

Between Human Rights and Insecurity: An Exploration of Ahmed Yerima's *PARI*

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Abstract

On 25th September, 2015, world leaders gathered to adopt the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and its 17 sustainable goals (SDG's) aimed at achieving equality for all humans by eradicating poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring prosperity. Goal 5 according to Victor Dugga, states 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'(9), however, this is feasible if the environment is safe for our womenfolk to thrive. The attainment of gender equality is not only seen as an end itself and a human right issue but is a prerequisite for the achievement of sustainable development. In times of crises, conflict or war, women and children have always been the worst hit. The men die or are injured and go into oblivion, however the woman lives with the scars, trauma if she ever recovers, becomes a walking shadow of herself. One of the key elements of confronting victims of rape and torture, opines Roberta Culbertson in Rosemary Jolly, is that once the victim-survivor has experienced the violent truncation of her ability to control what happened to her body, then the sovereignty of the notion that this will never happen to one again is impossible to resurrect (29). This paper adopts the content analysis by appraising the play *Pari* by Ahmed Yerima, it is anchored on the feminism theory and criticism. The researcher aims to reflect the trauma of rape victims and recommend that there is the need to implement fully the human rights laws that protects the girls and women during conflict.

Keywords: Human rights, Women, Insecurity, Violence, Victim

Introduction

Human rights have been thorny issues in the Nigerian political history, more so the rights of women. The dabbling of the military into this terrain

has not helped but rather retarded the growth of the polit. Then in 1999, there was the transition to democratic rule although human rights violation persisted contrary to sections 33-44 of the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria as amended. In Nigeria, the country's 1990 constitution (as amended) encapsulates some of the fundamental human rights as follow:

Section 33: Right to life.

Section 34: right to dignity of human person.

Section 38: right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion.

Section 41: right to freedom of movement.

To mention but few however, these rights have not been adhered to due to continuous human rights violations. Nigeria has ratified UN agreements such as the convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, which guarantees women equal rights and protection from discrimination. However these have not informed policy-making or translated into better living and working conditions for women. National development is hampered by excluding the perspectives, skills and dynamism of half the population. Without meaningful commitment in the form of policy changes and the provision of resources to deal with the root causes of women's conditions, the international development community, there has been a shift in thinking from the initial “women in development” (WiD) approach, which focused narrowly on women's productive roles, to a broader “gender and development” perspective, which takes into account all spheres of women's lives and seeks to bring analysis into the core of development policy. UN agencies such as the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of women (INSTRAW) and UN Development Programme (UNDP) support gender awareness training for policy-makers, provide technical assistance and build strong gender components into their own programming and projects.

The Face of VictimBoko Haram

Boko Haram is a militant Islamic group working out of Nigeria, whose purpose is to institute Sharia or Islamic law. Boko Haram in the Hausa dialect means Western education is forbidden. The group also refers to

itself as *Jama'atuAhlisSunnaLidda'awatiWal-Jihad*, meaning People committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teaching. Boko Haram militants mainly inhabit areas in the northern states of Nigeria, specifically Yobe, Kano, Bauchi, Borno and Kaduna. Originally, Boko Haram was referred to locally as the Nigerian Taliban because of their religious similarities to the Taliban. Boko Haram does not engage in Nigeria's political system out of adherence to a fundamentalist form of Islam, which forbids participation unless the system is based in Sharia and Islamic Law.

The group, which may have existed since the late 1990s, organizes under the Muslim cleric Mohammed Yusuf in 2002. It is centered in Maiduguri, the capital of the north eastern state of Borno. In December 2003, the first known attack by Boko Haram includes roughly 200 militants, who attacked multiple Police stations in the state of Yobe, near the Niger Border.

In July 2009, the Boko Haram uprising begins in Bauchi and spreads to the states of Borno, Kano and Yobe. The militant group killed scores of police officers. Joint military task forces respond, leaving more than 700 Boko Haram members dead and its operational mosque destroyed. The uprising ends when police captured Yusuf. His deputy, Abubakar Shekau, attempted escape, but Boko Haram claims it is an extrajudicial execution.

May 29, 2011, during the President Goodluck Jonathan's Inauguration, Boko Haram destoned three IEDs near a military barrack in Bauchi. All through 2011, 2012, 2013 many lost their lives I the north eastern states of Yobe and Borno. Churches ad markets were also destroyed. The federal capital territory, Abuja was not spared too. In April, 2013, President Goodluck Jonathan stated that he had appointed a team to explore the possibility of amnesty for Islamist militants. Shekau responded in an audio statement: “surprisingly the Nigerian government is talking about granting us amnesty. What wrong have we done? On the contrary, it is that we should grant you pardon”. On 14 April, 2014, Boko Haram militants kidnapped approximately 276 teenage girls from a sparked a global outrage and a '#Bring Back Our Girls' campaign on

social media.

On May 21, 2014, the White House announces that the United States had sent 80 troops to Chad to help search for the kidnapped schoolgirls. On 22 May, the UN Security Council added Boko Haram to its sanctions list.

Then 2015 became the era of beheading for the terror group. In March 12, 2015 Shekau in a video pledge allegiance to ISIS. The Islamic militant group which controls areas of Iraq and Syria. All through 2015, 2016, 2017, Eighty-two Chibok girls were released after negotiations between Boko Haram the Nigerian government. The shenanigans of Boko Haram continued right up to 2018.

On 19 February, 2018, a fraction of Boko Haram struck at another Government Girls Science and Technical College in the northeast Nigerian town of Dapchi kidnapping 110 students of the college. The school girls who were kidnapped from their boarding school were reportedly released by the side of the road almost five weeks later. Five of the girls did not survive the ordeal and one other- a Christian refused to convert to Islam –is still being held. Her name is Leah Sharibu. This is 2023 and she is still held as a captive in Boko Haram's den.

Background of the Play

On the night of 14-15 April, 2014, about 278 female students were kidnapped from the Government Secondary School in the town of Chibok in Borno State, Nigerian. The Vanguard Newspaper reported in 2016 that out of this number of the kidnapped Chibok girls, only 104 were not married off by Boko Haram leaders and associates, while some were killed by either bombs, bad weather or lack of medical and food supplies. It was gathered from top individuals who were involved in the negotiations leading to the recent release of 82 girls, that most of them were kept by a faction loyal to the son of the founder of Boko Haram, Mohammed Yusuf, in some areas around Lake Chad while the rest of them were another faction loyal to Abubakar Shekau.

Meanwhile, contrary to claims that some of the Chibok girls refused to be freed along with others released by Boko Haram, indication emerged

that none of those girls had any such options to choose to be freed or left behind in the custody of the terrorists. *The Vanguard* also had it via a top source who was actively involved in the negotiation for the release of the girls that the issue of any of the trapped girls deciding whether to return did not arise throughout the discussions for their freedom. The source said that unknown to many Nigerians, many of the Chibok girls and others were immediately radicalized and married off by the Boko Harm members upon capture.

Theoretical Concept

The theoretical framework for this paper is feminism. This refers to a composite of theories, beliefs and movement, social, political and also moral philosophies, largely informed by concerning the experiences of women especially in the terms of their social, political and economic situation. One of the beliefs of feminism is that the manner women related issues are projected in literary works has an effect on their empowerment. This is referred to as feminist literary criticism and it is the tool for the analysis of the play text. The feminist issues will be identified in the process of examining the perspective of the playwright. The concept of feminism is best described as the belief that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men. Women and girls should be given the opportunity to decide for themselves what they want and to make decisions for themselves (9).

Analysis of the Play *Pari*

It is against this background that Ahmed Yerima based his plot of *Pari*. The story is built around the escape of one of the kidnapped Chibok school girls called Hyelapari. She escapes with the assistance of a woman in the camp of the Boko Haram insurgents. The play opens with her mother, Ama, passionately lamenting the loss of her only daughter, and wishes, prays and vows to do anything, including abandoning her faith, Christianity, to have her daughter return to her. She also tries to influence her husband to switch to Islam in the hope that the god of the religion of her daughter's kidnappers would likely be more understanding and sympathetic to her plight and will answer her prayers and return *Pari*.

The plot takes an anti-climactic dimension when suddenly Hyelapari

finally shows up in her parents' home through a government representative channel, beaten, a psychological wreck, and a mother of one. This is far from her mother's long-term dream and hope of a reunion with her mother and father. In a further strange circumstance, the 'husband', Ibrahim, also shows up. In the wreck that Pari has become, the only reality she now knows is that of her attachment to her said forced husband and child. All effort made by her parents especially her mother, not to leave with Ibrahim at the point that family members try to whisk him away fails as she insists that they are both inseparable. Pari and the child finally leave with Ibrahim leaving her mother, father and other family members helpless and heartbroken.

Pari is an emotionally laden piece that vividly portrays again the realistic approach to illustrate the heart wrenching pains and untold trauma the girls, parents and relations of the kidnapped girls experience. In their waiting process for the release of the girls on one hand and the psychological and physiological degradation and the worst form of dehumanization the kidnapped girls pass through on the other through their experience. Even when they become free either by release or escape, they are never the same again. They are victims of the worst kind of dehumanizing treatment and feel worthless. These emotions are seen through the eyes of Pari in the play text as she narrates her ordeal to her parents:

Tada: Tell us what happened from the last time we saw you in school on your visiting day, two years ago.

Pari: It was a dry night in school. Everything went on normally. We had dinner and we were preparing for prep...then all a sudden, there was commotion. Gun-toting men, about two hundred, entered the school. There was no light in school, so the darkness helped their cause. We were frightened to the bones. Then they stated to gather us together towards the gate. Some girls were lucky, they were able to escape at the time, but I was petrified...frozen with fear...after a little distance from the school, we got to the place where vehicles were parked, and we were hauled into

them like cattle. After some distance, we drove into the Sambisa forest (35).

Pari's narration gives a clear, graphic representation of the actual events that led to the kidnap. She goes further to enlighten her unhappy parents, on her traumatic experience in the hands of the Boko Haram terrorists.

Ama: So what happened after?

Pari: Hell broke loose. We were really scared and the hooded men melted our resistance. Then one day, they said we all had to get married. We resisted it. Oe girl who screamed her refusal was blindfolded and before our very eyes, she was killed. Petrified, we gave up everything. Then they started to rape us. Some of us died from the pain. Those who lived or survived like me were living carcasses from the world beyond (36).

These lines portray the brutality of man, his insensitivity to his fellow man, women in this case. It is a window to the soul of rape victims and the ordeal they have been through. Pari goes further to announce that there were other women victims before the Chibok girls, who have no voice. This shows the state of insecurity in the nation.

Pari: No, Ama. There were women victims long before we were taken at Chibok. That was why I was angry with the chairman when he kept mentioning Chibok girls as if that was all there were. There are more innocent victims in that cursed forest. They must bring us all home (37).

The agony of a mother whose only child has been kidnapped knows no bounds. Agnes (Ama) lives in constant fear of whether her daughter is alive or dead. She is torn on every side by what in-laws and society will say about her childless state as is common in the African setting. Ama is constantly terrified by fear. No mother wants to lose her child especially an only one. Her terror is palpable and makes her think irrational thoughts sometimes. Her pain is felt in her words:

Ama: Don't touch me! Just bring back my girl that is all I ask. Give me back my Hyelapari (kneels down). I

used to have a daughter. And you know the custom of our people, that without a child, a woman is nothing in her husband's house. That is why my stupid godforsaken in-laws advised you to impregnate a prostitute. Now I must share everything even in my state of loss (11).

Agnes is desperate and ready to do anything, worship any deity, convert to any religion if need be as long as her daughter comes back. She says all manner of prayers and offers sacrifices to deities to get her child back.

Agnes by her speech indicates that two years have passed since her daughter's abduction, with nothing happening... she has lost faith in her God and her husband as she feels abandoned by God and him in her time of need:

Ama: (cynical) Faith? (Chuckles) My randy deacon with a pregnant prostitute for a second wife talks about faith? For whom? With whom? In whom? On whom? (Chuckles) I doubt your God now. How must I forgive me, but where is the miracle He promised me? He has let two years go past, with nothing happening, not a glimpse of hope... (13).

Her utterances clearly indicate the state of her mind, and how she feels regarding her faith.

Ama: My faith? (Chuckles) It melted...like the morning dew...it melted with the early scorching sun... (14).

This change of camp by Ama, Pari's mother from the above, illustrates the frustrations, confusion, and overwhelming desperation families of kidnapped victims are plunged into by the event and after-effect of waiting endlessly for their release. It was in the midst of Ama's reflections that Pari returns, a shadow of her former self groomed in the school of life. She has become a psychological wreck, violated, abused and dis-oriented. Ama at some point actually wished Pari had not come back. She could not fathom this new Pari at all. The playwright raised

some questions, in a country where there is a democratically elected government in charge of security of lives and properties, how could such a kidnap happen? Why should this sect target innocent and helpless school girls, waste their lives truncate their dreams and consequently expect the victims to pick up the pieces of their lives again?

Conclusion

The play *Pari* ends on a sad note. She never fully recovers from the trauma she has undergone as she does not go through therapy and is lost to her parents and family. Her innocence is gone, as is her virtue. Her education is shortened. She finally goes into oblivion with so many unanswered questions, thoughts, memories and never fully realizes her dream

What happens to other victims as this is one out of so many cases? How about the womenfolk in the hands of these terrorist? What becomes of the girl child born in such an environment? Do they grow and continue the sequence? There are so many questions but few answers. This is the year 2023 and Book Haram is still carrying out its rampage. The sect's recent style is to behead people and send the gory videos on the Internet. Women need to support each other to form organizations to advocate for girls and develop a strategy of political advocacy as guide.

The particular plight of victims of human rights violations can be seen as trying to become human after their ordeal and been acknowledged in the community of humans as many of such victims are discriminated against by family and friends alike. It is a 'shameful thing', in the African context to be raped and announced. Victims should be given room to testify as it helps to purge them of their traumatic experience, yes there might be stigma or victimization, but there would be recognition of areas to be worked upon using therapy. Although some of the victims of violence, like *Pari* might become attached to their captors, however, there is hope that many will be given a fresh start at life again through therapy and change of environment. The government should recognize that there is insecurity in the nation and set in machinery that would secure the lives of women and girls.

Recommendations

There should be enforcement of the rule of law, that is, all people and institutions are subject to and accountable to the law.

Trauma victims should be given therapy before they are reintegrated into the society.

Other female advocate groups should continue the struggle against oppression and work diligently to determine effective and strategic approaches to advancing and improving society.

Discriminatory practices against the female gender should be abolished by providing equal opportunity and representation in governance thereby negative and stereotyped views will be corrected.

The federal government should work out a security system where people's rights are not infringed upon. If acknowledge that there are victims, then the government or other non-governmental organizations should set up machinery to curb the excesses of the terrorists.

Women should be encouraged to participate in addressing the multiple effects of rape, abuse and oppression.

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