

Women Writers and the Images of Women Representation in the Post-Colonial Literature. Case Study of Zuwaira Isa Jos and Her Struggles

Dr Balbasatu Ibrahim

PhD. (Mrs.), Umaru Ali Polytechnic,
Sokoto, Sokoto State, Nigeria,

ABSTARCT

Women in Northern Nigeria although seemed and portrayed by many as naïve and back ward educationally, economically and politically, are blessed with talents and determination . These qualities make them able to struggle and overcome most of the cultural inhibitions; of gender discriminations and religious misconceptions that hinder them from participating in decision making and accessing other basic necessities for human development. They manage to break the silence and raise their voices through oral and written literature, where they lament and admonish the society against some cultural practices that are usually targeted at women folks. In this paper one of such women writers; Zuwaira Isa Jos, and her works are discussed. Index Terms: Reformist movement (The Nineteen Century Islamic Revolution lead by Sheik Othman Bin Foduye in Northern Nigeria 1908 that lead to the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate), Unguwar kurmi (a suburb area in Kano Metropolis), Kobo Air (Famous Air Line airlifting the Nigerian Pilgrims in the 80s.

INTRODUCTION

In Northern Nigeria women's development is neglected right from traditional setting into the post-colonial era. This could be seen in the early 19th century Hausa land now Northern Nigeria) when the reformist movement tried tackling the issue explaining that women were left in ignorance and were being used and dumped like old kitchen utensils. The colonial master's system of Education in the region was also focused more on educating male children of the elites and neglecting that of women folks for over a period of 26 years.

But in spite of this gap the very few females that were opportuned to be educated most of the times at primary level only, managed to push their way to the top where their voices could be heard through oral and written literature. Such women are the likes of Hafsat Abduwahid, Balaraba Ramat, Bilkisu Funtua, Zuwaira Isa etc. who managed to catch up with their male counterparts and even beat them in their own games. This is demonstrated in 1978 writing competition organized by Northern Nigeria Publishing Company (NNPC) where Mrs Hafsat Ahmad Abdulwaheed participated and win, her book *So Aljannar Duniya* was published in 1980 together with the other male Novelists that competed. Zuwaira Isa Jos was another prolific writer whose works tells the tales of women's struggle in Northern Nigeria during the postcolonial Era.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ZUWAIRA ISA

Zuwaira Isa Jos as she is popularly known is a prolific writer of Hausa poems, drama and prose fiction. She was born and live in the Northern Nigeria from 1967 to date. Her father is Alahji Isa Danlami Mai Kekuna and as was the tradition of Hausa/Fulani people of Northern Nigeria she started attending Malam Yusuf Dabo Quranic School at Unguwar Kurmi in Bauchi metropolis at the tender age of three. By the age of six years she was enrolled into the Bauchi Elementary School later called Baba Na Sidi Primary school from 1974 to 1980. In those days it was the Sarakuna (traditional leaders who gave the names of children under their rule for enrolment regardless of the consent of the parents because majority of the parents were against western education, they consider it un-Islamic and refused to send their children to formal schools.

Although Zuwaira was enrolled and allowed to complete primary school, she was denied her ambition to transit to secondary school and she was married off at the age of 13 years. After her marriage, because of her passion for education she convinced her husband who allowed her to join the Higher Islamic College (HIS) in Bauchi. Later when her husband was transferred to Jos she joined Center for Islamic Studies Jos, where she obtained both Junior and Senior secondary school certificates. She then joined COE Kano where she obtained National Certificate of Education (NCE). All of these happened amidst challenges from left, right and center because the society believed that a woman's place is best in the kitchen and frowned at any attempt to change that.

HER SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

Zuwaira was inspired to become a prolific writer by so many factors. She was born to be a writer because according to her, she has passion to compose poems since when she was a little girl and with the support of her grandmother whom she used to sing to and got words of encouragements, she nurtured her emotions and talent. Her passion for education made her to read many Hausa fiction novels which also inspired her to write prose fictions. Her courage and determination to demonstrate to the society that women too can make it (gender sensitivity), also inspired her as she demonstrated in 2005 when she participated in a poem competition *Gani- Ga-Ka* (Face to face) in favor of General Abacha's continuous rule for the second term, organized by the Department of Hausa ABU Zaria and emerged as the winner.

According to Zuwaira ever since she was a small girl she always thought that women were being discriminated against and wanted to do something about it. It was this thought that drove her to pursue her education and also became a writer so that she could voice out her feelings and also encourage other women. Many of her works were centered on female's empowerment, marriage life and the challenges they faced within the society.

HER LITERARY WORKS

Poetry

Zuwaira has demonstrated her literary talents right from her childhood when she finished her primary school and was denied the chance to transit to Secondary school, she was very sad and decided to voice her predicament through a poem lamenting and condemning the Hausa tradition of early marriage, in which she says:

"Saboda irin al'adun nan namu na Arewa, ("Because of our traditions in Northern Nigeria.)

Karatu ga diya maccen nan kun san bai dorewa” You know a girl child education could not survive.”)

Her other poems includes, She also composed a song *Wakar Jirgin Kabo (Song of Kabo Air)* out of admiration for the then famous Airline in Northern Nigeria name Kabo Air which they used to advertised their services over the Radio.

Zuwaira was always very passionate on anything that would be of benefit to women. So she worked her way through and established a partnership with Ministry for Women Affairs of Yobe state where she wrote several poems to enlighten women and the general public on the importance of women /girl child education, gender equity and economic empowerment for women. These poems were published in 2003 as a book titled (Wakokin Yobe) with women related theme like:

1. Wakar Ma’aikatar Mata (Song of Women Affairs)
2. Wakar Mu yi Hazaka Mata(Song of Let’s Brace up Women)
3. Wakar Matan Nigeria (Song of Nigerian Women)
4. ‘Wakar Matan Yobe “ (Song of Women of Yobe)
5. Wakar Ilmi Ga Mata unpublished (Song on the Importance of Education to Women)

In all the above mentioned songs the author was illustrating the images of *women* in the society in terms of how they were being regarded for instance in one the poems “*Mu yi Hazaka Mata*” (*Lets Brace up Women*) she said “women were treated merely like bungles that could be used and sold”. In another one “*Wakar Matan Nigeria*” (*The Song of Nigerian Women*). She called on women to be up and doing by engaging in entrepreneur activities that will assist them to improve their means of livelihoods and earn their rightful place in the society. In all the poems Zuwaira show cased the importance of education for women as she would mention the benefits not for the women only but also for the husbands, children and the lager society. In the song on Girl Child Education she made the following points.

“Gargadi ga diya mace, (Admonition to the girl child)

Neman ilmi ga diya mace, (Seeking for Knowledge for the girl child)

Tankar alumashen mace, (Is like educating the whole society)

Ashe kuma dole mu yakice, (so it is a most)

Mu bido Ilmi baki daya” (For all to seek for knowledge)

“Jahilci ne tushen tsiya, (Illiteracy is the root cause of poverty)

Ga mata lalacin Tsiya, (To females is laziness)

Tsegume a gidaje ta iya, (Gossip around is all she could do)

Loko-loko duk ta biya, (All round the neighborhood she goes)

Don bata da aikin moriya” (Because she has nothing good to do)

“Mazammu ku taimaka mana, (Our husbands you should assist us),

Wahalun yayan mu ku yi mana, (Taking care of the children)

“In mun ilmin morarku ne, (Our education is for your benefits)

Diyanku sukan amfana ne” (Your children will benefit too)

Zuwaira has always been pro- government and used to write songs in favor of government’s policies and plans especially on education, gender and environmental protection. For Instance when the Universal Basic Education program was launched in 1999 to encourage free and compulsory Basic Education for all Nigerian children. Zuwaira composed a song “*Wakar Ilmin UBE*,” (The song of UBE of 60 stanzas to enlighten the general public on the importance of the program, how it works and the need to support government to realize this goal. She also brought out the challenges that hinder Universal Primary Education (UPE) program launched in 1974 such as lack of planning, in adequate facilities in classrooms, insufficient trained teachers, poor ruminations for teachers that resulted in the erosion in the provision of quality education. She also mentioned the way forward for the Universal Basic Education to succeed, saying:

She also wrote the following songs in respect to government policies.

1. “Wakar Kare Muhalli ta hanyar dasa itatuwa”, (Environmental protection through tree planting)
2. “Zaman lafiyar kasa” (Song for National unity)

She also wrote several songs on the activities and achievements of the then governor of Yobe State.

Prose Fiction

Zuwaira’s reading habits also inspired her to write Prose - Fictions, which were mostly on issues that were of concern to her and which she wants to draw the attention of the society to. Some of the novels she wrote in Hausa language included:

1. Kara da kiyashi (1993) meaning (Straw with Ants)
2. Wahala Siradin Masoya (1994) (Love Story)
3. Santsin Soyayya (1995) (Dangers of love)
4. Alallalaba Auren Zamani (1996) (Be Careful! Marriage of Now A Days)
5. Y’ay’a Mata (1999) (Female Children)
6. Laifin Wanene (2006) (Who is to be Blamed)
7. Auren Masoya (2006) (Marriage of Love)

Almost all the themes of her books are related to family life e.g Issues of love, rampant divorces, polygamy and gender discrimination. For instances: Northern Nigeria is known to have rampant divorce cases and in most cases the fault is from the males but the society punished the female divorcee by apportioning the blame on her, castigating her and sometimes preventing her from marrying another decent husband again.

Zuwaira wrote a 3 series novel on this issue portraying different types of challenges that lead to women breaking away from a marriage, in which she pointed out both the male side and the female side for the society to learn from the Novel, titled *Alallalaba Auren Zamani (Be Careful! Marriage of Now a Days) 1, 2, and 3*” In her prelude for the book she wrote.

“I will not fry and forget onions, neither will I beat donkey and leave his load. The rampant divorce in our towns is most of times blamed on females, while in actual sense it is the men that are to be blamed. Because they are the ones responsible for poor relationships with their wives which lead to divorce.....”

She continued:

"Men are carried away by the beauty of a girl or the status of her parent in marriages rather than her character and morals....."

"....While we the women are carried away by worldly gains and flashy cars of the men to marry rather than their ability to take good care of us in a dignified way."

This prelude was followed with the story of a woman named Raliya who was initially forced to marry her cousin brother against her wish as was the tradition in the Hausa society. Raliya refused to stay with Kabiru and after several attempts by him to calm her down, he finally divorced her. Since then she got married several times and each time she would encounter one problem or the other that made it impossible for her to stay in the marriage. These problems included a battering husband, a miser who would not feed her, a harsh mate (rival) that would not allow to enjoy her husband or a jealous mother in-law etc.

In another Novel "*Kara Da Kiyashi*" (Straw with Ants) Zuwaira discussed the problem of polygamy in Hausa society and its devastating effect on the members of the households in particular the wives and the children. She set the story on a very peaceful and loving couple whose happiness was spoiled as a result of the husband marrying a second wife, who came in with the intention to drive the first wife out of the house by all means. With this in her mind, Bebi the second wife began floating dubious strategies to cause havoc between the first wife and the husband. She succeeded in sending the first wife out of her marital home and turned her cruelty to the daughter who she also wanted to separate from the father. It took the Husband a very long time to find out the truth (when he overheard the second wife discussing with her friend that since she succeeded in sending the mother out of her way; she would now make the life of the daughter miserable in that house. That was when he realized that the first wife was innocent and it was too late for him because she was already married to another man.

Here the writer was trying to explain that even though Hausa culture and the Islamic religion allow polygamy, the women themselves are the ones causing problems through witchcraft and witch-hunting as demonstrated in the story "*Kara da Kiyashi*". Therefore the society and men in particular should take note and stop promoting unnecessary polygamy in order to reduce the rate of broken houses and street children in Hausa Society.

Drama/Play

Zuwaira also wrote some Hausa plays (Drama), the published one was "*Uwa Ta Gari* (2002) (A Model Mother). This is a play written on the importance of education and entrepreneurship for women and the menace of hawking. It was dramatized into a film directed by one of the famous film directors in the 90s Ibrahim Mandawari. The play was a comparison between two families, where Amina the star of the play was lucky to have a virtuous mother who made sure she went to school and learnt some vocational skills. She later became a successful worker and a business tycoon that took good care of her family as well as assisting the needy in the society. While on the other hand the unlucky Hadiza was being sent hawking (as was the tradition in Northern Nigeria, mothers sent their girls to hawk in order to get money for marriage utensils) by her greedy mother. She ended up being divorced after marriage and also duped by someone while she was trying to get out of

Nigeria to Saudi Arabian, where she hope to work as a house maid. In the end she resorted to prostitution.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion one can say Zuwaira Isa and her contemporaries have displayed the talent and determination of Hausa women and how they struggled to wrench out of cultural inhibitions that hinder them from accessing formal education and attained some level of equity on social privileges in a patriarchal society such as Northern Nigeria.

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