BOOK AS A COMMUNICATION MEDIUM: USING BARCLAYS AYAKOROMA’S *DANCE ON THE GRAVE* TO DISCUSS SALIENT GENDER ISSUES

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Abstract

Book is an effective communication tool that can be used to achieve different purposes, including gender equality; it is a complimentary medium to the mainstream media. Gender inequality is prevalent in the society, and this exposes women to a lot of discrimination that widens the dichotomy between them and their male counterparts, and invariably prevents the women-folk from participating and playing vital and supportive roles in developing the society. The agitation for gender equality and advocacy for women liberation is being carried out through various fronts, including books written in form of Drama, which is a very formidable force and a transformer of society; drama being a useful tool in national discourse and social commentary. Consequently, this study looked at Barclays Ayakoroma’s play (book), *Dance on the grave*, a drama that focuses on women’s agitation for a voice and equality with men in the society. This research work is anchored on the Muted Group Theory (MGT); and in order to pick and analyse the burning gender issues raised in the play, review and textual analyses were used as the qualitative research methods. In conclusion, this paper submitted that women are endowed with a lot of potentials that can contribute to the development of the society if they are not discriminated against, but that women must develop themselves in all aspects of life. It recommended, among others, that women should be protected from all forms of gender-based violence, and that more books that highlight the ills against women in the society should be written.

**Keywords:** Book, Drama, Feminism, Gender, Inequality.

Introduction

Gender issue is an area of life that concerns everybody, that is why the discourse on gender inequality will continue to be contentious until a common ground is found, and positive steps are taken to resolve it. There has to be deliberate actions to do away with the discrimination against women by recreating some aspects of our culture to inculcate value diversity. Every generation of women has fought for an aspect of feminism, however, the clamour for gender equality in contemporary times, according to Asen (2015), has been a global focus on female emancipation since the declaration of the United Nations Decade for women from 1975-1985.
According to Asen, “the United Nation’s global Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of gender equality and women empowerment by year 2015 has also contributed to many activities geared towards bringing an end to the marginalisation of women in the society” (p. 175).

The recent action by the Nigerian Senate to vote against the 35 per cent affirmative action for women as Ministers as well as 20 per cent for women as Commissioners in States in the Gender Bill during the 2017 Constitution Amendment vote has further raised doubt on the sincerity of men to support the pursuit in achieving gender parity in all spheres of governance in the society. This might have warranted the protests of women barely 24 hours after the Ondo State Governor in Nigeria, Rotimi Akeredolu, sent the names of the 18 Commissioner-nominees to the Ondo State House of Assembly for confirmation; the list comprised 16 males and two females. The women faulted the list, saying women were being marginalized, and that the governor was biased for not including many women on the list (Akingboye, 2017; Adebayo, 2017). The under-representation of women in leadership positions and decision-making process, and not giving them opportunities to prove their worth in nation building supports the view that they are only sought after as electorate during elections.

The many discriminations women face have also led to the rise of different advocate groups for the women like Equality Now, International Council of Women, National Organization for Women, Women for Women International, African Women's Development Fund, and this is where playwrights who use the book, via drama, to address issues in the society fall. Playwrights and their works are very important in the society because the society cannot but pay attention to the issues of social concern that are given ample exposition in many plays; playwrights continue to associate themselves with the struggle of the people against oppression and exploitation by seeking to bridge the gap that separates people from their ultimate goals (Oboshi, 2015). Though a book disseminates information on individual basis, yet, according to Oso and Biobaku (2008, p. 28), “an average book reader believes that it is one of the credible media of mass communication.”

Hence a book, written in form of a play, like Barclays Ayokoroma’s *Dance on his grave*, which does not only serve as a watchdog in the society but highlights some of the demands of women in the society, is apt for analyses. Therefore, the main objective of this paper is to highlight the potency of the book as a communication medium to effectively pass across gender related issues.

**Theoretical Framework**

This paper is anchored on the Muted Group Theory (MGT). This theory, which came into being in 1975, is linked to two British social anthropologists, Edwin Ardener and Shirley Ardener. It was originally resident in the field of cultural anthropology. The basis of the theory, which is hinged on relationship that exists in a group, opines that the dominant group does most of the contributions in the formulation of the language system while the subordinate group members only need to get used to the formulated language and use it to communicate. According to Spender (1984), men, through their control over meaning, are able to impose their own view of the world on everyone.
It is for a reason like this that Ekwelie (2005) sees as double standard the situation where a wizard (a male witch) connotatively is a highly intelligent man, and the fact that it is the men that are making the rules and creating the vocabulary to their own advantage, and to the detriment of the women folk. Ekwelie (2005) observes that the English language has a restrictive vocabulary for women, and a lot of it is derogatory. The men monopolise the heroic titles like man-of-war, points-man, chairman, and so on while the women are labelled as being sexy, chesty, call-girl and so forth.

The muted group theory opines that women’s voices that try to express women’s experiences are rarely heard because they must be expressed in a language system that is designed for men’s interests and concerns rather than that of women, when the women are unable to express their experience in the male language they either internalise male reality (alienation), or are unable to speak at all (silence). Adebimpe (2012) explains that the muted group and female deficit theories employ descriptors implying inadequacy: women’s communication is variously described as handicapped, maladaptive, in need of remediation, deviant (from the masculine norm or, more accurately, the male cultural form), silenced, inarticulate and inferior.

However, there may be some communication problem along the way when the subordinate group finds it difficult to understand some aspect of the language (Kramarae, 1981). The dominant group (men) can decide to discard the agitations of the subordinate group (women), which may eventually lead to the “muteness” of the subordinate group. Hence, to address this anomaly, there is need to apply critical sensibility which Griffin (2003) sees as “an obligation to critique dominant voices, especially those that suppress opposing viewpoints; a responsibility to advocate for those who are muted.” In other words, both sides of a dialogue are equal to one another. No one group or person is more powerful or dominant than the other, and they are able to communicate without these inequities being meddlesome. However, the dialogue sessions may be rancorous and varying discourses.

Shirley Ardener, having examined some studies more closely, is quoted by Adebimpe (2012, p. 201) to have arrived at the conclusion that “the actual language of a culture had an inherent male bias, that men created the meanings for a group and that the feminine voice was suppressed or ’muted’. This silencing of women leads to their inability to express themselves eloquently in the male parlance.” Shirley is said to have added that the silencing of women has several manifestations, especially in public discourse. On his part, Ardener (1975), after conducting an experiment with the information in his essay, entitled "Belief and the Problem of Women", in which he explored the "problem" of women, found out that the male point of view in society is dominant while the female point of view is considered as non-dominant and non-standard.

Although this theory was developed to examine various issues that involved men and women, yet it can be applied to all other aspects of discrimination against women where the voice of the female gender is being “muted”; even though the concept of muted groups is applicable to both women and all other non-dominant groups that exists in the society (Orbe, 1995a; 1995b). This theory is relevant to this paper because it can be applied to the issue of imbalance in the socio-economic and political fronts which tend to be in favour of the male
(dominant?), and to the disfavour of the female gender (muted?). As Cowan (2007, p.4) puts it, "mutedness' does not refer to the absence of voice but to a kind of distortion where subordinate voices...are allowed to speak but only in the confines of the dominant communication system". The Muted Group Theory fits into the situations in Dance on the grave which reflects the state of the society, and how women are being treated.

**Literature Review**

**How the Woman is Viewed**

Many male jingoists support the discriminatory view expressed by Aristotle Stagiritis, the ancient Greek philosopher and political theorist that, “the male is by nature superior and the female by nature inferior, and the one ruled.” Regarding women as second class citizens and as the “weaker sex” may intimidate some women and hinder them from aiming high in life because they won’t want to see themselves as straying into areas that are the exclusive reserve of men. But contrary to this view, a woman is a “strong vessel” because she is biologically built to play multiple roles of wife, mother and worker, and she is not biologically inferior to the man. Naturally, most women are known to possess some special qualities than men that qualifies them to be referred to as being ‘strong’; such qualities include Open-mindedness and fortitude, Honesty in matters they consider serious, Cogency, Thought and justice, doggedness to a belief, Expressive stability, among other qualities.

Howbeit, women are still bedevilled with various challenges that hinder their participation in the development of nations; they contend with gender based division of labour, deprivations of quality health, socio-economic and political marginalization as well as total exclusion from the decision making process at all levels of the society, cultural views about women, domestic responsibilities assigned to women by the society, disparity between male and female, access to power, gender imbalances in right and entitlement, lack of adequate financial support, lack of access to financial networks, discriminatory patriarchal custom, subjection of widows to demeaning cultural demands, lack of economic independence, and legion of others.

That is why Wood (2014, p.4) opines that “gender stereotypes not only contribute to the status quo in terms of women’s and men’s roles, but also promote an asymmetrical vision of women and men in society.” Eisend (2010) in Espinosa (2010, p.6) states that “stereotypes can negatively impact and restrict opportunities, especially for women, by lowering self-dignity and body satisfaction, as well as career and self-development” Kwakpovwe (2016) observes that during the mid-20th century, women in the modern world were given the “freedom” they so much desired, they could now vote and be voted for, they could now own properties. But today, the modern woman now considers herself not only as an equal to the man but probably, his “superior”. She does not consider herself a “golden jar” of decoration anymore, rather, she sees herself as an “iron sharpening another iron”. Kwakpovwe (2016) laments that, unfortunately, some women today have become tired of being women! Or rather, some women now consider it a cosmic error for them to have been created as women hence the recent boom in transgender
medicine in the West, and this has made the home for the woman today to become completely unhomely.

However, it is inhuman and unjustifiable to paint the woman in a degrading light because God created the man and the woman equally. Maxwell (1982) quotes the book of Genesis, chapter 1, verse 27 of the Bible to support this thought thus, “So God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him; male and female created He them.” The woman too possesses the same leadership ability that the man has. Spiritually, God has released all that it takes for a woman to lead, women are also leaders. Emphasising the “enhancer” role of the woman in leadership, Oshikoya (2017, p. 118) cites Myles Munroe as saying that, As enhancer, the woman is a co-leader who shares his (man’s) vision and works with him to accomplish what they were both created to do. The woman takes who the man is and what the man has and enlarges and extends it. In this way his leadership is effective and their vision becomes reality.

Many people have misinterpreted scriptures and thereby encouraging the nonchalant attitude of many in disobedience to the will of God. Therefore Marchie (2005) asks: Who then says women can’t lead if God can work in them and through them to accomplish His will and purpose? The social circumstances of women in most African societies are oppressive, stifling and discouraging. It is instructive to note that discrimination against women is not limited to developing countries alone thus Haskell (1996) remarks that the western society still nurses the idea that women are inferior, “The prejudice against women is no less pernicious because it is based on a fallacy. Indeed, to have sanctioned by law and custom a judgment that goes against our instincts is the cornerstone of bad faith on which monuments of misunderstanding have been erected.”

The woman is cheated and deprived of most of her rights. Women are so looked down upon that, recently a 20-member Council of Islamic Ideology (CII) of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, proposed a law that stipulates that a husband should be allowed to ‘lightly beat’ his wife if she goes against his commands and refuses to dress up as per his desires, or turns down demands for intercourse without any religious excuse, or does not take bath after intercourse or menstrual period excuse. This is reprehensible, and robs women of their dignity. The CII also wishes to legalise domestic violence if a woman refuses to cover her head or face in public, ‘interacts with strangers; speaks loud enough that she can easily be heard by strangers; and provides monetary support to people without taking consent of her spouse’. Anu (2015) reports that the CII further wishes to ban women from appearing on television or print advertising, or nursing male patients. It would also require a woman to ask her husband for permission before visiting males other than her relatives.

The oppression of women takes place in different countries in different ways and different levels. For instance, it is in September 2017 that Saudi Arabia appointed its first female spokesperson ever, (Fatimah Baeshen) at its embassy in Washington, hours after Saudi women were granted the right to drive. On September 26, 2017, King Salman of Saudi Arabia ordered the Interior Ministry to give “licences to women and men equally” although his will take effect from June 2018. This comes after Saudi women and international rights groups have for several years campaigned to lift the ban. It was in 2015 that Saudi women were allowed to vote and run as candidates in the municipal elections for the first time. It was recently too that King Salman
ordered an end to the long-standing guardianship rule, which denied women access to government services if they did not have a male relative’s consent. However, women continue to require a male guardian’s approval to travel abroad or get married in Saudi Arabia (bbc.com, 2015).

Book as A Communication Medium

Communication, according to Soola (1998, p.13), is a dynamic, integrative, on-going and recursive process of transmitting thoughts; of sharing and imparting information; of conveying and receiving ideas, facts, data, attitudes and feeling… a two-way, not a linear unidirectional flow from source to the receiver. Communication is also defined by the trio of Hovland, Janis, and Kelly (in Semiu, 2010) as the process by which an individual (the communicator) transmits stimuli (usually verbal) to modify the behaviour of other individuals (the audience).

Communication is the movement of information from Person/Medium/Point A to another Person/Medium/Point B through a dedicated channel to bring about a desired effect or reaction. The information may be from a single or multiple source(s), also the receiver or recipients of the information may be one person or a multitude. Intra-personal communication takes place within an individual and among his/her sensory organs while Inter personal communication occurs between two or more persons while Mass communication is reaching out to a mass of population through various media (mass media). The different forms of communication that exist are: Written (when it is written down) and Oral (when the human voice is used); Verbal (Speech-talking) and Non-verbal (without speech or word of mouth, e.g. photographs, body movement, facial expression etc.), and Formal (when it is official) and Informal communication (non-official).

Generally, the basic functions of the media, among others, are streamlined to information dissemination, provision of entertainment and education to the populace of the society, transmission of culture, enlightenment, fighting repressive and bad governments on behalf of a nation’s citizenry, promoting justice and equity, moulding public opinion, as well as serving as the watchdog of the society hence Grabber (1989) opines that “not only are the media the chief source of most people’s view of the world, but they are also the fastest way to disperse information throughout the entire society (p. 3).

The book, which is part of the media, likewise performs these functions in different unique ways, one of which is through drama. Scholars like Gambo (2006), Adelabu (2010), and Ojah (2011) see the mass media as zeroing in on films, textbooks, booklets, video, radio, encyclopaedia, dictionaries, newspapers, official documents, duplicated materials, audio records, books, journals, magazines, televisions, Internet, cinema etcetera. Crucially, Oso and Biobaku (2008) assert that mass communication is one of the levels of communication, and that its development is inextricably linked to book publishing. Oloyede (2008) affirms that books have some unique characteristics, and “the most obvious is that they are designed to serve as an instrument of communication (p. 96).

The book boosts life, and the trio of Oso, Osunbiyi and Biobaku (2008, p. 3)) describe the book as, “a medium of mass communication which enhances effective utilisation of other
media.” Meanwhile Okwilagwe (2001, p.37) affirms, The book is a medium of mass communication. Like other media of mass communication, it plays the following roles in the human society: patterns the world for the individual members of the society; designs the individual’s own position in relation to the other members of the society and helps the individual adapt successfully to his or her environment.

According to Guanah and Ojo (2017), the swing from the old ways of communication to the now technological driven means of communication was triggered by the invention of the moveable type by Johann Gutenberg in about 1440 in Germany, which invariably gave a boost to communication “journalism” as they were tenable then. Oso and Biobaku (2008, p. 27) opine that Gutenberg’s feat was the source of massive cultural changes, declaring that “mass communication thrives on its media, which disseminate messages to a mass audience who are heterogeneous in nature”.

According to Bittner (1989), mass communication has five features, which are listed as: mass medium, limited sensory channels, impersonal communication, gate keeping and delayed feedback. Oso and Biobaku (2008) are of the view that book publishing also has all these characteristics which they identified as: books are distributed to mass audience; readers cannot see or touch the writer while reading a book; the contents of a book are directed to heterogeneous audience; the editor and publisher must have filtered what is published, and the feedback is delayed because whatever is written in a book cannot be commented on to the author or the publisher immediately. Hence they concluded that, “Book publishing is not just a form of mass communication but the oldest form” (p. 28).

Kenneth Burke (1897-1993), an American literary theorist, said communication should be looked at from the dramatic angle. He used three characteristics and elements to separate; i. The Act (the message produced by the communicator), ii. Purpose (the purpose/reason for the communication), iii. Agent (who communicated the message), iv. Agency (Through what medium did they use in expressing the message), and v. Pentadic analysis. According to Hansen (1996), “Burke's argument is that artistic communication cannot be understood if it is reduced to sheer information.” (p. 4). Just like any other medium of communication, the Book can be used to Inform, Educate, and Entertain through its contents. Its contents could also be in form of a play, hence the analysis of the communication ability in Barclays Ayakoroma’s Dance On The Grave that communicates some salient gender issues.

**Synopsis of Dance on the Grave**

* Dance on the Grave is all about women liberation in the men-dominated and controlled town of Toru-Ama. The women, led by Alaere, the wife of the King of Toru-Ama, are determined to make their voices heard in the affairs of the community, and to stop the anticipated war Toru-Ama plans against the neighbouring Angiama Village, because they (women) would lose more than the men if they embarked on the invasion of Angiama. Also, the women want to lead side-by-side with their male counterparts; they want to make inputs in matters concerning their children since they were the ones that breastfed and cleaned them up. They complained about how they cook for their husbands, wash their clothes, and yet do not argue with them. The
women are determined to enforce their demands ‘by-fire-force’ by not only disallowing their husbands from having sex with them, but by also withdrawing from performing all home chores. At home, Alaere makes the palace uncomfortable, and a hot ground for the King, in order to be given the voice with which to lead the women of Toru-Ama. She also argues with the king that Beke, their daughter, will not travel out of Toru-Ama and learn the ways of the white man, rather she would remain in Toru-Ama and learn the ways of the land.

In a meeting with his Chiefs, the King of Toru-Ama, King Olotu, is briefed by the chiefs about the sudden dissention displays of their wives at home, some women are said to even be insisting on being part of the decision making process in their homes, while some of them want to be on top while having sex with their husbands; some of the women even out rightly refuse to sleep with their husbands while some refuse to cook for them. The King gets angry and he shares canes to the chiefs; he tells them to beat their wives that night at home if they refused them sex, which the men really did.

The trick of beating the women tends to work because there was a bit of peace in homes across Toru-Ama. King Olotu uses the opportunity of the temporary calmness in the land to ask Alaere who is the real father of Beke, their only child and daughter. Earlier, during an altercation, Alaere had told the king he was not Beke’s father, this made King Olotuto pounce on her and attempts to strangulate her. The chiefs and the people around rush to save her after hearing her cry for help, this made Beke to be angry and forced to tell the father that she can never be the daughter to such a wicked man that tries to kill her mother. Beke ignorantly tells the King, “she is my mother but you are not my father”, which corroborates her mother’s claim that the King is not her father. The king is saddened because he finally believes that Beke had known all the while that she was not his child, which of course, is not the case.

He laments that nobody can fight women successfully in this world, and that he started a war in his family that is now resulting into his ruin. He realises that women are mothers and it is the duty of all to obey and respect them. The King regrets the altercation with the women and says if he knew he wouldn’t have waged war against the women. Out of frustration King Olotu drinks a poisonous portion he kept by his throne and dies slowly. His chiefs rush to help him but he orders them to stop. As the King dies, an angry Chief Apodi accuses Alaere of sending “a whole man to his early grave”; he then enjoins her to dance on the King’s grave.

**Gender Narratives in Dance on the Grave**

Drama interprets with greater immediacy than other genres, and is accessible in performance to those who cannot or do not read (Ukala, 2001, p.29) hence, setting aside the fictive aspect of the play, Ayakorma, through *Dance on The Grave*, brings to public discourse the issue of gender disparity, and just as the women revolted at the assumed discrimination, all advocates of equality in the society must speak against gender discrimination. Osofisan (in Awodiya, 2010, p. 207) supports this when he says “a good play should not only please but disturb….Perhaps the work of art loses its grip with reality when it provokes applause, and not debate, and not unease”. This is consistent with the assertion of Sir Philip Sidney, who, in Shakespeare’s days, countered attacks on the theatre as an instrument of the devil, when he said
that drama was a most effective way of providing moral instruction and encouraging worthwhile actions in ordinary people (Cameron and Gillespie, 2000, p.281).

Although, there are many gender issues raised by Barclays Ayokoroma in Dance on the Grave, they will be discussed under the broad subheads of: Violence against women, sexual abuse and marital rape, the state of the woman in the hearts of most men, clamour for leadership, a voice for women, and the strength of women. There are a lot of spousal abuses which Feminists define as maltreatment, mistreatment, or ill-treatment of a spouse. McDonnell (2003) observes that the Nigerian society is patterned along gender lines leading to a situation where men control and dominate women, which make the men to have access to significant material resources, while women are cheapened as secondary and inferior. The United Nations Commission Draft Declaration of 1992 conceptualises violence against women, amongst others, as any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, as coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty whether occurring in public or private life. It could also be physical sexual and psychological violence occurring within the general community, including rape, sexual abuse, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women and forced prostitution.

Violence against women in the society is rampant, and Aykoroma captures this very well in Dance on his grave. This is in concordance with the position of McDonnell (2003) who believes that, although there are several ways that men as a team reinforces female subjugation in social circumstances, violence stands as the most conspicuous and functional means of control. Violence against women is displayed in Dance on his grave. In a meeting at the Toru-Ama Village Square the towns men gathered to discuss the stalemates in their various homes due to the decisions of their wives to ‘close their legs’ to their husbands, and their refusal to carry out any home chore. Addressing the men, King Olotu encouraged the men to beat up their wives.

OLOTU: Good! We have to tell these women that it is not how you drink water that you drink akpetesi. If they are possessed by evil spirits, we have to make them hear ground. This is what I am decreeing (p. 77).
King Olotu went ahead to incite the men against their wives thus:
OLOTU: We have to act as the husbands of our wives. If yours is stubborn in the house, what do you do? (p. 77).
1ST MAN: You beat sense into her head (p. 78).
OLOTU: Yes, You are correct (p. 78).
OLOTU: A man must be a man. Yes! And a man must have some pride….We are going to tell our wives that we are men. (ODIBO comes in with bundles of canes) Yes…they are canes. I am giving one to each one of you. This night, we are all going to sleep with our wives by the first cockcrow. If they refuse us entry, the canes will do their work. If we break their will, their unity will be broken. Do not stop until they plead for mercy. For those with many wives, by the time you finish with one, the most stubborn one, the others will pledge their unreserved loyalty. Odibo, give one to each person. (He does so. Some ask for fat ones, or more as the case may be). Now, go my people; go and fight this war in the families (p. 79).
Another salient point raised by Ayakoroma is that of sexual abuse and marital rape. The United Nations Commission Draft Declaration of 1992 emphasises that violence against women could be in form of physical sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family including sexual abuse of female children in the household, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence-related exploitation. The incident of marital rape is captured in *Dance on his grave* when King Olotu tells the men,

**OLOTU:** …This night, we are all going to sleep with our wives by the first cockcrow. If they refuse us entry, the canes will do their work (p.79).

This instruction to the men to have sex with their wives by force (marital rape?) was eventually carried out because at the end of the day the men boasted about their escapades with their wives as expressed by the 3RD MAN in a discussion with the 1ST MAN.

**3RD MAN:** Which side? We have won. In nine full moons` time, we shall have the greatest number of births in this land. They shall be the prizes of the wars in the families (p.81).

When a man forcefully has sex with his wife without her consent, is it rape? In a place like India husbands can rape their wives, with no consequences. In 2015 the United Nations recommended that India should criminalise marital rape, but the government responded by arguing that such a law was incompatible with the understanding of marriage in the country. According to Thomson (2017), at a time the Indian government explained in a press release that, “The concept of marital rape, as understood internationally, cannot be suitably applied in the Indian context due to various factors, such as levels of education/illiteracy, poverty, myriad social customs and values, religious beliefs and mindset of the society to treat the marriage as a sacrament” (p. 3).

However, in Nigeria, according to McDonnell (2003), the law exonerates a man from rape accusation as long as he is married to the woman, he is immune from a charge of rape on her either under statutory marriages or customary marriages. The assumption is that a wife has submitted herself for sexual relations with her husband through the exchange of their marriage vows, and such consent can only be removed or aborted by a separation agreement or divorce. Even when the couple has a quarrel and the husband and wife are living separately, the husband still retains his right to consortium (union of marriage and its privileges). McDonnell (2003, p.45) concludes that “So, a man who has sexual relations with his wife against her will in these circumstances will not be guilty of rape. He is also excused from rape conviction, even if he exercised his conjugal right by reasonable force.” Is this not discrimination and cheating of the woman?

Yarhere and Soola (2007) assert that women have become symbolic battlegrounds where cultural boundaries abound and wars are fought but are yet to be included in the building of peace. For instance, Nigeria is a patriarchal society that places the man above the woman; the woman is more or less an extension of the man. She is overshadowed by the male folk right from childhood through maturity and when she gets married. Mass Mobilisation for Economic Recove
ry, Self-Reliance and Social Justice’s (MAMSER, 1989, p. 12) report has it that “Most Nigerian men see women as inferior to them, and only useful for producing children and attending to the needs of the men.” Owons-Ibie (2000) corroborates this report when he said, “In Nigeria, most women are of inferior status, they marry early, bear many children, have poor nutritional status, low literacy levels, well-being and health of their children, no matter the ages of such women” (p. 17). Some men see women as “never-do-wells”, and therefore demeaned them. For instance King Olotu refered to the meeting the women held as the “gathering of hens” (Ayakoroma, 2010, p. 36).

OLOTU: And what are they talking at that gathering of hens? (p. 36).
ODIBO: I don’t know, Your Highness. All the women of the house are there (p. 36).
OLOTU: What? What are they going to say there? Women! Well, the world is changing. Women want to put on thinking caps too, eh? Well, they would grow bald-headed too (p. 36)
ODIBO: How, my lord? (p. 36).
OLOTU: Oh yes. They want to act like men (p. 36)

Women have always been looked down upon and considered as pariahs by some men and a section of society. The derogation of women is so appalling that a Saudi cleric, Saad al-Hijri, said women should not be allowed to drive because they have a “quarter” of the brainpower of men. Hijri said women who normally are “half-brained”, compared to men, “end up with only a quarter” when they go shopping and therefore must be denied driving licences (punchng.com, 2017c). Being aware of the several inequalities women suffer, Amatokwu (2012, p. 370) declares his grief not only at the inequalities that displace women from filial access but at a number of the inequalities which were ill conceived from ignorance or from outright disrespect for humanity or females in a social world that is most favourable to paternity as being synonymous with family leadership.

The woman is cheated and deprived of most of her rights. Yarhere and Soola (2007) capture the pitiable state of the woman graphically when they quote Bauer who says:

the male is the head of the family. No woman can rule him. Women are placed on earth to amuse and comfort the male. She was meant to behave like silent girls who help the magicians do the trick on the stage. She must be kept in her place. When there is no propaganda that tells her to revolt, she can be very useful and pleasant (p. 236).

Ayakoroma likewise identified the clamour by the women for leadership positions because they feel they have what it takes to lead; but the men are not freely giving the women assess to power, and may not be ready to do so soon. In a meeting with his Chiefs, King Olotu wondered why the women want representation in the Council.
OLOTU: My people, I am surprised to hear all you have been telling me. This action of the women has been like rain. It has befallen all houses. However, what I have gathered from the clucking of my mother hen is that they want representation in the council of state (p. 58).

APODI: This is unheard of! Women wanting to put on thinking cap?

OSIMA: It is rubbish! They think taking care of the state affairs of this land is the same as haggling in the Zarama market? (p. 58).

Positive Impact of Women

Contrary to the view of some men that women lack the ability to lead or handle State affairs, women have always been in leadership positions. In Nigerian, for instance, women have been holding high-level political offices at the Federal, States, and the Local government levels; such women include Nigeria’s former Coordinating Minister for the Economy and the Honourable Minister of Finance, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala; Obiageli Ezekwesili, former Minister of State for Education; Late Dr. Dora Akunyili, former Director-General of National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC), and former Minister of Health; Senator Stella Omu, who represented Delta South Senatorial District between 1999 and 2003. Recently too, award winning Nigerian author, Chimamanda Adichie, was named among the 50 greatest world leaders in the 2017 Fortune magazine ranking. The list is made up of 50 great men and women who are said to be transforming the world and inspiring others to do the same in business, government, philanthropy and the arts (Ikeke, 2017).

In some African countries, at one time or the other, women have been female Presidents or Prime ministers; these countries are: Liberia (President Ellen Sirleaf Johnson), Central African Republic (Catherine Samba-Panza), Gabon (Rose Francine Rogombé), Mauritius (Agnès Monique Ohsan Bellepeau), South Africa (Ivy Matsepe-Casaburri), Malawi (Joyce Hilda Banda), and Burundi (Sylvie Kinigi). Women can actually be better leaders because they have attributes that their male counterparts do not commonly display; they love peace, engage in dialogue, take risks, and lead at the pleasure of the people who voted for them. Women are naturally good managers; in a place like Africa, women till the ground, grow their crops, nurture them, harvest them, sell some and cook some to feed the family. They are born survivors who relate with social issues.

From Asia and Africa to Europe and the Americas, women remain important forces of change as government leaders in the modern era. Indira Gandhi, was one of the earliest- and the only woman in India- to hold that position, from 1966 to 1977 and from 1980 until her assassination in 1984. Golda Meir was Prime Minister of Israel from 1969 to 1974. Benazir Bhutto, became the 11th Prime Minister of Pakistan in 1988, the first woman to head a Muslim-majority nation. Margaret Thatcher was Prime Minister of Britain from 1979 to 1990. Gro Harlem Brundtland served three terms as Prime Minister of Norway: in 1981; 1986 to 1989; and 1990 to 1996. Mary Robinson was the seventh and first female President of Ireland from 1990 to 1997. Helen Clark was Prime Minister of New Zealand for three successive terms from 1999 to 2008. In South America, Michelle Bachelet was elected President of Chile in 2006 and re-elected in 2014, with a break between terms to serve as the United Nations’ first executive director of
UN Women. Angela Merkel became the first female Chancellor of Germany in 2005. In addition, a cluster of women now leads nations in the Baltic region of Europe (Myers, 2017). Also, on September 14, 2017 Halimah Yacob, was inaugurated as Singapore`s first female President. However, the problem with the society is expressly declared by Nwosu (2004, p. 2) who says that “No matter how gifted a woman is, no matter her ingenuity and political exploits, she can only be recognised in the society as a good and caring mother”. Nwosu (2004) says “any other ambitious image a woman portrays outside this stereotype model earns her derogatory names like iron lady, or even the Biblical notorious name-Jezebel.” This assertion is corroborated by Isah (2005) who opines that this would not enable the women folk to play crucial and sustainable roles in societal development through active and direct participation in policy making strategy implementation.

Expressing his view on the issue of women liberation, Uchendu (1993, p 64) notes that men do not have the ability to claim exclusive rights to shape the future of our world, but rather, “it is time for men to accept challenge and share with women in decision making process.” He adds that men need to acknowledge that the denial of women`s right and opportunities is at “the root of our developmental problems and social economic ills….The most underdeveloped of all human resources are women”.

It is the belief in the ability of women to lead well, if not even lead better than the men-folk, that made them to want to wrestle power from the men “by fire by force” hence their various anti-discrimination acts against the men`s actions which culminated in Alaere even contesting for the King`s throne. In an altercation between King Olotu and his Queen, Alaere, the following dialogue took place,

**OLOTU**: …You came into my palace and never had the reverence to recognise my presence….
**ALAERE**: Nothing stops you from greeting me first, as my husband!
**OLOTU**: What! (Gets up in annoyance. Goes to her) Are you trying to turn this world upside down? Woman?
**ALAERE**: Why should I? If you must know, we only want our rightful place in the affairs of the land.
**OLOTU**: And where is that supposed to be?
**ALAERE**: (Going to sit on the throne) By your side! We want to have a voice! We want adequate representation….
**OLOTU**: (Pushing her away from the throne) Now woman, stop making fun of State affairs.
**ALAERE**: What gives you the impression that you are ruling this land better than what I can do? (pp. 38-39).

Alaere`s actions are in line with the admonishment to women by one of the richest women in Africa, Folorunso Alakija, who is reported by Ekwujuru (2017, p. 1) to have told women that, “As women, we have to take the bull by the horn and make the change happen by ourselves. As women, you need to go out there and fight for what you need to get and get where you want to be.”
The agitation of women has always been to be given their rightful place in the society; they want their voice to be heard. World acclaimed and multiple award winning writer, Chimamanda Adichie, has said that she wants women to be treated the same way as men (punchng.com, 2017d). Women need to exert themselves and disregard the “weaker sex” tag on them; for women who carry children in their womb for nine months can never be said to be weak in any manner. In fact, a recent study shows that women have greater muscle endurance than their male counterparts. The study, which was published in the *Applied Physiology, Nutrition, and Metabolism* journal, found out that women are considerably less exhausted after natural, dynamic muscle exercises than men of similar age and athletic ability (vanguardngr.com, 2017).

As a proof of women’s energy, a woman, Patrizia Panico, has become the first woman to coach a male football outfit in Italy where she takes the helm of the national under-16 team. Patrizia Panico is rated the best female footballer from Italy. Women are tantamount with success because they possess competence and burning ambition to make a difference wherever they find themselves, they have proved themselves all over the world as change agents. It is advisable that women’s demands should be negotiated and given to them peacefully if catastrophe is to be avoided, because, as King Olotu suggested, women can go to any length to get what they want:

**OLOTU:** What I have experienced since yesterday in this house shows that a woman can go to any extent to get what she wants (p.61)

The women had earlier threatened to use their power to bring the men under their control.

**OLOTU:** I realise that one of us must go under in this struggle.

**ALAERE:** Which?

**OLOTU:** The weaker, of course.

**ALAERE:** And the stronger will be in the right?

**OLOTU:** Naturally, since he has the power.

**ALAERE:** Then I am right.

**OLOTU:** Have you the power already?

**ALAERE:** Naturally! The power of a woman, and I shall use it to bring you under restraint.

**OLOTU:** You? You!

**ALAERE:** Yes! You wait. We shall see (pp. 53-54).

At the end of the day Alaere was able to put King Olotu “under restraint” as she promised to do. Is this the manifestation of “he who makes peaceful change impossible makes violent change inevitable?” The king died; it is a warning that women are ready to fight, if necessary “roughly”, to get the equality they are agitating for if they are not given peacefully.

Women will always react disrespectfully, and sometimes violently if they are oppressed, not minding the repercussion of their actions. This brings to mind the story of the 1929 Women's War (also known as "Aba Women's Riots") which took place in Aba. Igbo market women protested against British taxation. Based on their role as mothers and family suppliers, women collectively defended their new sphere of authority. We also remember the revolt led by Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, mother of music maestro, Fela Anikulopo Kuti, who fought against the Alake of Egbaland in present day Ogun State between 1946 and 1949. Oyibode (2017),
reports that the women were displeased with various actions of the Alake, some of which were the introduction of taxation on women’s produce and non-representation in the sole native authority. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti then led a massive protest against the Alake which spanned a period of almost four years culminating in the self-exile of the monarch.

A bold step in the direction to reduce the discrimination against women has already been taken by a traditional ruler who has given traditional roles to women in his domain in this modern time. The actions of His Royal Highness, Igwe Chimereze Linus-Pius of Okpogho Kingdom in Ezeagu Local Government Area of Enugu State, must be lauded, because, with an executive fiat, he made women part of his cabinet and allotted some prominent roles to them. Times have, indeed, changed. According to him, before now, women in his kingdom had no say in the community affairs, but having come in contact with the “Voices of Change”, a gender equality advocacy being promoted by the United Kingdom-based Department for International Development (DFID), he decided to dance to their tune. Women, he says, can now speak for themselves. Obi (2017) quotes His Royal Highness, Igwe Chimereze Linus-Pius as saying, “I have brought them into the cabinet and made the men to believe in what they can offer; and presently, they are championing development programmes in my community.”

Conclusion

No doubt, the potentials of a book to successfully pass across information has been exemplified by Dance on His Gave because it has effectively conveyed sensitive gender issues. Discrimination against women may be long, but it will end someday, it is advocated it ends with dialogue with the women, and doing the needful, which is allowing equality to reign between men and women. If conscious steps are not taken the end may not be palatable, and it may be disastrous as it happened to King Olotu. The rise in the level of education women have acquired, and the increase of their involvement in the workforce of nations has given them the opportunity to actively participate in the political and economic activities of their communities. Women should not be underestimated; when pushed to the wall, they will always fight back in one way or the other, either by withdrawal from cooking, from sex; disrespect to their husbands, or even the use of blackmail as used by Alaere to make her husband, the King, to take his own life.

Due to their psychological makeup they may have the tendency to talk “anyhow” sometimes, and may not know when to stop, which sometimes result into beating by their provoked husbands (King Olotu attempted beating Alaere when she insulted him), but this is not an excuse to beat them. Women as an autonomous functional group, are endowed with a lot of potentials that can contribute to the development of the society if they are not discriminated against. On their part, the women must develop themselves in all aspects of life; they must learn and acquire competences, total behaviour, and relevant skills so that they can adequately handle any assignment thrown on their shoulders, no matter how highly structured or complex such assignments may be.
Recommendations

i. Women should be protected from all forms of gender-based violence, and there should be intensified campaign against all forms of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV).

ii. Deliberate steps should be taken to check inequality, and urgent and concrete measures to secure gender equality and protect women’s rights must be put in place.

iii. Advocacy for equality should be intensified, and advocate groups must continually propagate the relevance of women to society locally and internationally.

iv. More books that highlight the ills against women in the society should be written.

v. Women must discover themselves and imbibe the culture of self-confidence, and be ready to display their amazing stamina for service.

vi. Women must come out of their cocoon and assume their rightful place and recover what they have lost so far.

vii. Books about gender should also be written in form of novels, novellas, poems, short stories and forms.

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