

# THE PRESENTATION OF GENDER AND SEXUALITY

## INTRODUCTION

In pre-colonial African Era and Nigeria per say, the native Nigerian societies developed administrative win-lose system that favors the male. Women were dusted in gloomy, but were not barred in providing for family by the way of financial support via Short Distant Trade (SDT). Women traditional assignment needs her financial less burden status or else, the eminent or near-collapse of the family system.

Furthermore, many extended family members helped to take care of the children, not only the mother. In fact, in some Colonia society, relatives were bound to train at least, one or two members of the extended family nucleus. The restrictions that colonial government places on women however, changes their prime position in the ingenious Nigerian societies and Africans at larger.

In the case of Nigeria, executive decrees or colonial legislations barring women, indirectly stopping them from carrying out their duties towards their families marks the genesis of women subjection. The resultant effect of the changes in the family role gingers many Nigerian women to rally themselves in female solidarity which culminates in series of protests throughout the colonial period against these policies and colonialism itself.

In 1929, the Aba women riot, questions the rationality behind the British policies that neglects the participation of women in decision or policy formulations. The Abeokuta Women Union led by Mrs. Fumilayo Ransome- Kuti, demands for the abdication of Alake Ademola 11 and the abortion of the Native Authority System strategized by the colonial masters that were exploiting the women, She campaigns against "Taxation without Representation" like the Americans did during the colonial occupation of the New World. Mrs. Fumilayo further states that ther should be a flat taxation rate because women do not suppose to pay separate tax from their husband hence the women are not participants in policy making. Generally speaking, colonial should be a metaphor of evil and the beginning of changes in African Traditional lifestyle which women are the most victim.

More so, to broaden this view, the introduction of gender mainstreaming by the Union Gender conference held in Kenya to facilitate development and the equality of the female in the 201<sup>st</sup>

generation is not only germane in all round development of the female potentials, but to address the psychological betrayals of the spirit of growth and feminism orchestrated by all- men dominated mantra or the patriarchal dominances of the third World Countries latent syndrome were considered uppermost. So in order to design better policies, the concept of gender mainstreaming was first introduced at the 1985 United Nations World Conference on Women in Nairobi. It was consequently introduced as a strategy in international gender equality policy through the Beijing Platform for Action adopted at the 1995 Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing.

Against this backdrop, poets, writers, activist, and all alike, has taken their pen lending their voices on the issue of the over-used tendencies of women by the men counterpart. Focusing particularly on the activities or the works of the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and the 201<sup>st</sup> centuries, poets or playwrights, whose themes has seek to address the protracted nature of gender base violence , dearth respect on sexuality and exploitation: depicts by the female fictional characters gains expression in the works of these author like “Color purple” by Alice Walker, “Beloved by Toni Morrison, “Jennifer Tiger” by Adrienne Rich, although the latter is a poem, but all features the unusual exploitation of women.

In fact Nelly Furman captures this ugly scenario when she opines “In a world defined by man, the trouble with woman is that she at once an object of desire and object of exchange, value on the other considered simply as a relationship sign between.” Hence writers rarely paint positive images of women in their fiction; hence writers to a larger extent among rural settings, urban both the rich and poor ones places woman a bit lower than children and disgracefully to the position of a house keeper.

When speaking of gender, we know it is the status of being male or female and when we talk about sexuality, it has to do with the feelings and attraction one feels towards other people. Extensively by maniacs can be seen as: the sexual subjection of women to the emotional satisfactions of the men. More or two themes in reality

shall continue to feature in both works. One of them is the literary representation or portraying of the female body in relation to that of the male; secondly is the manners that these women accept or reacts to these figurations of the body of early modern comedies.

This work shall seek to specifically, discuss the presentation of gender and sexuality in Ben Johnson's 'Volpone' and Woye Soyinka's 'The Lion and Jewel'.

In 'The Lion and The Jewel', in the story's village 'Ilujunle', women are subjected to playing a subservient and domestic role, as opposed to the men who are expected to be authoritative and educated figures. This statement can be easily proven using two main characters 'Sidi' and 'Lakunle'. Baroka is the titular ruler with a fisted staff who epitomizes masculinity and a free –for all sexual promiscuity as regards to many women in his possession as wives. Meanwhile, Sidi, is the titular "Jewel" just as Baroka, who is the Chief also known as Bale is the "Titular Lion."

Lakunle was the village school teacher which meant he was quite well educated as opposed to Sidi, who was like many women in the society. Lakunle is tagged 'Bush girls' because of their illiteracy. We see here the imbalanced spread of education between men and women in this society, men had the upper hand in education, while women were expected to look after the home and husband. Lakunle continuously belittled Sidi, by making constant remarks about how she was less intelligent and weaker than he was, simply because she was a woman, and he felt no remorse in saying such things to her because he felt justified in what he was saying and did not even see it as offensive, it was a common known fact to the men in their society; women were worth less than men, they were uneducated and all they were worth was reproduction and servitude to the man and his household. The most unorthodox part about these conversations that Lakunle had with Sidi is that they were in an effort to obtain her as a wife. Sidi on the other hand did feel a bit wounded by his remarks, she responded by reminding him of all the work women were expected to do in the community like pounding yams and carrying children and how it was ludicrous to call women the weaker sex.

This shows how Sidi truly felt about the role of women in their society, she truly felt that there was nothing wrong with living in servitude to the men and she even felt a bit proud of the fact that women were able to endure so much; and only seen in the domestic sphere or sex machine in the hands of the male. Again, she did not

feel oppressed in the slightest bit; rather, she feels that Lakunle was out of place and disrespectful for thinking of it from that angle, in her opinion the men deserved to be served and have the highest authority because that was just the norm, but that did not mean that women were worthless. Despite Lakunle's insults, Sidi still agreed to marry him if he paid the price. It was as simple as that in their society, there was not a lot of love and romance involved in marriage. A man simply had to pick a girl from the community that he liked and pay her family a certain price if she was a virgin, (if she wasn't then he did not even have to) and a few years or even months later he could go out and repeat the same process again.

Overall in my opinion, in the village of Ilujunle women lived in servitude to the men and the household but they did not feel oppressed by this, it was quite the opposite; they felt empowered.

In *Volpone*, female sexuality is examined in the characters Celia and Lady Would-be. These characters portray and reflect the misperception and low status of women in Renaissance Literature. Celia is known in the play to be religious, good, submissive and faithful to Corvino her husband who seems to control her and watch her movements. Corvino treats her far less like a lady and far more like a prisoner by keeping her locked in her room. He thinks of her as his most prized possession. We see that she was sexually harassed by Volpone and because of his act; the matter was taken to court where she appeals to heaven to expose him. She represents the Renaissance ideal of a woman: chaste, silent and obedient. Celia finally stands for herself in Act 3, when she protests Corvino prostituting her out to Volpone in order to gain his riches. After pleading with Corvino not to let this happen, her defense lies in Corvino again locking her away. She says to him, "Sir, let me beseech you, affect not these strange trials; if u doubt my chastity, why lock me up forever..." in this situation, Celia only hopes for a noble knight to rescue her from this situation. Luckily for her, one exists. In the Character of Lady Would-be, she is a repulsive female stereotype. She is Sir Politic's wife. In contrast to Celia, who is confined to her home, Lady Would-be is given a lot of freedom, roaming Venice freely. Lady Would-be also contrasts with the Renaissance ideal of a woman, since she is an extreme talkative and well educated. She is skilled with language and makes constant literary references, but most of the men in the play (in particular Volpone) find her exceptionally annoying.

In conclusion, the first generation writer in Nigeria paints or creates subservient fictional female characters that have to wallow in the pool of gender imbalances, sexually abused or overused via marriages, tradition, customs and other social roles.

Chiefly among this is Professor Woye Soyinka who never favor a woman positive heroine his works hence my choice of using "The Lion and the Jewel", which provides or raises issues that is very helpful to this essay. By and large, Ben Johnson's Volpone also has the issue of gender and sexuality tied all through the story, which did not promote the development of the women but rather subjects her generic milieu.