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## THE IMAGE OF WOMEN IN YORUBA NOVELS :

### AN EXAMPLE OF KO SI LATE

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#### Abstract

The challenges facing women in our society have become the subject of academic discourses in various disciplines in the recent time. In fact a call has been made that women image needs to be redeemed since it is not natural but only created by patriarchal society Sheba (1991). Hence many educated women in various cultures have risen up to the challenges. They employ literature as a major tool where they write to rectify the women's image. Among the tremendous artistic works which employ feminist approach to discuss women's image is Adekeye (2008) in her novel **Ko si late** This paper is to assess her novel within the theory of feminism.

#### INTRODUCTION

The slogan now in this our democratic society is the agitation for women empowerment. Although, issue of feminism emanated from the image of the women created by the patriarchal society which our culture has helped to nurture. One of the new advancements that influence our understanding of literary text is the expressions of feminist approach. This is evident in Shodipe (2008 : 242) that Feminist is not only to validate the claims that women are oppressed by patriarchal order or to demythologize negative images of women but to evolve a feminist basis of social relations aimed at enhancing women's selfesteem and helping them to find their voices in a male dominated social order.

Therefore 'womanism' within the theory of feminism is the best movement to demand for respect for the women. If that be the case, this paper is primarily focussed on **Ko si late** a novel written by Adekeye.

## Theoretical framework

In the literary circle, there are a number of theories that help in literary analysis. These theories are to enhance a perfect understanding, comprehension and appreciation of the theme of such novel.

Feminist theory is adopted in this paper because it is a gender oriented theory, more so it is set out to sustain a deep understanding and appreciation of women's folk. Feminism is from a traced back to 17<sup>th</sup> century in Europe when women in that aristocratic class s began to demand for improved rights and opportunities. In Nigeria to be specific in Yoruba land, we had examples of women who led various protests against women oppression such as 1929 and 1948 , Abeokua women riots, Moremi of Ife, madam Tinubu of Lagos to mention but a few

In view of this, many critics become women rights activists and could d be seen as defenden of this theory. Kolawole (1997 : 11) observes that

Feminist theory is not one but many theories or perspectives  
and that each perspectives attempts to describe women's  
oppression, to explain its causes and consequences, and to  
prescribe strategies for women liberation.

It is noted that African women recognize their husbands as heads s of the family, but they do not want cheating by men as some customs have it. Their plea is not to rub shoulder with men no but to say that they too have societal roles to play so as to make the society better for all an sundry,. In support of their claim, Sheba (1999: 55) says that

A womanist should among other things be in constant struggle against cultural value that negate womenfreedom for the benefit of women folk.

Ogunyemi (1988: 15) speaking in the same vein that womanism wants a mnatural relationship among every member of the family when he says:

Womanism is black-centered, it is accommodations  
it is believes in the independence and freedom of woman  
like feminism; unlike the radical feminism, it wants  
meaningful union between black women, men and

their children. It is this type of feminism that we adopt in this paper. It recognizes the qualities of women In solving family and societal problems. It persuades women to be strong in mind and body, and not to accept to be objects to pity but rather to have confidence in their powers and self

respect. From the foregoing, we can say that womanism as a perspective of feminism is a term that describes the position of women in a patriarchal society and also proffers ways for the women emancipation from male oppression.

### **The plot of the novel: Ko Si late**

The plot construct of this novel is simple, logically and straight forward. Different stories are woven together to depict Yoruba tradition, and customs. The title of the novel is from Yoruba proverbial saying which is 'olowo ko romo ra lori ate. That is (rich man can not see a chila to buy in the market). **Ko Si Late** can equally literarily means (unpurchaseable). The writer brings out moral issue and she creates awareness in the reader about the moral laxity of the present generation and the urgent need to change for better Her approach has drawn our attention to the evil of moral decadence. All aspects of life of women are depicted vividly in the novel to show their desirable aualities and blemishes.

**Ko Si Late** starts with Segilola's portrayal in sober mood because of her inability to bear children alter several years in marriage. All efforts to bear a child through the aid of herbalist Proven abortive undil she meets with a pastor who prays for her and she is able to have three children. The message of the novel in consonance with its theme is that parents particularly women should train their children well for future challenges, more so the blame of inability to Bear children should d not be a cross to be carried only by women.

### **The image of fwomen in the novel: ko si Late**

Many scholars have analysed the image of women in the past. Some portray women as deceitful, immoral and heartless, but some see them as saints and portray them as good mother, wife, partner and confidants.

The work of Adekeye (2008) under review depicts the picture of a good wife in her characters Segilola and Ojutalayo. Humility of Segilola is displayed when Agboola is annoyed for Her hacking a goat and dancing round the street as a way out for barrenness as prescribed by the Babalawo. The author recounts that:

lyen (Segilola) si kunle tio n bee.. pe dakun oko mi,

olowo ori mi... Bi Segitin ki agboola lori ikunle tio si

di ese re mu.

and Segilola kneels down begging, saying please my dearest

husband. As Segi is praising Agboola on her kneels.

she holds his legs.

Further more, Segilola is seen as an example of good mother. She single handedly struggle to become pregnant she made several attempts to visit babalawo despite her husband dislike to this act later her barrenness was solved by a pastor through a divine mean and she became mother of three children and take good care of her children. Women are portrayed here through this character as been courageous, hardworking and trustworthy. Sill the author do not spare her fellow women in her novel as she condemns and rebukes all negative activities of women identified, For instance the image of laziness, jealousy, wickedness and love for money as shown in Jokoo behaviours. Jokoo has failed as a good wife and mother to the family. She couldn't take proper care of the husband not to talk of the children. She is lazy, arrogant, a drunkard and to crown it all, she indulges in prostitution.

Women are portrayed as mere housewives in this novel. That is the reason why Patricia (1979) is of the opinion that any good feminist novel must uplift the image of women because of what they experienced which is more than a mere housewife in the family.

Child bearing is wrongly seen as ul timate in marriage. This is what makes Agboola to rush to take another wife who is opposite in everything to Segilola. Despite the fact that Segilola is humble, kind, hospitable and respectful to elders, she is frowned upon and condemned by Agboola because of delay in child-bearing. In a patriarchal society, women are held responsible for barrenness in the family. It is just an attempt to suppress and oppress women folk and to keep them under the bondage of men. In fact, what happened to Segilola and Agbaola's attitude really show that women are in bondage and they need liberation. It is morally alright for men to be partaker of what is going on in the family, it should be for better or for worse.

It is portrayed in the novel that men are free to do and undo, but women are being restricted with norms and customs. A woman can be inherited as a result of her husband's death. Women are subjected to hard labour, face the danger of rape, sexual Iharassment, and they bear the brunt of economic hardship. Now womanists seek for change on all these peculiar problem, they are calling for men and women collaboration.

Yoruba women are portrayed as respectful and humble to their husbands. Even in the novel when Agboola who is Segilola's husband was annoyed for her obedience to the Babalawo's instruction- all in the search for the fruit of the womb. She immediately calms him down by:

Segi bu sekun o kunle wo. O di orun ese re mu, oni

Oun o ya were aajo omo ni...

(Segibursts into tears and kneels down. She holds his

legs and pleads that she is not insane, it is the desire to bear a child.

(p. 8)

The impression of women being busybody, lazy, greedy, dirty is gradually reducing, they are now seeing as a good wife and mother upon all partners in progress. Some Nigerian women are more virtuous than the former popular portrays. Many of them now hold political offices and are charged with serious and sensitive responsibilities. However, we should not lose our sights that we have both virtuous and corrupt women.

In addition the image of jealousy and greediness as a common feature in African women is painted. Adekeye shows this in the characters of Segilola and Ayoni. She even concludes that every woman is tagged as lover of money. No wonder Mr Ovelowo while advising Kile says:

Woo Kile, owo ni opo obinrin mo. Opo awon omobirnrin ode oni gan an  
ko fe okunrin olori ebi,

(see Kile, majority of women are lovers of money. Majority of women  
nowadays do not want any relatives with their husbands.)

To sum up, women need intellectual empowerment to meet the challenges of modern living. A new understanding of modern African women is that her survival and self respect is not only dependent on marriage, since educated women can be successful in their chosen fields without husband.

### **Conclusion**

The author of **Ko Si Late** highlights the v womanism perception of marriage as retarding women's freedom, projecting women liberation as epitome of how freedom can bring about self-actualization. This paper has brought into focus the image of the Yoruba women as a wife, child-bearer and home maker. Nevertheless, there are women whose portraits suggest them as indisciplined, child-abusers, indolent, wicked and prostitutes. There is a need for the literary writers to work towards reconstruction of the image of women especially in these recent times. We should note that African feminist is interested in the issue related to family living but it is not down grade the status of the womenfolk or to render them useless. A good feminist novel must the image of women because of what they experienced which is more than a mere housewife in the family and the country at large.

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