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Research Article

A Study of Representation and Portrayal of Women in Selected Nigerian Arabic Plays

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Abstract. Research has shown that women are not well portrayed and un-equally represented as men in African Literature. This paper investigates how far this claim is true in relation to the Nigerian Arabic plays. The research is analytic and descriptive in nature. The study analyses the representation of women and describes their portrayal in six (6) randomly selected Nigerian Arabic plays namely; *Ustadhun Ragma Anfih* (A Teacher in Defiance of Him), *Fi-Mash-had at-Tilifisyun* (At the Television Viewing centre), *Al-Dhakhirat* (The Relic), *Baqaaun Muqaddar* (Destined to survive), *As-sayyid Al-muhadir* (Mr. Lecturer) and *Al-Hasad* (The Harvest). The result of the analyses of the characterization, with the aid of ratio and simple percentage, reveals that women are poorly represented in all the selected plays and the examination of the roles assigned to women in the selected texts shows that women are portrayed as illiterate, evil, liars, sex toys and disobedient. This paper recommends that authors of the Nigerian Arabic plays should assign more positive roles to women in their writings to

reveal some of the positive roles played by women in the society and equally put more female characters in the characterization.

Keywords: Representation, Portrayal, Women, Nigeria, Arabic Plays

INTRODUCTION

For centuries, the role of women has undergone different types of scrutiny and observation. In similar regard, the yesteryears sojourn is regarded crucial, disgraceful, a thing of scorn, and thus, handled with significant amount of grace and patience (Sima, 2019). The state of women was specifically investigated in relation to English Literature. The results revealed that women have been commoditized along with promoting different roles of woman motherhood. Women have faced satire based on the ineffective correspondence with social norms in the past but in modern age some writing are focused over reliance, over feminism for fighting social evils (Jolina et. al, 2023).

In line with the above, three Yoruba plays were examined to investigate how women's characters are portrayed in contemporary Nigerian Yoruba Novels selected in the study. These novels include: *Fila lobirin*, *Igba Oro* and *Eru Obodo*. The approach adopted in these novels, which is feminist in nature, informs this study's theoretical frame work. In *Fila lobirin*, the influence of wealth on women's choice of husband is portrayed. Similarly, the influence of money and its drive to spur women's engagement in amorous affairs, thus, becoming promiscuous is depicted in *Eru O b'odo*. As for *Igba Oro*, it duly portrays the predisposition of women towards envy, wickedness and destruction, especially when such women have other women competing with them.

Traditionally, women are connected to traits, some of which are dependence, being emotional, concern and consciousness over their outward and physical appearance. These traits and innate characters allow men the opportunity to dominate women, while societies continue to see them as overly emotional, erratic and prioritise their feelings over that of others. As for men, they are deemed non-expressive and emotionally stable, maintaining balance between their own emotions and that of others (Zola, 2023).

Similarly, another investigation was made on female characters in selected *Isizulu* novel after post-2000, using an African womanist literal approach. The purposive sampling technique was the method employed in selecting texts for the investigation. The conclusion from the study is the presence of gender bias with regards to the portrayal of female characters. However, the current social and political order of the day for women is not in tandem with their roles in literature. Women are still considered, regardless of their educational status, under the yoke of expression. Factors such as financial dependence and the institution of marriage have helped to ensure that men retain the upper hand to this day (Shabala, 2021).

In Francis Nyamnjoh’s *a Nose for Money*, women were portrayed in a negative light. Such portrayal, evidently, is a challenge to male oppression. The suggestion is that such negative portrayal of female characters in the novel articulates a positive purpose; it challenges male oppression (Koumtoudgi, 2023)

The Arabic Language Textbook for the primary second grade in Jordan was also examined to understand the image of women. The study found that women appeared in forty compared to seventy-one roles for men; however, a large amount of the often repeated women’s roles are either the roles of mother, daughter, pupil, teacher and/or the role of a friend. They appeared only once as a researcher, as a farmer, a painter and director men appeared in a series of playing the role of a father and son, a brother and uncle and a friend, a soldier, a doctor and a pharmacist, poet and a farmer. Women, as portrayed, often possess values such as compassion, humility and care for the family, honouring the parents of a man and maintaining cleanliness, while men unequivocally are made to represent values such as courage, preservation of time, generosity and sacrifice, independence, and leadership.

Characterisation and Portrayal of Women in *Ustadhun Ragma Anfi* (A Teacher in Defiance of Him)

1.1 About the play

It is a short Arabic play that consists of four acts. The play is authored by Moshood Abdul Ganiyy Adebayo in 2003. The play is about a brilliant, gifted and hardworking student, who despite his hatred for teaching profession, later became a good and talented teacher. He provides solution to academic problems faced by his colleagues, who find his explanations easy to understand and wish he becomes a teacher in future (Abdul Ganiyy,2015)

1.2 Characters in the play

The play consists of nine characters and they are as follows:

The mother: Atanda’s mother

Atanda: A brilliant student who later became a teacher

The Father: Atanda’s Father

Zango: A student in the same school with Atanda

Okafor: A male student and Atanda’s class mate

Darami: One of the students, a classmate of Atanda

Izzah: Baba Darami’s daughter and a wife of Atanda

Adisa: Atanda’s immediate boss

Eso: Atanda’s subordinate in the ministry (Moshood, 2001)

1.3 Analysis of the Characterization into male and female

Table 1.

No of male	No of female	Total no of characters
07	02	09

From the above the ratio of male to female characters is 2:7

Out of the 9 characters, seven are male and two are female and using simple percentage as follows: $2/9 \times 100 = 22.2\%$ shows that only 22.2% of the characters are women while the remaining 77.8% are men. This shows that women are underrepresented.

1.4 Roles and portrayals of the 2 female

There are two women in the play; Atanda's mother and his wife, Izzah, and they are both flat characters. Atanda's mother constituted an obstruction to the mentorship of Atanda's teacher, she is portrayed as enemy of progress, she is always discouraging Atanda whenever he delivered extramural classes to his colleagues and to other students. Although she does so out of love and care for Atanda.

Izzah: She is Atanda's wife, who constituted an obstacle to Atanda's discharge office assignment and duties. She complains when he leaves early to work and nags when he returns late because of official assignment. She actually does so in love for her hard working husband.

Fi-Mash-had at -Tilifisyun (At the Television Viewing Centre)

2.1 About the play

This play is authored by Zakariyau Oseni in 2017.

It is a short play in Arabic on the game of football. The hero of the play is Ahmad Babagidi, a specialist who delivered a brief lecture on the game at the television viewing centre and also commented briefly on the friendly football match between the super Eagles of Nigeria and Hungry Tigers of Sungaria. The play contains a mention of prominent of the Nigerian Football team in the past as well as notable members of Super Falcons of Nigeria (the female team). Another interesting issue raised by Buhlul, an Islamic asceticum mystic, who did not see anything good in football. Rather, he regarded those 22 young men or women who run after the "rounded inflated animal skin" as lunatics in spite of the fact that football is the most popular sport in the world.

The Hero left the center when penalty kicks to determine the winner were to commence because it was time for the canonical Islamic prayer at sunset. On Ahmad Babagidi's way out, he had a confrontation with Buhlul as in the beginning (Oseni, 2017)

2.2 Characters of the play

The play consists of eleven characters and they are;

Okoko: One of the viewers of television

Angulu: One of the viewers of television

Bulama: One of the viewers of television

Shaba: One of the viewers of television

Fadhilat Ikeke: A lady emotionally impressed about the super falcons (female footballers) at the television viewing center

Nurudin: One of the viewers at the television center

Rihanat: One of the viewers at the television center

Large crowd: viewers of television

Buhlul: An Islamic ascetic assumed to be a mad person

Ahmad Babagidi: The Hero of the play is a lecturer and specialist of football game. (Oseni, 2017)

Table 2

No of male	No of female	Total no of characters
09	02	11

The ratio of the female to male character is 2:9

Using simple percentage $\frac{2}{11} \times 100 = 18.18$ shows that 18% of the characters are female while the remaining 82% are male. This also shows that female is underrepresented in the play.

2.3 Portrayal of the two female characters

Rihanat: She is Portrayed as ignorant regarding football. She is just a viewer of football at the viewing center

Fadhilat Ikake: She is portrayed as being biased against male footballers and that she is only familiar about the super falcons (Nigerians female footballers). She is portrayed as half-baked regarding the knowledge of football

Adh-Dhakhirah (The Relic)

3.1 About the play

The play is written by Abdul-Ganiyy Adebayo in 2013.

The play discusses how people with different background, religion and culture because of their interaction at the University or some other places end up in a marriage, which may likely collapse.

It also mentions the effects of such marriage on the children of such family. This is the situation between Rafiq and Bisi as seen in this play.

3.2 Characters

The play consists of 21 characters and they are:

Thawban: Rafiq's father

Rafiq's mother

Baba: Rafiq's uncle

Mama: Baba's wife

Aminah: Thawban's sister

Tahir: Shafiq's father

Shafiq: Tahir's son

Shafiq's mother

Mujtaba: Khalid's friend

Bisi: Rafiq's wife

Children of Rafiq: Ahmad (Seven Years), Tawfiq (five years) and Munirah (3 years)

Adnan: Salama's father that fell sick

Salma's mother

Soji: Head of the missionary group in the nearby church

Lami: a member of the missionary group

Adinoyi: A member of the missionary group

Adamu: Rafiq's friend

Bisi's mother

Bisi's father

Bawna: Bisi's friend (Abdul Ganiyy,2013)

3.3 Characterisation of the play

Table 3

No of male	No of female	Total no of characters
21	08	29

The ratio of female to male character is 8:21

Using simple percentage $\frac{8}{29} \times 100 = 27.5$, therefore 28% of the characters constitute the female while the remaining 72 % are male and this means the female are underrepresented.

The ratio of female to male confirms that the female are underrepresented.

3.4 Portrayal of female characters

Only 2 female, out of the 8 that feature in the play, have played major and roles. The remaining six are redundant. The 2 females are Rafiq's mother and Bisi.

Rafiq's mother did not play the role expected of a muslim mother in terms of rearing and upbringing of a child in a correct Islamic way . She did not encourage her son Rafiq to acquire the real Islamic knowledge and as a result, Rafiq did not see anything bad in getting married to a non-muslim,

Bisi: she is portrayed as a betrayal of trust she promised to practice islam after her marriage with Rafiq but did not fulfill her promise until the marriage is about to collapse

Baqun Muqaddar (Destine to survive)

4.1 About the play

This play is written by Barihi Adetunji in 2005.

The play is a four act play in Arabic. It is about the evil machination of a wicked step-mother Bilqis, who nearly snuffed life out of Bashir, an unfortunate child, who was caught in the web of matrimonial rivalry and chicanery. A boy who lost his mother at birth was disappointed in the father who from all indication was supposed to be the only hope for his in life. The consequences of this step-mother's folly is a better lesson for those, who are devilish and do not have regard for the law of retribution (Barihi2005)

4.2 Characters of the play

The total no characters are 11 and they are;

- Bashir: Rafiu's son
- Rafiu: The father of Bashir and Rahmat
- Rahmat: Rafiu's daughter
- Fawziyyah: Bashir's mother (Late)
- Aishah: Bashir's fiancé
- Abdulmajid: Bashir's friend
- Baba Yunus: Head of Abomo's village
- Sheikh: An Islamic Scholar (Barihi 2005)

Table 4

No of male	No of female	Total no of characters
05	03	08

Using simple percentage $\frac{3}{8} \times 100 = 37.5$ shows that 37.5 % of the characters are female while the remaining 62.5% are male and this shows that the women have been underrepresented.

4.3 Portrayal of women in the play

Out of the 3 female that feature in the play, it is only Bilqis that played a major role; she was portrayed as fetish, evil and unkind. She nearly killed Bashir, her step son after the death of his mother.

As-sayyid Al-muhadir (Mr. Lecturer)

5.1 About the play

The play was authored Abdus Salam Al-Haqiqi in 2015. This play contains seven acts. It discusses the vices some lecturers perpetrate in various universities and other institutions of learning. The Hero is Dende (Mr. Lecturer) who is from a poor family and tries to survive with his evil tricks and struggle to gain appointment in an institution. Dende was engrossed in in different forms of corruption such as fornication and bribery. He always has sexual affairs with one of his student (Titi), who later got pregnant.

He was later dismissed by the university, when information about him got to them.

5.2 Characterisation

The play consists of 19 characters and they are;

- Dende: Mr. Lecturer
- Bero: Dende course mate when he was a student at the university
- Alabi: member of the senate
- Alhaji Garuba: Titi's father
- Baba: Titi's maternal uncle
- Exam supervisor

Stdents: Arike, Amole.

Titi's female course mates in the university: Awa, Sada, Ranlah.

Loke, Adi, Bala, Tonjoma (Titi's male course mate in the university)

Hotel servant

The Doctor

The police

Table 5

No of males	No of females	No of total characters
15	04	19

The ratio of male to female shows that the women were not well represented Using the simple percentage $4/19 \times 100 = 21.0$ and the remaining 79% represent the male characters .This means the women are underrepresented.

5.3. Portrayal of women in the play

The women were not portrayed well in the play. Titi was the only the female that performed major and significant role. She was portrayed as sex toy manipulated by Dende the Mr. Lecturer who finally impregnated her.

Al-Hasad (The Harvest)

6.1 About the play

The play was written by Abdul-Fattah Abdul-Hamid Olanro in 2015.

Al-Hasad (The Harvest) is a play in Arabic and Jibril was the Hero. He is blessed with wealth and unfortunately, he spent it lavishly. His prodigality led to his unfortunate condition. His blood pressure became high and his children were expelled from the university (Abdul-Fattah 2015)

6.2 Characterisation

There are 14 characters in the play and they include

Jibril: He is the hero of the play.

Kanle, Femi and Nusra who are all Jibril's children

Dr. Falowo: Lecturer and a head of Department in Seyida University

Dr. Khaleelah: Lecturer in Seyida University

Ali: One of the brilliant students in the university

Saheed: One of the brilliant students in the university

Dada: One of the brilliant students in the university

Najmudeen: Exam Invigilator

Professor Bush: Head of University disciplinary committee in the university

Mudarib: Tutor of the rich man in the play

MC: Master and Coordinator of programs at the university

Table 6.

No of male	No of female	Total of characters
14	0	14

This means that 100% of the characters are male and none of them are female
This shows the women or female were not represented at all in the play.

6.3 Portrayal of women in the play

Women are portrayed as not qualified to be students or lecturers in the university and the implication of this is that women are illiterate and are not supposed to be seen in an educational setting.

Table 7. Summary of representation of women and their portrayals in the selected Nigerian plays

Name of Plays	Author/Year of Publication	Ratio of Female to Male character	Total no of Characters	Percentage of Male	Percentage of Female	How Female are portrayed and their representation
Ustadhun Ragima Anfih (Teacher in Defiance of Him)	Mas'ud Abdul Ganiy Adebayo (2003)	2 : 7	9	22.8	77.8%	Female are underrepresented and are portrayed as obstruction to success
Baqaun Muqaddar (Destined to Survive)	Dr. Abdul Bari Adetunji (2005)	3 : 5	8	37.5%	62.5%	Women are underrepresented and portrayed as evil and fetish
Adh-Dhakhirah (The Relic)	Dr. AbdulGaniyy Adebayo (2013)	8 : 21	29	27.5%	72.5%	Women are underrepresented and portrayed as liars and not religious
Fi Mashhad Al-Tilifisiyun (At the Television viewing center)	Professor Zakariyau I. Oseni (2017)	2 : 9	11	11.18%	81.82%	Women are portrayed as less civilized compared to men especially in terms of sport
As-Sayyid Al-Muhadir	Murtada Abdussalam Al-Haqiqi (2015)	4 : 15	19	21%	79%	Women are underrepresented and portrayed as dropouts from university and sex toys for lecturers

Al-Hasad (The Harvest)	Abdul Fattah AbdulRahim Olonro (2015)	0 : 14	14	0%	100%	They are underrepresented and portrayed as illiterate and not be found in an academic setting
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CONCLUSION

The following conclusion can be reached from the play regarding the portrayal and roles of women in the selected plays:

In *Ustaadhun Ragma Anfih* (A Teacher in Defiance of him). Only two women which constitute 22.8% feature in the play as against seven men which compose of 77.8% and the role assigned to the two females are that of mother and wife. Atanda's woman although was kind to his son, tends to constitute obstacle and disturbance to the realization of the dream of his hardworking son Atanda, The same applies to Izzah, who played the role of wife. She monitors her husband's movement to and from office and as a result constitute a disturbance to him.

Similarly, in *Fi Mash-had At-tilifisyun* (At the television viewing center), only 2 females constituting 18.18% features in the play as against 9 men which compose 81.82%. Out of the 2 females that are in the play, only one of them play a significant but partial role as she shed light on the role of the women in sport. The other woman was just a spectator at the Television Viewing Center.

In *Adh-Dhakirah*, only 8 females which represent 27.5% of the characters feature in the play as against 21 men composing 72.5%. Out of the 8 women that appear in the play, only two played important roles. These include the role of a mother and a wife. In the play, Rafiq's mother lag behind in supporting the father in giving Islamic knowledge to their son Rafiq. Similarly, Bisi, wife of Rafiq, did not fulfill her promise to practice Islam after their marriage and she continue to train their children in a Christian way until the marriage was about to collapse

In *Baqauun Muqaddar* (Destined to survive), only 3 women standing for 37.5% of the characters feature in the play as against 5 men that represent the remaining 62.5%. Out of these 3 women, only one played a noticeable role. She played the role of a wicked step-mother. She contributed to the death of her co-wife and planned to kill Bashir, after killing her sister.

In *Assayid Al-Muhadir* (Mr. Lecturer), only four women feature in the play represent 21% of the characters as against 15 men who constitute 79%. Out of the four women, only one of them (Titi) performed a noticeable role. Others women are flat characters. Titi was portrayed as sex toys for university lecturers. She died because she wanted to abort her unwanted pregnancy.

In *Al-Hasad* (The Harvest), women are not represented. The implication of this is that women are portrayed as illiterate and can't work in a university setting. Generally speaking, it can be inferred that women are not well represented in the Nigerian Arabic plays, women constitute 21% of the characters in all the six plays, while the men constitute 79%. This shows that women are under-represented despite their large population in the society

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