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RESEARCH ARTICLE

WOMEN AND TERROR: A FEMINIST APPROACH TO “ODÚN Á YAKO”

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ABSTRACT

The issue of women terrorism has been in existence for a long period of time. In the recent time, women emancipation is in place to put women in their rightful position. In this paper, we will examine the problems faced by the girl-child right from birth until she strives to fulfil her destiny as a woman as it is expressed in the novel titled “Odún Á Yako” written by Níkèé Adésànyà. This will help us to pinpoint the problems a girl-child faces in the society. The work will be based on feminist theory. The work will also show that women manumission is the only way a girl-child can attain her freedom in the society. The issue of gender disparity is a well known phenomenon in the society to the extent that writers are not silent on it which brought about the novel “Odún Á Yako”. Therefore, this paper proposes that the girl-child should not be seen as subordinate to men, and they should be given the same opportunity with the boy child to realise their dreams and to fulfil their destiny.

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INTRODUCTION

In our society of today, the way and manner by which the girl-child is being handled has been of a great challenge. The society sees the girl-child as a not worthwhile venture. The belief is that educating the girl-child is a waste of resource because everything will end up in the kitchen. Meanwhile, a boy-child is seen as the pillar of the family, who will carry on the name and the lineage of the family. This has been the major reason for the disparity between the girl-child and the boy-child. In “Odún Á Yako” the text for this paper, the protagonist Moroláyo is a typical example of terrorism against the girl-child and women at large in the society. It is an unfortunate situation for Moroláyo’s mother whose children are all girls. Her children are seen as worthless since sooner or later they will leave their father’s house and become another man’s property. Hence, educating them is a taboo. The theory to be used for the work is Feminism. The theory believes in the social, political and economical equality of the two sexes; male and female. Feminism is a social movement organized around the conviction that biological sex should not be the pre-determinant factor shaping a person’s social identity. Janet Radcliffe Richard has argued in ‘The Skeptical Feminist’ that anyone who accepts that women suffer from systematic social injustice because of their sex is a feminist.

With the function that feminism performs, one can submit that it is all about gender emancipation, peace building and cooperation. Gender emancipation looks beyond sexual differences and seeing individuals as human beings with equal rights pertaining to education, health and freedom of expression.

This paper is divided into four parts; the introduction, the abridged story of the text, Odún Á Yako, the theme of the text which forms the body of the paper and the recommendation and conclusion.

ODÚN Á YAKO AT A GLANCE

The story is about a family named Asindemade in a town named Ayégbegé. The eldest wife had only female children, about five of them. This made the husband to be unhappy as a man and he saw himself as unfulfilled. The woman again gave birth to another female child named “Róláyo”. The father was very sad and was angry even friends and well wishers made mockery of them. The man did not train up the female children, rather they were sent to the neighbourhood as house-helpers to other families. The father saw a girl-child as a waste of investment, who would later be married to another man. The last of the five girls named Roláyo, later rose to become a promising child and changed the wrong impression of the society about the girl-child. Róláyo struggled to attain a good position in life. She started with a small trade of bread selling after obtaining her primary six certificates. For the fact that

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Róláyo wanted to become an achiever in life, with the wisdom God bestowed on her, she made an arrangement with Mr. Lògbólògbó a teacher in the secondary school where she was selling bread. With the help of the teacher, she came out with flying colour in West African Examinations.

Róláyo being a genius was able to make her way into the university. Through all odds of combining her small trade with her university education, she was still one of the best in the class. Her father never encouraged or praised her for once, all he was saying was that a girl-child can never fulfil any purpose in life, she will later end all she has gained in the kitchen, but this did not make Róláyo to look back, she forged ahead in an attempt to become somebody great in life.

Not only her father degraded her, even her people saw her as nobody, they thought the money she used in sending herself to school could be used for some other thing more important than her educating herself, but Róláyo did not relent in her effort. She also has good moral virtues like honesty, decency and promise-keeping.

As Róláyo, the last girl in this family struggled by herself to become somebody which she did, her father, Asíndemádé, was making jest of her and did not in any way contribute to Róláyo's education. Three of his female children whom he sent out to neighbouring towns to work as house girls died of lack of care.

Róláyo was determined to become a fulfilled person in life, she graduated from the university, she became well known person in the society, and she married a good person as a husband. Through her, the name of the family became popular in the town, she became a source of help in time of need to the members of her family and the society at large.

Róláyo's father learnt her lesson that giving birth to a girl-child is not a misfortune, and that a girl-child can become a great person in life too. He apologized to Róláyo and other people in the society, he realized the importance of a girl-child in the family, he pleaded to parents to arise to their responsibility in training up their children, either a male or female.

### THE FEMINIST'S THEME OF ODÚN Á YAKO

According to Adéniyi (1933:4) he said about literature and writes that:

...the basic thrust has been marked by a daring use of the medium to promote the good of society against the negative forces which tend to either slow us down or reinforce structures that reduce our capacity to achieve the goals of self-determination and actualization. In this sense, writers make use of happenings in the society to form the basis of their literary works. They do this either to correct the wrong doings or to commend the good aspects. That of *Odún Á Yako* is of no difference. These will be discussed below.

### PARITY BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE CHILD

The major concern of the author of *Odún Á Yako* is the problem of rejection faced by the female child in the society,

from the first page of the novel, the disparity between male and female child is clearly stated. It is shown that Asíndemádé, the father of Róláyo was not happy at all just because his wife gave birth to the fifth female child.

Èyí ló mú kí bíbí Róláyo só sí àwón òbí rè lènu kó sì tún buyò sí pèlù... Bàbá Róláyo nikan ni kò lè so bí ó ti rí lára re nítorí, íbí Róláyo ni ikárùn-ún tí yòò bí omobinrin. (oi. 1) This made Róláyo's parents to be tired of the whole issue... it is only Róláyo's father that could explain his feelings because it was the birth of Róláyo that brought about the fifth female child.

To show further that the birth of female child is not being appreciated, the people that came to congratulate Asíndemádé were there purposely to make jest of him. One of them said: Obinrin lo tún bí? iyá yí tún yí o móle. Oré, O jé kótijú tà, Kí o so fún iyáwo re pé kí ó gúnýán lélé fún mi Pèlú obe ègúsí kí n lè fí àsírí ako hàn o. (oi. 1)

(You gave birth to a female child? This woman take Lead again. My friend, it is better you take a bold step, tell your wife to prepare a bowl of pounded yam and Ègúsí soup for me so I can show you the secret of having male children.) This shows the level at which men put the female child.

On page 12-13, we could see the nonchalant attitude of the society about the girl child. Róláyo got an admission into a secondary school, this suppose to be a thing of joy for Asíndemádé, because it is a step to higher level, but Asíndemádé made it known that the society does not embrace the idea of educating a girl-child. He said:

Mo ti so fún o tele pé èmi kò ni se àsedànù, tí n ó tó omobinrin ní ilé-ìwé... láyé ñbí kó. Kò sí lámoón-sè lé fòò ebòlò, yòò rùngbé kánhin nàà ni... bóbinrin bá kàwé tí, ilé idáná okùnrin kan ni yòò parí re sí. (oi. 12)

I have told you before that I will not spend at a loss, for me to send a female child to school... never in my life. No amount of cooking you can do for Ebolo, it can never change its odour... no matter the level of education of a female child, she will end up in her husband's kitchen.

It is not that Asíndemádé does not want his children educated but he believes that such child must be a male child. He sees educating a female child as a waste of money but that giving education to a male child is the best. He says further:

‘Sìwájú àsikò yí ni bàbá Róláyo ti pinnu lókàn ara rè pé Kóláwolé, Gbóláboati Olákúnlé ni òun yòò fí dá oko òwò iwé kíkà. Àwon ni omo okùnrin tí yòò gbé orúko ebí ga leyinwá òla’.

Before then, Róláyo's father had made up his mind that it is only Kóláwolé, Gbólábo and Olákúnlé that He will invest in their education. The reason being that they are the one that will lift up the family's name.

The author stated further that the society does not see anything good about female child. This is more common among the

illiterates and the semi-illiterates in our society of today, we can see parents like Asíndemádé who are not ready to train their female children beyond primary six or secondary school level. They see it as a waste of time and resources sending female children to higher institutions.

Olujimi (1999:37) pointed out the way and manner the society look down on women. He said:

‘Nínú òrò enu Yorùbá, a lè rí àwon iso tí ó fi àwòrán bí obìnrin tí rí láwùjo hàn... irú ipèdè yí fi obìnrin hàn gégé bí olófòfó, onisokúso àti túlétulé. Irú ipèdè bée lo súa tó fi obìnrin sí ipò ègàn, bí aláìgbóran, asekúpani, odàle, elénu méjì, òdóró àti ikà èniyàn’.

From Yorùbá utterances, there are some words that portray the place of women in the society. These words describe women as busy-body, gossipers and home destroyers. There are many words as such that redicules women as been stubborn, destroyer, traitors, double standard, wicked and cruel.

All these character that are been put on women in the society with the belief that they will eventually end up in a man’s house make the society not to take educating female children serious. The author, Níkèé Adésànyà realizing the non chalant attitude of the society towards the girl-child does not stop at this but she makes the society to realize that that the girl –child is very useful and relevant if she can be given the freedom, education and necessary support to perform.

Despite the fact that Níkèé Adésànyà is not a member of Women in Nigeria (WIN), Women Right Advancement and Protection Alternation (WRAPA) Nigeria, there is a clear evidence that she has a deep knowledge of these organizations and their activities. She loves and believes in their struggle for women emancipation. According to the author on Women’s Right Advancement and Protection Alternation (WRAPA) Nigeria (2009:8) she refers:

Article 2: elimination of discrimination against women principle: deals with the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women.

Also on page 19:

Article 12: Right to education and training principle: it provides for non discrimination against women; equal opportunity and access to education and training. If we consider the goals of WRAPA and speech that Rolayo gave on her wedding day, it is obvious that the author, Nikee Adesanya is really fighting for women emancipation. There is a great similarity between the goals of WRAPA and Níkèé Adésànyà ‘s Odún Á Yako.

## WOMEN AND THE STRUGGLING SPIRIT

The author makes use of the protagonist of the novel, Róláyo, to drive home the point that women are very good in struggling to achieve their goals or determinations. Despite the fact that Róláyo’s father was not ready to train her, she found a means of livelihood for herself to become someone in life. After

Róláyo completed her primary school education, she started selling bread. She got a place at the town’s secondary school where she normally stayed to sell her bread. After she would have finished selling her goods, she would stand by the window of the classroom to listen to the teachers’ lessons. By and by, Róláyo came close to some of the teachers who would her to check the class works she attempted not minding the jests from the other students. To the attestation of the Maths teacher, Róláyo performed better than the students that were in the class. He says:

‘Róláyo ni akékòò kan soso tí ó gba ise síse tán lórí tópiiki tí mo kó won lose yii’ [oi.22]

It was Róláyo that scored all in the topic that I taught them this week.

Róláyo struggled along until she got to the final class taking her own lessons by the window; at times she suffered from rainfall and sun heat. From the money she made from the sales of bread, she was able to register for the final examination. She sat for the examinations and she passed. Róláyo did not stop at that, she determined to enter the university, by her will power, she sat for the entrance examination and got admitted into the university. Her father was not even impressed by her performances, despite all her achievements; his concern is for Róláyo to get married. He says:

‘Mo fún o ní osù kan kí o mú òkan wálé lára àwon oníbaàrà re, bí bée kó ikòkò kò ní gba omi kí ó tún gba eyìn emi re nínú ilé yì. O ó sì kúrò lèèdè mi nítòrí irú yín n’ gboyún kánhìn nàá ni’ [oi.58]

I give you one month to bring home a suitor  
Out of your customers, if not, the house will  
Be unbearable for you. And you will have  
Leave my house before you get impregnated.

This comment shows that the society does not believe at all in a girl-child becoming somebody in life. Róláyo did not allow her father’s comment to weigh her down, she endured. At the end, she graduated as a medical doctor.

## THE SIGNIFICATION OF ‘AKO’ AND ‘ABO’

In Yorùbá society, there is a significant use in the two words ‘ako’ and ‘abo’. It is traditionally believed that any event that tends towards ‘ako’ is a difficult and a problematic one. But if it is ‘abo’, then, it is of good omen. Hence a greeting form ‘odún á yabo’. This mode of greeting is being used at the beginning of a new year. It connotes a prayer that the year will be, fruitful, blissful and full of blessings. The author of the novel ‘Oduń Á Yako’ pointed this out in the speech delivered by Róláyo during her wedding reception. When she stood to read her speech, she greeted the gathering thus:

‘Mo kí gbogbo ijókòò yì pé, e kú ìkàlè. Odún tí ó n’ bò lonà yì yòò yako fún gbogbo wa o’ [oi 98].

I greet all of you seated, this coming new year

will not be 'fruitful'

In a sharp response, the gathering replied:  
 'Haa, iyawó! Irú ikíni wo ni èyí? Nígba  
 tí ó jé pé omo káárò-oò-jíire ni o. Tí  
 o sì mò pé odún tí ó bá yako kí í ní ibùkún.  
 Odún èyí kò ní yako o, abo ni yóò yà'.

Haa, the bride! What sort of greeting is this? The fact remains that you are from Yorùbá tribe. And you are aware that there is no blessing in a year that is not fruitful; the coming year will be void of unfruitfulness, it shall be blissful.

The connotation of 'abo' in Yorùbá society is fruitfulness. Without the female, there cannot be fruitfulness. The Yorùbá goddesses like Osun, Oya, Yemoja among others stand for fruitfulness and prosperity. Therefore, the importance of the girl-child cannot be over-emphasized.

### Conclusion

This paper investigates the feminist themes in the novel *Odún Á Yako*. Convincingly, the author of the novel has sent a great message to the society on the way the society handles the issue of the girl-child. It can be deduced from the paper that there should be no disparity between the girl-child and the boy-child, they should be given equal right. Also, the girl-child should also be given the opportunity to fulfil their own destiny, if this is done, a girl child can also become great in life.

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