maneuver the challenges of this world is highly a vice. Ophelia dies because she could not balance challenges met at the hands of patriarchy but also her emotional state was badly wanting because of her naivety to read between the lines. She is childlike and naive in nature. She is unaware of the harsh realities of life. Although she truly loves Hamlet, she is very loyal and obedient to her brother and father and avoids Hamlet upon their orders. As she tries to be loyal to her family's dictates and orders. Ophelia is a difficult role to play because her character, like Gertrude's, is murky and complicated. We know that Ophelia is torn between two contradictory poles. Her father and brother believe that Hamlet would use her, that he would take her virginity and throw it away because she could never be his wife. Her heart has convinced her that Hamlet loved her, though he swears he never did. To her father and brother, Ophelia is the eternal virgin, the vessel of morality whose purpose is to be a dutiful wife and steadfast mother. To Hamlet, she is a sexual object, a corrupt and deceitful lover. With no mother to guide her, she has no way of deciphering the contradictory expectations.

Just like Hamlet, the medieval precept that the father's word is unquestionable governs Ophelia. But her Renaissance sense of romantic love also rules her. How can she be obedient to her father and true to her love? When she lies to Hamlet and tells him that Polonius is home when he is concealed in the room eavesdropping, Ophelia proves she cannot live in both worlds. She has chosen one, and her choice seals her fate. The dilemma also forces her into madness. She

has no way to reconcile the contradictory selves her men demand that she be and still retain an equilibrium. Ophelia's desperation literally drives her crazy, and she has no means with which to heal herself. Ophelia is caught in a cross fire and ends up destroyed by the choice of life she makes. Her naivety and innocence blurs her sense of discernment to maneuver in a predominantly patriarchal society. The Ugandan feminist activists learn that whereas purity is a virtue female naivety is a vice which is deadly and disastrous.

The eleventh lesson is that Wit and ingenuity as necessary elements of female survival. One of the remarkable character who applies this trait; Rosalind's wit is sharp in *As you Like It*. She demonstrates both wit and ingenuity when she decides to disguise herself as Ganymede, a young gentleman. She escapes with Celia, who is disguised as a shepherdess. Rosalind's disguise is so good, that she even fools her father, who she meets later in the forest. Again, we see her selfless nature as the girls and Touchstone (the court jester) journey towards the Forest of Arden. In Act 2, Scene 4, Rosalind although extremely weary, her new role as Ganymede helps her keep her focus off her own problems. But regardless of her own weary discomfort, Rosalind takes her eyes off of her own feelings and focuses on the needs of others. Rosalind decisively buys the cottage at the edge of the woods. Banishment may have disillusioned someone of lesser strength, but Rosalind takes charge and makes the best of a very difficult situation. She finds shelter and food for herself and her companions. It is not clear why Rosalind maintains her disguise as long as she does in the play, but perhaps it is the disguise that provides her with the opportunity to test Orlando and see if he truly loves her. She definitely possesses strength of character to be able to keep up this guise in the presence of someone she really loves. She also demonstrates patience. It would have been so easy for her to reveal herself to Orlando sooner than she does, but she waits until the time is right. Finally, she organizes a quadruple wedding for Celia, herself, and two other couples in the middle of a forest, which cannot have been an easy task.

In general, feminism can be seen as a movement to put an end to sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression and to achieve full gender equality in law and in practice. For some, the goals of the feminist movement were simple: let women have freedom, equal opportunity, and control over their lives. Feminism advocates for women's rights and gender equality. However, feminist theories are not restricted to women's issues, but also promote power-sharing, leadership, and collaborative work in order to establish respect and acceptance for diversity amongst all members of the society. All these ideals have partly been tackled by Shakespeare whose 16<sup>th</sup> century portrayal of women has been viewed as ageless and a model for feminist and gender related concerns. Despite the power of men, women of Shakespeare could show women's liberation and resistance to existing norms of behavior. In Othello, even, when Desdemona married the African soldier, Othello, she disobeyed her father. Jessica eloped with Lorenzo in the Merchant of Venice, leaving her father Shylock behind. This portrays the spirit of free will that women in Uganda and feminist activists.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

Although the selected drama texts depict, and by extension, condemn the gross oppression of English women during the Elizabethan period by a strict patriarchal code, the manner in which some women decide to pick up courage and challenge their subjugation is admirable enough to offer inspiration for activists of gender equality and women emancipation in Uganda. Therefore, the selected Shakespearean female characters can be imitated by Ugandan women and women and feminism activists in their bid to achieve the women emancipation from age-long patriarchal oppression.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Conclusion

As discussed in the preceding chapters, the selected Shakespearean drama texts showed four types of women: the submissive who carry out the roles of an Elizabethan woman, aberrant women who refuse to submit to men and demand equal rights, women who control men negatively and those who do so positively. The major query of the study was: How could the study of Shakespearean works inspire the efforts of Ugandan promoters of gender equality and emancipation? To answer this query, I set three objectives: to examine Shakespeare's portrayal of women as victims of patriarchy; to investigate women represented as challengers of patriarchal systems; and finally examine the key lessons that could be drawn from Shakespeare's representation of all these women.

With regard to women as victims of patriarchy the researcher identified and examined instances of women victimized by patriarchy in Shakespeare's time. What was said in the UN report, cited earlier, is true that "unequal power relations between men and women" and "violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by which women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men." It was discovered that Innocent and holy women are forced to bend to the will of men. Although they try their best to fit in the system, they were battered, objectified, frustrated, treated as dolls or something to be owned and used by men and even killed. All these abuses happened to women because unequal power relations between men and women dictated by Patriarchy. Ironically, the men expect the women to teach their daughters to be so thus perpetuating subordination and male chauvinism. Men get away with big crimes because they are super creatures.

With regard to the second objective, the researcher analyzed cases of women as who are challengers of patriarchy. These women demand for their rights. For instance, they choose their husbands thus defying the custom of arranged marriages. In many cases these women refuse to flatter the ego of men as expected by men and many other useless customs of the Elizabethan time. Despite their resistance, these women too were thwarted by the patriarchal system.

The third category of women is those who control the men negatively. These women seem to be agents of patriarchy. They have extraordinary powers. They are charming and courageous but extremely ambitious and relentless in their evil pursuits. Cases in point are the Three Witches and Lady Macbeth, in *Macbeth*. Such women study the weakness men. Thereafter, they take advantage of the weakness to achieve their end. In *Macbeth*, the cited women start and fuel a process that brings Macbeth to his downfall. The witches capitalize on Macbeth's love for power and prophesy that he would be king. Macbeth does not remain the same after hearing this prophesy. Lady Macbeth also uses the good nature of Macbeth to provoke him seize the shortest path to kingship. She further uses his ambition to challenge his resoluteness. Paradoxically, these women are destroyed by the evil they hatch. The witches remain steeped in their evil thereby ripping nothing and Lady Macbeth wrecks and eventually commits suicide.

The fourth category of women is the positive controllers of women—these, too, are charming and courageous. They use their gifts of intelligence and wisdom to resolve impasses in men's lives. A case in point Portia who uses a song to help Bassanio chose the correct casket thus enabling him to get the hand of Portia in marriage and to improve on his economic situation. Portia also uses ruses to save Antonio from being killed by Shylock. Another wise and clever woman is Viola who manages to survive in a strange land and who succeeds to woo a woman where a man fails.

In conclusion, one can say that those who followed the roles of the Elizabethan women teach us, first, that bowing down to patriarchal rules does not guarantee happiness for women. In fact, it may actually lead to their domination and victimization. The second lesson is that the females who fight this domination of the patriarchal society also suffer as they are overpowered by the system. However, those who submit to male domination suffer more than the women who fought against male dominance. The third lesson is that the women who seek to guide their husbands in a complementary way, seems to be the kind of model for gender equality. In fighting for their rights, women should not seek to victimize men. Men are human beings just as women are; women must not victimize them. Therefore, both men and women are intelligent and are so to complement each other. Therefore, they must all be subjected to equal access to education, economic development to be able to live and work together.

Chapter one summarizes William Shakespeare's representation as an ageless dramatist who was able to address elements of patriarchal oppression of Elizabethan era but also fore saw that patriarchal oppression was not only an Elizabethan era norm but rather a world phenomena. He therefore fore told and championed the quest for women emancipation in his portrayal of women characters.

Chapter 2 summarizes the victimization of women by patriarchy; William Shakespeare's Elizabethan era reveals to us that women too facilitated patriarchal oppression of fellow women. The reigning monarch was a woman who also did not change the plight of women but instead facilitated victimization of women to thrive. The female drivers of activism for gender equality have more often ended up victimizing fellow women in the fight for women emancipation. In fighting to overturn, the trend does not mean violation of men. Virtue should prevail over vice in quest for balanced gender emancipation. The quest for gender equality

should not aim to have women dominate men but rather equality for both sex. Therefore, patriarchy has been instituted over time to haunt the woman. If it is not from a father it's from a lover but a woman has many a time become a victim of this norm. The feminist activists in Uganda need to understand the Shakespeare women portrayal of women victims of patriarchy as a basis for the struggle for gender equality.

Chapter 3 presents women as controllers of men. Some women have deviated from their conventional gender norms; as docile, obedient and submissive. Shakespeare presents women who challenge the odds to maneuver the norms of patriarchy. However, in most cases their struggle to challenge patriarchy has often times come with excesses that create irreversible effects and sometimes death. Therefore, the road to attain women emancipation should be walked with careful and calculated steps that would not lead to self-destruction. Ugandan advocates for women emancipation should desist from creating women who oppress men.

William Shakespeare presents the bad controllers and good controllers in chapter three. The good controllers use wit and ingenuity to maneuver through the patriarchal society and eventually lead to cause positive and solve societal impasse. Women like Portia in *Merchant of Venice* are able to stop evil from prevailing in society and bring justice to the culprit Shylock. Therefore, in the quest for women emancipation in Uganda, activists need to pick lessons from the portrayal of these good controllers in society.

Chapter 4 gives a summary of the lessons that activists for gender equality and women emancipation could draw from the depiction of 16th century women. There is need to rise from oppression and subjugation of women. The women have to challenge the norms of patriarchy but also avoid the excesses that would lead to self-destruction. Whereas patriarchal domination is oppressive, the creation of Matriarchy is equally oppressive. There is need for gender equality and emancipation of both men and women.

## 5.2 Recommendations

The study recommends as follows:

1. Given the numerous key lessons that can be drawn from Shakespearean drama texts in the quest for gender equality and emancipation, Shakespearean drama should be a major component of the curriculum on Gender Studies in universities and other institutions of higher learning.
2. Shakespeare not being of an age as earlier noted by his close associate Johnson, Ben. A close reading of these selected texts reveals instances of the prophetic nature of William Shakespeare as a playwright. The fact that he portrays the three witches in Macbeth as fortunetellers and eventually predict the tragic end of Macbeth. More so, his ability to portray the quest for gender equality and women emancipation ages before the inception of these movements proves aspects of prophetic nature in some of his works. Therefore, I recommend that future researchers should interest themselves in Shakespeare's portrayal of prophetic elements in the selected works.

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