

**Media Sensation and Injustice on Domestic Violence and Incest in Motshabi Tyelele's *Shwele Bwawo!*
(A Grave Injustice)!**

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Abstract

Domestic violence and incest have become a recurring event in the lives of many girls and women in the world. Nigeria as a country, is no exception to these injustices met out on especially the feminine gender. The trend has left many in awe as to what the future holds for the affected female. Media reportage is a method that has presented issues and events to the audience thereby instigating the public to react positively or negatively to information. Reportage form has pushed people to react through backlashing such as: anger, protest and violence. The theory of feminism, which advocates for equality of both sexes is used to explicate the negative effect of media reportage on issues of domestic violence and incest. Motshabi Tyelele is a South African playwright who presents the play in this review as she explored her setting to present injustice of the justice system and media reportage. It is the crux of the matter as this paper intends to view Motshabi Tyelele's *Shwele Bawo! (A Grave Injustice!)* in relation to media reportage of injustice on domestic violence and incest. The play advocates for equal treatment of persons irrespective of personality or social status. The play concludes by advocating objective investigative journalism.

Key Words: Domestic violence, incest, media, reportage and oppression.

Word Count: 206

Introduction

Domestic violence and incest have been reported by the media as a crime against women/child in recent times. Journalists and newspapers which make such reportage, never fail to blame and affirm that in most cases, the female specie is responsible for what comes to her. This is a sad twist of things for no female would want to undergo the agony of getting raped or receive battering from whichever quarter. It can be noted that media reportage in many instances, is not objective in writing about such issues. Al-Afifi, M. H. (2018) while writing on 'injustice in mainstream media and social medium' cite Stark, S. D. (1987) in the University of Miami Law Review who opines, that "Media is both a mirror and a lamp, reflecting public opinion, and leading it as well". This is a fact that might not completely be accepted by all scholars but it stands that it is

the hard truth concerning the media. Hockley, L and Fadima N. (2015) are of the view that the contemporary world of information depicts an illusion of knowledge as to what one aspires to know on happenings in the world. They further explain that, it is the same illusion or "fairytale" that recent history was recorded in an objective way.

Media has often used its form to frame conflicting issues of people or stories in good and bad light. Some events and the reportage are characterised as "terrorists" or "mentally ill" by personalities. Language of the media has seldom risen thought-provoking issues or events based on racial classifications, stereotypes, political, ethnological variation, religion and social inclination. Effiong J. (2014) opines that "Journalistic practice without a regulating body to enforce gate-keeping tenets has allowed for abuses in the name of sensationalism". The

varying form of media or mainstream media has framed events and issues which has sometimes caused injustice in certain institutions like the judiciary.

In contemporary times and with the age of mobile telecommunication, many people depend on information from the media. Rodriguez- Lopez, S. (2018) is of the view that many people view it as the only source of information, about events which they have no direct access to. It can be noted that the importance of the media cannot completely be neglected as the media is useful in simplifying information provided by the use of stereotype which is a form of compelling the audience to read or accept presentations. Bearing this at the back of the mind, the media reports for sensation (fabricated facts) and not truth is believed will arouse the emotion of the audience positively or negatively. This is the case with media reportage which often throws bad light on legal cases as will be explicated in *Shwele Bawo!* This paper thus, intends to evaluate the effect of media reportage on domestic violence and incest in Moshabi Tyelele's *Shwele Bawo! (A Grave Injustice!)*. It will also depict how the protagonist rise in relaying her story to stand her ground for truth, equality and justice in equity.

Synopsis of *Shwele Bawo! (A Grave Injustice)*

Shwele Bawo! is a play set in South Africa. The play depicts the traumatic experience of a woman who was unjustly sentenced to life imprisonment as a result of insinuations by which the media carried out its reportage. Dikeledi, the protagonist, in spite of the abuse she faced in marriage did not find freedom after her husband's death because of her condemnation to life imprisonment for a crime she did not commit. Culture and tradition did not support the little freedom she craved for but rather nailed her predicament insisting that she respects her husband and tradition no matter the manner she is treated in marriage. She managed to live and endure her husband's battering, abuse, pain, disrespect, immorality and arrogance for twelve years; in which she was married for. The crux of her bitter marriage was the realisation that her husband had raped their daughter, Bontle repeatedly without her knowledge. This prompted her to decide on ending her husband's life who was

protected by the society even though, he was into illegal business, the major source of his wealth.

Solly, Dikeledi's husband, was ruthless in his dealings with people irrespective of sex, age and status. He treated women with little or no respect especially the harem he maintained. He took the lives of those who stand in his way and forced the women who got pregnant for him to abort it. Dikeledi was just a material kept to be used whenever he is attending social functions as his show off 'thing'. He grumbles and fumes from the attention she receives whenever people admire her. The punishment she receives when they are home is battering for being herself and relating with others; whether male or female. Solly brings women to soil his matrimonial bed even in her presence and she dare not complain about his actions. Her great Aunt and other relations told her to maintain her calm and to accept her fate in silence. She should know that Solly is an "axe", which is to be lent and used by anyone, anytime and at will.

The mistake Dikeledi made is in sharing her heart's intention with her friend about the plan to end her husband's life. This singular intent nailed her to the justice system as it was the only evidence used in sentencing her to life imprisonment for the death of her husband. The South African justice system failed to protect her despite the fact that Solly was connected with people of questionable character. The media, which thrived more on gossips (especially for the elite class) had a field day fabricating fact as desired. The justice system refused to carry out proper investigation before passing judgement on her. In making her situation worse and unrepairable, she was denied an appeal by the same judicial system which jailed her.

Dikeledi, is one of many women whose lives is riddled with similar experience. She stands as a lone figure who represents the voiceless women who are denied justice for domestic violence and child abuse; in this case, incest. She therefore, takes solace in Maya Angelou's poem "I Stand" to declare her unrestrained hope to rise above her predicament in life and to fight for justice no matter how long it takes. The poem is also supposed to give her hope for a better future for other women. It is meant to inform the media

that their part in telling her story ended up imprisoning her instead of setting her free. The media compounded her case by condemning her for a crime she did not commit; it rather gave credence to unjustifiable claim while uplifting those with questioning character in the society.

An Overview of Domestic Violence and Incest

Domestic violence is synonymous to domestic abuse or family violence. The [Lite/en.m.wikipedia.org](http://en.m.wikipedia.org), defines domestic violence as words:

Often used as a synonym for intimate partner violence, which is committed by one of the people in an intimate relationship against the other person, and can take place in heterosexual or same- sex relationships or between former spouses or partners.

The Wikipedia.org goes on to explain that, domestic violence also involves violence committed against children, teenagers, parents or the elderly. This is often manifested in “physical, verbal, emotional, economic, religious, reproductive and sexual abuse”. Different forms are used to perpetrate domestic violence. These can be through subtle or coercive forms of ‘marital rape’ and violent physical abuse like beating, throwing acid, (which often disfigure the victim); choking, using sharp objects (knife, razor, stick, metal) to disfigure the victim, using electric iron to burn any part of the body and female genital mutilation. Domestic violence seldom leads to murder and the forms include: stoning, honour killing, bride burning and dowry death. A purple ribbon is used to promote awareness of domestic violence.

In most cases of domestic violence, women are the overwhelming victims. In some countries, domestic violence is not frowned at but seen to justify or legally permit infidelity (where the woman is suspected). Esquivel- Santovena et al (2016) in their research show that, countries where there is gender inequality experience domestic violence more. Evident is the fact that domestic violence is the underreported crime in the whole world amongst both men and women. Strong, Bryan et al (2017) and Concannon, Diana (2013) further concur with this assertion. Hess, Karen et al (2016) assent that as a result of the

stigma of male victimisation, men who face domestic violence do not report to healthcare providers.

Domestic violence is constantly carried out when the abuser thinks and believe the only justified or outlet is punishment on the abused. This is noted according to Halket, M. M. et al (2013) to produce an “intergenerational cycle of violence” in children who come from family where this is practicable. Many people accept domestic violence as normal family experiences and therefore are silent about it. Besides, in some African setting, patriarchy promotes such violence.

Incest on the other hand, according to Fridell, Lorie A. (1990) is sexual contact between a related adult and a child and is form of familial sexual violence. Some cultures permit this with a form of ritual attached but with the knowledge and consent of family. This could be to obtain goods or financial assistance. The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (2015) was the first international treaty that addressed child sexual abuse which occurs in home or family.

Awareness of domestic violence vary from country to country. The WHO (2013) report that this is not only common in child forced marriage, but even in legally contracted marriage in “love”. Abusive relationships have history of cycle of abuse after which, violence will manifest. Reconciliation and calm may bring temporary peace before another is committed. Sometimes victims are trapped in violent situations and find it difficult to leave as a result of emotional ties.

Other reasons for keeping the victim in situations is lack of financial resources, shame, fear of the child (ren) protection. In such kind of situation also, victims experience disabilities, disfiguration, stress, chronic health problems (hypertension, diabetes, and ulcer) mental illness and psychological disorder. Children in such homes suffer psychological problems from an early age. Some of these psychological disorders may affect the person up to adulthood and later part of one’s years.

WHO (2016) add that “controlling behaviours” is a form of abuse. The General Assembly (1993) of the United Nations

Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women defined domestic violence as:

Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family, including battering, sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation.

The above thus indicates that any of the outlined is considered a domestic violence. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2015) states that in the early 1800s the legal systems accept wife-beating as a husband's right over his wife. In the 16th Century, English common Law treated domestic violence as a crime against the community instead of on the woman. They viewed it as "a breach of the peace". Wives were given the chance to seek for redress which comes in the form of a "peace bond" from a local "judiciary of peace". The proceedings were normally informal and off record. There is no guidance or proof or degree of violence which is expected to determine a conviction. The typical sentences are forcing the husband to post bond or 'stake pledges from associates who would guarantee such behaviour in the future. The charges typically are minimal fines except in cases of injury or death.

Differences exist in domestic violence. These forms are hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, intimidation, sexual assault, coercion, etc. Womenslaw.org. (2011) explain that these can also be carried out through kidnapping, unlawful imprisonment, coercion, harassment and trespassing. Furthermore, the United States Department of Justice (2007) and Department of Justice, Canada (2001) advanced that physical abuse which involves contact is meant to cause "fear, pain, injury, or other bodily harm".

Feminism in Summary

Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own* (1929), and Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) have tried to define and redefine the roles of women in society,

both the assigned and expected roles. Tonia Umoren (2014) defines feminism as "a worldwide cultural activity poised for the liberation of women from the bottleneck of tradition with a view to improving on their subordinate status in the society" (03). It is not just tradition that bothers the woman, but the society with its milieu and dictates. Patriarchy is a major obstacle to women liberation as humans in our society. It is a weapon that has often been used by the empowered society to pull the woman down no matter her educational attainment or status in life. Feminism therefore brings to the fore the struggle against patriarchy, violence, discrimination, sexual objectification and others as it concerns women. It further highlights the negative experiences of women in patriarchal societies. Patriarchy is the hammer that is used to nail Dikeledi in *Shwele Bawo!* She on her part refused to be burdened by her social milieu but to stand strong in spirit and be humane.

The Media and Injustice on Domestic Violence and Incest in *Shwele Bawo!*

The play generally examines a woman's abuse in Motshabi Tyelele's, *Shwele Bawo!*. It looks at the role of tradition in contemporary society and how it perpetuates domestic violence on women and girl-child. This is what the South African play, *Shwele Bawo! (A Grave Injustice)* presents. This is the theme of this paper which has become an epidemic in not just South Africa but the world as a whole. Motshabi Tyelele comments on joburg: arts, culture and heritage' as joburg.org reports, opine that the need for people making change to meet modern trend (lifestyle) has brought untold social vices. It is a lifestyle that some people choose, which has usurped their moral status in life. The play looks at the challenge women face in marriage and how it also plays out on their children (girl-child).

Dikeledi (nee 'tears') Nkabinde plays the single actress in the play. The play as <https://www.joburg.org.za> as Maree states, is "in a sensitive and thought-provoking way, it tackles the challenges that women face when tradition and modernity clash . . . it tells of a down trodden woman who is forced to stay in an abusive marriage because of tradition". Effiong J. (2014: 443), adds to the subject matter of the play which is that, "The play showcases sensationalism in journalism as against

investigative and objective reporting and indexically recommends “truth” as the lens through which reports should be editorialised”.

The play begins with Dikeledi in prison. She had been there for two years, as she was sentenced to life for a crime she did not commit. She narrates her life’s story in retrospect by playing out the different roles of the characters in the plot. Solly Nkabinde, her late husband, was a socialite. For twelve years, she endured his physical abuse and infidelities. She stayed in the marriage as she obeyed the advice by elders enduring all forms of abuse. The knowledge that her husband was also abusing their daughter prompt her to take a decision- the decision to kill her husband while her motherly instinct pushed her to protect her daughter. As the play progresses in flashbacks, many layers of the play was uncovered. One of such is ‘identity crises among men and women; the disintegration of family structures; woman and child abuse; relationships; incest; the power of the media and the inequalities in our injustice system’.

Maree in joburg.org.za explained that, “issues of injustice, domestic violence and how the media report are raised in the play”. Dikeledi while relieving events, replies a journalist who told her that the major reason for such reportage is, “it’s just to sensationalise, nothing serious!” (*Shwele Bawo*, 117). She responds, “For you have the power! Power to make and break stars and families! Like you always say, you give people exposure (*Shwele Bawo*, 117). Effiong J. (2014:445) categorically affirms that, “... journalism now seems bastardised, and the people who were to be defended by the press are now “terrorized” by the press”. The exposure here is subjectively presented to the public instead of objectively.

The play is also about the voiceless woman in South Africa and the world. It lends the voice of Maree who puts it as the “innocent woman in prison”... it looks at the old situation with fresh eyes. The play touches everyone from all angles of life and it changes life too”. Dikeledi stands to represent the fresh eyes which wants to bring change to the existing order. An order which oppress and subjugates the woman. She tells her audience, especially the press:

Well, it’s my democratic right to tell our story, too!

The story of all women who’ve kept Their anger burning slowly on a back burner.

Women with no voice, who Now sit in prison for life Because of a justice system That doesn’t recognize the difference between

A drunk man killing in a barroom brawl

And an abused woman who had no other way! (*Shwele Bawo*, 117).

Shwele Bawo reveals how these issues have been ignored and neglected for a long time- it creates a social time bomb enclave in secrets as it threatens to destroy the society. Abuse in whatever form should not be accepted in silence but transformation is needed. Maree points out that; “Any kind of abuse is socially unacceptable and it is up to society to change the situation. People need to do something about it rather than wait for the government to bring about change. Change is within the people”.

Many women have remained in abusive marriage for the sake of preserving their integrity of being respected as married women and for the sake of their children who they fear will definitely be maltreated by another woman who replaces her. Dikeledi admits this line of thought when she says: “A woman is born to suffer. Now I understand those women who always plead with their men to abuse them... Or stay in abusive relationships . . . (*Shwele Bawo!* 119). Dikeledi alludes to the justice system which does not support the woman in the name of keeping the marriage a sacred institution, not to be interfered in and maintained. The African tradition holds marriage institution in high esteem and admonished couples to tolerate the other no matter the condition therein. She relates what the policeman told her when she complained of her husband’s domestic abuse. He tells her:

Sisi [sister], this is a family matter, we can’t interfere! Go home!

It’s because of that twisted indoctrination!

[Thinks.] *Monna ke selepe* [A man is an axe]! What does that make me if

he is an axe?

A piece of wood to be chopped and
burnt?

No, really! (*Shwele Bawo!* 120).

This aptly presents the situation of the African woman who is forced to endure societal ambience and expectations in maintaining the sanitation of her marriage and family. She is burdened with the pains, trials and tribulation of marriage all in a bid to uphold the marriage institution and for her children to grow up as responsible people in the society. Part of her cross is for the children to have a better life even in her pain and sorrow.

When Dikeledi's pain (Solly) died, she felt free and relieved to live a life free from oppression, slavery and battering. She felt her pain was taken away hence, her carriage and attitude to the happenings around her. She thinks to herself: "I was dancing my sorrows away and of course you started spreading your rumours. 'Widow celebrates hubby's death!', 'Could she be the murderer?', 'Beauty who killed!' (*Shwele Bawo!* 122). The media (press) through their sensationalism began painting the picture of a free woman who should be a major suspect in a murder case just because she exhibits a carefree attitude to life after the demise of her oppressor.

Dikeledi blames her family who forced her to imbibe the African culture which was not much practicable in contemporary times. Born and bred in an African setting, she was unfortunate to grow up with her Grandmother after the death of her mother. Her late mother had her out of wedlock with an unknown European thus, giving her complexion an identity complex. She affirms her origin and stated, "... I'm a boesman? I'm a boesman and don't have manners. Well, boesman is tired of living a lie!" (*Shwele Bawo!* 123). Her colour added to her beauty making her attractive to the opposite sex. Even at the age of sixteen, she was attracted to Solly before he married her when she turned nineteen. Thus, she became a socialite from living in the slums. She presents it as: "I moved from a matchbox house with no electricity, to a seven- bedroom palace, with a Jacuzzi, bar, sauna, gym, tennis court, pool ... basically, every luxury you can think of" (*Shwele Bawo!*, 118).

It is depression to note as Effiong J. (2014) encapsulate on democratic society when he writes

that, "Modern as the society is and democratic as the new South Africa claims to be with a constitution, yet tradition is still wielding its whims especially against women in a segregated patriarchal abandon". What is worth noting is that for every costless beauty painlessly received, there is a price to pay. Dikeledi pays the price when she mingled with the wrong group. She owns up to this placement as she says: "But that had its price. It wasn't free love! I was materially wealthy, spiritually under- nourished, and culturally very poor!" (*Shwele Bawo!* 119).

Marriage for Dikeledi was a prison and so, when her husband died, she is temporarily set free from her bondage; only to continue in the prison. But then, a difference lies in her present bondage for she is free from constant pain inflicted upon her by Solly and the sharp biting admonishment of family relations. She puts it thus: "The only difference is I've been deployed from a Tuscan palace to a toilet – size cell, with many others like me (*Shwele Bawo!* 118). The sympathy Dikeledi feels is not just for the likes herself in the society but for the press who fuelled her situation. She tells the press: "You too hurt me! You were the steel that enclosed my cell. But I'm not blaming you! You have no power over what you write about! You, too, are victims (*Shwele Bawo!*, 121). The world of the press is not only to citizens but also to the journalists who carry out their reportage. Dikeledi let them know the hard truth that they are also affected.

A glaring fact about media reportage is distortion of facts for profit purpose and for popularity. The truth is still voiced out to the press by Dikeledi in a hypocritical manner to make her point made. She postulate the hypocrisy of the press on issues and events of domestic violence and incest as she relay the attitude of the press. The death of Solly was a media sensation giving him praises for the reckless life he lived. He was glorified for a worthless cursed life of which the press is aware of but prefer to dwell in hypocrisy for the financial benefit accrue to them and the sensation the reportage will bring to the audience. The media threw caution to the winds but instead choose praise in place of justice.

Bontle, Solly and Dikeledi's first child was repeatedly raped by her father. He committed

many abortions with her, sent her to school abroad and in his continued effort to continue his escapade with her, he provides her with all life's necessity. She contracts HIV (AIDS) from her father and became psychologically affected by what she passed through. Her mother summarise her daughter's situation as:

Some of you know about these things
Long before Bontle exposed them.
But since we've become a society that
worships all that is rotten we always
choose to live a life of lies and go to
the dogs! ...
Sadly, even the dogs are disgusted by
us,
A people concerned about lining our
pockets
Even at the expense of our children! . .

.
I'm talking about the poor,
Innocent and helpless children!
(*Shwele Bawo!* 135- 136).

Dikeledi was happy to welcome freedom from the pain caused to her and her daughter. Even though she wanted Solly dead, somebody else did the job for her. This means that she was not the only one who had scores to settle with him. The company he keeps and the business he was into are enough ways to have people wanting to end his life maybe as revenge. She had prepared herself to protect her children no matter what it takes; even if it means killing him. She tells the press in a proverb, ". . . The tightness of the shoe is felt by the one wearing it!" (*Shwele Bawo!* 136). She affirms the fact of the one facing problems and knowing how it feels in her home. Her maternal instinct therefore, is on the alert to seek the welfare of her children.

Media reportage did not in anyway, help to salvage Dikeledi's situation; it rather nailed the wood on her coffin. She tells them:

Besides, you broke me
Long before you even tried to make me.
I don't want your fame,
Only want to set the record straight.
Not only for you! But for myself, my
children ... yes, my children, and all those
voiceless women who never had a chance!
You wrote all the crap you wanted to
believe.

It's your democratic right! (*Shwele Bawo!*
117).

One can note from the above, the determination of Dikeledi to break the jinx behind patriarchal oppression of the woman. She rises to challenge the statuesque of patriarchy on its infringement on the female's humanity and place in the society. She accepts her fate but vows to live above oppression by not letting her situation break her heart. Journalistic sensationalism does not end with her, but what about a future occurrence? She asks: "Tell me ladies and gentlemen, if we protect the Sollys of this world, what kind of mothers the Bontles are going to be. What kind of fathers are the Lesegos and Kgotos going to be?" (*Shwele Bawo!* (137).

Many women in the past suffered untold hardship in the hands of their husbands but decide to live their marriage to the end. This reminds her of a local mama, Ellen Khuzwaye, who wrote a text titled *Call me Woman*. According to her, this historical text relays the following: "I tell you, these women went through hell. I'm surprised they didn't kill anyone! Hey! Maybe the writing helped cool them down!" (*Shwele Bawo!* 116). Writing and talking really helped to cool them down. This is why Dikeledi is drawing strength from these elders who managed to handle the affairs of their homes and stood strong to the end.

Conclusion

Domestic violence and incest in whatever form or capacity is unacceptable. Every female irrespective of age and status should not be unduly oppressed. She should be respected and fairly treated with care. The justice system should be enjoyed by all and sundry without bias. No one is above the law and any defaulter must be punished. The media must change from sensation to reporting factual issues and events. Proper investigation must be carried out before conclusion is drawn on issues. Money is not everything. Hypocrisy is the root of evil and thus must be avoided in order to save the voiceless women from constant death or disfiguration in any form. The female specie (women and girl- child) are humans and must be treated thus. They also have a right to legitimate justice system. Sentiments is not a solution to positive living. Change must begin with the judicial system which

constantly condemn the innocent.

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