

Women and Culture of Violence and Abuse in Yoruba Land in the Context of Luke 13:8-16

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Abstract

In most of the cultures in the world, women are considered to be inferior to men. African culture, Yoruba in particular, though diverse, is not an exception. Women are wives and mothers. They do the cooking, the mending, the sewing and the washing. They take care of the men and are subordinate to male authority. They are largely excluded from high status occupations and from positions of power. The most basic division of labour appears to be founded on sex or gender. Clearly women are biologically different from men; but gender roles in most societies are a product of culture rather than biology. The division of labour on the basis of sex supported and justified by a value system which gender roles as normal, natural, right and proper. In every society, a higher value is placed on culture than on nature.

This paper is aimed at identifying gender violence and abuse, social cultural factors which continue to act against the principles of social justice and equality despite all the national and international initiatives on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women. The paper adopted Black feminism as it affects the female in general. It then suggests that man and woman are created in the image of God and no one is inferior to the other. The work concludes by showing the world that violence, abuse and marginalizing women in the society is a crime against humanity and both male and female should rise up to fight it as a crime against gender or violence against women.

Key words: Gender, Violence, Culture, Abuse

Introduction

Over centuries the African women have undergone a lot of demoralization. Oppression, suppression, emotional trauma and discrimination have made her insecure. (Awe, 2002) The story of the woman in Luke chapter 13:10-14 paints a real picture of the hurt and needs of women around the world, especially in Africa. Great numbers of women are not only stopped physically but they are bowed and crouched in their mental attitudes towards life. They are bent in their spirits by the unbearable weight and unfair burden of religion, culture, tradition, laws and doctrines disregarding women (Awe,2002).

Awe,2002 posits that African women have been exposed from early childhood to strenuous work such as carrying heavy load of wood Far beyond their physical capacity. As a result some have developed spinal injuries and are bent physically for life. She reiterates that others have to work long hours for low pay, sometimes under harassment by their husbands. Then they come home and do the cooking and clearing while their partner sits sometimes their possessions are taken from them (Awe,2002).

Women in African societies are almost always regarded as their husband's property and it is more often than not unethical for them to aspire too much. (Adetunji, 2018), being themselves property they could not own property. Ruben (1996), in his study of women in transition claimed that people who believe in traditional sex- roles think of the husband as his wife's superior. She is his dependent, his responsibility for her and the children legitimize his authority over them. Hence, such decisions as affect the entire family are considered part of his rightful domain, as he is the provider and family head. Thus, belief in traditional sex- roles may shift equity in favour of the husband.

Adegbemi (1997) added that there is universal agreement that women are at a disadvantage relative to man and that the road to gender equality is strewn with man social cultural hurdles. In his study of equality, (Maier,1986) opines that wife's equity point is influenced by her sex-role beliefs as well as her husband's earnings

Women in Yoruba Land

The Yoruba-speaking communities of Nigeria are in the Southwestern part of the country. In this community, the custom is similar to that of the Jews. Every young woman preparing for marriage is reminded always that the husband is the head of the wife. As head of the household, the husband makes all decisions which also include even a promise made by the wife which is invalid without her husband's consent, as found in Israeli culture (Adegbite, 2012).

In the Yoruba culture, a woman has no right to leave her husband for whatever reason but she might have to be subordinate to a new wife or concubine. In almost all Nigerian cultures, women are generally denied the right to inherit property. Females in a family are allegedly under the protection of a male. As a child, a girl's father is her master; as a bride, her husband; as a widow, her husband's closest male relative. For this reason and possibly because of the influence of the biblical tradition, women regard their husbands as their heads. But the word "headship" is beyond the biblical perspective, to the fact that the man paid a dowry or bride price which is considered to be a "head price" of the woman. They refer to their husbands as "*olowo ori mi*" that is, "the one who has paid for my head", "who owns my head" or simply "the one who paid my bride price" (Adegbite,2012).

Adegbite (2012) posit that in a culture where a man is the one who "pays for the head" of a woman, it is natural to expect that the woman is his property. A very strong emphasis is laid on a wife's obedience and subjection to her husband. Sometimes, the culture fails to address the situation whereby the husband is bad and is giving bad instructions; the rule is that for a woman to be considered as good wife, she must obey her husband.

In the Yoruba culture, it is irrationally assumed that the obedient child is the child of his/her father and the disobedient one is the child of his/her mother. This is because once a child refuses to obey his or her father, it shows that the mother did not also obey her father and therefore, did not teach her child to obey his or her father. Women are not allowed to become kings even if they are the only heir to the throne of their fathers; the royalty will rather go to a relative. This causes kings to do whatever it takes to have male children. In most cases, kings in Yoruba land are fond of marrying as many wives as possible so as to have heirs to their throne (Akorede,2011).

In the light of these traditional views, the issue of power and or authority can easily be understood; women in this kind of culture will naturally not bother to struggle for authority of any kind. The Yoruba culture places many barriers at the doorsteps of women. These hinder them in the realisation of their goals (Akintan, 2002).

In the first place, among the Yoruba, women's activities seem to be subordinate to those of men. This is as a result of the patrilineal nature of the Yoruba society. Patriarchy is the order of the day. By patriarchy we mean:

... a culture that is slanted so that men are valued a lot and women are valued less; or in which man's prestige is up and women's prestige is down (Gray, 1982:32). A system advantage of social stratification and differentiation on the basis of sex, which provides material advantages to males; while simultaneously placing severe constraint and activities of females (Aina, 1998:23).

This emphasises male dominance at the expense of the female folk, who could be disposed of at will. Authority in the home rests with the husband who is responsible for all decisions in the family and the woman is to abide by whatever decision the husband makes. Thus, the inequality of men and women is stressed. Therefore, the claim by women, of equality with men is an aberration (Aina, 1998).

In the Yoruba society, there is a preference for male children over female ones. This preference is due to the cultural basis which regards male children as heirs to their father's property. They are also regarded as the agent through whom the family's name will be perpetuated. Traditionally, female children are not valued for the simple reason that they are expected to help their mothers in household chores, rearing the young ones, and getting ready for marriage (Akorede, 2011:43) This idea of male dominance informs the general Yoruba preference for male children as carriers of the family name and tradition. Most parents prefer to send boys to school and allow them to continue to higher heights. The birth of male children is a mark of social fulfilment on the part of a man while the woman sees it as a sign of satisfaction and security in her husband's home. The same cannot be said of the birth of female children. This often leads to rejection, anxiety and shame on the part of the mother whose position in the house seems threatened since the man could bring in another woman to replace her for failing to give birth to a male child. In addition to this, the

female children eventually leave their father's house at marriage and become members of other families. This accounts for the disdain with which women are treated; female children are given the barest education while male children are given the best education (Amolo, 2012)

Men usually prove their dominance and superiority over women by marrying more than one wife as they see in this, a confirmation of social status and responsibility. The number of wives and children a man has is an indication of his success in life, while having many children is assurance of support in old age. Olusanya (1970) as quoted by Akintan (2002) said that polygamy in the Yoruba Society is purely "the exploitation of females".

Adegbite (2012) opines to the fact that awareness about the role of women in development gained momentum in the latter half of the 1980s, and that it was further enhanced in 1995 as a result of the effective participation of Nigerian women in the International Conference on Women in Beijing, China. In spite of these efforts, it is appropriate to state that the role of Nigerian women in development has not been sufficiently emphasized.

Despite the fact that women are generally sidetracked, some women still force their way into playing very significant roles in the political history of ancient Nigeria. In Zaria, a woman called Queen Bakwa Turuku ruled, and her daughter called Amina who later succeeded her as Queen was said to be a very powerful woman and a great warrior. She built a high wall around Zaria in order to protect the city from invasion and extended the boundaries of her territory beyond Bauchi. The people of Kano and Katsina paid tributes to her. She turned Zaria into a very prominent commercial center (Adegbite,2012).

This story was not too different in the ancient Yoruba-land. There were females in the palace. The *Oba* ruled with the assistance of a number of women referred to as the ladies of the palace. The ladies of the palace consisted different titled ladies of the highest rank, such as "*Iyalode*" meaning Chief of Women to represent the interest of women in the palace. "*Yeye oba*" mother of the King, "*Iyalaje*" etc. These titles did not have much to do with authority. Apart from these palace women, there are records of women who played either positive or negative roles in Yoruba history. Moremi of Ile-lfe is an example of a woman who played significant *roles*, while Efunsetan Aniwura is an example of an evil woman.

Moremi is popularly known as Moremi Ajasoro, Queen of the Yoruba, a very brave woman of great beauty and virtue, who in order to deal with the problem facing her people, offered her son Ela Olurogbo to the spirit of the river Esimirin so that she could discover the strength of her nation's enemies. As a result of what she did to save her people, the Edi Festival is said to be a means of celebrating the sacrifice the princess made for the people of Yorubaland. A number of public places are named after her. The female halls of residence in the University of Lagos and Obafemi Awolowo University are examples good of such places (Adegbite, 2012).

Yoruba Culture, Violence and Abuse of Women

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In Yoruba society, there is a preference for male children over female children. This preference is due to cultural biases which regard male children as heir to the father's property. They are also regarded as the agent through whom the family's name will be perpetuated (Akintan,2002). Traditionally female children are not valued for the simple reason that they are expected to help their mothers in household chores, rearing the young ones, and getting ready for marriage. This idea of male dominance informs the general Yoruba preference for male children as carriers of the family name and tradition. Akintan,2002 added that most parents prefer to send boys to school and allow them to continue to higher heights. The birth of male children is a mark of social fulfillment on the part of a man while the woman sees it as a sign of satisfaction and security in her husband's home. The same cannot be said of the birth of female children this often leads to rejection, anxiety and shame on the part of the mother whose position in the house seems threatened since the man could bring in another woman to replace her for failing to give birth to male children (Akintan, 2002). In addition to this, Akintan, 2002, said the female children eventually leave their families. This accounts for the disdain with which women are treated; female children are given the barest education while male children are given the best education.

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Women's Role in Production

In most tradition African societies, the family institution is the bedrock of other social relations-economic, political, religious, etc. within the traditional African social structure, the basic division of labour was often based on age and sex. Marriage relation dictated familial ties, lineage membership and property relations. Farming was the major occupation with women taking a very active part. Other subsidiary occupations are trading, crafts, keeping of livestock, etc. The access of women to critical resources like land, labour and capital depended on their position in the family, the lineage or the community (Ola-Aluko& Edewor,2002).

The role of Nigeria women in the economic sphere is largely inhibited because of lack of access to family land and capital and lack of control over her own time and the product of her labour. Most of the time, husband manage the family farm and keep the proceeds of export crops under their control, while wives use the earnings from food crops and trading to meet family daily needs. However, in traditional Yoruba setting, a woman can be fairly independent economic activity is an important component in the personality of a complete woman and this has a strong influence on the nature of the Yoruba family structure(Lloyd,1968) noted that the degree of jealousy and envy that exists between Yoruba men and women is dependent on two factors one of which is women's economic independence. Nadel,1952 also asserts that men find women's economic independence threatening to their dominant status(Ola-Aluko,2002).

With the present increase in urbanization in Nigeria, there has been a steady increase in the rate of female participation in the formal labour market. Edewor, 2002 posits that this may be attributed to their desire for economic independence, as well a response of growing financial pressure. With the development of a capitalist economy in Nigeria, women now engage in a multiplicity of roles both within and outside the home, without any substantial decrease in the reproductive tasks traditionally attached to women.

Africana- Womanism

This paper adopted Africana- Womanism, it is aimed primarily at achieving self-definition and self-actualization for black women. As a result of centuries of racial and sexist oppression black women have been abused. The affinity between black women was however questioned when another group rose up to challenge the womanist / Black Feminists sincerity in the articulation of realities of all Black women (Mogu,1999). The new group highlights the necessity of having an Afrocentric standpoint for the African-American women. The undisguised approval of lesbianism (Echols,199) and the allegation that Black feminism agenda is just slightly different from mainstream feminist's made black activities of African descent like Cleonora Hudson- Weems and Kolawole to dissociate from Black feminism. This is because lesbianism is a mode of expression that is completely strange to the African woman (Kolawole,1997).

Hudson- Weems (1993) a leading activist also reject black feminism on the ground that it tows the path of western feminism she argues that the conflict of purpose and approach among women movement is responsible for the different off shoots of the movement. In summary, being an African, and a successful woman, yet she will realize and recognizes her emptiness even in the face of her achievements. She believes that for her to be truly fulfilled as a woman and her child to experience a balanced development, she still needs her husband. Sotunsa,2017, upholds that whatever the challenges which face an African woman, the family institution must still be esteemed. African women should strive for self-actualization with or without the support of their husbands. When the men turn out to be as unhelpful, African women still need to understand that "we are lame...But this is no time to crawl". It is time to learn to walk again.

Biblical Concept of women

A woman is generally defined as an adult female being. The Genesis account described the woman as a help mate for the man (Gen 2:18), although generally speaking, Jewish culture never treated women as helper "fit for him" but as property. It is noted that some women with outstanding potential are generally respected; Deborah is an example of such women. This culture continues in the New Testament times even in the ministry of Jesus but the ministry of Phoebe, Priscilla and other women in the New Testament cannot be overemphasized. Despite the fact that too much is known about these women, Nichols(1990) attested to the fact that Paul and the members of his congregations were aware of these outstanding women. Moulder, 1997 further explained that the early fathers generally viewed women as "the devil's gateway" "the weaker vessel", slow of understanding", unstable in mind", liable to deception" the one whose disobedience had ruined the man, the image and glory of God, requiring the death of God's own son for atonement (Moulder,1999). They held a very unfavourable view to Ecclesiastes 7:26 is snares and nets" and "whose hands are bands" from which it is impossible for the unwary to escape. Mascall, 1972, do

not see women as people who can create revolution; but what they do is create anarchy; and the difference between these is not a question of fruitfulness and finality". The woman is still accused of being the vehicle of temptation for man. However, some feminists question this view of women culture. The question of hermeneutics, exegesis and the authority of the Bible has even being raised in the consideration of the issue of the violence and abuse of women.

Exegesis Luke 13:10-17

10^ο Ἦν δὲ διδάσκων ἐν μιᾷ τῶν συναγωγῶν ἐν τοῖς σάββασι. **11** καὶ ἰδοὺ γυνὴ ἣν πνεῦμα ἔχουσα ἀσθενείας ἔτη δέκα καὶ ὀκτώ, καὶ ἦν συγκύπτουσα καὶ μὴ δυναμένη ἀνακύψαι εἰς τὸ παντελές. **12** ἰδὼν δὲ αὐτὴν ὁ Ἰησοῦς προσεφώνησε καὶ εἶπεν αὐτῇ· Γύναι, ἀπολέλυσαι τῆς ἀσθενείας σου. **13** καὶ ἐπέθηκεν αὐτῇ τὰς χεῖρας· καὶ παραχρῆμα ἀνωρθώθη καὶ ἐδόξαζε τὸν Θεόν. **14** ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ ὁ ἀρχισυνάγωγος, ἀγανακτῶν ὅτι τῷ σαββάτῳ ἐθεράπευσεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς, ἔλεγε τῷ ὄχλῳ· Ἐξ ἡμέραι εἰσὶν ἐν αἷς δεῖ ἐργάζεσθαι· ἐν ταύταις οὖν ἐρχόμενοι θεραπεύεσθε, καὶ μὴ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ σαββάτου. **15** ἀπεκρίθη οὖν αὐτῷ ὁ Κύριος καὶ εἶπεν· Ὑποκριτά· ἕκαστος ὑμῶν τῷ σαββάτῳ οὐ λύει τὸν βοῦν αὐτοῦ ἢ τὸν ὄνον ἀπὸ τῆς φάτνης καὶ ἀπαγαγὼν ποτίζει; **16** ταύτην δὲ, θυγατέρα Ἀβραάμ οὖσαν, ἣν ἔδησεν ὁ σατανᾶς ἰδοὺ δέκα καὶ ὀκτώ ἔτη, οὐκ ἔδει λυθῆναι ἀπὸ τοῦ δεσμοῦ τούτου τῇ ἡμέρᾳ τοῦ σαββάτου; **17** καὶ ταῦτα λέγοντος αὐτοῦ κατησχύνοντο πάντες οἱ ἀντικείμενοι αὐτῷ, καὶ πᾶς ὁ ὄχλος ἔχαιρεν ἐπὶ πᾶσι τοῖς ἐνδόξοις τοῖς γινομένοις ὑπ' αὐτοῦ.

^{KJV} **Luke 13:10** And he was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath.

^{KJV} **Luke 13:11** And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up *herself*.

^{KJV} **Luke 13:12** And when Jesus saw her, he called *her to him*, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity.

^{KJV} **Luke 13:13** And he laid *his* hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God.

^{KJV} **Luke 13:14** And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day.

^{KJV} **Luke 13:15** The Lord then answered him, and said, *Thou* hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or *his* ass from the stall, and lead *him* away to watering?

^{KJV} **Luke 13:16** And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?

^{KJV} **Luke 13:17** And when he had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by him

Are women not part of the world? Are they not human being in all the miracles performed by Jesus both in the synoptic and Johannine Gospel there was never a single place where a woman is mentioned the influence of the culture of the Jewish have been negative for women hence women and children are categorized as neuter gender. Luke 13:10-17 and 14: 4-5 was similar in nature because both the passages was addressing the healing on the Sabbath. However, Jesus was not

concerned with the spirit that crippled her (NRSV) is literally “a spirit of weakness”. Even though Jesus does not address the spirit, as in an exorcism, attributing the woman’s condition to a spirit relates her to other persons possessed by evil or unclean spirits. In verse 16 was described her condition is described as bondage to satan, the evil power behind the demons. The woman is another person on the margins of Jewish society, just like the hemorrhaging woman, (8:43-48) for she has been afflicted by an evil, unclean spirit for eighteen years. Jesus described the leader of the synagogue as hypocrite (ανπεκριθ δε αυτω ο κυριος κια ειπεν, Υποκριται, εκαστος υμων τω σαββατω. Ταυτην δε θυγατερα Αβρααμ.) it is Jesus task to free her from Satan’s bondage and restore her to her rightful place as “a daughter of Abraham.”

The description of the woman as daughter of Abraham is unusual. It is placed first in the Greek sentence v. 16, a position of emphasis. This description will be matched in 19:9 by Jesus insistence that Zacchaeus is “a son of Abraham,” a point that Jesus makes against the crowd, which rejects Zacchaeus as a “sinner”. Abraham has an important place in Luke-Acts. Abraham represents the originating covenant and promise given to the Jewish people. This promise is still valid, but its realization requires radical transformation. when Jesus heals, he says, “You are set free from your ailment” (using the verb apoluo). In verse 16 he explains that the woman had been “bound” by Satan; therefore, it was necessary for her to “be set free from this bondage” (using luo apo). The analogy in verse 15 is relevant because it concerns freeing an animal that was confined (σαββατω ουλυει τον λυει τον βουν)” untie in the NRSV translate luo, which could also be translated “free” or release”. Jesus’ healing on the Sabbath, however, meets resistance from the leader of the synagogue, who cites the Sabbath commandment. His words are directed to the crowd, which although recently criticized for lack of response to Jesus, is much more willing to accept Sabbath healing than the synagogue leader is. In his response, Jesus is addressing the synagogue leader but also others like him, since he uses the plural “hypocrites”. This term, which is much less frequent in Luke than in Matthew, is probably explained by the following argument, which points to an inconsistency between the critics’ position on the woman and on animals Jesus argument implies that what hold in the important of releasing animals must surely hold also in the more important case of the woman. Two points of contrast increase the force of the arguments she is a daughter of Abraham, not an ox or a donkey, and she has been waiting eighteen years, not the comparatively brief time the animals must wait. Her release is long overdue, it is a compelling necessity. (The verb dei “it is necessary,” is used in v.16). Therefore, Jesus’ opponents were put to shame” when their self-centered inconsistency was publicly exposed, according to the story. Most opponents, of course, would respond by denying that the case of the animals and the case of the woman are really compatible. For Jesus in Luke, however, release of this daughter of Abraham is an immediate necessity and entirely appropriate to the Sabbath Tamehill,1996.

Area of violence and abuse of women are still many in Nigeria particular in Yoruba land. Cases of violence, rape and sexual abuse of women and girls are still widely reported. The practice of female genital mutilation is still rife in many parts of Yoruba land. Similarly, wife battering and denial of the right of inheritance are other areas of denial of women. Women are not given leadership role, the only thing that is common in Yoruba land is regent (Adele Oba) like in part of civilized world Yoruba cannot boast of any woman who has been enthroned as Oba.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It will not be an over statement to say that women in Yoruba land have played prominent roles in the society. They constitute an indispensable element in society. They have been described as “heaven’s best gift, man’s joy and pride in prosperity and his support and comfort in affliction (Ada, 2000). The influence of the cultures both African and Biblical have been negative for women hence this work plea to distill what is counter-culture but positive for women’s development both in the Bible and in African culture and to present them for the transformation of the present. Akintunde in Browmiller, 2000, gave some suggested solutions. Yet we believe the application could be apt for women in Africa, since phenomenon is universal. The female child should avoid remaining alone in deserted places like basements and garages. She advices women and girls to carry a ‘practical weapon ‘such as a hat- pin, an umbrella for self defence if need be. On the part introduced early enough both at home and in school. This is to stress personal responsibility, respect of the dignity of the human person and to foster family values. Our law enforcement agents should be trained to be gender sensitive, while women should handle cases of rape, this will encourage victims to report cases to the appropriate quarters. Above all, the church should lay emphasis on the fact that men and women alike are created in God’s image and announce eternal damnation for any soul which violates the image of God.

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