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The SOCIO-ECONOMIC ROLES OF WOMEN IN ÀRÌNPÉ ADÉJUMÓ'S RÒ ÓO RE.

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Abstract

This study examines the roles attributed to the contemporary Yorùbá women in the Nigerian socio-economic milieu. Series of critical works have existed on female characters in both Yorùbá prose and plays but few, as we are aware, has existed on Yorùbá written poetry. In an attempt to fill this gap, this study made use of six poems selected from Adéjùmò's collection of twenty-eight poems, Rò óo Re (2002). The study employed the theory of African feminism as framework. Among the findings of the study were that the roles played by the Yorùbá women in the present Nigerian socio-economic system are enormous. They play both supportive and complementary roles to their husbands in making ends meet at home, and also help in nation building. The study also identified and condemned some ugly aspects in the attitudes and behaviours of some contemporary women which prevented them from fulfilling their socio-economic responsibilities in the society. It, therefore, concluded that women should be treated equally as their male counterparts.

Introduction

Few critical works, so far, exist on the Yorùbá written poetry. Among the existing works are, Fólórúnṣó (1989), Olátéjù (2001), Adéyemí (2001), Adéjùmò (2005), and Adéòsun (2008). These works are on different discourses. For example, Fólórúnṣó (1989) examines semiotic features in Olábimtán's poems. He employs Peirce's classification of signs, i.e. icon, index and symbol. Out of these three signs, Fólórúnṣó adopts symbol as a semiotic tool to analyze Olábimtán's poems titled 'Òtító pèlú Èké', 'Ení dalè', 'Ìjà Ìlara' and 'Ìjà Òsùpá pèlú Oòrùn' in Àádóta Àròfò. In his work, Olátéjù (2001) discusses sound pattern in Yorùbá poetic discourse. He attempts to see how the various sounds of the

Yorùbá language combine to form network of patterns that support or contribute to the over-all interpretation of poetic works. Adéyemí (2001) investigates political commitment and poetic utterances in Jibóla Abíódún's Àlo n lo...Ewì and describes Abíódún as a committed poet of the progressive and revolutionary camp. Adéjùmò (2005) appraises Àtári Àjànàkú's Orin Ewùro. She is of the opinion that the poet, in an attempt to comment on issues in Orin Ewùro, makes use of satire as one of his weapons to wage a verbal attack on his target. Adéòsun (2008) examines Àyàngbìlè and Òpádòtun's Ayé n yípo and comments on the effects of globalization on the Yorùbá culture, particularly the marriage institution. The work considers the adverse effects of economic, political, technological and scientific development on the Yorùbá cultural settings.

As illuminating these works are, none of them addresses issues concerning women. What we think may be responsible for this is, perhaps, the limited number of Yorùbá poetry focusing on women related issues. The contemporary Yorùbá women have played significant roles in the socio-economic advancement of the society, yet much have not been written to recognize this fact, hence the need for this work.

Among few Yorùbá female poets that have written on women related issues are Adéjùmò (2002) and Adébòwálé (2003). However, Adéjùmò in the preface to her book declares that

*...Ó ní ohun tó mú mí polongo àwon ewì
inú iwé yìí. Àimòkan tí mú ogunlógò
eniyàn so obinrin di àtémérè. Bèè àìro
ipò àtí ipa tí obinrin n ko láwùjo ló fa
irú àsìrò bèè. Èrèdù èyí ló mú mí walèjìn
lórí ipò obinrin láwùjo kí olúkùlukú le
yèrò padà, kí wón sì tún tabo rò o re (p.v)*

*(...I have a purpose for writing these poems.
Ignorance has made many to underrate
women. The reason is the insensitivity of
the people to the roles played by women
in the society. Hence the need for
me to discuss in detail on this issue, so as
for people to have a rethink about
women.)*

In a similar vein, Adébòwálé (2003) says:

*...Akitiyan láti so èrò obinrin di mímò nínú ewì
àpilèko lórí òkan-ò-jòkan ohun tí n lo
láwùjo ló bí àkójopò àwon ewì inú iwé yìí.*

(...Effort to make the thoughts of women known on certain issues in society, is the reason for the compilation of poems in this book.)

From the foregoing, it is noted that issues of women interest as major themes in Yorùbá written poetry, as well as critical work, is relatively new. One of the female scholars quoted in the excerpts above, and whose poems are examined in this work, is the frontier in the feminine aspect of the Yorùbá written poetry.

Theoretical Framework: Feminist Approach

Feminism is another form of ideology which is based on women emancipation. Joseph (2003, p. 161) posits that Feminism is a worldwide ideological and political movement directed at changing the existing power relations between men and women in a patriarchal society. Men in such society hide under the guise of male supremacy to subjugate women by a system of sex role stereotyping. Feminism can also be defined as an ideology of social commitment to the struggle for female liberation in the society through conscious and collective efforts. As reported by Joseph (2007, pp. 192-193), feminism started with women movements in the 1960s with exhibitions to depict the skills of women in various disciplines. The most prominent among them was the National Organization for Women (NOW). It was first headed by Betty Freidan in 1966 and was set to advocate for the rights of women in the society and to project the fact that women are human beings like men and must be treated with respect and dignity.

Lockwood (1974, p. 12) argues that early Feminists like Simon de Beauvoir, Elaine Showalter and Kate Millet directed their literary criticism at women as producers of literary artifacts to deconstruct the culture's automatic spread of the grain of patriarchy that puts male over female. Showalter (1988, p. 209) propounds some ideological theories which define the aesthetics of female writings. One of these is androgynist poetic which contradicts the fact that there is any specifically male or female way of writing or approaching texts because human imagination is essentially genderless. Another of her theory is gynocriticism which focuses on the location and examination of texts by women and undertakes a historical analysis of the problems of talented women attempting to create in a male dominated society. Women are encouraged by gynocritics to explore, discover and write more about their bodies in order to portray the notion of female aesthetics.

Moreover, Balogun (2007, p. 204) sees Feminism as an attempt by the

women-folk to universally liberate itself from male chauvinism and patriarchy. It aims at making the position of women at home, at work, at school, in the street etc. more challenging to themselves and their men-folk in the social phenomenon. The radical posture of Feminist criticism is reflected in its dissatisfaction with the place of women in global social and cultural situations. Because of its interest in social issues, Feminism, like Marxism, is political and it proposes a dynamic ideological commitment. Balogun explains that the Feminist literary critic's interest is to pursue the cause of women in literary texts. This is accomplished as women authors write novels, plays and poems. Furthermore, the Feminist literary writers feature and make women characters and ideas dominant in their works. Such writers endeavour to propagate Feminist thought, female concerns, ideas and accomplishments on the one hand and to recover the largely unrecorded and unknown history of women in earlier times on the other hand (Beaty, 2005, p. A25).

Obáfemi (2008, p. 85) observes that in a similar frame as her Western counterpart, the Nigerian female writer is convinced that male writers dominate the Nigerian literary scene and misrepresent the female personality and contribution to nation-building. The position of women writers and critics is that only women writers themselves can create female protagonists, in terms of their dynamism, intuition, innermost complexities and initiative. A few studies by Nigerian female critics of female writing, however, confirm the heterogeneous nature of female visions and consciousness of themselves and of the larger society.

However, Joseph (2007, p. 193) claims that Feminism later spread to Africa where patriarchy prevents the female from actualizing her self-potentials in the society. Arising from the oppressive mode of patriarchy, African Feminist writers, inspired by heroic women of the old like Queen Amina of Zaria, Amazons of Benin Republic and others, write to antagonize patriarchy and pave the way for women emancipation by making them economically independent. Thus, to Joseph, African Feminism, as adopted in this study, is distinctive in nature as it depicts the concepts of accommodationism and motherism in its attempt to emancipate the female from male subjugation. It is different from Western Feminism as it projects gender complementarity and gives room to caring and nurturing of children. This practice makes African Feminism to be tagged neutral. Consequently, it is interesting to note that there are few Yorùbá Feminist writers that are men. Example of such is a renowned Yorùbá novelist and critic, Léré Adéyemí, in his novel entitled *Ògá nì 'yàà mi* (2005). In this work, Adéyemí sees women as mothers who are hardworking, sincere, upright and tolerant. This is

emplified in a female character, Yémisi, whom after the death of her husband stands firmly by her son, Íwàlewà, and ensured that the latter becomes successful in life.

However, there are few Yorùbá Feminist poets among whose work we are examining in this study. These female poets write to propagate feminist thought, ideas and virtues in their poems.

The Socio-Economic Roles of Women in Adéjùmò's Rò óo Re.

This section examines the roles of Yorùbá contemporary women in the Nigeria socio-economic environment as portrayed by Adéjùmò in her work, Rò óo Re. Among the roles attributed to Yorùbá women by the poet is that of playing complementary role to men in fulfilling their socio-economic responsibilities at home, and as well as in the society. Adéjùmò (2002, p. 1) explains in the poem "Orí ló dá mi lábo" (It's my destiny to be created a woman):

*Opé t'Olú se mí lólùrànlowó
Olùrànlowó labó kúkú.jé fókó è
Bábo se n gbébiró
Tí n gbóko ró
Bèè ní n táyé omo se...(p.1)*

*(I thank God for making me a help-mate
A woman is a help-mate to her husband
As she assists in sustaining the family,
She assists her husband
So she trains the children...)*

The poet presents the contemporary Yorùbá woman as supportive of her husband in all ramifications. She assists socially, economically and morally in the socio-economic responsibilities in the family. Adéjùmò stresses that, in most cases, especially if the husband is jobless, it is the woman that bears all the responsibilities at home. This is evident in the poem "Ègún Àbépè?" (Is it a curse?):

*Sóko táya rán nílè èkò
Tó kàwé gboyè imò ijìnlè tán
Tó tún fodún méfà jókòò kalè lánísé
Tí gbogbo búkáátà ilé di wò lórùn aya...(p. 17).*

*(Is it a husband whose wife financed her
education Who having bagged degree
Stayed at home for six years without job
And all the responsibilities were borne by
the wife...)*

The excerpt points to the roles and responsibilities placed on the contemporary Yorùbá women in the face of socio-economic hardship that permeates the Nigerian society. It is almost becoming difficult, if not impossible, to see a man making ends meet without the full support of his wife. She declares in "Ààbò" (Protection) that:

*Á tòjú oko
Á tòjú omo
Á sì tún tòjú àyíká
Isé àtije ò gbodò gbélé (p. 29).*

*(She takes care of husband
She takes care of the children
She also takes care of the environment
And her work must not suffer.)*

The poet is of the opinion that despite a woman's primary role of taking care of her home and the environment, she also contributes economically to the well-being of the family. Adéjùmò therefore concludes that:

*Abo là bá kúkú maa pè láàbò
Ààbò tíi boko lójó ipónjú
Ààbò tíi bomo lójó isòro...(p.31)*

*(It is woman that should be called a protector
The protector that protects her husband in trying
periods The protector that protects her children in
difficult times.)*

Aside from the complementary role played by women, the poets argue that women are as valuable as men in the society. There is hardly anything men do that women cannot do as well. Adéjùmò, in the poem "Etàn Tùtù" (Mild deceit), says

*Kò sóro táko ní
Tábo ò lè kójo
Mo rìn títi títi
Mo rábo tó lólá lókikí
Tó lókikí tóko rè n folá è mí
Kí lakó lè se tábo ò lè se? (p.42)*

*(There is no amount of wealth men possess
That women cannot possess same
In my sojourn in life*

*I have seen a very wealthy woman
Whose husband lives on her wealth
Then, what does a man do that a woman cannot do?.)*

Adéjùmò admonishes women, especially young girls, not to fall prey to deceitful men who entice women with money to destroy their lives. She, thus, advises and encourages women to be focused, hardworking, and self-reliant.

Moreover, the poet observes the latest development in the Nigeria political scene since 1999 where women occupy exalted and challenging offices like deputy governor, minister, director-general, heads of boards and parastatals, etc., and charge other women to emulate them. Examples of such women are Erelú Olúsolá Obadà (a former Deputy Governor, Osun State and now Minister for State of Defence), Alhaja Salimat Badru (a former Deputy Governor, Ogun State), Serah Sosan (a former Deputy Governor, Lagos State). Others include; Dora Akunyili (a former Minister of Information and Communication, and Former Director-General, NAFDAC), Faridah Waziri (a former Chairman, EFCC), Ngozi Okonjo Iweala (Minister of Finance, and former Managing Director, World Bank) and a host of others. Adéjùmò notes that

*Òpò abo ní sì n be nílè yìí
Tàà bá máa pè lólú omo
Irú won nù di ilé-isé nlá mú
Irú won lOba òkè fì sípò kànkà
Wón dipò kànkà mú
Won ò sì balé isé jé
Ààbò tí n gbalé isé níjò isòro
lOlú tún firú won se...(p. 31)*

*(There are a lot of women in this country
That can be referred to as chiefs among women
Their kinds manage high positions
Their kinds are those Almighty
God places in exalted offices
They hold exalted offices
And perform wonderfully well
A protector that rescues in time of difficulty
That God has even made them of...)*

From the foregoing, it is inferred that the poet sees the contemporary women as being capable of contributing meaningfully to the overall development of the society. She frowns at the misconception by many people that women are not as important as men. Adéjùmò (2002, p. 44)

makes a historical allusion to the roles played by women in the traditional Yorùbá society. She mentions women like Madam Tinúbù, the then Ìyálóde Ègbá, who liberated the Ègbás from the Dahomeys, and Madam Móremi who rescued the people of Ifè from the Ìgbòs. This allusion further points to the fact that the importance of women in Yorùbá society cannot be underestimated. The poet is therefore, of the opinion that women are so valuable and dependant at home, at work, and in the society. Women are portrayed as necessities in the lives of men and the society at large. She says:

*Bẹẹ bá rọkọ tó oríre
Ẹyìn ẹ tú u délẹ ikòkò
Ẹ ẹ rú pé gbọingbọin
Layá dúró lẹyìn irú won...(p. 31)*

*(If you see any successful husband
You observe it very well
You will notice that
Her wife is strongly behind him...)*

The extract above is the poet's conviction about the general saying that "behind a successful man, there is a woman". This negates the view of some people that women are worthless as presented in the opening of the poem:

*Bọmọdé mí a wí
Wọ́n á lóbinrin wẹ
Bágbà mí a fọ
Wọ́n á lóbinrin ò tóó pọ́n...(p. 29)*

*(If the young ones would say
They would say of what value is a woman
If the older ones would say
They would say a woman is worthless...)*

To the poet, this impression is myopic and condemnable considering the roles played by women towards the socio-economic advancement of homes and the society at large.

However, the poet does not only comment on the good aspects of women, she also attempts to criticize some attitudes that bring disrepute to womanhood in the contemporary Yorùbá society. Among such attitudes is non-submissiveness of a wife to the authority of her husband. A development that has broken many marriages and has adversely affected the children. She is of the opinion that this attitude is not Yorùbá like, hence it should be discouraged. Adéjùmò espouses this

idea in "Ilé Èkó" (A Learning Centre) (pp. 15-16) thus:

Sùgbón ilé-èkó kan n be o jàrè
Èyí a dá fòbínrín òrèrè
Bó tí wù kímò abo pò tó
Òyè yòòwù tábo ibáà gbà
Bó kò tí ò gbékòò ilé oko
Àfàimò kádé orí e ó má sí sonù... (p. 15)

(There is a particular school
Which is meant for women
No matter the amount of knowledge a woman has
No matter the amount of qualification she possesses
If she fails to submit to her husband
There is no way she will not lose her crown
(husband)...))

Adéjùmò observes that many marriages are breaking nowadays because some women no longer respect their husbands, perhaps because of their educational and social status in the society. Hence, she submits that educational attainment should not play negative roles in husband-wife relationship. The poet re-echoes the Yorùbá concept that a husband is a symbolic crown of his wife, therefore, should be guided jealously. As a result of the fact that the marriage institution in Africa, and in Nigeria in particular, is held in high esteem, the poet advises women to be patient while facing challenges in their marriages.

Èyin iyàwó lódé
N • e lẹ bá wá na sùúrù sí o
È na sùúrù sí i kádé ó má isonù (p. 16)
(You house wives
It is advisable to be patient
Be patient so that you don't lose your crown).

This is a statement usually used among the Yorubá to advise a bride on her marriage day. The poet gives the principles of peaceful home within the socio-cultural beliefs of the Yorùbá people. The Yorùbá believe that "ilé ọkọ, ilé ẹkọ ni" (the husband's home is a training centre), a place where training starts afresh, and to succeed in such a new life needs a lot of patience and long-suffering. However, the poet advises that the men should consider the long-suffering of their wives and must not oppress them, because they are not fools. She also admonishes that women should present their matter(s) intelligently and respectfully to their husband and that they should not keep mute over serious matters; rather they should "speak out". The message of the poet is to

encourage, motivate and sensitise the womenfold to their rights in the family but with high moral value.

Bẹẹ dọgbón sọrọ ọhún kò lèèwọ
Àilèsọrọ nù pílẹ orí burúkú
Àimẹtọ ẹni a máa kọyà jẹni
Bẹẹ tí n' e sùúrù
È fẹtọ abo lélé
Kábo ó má bà á kúkú iyà
Kíkú ẹsín ó má paní sílẹ ẹkọ nlá (p. 16)

(There is no crime if you apply wisdom
in presenting the matter
Silence is the root of stupidity
Lack of knowledge of one's right makes one to suffer
As you are patient
Enshrine women's rights
Lest women die in suffering
Lest one dies a shameful death in the
great learning centre).

In this extract, the poet suggests application of wisdom where applicable in tackling problems that may arise while dealing with the husband's relations. According to the poet, women should exercise patience and use wisdom to present their cases when situation arises. She, therefore, charges the women to be aware of their rights so that they will not die in suffering.

Furthermore, Adéjùmò (2002) condemns the act of laziness among women and charges them to be hard-working. She is of the opinion that there are some women who rely so much on men for everything they need, and warns that such an act should be discouraged. She states in "A-lá-bọdó" (A lazy woman) (pp. 27-28) that:

Òlafàjò tí tera rè mere
Ó wá n bomi iyà mu
Kò tara sàsà
Kò roko bírisopé
Kò gbàárù
Kò roko àjàpá
Káyé ó lè derùn fún un tomo tomo... (p. 28)

(Lazy one that undermines herself
She lives in abject poverty
Instead of her to make haste

*To, at least, look for a menial job
Look for a kind of job
So that life will be meaningful
For her and her children...*

It is not as if the poet is advocating menial job for women in this context, rather she suggests that instead of women idling away and expecting men to provide everything for her, it is honorable for the womenfolk to engage in any job that would fetch some money to, at least, maintain them and their children. Thus, the poet's stand is in line with the popular maxim which says "there is dignity in labour". This also corroborates the belief of the Yorùbá that "eni tó jalè ló bomo jé" (he who steals brings dishonour to himself). In essence, any legitimate work one does that brings in money is honourable and cannot be compared with stealing or prostitution.

Conclusion

This paper has, thus far, examined some selected poems in Adéjùmò's Yorùbá poetry text, *Rò óo Re*: (2002). The paper focused on the socio-economic roles of the contemporary Yorùbá women in Nigeria and adopted the feminist approach as its theoretical framework. The paper concluded that the roles played by the contemporary Yorùbá women in building a virile socio-economic society were so enormous. They played supportive and complementary roles to their husbands in making ends meet at home, as well as helping in nation building. On the other hand, it identified and condemned some ugly aspects in the attitudes and behaviours of some contemporary Yorùbá women which prevented them from fulfilling their socio-economic responsibilities in the society.

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