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GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN OLA ROTIMI'S *OUR HUSBAND HAS GONE MAD AGAIN* AND BERNARD SHAW'S *ARMS AND THE MAN*

INTRODUCTION

Definition of *GENDER*?

According to Omonubi-McDonell, gender can be defined in the following regards:

- the characteristics, traits that differentiate men and women — behavioral, aesthetic
- what it takes to be *good at being* a man/woman
- it's a relational category — gender is not a euphemism for “women”
- includes value judgments, positive and negative, associated with masculinity

and femininity

- things other than people can be ‘gendered’ — an outfit, a color (blue/pink), a sport

the analytical concept of gender was introduced in the 1970s to indicate the social roles, characteristics, and values *assigned* to males and females in a given society; gender understood as historically and cross-culturally particular

gender is social, not natural, not *fixed* in nature — biological or cosmological

important implication: gender hierarchy, patriarchy, is thus social, not natural — not inevitable

What is *SEXUALITY*? (in the sense as issue in literature)

sexual desire, as an aspect of human nature (hormones, bodies as well as feelings, thoughts)

sexual acts, practices, behavior — what people *do* sexually — within social relations, relations that may be characterized by hierarchy, inequality

sexual orientation — personal identity (gay, straight, bi) based on the gender of one's generalized object of desire

“**sexuality**” has to do with all of these, how **desire**, **practice** and **identity** are bundled together, in various ways

Gender and sexuality in literature is a tool in the hands of the feminist theory which to aims to understand the nature of inequality of women and focuses on gender politics, power relations and sexuality. It campaigns on issues such as reproductive rights, domestic violence, maternity leave, equal pay, sexual harassment, discrimination and

sexual violence. Themes explored in feminism include discrimination, stereotyping, objectification (especially sexual objectification), oppression and patriarchy. The basis of feminist ideology is that rights, privileges, status and obligations should not be determined by gender. Modern feminist theory has been extensively criticized as being predominantly, but not exclusively, associated with western middle-class academia. Feminist activism, however, is a grass roots movement which crosses class and race boundaries. It is culturally specific and addresses the issues relevant to the women of that society. Some issues such as rape, incest, mothering, are universal themes.

Simone de Beauvoir (1908–1986) was a French writer, intellectual, feminist and social theorist who is best known for her treatise *The Second Sex* (1949), a detailed analysis of women's oppression and a foundational tract of contemporary feminism. It deals with the treatment of women throughout history and is often regarded as a major work of feminist philosophy. It illustrates de Beauvoir's concept of woman as "the Other." "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (301). It asserts that the experience of woman has been neglected by conventional society. As de Beauvoir writes in her *The Second Sex*, "[t]wo separate beings, in different circumstances, face to face in freedom and seeking justification of their existence through one another, will always live an adventure full of risk and promise"(248).

Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, declares that "[o]ur societies are patriarchal and a woman must break the bonds in order to be herself as a human being" (125). Meanwhile, in 1878, in notes made for *A Doll's House* Ibsen declares that "[a] woman cannot be herself in the society of the present day, which is an exclusively

masculine society, with laws framed by men and with a judicial system that judges feminine, from a masculine point of view” (Meyer, 1971b:9).

In early Nigerian fiction works, female characters were usually portrayed in negative light or not given any

major role. Femi Osofisan explains this trend:

As far as the women are concerned, the bulk of our literature is secretly a weapon of male propaganda, of an agenda to keep the female under perpetual dominance... they mention works like Soyinka’s *The Lion and the Jewel*, Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Clark’s *Song of a Goat*, Wale Ogunyemi’s *The Divorce* and so on, as examples of this sexist agenda (p.4).

The negative portrayal reflects the highly patriarchal nature of the Nigerian society dictated by cultural beliefs. Ahmed Yerima explains this further:

The masculine traditional cannon has always dominated the African consciousness concerning beliefs and existence. The culture, the tradition, the languages, the names, the types of vocation, even the biological and physiological structure of human as determined by this environment and nature, have always reemphasized the dominance of the male. Man grew with such cultural beliefs, believing in it, guided through life by the society,

and practicing such beliefs even in later stories he created to his death. The female counterpart was made to accept it as the only way... woman was indeed a stereotype, a symbol of life, cocooned by cultural beliefs (pp.59-60).

Gender and sexuality portrayed in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*

In Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, women are naïve, ordinary and foolish.

Women are

also portrayed as illiterates in the characters of Mama Rashida and Sikira who are viewed as uneducated and uncivilized about people, places and issues. Rotimi is however, supportive of the feminist cause in *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*. He distances himself from inferior viewpoints held about women in society. He revolts against the debased look society has of women and their confinement to the domestic realm. Women are not considered highly in state matters. In the play, the advocacy for women's liberation is advanced by Sikira in her conflict with her husband, Lejoka-Brown

Sikira's rebellious stance and theory of equality of the sexes is the result of Liza's pedagogic

role in the play. Liza is seen as the transporter of sexual equity from the western scene to the African setting. Sikira's quest for self-identity is vividly conveyed in one of her caustic responses to her husband Lejoka-Brown: "*Do as you say, do as you say! It is always do as you say. Always command, command, command! Why don't you show some respect and let me do as I want, just once*" (p.57).

Gender And Sexuality in *Arms and the Man*

In reading a George Bernard Shaw's play, *Arms and the Man*, one should pay attention to difference between characters of social class and gender or sexes. George Bernard Shaw pictures gender role in characters, Louka, Catherine, Sergius, and other. There is masculinity in Louka's character while annoying Nicola. She reveals her control through her interaction with Sergius. Mrs. Petkoff also shows masculinity in controlling house hold works in absence of her husband Mr. Petkoff. In first act of the play, Raina is threaded by Bluntschli who runs and escapes form soldiers. He threatens a defenseless woman with his gun and allows her to hide him behind the curtain. Raina:

Who's there? Who's there? Who is that? A man's voice: (in the darlcness, subduedly, but threatening)

Sh-sh! Don't call out or you'll be shot. Be good; and no harm will happen to you. Remember. If you raise your

voice my pistol will go off.

Raina: Yes.

Man: Well, I don't intend to get killed if I can help it. Do you understand that?

Raina: I suppose not. Some soldiers, I know, are afraid of death.

Man: All of them, dear lady, all of them, believe me. It is our duty to live as long as we can, and kill as many of the enemy as we can (Act I, 10).

Nicola is a principle male servant of Petkoff household and Louka is beautiful maid and Nicola's fiancée. Nicola has his ambitions and wants to be a businessman. When he realized that Sergius has romantic desire to Louka, he decided to have Louka as a customer rather than a wife. So he encourages her to engage with Sergius. "Louka: I believe you would rather be my servant than my husband. You make me more out of me. Oh, I know that soul of yours. I must believe in my own way. [Sergius comes in. he checks himself a moment on seeing Louka; then goes to the stove]. Nicola: oh, sir, thank you kindly. I was speaking to this foolish girl about her habit of running up here to the library whenever she gets a chance, to look at the books. That's the worst of her education sir: it gives her habit above her station.

CONCLUSION

The overriding focal thrust of literature has always been to foreground the physical, prurient, negative nature of woman. By their negative portrayal of women, men expose their propensity to suppress women. Women are seen as responsible for all the ills of the society. They are noted for moral bankruptcy, loose tongue, gossip, flippancy, rumour mongering, hypocrisy, treachery, and many more. These allegations against women are mere figments of male imagination. Women's portrayal as sex objects and mostly as mothers and wives forecloses their other capabilities. Feminists are engaged in the struggle for a fundamental change in gender relations so as to recognize the role of women as full and active participants in the development process.

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