WOMEN ON WOMEN: THE STEREOTYPING OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE POPULAR FICTION OF NORTHERN NIGERIAN WOMEN WRITERS.

BY

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CERTIFICATION

This thesis, titled WOMEN ON WOMEN: THE STEREOTYPING OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN THE POPULAR FICTION OF NORTHERN NIGERIAN WOMEN WRITERS by HALIMAT ABOLUSAWU-SEKULA meets the regulations governing the award of MASTER OF ARTS in LITERATURE of AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY and is approved for its contribution to knowledge and literary presentation.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my Creator for His patience.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis has been written by me after due research.

It has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

All information sources are duly acknowledged by a list of references.

13th December 2000

HALIMAT ABOLUSAWU-SEKULA

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, there has been a proliferation of writing by women authors in Northern Nigeria. This energetic spurt of creative activity is especially noticeable in what is called popular fiction.

It has been asserted that Nigerian female writers often react against the chauvinist - cast character stereotypes of women in the male dominated Nigerian literature. For example Flora Nwapa's Efuru and Idu are direct reactions against writers like Chinua Achebe's inadequate portrayal of lgbo women in eastern Nigeria.

If Nigerian female writers like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and Zaynab Alkali have tried their utmost to correct the Nigerian male literary hegemony's stereotypes, how have the writers of popular fiction fared?

Popular fiction appears to be a genre of creative writing usually ignored by critics. Perhaps due to the fact that it does not consciously aspire to 'elitism' in its literary styles. Critics who give it attention do so in order, it seems to castigate its forms as inferior creative writing.

This thesis attempts to explore northern Nigerian women's popular writing in an attempt to evaluate the significance of heroine stereotyping and also it intends to explore aspirations as portrayed in the fiction studied.

A cursory glance at some popular texts written by these female writers indicates that popular heroines, despite their apparent show of a certain individuality, tread the usual line of love, a knight in shining armour and they lived happily ever after path.

The audience usually leaves these heroines as happy housewives or potentially happy housewives. But rarely as women whose lives and decisions affect the larger society around them.

This is not an exegesis against marriage but it is an attempt to expose the 'formulaic' writing of northern Nigerian female writers as prescribing love and marriage as ends in themselves, most times to the exclusion of careers and economic survival.

The thesis intends to explore the hypothesis that the over emphasis placed on marriage for literary heroines de-emphasizes and relegates to a place of less importance, the role and contributions of the northern Nigerian woman to the larger society within which she lives.

Chapter one offers an introduction to popular fiction in Nigeria and also, a critical analysis of available literature on popular fiction in Nigeria.

Chapter two explores Gynocriticism as a theoretical framework for analysing women's writing in Northern Nigeria.

Chapter three examines thematically the five texts chosen.

Chapter four explores the stylistic ranges of the texts analysed while Chapter five discusses conclusions drawn from the research work.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Popular fiction in this thesis refers to those texts which are regarded as light reading and which do not tax our literary intelligence unduly. They are usually simple if not simplistic in their treatment of plot and themes and characterization is usually flat or stereotyped.

The interest in this type of fiction stems from the notion that they are a true reflection of the contemporary society within which they are written because the writers are influenced by the day to day occurrences and trivia that ultimately shape experiences. Therefore popular texts in their turn - shape readers' attitudes to their environment especially in the all important aspects of love and marriage. Also, it is perceived that popular fiction has a wider audience than 'elitist' literature.

Popular fiction is often scorned by some literary critics, therefore this chapter examines what the critics who have given the genre some attention say. It also offers an introduction to popular fiction from the perspective of prose fiction of varying lengths.

This location of the study within the genre of prose fiction underscores the fact that a large majority of the women writers write in prose.

Because popular fiction written by women in northern Nigeria is a prolific genre, its viability as a tool for consolidating mass awareness in

northern Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. The texts are available and easy for semi- literate house wives and young impressionable teenagers to read. Women read these texts and more often than not, tell their friends and peers the juicy bits and pieces of the stories.

Since the "woman issue" has become an ever present under current in Nigerian society, it is not surprising that literary or rather creative texts written by Nigerian women are being examined with the aim of exposing and exploring their sexual or gender definitions and affiliations.

Because stereotypes are categorical types, it is relatively easy to slot the Nigerian woman into a category created for her by the Nigerian male writer.

The Nigerian woman from the male pen perspective is either a mysterious semi-goddess, mother figure, daughter, obedient housewife, quarrelsome housewife a woman of loose morals or more recently, a no nonsense career woman who is capable of sacrificing anything for the sake of her career. In short, the Nigerian woman is portrayed either as singularly good or entirely monstrous.

Popular creative writing by men has used the usual stock of good, bitchy bad or bad merely silent women in their depiction of female characters. Interestingly female writers of popular fiction have to a large extent also used, quite indiscriminately, the stock stereotypes they found when they started writing.

Thus the images of northern Nigerian women in popular fiction includes those of meek, virtuous women and vicious rivals or stepmothers or the traitorous friend all of which are melodramatically portrayed.

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie in the article "The female writer and her commitment" posits that the predominant image of women of African literature is that of lover. She asserts that "In addition to the ... houri' stereotypes of the African woman, we may consider stereotypes of the 'sophisticated' city girl and rural woman.. Both figures are often shallow, exaggerated and false". (Jones Vol.1987 15:6).

Ogundipe - Leslie advocates that female writers should search through the different connotations of womanhood and present diversified facets of these. This, according to her is because womanhood does not only define a biological state, but a socio-cultural one.

She goes on to state that the African female writer is bound by a three dimensional commitment (i) as a writer (ii) as a woman and thirdly as a third world woman. Her identification of women writers of ability and achievement includes Bessie Head, Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Ba, Zulu Sofola and Micere Mugo. The place of the African women as a creator of popular fiction is left a blank, gaping and unrecognized hole in her analysis. This assessment of the African woman as a writer is also applicable to the female popular writers of today.

Popular literature according to Adrian Roscoe in the book Mother As Gold: A study in West African Literature is a by product of formal style education in Nigeria. Roscoe attests to its existence alongside 'elitist' genres of literature.

Roscoe's focus when he discusses popular fiction is mainly on Onitsha market pamphleteers and even then, women have no place in his brief analysis. His assessment of the literary and sociological worth of popular fiction writers seem apparent in the words

> *Their work however, is essentially ephemeral and its interest lies in the implications it holds for the growth of indigenous popular reading than for any special artistry it might reveal.* (Roscoe 1971:145).

He goes on to define the author - reader relationship of popular fiction as "A semi-literate, entirely local, audience creating a demand which a school of semi-literate authors swiftly satisfied". (145)

Presently, the author-audience horizon of popular fiction in northern Nigeria has widened to encompass the well educated both as author and as audience.

Like most developing and dynamic societies the Northern Nigerian contemporary society is undergoing socio-cultural changes that would probably have far reaching effects on how people perceive certain socio-cultural factors like marriage, education (formal) and generally, social

interaction. To a large extent the fiction of female writers within this milieu mirrors these changes and at the same time reflects the ambivalent attitude that is perceivable at the period of any great change. Ambivalence resulting from the inability to completely break away from the old and established norms by completely embracing the new and 'uncertain' culture.

In the authors' works, issues are rendered from the angle of the individual struggling against the rigid dictates of culture and tradition as further analyses of the chosen texts will reveal. The individual usually triumphs in the end. Therefore, the heroine who against family wishes marries Mr. Right appears to have triumphed over culture and society.

But actually, the resolutions at the end of the novels usually give simplistic solutions to complex issues of the individual versus society. One of the basic areas consciously or unconsciously addressed is the place and role of contemporary Northern Nigerian woman in the society today. According to most of the texts under study, the world for the woman, outside marriage is small indeed.

This would seem to disprove Adebukola Afolayan (1990)'s assertion that, "The African woman writer is consciously trying to kill the angel in the house." The fact that her thesis, The changing Roles of Women in the fiction of Ama Ata Aidoo, Mariama Ba and Buchi Emecheta does not even acknowledge popular fiction in African women's writing suggests that she

finds no literary relevance in them. However, in her evaluation of the literary scene in Africa she says that,

> *Contemporary African literature has marginalised women. Women are depicted in unrealistic roles of dependence and subordination. An examination of these roles prove that they are no longer tenable especially within the context of changes occurring in the society.*(Afolayan 1990: vii)

Halima Shehu in her thesis feminism in The Writings of Ama Ata Aidoo And Mariama Ba confidently asserts that,

> *Female Writers are certainly influenced by the Feminist movement and go all out to demand for a recognition of the rights of woman and also to show that the African Women has a personality of her own. They are concerned about the relationship between man and woman; and about slave trade; colonialism, and what neo-colonialism has done to the African people.* (Shehu 1987: 3).

Though popular fiction was still in its infancy in the early 1980's it is obvious that Shehu does not consider African women's writing from the perspective of the northern Nigerian women writers. Today though most popular writers try to advocate a form of nonconformity or a breaking away from the restrictive traditional norms and values, true independence is rarely achieved. The female protagonist is portrayed as born half and only a merger with a suitably smitten hero can complete her. Furthermore in

most popular fiction the novelists in question care little for urgent, contemporary societal issues like politics and economics. The heroines' only source of concern is her love life.

Perhaps this is one of the issues that serve as irritant to critics and discerning readers. Raised to ridiculous heights and importance are the little vagaries, pleasures and pains of emotional relationships, closing out any thing that cannot intrude positively in the theme of love. Therefore, in all the texts studied, the recent tumultuous political and socio-economic mood of the Nigerian nation is of so little importance that it does not earn a single mention!

For J.M.S Tompkins, popular fiction is "Tenth-rate fiction" She exhibits lively interest in the tastes which are affected by popular fiction and which in turn affect popular taste. Tompkins agrees that popular fiction can and does feed "The appetite of the reading public, reflected and shaped their imaginations and sometimes broke out into experiment and adventure". (Tompkins 1932: v).

Yet she finds no place for popular fiction in the many rooms of literature. Indeed she is apologetic about having to study a genre as trivial and (to her) as unimportant as popular fiction. This is inspite of the acknowledged fact that a lot more people in many societies read popular fiction more than they do 'elitist' texts. Her definitions of popular texts is derived from critics' assessment of it,

> *For these are not good books whose vitality spring from an inner source. But poor books on which the colour of life was reflected from their readers.* (Tompkins 1932: v-vi)

If a text reflects to whatever extent, the colour of life, no matter how badly written, it would be unwise to consign it to the backwoods of literature.

In The purple Heartthrobs: The sub Literature of love, a quite voluminous treatise of the authors and themes of English popular novels, Anderson defines the scope of popular romantic fiction as "The branch of literature consisting of light weight, but full length, novels of no great literary qualities which appeal to a wide popular audience..." (Anderson 1974: 14)

Her exegesis traces the origin of English popular art from the 17th century. Anderson's work appears to be marred by her cynicism towards the writers she studies. She seems to look down on them for plying the trade of popular fiction. She describes Ouida (Marie Louise Rame) a prolific 19th century popular writer thus;

> *She was rather plain, but self centred, vain and spoilt. She dressed very showily... Even at the age of forty-seven, when one observer described her as having a hideous and deformed body, she continued to wear youthfully styled and coloured silk dresses.*(65)

Here it would appear from Anderson's description that Ouida's looks affected her fiction. Despite her patronizing attitude however, Anderson

agrees that popular fiction appears to set societal standards much more than 'elitist' literature does.

The relevance of her book lies not only in its stylistic analysis but also in its incisive exposition of the themes and the lack of Verisimilitude most popular art exhibit.

Emmanuel Obiechina's impressive An African Popular Literature: A study of Onitsha Popular Pamphlets (1973) is one of the earliest works by a Nigerian critic to give some detailed attention to popular fiction in Nigeria.

His analysis is based almost exclusively on Igbo market literature and of all the titles he discussed, none was written by a woman. Thus he has portrayed the art as a male dominated sphere of which he says:

> *The pamphlets aim not at regaling the reader with knowledge but in reforming his morals and refining his attitudes in order to prepare him to face the social, economic and emotional problems of present day...* (19)

He says of the authors that they are "amateurs rather than professionals" and that writing is a pastime rather than a full time occupation. This essentially is also true of female popular writers in northern Nigeria whose major pleasure appear to be seeing their names on the front covers only.

In the works Obiechina analyzed and in his analysis, the place and roles of women are firmly within the covers of texts, right where the male writers want them to be. Therefore female characters are seen having to

choose between love and money. (Those who choose the later are roundly condemned), daughters whose fathers are intent on selling them and good time girls who drive young men to financial ruin.

Of the heroines and anti-heroines, Obiechina has this to say,

> *In most of these pamphlets, young girls put love above every other consideration. But there are some exceptions. A girl may actually desert a young man to whom she is deeply attached for a more educated and a wealthier suitor who would provide her with greater economic security.* (37)

Thus, it is obvious that the stereotypes of the good versus the bad woman abound in the texts Obiechina analyzed. Obiechina finds little wrong with the male constructs of female character stereotype and he does not find the absence of female writers in his analysis remarkable. Obiechina in his introduction postulates that he wanted to explore popular themes and the influences conditioning them. But he completely ignored the woman as a writer and creator of themes and characters.

It is quite obvious then that, as at the time men started writing in Nigeria, woman were still in the kitchen. This is not so much a lack of inspirational attitudes in the Nigerian woman's psyche but it is more due to the fact that colonialism, with its idea of female helplessness and assumed indolence, largely ignored the Nigeria woman when it came to formal education. The colonialists needed Clerks and other lower ranking civil servants for their various companies and men were usually given the barest

minimum education which would enable them to fill these posts. One proof of this would be the fact that the first secondary school in Northern Nigeria was established in Katsina in 1929 to formally educate boys only.

A proliferation of popular female writers occurred when more and more women gained access to western type of education. A cursory look at the writers' background reveals that quite a number of them are educated beyond secondary school level. They turned to novel and short story writing more easily due, probably to their familiarity with the folk tales and oral narrations told them in childhood.

Popular culture itself seems to have evolved in urban areas due to the mixture of traditional art forms with new and emerging modern or to put more aptly, contemporary arts of the lower to middle classes. Therefore, it is close to the spirit of the mass of the populace for two reasons; the traditional forms are easily identified with as the known. On the other hand, the modern aspect of popular art is also identifiable as something desirable. This is informed by the psychological urge to cling to the known while exploring the new. This synthesis seems to be the reason d'etre of the success of popular art in northern Nigerian society. Popular fiction touches the lives and psyches of those who read them with an immediacy born of its links to our romantic, material and cultural everyday existence.

The criteria governing the success of popular forms include lack of complexity. This means that themes, plots and narrative techniques are straightforward and simple. Secondly, it must also be well grounded in the cultural pathos of its reading public. This perhaps, is the most powerful weapon of mass art; the symbolic identification that passes from text to reader and back from reader to writer/text. The authors usually are members of the society they fictitiously portray in their fiction they are therefore influence by the society and their writings also influence society, it is symbiotic relationship. It is usually assumed by it's detractors that it is mainly barely literate people who read popular fiction. But with the continual blurring of the line dividing the lower and middle class in northern Nigeria, popular fiction has moved up some rings in the social ladder. It has nevertheless stayed as close to the cultural pathos of its environment as possible. Therefore it can rightly be claimed that in northern Nigeria, popular art not only moves between and among classes, it also serves as a bridge between classes.

Another importance of popular fiction as a genre lies in its potentials to become not great literature but a veritable artistic genre capable not only of mirroring society, but helping to move it forward.

The popular text in northern Nigeria serves as entertainment media it also helps the writers to achieve some sort of positive public recognition

and, it is also a yardstick for analysing social norms culture and societal dynamism.

Tompkins (1932) in her assessment of women popular writers insists that they idealize the submission of heroines to men. She says that female writers portray submission not as "Degradation but as a social grace." (120)

This could have an effect on the readers of such texts because writers have a certain hold on their audience, "Women... like to read what women have written, to meet in books with a reflection of their own interests and point of view." (Tompkins 1932: 120)

The art of popular fiction deals extensively with the matter of morals; what the society expects of an individual. The writers, despite their attempts to make iconoclasts of their heroines, often take into serious consideration the issue of societal expectation. Perhaps that is where the contradictions lie; the attempt at rationalization of personal ambition with social expectation and pressure cannot fail to produce confused stereotypes of female characters. Furthermore, the plot and characters are usually forced to portray the writers' own social and/or emotional views.

The plots usually take the man and woman in love motif, fix obstacles between the lovers to stall the final celebration of true love. As the popular saying goes all the world loves a lover, and writers take advantage of this by steeping their heroines deep in the pot of turbulent love, hardly giving the heroines time for other aspects of life.

Usually the most important and laudable occurrence in the texts is the heroine finally snaring her "Mr. Right."

This pre-occupation with love entails a constant reworking of plots in different texts with slight alterations in characterization, names and setting. Therefore an author could write several books out of a single plot. One for the price of many as it were.

This could be one of the observations that gave rise to Sani Abba Aliyu's comments on popular fiction that

> *These Hausa `Pulp' novels... lack depth in form or seriousness in style, and mainly reflect the preoccupations and cultural contexts of the authors, being Hausa renditions of Indian films and English popular romantic novels.* (Newel 1997:154)

Popular writers might water down or even avoid this criticism if they prove their relevance to society by focusing on issues beyond love that affect the contemporary northern Nigerian women.

The stylistic weakness of the texts is surprising since popular fiction is a close kin to the oral or folkloric art form. In Northern Nigeria, the oral art form is an ancient, well developed and popular creative medium which is arguably dominated by the women folk.

According to Aliyu in his incisive analysis of Hausa women as oral story tellers, "Local oral art forms had a far more pervasive influence and

women were pivotal to the rendition of imaginative narratives". (In Newell 1997: 150)

He further postulates that the excellence of northern Nigerian women as story tellers stems from their confinement in the home with the children while the men move outside of the sphere of domestic affairs. It is remarkable then that in northern Nigerian male writers with the advantage of early western type of education, were the first writers of published fiction in northern Nigeria. Aliyu goes on to say that European formal type of education contributed to the art of novel reading in Northern Nigeria.

He asserts also that,

> *"Educated Hausa children were more likely to be found reading Hausa or English novels than listening to women story tellers".*

Perhaps these educated people have taken a step from listening to women story tellers and are now reading texts written by women. This is hardly surprising since the oral art form, a literary mode close to the masses of northern Nigeria is a close kin to the popular art form.

Most critics pick on Hausa novelists because they seem set on destabilizing the cultural status quo by portraying characters who break cultural and some times even religious boundaries.

Yusuf Mohammed Adamu's article "The Hausa Novel At The Cross Road" (1994) is a veritable defense of Northern Nigerian popular fiction. It is a short but vigorous defense of popular art forms against critics'

allegations that the novelists are "Spoiling the society with their poisonous pens."

As he rightly points out, the novelists do not write out of nothingness, but rather take their themes from society and its attendant problems and ills. But while this may be so, Adamu is inclined to ignore the possibility that in reality, the extravagant treatment of themes and plots and simplistic conflict resolutions might influence a young impressionable reader to believe that life's solutions are simple. For instance in numerous African's fiction, 'elitist' or popular, educated women are ridiculed as either pushy and aggressive or seem to end-up as old maids. But a true to life character is not filled completely with virtues or completely with depravity but like most human beings, realistic characters are an intermixture of virtues, vices, fears, weaknesses and strength.

Apart from the unrealistic exaggerations obtainable in popular texts written by women in Northern Nigeria, the untrue and usually ridiculous images of women depicted, are a serious cause for concern to gender conscious critics and literary analysts.

It is ironic that in its character stereotypes, popular fiction neither favours the woman or man. While portraying the ideal woman as good and beyond any flaw, the ideal hero is deeply in love and absolutely ready and able to cater for his heroine's every need and desire, a situation no doubt, that could place a strain on any normal man.

Stephanie Newell insists that the issue of gender is very important in West Africa. According to her, "West African Societies overflow with local, culturally specific constructions of gender which circulate in literature and popular representations."
(Newell 1997:1)

In the book Writing African Women: Gender, Popular Culture and Literature, the issues surrounding the female gender as discussed from different perspectives; oral literature and the mass media as analysed by Sani Abba Aliyu's essay discussed earlier. Also of relevance is Jane Bryce's "A life on the Women's page; Treena Kwenta's diary". Bryce states that

> *In the debate about `good' and `bad' writing in Africa, or `elite' versus 'popular'... What emerges is a vertical scale of value in which writing by women occupies a place below male authored or masculine oriented texts.*
> (Newell 1997:49)

It is obvious that Newell gives little thought to popular texts written by northern Nigeria women when she confidently claims that the essayists of Writing African Women "Broadly agree that West African Women writers challenge, fracture and rewrite the stereotypes and myths that have surrounded and defined them. "(7)

This assertion cannot be sustained after a vigorous analysis of majority of popular creative writing that has emanated from the pens of

these women. It can even be ventured that for most of these writers, there is in their treatment of the plight and successes of their respective heroines, a celebration of patriarchy and its attendant female subjugation.

The `Prince charming will come and save the heroine motif or the love conquers all' theme is at best highly deceptive and urges escapism borne of ridiculous over reliance on men.

According to Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Guber (1979) Some romantic conventions "create absurd misconceptions" in the readers psyche. They go on to postulate that:

> *"Such novelistic cliche's as love at first sight, the primacy of passion over all other emotions and/or duties, the chivalric exploits of the hero, the vulnerable sensitivity of the heroine... are all shown to be .. improbable,... they are shown to provide manipulative roles and hypocritical jargon which mask materialistic and libidinal egoism."* (Gilbert and Guber 1979:115)

Ferguson (1978) sees a link between the literary stereotyping of women and the creation and sustenance of myth. In this sense therefore myths can be equated with social stereotypes that subsequently seep into literature. Thus female popular writers by not writing women anew and giving them the powerful and positive images the Northern Nigerian women deserve, are perpetuating the myth of the woman as lower than man and generally inferior in social status.

Marriage and love are viewed as necessary for the attainment of contentment and respect in northern Nigeria.

It is viewed as a curse for a woman to remain unmarried for life. As such, all behavioural attitudes in the society and by extension the fiction emanating from such a society are geared toward avoiding this distasteful state. The popularity of the texts written by women in Northern Nigeria justifies this hypothesis. The vigorous spate of popular output by Northern Nigerians writers suggests the popularity of the texts with the readers. In these texts, a woman who is educated and ready to take her place beside a man becomes a pariah as men fear that she will be difficult to control. Therefore the writers must necessarily seek to avoid such negative roles for their heroines. Thus when the heroine is well educated care is taken not to give her career much emphasis so as not to detract from her perceived femininity. The writers apparently do not notice the conflict in desiring an educated but docile and domesticated heroine on one hand and portraying an educated, career fulfilled and upwardly mobile hero on the other.

By focusing on women's writing in Northern Nigeria, it is possible to sideline to a considerable extent the expectations of the male literary hegemony on female characters. It will necessitate therefore, a sharp focus on the positive and negative aspects of how women perceive other women and also, what women's expectations are, from and for other women.

By so doing, that is by placing a mirror opposite women's writing, the faults of omission and commission can be observed and analyzed.

Analyses of women's writing cannot of course be complete without taking into consideration the existing and constantly emerging concepts of feminism, therefore, this thesis locates its framework firmly within the feminist literary canon. Because of the wide and varied nature of feminist literary discourse, it is pertinent to narrow the perspective so as to achieve a more incisive analysis. To this effect, the feminist literary model of Gynocritism is employed to analyses the texts under study. Gynocritism advocates a focus chiefly into the writing of women as distinct and therefore separable from the writing of men. This concept is further discussed in the next chapter. The chapter deals with feminism as a literary concept and its application to the creative writing of African women in general and female popular writers in particular.

CHAPTER TWO

A FEMINIST LITERARY APPROACH

Feminism in its treatment of female writers often tends towards a cacophony of voices. While some feminist literary theorists demand that the personal experiences of a writer and even that of a critic is important in any analysis, others insist on historical contemporaneous accuracy of data, i.e. what is obtainable and observable in a writer's society should be taken into consideration.

But as Toril Moi (1985) cautions, the autobiographical facts of a writer's life and the society's historical factors alone do not make for creditable fiction. Deeper psychoanalytic yearnings, some quite repressed, often come into play in fictional texts.

It would sometimes appear, that a lot of female writers use fiction as vehicles of escapism, means of readjustment which while unreal and sometimes even unrealistic, are useful as the comforter for a patriarchally subjugated woman.

Feminists believe that critics and writers alike speak, to use Moi's own expression, from "positions shaped by cultural, social, political and personal factors." (Moi 1985:43).

Therefore, a study of the socio-cultural milieu of the writer is relevant in analyzing her plots, ideas and characterization. Moi asserts that

"To study images of women in fiction is equivalent to studying false images of women in fiction written by both sexes." She therefore insists that characters in most literary texts are portrayed in often tangential relation "To the real person whom literature somehow never quite manages to convey to the reader." (44-45)

Julia Kristeva, herself an ardent feminist literary critic differentiates

Between three types of feminist theories. The first set of theorists known as liberal feminists "demand equal access to the symbolic order". The radical feminists reject completely the male symbolic order but extol on the other hand, in its entirety, femininity as sex and as gender. The third position, which incidentally is Kristeva's own position, seeks to erase the dichotomy between masculinity and femininity, seeing it not as real but as metaphysical. (Moi 1985:17).

In reality however, majority of feminists have one thing in common, the rejection of patriarchal subordination of women and the defense of womanhood as powerful and equal to man.

For Ida Grabbe, feminist literary criticism's "Conception of the literary text is primarily determined by the intent to unmask phalocratic symbols and unseat any non-feminist reading or interpretation." (Grabbe 1991:142).

Feminism tries to debunk the notion that there are differences in the roles considered suitable for a man or a woman. For most feminists, it is in

the field of unfair and arbitrary role ascription and allocation that patriarchy offends most. Sex and gender, what patriarchy uses to subjugate women are interpreted as distinctly different. While sex is the biological differentiation of the human specie, gender is culturally motivated and interpreted. Furthermore, society in its division of human kind into classes has used sex to judge what is good and proper for one gender and what is ridiculous or atrocious in the other. In any case gender role allocations differ from society to society, what is deemed right and proper for a man in one society might be seen as atrocious in another.

Gender, according to Annette Kolodny is relational because it is based on a comparison between one and the other, in this case between man and the other, woman. Accordingly, Kolodny advocates that an effective analysis of feminist literature should "begin by treating each other and each separate work by each author as itself unique and individual. (Moi. 1985:7).

This is in order to determine the salient points, which gives each author and her texts her gender affiliations.

In African societies women find it especially difficult to operate outside gender definitions because many things that are taken as natural, logical and normative are actually merely gender determined. But these issues have been so culturally and socially entrenched that they do not appear so at all.

Some feminist literary critics see gender as influencing or rather, appropriating certain genres of literature, for example it is assumed that women writers often prefer writing prose fiction. This restriction is taken further by the limited choice of character portrayal; female characters seem to be limited to interpretations of roles in relation to men.

This can be seen in most of the popular fiction written by Northern Nigerian women. Perhaps this is in direct correlation to societal beliefs and expectations.

The text for feminist literary critics is not autonomous, therefore it should not be seen as existing over and above or even outside the society within which it was produced.

To talk of a particular conceptual framework would appear to be presumptuous, because woman as a social concept has had different experiences and even ideals due to different socio-economic, racial and cultural backgrounds.

Gender aspirations and interpretations of inequality and subjugation must of necessity vary from culture to culture because of the different variables of race, religion and social norms and values.

Therefore to ground this divergence in one wholistic frame is quite ridiculous. So any literary framework aiming to prove or disprove a feminist hypothesis has to be in itself, a highly flexible concept taking into consideration the modalities of the society within which it exists.

Feminism as a literary concept does not just advocate that women's fiction be taken seriously, it advocates a new yardstick for evaluating the fiction of women. This criterion calls for the exclusion of phallocracy in women's literary activities.

Sociological factors often impinge on studies of literature and its sub genres because a writer's worldview (formed by her experiences within the society) permeates her work consciously and unconsciously.

Elaine Showalter in her defense of the distinctiveness of women writers says that

> *...Women do have a special history susceptible to analysis, which includes such complex considerations as the economics of their relation to the literary market place, the effects of social and political changes in women's status upon individuals and the implications of stereotypes of the woman writer and restrictions of her artistic autonomy* (Grabbe 1991:50).

For Showalter, it is justifiable and relevant to study separately the woman writer. This approach takes into cognizance the woman as creator of 'textual meaning'.

Gynocriticism deals with women writers as encoders and enforcers of meaning. The woman writer is the authority from which a text emanates as such the woman as writer is not only an interpreter of societal norms but also a producer of such norms. Gynocriticism as its chief proponent Showalter intimates, deals with,

> *Women as writers... the history, styles, themes, genres and structures of writing by women, the psycho-dynamics of female creativity; the trajectory of the individual or collective female career; and the evaluation and laws of a female literary tradition.* (Grabbe 1991:153)

The concept distinguishes at least four areas of separateness of woman's writing from the male. Obviously, the woman would write from firstly the perspective of the woman, secondly Gynocriticism distinguished the female linguistic range as different from that of men. Thirdly, perhaps in support of Freudian analyses, the psychological basis of female-authored texts is different from that of men because biological differences presumably lead to psychoanalytic differences. Finally is the socio-cultural difference of women from men. The politics of feminism in the western part of the world began even earlier than the 17th century but its offshoot, feminist literary criticism started taking solid shape only in the late 1960's.

Feminist literary theory as a concept demands knowledge both of the political ideology propounded by feminists and some form of literary knowledge.

Feminist literary criticism took shape, in reaction to the trivial and unimportant roles given to textual female characters, women writers and female critics in the literary world. Thus feminist literary criticism works from the position of studying texts not only for their literary worth but also

takes into cognizance, in literary evaluations, a text's ability to depict women positively or negatively or even better, as true to life creations.

In fact, Grabbe insists that feminist literary criticism goes further by advocating

> *That literature may not be studied for purely aesthetic reasons but must change the readers by prescriptive education so that readers in turn can change the world.* (Grabbe 1991:144).

While it is unreasonable to demand starched stereotypes of successful women or a few aspiring and inspiring female heroines would go a long way in furthering the cause of women in contemporary Nigerian and African society.

Feminism as a literary concept takes into consideration the binary opposition in the signification of male and female sex and gender roles. Man is seen as the central focus, the social norm of power while woman is the other. When viewed vertically, with man first, woman automatically assumes the inferior beneath positions.

Texts are seen to be always gender specific whether the author is aware of that or not. Male authors usually write from the perspective of the man looking at woman from a certain stance, while women write from the viewpoint of knowledge of the experience of woman as a human entity.

A cursory glance at literary feminism from different perspectives seems relevant here. Firstly, socio - feminism takes into consideration, in

textual analysis, the roles and perceptions of women in a given society. Semio-feminism is concerned with the sort of language used to create and/or recreate the woman not only in fiction but in communication.

Marxist feminists equate women with the oppressed of the earth and therefore analyses literary texts from the perspective of the oppression of the lower class by the upper class and of women by patriarchy. Psycho-feminism in its literary conceptualization delves into the psychology of the society and the authors from which a text emanates.

Lesbian feminism is concerned with the rejection of the male specie. Man is seen as capable of achieving redundancy in the female life. The lesbian feminists if possible would have nothing to do with men. Black feminism takes into consideration the issue of race as capable of generating oppression alongside gender oppression. Bell Hooks (1981) insists that black women are oppressed at various levels. The western society which practices racism against them, oppression and subjugation also comes from black men who are patriarchal in nature and finally subjugation also comes from within the feminism fold because white western feminists tend to marginalize the black women in their fold.

In Nigeria, feminism is a concept a lot of women are wary of because of the radical and rejectionist tendencies of the western radical feminists who attempt, vigorously to shrug off any societal hold on their psyche. Molara Ogundipe-Leslie asserts that:

> *Many of the African female writers like to declare that they are no feminists, as if it were a crime to be a feminist. These denials come from unlikely writers such as Bessie Head, Buchi Emecheta, even Mariama Ba. I would put this down to a successful intimidation of African women by men over the issues of women's liberation and feminism.*
> (Jones 1980:11)

Today, women in Africa have not only devised suitable forms of male supremacy rejection concepts, but have also coined their own brand names for them. Thus terms like womanism, motherism and femalism are becoming more and more familiar as concepts dealing with the roles and images of the women of Africa in contemporary society.

Critics like Chinyere Grace Okafor propound the hypothesis that female subordination (at least economically) in Nigeria is a by product of colonization which brought with it the Victorian notion of female helplessness. But historical observation indicates that patriarchy has always in one form or the other, existed in Africa before the advent of the colonial master.

With the very rare exceptions of female trailblazers like the Amazons of Dahomey, the colonialists on arrival in Africa, found the African woman behind the man. That is not say that the African woman was as subjugated as the western woman, African women had roles and functions in the society that were important in themselves (for example religious priestesses and family matriarchs) and she was more economically

active and therefore independent. But politically, the African women took second place to man.

While the models of radical feminist philosophy does not seem the way out of marginalisation of the African woman and might lead to certain pitfalls, African women need a feminist awareness based on the socio-cultural and religious backgrounds of the African people. A form of feminine gender aspiration is necessary for the young women of Northern Nigeria if only to eradicate the undue and catastrophic submissiveness prevalent among African women.

Women writers have a role to play in this crusade, because they can write themselves out of patriarchally created stereotypes instead of being spokes-persons for male supremacist ideologies. Since Northern Nigerian society is a gender specific society, it is relevant to study the fiction that touches the majority of its populace within a gender centred frame work because studying the fiction of female popular writers is akin to trying to listen to the loud if sometimes incoherent voices of relevance in the society.

Northern Nigerian female popular writers images of women studied within the feminist literary perspective creates a focus which is intended to give concrete direction (if not already in existence) to popular women writers. This is in agreement with Nana Wilson-Tagoe who says,

> *A reading of African women's writing within a feminist frame work can bring a new energy and vitality to this writing. Within its own*

specific context and within the larger context of feminist writing. (Newell 1997:11).

Assessing the portrayal of women in literary texts leads to the rewards of unveiling stereotypes and showing them to be rigid and not true to contemporary reality.

Furthermore, the woman writer and reader may then not only begin to perceive herself as a holder of potentials, but can begin and continue to create herself positively in society to forestall further stereotyping.

It is perhaps true that of all Nigerian writers of different genres, popular writers are the least ideologically concerned. But then, on the other hand, most African fiction that consciously aspire to depict the woman's predicament in a patriarchal society tend to place in a negative light men's behaviour, men are shown as creating trouble for women or barring their progress. On the other hand, African women in most 'elitist' feminist literature are glorified. Their sufferings under patriarchy raise them, supposedly to the martyrdom status.

The idea of an African feminism, literary and political is not to devalue the male but to uphold the power attributes of the African woman. Usually, representing women realistically suppress negative stereotypes. In popular fiction written by women in Northern Nigeria, it is possible to achieve the truthful portrayal and furthering of the cause of the Africa woman because female characters often play the leading role and

everything revolves round the heroine. With such a position of importance, she can wield a lot of influence in texts and by extension with the audience.

The next chapter in dealing with the themes of the selected texts explores the under use of the potentials of the female characterization in the texts.

CHAPTER THREE

THEMATIC CONCERNS

This chapter will undertake an appraisal of the themes of the texts under study. But in discussing the thematic concerns of popular texts, a new yardstick is being advocated which analyzes themes as originating from not only writers concerns, but as being influenced by the character of the heroine. Therefore, if the heroine is the traditional meek young woman, the expected themes will be the much-explored ones of love and marriage.

Most popular texts written by the writers' deal in one form of the other with themes of love, romantic love, impaired love or loveless marriage. There are stereotypical situations of young people in love who have obstacles implanted in the parts-stereotypical plots lead quite logically to cast - stereotyped characters.

Since these stereotypes of themes and characters are firmly embedded in a patriarchally located literary enclave, it is safe to assume that it will favour patriarchy. A patriarchal society conforms mainly to the definition and belief of the male human as superior to the woman, therefore wielding mere socio-political, cultural and economic power in the society.

Feminism is therefore a necessary antidote to the unfair categorization of women as inferior to man. To begin this chapter, a brief discussion of some of the writers is necessary. Most of them grew up within the Northern Nigerian cultural milieu and are therefore very

conversant with the intricacies of social behaviour in existence in Northern Nigeria.

Another interesting point to note is the relative youth of the writers. Of all the writers whose works are being discussed, Aishatu Gidado Idris is the oldest at thirty-two, while Hauwwa Mohammed Allurawa published The Weeping Heart at the age of twenty.

Thus it can rightly be said that the writers grew up amidst the almost cataclysmic struggle between old and familiar ways and the newer European and Asian models. This without doubt is reflected in their fiction for while they depict a deep respect for the tradition and probably, religious values of their society, they are ready for their heroines to bask in the comforts of Western education and material luxury.

While it would be impossible to say that all the five writers whose works are studied in this thesis are feminists or would even agree to be called feminists, most of them, especially from their writing in their own ways (negative perhaps) try to address the issue of the inequality of women in Northern Nigeria. It is suggested that their solutions are escapist solutions because most of the writers see the only way out for woman as still, through the ministrations of man and not through the woman's awareness of her true plight and a subsequent active effort to overcome the ills of patriarchy.

In a patriarchal society, women, to fit in properly tend to down play their abilities and ambitions. Ambitious and achievement seeking women are often seen as unfeminine, aggressive and unattractive. Thus since traditionally the women's chief role and need is to be feminine and attractive, she tends to shun the necessary assertiveness needed for success. To this end, women have been so successful that Ferguson (1980) says that,

> *Man has been defined by his relationship to the outside world - to nature, to society, indeed to God - whereas women has been defined in relationship to men...*(10)

So if society prescribes rules of behaviour and restrictions on women, these rules and restrictions are bound to find their ways into the popular fiction which emanates from women's pen. It is perceived that the ever-changing societal issues or the dynamism of the society at large are depicted in popular fiction. For example, in the contemporary treatment of love and marriages popular texts try to put heroine need into consideration. For example when Rabiat's marriage is on the verge of breaking up, her confusion is explored by the writer in some detail.

> *Be true to yourself. My father's advice now sounded hollow, irrelevant. I no longer knew who I was, let alone the true self I held so dear. All through the night, I paced up and down the room trying hard to concentrate on the television. I tried to brush away sentiments in an effort to reduce my options into terms of cut and dried reality. I could return to Kaduna to flush away the seed of this love-hate relationship between Mohammed and I, or remain and bear the consequences for the sake of A'isha despite the arrows of a garrulous society.* (Idris 1997:75)

The above shows a woman who has been truly in love and is now forced to face the reality that the romantic love she needs cannot be given to her by husband Mohammed.

Though one finds some point of disagreement with Obiechina (1973)'s claim that romantic love came to West Africa through the white man, it is non debatable that with the continual westernization of the African society, some of the norms restricting 'individualistic need oriented ' love has been continually stifled and could become extinct.

Lovers are increasingly certain of their individual choices as needing endorsement basically from themselves.

> *Rabiat finally decides to make her own choices and ignore society's judgement "I decided that I could do wrong things for the right reasons, rather than do the right things for the wrong reasons".* (Idris 1997: 114)

Also, social 'ethnic' religious and even national barriers are increasingly transgressed. It would seem that popular fiction by thematizing some of these social restrictions are helping to tear them apart.

In actual fact, love in the texts, especially the ones selected for this study is thematised and depicted from the perspective of woman as receiver of attention: A person who wins love due to her 'correctness' which more often than not, includes a non assertive nature. We rarely see the full potential of these women either as wives or lovers, much less see them as fully involved in careers.

This justifies Ferguson (1980)'s claim of women in society that they

> *Are thought to be passive when compared to men who assume the initiative in the sexual act, in business, and in politics; passivity has a lower value since assertiveness is needed for success...(7).*

Since love is seen as one of the sublimes of womanhood in Northern Nigerian fiction, modalities for its assumed success are created in popular texts. Therefore these texts can and do become yardsticks for the readers in the attainment of love and marriage.

Writing with love as a major if not the only motif seem to be what Northern Nigerian female popular writers excel in. Therefore it is very important to reveal their characterization and thematic concerns as social vehicles that help to perpetuate patriarchy, in accordance with male supremacist views these texts hint broadly that women are helpless without men. This is not actually so. Enid Schildkrout's study of the Hausa woman in purdah reveal that they are economically active and versatile (In Jones, 1987). This economic activity of the northern Nigerian woman is rarely depicted in popular texts. If no such reflection of such economic activity is shown in the fiction of the society, the fiction is not only biased but inadequate as a reflection of contemporary issues.

The texts also take into particular consideration matters of behaviour, and the proper conduct of people. Often, the forces of evil are juxtaposed against those of good and usually good prevails. But the

philosophical enigma of what is good as against what is wrong and/or bad sometimes hedge the writers into a tight corner.

In Talatu Wada Ahmed's SILENT TEARS , Aminu is portrayed as a loving and caring man despite having helped to destroy Sansanatu's life, the woman he claims to love. When Sansanatu, Aminu's ex-lover and the rightful queen of Kainuwa lost her sanity and wandered into Namu, Aminu was the only one who recognized her and had he chosen, he could have had her returned to her proper place in Kainuwa. But instead he defiled her. Yet of this man Wada Ahmed sympathetically writes,

> *Aminu could not help pitying Sansanatu... Something kept telling him to courageously face the world so that he may bring an end to Sansanatu's predicament. Sansanatu was almost a year old in the village, how could he continue to bear looking at her sleep on the bear ground. (Ahmed 1998:35).*

This is the woman Aminu sought and lost; a woman he claimed he still loved. But because he thought of her as a thing to be used for his own physical gratification, he kept mute and watched her live a life of madness, misery and destitution all for the sake of lust. Aminu refused to see Sansanatu as a person who might if sane want and need to make choices for herself.

After all, before she became mad she was the much beloved queen of a Kingdom and she was very much in love with her husband the Emir of Kainuwa. Yet even with his conscience pricking him, Aminu went ahead to

take advantage of Sansantu's mental and physical destitution. This is a vivid portrayal of the way women are seen as not needing any mental or intellectual capacity to relate with the opposite sex.

Yet despite the atrocities Aminu visited on the female characters around him, Sansanatu and even Rabiat his wife whom he has little or no respect for, Aminu is still depicted as a 'positive' character. Apparently his love for Nana his illegitimate child is all that is needed to redeem him. This is clearly in support of the unwritten law of patriarchy which absolves or reduces a man's share of blame in such matters of moral conduct.

Sansanatu's giving birth to a girl from Aminu's act of selfish passion is certainly a fortunate thing from the patriarchal point of view. Nana will leave Aminu's house for her husband's house sooner or later and their need be no unpleasantness. But if this child were a man, in the Hausa Muslim Milieu, where would he fit into? Whose son would he be? Especially with the "Dan Wani, Jikan Wani" syndrome.

> Aminu cannot even be Sansanatu's husband according to Islamic injunction because of the atrocity he visited on her.

Rabiatu, the legitimate wife of Aminu is of no consequence, when she complains about Aminu's behaviour after years of caring for Sansanatu and Nana, the whole village rise up against her. Indeed the writer herself apparently in a subconscious subscription to the rigid rules of patriarchy appears to be antagonistic to Rabi. Rabi is after all merely a woman and is

made to look foolish and wicked for protesting infringements on her rights as a human being, wife and mother.

Moreover since Aminu is depicted in a positive light in Silent Tears, Jakadiya the king of Kainuwa's royal consort cannot justifiably be negatively portrayed. This is because they both contributed almost equally to Sansanatu's misery and wretchedness.

Although it was Jakadiya who out of jealousy drove Sansanatu into insanity, Aminu could have helped Sansanatu more by revealing her identity and position to the villagers of Namu the village she wanders into. So, therefore, the question of good or bad seems largely to go unresolved in the texts. Characters are good and bad as seen only from Wada's perspective and not essentially from their action in the plot or the text.

Mairo Mohammed Mudi's When the Wall Cracks is especially relevant in the analysis of morality in popular fiction. In this slim volume of prose fiction, Mudi is concerned about the conduct of wives in relation to and with each other and to the husband. She is also concerned with the relationship and conduct of children towards their parents and the society at large. There is serious disharmony in the Mutunci household because the two wives of Alhaji Mutunci do not see eye to eye. This is expressed as having dire consequences on the children in the family, because competition and unhealthy rivalry springs up between the female children of the two wives. Ironically or perhaps logically in a patriarchally

sanctioned society, the male children of the Mutunci family are not in the least involved in this family antipathy. They are busy trying to consolidate and expand their father's business empire.

Furthermore, in accordance with the unwritten rule of popular fiction, Mudi divides the characters into two distinct groups, the good and the bad. The first wife Hajia Hakuri the pivot around whom all the 'good' characters revolve namely her husband and her children.

Her co wife Hajia Gogo and her children are depicted as bad to their point of their being foolish.

Umma, Hajia Gogo's daughter's lack of firm moral values and virtues lead to her being impregnated by Sadau the arch Villain of the story. In the end it is only when the two wives realize that enmity, envy and rivalry will get them nowhere that they resolve to be friends.

Mudi as writer of the text appears to uphold and support the dictates of polygamy. she depicts the trouble in the Mutunci household as not caused by the sharing of one man by two women but as a result of impatience, jealousy and intolerance. Hakuri, the portrait of an ideal wife in a polygamous home says of her relationship with Hajia Gogo her co wife,

"She knew that because of the jealousy that was between them, none of them trusted each other". (Mudi, 1998:6)

Evil, seen popularly as deviation from the path of societal norms and unwritten laws, is always punished in the end. In Silent Tears , Jakadiya

the evil one comes face to face with her evil deeds in the final pages of the text and in ideal retribution, appears to loose her senses.

Sadau is disgraced by the two wives of Alhaji Mutunci in When The Wall Cracks. while Umma, the deviant daughter who falls victim to Sadau pays for her foolishness with an unwanted pregnancy.

The issue of morality further is complicated when the wives decide to help Umma get rid of the pregnancy to preserve her 'chastity' in the eyes of her father and the world.

The scope of the five texts under discussion is limited to the home front (except for Fatima Usara Hassan-Tom's collection of short stories which tries to see women aspiring against socio economic odds or in battle against super or supranatural phenomena). Woman in these texts is viewed in relation to her family, her suitors or her Lover/husband. Therefore it is not particularly surprising that there is little departure from the conventional boy meets girl, conflict and conflict resolution plots.

According to J.M.S Tompkins, most popular texts "Dress up the old themes of Cinderella, virtue persecuted and the good young man in new scenes and characters". (Tompkins 1932).

Love in fiction especially complicated love has always had special value for writers and audience alike, even in 'highbrow' literature. Thus it is easy to understand and justify popular fiction writer's almost obsessive preoccupation with love as theme. A certain uniformity of style and theme

and the similarity of the socio-psychological framework of these popular texts set them apart from 'serious' 'works of literature. Whereas most African 'serious literature try to explore the intricacies of social and individual behaviour while at the same time trying not to pass rigid judgements of approval and disapproval, the kind of works grouped under popular in their thematic and character portrayals try to make the audience participate in the identification of character or groups of characters as good or bad. This is usually achieved through rigid, stock in trade stereotypes.

In Silent Tears Jakadiya the emir's emissary for no apparent reason hates Sansanatu and plots to drive her away from the palace. In depicting Jakadiya's frenzy of wickedness as juxtaposed against queen Sansanatu's goodness, gentleness and amiability, Wada Ahmed forces us to take sides.

Good is usually depicted as passive, meek and weak while bad is actively vicious. Therefore if good is stereotyped as meek and weak, in taking sides (Presumably the side of the 'good' character) there could be a subconscious effort to adopt meekness in the behavioural attitude.

Thus the socialization of the women as weak and meek is a process which could and does find support in the popular fiction of northern Nigerian women.

The popular writers in employing their act and even through their characterization almost inevitably weaken women. It is important to point out here that though the end result of the texts are similar in direction and

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attitude, the writers have different ways and styles of character portrayal and plot realization. This is because even though popular fiction thrives and encourages mass appeal and mass production, the distinctiveness of each writers socio-cultural and personal ideosyncracies seep through. While Mairo Mudi is concerned with the maintenance of equilibrium in a polygamous home, (by advocating women's acceptance of polygamy in its entirety), Ahmed is concerned with the supreme and all redeeming position of love in a women's life.

Usually, the writers become so personally involved in their plots and narration that they appear to take a stand alongside their heroines and fight her cause for her against other characters. Throughout Silent Tears Talatu Wada Ahmed seems inclined to carry Nana on her head, so much so that Nana, the would be heroine of the story, comes across as limp, spineless and unable to think for herself.

Furthermore, in Rabiat, the author Aishatu Gidado Idris is always there to explain Rabiat the central character's every move. She is there ready to sympathize with Rabiat's hurts and pains.

> *All my life I had lived through a glowing example of people who never conceded defeat, even if defeat was a foregone conclusion. My mind told me to detest moral cowards and to despise those who would not fight for their right to live. ...Why should you allow someone to treat you as if you were less than a human being and not do anything about it? I wondered.*
> (Idris 1998: 64)

Furthermore, it appears that these female writers in their fiction depict life as they would want it to be, but not as it really is. In her indictment of female popular writers, Tompkins (1932) says that,

> *They were moralists... and dreamers. In their hands the novel was not so much a reflection of life as a counterpoise to it, within the covers of which they look for compensation for ideal pleasures and ideal revenge.*

In their thematic preoccupations popular female writers in northern Nigeria can be seen to practice an escapism which seeks to shut out patriarchal subjugation of women. Instead of challenging the values that limits their progress, the writers tend to glorify the state of submissiveness and elevate it to the level of desirable feminine art.

Thus instead of using the power at the tips of their various pens to right the injustices of patriarchy or even speak out against it, they submerge their heroines in the justification of feminine inferiority.

Hauwa M. Allurawa's "The Weeping Heart" is particularly conspicuous in the treatment of women as appendages to men. Nearly, in fact all her major female characters are highly educated in the western formal sense but their only importance in the text lie in their quest and attainment of love.

The writers instead of carving out new ways of life for women in Northern Nigeria, lead the readers into fantasy as an escape from the plight of women in the patriarchal society. Their fiction also affords an escape

from the day to day worries of the full time housewife's life. The writers take advantage of and exploit the human need for immediate and ephemeral gratification and entertainment.

Popular fiction's mass appeal and mass acceptability seems to arise from its melodramatic treatment of the trivia of everyday life. Readers are able to identify with its similarities to their lives and also they appreciate the glorification of their lives and problems through popular melodrama.

One of its major weaknesses as stressed by Richetti (1969) is that, "It sets out to flatter and exploit rather than to challenge or redefine the assumptions of its implied audience".

Talatu Wada Ahmed in Silent Tears and Mairo Mudi in When The Wall Cracks enthrall the readers by thrashing issues that are already well known to the reader's socio-cultural psychology; issues of polygamy and courtship. In fact they are not only well known, but in Northern Nigeria the reader could probably expect to be involved in the issues at some point in her life. Hajia Hakuri practices ideal polygamy by being a submissive and uncomplaining wife even in the face of extreme provocation.

> *Though she could not fault her husband the way he treated them but she thought he ought to have done something about her mate and her trouble a long time ago...For long, her mate had been pestering their husband to employ female house-helps for them. When he called the two of them and tabled the issue, Hajia Hakuri went against it strongly with points to support her objection...*
> (Mudi, 1997: 7).

By calling forth no new dimensions to these age old social dynamics the texts and by extension the writers support the existing norms of a young girl (at sometimes heavy costs to herself) believing that marriage is the most important calling of her life. Marriage, whether polygamous or not is preferred to the state of maidenship.

In a lot of popular texts, the heroine, after suffering obstacles finally attains the most important component of her existence; a man. We usually leave these heroines at the point when they have just entered or are about into the joys of matrimony.

How can the Northern Nigerian female writers break away from the straits of using the insipid stereotypes of women prepared for them by the existing male literary hegemony? A reassessment of characterization with the aim of exposing patriarchally approved stereotypes of women seems to be the first step.

As has been indicated earlier, popular writers take advantage of human beings' desire to be loved and they therefore use their heroines' plight to prey on reader's emotions. Nana's lover, prince Sadiq heir to a throne would be a dream lover for most readers of Silent Tears. This ensures identification of the readers especially young female readers with Nana's plight. The difficulties that lie in Nana and Sadiq's affair, when finally resolved would tends to meet the approval of most readers.

Also, because it is concerned with physical and materially immediate aspects of life, readers are ready to be absorbed and submerged into it. More often then not it registers inner most desires and fantasies, it thus reflects what Anderson (1974) calls the " social conscience".

'We' and who we are and who we want to be are revealed and re-enforced by these novels. As regards the love theme, Anderson has this to say,

> *It goes without saying that all heroines are waiting for love, for the supreme moment of falling in love. Some heroines are quite unaware of this impending inevitability and are caught unexpectedly by it. Other, possibly less ingenuous heroines are fully aware of the fact that waiting for love is the whole reason for their existence.* ***(Anderson 1974:114)***

According to Obiechina, "young people are extremely impressionable and use the experience they find in books to validate their aspirations" (Obiechina 1973:37).

Since the thematic concerns of the works treated are derived from contemporary society's norms and societal problems which immediately affect the day to day lives of the generality of the people, it is safe to assume that the readers, the target audience must in turn be influenced by the plots and conflict resolutions of the texts. They therefore derive solutions to their problems from those prescribed in the stories. This

symbiotic relationship between text and society probably accounts for the inability of critics to completely sweep popular texts under the carpet.

An example of this simplistic conflict resolution is the case of Nana In Silent Tears, a child of a disgraceful alliance with an unpleasant future facing her in the highly moralistic Hausa society, she is saved from an uncertain future by the love Prince Sadiq offers her.

In The Weeping Heart the heroine Hani finds relief only in her relationship with Kabir. Even Rabiat of Rabiat who has had a bitter experience with an unhappy and subsequently broken marriage, can only see a second marriage as the way out of her dilemma. This is despite her philosophical assertions that "marriage (is) a matter of conscience". Rabiat hits the nail on the head when she says,

> *If not for the religious injunction recommending it, staying with a partner for the sake of preventing oneself from indecencies, most people wouldn't have married.* ***(Idris 1998: 114).***

The themes, ideas and emotional outreach of these novels are addressed mostly to female readers, for it is assumed that women readers like to read women writers. Probably it is easier to get a fusion of ideas and an understanding that comes from being in the same socio-cultural milieu. Furthermore, to subscribe to Gynocriticism, it is also easier for women to read other women's writing because of the general similarity of their socio-

psychological being and their language, what Elaine Showalter Calls "Femme Parler."

It is also easier to identify with women authored popular texts because female writers invariably paint their heroines in a more positive light than usually obtainable in the physical society. At least if nothing else, other characters revolve around the heroines. This role of importance is easily identified with and wished for by many readers.

Positive portrayal in this case does not necessarily mean good, aspiring or even true to life depictions of women in these popular texts. But as the women in the texts studied are given prominence and their actions and motivations magnified (much more than in male authored texts), this is a positive phenomena, for women ought to speak about women and women's problem from the view point of women.

This is especially important since literature and all its subgenres being social mirrors carry within them society's sexual definitions. But at the level the societal conventions have influenced popular writers to such an extent that in most popular texts, the only thing of importance which happens is when the heroine marries the ideal hero.

The heroine does not hesitate to subsume her identity in the hero it is believed that he is there for the sole purpose of taking care of her. In The Weeping Heart when Hani finally finds Nasir she feels complete and we are left with an indication that with this great find, all is well.

> *Hani Settled down to savour every moment of her rekindled soul. She was sure Nasir would forever remain the salt of that enchanting prospect.**(Allurawa, 1998: 96).***

This corroborates Anderson (1974) who suggests that,

> *On and on goes the desperate search for Mr. Right. Some what surprisingly, in view of her supposed emancipation and her independence, What the romantic heroine really yearned for was to feel small, petite even and cherished and feminine. **(Anderson 1974: 202).***

Women as portrayed in the texts studied are role fillers and rarely living, breathing vibrant characters Nana in Silent Tears is the arch stereotype of the delicate harmless and virtuous heroine who deserves prince charming despite her unfortunate accident of birth. She is rewarded for her virtues with the love of prince Sadiq.

Jakadiya, the king's emissary is depicted to us only from the angle of her wickedness to Sansanatu. In fact the plot and story line fail to explain the why and how of such unrepentant evil in a Character. When the wall cracks, the female characters are merely stereotypes of perceived good and bad social values.

Hajia Hakuri and her daughters Zubaida and Sa'adatu represent what good wives and daughters should be. (Hakuri in the Hausa language means patience, and patience is a virtue very much admired and needed in a polygamous household). On the other hand Hajia Gogo and her daughters

Umma and Hauwa represent stereotypes of the quarrelsome younger wife and her badly brought up, ill-mannered daughters.

The quarrel on the opening pages of the text prepares us to see a division of values into two camps. While Hajia Gogo is railing and ranting and threatening hell fire and brimstone, Hajia Hakuri quietly locks herself and her daughters in her own apartment, thereby limiting the scale of the quarrel. She thus justifies her appellation. These roles and characterization are so predictable, that it sometimes appears that the writers are not even aware that there are other roles for women in the society.

Even when, sometimes a character like Hauwa, Hajia Gogo's daughter breaks with the accepted norms of the society by getting pregnant outside wedlock, in the end such characters have no new solutions to provide. In fact they are actually punished for their daring, therefore the status quo is maintained. For these deviant character serve as warning and possible deterrent. Hauwa is punished for her independence both of mind with an unwanted pregnancy and an in constant lover.

Even if the heroine is purported to have 'liberal' and modern views, on closer inspection, she assumes a position of needing to be loved and cared for above everything else and in the case of the educated woman, her education takes second place to her role in the kitchen.

The Weeping Heart parades an impressive array of university educated female characters, but from all points of analyses not one of them

considers her education or career to be worth the focus of much attention. Furthermore in Silent Tears' Nana's education is geared towards making her a dutiful and capable housewife and not a career competitor to her husband.

> *In school Nana's report was appreciable, but it was in handcrafts that she had no rival, she stitched, sewed, concocted and created all manner of things.* ***(Ahmed 1998: 64).***

Here Talatu Wada Ahmed seems to indicate that the homemaking or domestic crafts are more important for Nana than academic excellence. For the heroine this option is an all too easy option and a comfortable alternative to the rigours of a career outside the home.

This perspective of popular writers' characterization supports Jo Freeman's (1979) assertion that "it is much more socially acceptable for a woman to be well educated than for her to earn money with her education." It is quite clear that in contemporary Nigeria, prestige and positive recognition is given to education and knowledge but this prestige takes second place to marriage.

In The Weeping Heart a whole university era as it were, of Fawziya one of the numerous heroines, including law school is brushed over not in a page but in a single paragraph.

> *Some years later, Fawziya passed out from secondary school. She enrolled into a computer school to keep herself busy and to gain knowledge before her admission into the*

> *Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. Everything was so difficult for her at first, the academic stress and living on campus. It was her first time of staying away from home. She studied law for four years before she went to the Nigerian Law School, Lagos.* ***(Allurawa 1998: 55).***

Fawziya's main aim was to get married and when she completed law school thereby having a higher bargaining power, her most pressing desire was not to start practicing law but to find a man because, "She knew even with her degree that something was missing in her life. She could feel the yawning chasm deep down in her mind." (Allurawa 1998:24). This is a young heroine who had just bagged the qualification to practice a respectable profession.

In most African family hierarchical set up, tradition dictates that the woman takes second position to man. And to be inferior to man, there must be some sort of passivity involved. Dissenters of the traditional passivity of women are often frowned upon. This is because, according to Bell Hooks " most men in a patriarchal society fear and resent women who do not assume traditional passive roles." (Hooks 1981: 13).

This fear of assertive women cuts across cultural and continental boundaries and Hooks goes on to say that a lot of young university educated African American women tend to suppress their career needs and aspirations so that their men will not feel threatened.

In their response to this endemic fear popular female writers in Northern Nigeria portray heroines who refuse to challenge or even chaff against patriarchal power over women and the labour force.

According to Patricia Duncker, the woman's position in the society becomes clearer to us if we ask ourselves "How much do you earn? Who pays you? What do you have to. do to earn that money?" (Duncker 1992:31).

A high percentage of Nigerian women probably would not find these questions palatable and the resulting answers might show the women on a much lower economic and power rung than her male counterpart. Nuss (1989) suggests that the highest percentage of third world women engaged in labour is working in the field of unspecialized and underpaid labour.

Of the educational qualification and motivation as the Nigerian woman from childhood, Ayesha Imam (1990) says less girls than boys receive western style education and even the girls who do go to school are encouraged to read courses like nursing, secretarial courses or catering. (In Davis: 1990, 102).

By portraying docile and only marriage oriented heroines, the female writers of Northern Nigerian popular literature are helping to socialize young female readers into the roles predetermined for them by the society. Principally that of the hardworking, concerned for her home only housewife.

Obiechina (1973) says of the writers of popular romances that they believe love is the all sustaining force of marriage but according to him,

> *Marriage certainly needs stronger props than these and it is immature and unrealistic to think of marriage almost entirely in terms of love, without at the same time considering the means of supporting the home.(51).*

The Weeping Heart offers an indication of the role conventionalization of women. Dr Umar the husband is always at work in his clinic while Mrs. Umar an educated woman and a civil servant is given prominence and importance only in the home as a mother and a wife. The female characters in the texts are daughters, wives or lovers. They are relational or relative figures. There is rarely the sense of the self as the 'I am'.

The characters themselves highlight the strength of this cardboard perception of women in popular fiction. They seem to be locked in a tunnel with no way out and the option that keeps reverberating round and back to them is marriage.

After the break up of Rabiat's marriage, when she was confused and still smarting from the horror of that first failed marriage, the only advice her friend could give Rabiat was "why don't you get married to Isa (another suitor) and end it all?" (Idris 1998: 19).

But does it all end with marriage? If it did, Rabiat's first marriage should not have failed. Paradoxically, it is the limp Nana of Silent Tears who appears to see, however dimly the plot patriarchal society to marry off every girl whether she is ready or not. This little teenager, not yet out of secondary school is besieged by everyone around her to choose a man as soon as possible, even before she leaves secondary school. She realises that her opinion had not been sought and in fact no one wanted to know if she wanted a suitor or not. Nana is baffled by this frenzy of matchmaking of the elders around her. At some point she starts to wonder.

> *Is it by force that I must marry? All I want to do is to be left alone, I have no time for any silly love and if the principal thinks I don't know what I want she has another story to tell.(**Wada Ahmed 1998: 126).***

But for how long will Nana be able to defy the heavy weight of family and societal expectation?

Susan Gilbert and Sandra Guber (1979) have stated that when women started writing they found ready conceived and deeply entrenched stereotypes of women in fiction. Those of the 'angel' and the 'monster' the angel is the sweet, docile and submissive woman who accepts her role uncomplainingly. The 'monster' woman on the other hand chaffs against the norms of society where patriarchy reigns. Women writers often use these stereotypes in their fiction apparently unaware or uncaring that by

using patriarchally originated characterization, the women writers contribute to the oppression and subjugation of women in the ambience of the society within which that fiction originates.

Furthermore, the hero as the saviour motif seems to be an extension or maybe even the result of rigid stereotyping of characters in popular fiction. The female characters, the heroines especially are located in situations that often demand that a brave hero should save them. An example of where this can go wrong is in the case of Hauwa in When The Wall cracks who, desperate to find a man to take her away from the palpable hatred which exists in her polygamous home, falls prey to Sadau's trickery. The author Mairo Mudi's ingenuity in this instance lies in her success at turning Sadau the perfect prince charming into the anti -hero, a common liar and con man. But in all the other texts (Save Eyes of Darkness which does not place women at the mercy of doubtful heroes) a hero is expected to surface and make it an all is well that ends well" affair.

Since literary activity popular or otherwise has some form of influence over the society, it is not difficult to imagine the effect of this Cinderella and the prince motif on women especially young impressionable teenage girls.

The social, moral and religious norms of Northern Nigeria favours the women as a married because as Stephanie Newell (1997) indicates, the African society see marriage as a stabilizing institution.

Thus the female popular writers of Northern Nigeria try to take advantage of marriage as an institution that appeals to the larger proportion of the society. Readers are encouraged subtly and sometimes not so subtly to feel empathy towards heroines who aspire to marry or are already married.

Left out of the fantastic and utopia world of popular fiction by Northern Nigeria women however is the place, the position of the women in the family, a family with rules, norms and values determined by patriarchy.

The main concern of the writers is with the social recognition and respectability marriage guarantees women and even men in the society.

In entertaining the audience and identifying with society's perceived or presumed conventions, these writers often fail to seek or expose new truths in their fiction. The reality of how marriage could and sometimes does have disillusionment in store for the participants is carefully ignored by the writers.

They thus write according to society's perception of what is right and proper. So the heroines in addition to being virtuous, must marry or desire marriage above most things so that the social norms and equilibrium are maintained.

The didacticism often found in popular texts tends towards exposition and condemnation of deviation from the norms of the society.

Thus because writers want to identify with the society's ideals, it becomes easy to compartmentalise themes and characters.

In When The Wall Cracks one of the major thematic concerns of the writer is to justify polygyny and blame its pains and failures not on polygyny itself, but Mudi sees the problems in a polygynous home as arising from the wives reluctance or inability to accept this particular form of marriage. Mudi, like patriarchal society fails to explore or willingly ignores the negative psycho-emotional effect the sharing of her home and husband can have on a woman.

In fact popular fiction goes a long way in reinforcing the patriarchal notion that the major importance of a woman in the society is within the framework of marriage. Nana, Rabiat, Fawziya and Hauwa at very young ages could only think of marriage as the most important condition of their lives. Women heroines are depicted by authors as meaningful only in relation of their importance to men. This gives strength to Nina Auerbach assertion that, " communities of women without men are seen immediately as mutilated." (Auerbach 1987:4).

Perhaps these writers consciously or sub-consciously subscribe to Chinweizu(1980)'s assertion that a woman's power lies in her ability to control a man with her womb and her feminine wiles.

But then, any woman who genuinely believes that her womb, literally and figuratively speaking gives her power in a patriarchal society is

living in a fool's paradise because in such a society the eventual man controls the product of the womb and ultimately even, when the womb assumes the role of production! At this point, it is pertinent to point out an important difference in role identification between the women in the West (America and Europe) and the Northern Nigeria, indeed the African woman. While the Western woman seems to have attained a remarkable level of individuality and can thus take decisions which she thinks can reflect only on herself, the African women is communal minded. She assumes her decisions affect and concern not only herself, but her immediate and extended family. In its true essence this communality is not negative since it takes into cognizance the fact that no one is an island, that the society is a structural whole comprising of different functioning units. But adversely the patriarchal society has taken advantage of this communality to socialize women into a perpetual state of submissiveness. Demands are made on women which even when it goes beyond what she demands for happiness and self-fulfillment and actualization, women must conform with if they must fit properly into the society.

Thus even when it was obvious to everyone that Rabiat was in an unhappy marriage, her community, including family, friends and "well wishers" wanted her to stay on in the marriage so that she would not rock the boat.

Significantly also, there is always a heavy price to pay when a woman becomes deviant. Rabiat as a divorcee becomes a bit like the untouchable, the butt of lewd jokes.

> *"People have seen faults in you for accepting defeat in your marriage," I remember my grandfather telling me.*
> *"It is I, only I, that knows what I have been through," I had told him. " Now that I am as free as a bird, I feel consoled. One had to be in my shoes to know exactly how I felt and coped."*
> *His pulse skipped.*
> *"You cannot deny that a bird in the cage is more attractive than the one out in the bush, can you?" With a coy smile, he added, "And you did recommend Mohammed highly to me once, remember? And now that the bird is no longer in the cage, no doubt the vacancy in your bed is widening."*
> *Was that an insult? May be. But insults no longer hurt me. I had passed beyond them, ready to disown my heart to Mohammed.(Idris 1998:107)*

Hauwa in When The Wall Cracks got off with a somewhat lighter sentence, her mother plans an abortion for her so that her sins against social norms may not be found out.

> *"Hakuri"*
> *"Na'am"*
> *"I am taking her..."*
> *"We are taking her."*
> *"Okay we are taking her to the best doctor around and I don't want Alhaji to know."* (Mudi 1998:82)

By portraying heroines who suffer for deviating from social norms and expectations and who gain nothing but disgrace, the writers are indirectly advocating maintenance of the existing status quo.

In When The Wall Cracks, while the male children join their father in business and are rarely encountered in the enclosure of the home, the female children are seen in the process of being socialised into believing that the kitchen is the bedrock of life for a woman. Therefore Hajia Hakuri urges the women of the house to take their kitchen duties seriously.

In Silent Tears the principal of Nana's secondary school, herself a well educated woman has this to say to Nana her student and ward; a young impressionable girl who is certain to be greatly influenced by any advice offered by her principal.

> *Now that you have finished your secondary schooling you will encounter more and more such things (love letters). You can't live your life in isolation. Who you decide to choose will very much determine how you'll live the rest of your life. A good man can make a woman blossom.(125).*

The principal did not balance this important advice with any about what Nana ought to do with her life in relation to a career apart from choosing the right man. The fact that this piece of advice comes from a very well educated female character reinforces the notion that some women do see education as a tool for acquiring 'class' and social climbing not for serious career aspiration.

Thus through the principal of Nana's school Wada Ahmed inadvertently, perhaps, is helping to socialize the many female youths who read Silent Tears that the surest way to happiness is through a man.

By this Talatu Wada Ahmed has defeated her aim of making Nana a heroine of some academic pretensions. The most important contrivance in the plotting of Silent Tears seems to be the almost forceful injection of prince Sadiq Karimu, Nana's egoist lover into the storyline.

From the story line, it appears that Nana's virtues were especially light-lighted to vividly portray her suitability as wife to be for prince Sadiq, prince and heir apparent of the Kainqwa dynasty. This charming and self confident suitor of Nana believes so much in his eligibility that he assumes he has only to send a photograph of himself to Nana and she must surely fall in love with him.

With such an eligible suitor at hand, the principal does not bother to advice. Nana on success through personal endeavours. Also, her formal education skills are obviously not needed in the sphere chosen for her, the home.

On the other hand, Sadiq Karimu is depicted as aspiring and handworking. Despite his father's wealth and position, after obtaining a degree from Magwan University he goes immediately to Oxford University for a higher degree. As heir to a throne and a well educated man he is as such the ideal suitor/hero. This clearly shows how the male characters in

Silent Tears, Aminu included are depicted in roles outside the home as well as in relation to the women in their lives. Meanwhile the female characters are portrayed in their relation to the home, love or their view(s) of marriage and family. Even the principal of Nana's secondary school assumes importance in the text and in Nana's life chiefly due to her role as love counsellor to Nana.

To this end, it is the male characters who assume positions of saviour. The characters of Hauwa in When The Wall Cracks and Rabiat in Rabiat explore to an extent the failure of the man as a true saviour. The fact is that Hauwa falls prey to the con man Sadau's tricks reflects the desire and urgency of some young women to avoid societal and familial pressure by getting attached to a man. As shown in the texts, such blind urgency sometimes lead to women falling prey to ruthless men who take advantage of them. Or they, like Rabiat, could fall into prisons created by their inability to distinguish between the real and the illusory in marriage, for apart from her husband Mohammed's innate callousness, Rabiat unrealistic expectation of a fairy tale marriage added to the crashing of the marriage.

The plots and story lines often embrace modernity in its physical and ephemeral aspects. Education is seen as a positive bargaining power socially. Also ostentatious living borne of wanton spending is depicted.

> *The bridal portmanteau was brought in two weeks later. There was so much of everything that made relatives to look in awe. There were one dozen of bangles and six sets of*

necklace too. The cosmetics box included designer perfumery. In fact, there were block Hollandais while the laces were Swiss-made. ***(Idris 1998:30)***

Rabiat also glorifies the almost fairy tale world of the rich and their inter-marriages. Wealth is seen as important for itself and houses can and clothes are acquired not for need but for pleasure.

> *The wedding finally took place. It was the biggest wedding that year. Guest said it was more than just a wedding... the wedding lasted three days in all...In procession we drove by the Gidan Makama Museum...As soon as we reach our destination, the guard, an old man, opened the gates to let us into what was to be my residence.*
> *The mansion was stately indeed. The garden was beautiful, with surrounding trees and walls round it for added privacy. The sitting rooms were well stuffed, with all the necessary modern luxuries. All were furnished magnificently...*(Idris 1998:32-34)

In actuality the dreams, thoughts, aspirations and disappointments of Rabiat are more sensitively explored than those of the characters in the other texts. Therefore she is a closer representation to a living, breathing Northern Nigerian woman than some of the cardboard characters presented to us in the other texts.

But Rabiat cannot properly face the challenges of life without a man by her side. After the collapse of her marriage, if she had taken up the pieces of her life and continued her hitherto abandoned education or even looked for a means of making herself useful, her perpetual angst might have been relieved.

But having been socialised into a dependency status, she goes back to her family and twiddles her thumbs waiting for the next husband to come. Rabiat, it seems, despite her highly philosophic musings does not realise that she could be letting herself into a vicious circle.

Rabiat is labelled a failure because she left a hellish marriage, her courage in the face of such immense disapproval is commendable since she took positive steps to reject a life of emotional slavery. But sadly, her iconoclasm ended not with any self realization and emotional independence. Instead the story closes on her in her parents home, waiting impatiently for the next Mr. Right, yet not quite healed of the old wounds.

This leads to the question of the place of the Northern Nigerian woman inside the home. The home, being the environment most favoured for woman in the texts studied assumes so much importance that one would think that woman in her husband's house is happier than every unmarried woman. But Rabiat in the home of her first husband Mohammed has very little happiness principally because her ideas of matrimony and the realities of marriage do not quite correspond.

Her husband told Rabiat then a new bride that she took second place to his relations and he accordingly treated her so. To the extent that he took his distant relation as second wife and rival to Rabiat.

Except for Fatima Usara Hassan - Tom's is collection of short stories Eyes Of Darkness where the respective heroines show a high level of self

respect, most of the other heroines no matter their level of importance in the texts are mere appendages to men or would be appendages. They depend on the good will of the male characters for their happiness.

Even Nana who is not married yet is continually socialised against her will even, to see herself as non-important except in relation to a man.

Apart from being a wife and mother in the home how much of a determiner is woman even in the home she gives so much of herself to attain? Even in the home there is rarely complete self-fulfillment as she is careful not to undertake anything that could destroy the marriage.

The nitty - gritty of the marriage institution is rarely portrayed in the texts except when we glimpse through Mairo Mudi's portrayal of Alhaji Mutunci's house hold in When The Wall Cracks that the onus lie on the women folk to keep the home happy.

The two wives finally admonish each to unite so as to keep the family happy and united. Hajia Gogo the troublesome one finally realises her mistakes and repentant, she acknowledges that,

> *You see your family should always come first. It is only when we are united here and love one another in this family that we will be able to love other people. We can then have time to help others and be good to them.*
> (Mudi 1998: 89).

Here unity and social acceptance of role despite personal discomfort is preached as the key to happiness.

This conformity to societal expectations or rather perceived social expectations is a motif that runs through most of the texts studied and gives credence to the notion that the writers in most cases are merely pandering to society's taste.

Out of the five texts chosen, three were published by Informart Publishers, a publishing house in Kaduna. Its motto "Emerging Talents" reflects the publisher Ibrahim Sheme's crusade to give fledgling writers the necessary push. In an interview with Sheme, he declared that his aim was to help raise the silent voices of Northern Nigerian female writers who might otherwise find it difficult to publish their works.

The truth of this is evident when it is understood that the two texts not published by Informart Publishers were privately published; WHEN THE WALL CRACKS AND SILENT TEARS. The difficulty of being published is thus a serious constraint to popular fiction in Northern Nigeria. Established publishers rarely if ever undertake to publish a work deemed popular.

Thus when the writers finally do get publishers, their works have to be agreeable to the publishers to get published. Thus could ultimately affect the thematic concerns and styles of the work.

CHAPTER FOUR

STYLISTIC CONVENTIONS

An analysis of the thematic concerns of any literary work is incomplete without an analytic discussion of styles and stylistic devices employed. Popular fiction written by the female writers of Northern Nigeria must be assumed to have a literary style of its own. Actually it is this peculiar style that differentiates it not only from other genres of literature but from the writing of male authors as well.

Style in literary terms is the method of presentation of a piece of literary work. It encompasses not just form and language but also the settings of a literary work. It is relevant to discuss style in discussing popular fiction written by Northern Nigerian women for as gynocritism has pointed out women's language and manner of expression is quite different from that of men. Therefore it is logical to expect the style of writing used by women writers in Northern Nigeria to be markedly different from that of men. Furthermore it is by an analyses of the styles of presentation that critics can determine which of the literary genres a work of fiction belongs to. Because of the belief that women write differently from men, Gynocriticism places a lot of emphasis on style. Therefore the concept advocates a different yardstick for literary criticism from that which is obtained in the male oriented literary hegemony. But as Jo Freeman (1979) says,

> *A woman's linguistic existence is in many cases expressed in essentially male terms, from a male point of view, and/or with male interests in mind. One example of this tendency is the fact that many of the nouns that refer to women performing various activities or roles are linguistically marked as derivatives of basic (male) forms. Thus we have poetess, songstress and stewardess, usherette and majorette.(491)*

Thus with language predisposing women and women writers into patriarchy how do women writers identify themselves, first as women and secondly as writers?

In Northern Nigerian popular fiction one of the modalities that delineates women's writing from that of men is an almost exclusive commitment to the theme of love. The writers take this theme and rework and remodel it from different angles so much so that critics tend to see these women writers as being mainly concerned with the trivialities of contemporary society.

Popular art demands the immediate and emotional attention of its audience. Therefore its styles of presentation must be simple but catchy enough to engage the readers' attention. In the texts studied, the writers use a vividly fertile imagination and simplicity of language to render their themes.

These texts are more often than not spontaneous displays of sympathy or identification for a feminine plight. For example Rabiat addresses the issue of divorce in the society. But instead of exploring the root cause and effect of this social menace, the narrator merely seeks to justify her own behaviour and

apportions blames to others. The deep involvement of the authors in these texts ascertains a lack of objectivity to their fiction which in turn creates a lack of philosophical depth.

The issue of broken marriages the main pre-occupation of Rabiat is not given the depth of treatment one expects of such a devastating societal phenomenon.

In the world of popular fiction right and wrong are clearly defined and the societal values are simplified to such an extent that the reader has very little trouble identifying what is assumed right and what is deemed wrong. In the simple detective narration the heroes and heroines survive to live happily ever after while the villains get punished. In Silent Tears Jakadiya is finally brought face to face with the wickedness she perpetuated on queen Sansanatu. This happens when Jakadiya led an entourage from the king's court in Kainuwa to Namu so as to on behalf of Prince Saddiq Karimu ask for Nana Sansanatu's daughter's hand in marriage. Jakadiya's punishment consists not only of her public disgrace but her resulting insanity. So the madness she visited on Sansanatu rebounded to her.

Hauwa the unwise step sister of Mairo Mudi's When The Wall Cracks is punished with pregnancy outside of wedlock while Sadau the con man gets a few dirty slaps for his evil.

In the texts are an abundance of exaggerations, exuberance of emotions, actions and feelings.

"Can't you greet me Zubaida? Please you should know by now you mean a lot to me. How can I do without you, my beautiful queen? I want you to know that you are the apple of my eyes the only person that ...."
"I told you, I don't like this talk please stop it."
"Okay I will stop it if it makes you happy. You know I will give my life to make you happy. My life without you is as good as useless." (Mudi 1998:16-17).

This kind of dialogue is so unrealistic even in the extremity of love as to make it ridiculous.

The good characters Nana and Zubaida especially are so good that one begins to wonder if any real woman can come close to this portraiture. While the bad characters Jakadiya, Mohammed and Sadau are so devilish that one expects them to have three horns and a forked tail.

If there were to be a pyramid of range and scale of subjects treated by these texts love and marriage would rank top on the scale of preference followed by the depiction of life in polygynous households.

Silent Tears, The Weeping Heart and When The Wall Cracks all have the love motif in one way or the other. Most times the heroines are so passive, especially over their destinies that they appear like leaves being blown every which way in a storm.

In Silent Tears, Nana, seems able to achieve coherence only when she is with prince Saddiq Karimu, her suitor. Apart from her abortive attempt to run

away from school, she makes no remarkable movement in the story and we see her as a pawn that Talatu Wada Ahmed the writer moves around as she pleases.

Nana is cast in a pathetic, helpless mould that sometimes stirs irritation in the reader, if not even outright anger at such willful helplessness. Despite her inclination not to succumb to Saddiq's charms, with a little pressure from her nameless school principal and her stepbrother she submits to his courtship. Furthermore her act of running away from school serves no purpose either in her own progress or even in the success of the plot. Apart from what the writer tries to tell the readers about Nana, the readers know little of who she is or what she really wants. Her actions are jerky responses to her relations, well wishers and lover; not meaningful in themselves.

Nana appears to have inherited her good-natured mindlessness from her mother Sansanatu. Sansanatu, both when she was sane and in her madness, submitted to the will of her parents and all the men within her radius, as a young girl purported to be deeply in love with Aminu she was pressured into marrying Emir Karimu, (Saddiq's father). To further depict her pliant and unquestioning nature the reader is made to believe that she found love and happiness in emir Karimu's palace.

After she ran mad due to Jakadiya's evil and spiritual machinations she wanders into the village of Namu where Aminu the disappointed lover has migrated to. There, in her lunatic state Aminu with a few kind words and a little groundnut could do as he pleased with her.

Rabiat is one text that opens with every promise of stylistic superiority. As the reader goes on through it is observed that Rabiat, a text very suggestive of autobiography offers little originality of thought. In almost every page the narrator's personality, philosophy and ideologies seep through. Lack of objectivity, which often mars a piece of autobiographical writing, is very evident in Rabiat. The narrator makes up for the lack of originality and detachment by the freshness in the presentation of old ideas,

> *Don't worry Rabiat, my mind told me, the victims of this would are a lot more decent than those who play their cards right. (Idris 1998: 89).*

Since the readers see events and characters only through the eyes of the principal character Rabiat, the discerning critic is justified in regarding as suspect her conclusions as to the motivations of those around her. This is because the vision of herself Rabiat presents, apart from giving the impression of a disillusioned and confused young woman, seems to be self directed and introspective,

> *I must be concerned with reality .... If I fail to tell the truth to my parents, friends and even my adversaries, how can I deny the fact that I am not merely being negative? Ordinarily, I would not have confided such private matters or discussed them but in this case I had to extricate myself from the messy lies about my private life, for the sake of those loved ones. So bearing this in mind, I decided to be brave resolute, and bluntly honest.* (Idris 1998: 1-7).

But truth works from different perspectives and in this case it must surely be subjective since it is one dimensional. More so because of the first person narrative mode used. While granting the narrator depth of self knowledge and imparting the genuineness of emotions the first person narrative technique must necessarily speak from one perspective. Thus the other characters because they are depicted from the narrator's perspective alone are rarely justly portrayed. Such 'other' characters are either 'idealised' or over castigated.

Verisimilitude is often a problem of the texts studied. In Silent Tears there is a sense of the unreality of the episodes which make up the plot. Things fall into place or are explained away too simplistically, the law of probability is stretched beyond reasonable limit. For instance did no one from Kainuwa ever visit Namu? If Sansanatu could walk from Kainuwa to the village of Namu, it is then logical to assume that the distance between the two villages is not so considerable. Therefore it is highly improbable that no one recognised Sansanatu as the missing queen of Kainuwa.

In Mudi's When The Wall Cracks Sadau the villain succeeds in conning two sisters in the same household. What remain unclear are his motives for wishing to hurt and disgrace the Mutunci family. The narrator certainly does not indicate clearly Sadau's motivation for such evil. Or is it random selection? Vengeance, which would be a reasonable motive is not indicated, even when his friends warned him to stop his evil, the readers are given no reason why he would go to such lengths of wickedness.

After Zubaida left, within a few minutes, Sadau turned and left the house smiling. He drove the car to a friend's house where he met his two friends in the sitting room chatting. When he entered they looked at his bright face and laughed. Sadau shook their hands still smiling and sat opposite them.
"From all indications, I know today is a lucky day for you Sadau." One of the two friends called I.C. (Saiau).
"I am almost winning, and ....."
"I see, we are tired of hearing this all the times." I.C. said disappointedly.
"Please Sadau leave the poor girl alone." The other friend called Talle advised. "Take, please leave me alone. I have to finish what I have started..."
(Mudi,1998:40).

Irrelevant episodes and situations are amassed indiscriminately in the texts and this often leads to diffuseness and sometimes even confused plot revelation. The episode where Rabiat and Mohammed her husband pay a visit to Habiba and her own husband appears quite irrelevant and extraneous to the story of Rabiat. Habiba and Umar are only mentioned in that episode and do not in any way contribute to the thematic or stylistic concern of the story.

Silent Tears whizzes breathlessly through episodes and encounters, hardly pausing for the reader to breath before launching on the next scene. After Sansanatu leaves Kainuwa there is a complete ignoring of Kainuwa and the royal household. The reader does not know how emir Karim felt at the disappearance of his beloved queen or what measures he took to search for her.

Years later the writer does not skillfully explore when Saddiq Karimu the emir's son emerges from the same royal household to court Nana, Sansanatu's daughter, the irony and pathos of the situation.

Hauwa M. Allurawa's The Weeping Heart is a shocking little book in its attention to the macabre. Written in impressively good prose and realistic dialogue, The Weeping Heart seems to be little more than collections of anecdotes of horrors lightly pieced together. One after the other Allurawa rapidly kills off her characters so that she can contrive for Hani the only character left alive (out of three generations of a tortured family) to meet Kabir. The only character who escapes Allurawa's sword is Ahmed, Fawziya's elder brother. That is probably because the writer forgot about him after his escape to the United States.

In this text, the characters are more often than not in the throes of grief. The plot is simple but filled with an over whelming abundance of incidents that detract from the talent visible in the work. As a first effort it achieves a high standard of coherent and cohesive prose. Allurawa when she chooses can skillfully paint a vivid and suspenseful atmosphere that grips the attention of the reader. Her major achievement is her attention to credible dialogue and her ability to make readers visualise a scene vividly. The episode of Ahmed's encounter with the cultists reveals the descriptive talent of the author at its best.

> *The wind became wilder. The environment changed. A bonfire sprang out of an enclosure of dried leaves that looked like a kraal. Ahmed felt it was another world. Then some naked men, with a few girls among them, appeared. They gathered round the burning fire.*

> *Rahab got into their midst, heading them. The realisation of what was going on hit Ahmed like a bout of cold water in the harmattan.* (Allurawa 1998: 41).

Apart from When The Wall Cracks which has a suitable if unimaginative title, the title of the texts rarely give an indication of what to expect or more appropriately, the reader usually does not find the title relevant to the plot.

In Silent Tears the only times Nana was profoundly moved was after her encounter with Rabiat her stepmother. She also cried at the final parting with her guardian and mentor the school principal. Surely Talatu Wada Ahmed is not suggesting that these are the most profound moments in the texts. For Nana's feelings in the novel are so temperate that Silent Tears seems a far fetched title to describe her travails. And, locked in her secure world of madness Sansanatu knows of nothing amiss. The plots are filled with characters engaging in frenzies of activities as if bent on showing who they are with as many examples as possible. In the end, the plot appears too weak to bear the over abundance of episodes. Because of the high focus on episodes, characterization suffers and often, the characters are flat types or caricatures representing stereotypes. Fawziya, Nana and Zubaida are stereotypes of good girls and virtuous daughters, while Jakadiya, and Sadau are portrayed as villains.

Characters are often not important in themselves but serve as vehicles for the novelists ideas of virtue, vice or depravity. Mairo Mudi (1998) goes as far as giving names suggesting the inherent or attributed characteristics of her fictive

people. Alhaji Mutunci true to his name is an honest, principled man who strives for peace and harmony in his home by treating his wives and children very well (at least materially).

Hajia Hakuri is the epitome of the eternally patient senior wife who refuses to be drawn into fights with her troublesome co-wife Hajia Gogo. These characters have been stereotyped into the good and dutiful husband, the good and bad daughters with Sadau as the wolf in sheep's clothing.

Rabiat of Rabiat is portrayed as the long suffering, sinned against wife. Unbelievably though Wada Ahmed tries to portray Rabiat, Aminu's wife in Silent Tears as the wicked stepmother. Rabiat was uncomplaining until she realised that Aminu preferred Nana to his other children by her. For daring to voice her displeasure at this unpleasant occurrence she is labelled wicked.

Furthermore emotions, like characterization is highly exaggerated and melodramatic.

> Open the door, you idiot, coward. If you know you are the true daughter of your father, I want to see you out now. (Mudi 1998:1).

Thus Hajia Gogo for an unexplained reason rants at Hakuri her co-wife. The characters' psychology and reasons for actions are rarely explored with any depth. The end products therefore afford a merely panoramic view of profound issues and situations. For example the narration of Silent Tears starts from the origin of Kainuwa and Garkuwa (even though Garkuwa plays absolutely no role in

the story line or the plot) to Namu to G.G.S.S. Dan Iyau with rapid succession plot.

Allurawa's The Weeping Heart jerks from Kaduna to Bauchi briefly to law school Lagos and then back to Kaduna without offering a pause for breath. Tompkins (1932) puts it succinctly when she declares that,

> *Fortunes wheel is wrenched round at a giddy rate, and the entire caste are jerked from posture to posture, with barely time to gasp out the appropriate comments.*(60).

In chapter two of Silent Tears with no warning what so ever Wada Ahmed takes us back into the past for a flashback into Sansanatu's past. Flashback as a Literary device can be quite effective when appropriately employed but when the reader does not know when it starts or ends therein lies for the reader a lack of proper assimilation. With this constant revolving there is little plot sustenance and side attractions tend to predominate. Notable exceptions are When The Wall Cracks where the writer sticks to the simple plot line, therefore the threads of the plot and narration are knitted strongly together through to the end. Hassan - Tom's Eyes of Darkness also exhibits a unity of themes and plots that give the six short stories verisimilitude and cohesion.

The writers' carelessness in plot arrangement is evident in Rabiat. The idea intrudes uncomfortably that the writer is merely reminiscing and philosophising. There is no coherent plot or narrative structures. This might not be mandatory in

fiction, but even in modernist formlessness, there is some sort of cohesion which is lacking in Rabiat. Structural form is greatly disregarded especially in Silent Tears and Rabiat. To call these narrations simple does not divest them of the shoddiness that sometimes finds its way into the tales.

To a large extent literary discipline and restraint is thrown to the winds and the writers often indulge in their wildest fantasies in the texts. Most of the actions are too rapid to allow for suspense through tension. and there is always a sneaky feeling that the issues that are presented will be resolved comfortably at the end.

Apart from the first person narration of Rabiat, the other texts studied employ a third person narrative technique which facilitates the movement from one incident to the other, and also serves to differentiate more clearly characters from each other. The tone of the stories are both strident and melodramatic or, at the other end of the scale rambling. Silent Tears over identification with the principal characters achieve this strident tone mainly due to exaggeration of episodes. While When The Wall Cracks achieves a more measured tone possibly because a large part of it is written in dialogue which has the advantage of keeping the writer at a more detached distance.

Indian films have to a large extent contributed to the shaping and dynamics of popular fiction in Northern Nigeria. Its picaresque heroine finally, is saved and married by the handsome love bitten hero. The contribution of the Indian film motif is evident in the way heroes are portrayed as vibrant and active, while heroines are passive.

One negative aspect of the influence of Indian films is that because in most Indian films the heroine is depicted as a virtuous, helpless and wronged character who only finds freedom, peace and happiness when the hero slays all the necessary dragons and saves her from a horrible fate, the heroine rarely exhibits any unique individually.

This active hero versus passive heroine has been grafted by Northern Nigerian female writers of popular fiction. Most critics are forced to exclude the novels from the realms of the plausible because of the impossibilities of the storyline and also by the very nature of the characters they portray; the completely helpless woman versus the super human man.

Some of the texts have poor typesetting and from the quality of the papers and cover, cheaply produced. This is with the exception of The Weeping Heart and The Eyes of Darkness, Silent Tears is so poorly typeset that the print often slants into the bound part. There is a distinct carelessness or disregard for grammatical structure or perhaps the language appears sometimes like direct translation of the Hausa language into English. Also some of these texts are filled with careless, shoddy sentences like "the last Saturday before the exams were scheduled to start, Monday of the coming week was visiting day and Aminu came as usual" (Wada Ahmed 1998: 124). Silent Tears has its roots in the Hausa Tatsuniya tradition (the art of oral telling). It begins, "once upon a long not too long ago past, two men sat underneath a tree and simply disagreed." (Wada Ahmed 1998: 1).

This appears to be link the root of the contemporary Northern Nigerian popular to art earlier oral narratives. Though it has moved away from the traditional oral narratives, contemporary popular art still retains a lot of similarities with earlier oral narrative modes, especially exuberance of narration and exaggeration. These literary hyperbole indicative of the fable is obvious in Silent Tears' description of Kainuwa town.

> *So famous was Kainuwa that were we to do justice to its fame, the earth, the firmaments and all the waters of the world would be insufficient as writing surface and ink.*(2).

At the beginning of the narration, the story rambles on about the creation of the two towns Garkuwa and Kainuwa. This is unnecessary since Garkuwa plays practically no role in plot. The main events of the story occur in Namu. The language is colloquial except for a marked tendency towards verbosity, "One of the youngest ever for all Kainuwa to ascend the throne,"(pp. 4). There are quite beautiful translations into English of the snide Hausa comments and proverbs.

> *"A chicken climbs a rubbish bin and proclaims herself a queen because she can feel her claws dislodging something substantial,"* (75-76).

Smatterings of Hausa words for example "Yaji" (To leave one's husband's house in anger) Babbariga (flowing male garment) are dotted through the text.

Wada Ahmed is also concerned with the etiquette of the society. In some detail, she describes palace court norms especially the royal etiquette that leads to a king's envoys like Jakadiya amassing such immense powers in the royal

household. The text shows occasional flashes of artistic inspiration resulting in sentences like "She drew nearer to him as she peeped through the door to ascertain the absence of a third party. Assured, she spoke in gossip whispers." (6). Her tone is melodramatic with a somewhat praise singer effect to positive characters and she assumes a denouncing tone to bad characters.

Fatima Usara Hassan Tom's Eyes of Darkness in dealing with her favoured subject of super and supra reality, comes across as a serious artist depicting determined women who are intent on succeeding even against all odds. Hassan - Tom's stories focus and highlight the problems and aspirations of the young girl just emerging into womanhood. Her prose is clear, lucid and Hemingway-like in its complex simplicity.

> *I remembered I had locked my door when I ran in; but then, slowly very slowly and silently too, the door opened wide. The window curtain waved and flew up and down in the air.*(Hassan - Tom 1998: 24).

She is an expert at creating atmosphere especially with minute descriptions of emotional turmoil.

> *I broke into a more severe panic.*
> *I felt like hiding in my position of half -sitting, half-lying and my hands stretched downwards digging into the mattress. I started moving backwards by gently dragging my body to wards the wall and pushed hard,*(24)

The narration of Rabiat while generally of clear prose affects a moralizing tone that suggests that Rabiat has an axe to grind. Rabiat as a character portrays a

young woman married to a rich man and living a trite, trivial life anchored to the whims of her wealthy husband.

The writers usually deal with heroines whose interactions are set within the ambience of the contemporary urban Northern Nigerian milieu. Even when they are born in villages (like Nana) they eventually gravitate towards more urbanised settings. Perhaps Little (1980) is right when he suggests that,

> *It is the city that provides the best guides to current social attitudes and trends. It is where the major decisions are made, that social change is most rapid. In the city, women are brought into new and different relationships with the opposite sex.*(Little 1980:2)

Conclusions to the narratives are made in such an uncomplex and simplified fashion that makes most popular fiction similar to one another. In short, the villain is always punished and the virtuous characters rewarded.

In Silent Tears Nana's future is assured with her impending betrothal to Saddiq Karimu. When The Wall Cracks concludes with Hajia Gogo realising her inadequacies and she then urges for unity in the Mutunci family. The Weeping Heart finally allows Hani to find love with her hero Nasir. Rabiat ends with the protagonist considering Suleiman as a prospective husband.

All in all, in their stylistic range and achievements as well as their thematic concerns, there is very little originality and the rule is a perpetual agreement with the male literary hegemony in Northern Nigeria which depicts role ascription of women as gender related.

The characters are therefore far from impressive for they are stereotypes of submissive and pliant women who can fit easily into and be subsumed by the Northern Nigerian patriarchal society.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The separatist advocation of western radical feminism is clearly not conducive to the African communal psyche. So a model which repudiates the negative aspects of patriarchy and reforms cultural views of gender is urgently needed to validate the Northern Nigerian woman's importance, not only in fiction but also in the society.

Analysing feminist literary criticism from within the Northern Nigerian woman's fiction gives it a verisimilitude and immediacy often lacking in the criticism of texts by conventional modes of criticism. Popular fiction written by Northern Nigerian women in its present form reinforces the societal norms of patriarchy which demands that for a woman to be happy and respected, she must be loved by a man.

Ironically most of these writers do not consciously perpetuate patriarchally generated stereotypes of female oppression, but they are so caught up in the web of easy character depiction that they often do not realise the harm they inflict on women in the society. Portraying heroines who ignore the responsibility of personnel achievement does this harm. The writers advocate implicitly the acceptance by woman, of her role in society as assigned to her by patriarchy. Culturally in Northern Nigeria as in most societies of the world, the role is inferior to that of the man. In Northern Nigeria, the issue that is of congest importance and which needs to be immediately addressed is the disinclination of some women to

struggle for themselves due to the socialization which indicates that man is there to cater for her. This attitude is often reflected in Northern Nigerian popular fiction by the portrayal of men as financially and socially independent while the woman is economically dependent.

Thus women carry into their relationships with men unrealistic expectations borne out of reliance on the ability and the goodwill of man to solve every problem. Often disillusioned, these women become resentful and even embittered with men in particular and life in general. The stereotype of woman needing only marital security is meant to tie her perpetually to the home because woman in Nigeria today can hardly be said to contribute even half her potential to national development.

The relevance of this thematic analysis deals, also with the Northern Nigerian as a married woman. Marriage is seen as a power relationship. Phyllis Rose agrees with John Stuart Mill the 19th century philosopher and upholder of the rights of women that marriage is the "primary political experience in which most adults find themselves in." (134).

If marriage is a power relationship, it goes without saying that the spouse with the most strength economically and therefore psychologically wields the most power, influence and authority. Since economic strength is linked to emotional power it is obvious who the power holder in most Northern Nigerian marriages are. If someone is completely responsible for the other person, it is easy then for

the powerful one to see the other as a possession to be treated as the mood takes him.

Perhaps if Rabiat had been less dependent on her husband and less aggressive in her demands for material fulfillment Mohammed her husband would have respected her more and resented her demands less.

Aside from the obvious and persistent suppression of the political and economic potential of women in most fields by patriarchy, women themselves have become scared of venturing out of the places assigned to them by patriarchy,

> *A culture which allots political and economic power to the male and gives him the prestige of playing the public roles, invites a number of responses from the female, to whom these rights and response are denied.* ***(Oakley 1985:125).***

Female writers can respond by continually creating and sustaining female role models that can rise above the difficulties of the patriarchal system.

Although role models are needed in popular texts, super or supra real models, women who damn all consequences will on the other hand be negative in the final analyses. It would be a replacement of stereotypes with other stereotypes.

Conscious efforts must be made to locate real women in popular fiction. These female characters do not have to be entirely good but they can be inspirations by merely being lifelike and determined to succeed; heroines or rather female protagonists whose problems, aspirations and successes can serve as inspiration to female readers.

This might appear difficult because feminism as a political and literary concept despite having broken great grounds in the western world is still either largely treated in the Northern Nigerian society with scorn and hostility or swept under the carpet. This is really surprising since most African feminist works do not advocate or encourage a world without men but rather press for a society devoid of patriarchal oppression.

Education is a gateway that allows the woman (Whether married or not) to venture beyond the realms of the home and family into situations of self fulfillment and truly meaningful contribution to the society.

It is a mistake to think that patriarchal oppression and subjugation of women can end with only the re-education of men, that is the re-orientation of men to help upgrade the women of their society.

The onus of real liberation lies with the women themselves to end societal subjugation by striving for emotional and economic strength. Women should look inwards into themselves for happiness, then can they find it in others.

The woman writer's role is very important in this quest. By re-organising the range of stereotypes with which women are stamped into literature, the woman writer can redefine the image of the submissive, helpless woman as only ideal of African womanhood by creating stronger women who also respect society.

For any society to move forward and enjoy positive dynamism, its women population must be recognised as positive forces. To this end there is complete

agreement with Martin Delaney the African American civil rights activist who insists that,

> *Our females must be qualified, because they are to be mothers of our children. As mothers are the first nurse and instructors of children; from them children consequently get their first impression, which being always the most lasting, should be more correct. Raise the mothers above the level of degradation and the offspring is elevated with them.* (Hooks 1981:89).

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