

**AGONY OF FEMINISM IN AFRICA AND THE NEED FOR SOCIAL REINFORCEMENT IN
BALARABA YAKUB'S SIN IS A PUPPY THAT FOLLOWS YOU HOME.**

BY

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Abstract

In African tradition, Women are considered to be the backbone of development, nation building and mutation in various communities. However, their agony of marginalisation that gain its root from religious, traditional beliefs and the narrow mind-set of an average African man on feminism made them incapacitated towards playing their roles successfully. No matter the status of a woman, she is always seen as a second class citizen in her community. To an African man, her primary assignment is to work, bear children and do other domestic works. On the above bedrock, the paper discussed the agony of feminism and social reinforcement in Africa in Balaraba Yakubu's Sin is a Puppy That Follows You Home (2012) using the Northern part of Nigeria as a case study. With the aid of Feminism as a guiding knot, the paper discussed issues confronting women especially some religious, cultural beliefs and customs that are inimical to womanhood. The paper concluded on the note that as long as men continue to arrogate power to themselves, women will continue to be marginalised, oppressed and subjected to the whims and caprices of man all time. The paper recommended that there should be equality and respect between both sexes.
Keywords: Feminism , Patriarchy , Agony and Social Reinforcement

Introduction

Human societies exist on the basis of certain features among which language and literature play vital role. As a creative work of art, literature reflects the happenings in the society and featured such with a close observation of the environment. Using artistic lens, the writer uses his creative imagination to explore people's values from diverse analysis. In view of this, the socio-cultural practices of the Northern people and how these practices influence the choice of characters as projected in various literary works shall be examined and appraised. Ngugi (1981), observes thus: *Literature does not grow or develop out of vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society.* The above view implies that literature does not develop out of empty space; rather, the society serves as the canvass on which the literary artist weaves his work. To Ngugi, a literary artist's work is directed towards his experience from/in the environment in which he finds himself. Such experience could be religious, historical, socio-political etc.

The above lend credence to the fact that, literature mirrors the aesthetic and imaginative behavior(s) of the struggle of community and its socio-political environment. It is the view in literature that, a writer does not jump down from heaven; he is a product of a particular environment, class, social status etc which he/ she has become a part and parcel of. Therefore it is safe to say that, the view of the literary artist is usually what he/she presents to readers. Northern Nigeria is a region with cultural diversity and collective identity. The region is made up of other Hausa (predominantly) speaking states carved out of the then Northern Nigeria. From the pre-colonial area, records have shown that Northern literatures have been dominated by male authorship while female writers were been up surged. To buttress the above, Sani and Ibrahim (1997), are of the view that:

For instance, in 1985, stock and price list issued by the Most influential publisher of literature in Northern Nigeria, The Northern Nigeria Publishing Company (NNPC) Zaria, out of a total of 68 literary titles; only one poetry book was authored by a woman , i.e. Alkalami, A. Hannu Mata (The Pen Welded by Women); an educational piece in the Hausa language by H. Hauwa and H. Yai Shehu.

In the recent past, the authorship of Northern literary scene has been taken up by female writers who debunked the patriarchy mindset that 'females are second class citizens.' To them, patriarchy is as an act of subjugating the female to their male counterpart. Contemporarily, the above step is a drive towards creating a new identity for females

different from what it used to be in the past. The reflection of female authorship in the Northern literature has gone a long way in assisting in examining and appraising socio-cultural practices in Northern Nigeria and how such practices metamorphosed into the treatment of female characters as projected in the primary text. Despite the fact that the language of literature in the North at the beginning was Hausa and other native languages, contemporarily, English has become the major medium of literary communication. Considering the above view, Balaraba Yakubu's *Sin is a Puppy that Follows You Home* (2011), is a popular Hausa literature that reveals some vital issues in Hausa society. It showcases the belief of an average Northerner and discusses the challenges facing women in the Hausa society. It must be noted that the exploitation of women in contemporary African societies is not because they are 'weaker vessels' but it is as a result of the mind-set of their male counterpart to perpetually keep them in a state of subjugation and social imprisonment. In most of Northern Nigerian fictional works, the female, as a member of the society is relegated. In the past when males were majorly the authors in Northern literary works, female characters were presented with less importance in the society as they were tied to the aprons of religion and tradition in order for them to be dominated by their male counterparts.

The Northern Popular Literature (in Nigeria) centres on the customs and tradition of the Hausa people in the Northern part of Nigeria commonly referred to as "Hausa community" (Norvia and Whitsitt, 2002). The literature can be found in cities and areas like Zaria, Kaduna, Katsina and Sakkwato but majority of this literature is written and sold in Kano market (Norvia and Whitsitt, 2002). At the beginning (possibly 80's), writers were fond of writing popular romance fiction which is commonly known by Hausa speaker as *littatan fai soyaya* (books of love). The writer discusses issues of love, marital relationship, problems of polygamy etc. (Norvia and Whitsitt, 2002). At the beginning, some scholars felt that Hausa fiction tends to promote and develop sexual promiscuity among the youths and also encourage disobedience in the society. Some felt that the fiction is characterized by Western philosophies and had nothing to do with Hausa culture. At the end of the day, many 'Soyayya' writers like Hafsat Sodangi, Habiba Abubakar, Sadiya Garba Yakasai etc , created the awareness to the world that 'the novels are created with the ultimate intention of installing proper moral behavior among the reading constituency...' (Norvia and Whitsitt, 2002).

To further support the above view, Maryam (2006), in her postulation is of the belief that 'soyayya' novels cannot corrupt a girl but could be a source of corrective measure to the reader. She further claims that 'Soyayya' novels often show the young girl or woman things that they do that are wrong and how to correct such. Though 'Soyayya' novels are dominated with themes of love, romance or (and) matters relating to love, Maryam (2006) further opines:

*...the books are like a school to women
many of whom do not know how to treat their husbands well...
But if a woman frequently reads (the Soyayya novels)
she can hardly be found wanting by her husband.*

Based on the above, it could be inferred that soyayya novels are antidote to marital problems especially on the part of wife-husband relationship. It is worthy of note that, some Hausa writers are female and in most cases, they bring to lime light various constraints placed on the woman as a result of her gender and attempts at revolt rain more havoc on them. As one of the female Hausa writers, Balaraba Yakubu, in her fiction, presents a Northern society where patriarchal hegemony, feministic marginalisation, polygamous trauma, way-wardness and female segregation reign supreme during the colonial era. Using feminism as the theoretical frame work, this paper exposes the numerous forces militating against the rights of Africa women specifically in the traditional setting as well as cultural beliefs and customs which could promote the perpetual relegation of women to the background. John Stuart Mill in Ventino (2013) observes the presentation of women as "an eminently artificial thing – the result of forced oppression". Also, this paper exposes the various efforts of women (via their literary works) at creating awareness on the rights of the female as a member of the society and to agitate for such in a patriarchy society. In all, the paper contributes its quota to knowledge as it highlights the means of self actualisation in patriarchy society.

Theoretical Frame Work

Concept of Feminism: Feminism, according to Pasque and Tarrington (2011) is a movement aimed at ending sexism, sexist exploitation and oppression. It is a complex notion that has vast differences in meaning and connotation for people spanning generations, ethnic identities, sexual orientations, social classes, nationality and myriad identities. The term Feminism appeared in France in the late 1880s by Hunburtine Auclert in her Journal *La Citoyenne* as *La Feminitè* where she tried to criticize male domination and assert for women's rights in addition to the emancipation promised by the French revolution. By the first decade of the twentieth century, the term appeared in English, first in Britain; in the 1910s in America and by 1920s in the Arab World as *Niswia*. The word Feminism

originates from the Latin word 'femina', a term that describes women issues. Feminism is concerned with females not just as a biological category, but the female gender as a social category. Therefore, feminists shared the view that women's oppression is tied to their sexuality. This was so because women and men's biological differences is reflected in the organization of society and based on these differences, women have been treated as inferior to men. However, whether as a theory, a social movement or a political movement, feminism specifically focuses on women's experiences and highlights various forms of oppression that the female gender is subjected to in the society.

Seen from this perspective, feminism can be said to have emerged as a concept that can encompass both an ideology and a movement for socio-political change based on a critical analysis of male privilege and women's subordination within any given society. Elaborating feminism as an ideology, it posits gender, or the differential social construction of the behaviour of the sexes, based on their physiological differences, as the primary category of analysis. By so doing, feminism raises issues that concern personal autonomy or freedom with constant reference to basic issues of societal organization, which center, in Western societies, on the long-standing debate over the family and its relationship to the state, and on the historically inequitable distribution of political, social and economic power between the sexes that underlies this debate. Feminism opposes women's subordination to men in the family and society, along with men's claims to define what is best for women without consulting them; it therefore offers a frontal challenge to patriarchal thought, social organization and control mechanisms. It seeks to destroy masculinist hierarchy but not sexual dualism. Feminism is undoubtedly pro-woman but this does not follow that it must be anti-man; indeed, in time past, some of the most important advocates of women's cause have been men. Feminism makes claims for a rebalancing between women and men of the social, economic and political power within a given society, on behalf of both sexes in the name of their common humanity, but with respect for their differences..

Types of Feminism

Feminism is both an intellectual commitment and a political movement that seeks justice for women and the end of sexism in all forms. There are many kinds of feminism in which each one of them gives principles and conditions for giving the woman her rights. The underlisted constitute types of feminism as discussed by Echols (1989), Jaggard and Rothenberg (1993), cited in <https://www.uah.edu/~woolf/feminism> and Ghorfati, and Medini, (2015).

Liberal Feminism: Liberal feminism is a particular approach at achieving equality between men and women. It emphasizes the power of an individual person to alter discriminatory practices against women. It is considered as the most important kinds of feminism, which works within the structure of society to integrate women into it.

Liberal feminism aims at individuals using their own abilities and the democratic process to help women and men to become equal in the eyes of the law and in society. By organising women into larger groups that can speak at a higher level, push for legislation, and raise awareness of issues, those taking a liberal feminist approach will use the resources and tools available in the society to advocate for change. The main thrust of liberal feminism is that an individual woman should be able to determine her social role with as great freedom as does a man. Feminism therefore has required removing the historic structure of patriarchal law that denied women's civil rights. The major emphasis is equality of women before the law, in educational and professional opportunities, change in marriage laws, property rights, inequitable divorce, equal pay for equal work, protection from rape, wife battering in the home and liberation from all dehumanizing forces. In short, it aims at bringing equality between women and men in the framework of the existing social system.

Radical Feminism Radical feminism is a movement that believes sexism is so deeply rooted in society that the only cure is to eliminate the concept of gender. It denies the liberal claim that the lack of political or civil rights causes women's oppression. Radical feminism views patriarchy as the root of women subjugation. Therefore, it aims at challenging and overthrowing patriarchy by opposing standard gender roles and oppression of women and calls for a radical reordering of society. The reason this group gets the radical label is that they view the oppression of women as the most fundamental form of man's domination, one that cuts across boundaries of race, culture and economic class. In fact, this is a movement intent on social change, change of rather revolutionary proportions.

Radical feminism questions why women must adopt certain roles based on their biology, just as it questions why men adopt certain roles based on gender. They attempt to draw lines between biologically determined behaviour and culturally determined behaviour in order to free both men and women as much as possible from their previous narrow gender roles.

Socialist Feminism: Socialist feminism also known as Marxist feminism or Materialist feminism is an important movement of feminism. It calls for an end to capitalism through a socialist reformation of economy. Socialist feminists view gender inequalities as intrinsic to the capitalist system, which makes vast profits off women's unpaid labour in the home and underpaid labour in the workforce. Socialist feminism argues that capitalism strengthens and supports the sexist status because men are the ones who currently have power and money. Those men are more

willing to share their power and money with other men, which mean that women have fewer opportunities and resources. Therefore, they tried to eliminate the capitalist system and replace it with socialism, which collectively shares the wealth created by human labour and has no economic stake in maintaining exploitation. Sexism benefits the capitalism, by providing a supply of cheap labor for industry. Women are in low paid, low status or even no paid work. It means that, Socialist feminists reject the idea that liberation for women requires the abolition of childbirth. They seek to analyze the subordination of women as linked with other forms of oppression, and attempt to unite the fights for socialism with that for women's liberation.

The principal criticism levied against Feminism as a theory is that it centres on the experiences of white women and view issues based on the perspective of the Western world. In this case, since it failed to take cognisance of black woman, then it has no much relevance on African literary world. Based on this perspective, feminist then create room for the visibility of the black woman and this brings to lime light the theory of Womanism where black woman's experiences are shared and put into cognisance for feminist analysis but the theory anchors a radical transformation putting into consideration societal factors such as customs, tradition, religion, politics etc (Carby; Ramazonoglu quoted in Langan and Day 1992:16). The theory of womanism became a spirited academic movement which gained entrance into the African literary world with the work of Alice Walker's book titled: *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose*. Alice Walker view womanism thus:

From 'womanish' (opp. of girlish) .A black feminist or feminist of colour. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children 'You acting womanish', i.e like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful behaviour. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one. Interested in grown – up doings. Acting grown up. Responsible, In-charge, serious.

The above definition attests to how conscious a black woman is to her responsibilities. It further explains how gender bias a black woman could be in terms of dispatching her duties to the society. A black woman is always outrageous, courageous, audacious and always strive harder to learn and know more about her society and what goes round in the entire world. A black woman exercises matured behavior, always in charge of situation at all time, serious and never found wanting in her area of duty. Considering all this good features of the black woman, African literary writers jointly embrace the concept of Womanism as a total description of an African feminist thought (Satunsa, 2008). Using the above factor, Mary Kolawole sees African feminism as the “conscious to locate struggle within the African cultural realities by working for a total and robust self retrieval of African woman.” (1997). The cultural realities mentioned above include: African pride, experiences of pre and post colonialism, agitation for self independence, traditional norms, socio-political and family values. Therefore, the African woman cannot be subjected to the imperialist and hegemonic ideology brought about by the West which is referred to as “superfluous to the needs of the majority (Kolawole, 1997).

Agony of Feminism and Socio-reinforcement in Balaraba Yakubu's *Sin Is A Puppy that Follows You Home*

Balaraba Ramat Yakubu's *Sin Is a Puppy that Follows You Home* gives a picture of the African woman focusing much on the Northern part of Nigeria. The role of the major character in the literary work reveals what it takes to be a woman and a mother in an African society. The major discuss in her work is the plight of both rural and urban women where effort to satisfy men proves fruitless. Balaraba does not only bring to the fore the oppression and agony of the female folk but also displays how sexuality and polygamy are social constraints on the woman. The text shows a religious society where polygamy is highly practiced among the people. Adherents of the religion portrayed in the text are of the belief that polygamy is one of the commandments of the Creator. Thus, most embark on polygamy without thinking of the rules governing such practice and without thinking about their ability to take care of their families. It is pathetic that most African men see polygamy as a social passport than a sensitive aspect of marriage that needs to be given a special consideration. Most male characters in the text indulge in polygamy even when they have neither economic nor religious strength to uphold the family structure and marriage institution.

In the text, Alhaji Abdul marries three (3) wives (Balaraba, 8,9), Alhaji Barau gets married to Hajia Halima, Hajia Amina and lastly to Sa'adatu (80). At this level, the text reveals the symbolic representation of females as social and cultural identifier that exists to define feminism. It sees the female as more of a social pariah than a productive element in the society. Male characters in the text see women as properties to be used and dumped in line with the Judeo-Christian myth of creation. Genesis (2:21-22) opines thus:

*...while he was sleeping, He took one of the man's ribs
and close up the place with flesh. Then the Lord made a woman
from the rib He had taken out of the man, and He brought her out
to the man.*

In line with events in the text, it is religious stand that gives the men the blank ticket to handle and treat women without dignity and to also exploit and oppress them at will. As part of recent post-independence literary works that address feminism issue in the Northern part of Nigeria, Balaraba Yakubu addresses the issue of divorce meted on females in the African society. As viewed in the text, divorce is usually an instrument of peace in the Northern part; thus exposing the ignorance of the male gender in relation to religious injunctions. To buttress the above view, Alhaji Abdul marries Rabi ten (10) years ago after which he divorces his first wife who gives birth to a baby girl (P.1). He further divorces Rabi for Deli in order for peace to reign in his home (p.21). Alhaji Abubakar Barau divorces Hajia Amina (p.26) for Hajia Halima and finally, Hajia Halima is divorced in order to allow Sa'adatu to have rest of mind at home (p.97). The author presents divorce as an escape route for male promiscuity. This shows the extent to which men in the North use religion to cover their waywardness; no wonder Alhaji Abdul's first wife left him because *he would not stop chasing women* (P.1). It is obvious in the text that the female characters who experience such humiliation do not see the need to challenge this dominance by their male counterparts talk less of seeing the situation as a serious concern that calls for a stop. The trado-religious and cultural belief of female Northerners that men are the 'alpha and omega' of their homes have subjected them to the exploitative and oppressive tendencies of their male counterpart.

Drawn from Hausa society in Nigeria, the text presents a religious society where women are marginalized, subjugated, frustrated, discriminated and relegated. In the text, Balaraba projects a socio-political terrain of a Northern part of Nigeria where the male is seen as the alpha and omega of everything while the female is referred to as second class citizen. In the text, female characters are tongue-tied as a result of the religious belief that men are usually the head of the family. Female characters like Hajia Rabi, Hajia Halima, Hajia Amina and Sa'adatu are all "zombies" to their respective husbands. Though wives in their respective homes, these set of women always abide strictly by what their husbands say or they will be left without an option than to face the wrath of religion or tradition. The above is suggestive of the reason why in most Northern literatures, women are usually flat characters who are usually given minimal roles like house wives, cooks, house maid, etc to play. They will never be given roles that will project their integrity; roles that will showcase them as agents of change and nation builder or roles that will promotes their identities in the society. The author further attempts to reveal the tragedy and agony of most women in polygamous homes. Apart from patriarchal dominance, the text exposes jealousy among co-wives which usually lead to quarrel and assaults in many homes. For instance, Hajia Halima and Hajia Amina who happen to be Alhaji Abubakar's wives are like cat and dog as they could not live together successfully under the same roof (p.46). There are series of clashes between Rabi and Deli (Alhaji Abdul's wives) as a result of jealousy and in few instances, it results into assault (Pp.19-20). The case of Sa'adatu and Hajia Halima in Alhaji Abubakar Barau's Family is never an exception. These two women see each other as enemies until when Alhaji Abubakar divorces Hajia Halima after which peace reign supreme in the family.

The oppression, use and dump syndrome and rigors of the female folk is clearly portrayed in the novel. Balaraba Yakubu presents a picture of a cosmopolitan society that has no regard for the female but sees them as a tissue paper, baby producing factory and a kitchen docked personal. Drawn from the novel, Alhaji Abdul dumped Rabi with her nine children. He also used and dumped Deli as well as other wives under the auspices of divorce. Despite the fact that these women bore them children, the male characters in the text are depicted as irresponsible because they refuse to cater for the products of their various marriages. For example, though rich and wealthy, Alhaji Abdul neglect Rabi with the nine children she has for him. Alhaji Abubakar Barau also fails to cater much for his family. Balaraba Yakubu satirises the male folk for their neglect and inability to properly take care of their families despite their wealth and riches. The novel further depicts the influence of supernatural forces over the living in all their actions and inactions. From the text, it could be deduced that the Hausa society believes in the existence of spiritual forces that occupy superlative role over the living. To soften the pains and agony inflicted upon women in terms of marriage institution in the North, some women in the text do engage in diabolical or spiritual means in order to secure their marriages. For example, Deli visits Boka (a soothsayer) who assisted her to prepare concoction which she uses to enchant Alhaji Abdul under her auspices and within her reach (p.65). Since Deli has no permanent husband, she engages in prostitution and uses spiritual means to control men. In returning the gesture of Boka (soothsayer), Deli gives her body (sex) to subsidies her payment. This testifies to the level of poverty in the society.

In the North, females stand the risk of proposition. Particularly in a patriarchal society like the one projected in the text under discourse, one of the best option for the female is to enter into an arranged marriage. This explains why Alhaji Abdul's marriage with Rabi is an arranged one, likewise Alhaji Barau and Alhaji Abubakar Barau's marriages. As a Northern female writer, Balaraba is calling for a society that gives the females free will to choose their husbands like in the case of Sa'adatu and Alhaji Abubakar. From her analysis, Balaraba debunks the belief that women are dependent. She succeeded in changing the views of the society that women can be industrious and independent. A good example can be seen in Rabi who takes care of all her nine (9) children and also becomes the breadwinner of the family after the doom of Alhaji Abdul. It is worthy of note that, Balaraba's fiction clamours for social reconfiguration and the adoption of equitable gender system. Through the use of unique characters, the author criticises the norms of the Hausa society. For example, the author challenges polygamy by focusing on men's view about women. Alhaji Abdul divorces a wife and gets married to Deli. Alhaji Abdul sees women as disposables; whenever he is not pleased with one, he divorces such and marries another. The result is that he has no settled home because he refuses to respect the marriage institution. Alhaji Abdul further abuses the injunction of Islam and Prophet Mohammed (SAW) in his hadith that says 'Allah will bless the efforts of those charged with the divine responsibility of caring for others' (viii). Alhaji Abdul fails in providing and caring for his family members. He abandons Rabi with her nine children, without any provision for food, education or shelter. He further sends mother and the children packing without any plan to secure their future. Rabi labours to train the children and to make ends meet. Due to the fact that Alhaji Abdul abuses this injunction, he meets with his doom. Balaraba Yukubu at this juncture calls for a collective assessment of the Hausa society and its gender dynamism.

In addition, Balaraba reinforces social expectation by creating societal awareness that a woman is not a slave the way the average Northern man in the text thinks; but rather a help mate. The author showcases Rabi who assists her husband in many ways and also Sa'adatu in Alhaji Abdul's home. The author further challenges society's inability to embrace women literacy and religious education. The author therefore calls for women educational emancipation. Most of the female characters in Balaraba's *Sin is a Puppy that Follows You Home* are illiterate and this explains why they fall victim of "use and dump" syndrome by men except Sa'adatu who has a bit of education. The fiction is a call for social change in gender expectations of religious Hausa culture within Kano environment in particular and Northern Nigeria as a whole.

Conclusion

The paper presented the agony, pains and trauma experienced by female in a patriarchal society which stems from religion, culture and traditions that place limitations not only on the rights of women but also on their existence because some have died out of frustration. This is a clarion call to all women in Africa to be zealous, hopeful and courageous that the future is bright and that behind every problem, there lies a solution. It should be noted that, African societies have not been fair to women especially the Northern part of Nigeria where religion is used as a weapon of oppression, subjugation, colonisation, marginalisation and segregation. Considering the lives of characters like Alhaji Abdul and Alhaji Abubakar Barau, each of them practice monogamy and lives were better for them. No wonder then the Holy Qur'an says *marry women of your choice: two, three, four but if you cannot maintain justice, then marry only one* (Q4 vs 4). As a rider to the above, God himself confirms that *You will never be able to do perfect justice between wives even if it is your ardent desire* (Q4 vs129). In African societies, no justice is done to polygamy and women are seen to be second class citizens who are totally inferior to their male counterparts. The agony of feminism ranges from religion, tradition, poverty, illiteracy, polygamy etc. and this has on several occasions led to untimely death of some women which is as a result of intimidation and frustration in the process of searching for self actualisation. Female in Africa should fight for their right in order to be free from the shackles of patriarchy which has smothered the female in Africa for decades.

Recommendations

From the above discourse, the following recommendations are made in order to maintain a utopian society free from patriarchal domination.

- Since female are not animals, the male should give them maximum opportunity to take decisions of their own.
- Laws should be enacted to stop the colony, marginalization, maltreatment and brutalization of female by male counterparts.
- Females should be given access to standard form of education that would make them stand the test of time and be independent.
- Men and women should shun immoral acts and embrace morality in every of their dealings.

Men should not see polygamy as a do or die affair. Even though religion mandates it, this should be practiced strictly where the economic and socio-political marital environment can take good care of it.

- Women should be seen as help mates, they should be respected in the society; thus, they should be allowed to hold some rightful positions in the society.

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