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A Socio-Cultural Study of Negative Portrayals of Masculinity in the Yorùbá Oral Literature: Yorùbá Proverbs as a Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The negative portrayal of masculinity has been thoroughly attempted in this paper. The Yoruba proverbs were selected for analysis because it cuts across the length and breadth of the Yorubaland. The genre is rendered by both men and women in the society. It is established in this paper that men are not left out of various social misconducts which are capable of disorganizing the love, peace and unity that are expected of normal socio-cultural setting, not only in the Yorubaland but also in the world at large. Therefore, this paper concludes that men are liable to social ills in the society like their female counterparts.

Keywords: Disorganizing, Masculinity, Negative portrayals, Proverbs, Yorubaland.

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1.0 Introduction

The focus of this paper is the negative portrayals of masculinity in the Yorùbá proverbs. The Yorùbá oral genre was selected for analysis because it cuts across the length and breadth of the Yorubaland. The selection of this is about how the popular genre will help us to critically view how the Yorùba perceive men in the society. Albeit, there are other genres often used within the society, but I think perhaps, proverbs will be most appropriate due to the reasons given above. Therefore, this work attempts to show that men are not left out in the social misbehaviours in the society. Such misbehaviour includes: wickedness, shamelessness, cowardness, laziness, adultery, irrationality, aggression, irresponsibility, stupidity, pride, stinginess, partiality, stealing, fumbling among others. Research shows that the previous works were mainly on women. It is of recent that attention has been shifted to men. So, Ogunwale (1998: 103-112) says:

Yoruba proverbs are believed to be misogynous; that is anti-female so emphatic and adent to the belief that it leads to the utter neglect of the analysis of the anti-female nature of the proverbs.

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It worths to note that the above work discusses the negative portrayal of women in Yoruba proverbs. Anandhi and Jeyaranjan (2002: 22-26) also write:

In my youth, my wife used to be scared of me. I will give her a severe beating. My father used to beat all of his daughter-in-laws heavily. We never interfere because he will beat us if we did. Then, we also will beat up our wives. My wife still fears me. I do shout at her and at times I beat her up. But, I don't quarrel with anyone outside.

The above writer also pointed out the negative behaviours of men in the society. Another writer is Susan Weinger et al (2006: 16-26) who says:

Attention is drawn away from men's wrong doings towards women by depicting women as conniving evil doers who sometimes choose men as pawns to implement their plots. The women are deserving punishment while men go free from any penalty.

The above writer also discusses negative aspects of men's behaviours. Ajibade (2006: 375-376) in his work entitled "Yorùbá Men, Yorùbá Women", explains that from time immemorial, our forefathers have noticed some things about child-birth. If the delivery of the child is quick, they say, it is a baby boy. But if otherwise, they say, it is a baby girl. What the writer is trying to say is that Yorùbá society gives men better treatment over and above the women counterparts. The writer's opinion is very true of the Yorùbá society.

Another author is Olofinsao (2011) who examines "The representation of Men in Alámò Chant and obitun Song", genres of the Yorùbá oral literature. In this work, the author concludes that men are also involved in the social ills in the Yorùbá society. Therefore, in this paper, an attempt is made to analyse the negative portrayal of masculinity in the Yorùbá proverbs which are both usually rendered by both men and women in the society.

Another writer is Javier Pineda (2000) who says:

Most of the man interviewed in the district had lost their jobs in the female sector. They had to face not only the vulnerability of the family given the lack of unemployment benefit, but also their identity problem of not fulfilling their family as a provider.

Williams (2006: 71-72) in his work entitled "Founding Fathers" says South Africa men in impoverished areas had refused to participate in community development while their women counterparts for the last decades were actively involved in the community development. He further says that South Africa men were deeply involved in social vices which were hereditary. Also Gilbert (2000: 376-381) discusses the issue of "Boys Becoming men" in Uganda. In his work, he explains the type of training they give to their boys to ensure their success in life. They believe that a successful man should be able to provide for the needs of his family. He goes further to say that a man gets his freedom as from the age of 12. And, at this time he can contribute meaningfully to the development of the community at the expense of their female counterparts.

2.0 Analysis

The social ills usually committed by men in Yorùbá society will be discussed one after the other:

2.01 Wickedness

There is a proverb which indicates that men are wicked to either their female or male counterparts. The proverb goes thus:

"Bí a bá mọ ọjọ ǎǎ kú ni, ọkúnrin mǐràn ì bá yàgbẹ sǐbàdì àwọn ìyàwó rẹ, kí eni tí yòò.súpó ba à je òòrùn yó"

(If one knows the days of one's death, a man would have excreted to his wives' bottoms for anyone who wishes to inherit his wives be fed up with odour).

The above proverb depicts that some men prefer to destroy valuable materials in order that other people may not benefit as a result of their chronic minds. This type of behaviour is usually uncalled for in the Yoruba social and cultural settings.

2.02 Shamelessness

One of the most irritating behaviour in the Yorùbá society is shamelessness which usually comes up by the sue of proverbs during any type of discourse in the Yorùbá society. Below is an example:

"Aláìlójútì ọ̀kùnrin tó relé àṅa rẹ̀ kú sí"

(A shameless man who dies in the residence of his in-law)

The above proverb shows that a shameless man can commit any social vices not minding its negative implication to his personality in the society, that is, a shameless man is more or less a useless person who cannot be accorded with honour in the society.

2.03 Cowardness

The Yoruba believe that hardly can a coward record a success in any adventure as it commonly occurs in the use of proverbs in the Yoruba society. For example:

"Àisí ènìyàn lóko ní mú ní í pe ajá ní àwé. Ọ̀wọ̀n ènìyàn ni obìnrin fí í pe ojo ọ̀kọ̀ lẹ̀kùnrin"

(For there is no one in the farm is the reason we address dog as human. So, the scarcity of human is why a woman calls a coward husband a man).

The above proverb indicates that women reluctantly regard/accept a coward man in the absence of a brave one. This shows that boldness is one of the qualities that women adore in a man in the society.

2.04 Laziness

Laziness is one of the social ills that the Yorùbá will not like to accommodate which is why the following proverb is encompassed in day-to-day conversation in the Yorùbá community. Below is the proverb:

"Ọ̀kùnrin ti kò nṣẹ̀ ní sìnkú àbíkú"

(A jobless man buries àbíkú (born to die))

The above proverb indicates that one should not be idle because a lazy man can be engaged in any unprofitable venture, that is, the Yorùbá society does not entertain any act of laziness because a lazy man is regarded irresponsible

2.05 Adultery

It is a common saying that an adulterer can never be responsible because an adulterer must be cunning, funny and a liar. The following proverb can be a test case. Thus:

"Pansàgà obìnrin lā́ rí, ọ̀kùnrin tó kunjú, tó kunṣẹ̀ tó fí apá silẹ̀ tó n'yan orí, kí ni ká ti pe irú wọ̀n?"

(We know of an adulterous woman, but a man who makes over his face, his legs, however, leaves out his arms to choose head, what should we call his name?)

The above proverb depicts that an adulterous woman can be pardonable but in the case of a man, it is highly forbidden to engage in such dangerous and misleading behaviour in the society.

2.06 Irrationality

Irrational behaviour usually comes up in Yorùbá proverbs to correct social ills in the society. For example:

“Àgbà tó je à je e wèyìn yòò rugbàa rẹ̀ dẹ̀lé”
(A stingy man will alone carry his baggage without help)

The above proverb indicates that an elderly man who engages himself in the act of stinginess will not be sympathized. In essence, it is only an act of generosity that is acceptable and recognized in the Yorùbá culture.

2.12 Partiality

It is a person who listens to both sides of a case that the Yorùbá regard as a honest and thorough man. Thus:

“A gbéjò enìkan dā, àgbà òsìkà”
(An elderly man who adjudges by only listening to a party of a quarrel is a callous one)

The aforementioned proverb implies that one must be thorough, sincere and honest with whatever one does at any given occasion, that is, the act of impartiality is highly recognized to enhance love, peace and unity in the society.

2.13 Stealing

One of the worst acts of moral decadence in the Yorùbáland is stealing. For example:

“Giripá olè tóbìnrin kò lè mú, Ọlórún Ọba nìkan ló le mú irúu wọ̀n”
(A very strong thief whom women cannot catch, it is only God who can catch him.)

The above proverb indicates that a thief cannot go unpunished, that is, how clever and/or strong a thief may be, he will surely be paid in his own coin aftermath. Therefore, stealing is a great act of social misconduct and any man who involves himself in this act will never be accorded with honour and place of responsibility in the society.

2.14 Fumbling

The act of fumbling is anti-social and misdirecting in the Yorùbá social and cultural settings. The following proverb proves this type of social ill beyond reasonable doubt. For example:

“Àgbà tó n fónu ká tí kò lówó lówó aja lásán ní n gbó”
“A poverty elder man who keeps bragging about is a barking dog”

The foregoing proverb shows that a fumbling man is unpredictable and morally undependable, that is, a fumbling man can cause confusion or total collapse of a community.

3.0 Conclusion

In this paper, the negative portrayal of masculinity has been thoroughly attempted. Hence, it is clearly shown that men are not left out of various social misconducts which are capable of disorganizing the love, peace and unity that are expected of normal socio-cultural setting, not only in the Yorùbáland but also in the world at large. Besides, this paper concludes that men are not exempted in contributing to social ills and vices in the Yorùbá society through the genre of Yorùbá oral literature.

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