

## **The New Media and Literature as the Soapbox for Unmasking Female Oppression: A Study of Two Online Narratives**

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### ***Abstract***

*This study evaluates the prospects of the new media on Literature in English. The new media and Literature in English can be used to facilitate the growth and development of the society. The new media is now used as the space for exposing female oppression across the world. Both the media and literature inform, educate and entertain. Exploring the social media helps to boost an individual's creative impulse and at the same time, exposes a reader to the diverse literature of other people. Literature is all about man in his environment; through the social media, we come in contact with cultures and narratives of people from other places of the world which we may not be able to see in person. Thus, we can lend our voices to the malaise plaguing mankind. The women in Afghanistan and Somali are subjected to pain and discrimination by the patriarchal society. It is a patriarchal world where the women are treated like animals. These women are determined to expose their ordeal to the world. Navigating the social media space, a writer's caption of his work becomes a kind of shibboleth that reveals what we are likely to encounter in a narrative. To examine the relationship between the new media and literature in English, this study examines two online videos*

*revealing the debasement of women: Assaulted, Blackmailed and Shamed Online and Women in Afghanistan find Ways to make their Voices heard under Taliban Oppression. The research will be anchored on feministic theory to the study of literature. The new media and literature in English complement each other hence, the new media provides the platform for highlighting literary works while literature in English uses the new media platform as the dais to educate, inform, criticize, entertain the people and revive the society.*

**Keywords:** *new media, literature, prospects, women, subjugation, feminism.*

## **Introduction**

It is interesting to note that the new media has become an important space to discuss the issue of female oppression. Media's global impact in revealing women's oppression remains commendable like we can see in the case of the torture of Afghanistan and Somali women. The women speak in their own voices of the pain and humiliation they go through in the hands of the men. The women are carrying out a fierce struggle against their assault; while the men want them to remain in their subjugating space, they fight to free themselves from the clutches of patriarchy and stifling Muslim culture. It is as a result of this kind of intimidation that feminism as a discourse encourages women to fight for their freedom. Apart from these women coming online to narrate their ordeal, it becomes an avenue for the

oppressed women to mount campaign against female domination and injustice.

Furthermore, the brutality that is meted against Afghanistan and Somali women in the videos is so traumatizing that those who are bold to come out to speak of the repression need to be applauded. The encumbrance of women's advancement gave rise to feminism as a crucial theory in literary criticism. It questions the relegation of women and advocates for their rights. According to Gloria Chukukere, it pays "critical attention to the social, political and psychological presence of women in African societies" (100). In the same vein, Joy Meyer states that, "women have not enjoyed being respected properly nor have they enjoyed their rightful place in society" (vii). This is the reason women should be sensitized to reject any manner of oppression or anything that can affect their advancement wherever they find themselves.

The discrimination against women has been long-standing, it is rooted in tradition which places the man above the woman and forces her to be in a submissive and inferior position always. According to Nawal El Saadawi, "among the male authors I have read, both in the West and in the Arab world ... not one has been able to free himself from this age – old image of women handed down to us from an ancient past, no matter how famous many of them have been for their passionate defence of human rights, human values and justice .... (520). Feminism advocates for the rights of women and advises them to reject slavish positions or roles. The two videos highlight what many women go through in many societies of the world. The narratives reveal the situation of

the woman in a Muslim culture where only the man is recognized as the subject.

In addition, through their stories, they have broken the silence by speaking against their tribulation and letting the world hear of their predicament in an insensitive male dominated society that destroys a woman's identity. Molaria Ogundipe – Leslie attests that, “women are oppressed as women and they are oppressed as the majority members of subordinate classes which are also in the majority” (546). Also, Tonia Umoren, reveals that, “the quest for social order has been man's endless life journey as pockets of crises ... stare man's society in the face. Many other disciplines have tried to grapple with this monster, and the literary arena also feels obliged to lend a hand in this quest for an orderly and tranquil society” (1).

In like manner, the woman is seen as an acquired property or a slave who has no right to think for herself or act on her own but will always depend on the assistance of her master who invariably is the man. Both the patriarchal society and Muslim customs inhibit the advancement of the women in Afghanistan and Somali as the videos reveal. The hindrance of women's development gives rise to feminism as a valuable discussion in literary criticism and it empowers women to say no to all manner of debasement.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

Media is the word used to refer to the various means of communication cum information dissemination like radio, television, internet, among others. Specifically, there are the print and electronic media; the print media consists of the magazines,

journals, newspapers and so on while electronic media includes cell phones, television, laptops, desktops, MP players and so on. Rosecolette Ewurum and Maduabuchi Ogidi posit that “media is a generic term that refers to the various channels through which information are exchanged and reacted to between a sender and a receiver in a communication process. Media refers to the collective communication outlets or tools that are used to store and deliver data or information” (153-4). In the same vein, the new media can be defined as the media that is produced online. The difference between the old media and the new one hinges on the fact that the new media is available to the users as they receive information and react to what is before them.

Also, the new media means digital technologies and other platforms created in the modern times which changes the method information is produced, relayed and consumed. Firstly, there is the social media which provides platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter including LinkedIn which helps users to create content and the needed social interaction. Secondly, there is the interactive media like video games, apps, and websites including reality experiences. Thirdly, there is the digital media like streaming services, blogs, online content and podcasts. The new media has helped in knowledge explosion, creating connectivity and interaction across the world.

Additionally, comprehending all the facets of the new media, users will make use of the opportunities it offers to overcome the challenges that are likely to manifest. Information is very crucial to the growth and advancement of any society. According to Benedette Onunkwor and Obiageli Anyaegba, “the importance of information is such that it confers enormous power and influence

on those who understand its intrinsic values and are exposed to the skills necessary for its acquisition and utilization” (1). The preceding quote depicts that the importance of the new media can never be underestimated. Therefore, a country’s advancement can be assessed against the backdrop of the information mechanism at the disposal of the populace. This is because it creates an enriching environment which stimulates the mental capacity and wellbeing of the people.

There are many sites and opportunities at the disposal of internet users to learn and improve themselves. The process of producing books may be rigorous, time consuming and expensive while such information is easily provided through the new media platforms. In addition, new media has impacted positively on the lives of individuals in the society.

### **Theoretical Clarification**

Feminism is a progressive and detailed literary theory which investigates and confronts gender – based disparities as well as campaigning for women’s rights and emancipation. It started in Europe in 1840 and spread to other countries of the world. It is established on the ideological ground that the woman can perform like the man politically, economically, intellectually among others and should be given equal opportunity to flourish. The feminists uphold that there should be equal treatment between the male and the female.

Moreover, it questions and disagrees with patriarchy on the discrimination and oppression against women. Feminism helps to liberate women from oppression and patriarchal restraints. Carolyn Heilbrun remarks that, when the issue of feminism is

discussed, “Men’s fear are palpable. Men have long been members of a profession whose masculinity can ... be questioned. I suspect that the macho attitudes of most English professors, their notable male bonding, can be directly attributed to the fear of female dominance. Now comes the additional threat of the profession’s being feminized” (24). Ann Dobie confirms this assertion when she posits that, “the growing strength of the feminist movement has also led to the establishment of women’s studies programs ...Men have different conceptions of self and different modes of interaction with others .. Ignoring them inevitably leads to a suppression of women’s understanding” (108). Men believe that if women are given more opportunities, they may outstrip them. The men want the women to play the secondary roles always while they will be at the top forever. The notion that feminism will diminish the inferior status ascribed to the women can be unsettling to the men. Therefore, the only way to prevent female dominance is to prevent any interest geared towards their advancement.

Similarly, feminism exposes manifestations of men’s manipulations against women, teaches a woman to realize her identity and potentials in order to fight for her rights. Thus, the woman understands her relevance in the society. Because of the patriarchal nature of the society and the value placed on manliness, women are seen as lesser humans. The insignificance placed on the women inhibits their development. Feminism advises women to reject this subordinate position. For the growth of our society, it is imperative to emancipate women from frustrating and stifling patriarchal strategies that depress and overwhelm them.

Likewise, it is important to reconstitute the woman to her right of place. John Mill agrees to this view when he states that, “civilization and Christianity have restored to the woman her just rights” (145). Additionally, Toril Moi emphasizes that, “feminism ... is at once a relatively comprehensive analysis of power relations between the sexes, and the effort to change or undo any power system that authorizes and condones male power over women” (183). As a result of masculine barriers and hindrance and the effects on the woman, she cannot continue to endure the restraining conditions around her. With enlightenment and the accompanying education, the woman is conscious of her liberty and eager to protect it. In addition, the female writers and critics alike are not relenting in creating the awareness of female oppression and exploitation. Feminism today remains the sledge – hammer used to pull down the traditional codes against female advancement. Feminism is a movement that seeks the honour and accomplishment of the personhood of the woman. It is a movement that cuts across all continents of the world, also, it is worthy of note that, literature has been a forceful weapon that has been helpful in boosting the success of this important movement. Female writers use the medium of their literary works to address female subjugation.

### ***Clarification of Assaulted, Blackmailed and Shamed Online***

Sexual exploitation of Somali women residing in Italy remains one of the harrowing experiences which they are subjected to by their fellow Somali men. Nimeral (not real name) a fifteen year old girl is lured into sexual act by a rich old man under the guise of marrying her. She gets pregnant and the man threatens to

abandon her if she refuses to abort the baby. The man vows to publish online her recorded nude video. In order to tarnish the image of the girl, it becomes a ploy to resort to publishing such video online so as to subdue the girl's dissenting voice forever. The girl is helpless with not even her parents or the law enforcement agents to protect her.

She is subjected to agony for the permanent pain and stain inflicted on her personhood. The enchainment of Somali women is very dehumanizing as the narrative indicates. Men fail to recognize the worth of women in the society because they want to be leading always. According to Flora Nwapa, "the woman's role in Africa is crucial for the survival and progress of the race. This is of course true of all women across the globe, be they black or white ... Male authors understandably neglect to point out the positive side of womanhood ... women have started to redefine themselves; they have started to project themselves as they feel they should be presented" (527). This is the result of the feminists' struggles; the desire to champion women's right and fight patriarchal tyranny have been the preoccupation of the feminist contest. The woman is made to understand that she can only perform at home under the supervision of the man.

Additionally, the African society believes that the woman is underlying and treats her with contempt. Any attempt to react to her oppression is condemned by the patriarchal society. Chinyere Grace Okafor emphasizes: "men constitute the centre and the standard ... it clarifies the predicament of women in the social, political and cultural life in terms of their marginalization and construction as inferior reflections of the standard" (58). The woman is not expected to question her position or status.

Nimeral's sexual video clip is purposely posted online to ridicule her, a disparaging act solely carried out to tarnish her image always. The man sees himself as the usual social code and measure of relevance in the society while the woman remains the unusual and insignificant.

Further, the rich old man who vows to expose her online if she refuses to abort the baby gets her pregnant for the second time and makes it clear to deal with her if she reveals the paternity of the baby (*Assaulted, Blackmailed*). According to her, "I wasn't aware he was recording, he threatened to make the video public". The minor decides to leave him and live her life while the man tells her of his intention to deal with her if she abandons him. It is really a distressing situation for her as this quote shows. The woman is expected to keep quiet always and tolerate the man's excesses. Grace Okereke is of the opinion that, "African gender myths of vocalicity configure speech and vocalicity as male prerogatives, while silence is seen as a female virtue" (136). The girl gets pregnant again and decides not to abort it. She is abandoned with her baby. Lauretta Ngcobo asserts that "all these crimes against women stem from one fundamental principle – the social and sexual subordination of women. There is an age-old fear that the independence of the female spirit will destroy the pillars of our society" (540). This evil and disservice assumption remains the reason why women are oppressed and exploited. The principle which the women can apply is to start with a commitment to expose the politics of female identity; to actualize the objectives of feminism, the primary goal of every woman is to work towards social change through campaigns, actions and revolutions. The social transformation can be facilitated with the

education of the girl-child. It offers her the means of sustenance and prevents further subordination and marginalization.

In the Somali neighbourhood in Italy, women are treated with ignominy. To spit a woman or any girl that refuses a man's sexual advances, to destroy her forever, all the man needs is to lure her into a forced sexual intercourse, records it and the threat of publishing it online becomes a glaring evidence to give the man what he wants. These victims of rape narrate their ordeal online. They tell stories of their woes in plausible and authentic manner. To this, Florence Orabueze argues that, "the true freedom can only come when both men and women discard the webs of silence that ensnare them by raising their voices to be heard in protest and by making sensible choices" (86). These callous men post the videos and make them go viral. They sell the films which offer them some form of finance at the expense and dignity of the woman. Seeing the naked body of a woman can be traumatizing to the casualty as well as her family. The parents of the girl now see it as a permanent stain and will decide to force the girl into marriage to the same man who has violated her in order to avoid shame. In the same vein, the man in turn will continue to abuse her until she leaves the marriage.

Beside, the victims are too afraid to report their experiences to the police because they can be killed for being naked. Also, the police are corrupt, they take bribe and allow the culprits to go unpunished. Therefore, the aftermath of this nefariousness is that the women are forced to be passive and silent. Generally, women are subjected to humiliation, according to Ann Dibugo Oguamanam, "the feeling of low self-esteem leaves the woman distraught ... Everything surrounding the African woman is

fraught with abuse, repression and debasement” (38). As a result of such exploitation, the woman is alienated, dysfunctional and only limited within her home space.

Furthermore, gender imbalance is associated with patriarchy because of its heinous regulations of the woman, the discriminations that are meted to womanhood places the man on a favourable and esteemed position while his counterpart is ridiculed. This inferiority tag that is surrounding the women, this injustice becomes a ligature repressing their ascent or preferment. Rose Acholonu lends credence to this assertion when she posits that: “the degrading status of womanhood has continued to bog down the life cycle of the average female, who ... denied equal opportunities to enjoy the full benefits of her human rights” (94). It shows that the societal rules are designed to clamp down women’s growth and development. The quest for female discovery and acceptance can only be possible by confronting patriarchal exploitations which make the women vulnerable. With cultural undertones, it arrogates so much power to the men at the exclusion of the women.

It is worthy of note that the women in Somali are petrified to report their ugly experiences because the knowledge that they are naked can lead to their death. Into the bargain, in sexual crimes against women, the men go unpunished. Somali elders are the people who settle such cases and they will give the verdict in favour of the men. They make the women to understand that as Muslims they should not expose their Muslim brothers. These men never cared about the dignity of their Muslim sisters before carrying out the obscenity. Thus, religion becomes a ploy used to cover the excesses of these treacherous and vile men.

Another victim of male abuse and repression is Hally (not real name) who is mistreated by her husband who rapes, ditches her and no one convicts such a man. Her offence remains that she has been raped before she gets married and the information gets to her husband. Her husband questions her: “What is your pride?” The man and his relations in an acrimonious manner take away her children from her. She is seen as being incompetent to raise her own children and she is prevented from seeing them. According to Molará McDonnell, “the society is patterned along gender lines leading to a situation where men control women. As the dominant group, men have access to significant material resources, while women are cheapened as secondary and inferior” (37). This depth of debasement of women makes them to feel underlying. Economic power is an important means of liberating the women and lessen their dependence on the men. A woman will always hang on the husband if she lacks financial empowerment.

Many sources and platforms on the internet and You-Tube are used to share these videos which go viral and get money for these callous men. Therefore, it becomes a brisk business to rape women and get them recorded. Also, victims are defiled and dumped by the side of the road. Many Somali women are debarred from seeking justice outside their environment. The women are extremely disconsolate the way the Somali society treats them. It is as a result of such harsh treatment against women that Evelyn Accad records that: “I learned to demystify the world of men at a very tender age. I told my mother that I didn’t want to marry ... some of my illiterate cousins had died under the blows of husbands and I said that I would never accept that fate” (44). In the case of Somali, women are not safe whether single or married.

Freedom is very important to every individual, to be restricted is an unpleasant experience, therefore, this is the reason behind the feminist struggle which is to eradicate oppression and get freedom for womanhood.

Through the platform of the new media, we come in contact with this debasing act of man's inhumanity to another. However, we can contribute in building a better society by lending our voices to this malaise ravaging womanhood. Through the new media, the victims agree to come online to reveal their experiences and those of others who may not have the boldness to come out and narrate their predicament. The victims claim they cannot walk freely on the street because of shame. The anguish is so devastating to the women as they have no help coming their way. The Muslim codes and stipulations in Somali are very harsh and destructive to the growth and advancement of the women.

### ***Clarification of Women in Afghanistan find Ways to make their Voices heard under Taliban Oppression***

The narrative sets out to expose the ordeal of women living in Afghanistan; women are prevented from attending colleges and they are not allowed to work with aid groups. This kind of quell has adversely affected the lives of Afghanistan women. Education remains a very important tool for female ascension; a situation where women are precluded from obtaining formal schooling, it means that their prospect of a bright and ensured future has been destroyed. This depth of oppression is resisted by women who carry out revolutionary struggle and the viewer witnesses the aftermath on the women.

One of the female activists reports that, “They beat me and my friends up, most of us were held hostage. They were shooting guns right in front of us and they were threatening us. They hit my head with the butt of a rifle, they hit my hands with a whip. They kicked me too ... most of us were beaten and arrested and held hostage for almost a month” (*Women in Afghanistan find Ways*). Marie Pauline Eboh remarks that, “it is very clear that women have fallen victim of overwhelming circumstances. They have long realized that the solution to the problem lies in facing it squarely. Accordingly, they have taken the bull by the horn” (20). It is worthy of commendation that despite the subjugation the Taliban subjects the women to, they are very daring and resolute in their confrontation against “sexual apartheid”.

As a result, they react harshly against the debasement and disenchantment around them. Fatima Mernissi evaluating the relationship between the sexes in the Muslim culture laments that, “men and women were and still are socialized to perceive each other as enemies ... Muslim ideology which views men and women as enemies, tries to separate the two and empowers men with institutionalized means to oppress women (xvi-xvii). This is the reason men will always continue to subjugate the women because the society has given them so much power over the women. Therefore, one observes the imbalance of relation in the Afghanistan society; the men are neither discriminated against nor clamped down as the women because it is a man’s world. Okafor laments that, “otherness is a theory of objectification of women in the world ... It clarifies the predicament of women... this central/marginal, standard/other dichotomy is based on the patriarchal order of society ...” (58). For the success of the

society, there is the need to re-order the structure of the society by recognizing the relevance of the woman and the contributions she will make to her society. Therefore, those traditional codes which marginalize the woman should be abolished.

In addition, the women decide to resist the Afghanistan imperative social order which subdues them. Unlike in Somali where the women are passive, Afghanistan women's backlash against their oppression is astonishing and admirable. Thomas Jefferson reiterates that, "governments are instituted among men, deriving their just power from the consent of the governed ... whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these end, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it (570 – 1). It is as a result of this backdrop that women construe to their quagmire.

In the same vein, the encumbrance of the female personality has given rise to series of protests. Resorting to rebellion remains the only way for the women to fight for their existence. Aduke Adebayo admonishes that, "women of all social groups must know who they were, where they are now, where they are going and where they could be. Sex-objects among others must be unearthed and changes must be effected for the overall progress" of womanhood (31). The Somali and Afghanistan women having observed their past and present see the need to oppose their oppression and discrimination

Also, girls and women are not allowed to go to amusement parks, women protesters who try to challenge the impunity of the Taliban are threatened. According to one of the protesters who has worked with government before, "after every protest, I couldn't go home for almost a month because there is the possibility that

my location will be discovered and myself getting arrested. Each time after I protest, I receive calls from anonymous numbers. They warn that if I protest again or come out on the street, I will be killed or vanished in the way that nobody will understand what happened to me”. (*Women in Afghanistan find Ways*). Another victim laments that, “my family is really scared for my life. They tell me one day you will get killed. Your life is in danger”. (*Women in Afghanistan find Ways*). It is evident that the virulent patriarchal society is toxic and dangerous for the growth of the woman.

There is bonding among the women as they fight to free themselves from a dysfunctional male dominated milieu. Their success lies in their courage to carry on the protest in a hostile Muslem environment. Another female activist reveals that, “I am teaching girls who are banned to get an education through an online platform... our activities are somehow under [the] radar” (*Women in Afghanistan find Ways*). In concern with this belief, Andermahr Lovell and Wolkowitz state that “the whole gender order in which people, things and behaviour are classified in terms of the distinction between masculine and feminine is socially constructed and has no basis in natural differences between the sexes” (qtd.in Goring, Hawthorn and Mitchell 197). The women suffer from depression as a result of the situation they find themselves.

The Taliban destroy women’s lives and future. According to Simone De Beauvoir, “It is in a society that the species attain the status of existence – transcending itself toward the world and toward the future. Its ways and customs cannot be deduced from biology, for the individuals that compose the society are never abandoned to the dictates of their nature; they are subject rather to

that second nature which is custom ....” (40). This shows that women’s crack-down is caused by the male society which is out to stifle the woman’s voice. Women’s exploitation and marginalization in this country is worse than enslavement. Actions in Afghanistan depict that based on gender, women worth nothing and must be restrained by masculine authority and guidance. The humiliation of women in Afghanistan is horrifying and demands global outcry.

## **Conclusion**

In this research, the new media offers us the opportunity of observing the manipulation the Somali and Afghanistan women are subjected to. There is the urgency to eradicate the domination against the woman ideologically, politically, economically and socially. The narratives under study portrays an account and analysis of women’s oppression. There is the need therefore to encourage positive transformation by sensitizing the women through the new media and literary writing. Unarguably, literature has made considerable contributions in the advancement of the female struggle. There is the necessity to work harder until the woman is situated in her rightful place. There should be campaigns against female subjugation; the discrimination against man and woman is traditionally designed as God has not created any disparity between the sexes. The readers can lend their voices to the ailing human condition in these two societies. Apart from this source, we may not be opportune to read from any book this act of human decadence. In essence, the new media and literature in English become important connections to criticize the follies of men and help in building a vibrant society. Feminist critics

believe that the oppression of women is perpetuated by the patriarchal society and it is based on this fact that feminism has become the metaphorical gun of change, and a female weapon in fighting female subjugation.

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