
EXPLOITATION OF WOMANHOOD IN NIGERIA A CASE STUDY OF ALKALIS THE STILLBORN

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to find out the aspects of exploitation of womanhood, with reference to Alkalis: The Stillborn. This research work is a literary research and the researcher used already written works to find data for the study. After the research, the researcher found that women are greatly exploited in Nigeria by their male counterparts. The researcher also found that the exploitation of womanhood in Nigeria is clearly portrayed in Alkalis: The Stillborn the researcher found that the emotional and psychological wranglings and trauma underwent by women in the timid Hausa society is portrayed in Alkalis: The Stillborn. The researcher found that Li through dint of hard work bridged the gap between educated women and non-educated Hausa ladies and presents resistance to intimidation and callous exploitation of women by men. The data found also portrays the problem of early marriage, childlessness and abandonment among women. The researcher recommends that the exploitation of women should stop. The researcher also recommends that women should be educated.

Keyword: Womanhood, alkali, exploitation, stillborn, labor.

Introduction

The traditional beliefs and practices relegated women to the background. Their roles included producing offspring, cooking, farming, housekeeping and being primary agents of socialization. Their contributions during this period was mainly felt in Agricultural sector where they

remained the main sources of family sustenance and labor. The colonial period ushered in a new dimension in the role of women as regarding national development. The few women who had access to western education played vital roles which slackened. The cultural shackles which tied women to the kitchen, farms and maternity homes. Women came out from their

subordinate anonymous roles and steeped into public life. During this period, most of their public roles were centered on protest against particular issues of national concern and relevance such as taxation. The famous Abs women riots of 1929 which actually achieved fair taxation that the men have been fighting without result is worthy of note. Not forgotten are the national women movement at Abeokuta and Lagos which led to the exile of the flake of Abeokuta and the abolition of poll tax on women. The pioneering roles and contributions of women like Margaret Epo, Funmi Layo Rasome Kuti, Queen Amjna, Madam Tinubu and Gambo Swabo are a clear indication that women are relevant to national life. Hence women combined the roles of mother, wife and farmhand with public life. The achievements recorded by women during the colonial era and the attainment of independence instilled more confidence in their participation in national life as more and more women were exposed to good education and responsibilities.

Hence, the role of women now extended to different sectors of public life. Today our national landscape is dotted by women, who have excelled in the field of commerce, industry and politics. The role played by women organizations such as

better life for rural women, family support programme etc is worthy of mention.

According to Kurubo (1993): the Nigerian women have made and are still making giant strides both in the home front and in the public sector. So great has been their contributions to national life that it has become practically impossible to ignore their key roles in the development of the country. (p. 28).

There is a political legacy from our colonial masters which portrayed the women as being so soft as to be involved in the cumbersome and intricate business of government. This assertion was proved wrong by the women riots in Abeokuta, Lagos etc.¹ here women asserted themselves in public life. This trend of depressing women politically is however not restricted to Nigeria alone. In most countries, women participate only marginally at the highest level of decision making. Their impact is mostly felt at lower levels of political activities. While more and more women. Are used to mobilize support for candidates, few of them actually occupy important and other public decisions making positions.

Statistics indicate that of the over 47 million registered voters over 24 million were females and the 1998 federal executive council reflect the highest number of

female ministers to date. From the foregoing discussion, we are quick to notice that women participation in politics is quite so negligible at higher levels. To optimize their contribution in this sector, there is need to adequately empower women. According to Joekes (1987): studies indicates that woman exhibit a very low productive activity in formal sector of the economy. This yards stick does not reflect the real position since unpaid labor both in the formal and informal sector is productive. (P.5).

The study carried out by Jokes (1987) shows that apart from their engaging in agricultural practices (which also has an economic under tone) most women are the bread winners of their homes as a result of their petty trading.

Theoretical Rationale:

Many authors have commented on the exploitation of womanhood in Nigeria⁴ One of these authors is Onyis (2001) who said that: Women in Nigeria have been exploited by their male counterparts. In Nigeria, women are treated as second class citizens and they are maltreated in all possible ways. Women are even regarded worse than animals (P. 7). It is the above theory that provided the theoretical Rationale for the study.

Statement of the Research Problem

It is very unfortunate that in Nigeria today most women are being exploited by their male counterparts, The exploitation of womanhood is a serious matter which should be looked into and addressed once and for all. This is because women are also human beings created by God, Women should therefore be given due respects especially from men.

This is why Ifeoma Okoye and Alkali captured, the exploitation of womanhood in their works of art such as still born. In this novel, women are portrayed as being under the subjugation and exploitation by men. Women are portrayed as tailor-made for second class role while the men are regarded as all and all. The drudgery in which women are subjected to is not only pitiable but derogatory and all hand must be on deck to improve the condition, of the womenfolk. It is possible that if women are given position of importance and trust, such women will prove their mettle. The likes of professor Grace Alale Williams and Dr, Dora. Akunyillu are some of the women who have held: prominent position in Nigeria.

These women have lived up to expectation in terms of holding the affairs entrusted to them. Dora Akunyilu for instance e is the direct tor general of National. Drugs, food

and administrative control (NAFDAC): and since her appointment lute that office, she has not failed the nation, professor Grace Alale Williams is the former vice chancellor of university of Benin and she has proved her mettle S the Vice chancellor.

Research Questions:

The following research questions have been set to guide this study:

- 1) Are women exploited in Nigeria?
- 2) Are women treated as second class citizens?
- 3) Are women maltreated by their make counterparts?
- 4) Do women hold any position of power in Nigeria?
- 5) Row can the exploitation of women be checked?

Methodology

This research work is literary research and the researcher already written works to find data for the study.

Data Collection

The researcher collected data for the study through already written literatures. In this regard, the views of other authors are examined and used for the study.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data: for the study through content analysis.

Results

This chapter clearly dewed into the emotional and psychological wrangling and trauma underwent by women in the times Hausa society of Nigeria. It dealt with the humiliations suffered by women in the contemporary Nigerian society and in the Hausa community where the traditional concept of a woman was seen as a rag which could be used toyed and thrown away, after much neglect, embarrassment and abandonment as brought to light by Zaynab Alkali in her novel, *The Stillborn*. Zaynab Alkahi's areas of concentration were early marriages among the girls, childlessness and abandonment. It has been a vogue in Nigeria today for girls from the ages of thirteenth be given out in marriage without due consideration to health hazards, education and freedom of choice. In some parts of Nigeria, girls between the ages of ten and thirteen or immediately after menarche were always given out in marriage. The reasons for these acts have far reaching consequences. The freedom of choice of husband was tied down as most choices were-made by parents.

Most African studies to a large extent revealed the none-involvement of women on marital affairs. Girls are completely

ruled out in affairs relating to choice of suitors and marriages in its entirety. This was true of Dennis Pauline's research in French Sudan around Bororo. Again, Akwaeze (1994) observed with dismay the implications of early marriages when she noted that "the child is immature, encompassed, uneducated and psychologically not set for such uphill task (P.1). Equally in a related vein Nwaneri (2001) advised parents not to engage their wards in early marriages as they have not attained the age of maturity and the consequent emotional and psychological and physiological problems could not be effectively borne by them" (P.9).

In her novel, *The Stillborn* by Zanyad Alkali, she clearly narrated how headmaster married a thirteen year old girl, much to her taste, fondly referred to as the bride child or child bride. The headmaster was no cassanova, will go to any length to satisfy the needs of the child bride, but later lost her. It is thirteen year old bride died in labour a few years ago because she was his father's choice. A girl who is married to a man who is supposed to be the age of his father has no say in the family.

Most decisions as at concerned the family were taken by the man. This suggests that; equally as the woman was used as a rag, the man must look for far: outside the house.

Alkali noted in (46) yet whatever he had ever felt at that time; love or compassion for the Chilo bride had not prevented him from taking his pleasures elsewhere. It is often observed among the Igbo societies these days that breakage in marriages often occur between the adolescents. Most matured ladies who engage in marriage with adults find it disgracing to say "We have parted" In lieu of this the adult taken full control of the 'bride child' life is very boring for such bride child who married the man who is the age of his theirs. To them there are some emotional, physical and psychological problems to overcome which she may or may not introduce to her better half. Men tend to be weak at old age, women are receivers and can withhold at any age, but the suppliers who are men are weak, and thus finds it impossible to in pregnant the woman, therefore now counted as childless and barren.

Where this happens, that is when the man's neglect and abandonment takes control within the family. Zaynab thus looked at the case of weakness had weighed him down that he could not perform. This resulted in his bride packing her things in readiness to go. She went as far as ignoring the clan's people pleadings to stay, NO, I cannot stay, age mates of my father, who could rebuke the innocent children when

they call me barren?, Who indeed could stop the wagging tongue of my enemies in the dancing arena (54), To an average married couple in the African context bareness is seen as a taboo.

It is generally believed that the sole aim of one getting into marriage is to bear children. This is important as the child is a pure recreation of either the male or the female and at most other times the heir apparent. A child equally is believed to be a source of wealth and an arbiter of peace. It is also the course of joy to the entire family. Bareness creates a room for gossip, hatred, acrimony and rancor within the ranks and files of those who are known or unknown to the family. This in this context has forced many into taking many other wives. Awa pointed out that “you cancel it what you like sister, but the point is that one can acquire many wives without slaving for them, so each woman looks after herself and her children while the man keeps a common born. In the Stillborn, his handlavy, Hadys consoles her after she had complained to her of Habu’s attitude towards her within the past four years. Habu was in the city. When 14 made up her mind to meet Habu her husband in the town, he was in different. Hadija consoled’ Have patience, you have a child on the way. You have something to think about, You have no idea how favored

you are. Zaynab clearly showed the importance of children or a child in any situation in marriage. Irrespective of the number of years of childlessness when the child comes, there must be laughter, joy and peace). A child is important no matter the humiliation one received from the husband. Hadys herself was portrayed as a second class citizen among other wives. She was the first wife but childless. The other wives brought in 11 males and four females. At the birth of every new child her agony increases. Hadiya says I was the eldest wife and the barren one. With every birth in the family, I experienced a raw agony”. (P.?). Here Zaynab brought out the humiliation a woman suffers in bareness. She was assaulted, hooked, jeered and made an object of caricature.

Most African writers in their works had death on bareness in marriage. Flora Nwapa in *One is Enough*, narrated how Amaka went to a native doctor to become pregnant after married to Obura for six years. Later Amaka packed out of her husband’s house when any issue for Obura. According to Nwapa, Amaka’s hope failed.

In contrast, Nnu Ego in Buchi Emechere’s *Joys of motherhood*, claimed that her stay in Nnaife’s house was that Nnaife proved her a woman. Flora Nwapa in *Idu* says “If Idu can’t have a child, let her allow her

husband to marry another wife. That's our people do".

In *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa, Efuru accepted the responsibility of her problem and encouraged the husband to marry another wife who will have children for him.

Bareness in the African context might be caused by either spake squabble, disease or stress. However, the holy book made us to understand that among the adherents of Christ, there should be no barren woman. Thus based on this faith, barren women should not be left out to tarnish or go astray. They should be compensated. That is why in her *Stillborn*, Hadja was compensated. When the husband was ill and about to die, he called in Hadya by his bed side and gave her the documents of one of his buildings in the heart of the city. He says "the building in the heart of the city behind in the heart of the city behind the Emirs palace is yours. I built it in your name. Keep the papers and as from this month, collect the rents, when I die they will split my wealth over my corpse like vultures over a carcass. They will not give you a brick because you have no child (P—73).

This was shocking, unbecoming but well thought out.

Radiya expressed surprise and say "I bad hugged the idea that he cared only for his

children and the mothers of his children 73). Hadja expressed surprise because she knew that in the true African context, a barren woman has no share in her husband's wealth. Several married women suffer neglect or abandonment from their husbands. Zaynab Alkali in *Stillborn* clearly examined the psychological and emotional problems underwent by women in most cases of abandonment. They are either subjected to second class citizens or dejected completely as one who had not been in marriage before. One may adduce that men at this point in time men tend to be joyful on most activities they perform. Men according to Zaynab Alkahi in *Stillborn* saw men as callous, inhumane and apathetic, In *stillborn* was abandoned, neglected and made to vote away in the village by Habu for a period of four years, while Habu went to the city to enjoy life. This type of life did not in any way augur well for a woman in her youths as temptations in form of courtship remarriage, gossips usually accompany such barren woman.

This clearly portrayed that there is no protection whatsoever for the woman. As Li passed around the village men were always insightful and passed some sinister comments like "What man in his senses would leave a woman like this behind?, If

he isn't capable there are other capable men around.

Zaynab describes Habu as being slippery as a fish who is good bait for foolish girls. Habu kept a lover house in his house in the city. This particular problem brought him into a type of confusion that he least expected. It should be recalled that the poor Habu was not fully educated, even, the so called Headmaster equally was uneducated as such people. They know little about city girls, their made of love and the desperate. Mode into which they usually plunge these half-baked lovers like Habu. The city girl Habu kept diverted his attention. The problem was not solved when Li was advised to join Habu in the city. Habu kept late nights. The sight of Li was very irritating and disturbing to him. He even refused to eat meals prepared by Li and this was the peak of Li's disturbance. Habu did not care about Li his wife again. They only met when Habu was drunk Li was always full of regrets as hot tears trickled down her cheeks.

The answer was evident she has lost her husband to the city involves. Listen to Li "where is my man, she walked silently. That boyish man with an incredible smile and a mischievous twinkle in the eye. Where is that proud, self confident, half naked lover. That defined the laughter of

the villagers and walked the length and breath of the village Just to see me. Li knew she had lost her man to the city. This man wasn't the man she used to roll with on the sand in front of her father's compound. It is evident that Habu did not want Li in the city. She was more of a village girl now worthy to equate the sophisticated attained by Habu now. Li equally had not exposed her own plans towards Habu. She was bent on not stopping down so low. Her discussions with Hadya clearly revealed that she wanted to go back to the village, but Badj advised about her condition. Li was up to some months pregnancy. Li was desperate to go, and so she said "he treats me as he would treat a dog in disgust (71). When Li couldn't endure any longer the embarrassment she planned seriously to get back to the village.

Zaynab clearly presented Li as a woman who could not stomach the overzealous and callous behaviors of men. She equally projected Li as one of those courageous women who defy every societal assumption of women inferiority over men to rebel against such callous humiliations from men. Li did not make words when she finally determined to get back to the village. In spite of threats from Habu, she maintained her grounds. She was hell bent on going back to the village and demanded

for divorce from Habu was non-challant over this issue of choice, but rather Li prelisted and voiced out “if you call yourself a man divorce me properly” (74). Li has swallowed all those regards she had for Habu, Hebu was not determined to let go Li, either for the exposure of his evil acts in the city or because of his inability to meet his obligations as a man but when his pleadings failed he let to Li.

Li did not go into hiding after she was rejected by Habu, instead she made the cultural dance arena and festivals her usual joint of visit. She appeared there in most attractive we8rs and her stay there were sources of joy to her. Li decided like other modern girls to turn to education. This has been unheard of in the recent history of education among the illiterate Hausas talkless of the women folk who were denied these rights.

Discussion

This will form a new break through against women revolt and liberation against their male counterparts. U went to a spiritualist who made some revelations about Habu and his city girl friend. This revelation served as a morale booster and an eye opener to Li. It should be noted that Li’s younger brother had to a large extent written series of letters to expose Habus misdeeds in the city, but all to no avail.

Habu had constantly exploited. Womanhood,, dumped Li in the village for four years, abandoned her and her meals, Yet borrowed money and terminated the pregnancy from her city girl. The baby was lost and the lady equally lost her womb. The womb of the girl was cut off during this process. Zaynab Alkali, clearly pointed out how Li, though slowly but hesitantly bridged the gap between the educated and non educated Hausa Ladies and her gradual resistance to intimidation and callous exploitation of women by men. He really fought for that Liberation of women from the dejected, and abandoned second class citizens to a lady of an enviable position.

Really, Li made it and was a star to be reckoned with. She broke the jinx of the emancipation of womanhood worthy of a picture of what is in existence in today’s dispensation.

What a humiliation, she wanted to be educationally advanced more than his husband, Hubu and she acquired this irrespective of all odds. This really proved that determination per se is success and that one can attain any length or height at any point in time. In case of Habu, he succeeded in lying a double life, keening the village woman and the city lady, and equally keeping to wives who do not know each

other. All efforts made now to have Li and her child back proved abortive. Habu threatened to commit suicide, He Says “I am ruined, I will commit suicide if you do not come back” (92). Yet all to no avail. Li remarked that every drop of tears hardened her feelings. Zaynab Alkali in *Stillborn* however pointed out the implications behind man’s level beardedness. Habu is a confused state at what is to be and what has been his filth over his departed wife was involved in a fatal accident, thus was placed on a wheel chair. Li was out of reach and his life was equally jeopardized. What a shame. Li clearly triumphed over the callous emancipation of womanhood by male. Most male may solidly not claim much superiority over the female counterparts and that was the exact picture exhibited by Li and Habu in the *Stillborn*

The data found shows that women are greatly exploited in Nigeria. The data found show that women are treated worse than animals. The data found show that women are given second class citizens and are denied of their rights.

Conclusion

Education is the actualistic understanding of the contemporary world and infect the total being of man. Education liberates man from the bondage of crude ignorance. Every individual has the right to acquire the right

type of education. Education has a long history in Nigeria. The first inspector of schools for Lagos colony was appointed in 1902. In 1904 the government found its first school, a primary school for Muslim children in Lagos. In 1900, the year in which the protectorate of southern Nigeria was formed, the government took over the management of the Niger delta pastorates Boys school at Bonny. In 1902, an inspector of schools was appointed for southern Nigeria and an education code for that part of the country was put in force. An education code was enacted in 1916 during the regime of the governor general Lord Lugard.

A board of education was established in 1926, with a large majority of mission and non-official members which in addition to having advisory powers could recommend the refusal of permission to open a school or the closure of inefficient schools. In 1929, the education department in northern and southern Nigeria were amalgamated with a new education code governing the two regions. The discrepancy in the early codes in education were aimed at effective management and control of educational systems and practices which aims also at the society. Education makes the learner to be fully informed of the knowledge be

required in order to socialize and interact with the members of other society.

With the introduction of western education in Africa, the Africans were not only taught how to read and write but were taught the right type of behaviour. It is therefore not very long since the entire society realize the need or value of education. Today many enlightened Nigerians have been advocating for the inculcation of education into the young boys and girls so that these teenagers will be informed.

Recommendations for further research:

The following areas have been recommended for further research:

- 1) The need for the education of women.
- 2) The problems of the exploitation of womanhood in Nigeria.
- 3) The maltreatments of women in Nigeria.
- 4) Women and marriage.
- 5) The historical background of women exploitation.

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