

IMAGES OF ISLAMIC DIALECTICS IN NIGERIAN FEMINIST FICTION: THE AXIS OF SUSTAINABLE DOMESTIC STABILITY.

By

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Abstract

Women related issues in African Literature are key to domestic sustainability, such that the female development both within and outside the home is vital for her to take her right of place in the society. This paper examines how literature interrogates the position, rights and identity of women in the society, especially in Muslim Northern Nigeria. The discussion of the condition of the Muslim woman in a patriarchal society is poised against religious claims on the rights and position of women. Using Islamic religion's provision on the place of women in society, the paper argues that man has deviated from the Islamic injunction on women, clinging more to tradition and patriarchy. This research work adopts 'African Womanism' as its working theory, an emergent discourse of African Feminism which focuses on the subject of feminine identity and women dialectics within the African context. This paper aims at promoting women's human and legal rights despite statutory laws, religion laws and customary laws using selected fictional works as case studies. It further aims at influencing the decisions of policy makers in the ethnic setting on issues that concern the female gender. The question is how can the woman get adequate religion customary and legal rights and how can they best rule out the earlier image that seem to domestically relegate them to the background but ironically sustains the women. It should be noted that women maltreatment cuts across all cultures, ethnicity, religion, politics and tradition. The ideas here should therefore serve as good supplements to agitation in present times, regarding women education, women groups, women status and rights. Part of findings of this article is that various stigmas of the female figure are glaring in the societal world view, ideology, beliefs, religion and practices.

Key Words: *Stability, Domestic, Womanism, Image, Feminism, Articulation, Stereotype*

Introduction

The female in Nigeria society and indeed Africa is perceived as a subordinate and inferior being, coupled with the trauma of molestation and physical violence. The men use threatening force and cause physical injury, inflict pain, humiliation and degradation on their, especially in marriages. However, both may cause women mental instability. The male attackers create room for enmity especially because the women in most cases are not guilty but wrongly put at fault just because they were born females. Most women are denied public movement and family interaction because they are deemed not qualified to attend family gatherings as a result of not having a male child. Some, who are allowed to attend because they have male children, are not permitted to have much say. Hence in the society where women are treated as if they are children, not by petting but by ignoring them and so by men's refusal to give them affection and encourage their social relationship with the wider community: her family, friends, and incompetent beings. Women are made to take, instructions all the time. Apart from experiencing domestic harassment for the mere fact that they are females, they face threat of sexual harassment and lack of promotion in the office. Young girls are used for slave-like practices; such as female wards and house girls. Widows are denied their rites when they lose their husbands. "In some cultures, a widow is forced to drink the water that is used to wash the corpse of her dead husband. She is not allowed to keep any of her husband's property or jointly owned property. A widow is frequently accused of being the cause of her husband's death" (Asmau 7).

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General African Image of the Female

Olowoyeye (21) opines that: "the family constitutes the first world of the child. The home is the first agency of the child's education. The public without the home function will have no foundation upon which to build."

Despite child custody and total family guardianship as part of the responsibilities of women, husbands' duties are added to women's role. They become the sole maintainer of the family owned by the man. Many men leave their families in places rather too far from them for a number of months and weeks on the presence that working in the urban areas will fetch them more money and that it is too costly having a family in the said urban cities, accommodation and feeding wise. The actual reason for staying alone like a bachelor however is the self-freedom that enables the men to mess around with other ladies while their obedient wives are kept in isolation. Prolonged absence on the part of the men adds to their wives problems, mentally and psychologically. Failure to provide sexual satisfaction would be the emotional distress caused by the man in addition to loneliness. This study gives an introduction, reviews causes and types of the problems women face and examines the effects of these problems on women, based on its findings and realities. The world is a male dominated society. Hence, male chauvinism is, expressed, established and sustained in customary practices and the society constructed a world of the male. Female discrimination varies at home and in the open places and have thus been categorized according to types in the discussions on the findings of this study. Among the recognized types of domestic discrimination, the ones relevant to women's situation are the following;

Child Marriage

No matter the type of marriage, be it statutory, customary, legal, religious, women are discriminated against in family laws. An underage child is married off as soon as possible as about twelve years old to be forced to face the African marital realities. The family of the woman's husband abuses the allegiance and promises made at each stage of the marriage proceedings, in the first place, the man in all the types of marriages is believed and placed above the woman in the joining process and through the use of discriminatory languages. He is for example, referred to as the head of family, the provider and the decider of family matters. And appellation give room for the brutal dictatorship that follows immediately after the marriage. Chastisement (wife beating) is accepted on the land according to Muslim and customary law. But how Islam recommends this beating to be conducted is what men do not adhere to.

Female Genital Mutilation

Genital mutilation is varied and widespread in Nigeria. It is amputation of the top of the vagina clitoris. It's believed in the society for instance, that the purpose is to curtail female promiscuity and prostitution. The cutting is done traditional women and birth attendants. In a particular community it is referred to as *esuriha* and believed to be a treatment of emotional excesses and frigidity. It is inflicted on female children at birth. This circumcision practice is usually inflicted on the female children at birth for different arguments on this issue (Ikpe, 20-21; Ajikobi, 16, Babatunde, 18).

Denial of Good Nutrition even in Pregnancy

In addition to the denial of affection, love and use of cruelty as alternative, many of these women fend for themselves even in pregnancy. They go to farm during pregnancy to make ends meet. They are therefore denied the time for relaxation and the right to accumulate wealth, as they live with

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their children on the farm products they have labored for. Pregnant women for example are forbidden from eating certain bush meat. Ikpe (51-52) discusses the various food taboos put on pregnant women by different Nigerian cultures. She argues that these taboos were the reason why many pregnant women were malnourished. Likewise, Auda (77) argues that nutritional problems predispose women to anemia and other pregnancy complications. Men alone enjoy goodies such as bush meat. A woman in a typical African Society cannot therefore think of any balanced diet even at pregnancy time.

Denial of Education

The best that a Nigerian girl is believed to be capable of doing is cooking good food, and helping in the household jobs. The men prefer to educate the male children rather than the female for two major reasons. In the first place, it is believed that it is the male that will 'carry forth' the family name while the female will end up in her husband's house control. Besides, no world of men is a gender centered one. The females are deliberately left uneducated for the fear of their being enlightened, hence exposed. The fear is that, an educated female may refuse husband's control. Therefore, the few educated female are not given the opportunity to work in government offices. And even when they do, they are castigated.

Discrimination Against Women in the Public

The Women's unequal work burden is compounded with limited access to structural policies and citizenship resources. Women are not allowed to fully participate in the local politics because of certain cultural, social, religious and legal factors, all of which restrict them against public appearance. These are inferred to be society's deliberately implanted factors that militate against women's involvement in partisan politics. Hence, women are denied governance and democratic rule which the society claims to operate.

Sexual Assault and Rape

Sexual attacks are most frequent during public riots and at night market times. Rape cases degenerate to the extent of the use of hands, knives, bottles and sticks rather than the penis to penetrate the female genital. This happens on streets, in markets inside compound of desperate men without the consent of the woman. Children are the victims of their Islamic and Arabic teachers

Street Harassment and Attacks

Men disapprove of women being in their mist and therefore harass them. They do this by complaining about the way the women are dressed, which the male may call improper dressing that requires the female to go into hiding and not come out to the public. This type of harassment is clearer in Lagos Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies (Ladi 83), especially since the enactment and extension of Sharia law into the area. Aftermaths of the Sharia in other Nigerian settings is the newspaper's report which says security men have debarred women in trousers from entering public buildings in Abuja for instance.

Adulteration of Legal Protection and Practices by Muslims

The Local government considers domestic violence for instance as a family problem about which very little can be done (Agomo, 98). This therefore, allows for the persistence of violence,

harassments, verbal and physical assaults. Hence, women suffer in silence. The Nigerian Government generally itself is a direct or an indirect agent of violence, assaults, harassments against women. Discrimination can be found in the laws themselves. For example, the Islamic law is a male-focused and dominated and perhaps a misinterpretation of Allah's good intention on the freedom of man, gender notwithstanding. It is therefore perhaps the customary and traditional dictations regarding the female as a weaker sex that is being codified into the Muslim family law or perhaps the presentation of the laws by the male-chauvinistic mind. Against this background, Northern Nigerian writers tend to explore gender-related issues in the society from Islamic perspective.

Abubakar Gimba emerged in the northern Nigerian literary scene in the second generation of Nigerian literature with his peculiar and subtle African womanist writings. Like Zaynab Alkali, Gimba runs through the second generation of Nigerian literature to the contemporary. He subtly interrogates the plight of women. Gimba uses his works to identify the problems of the Northern Nigerian female and emphasizes how deviations from religious and cultural values by men and some of the women have resulted in the emergent problems of women (Umar 43).

Some of these practices are sold to the women as religious injunctions, making it difficult for them to react against them. But through literature based on 'Islamic Feminism' (although I have my quarrel with the coinage), authors are able to draw a line between Islamic injunctions and culture.

Abubakar Gimba sees writing beyond mere expression through words. To him, as a matter of responsibility alongside creativity; he sees writing as an avenue to contribute towards the social discourse of emphasizing morality, in order to bring out the level of morality in society. (Okome, 23).

Through his works, he displays the intensity of the writer who is passionate about social and cultural concern of his community remote or extended. He is also attached and committed to his works with Nigeria as focus and Hausa-northern Nigeria as specific focus. Gimba is conventional in the presentation of issues, to some extent. Though he is more Islamic inclined and therefore based his ideological ethos on Islamic ethics and doctrine in the presentation of women as members of the society.

The application of the existing laws is faulty and oppressive. At the dissolution of marriage for examples, the wife must refund the bride price even though she was not given the dowry by her parents. A man can unilaterally divorce a woman by mutual consent, but a woman cannot unless through the court. The constitution is itself discriminatory. For further instance, it is written in the masculine gender. The language use in the Nigerian constitution is male-domineering. And this exemplifies the stereotype that women are after - thoughts and not equal citizens and do not have the rights of men citizens. The constitution for instance does not work out defiance - mechanisms for public attacks, assault and rape on women. Experienced women interviewed in the course of this write-up observed that a woman's attempt to rely on constitutional rights are subjected to long waits as the case would be made to move from one level of the court to the other. The money, time, and energy spent by women in the community in the search for their rights plus their very tight domestic schedule put them off. Hence, the female is not given the access

to justice. They are rather frustrated. This is because most court staff and judges are male especially as it is a religious and customary court. Besides, the judge's attitude, preconception, biases and cultural belief would influence the type of final judgment he would pass. Women are always at the losing end.

Lack of Access to Justice

Nigeria women generally are not made part of the administration and institutions that justify rights. This is perhaps in order to disable the women from learning mechanisms for remedying injustice. Some of the injustice acts are the ones narrated in the above discussions. Lack of Equal Participation of Women in Politics In myth and historical records of Nupe land, it is observed that a woman set the pace for politics. Lelu. Similarly in other Nigerian settings, for example, the legendary Moremj of Ife, Queen Amina of Zaria, the Iba of Efunsetan, Emetan of Benin, women are political pace setters (Awe, 9). Yet, they are limited in their attempt to participate in open politics.

Creation of social welfare departments whose function is to resolve reported family problems is one of the moves by the government. The role of this department is to administer justice on matters brought before them. The question however is that how. Many women take their cases before these departments? Women in these settings consider public complaints as family exposure and disgrace. They therefore, prefer to conceive their problems within themselves. The police force is another supposed governmental aiding establishment but they take women issues with levity. At times, the men go free without paying the female anything for the havoc they must have caused the woman. The court system in the towns is another effort meant for handling family issues, apart from other criminal occurrences. However, in most cases, men are not given fair trial. Some of them even fall victims of the prison, where in actual cases they are not at all guilty. May courts give loose interpretations to laws that concern women. This in essence is part of the reason why women do not want to make reports.

There are various perspectives on the presentation of the image of women in African literature. This is because these representations are characterized by variety of themes, attitudes and viewpoints, arising from the differences in socio-cultural backgrounds, contexts and situations. In this regard, Obiechina (33) argues that: "Since gender concerns are very broad, it is necessary to delimit them by concentrating on a unified within a few texts, with a view to establishing the authors' perspectives.

Abubakar Gimba emerged in the northern Nigerian literary scene in the second generation of Nigerian literature with his peculiar and subtle African womanist writings. Like Zaynab Alkali, Gimba runs through the second generation of Nigerian literature to the contemporary. He subtly interrogates the plight of women while at the same time he encourages, admonishes and challenges the women to take their destiny in their hands and make bold attempts to tackle the social challenges they encounter, while still being women. Gimba also uses his works to identify the problems of the northern Nigerian female and emphasizes how deviations from religious and cultural values by men and some of the women have resulted in the emergent problems of women. (Umar, 27).

Abubakar Gimba sees writing beyond mere expression through words. To him, writing is an avenue to contribute towards the social discourse of emphasizing morality, in order to bring out the level of morality in society. (Okome, 23) through his works, he displays the intensity of the writer who is passionate about social and cultural concern of his community remote or extended. He is also attached and committed to his works with Nigeria as focus and Hausa-northern Nigeria as specific focus. Gimba is conventional in the presentation of issues, to some extent. Though he is more Islamic inclined and therefore based his ideological ethos on Islamic ethics and doctrine in the presentation of women as members of the society. There is however "a generalization, underpinning the possibility of religious influence in Gimba's feminist works..." (Alkali, 111).

Conclusion

The case of the number of women is quite similar to the predicament of other woman in other settings in Nigeria. As discussed in this article, the female is highly discriminated against in all spheres of life. However, it is hoped that this contribution to gender issues will enlighten the women and encourage them to talk about their problems in order to change their image within the society in which they were born. Programmes could be designed in the area for the sake of women's safety and security. All findings in terms of the oppression of widow, house-girl/maid peculiar to the area, under aged forceful marriage, custody guardianship, lack of moral and financial supports which are all aspects of discrimination against women in this land, would be discouraged. Also, other public literacy enlightenments could help to safeguard against the persistence or even total deterioration of women condition as men advance in their application of domineering and oppressive attitudes. Gender-awareness training and gender analysis on the male-centric biases in law, Constitution and society would help to make people's mind open. Training for the religious and traditional leaders and scholars in the area is therefore necessitated, since they are the authorities for the informal injustice mechanisms. They could be made to justify mechanisms since the general cultural and religious beliefs is that, wrong injunctions are punishable by God. Women organizations should work towards women empowerment, education and liberation and spread to local government areas of the Nupe speaking people. The police, lawyers and other authoritarian male-chauvinists need to be trained. There is in fact the need to overhaul the legal institutions. The mobilization of strategies in addition to this overhauling would aid effective participation of women in the on-going civil rule programmes. The men would go a long way to also develop positive inclination towards women and erase gender inequality in the Nupe socio-cultural and socio-political terrain. The Women can also begin to see their male counterparts as equals and not as Superior beings or first class citizens. And the media (radio and television) is also a powerful means of affecting this. Change in the female status quo, new awareness and re-orientation of women would help to erase female discrimination in Nupeland. Hence, women can say although we are women, but we are also Contributors to the progress of the community. In his alternative suggestions to the notions of Feminista subjectivity, Sigus, E. (12) sums up every opinion thus:

The gendered dimensions of restructuring the global and national communities extend far beyond the economic. Instead, the current round of restructuring entails a fundamental redrawing of the familiar boundaries between international and national, the state and economy, and the so called "public" and "private".

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