
SOCIO-ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR WOMEN IN BÀTÚLÌ ÀLÀKÉ AND SÀLÀWÁ ÀBÈNÍ'S WÁKÀ MUSICS

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Abstract Among the Yorubas, the role of women is being seen as passive and therefore has been marginalized in the society. This paper critically appraises the role of women in the society as against the societal beliefs. Båtúli Àláké and Sàlàwá Àbèní are women whose songs are usually tailored towards correcting social evils, social vices and criminality in the society. But more than that, their songs seem to canvass for social and ethical considerations for women in the Nigeria public space. Being women themselves, they have carved niches for themselves in the musical world which has accorded them social acceptability and respect among Nigerian musicians and elites. The research approach is qualitative and therefore seeks to reveal the socio-ethical consideration given to women from the Waka Music of these renowned Waka Musicians within the general framework of Womanism Theory.

Keywords: Socio-ethical, Social evils, Social vices, Criminality

1. Introduction

The Yoruba community is one that has its beliefs based on patriarchy and stereotypes. Most of these stereotypes are exemplified by idiomatic and proverbial expressions which have relegated the social status of women to that of nonentity (Sekukhuru 1994:3). Such kinds of expressions like, "*ilé t'óbìnrin ti ñ ẹ se atótó arère, igi arère ní hù nìbè*", i.e. any family that allows the woman to be vocal will see the abnormal growth of the wild *Arère* tree inside the house. This means that, when a woman is vocal in taking decisions in the home, it results in an abnormal environment. Such assertion and others make the society believe that women are not so important and that their rights can be violated. Also, according to Kramarae and

Trecher (1985: 323), patriarchy does not only refer to the prevention of women from occupying powerful positions in the society, but also creates the negative social view which men attach to women. Patriarchy made men see women as nothing in the society; they were perceived to be inferior, have their personalities humiliated with their basic human rights and respects deprived.

This work, therefore, shows that with modernization and globalization, women are now showing open resistance to certain beliefs and practices that relegate women in the society. The Waka musicians, being women themselves, show in their songs that the erroneous beliefs about women are to be changed and that women

are to be seen as being brave, spiritually powerful, humble, indispensable and fashionable. The finding reveals that Waka music plays a vital role in women's struggle against men's oppression over women and stereotype. It also reveals that women are not to be despised in the society.

2. The Yoruba People

The Yoruba people live in the south western part of Nigeria. They are an African ethnic group that inhabits Western Africa, mainly Nigeria and Benin and constitute about 44 million people in total. There are eight states in Yoruba land in Nigeria; they are Oyo, Ogun, Kwara, Lagos, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti and Kogi states. However, some parts of Edo state are also categorized as Yoruba. Furthermore, some groups of Yoruba people can be found in Benin Republic, Cuba, Brazil, Togo, Sierra Leone and some parts of the U.S. who were brought to these lands since the time of colonialism as slaves but are now free citizens. Omamar (1982), Samuel Johnson (2009). This paper shall however focus on the Yoruba community in Nigeria.

The Yoruba people have a standard orthography which is updated from time to time to meet the need of change and to incorporate the methodology for various disciplines. The language is the vehicle for conveying all the messages for the various cultural disciplines. (Ilesanmi 2004:36). The Yoruba people are highly cultural and their culture affects a lot of things. One of the areas of life that is affected by culture in Yoruba Society is the understanding and treatment of women. The Yoruba people believe that women have no right in the society and that they are slaves. They believe in patriarchy in which men hold

the power and the women are excluded. This affects all aspects of their lives from political leadership, business management, religious institutions, economic systems and property ownership; right down to the family home where men are considered to be the head of the household. This paper, therefore, reveals that in the modern Nigerian society, women are proving to be more valuable than the way they were formally assumed to be and that they are now equal with men and that both males and females contribute to the development of the society.

3. Womanism Theory

Womanism is a social theory based on the history and everyday experiences of women of colour especially black women. It is a term which was introduced by Alice Walker (1983) in her work "In search of our Mother's Garden". According to Westfield (2001:1 – 2), the term "Womanist" was coined from Walker's use of folk term "womanish" to characterize the spirit and posture of African women who individually and collectively dare to resist oppression. Walker defined a "womanist" as a "black feminist or feminist of colour"; terms she used interchangeably. Like Walker, many African American women see little or no difference between the two since both works towards a common agenda of black women's self-definition.

According to Molade (1994:34), Black feminism is sometimes referred to as womanism because both are concerned with struggles against sexism and racism by black women who are themselves part of the black community's effort to achieve equality and liberty. Kolawole (1997:19) affirms that the womanist ideology is an ideal theory for women in Africa because it

is culturally valid. Norma Masuku (2005:52) agrees with Kolawole by saying that womanism addresses issues relevant to African women. She also believes that feminism is uncompromising and does not fully comprehend the peculiarity of the African culture. Ajibade (2005:21) supports this view, that; women should have equal authority with men, women should not be denied their rights and that women should play significant roles in the society in religion, politics, economy and in oral genres as a product of the society.

This womanism theory is therefore considered the most suitable for this paper since it addresses the issue of equality and liberty against societal oppressions from African point of view. It will also help us to understand that African women consider their homes and families very important in their struggle against men's oppression. These two musicians, whose works are being considered, being women, do not neglect their biological roles but speak their minds and reveal to the society that women are neither to be ridiculed nor marginalised in the scheme of things in the society.

4. The Waka Music

Waka is a type of Yoruba traditional music influenced by Muslim traditions and it has been in place long before Fuji or Juju according to Olusoji (2008). Initially waka developed as local music, performed in almost the same manner as the semi-religious music. The name 'Waka' is from Hausa word for song of any kind. It is clearly shown that the word is a borrowed word from Hausa due to the relationship between the Hausas and the Yoruba; knowing quite well that Hausas are predominantly Muslims. This means that the relationship between the two ethnic groups

bring about the name and the songs into the Yoruba Community. Adegbite (1989:36) confirmed this and said that the flexibility of Islam and its doctrine of peaceful coexistence with Yoruba traditional institution have resulted in a musical synthesis, the products of which are Waka, Were, Seli, and so on.

Waka songs are usually sung by women. It was initially a kind of socio-religious song used by Yoruba Muslim women. It was later adopted by professional musicians and turned into music for entertainment and social dancing. This was first noticed through Batuli Alake, a popular waka exponent whose waka music was prominent in the late twentieth to the early twenty-first century. Waka music was developed by Batuli Alake and later popularized by Salawa Abeni, Muniratu Abeo, Kuburat Alaraagbo who are Muslims, but there are contemporary Christian version called 'Waka Gospel' powered by Lady Evangelist Serah Kokumo and Ibidun Anifowose (Adedeji (2004).

5. Socio – Ethical Consideration for Women In Waka Music

Music has many important roles it plays in any given society. It reveals what a particular society believes and values, and indeed extols as important part of how such society is organised. Waka music as a socio-cultural musical genre plays a huge role within everyday society, from the advertising campaigns of corporate businesses, to live performances and for relaxations. As a socio-cultural musical genre, it could also serve to promote or relegate. But it has been carefully observed that women are portrayed in waka songs in various positive ways that are expected to change beliefs and values of the society. They are considered to be not only socially and ethically good but also

relevant in the society. Such considerations are seen in the way the two selected singers present themselves in their songs. The examples include:

5.1 Women's Visibility and Assiduity

In time past, women were looked upon as people who were not brave and even useless in the society. They were relegated to the extent of not being at liberty to have a business or work of their own (This assertion may not be true of all women though). They were subjected to following their husbands to the farm or doing meaner jobs at home. They were denied the right to formal education because their parents believed it would not be useful for them as the certificates would end up in their husbands' kitchens. Such attitudes were condemned in the excerpt below as sung by these two artists. They made it known that women are now taking up great positions in the society and as a result of this, should be given equal rights. The example goes thus;

Lílé: È té tí ẹ gbó gbogbo bímọ, bímọ ayééé

È yé ma fikan-ké kan mó

Bó sọkùnrin bó sobìnrin

Òunlólóhun fí ta wá ló rẹ

Kílọkùnrin se tóbìnrin ò lè se

To ráyé ti dayéòlàjú, òlàjú, òlàjú

È fún wa ní equal right

Ègbè: È jòwó ẹ tó wadógbadógba

Lílé: Ọkùnrin n se doctor o

Obìnrin n se doctor o

Ègbè: È fún wa ní equal right

È jòwó ẹ tó wadógbadógba

Lílé: Ọkùnrin n se lóyà o

Obìnrin n se lóyà o...

Ègbè: È fún wa ní equal right

È jòwó ẹ tó wadógbadógba.

(Equal Right)

The English interpretation of this is as follows:

Call: Listen all you parents in the universe

Do not place one over the other

Whether male or female

Both are given to you by God

There is nothing a man does that a woman cannot do

The world is now civilized

Resp: Give us equal rights

Please train us equally

Call: There are male and female doctors

Resp: Give us equal Right

Please train us equally

Call: There are male and female lawyers

Resp: Give us equal right

Please train us equally

The excerpt above made it known that women, through their bravery are now taking up important positions such as engineers, doctors and lawyers and this has made them equal with their male counterpart as expected by the womanist. This shows that women are not left behind in the development being experienced in the society. Parents are also advised to stop placing one sex above the other but rather give equal treatment to both sexes, since there is nothing done by one that the other cannot do. All the things that could be done by the males as believed by the society have been proven to be well achieved by females, in the modern days and even better. The so called hard jobs like artisans such as mechanics, plumbers etc., have recorded a reasonable of women practicing them, proving the extent of their industry.

Another example that shows women's assiduity is found in another song below:

National Ladies, club of Lagos o

Ègbé tó gbajúmò, ẹgbé to rówóná

Wọn ò bárawọnjà, wón n bárawọnséré.

Àwọnolówópèlúgbajúmò wón n segbé
Ràgèràgè kúrò ni ti National Ladies
What a man can do ní ti ká nàwó
A woman can also do kí e lo mò yen.
(Motún dé bí mo se n dé)

This interpreted in English means;
National ladies club of Lagos
A socialize club, a rich club
They do not fight with themselves
They play with one another
The rich and famous are found in the club

There is no foolishness in national ladies
What a man can do as regards spending
A woman can also do, you should know.

The above song revealed that women could also coordinate a group and the group would be well established. In Yoruba traditional communities, women are not allowed to be found in associations sanctioned by their fathers or husbands. Nowadays, they belong to various associations and even participate in politics due to civilization. The singer made it known that women are famous and rich personnel in the society, showing that the club comprised of people who had made tremendous impact as women, hence the expression “What a man can do, a woman can also do”. The musician moreover, specified that the club was headed by some women, namely; Hajia Sidikat and Hajia Ayinke Cole who were the governor general and president of the club respectively. This was further established in the song below:

È sí mí ká relé governor general egbé
Haja Sidikat àwónsa la fi se yèn
Mother Débísí, Àmòsákòrìkòsùn
Lady President Egbé, ÀlàájàÀyìnké aya Cole
mi...

(Mo tún dé bí mo se n dé)

This In English reads thus;

Come with me to the governor general of the club

Hajia Sidikat is the one
Debisi’s mother, a friend of Amosa
Hajia Ayinke Cole, lady president of the club.

The musician deliberately mentioned the names of these persons to make the society understand that women were leading powerful and delicate positions like the Governor general and president of a society as against the patriarchal arrangement (Opefeyitimi, 2013), that only men can be placed as heads of towns, cities or villages as Obas. Some women have served as Deputy Governors for their states while some were seen as Ministers. Such examples include Honourable Olusola Agbeja, a one-time Deputy Governor of Osun State and Dr Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, two – times former minister of Finance in Nigeria and a director at the World bank. Also, at present there are more women in politics and they are seen in higher positions. Examples of such are Hajiya Sadiya Farouq, who is the Minister for humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management and the de facto Minister of Economy, who serves as both Nigerian Minister of finance, Budget and National Planning, Zainab Shamsuna Ahmed just to mention but a few.

The lyrics of another song also say:

Lílé: Kakorinpèlùlù kó yeniyéké

Ègbè: BàtùlìÀlàké iyá Alájé

Lílé: Àwá ti dàdéorinójó ti pé

Mama Mònsúraelèwà n gberin

Ègbè: Ó n gberin kò jé fisée rè siré

(Mo jilónií Olúwa)

The interpretation of this in English is highlighted below;

Call: To sing with instrument with understanding

Response: Batuli Àlàké, the business tycoon

Call: We have been crowned with song ever since

Monsurat's mother, a bean seller responds to song

Response: She sings and never jokes with her trade.

Batuli Alake and Salawa Abeni then stressed again that powerful positions were headed by women and they were performing brilliantly.

With respect to popular gospel music, Idumwonyi and Gbadegesin (2016: 171-182) had earlier shown in their jointly written paper how visible and influential women in Nigerian popular gospel music are to the issue of development in the religious and public spheres in Nigeria. They argue that "women gospel singers could provide opportunity for engaging scholars who seek to analyse inspirational leaders whose roles are revolutionizing the gospel (2016:178)." They even believed that popular gospel music would become a springboard for women in Pentecostal circles to express themselves and being able to access a novel and sacred platform as preachers of the gospel. Furthermore, they boldly asserted that "women in both secular and sacred spaces are stepping up as revolutionary, innovative, transformative and charismatic leaders (2016:178)." Indeed, what Batuli Alake and Salawa Abeni are actually doing is to serve as revolutionary and innovative agents and in their own way contributing to the music industry in Nigeria.

This is one of the changes that have occurred globally today, in which there are female presidents, ministers, commissioners, etc. This agreed with the song; that women are active,

brave and are not to be ridiculed in the society. Another example of a song that shows this is written below:

Lílé: Kálo síkejàníbisé aya Shaba

Ègbè: Kálo síkejàníbisé aya Shaba

Lílé: Alhaja obìnrin méta

Ègbè: Bèè ni

Lílé: Tan fi n sàdúràfóbìnrin

(Gentle Lady)

This in English means;

Call: Let us go to Ikeja; Shaba's Wife's office

Resp: Let us go to Ikeja; Shaba's Wife's office

Call: A very strong woman

Resp: Yes

Call: The kind everyone wishes for

The song above portrayed Mrs. Shaba as a strong business tycoon, who does not joke with her work. She is strong, hardworking and very brave. One thing that is certain of most of these women is that, as they are industrious and career women, they still put into consideration, their homes and families.

5.2 Women, Beauty and Fashion

It seems generally all over the world, beautiful women attract the gaze of men and they are well-cherished. Perhaps just like elsewhere, being fashionable is part of Yoruba custom and that is why there is the adage:

Afinjúwojàwọn a ringbẹndéke

Òbùnwojà pa siòsiò

Òbùnsiòsiòni yòò ruẹrùafinjúwolé

This adage in English means:

A neat person walks freely

A dirty one walks sluggishly

A dirty one would be the one to serve the neat.

This proverb reveals the stance of the Yoruba as regards fashion. They believe that a dirty person cannot be fashionable and would be the one to serve the neat. It is shown in waka songs that

women are very fashionable which emphasises their beauty. If a woman is beautiful but refuses to be fashionable, there is no way such beauty will be seen and appreciated, hence the need for beauty to be displayed. The Yoruba have different ways of showing their fashion, right from wearing of clothes, having tribal marks, weaving or plaiting of hair and so on. In lieu of this, singers show it in their songs by praising women who are fashionable for showing their social relevance in the society. An example goes thus:

Lílé: Àdàbà ti ò lówó tí ò lésè
 Kínni yó fi gbéra
 Omọge tí ò lásọ
 Kínni yòd fi jáde
 Àwọn imported sussy ló lè bá wájáde
 Nítóriwọn mọ fashion

Ègbè: Sisíológe e e

Lílé: Sisíológe e e

Ègbè: Sisíológe e e

Lílé: Torí wón mọ fashion

Ègbè: Sisíológe e e

(Experience)

The Song in English means;

Call: A dove without hands or legs

What will it fly with?

A lady without cloth

What will she wear out?

Only the pretty ladies, can go with us

Because they are fashionable

Resp: A fashionable lady

Call: A fashionable lady

Resp: A fashionable lady

Call: Because they know fashion

In the above song, the singer says a lady without good clothes cannot be pretty because appearing in goodly apparel at the right time is part of

Yoruba fashion as earlier pointed out and women are at the center of fashion.

Below is another example of a song that stresses this:

Ma jí ma wè ma soge
 Ma jí ma wè ma soge
 Mo wèwù tan, Ìbíwùmí
 Mo wèwù tan, o o
 Omọkùnrin o le è lọ o
 Ma jí ma wè ma soge

(Experience)

This again in English means;

When I wake up, I take my bathe and dress up

When I wake up, I take my bathe and dress up

When I put on my dress, Ibiwumi,

When I put on my dress,

Men cannot fathom it

When I wake up, I take my bathe and dress up.

The song above also pointed to regular bathing as part of Yoruba fashion and it is the beginning of a lady's fashion. The moment a lady bathes and dresses up, she becomes beautiful. Fashion nowadays has become globally popular. Apart from the fact that women are fashionable they have taken up some businesses such as; fashion designing, hair dressing, make up, etc. All these are part of women's contribution to the development of the society.

5.3 Submissiveness

Humility is seen as patience, endurance and submissiveness. It is part of the behavior a good woman must exhibit. It portrays a lady as a well-trained individual right from her own family and responsible. The waka song below presents women as humble and submissive.

Ègbéwọngbayì, wọnsitún mo fáàrí

Bí wọn se jólówó tó, wón teribafókọ nilé

National Ladies kóba má fikúyà wá o

(Mo tún dé, bí mo se n dé)

This song meant:

Their clubs are popular and fashionable,
Even though they are wealthy, they still respect
their husbands.

National ladies will not die.

We can deduce from the above song, that even
though the ladies in this club are wealthy and
popular, they still accord the necessary respect
to their husbands in line with Hudson-Weems
that African society in their struggle must not
destroy their home and society but to make the
men see the importance of living happily with
the women. The women in this club see their
husbands as their heads and accord them, their
due respect.

Two different songs by Bātúli Àlàkésay;

1. Ègbè: Jàgídíjàgàn ò se é jayé
Lílé: Ìṭeríba
Ègbè: È jé ká gbó tàwọ̀nọ̀kọ̀ wa
Lílé: Ìṭeríba
Ègbè: È jé ká gbọ̀ tàwọ̀nọ̀kọ̀ wa.
(Old School)

This in English means:

Resp: Unruly behavior is not
good

Call: Humility

Resp: Let us listen to our
husbands

Call: Humility

Resp: Let us listen to our
husbands

2. Orí mi dákun máa sìn mí lọ ná
Mo ṭeribafálàgbà o
Àgbà ẹ foríjimi (Oba
alásejù)

The interpretation in English is;

My head please follow me

I humble myself to the elders

Elders please forgive me

This song shows the humility of the singer,
being a female, popular and wealthy person; she
yet pays homage, in submissiveness to the
elders. This shows how important humility is
among the Yoruba community. It is one of the
criteria used in the society to assess women's
behaviour.

6. Women as Powerful People

Power in this aspect can be categorized into
two; physical and metaphysical. Both are
mentioned in songs to show the extent of the
power that God endowed women with. Some of
the women are physically powerful through
their wealth and positions. There is no woman
created by God that was not endowed with one
form of power or the other, however, there are
some accorded metaphysical power, usually
called "Àjé" or Witches among the Yoruba.
They are usually called "Ìyá Àjé" meaning
"Mother of the World". Opefeyitimi (1998:44)
discussed further about these women when he
said "there are women who by virtue of their
beings and dispositions are believed to possess
celestially sophisticated and unrivalled powers
transcending those of men. These are often
regarded as Iya Aje (Women of the world).
They are believed to be the powerful ones who
must be respected in the society; as doing this
would make them be at peace with you and as
such whatever is done in their presence would
be successful.

Salawa Abeni and Batuli Alake paid homage to
these women in their songs as highlighted below

Ègbè: Mo ti lọ se báláágodo, mo yege

Lílé: Èyin ìyá ayé mo júbà o

Ègbè: Mo ti lọ se báláágódo, mo yege...

Lílé: Ìyá mokun-mòsà mo júbà o

Ègbè: Mo ti lọ se báláágódo, mo yege

Lílé: ErelúÌyáàbíyè mo sèbà ò

Ègbè: Mo ti lo sèbà...

(JowúNíwòn)

The interpretation in English is;

Resp: I have paid homage in the secret

Call: I have paid homage to the women of the world

Resp: I have paid homage successfully

Call: The all known mother, I salute

Resp: I have paid homage.

In the excerpt above, the singer mentioned “Erelú Ìyá àbíyè” who is one of the leaders of the group and specifically permitted her to go on with her songs. It is a taboo in the Yoruba traditional community for an artiste to perform without paying homage to the terrestrial powers, such a one will regret that. But the moment homage is paid; such person would have a free and successful performance. This again shows how powerful women in the society are. Ilesanmi (2004) supported this when he said that the cult of the witches (Awon Iyami) has special roles to play in the thorough organization of the Yoruba community. They are seen as protectors who can be relied upon.

As a follow up to this, Salawa Abeni in a song says;

Ègbè: Ìbà lówó àwọn àgbà asíwájú ayé

Ìbà lówó iyá mi ọlómúorù

Lílé: Èmi SàláváÀbèní mo wá foríbalè o

Ègbè: Wón ti ní n sádayé mo mà ti sádayé

Eye kì í rógèdèpípó n kó má jẹ o

(Indian wákà)

Resp: Homage to the leaders of the world

Homage to my mothers with large breast

Call: I Salawa Abeni, I have come to bow my head

Resp: I was told to find refuge with the world

A bird cannot see a ripe plantain and not eat

This song showed that the singer had paid homage and as such found refuge with the women of this world; showing their ability to protect.

Another example of the manifestation of the women of this world is their ability to honour people. The Yoruba community believed that once they are honoured, they would return the favour in kind. This prompted Bātúli Àláké to sing thus:

Lílé: È gbé waníyìyìn iyá mi

Èyin tó láyé ẹ jé ó se é se fún wa nílèyí o

Mo ti jùbáfálàgbà o

(Bísimilahi)

This song in English means;

Call: Honour us our mother

You that own the world

Make it easy for us

I have paid homage to the elders.

This singer revealed that once the elders, i.e. the women of the world, who they believe to own the world are honoured and prayed for, they will in turn repent and allow her have a successful performance. This amongst many other beliefs shows that women are indispensable in the Yoruba community and therefore should not be downgraded or have the rights denied

7. Conclusion

It has been observed that women are so relevant right from the inception and have been useful in the society regardless of the fact that they were initially neglected and denied of their rights in the community due to societal patriarchal beliefs. It is quite evident through these singers that women are ethnically and socially relevant in the society. Their impacts cannot be

overlooked. They are brave, powerful, humble, fashionable and indispensable. It therefore follows that Waka music plays a vital role in revealing the mind of the women and painting out their good deeds in the community; thus establishing that women are not to be despised in the society.

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