


Education as a Tool for Women Empowerment in Zaynab Alkali and Abubakar Gimba's Selected Novels

Ngalari Mbutakto and John Tikikus

Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Jos, Nigeria.

Article Detail:	Abstract
<p>Received: 03 Apr 2023; Received in revised form: 22 Apr 2023; Accepted: 03 May 2023; Available online: 31 May 2023</p> <p>©2023 The Author(s). Published by International Journal of English Language, Education and Literature Studies (IJEEL). This is an open access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).</p>  <p>Keywords— Education, Empowerment, Northern Nigeria, Patriarchy, Islam, Woman.</p>	<p><i>The dominance of patriarchy as a cultural mainstay of the people and Islam as a religious philosophy and practice in northern Nigeria did not prioritise the education of the girl child until recently. The result of these is the diminished contribution of the woman to the welfare of northern Nigerian. This paper examines the plight of northern Nigerian woman and how education as a tool brings social development, empowers the woman to be an agent of change. The feminist critical approach to literature and Marxist literary theory are used as a tool for the textual assessment of Zaynab Alkali's <i>The Descendants</i> and Abubakar Gimba's <i>Sacred Apples</i> in this paper. Besides, many females do not have access to education in their community; this lack of access to educate the woman is the result of cultural, religious and economic factors. Furthermore, the paper reveals the importance of education to the woman, since no society progresses by the efforts of a segment of its population. The paper concludes that the emancipator power of education is a tool for social liberation, self-actualisation and development for the individual in particular and the society in general. It is the most important tool in addressing women problem in Nigeria, especially in the northern part.</i></p>

1. Introduction

The world over, education is the cornerstone of sustainable development; it is also a human right. Education was not a priority for the woman in Africa due to cultural and religious beliefs, but is groomed for domesticity. African creative writing has been dominated by men since the early 1950s; fictions depict female characters in only minor roles. The female character acts within the framework of traditional roles of wife and mother, and object of man's battering. As in the society, the texts deny girls education because of cultural views that women stay at home to learn home keeping and to minimise strain on the family's resources. The first generation

African male writers discussed themes of male interest and portrayed the women as timid, subdued and unthinking. Various studies indicate that literary field in most societies is male dominated.



The portrayal of women by male writers is challenged by the emergence of female writers in Nigeria like Flora Nwapa with *Efuru* in 1966. Nwapa's *Efuru* opened the gates for other female authors, who focus on the predicament of women as portrayed by male writers. These female writers write

about issues that concern women. These writers include Buchi Emecheta, Adaora Ulasi, Zulu Sofola, Ifeoma Okoye, Zaynab Alkali, Tess Onwueme, Helen Oubiageli, Razinat T. Mohammed, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sefi Atta among others; these have become part of the Nigerian literary circle. The northern part of Nigeria has few female writers. Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn* (1984) was a milestone in northern Nigerian women's writing in English. She portrayed women as crusaders that bring change and development. Razinat T. Mohammed is another female voice to emerge from Nigeria's north. She published *A Love Like a Woman's and Other Stories* in 2005. These female writers have a society deeply rooted in Islamic culture and education. There are however male writers who hold positive attitude towards the woman in their works. These male writers "cast African women in a good and noble image" (Nnolim 118). One of such writers to emerge from the Northern Nigeria is Abubakar Gimba.

Zaynab Alkali and Abubakar Gimba share the same religious background, this is evident in their works *The Descendants* (2005) and *Sacred Apples* (1994) respectively. Both show the resilience of the woman, who against all odds is able to make life out of her disadvantaged position. They are assertive, strong willed, tenacious, intelligent, and are able to use education to drive the process of development. This paper examines the importance of education to the woman as a potent tool for her emancipation and empowerment in the two texts. The northern Nigerian woman contends with enormous challenges that range from early/child marriage, which results in the prevalence of Vesico-Viginal Fistula (VVF) and street hawking among other forms of neglects.

The predominantly Hausa and Fulani Muslim women in northern Nigeria are victims of cultural and religious dictates. Many of these practices stem from the belief that women must be controlled into the role of wives and mothers. This situation leads to unfair treatment of women, faced with early/arranged marriages, teenage pregnancy, physical and psychological violence, polygamy, divorce and are denied the chance to receive education. These girls allow traditional system to be used against them and to limit their possibilities within the society.

Critical works abound that identify the problem of the woman in northern Nigeria, her plight and the things she goes through on a daily basis, works like Elsbeth Robson's *The 'Kitchen' as Women's Space in Rural Hausaland, Northern Nigeria*, and Novian

Whitsitt's *Islamic-Hausa Feminism and Kano Market Literature: Qur'anic Reinterpretation in The Novels of Balaraba Yakubu*. These works however did not delve into the ways in which the woman can be liberated, but merely stating the current calamitous scenario she finds herself in. This paper attempts to bridge the gap by identifying how the authors of the selected texts empower and liberate the protagonist in their fictive endeavours. The paper critically examines how Zaynab Alkali and Abubakar Gimba view Western education and its relationship to individual and societal development. It assesses the plight of women in cultural, economic and religious societies, to see how they individually deal with early marriage, teenage pregnancy, arranged marriages, polygamy, divorce and other forms of female subjugation. The paper also determines the importance of Western education and its role in the life of the woman in Northern Nigeria.

2. Theoretical Framework

The feminist literary criticism and the Marxist approach are adopted as tools for interpreting the selected texts in this paper. Both approaches are offshoots of the sociological theory. The choice of these theories is predicated on the fact that literary works are better understood from the perception of the society that creates them.

The justification for the adoption of the Marxist approach is that Marxism places works in context, thereby removing abstraction and making the work realistic. Marxist approach seeks to analyse the contradictions issuing from power and money within literature and is concerned with what the text hides. The Marxist approach interprets literary work as both a reflection and a product of economic conflict between the social classes. The theory explores ways in which the text reveals ideological oppression of a dominant economic class over subordinate classes. It examines literature in its cultural and economic contexts in which it is written or received. It often examines the artist's society to better comprehend the writer's creativity. Sometimes, it may examine the representation of such societal elements within literature itself. The choice of this approach is premised on the sociological issues that both Alkali and Gimba portray. The society and the fictional characters interpret each other. The novel therefore is a product of the society.

The feminist principle to interpret literature seeks to describe and analyse the ways in which literature reinforces the narratives of male domination. In the

most general and simple terms, feminist literary criticism is concerned with the politics of women's authorship and the representation of women's condition within literatures, this includes the depiction of fictional female characters. The theory seeks to develop and uncover a female tradition of writing, to interpret symbolism of women's writing so that it will not be lost or ignored by patriarchal point of view. Feminist literary criticism projects that women in literature are historically presented as objects seen from a male perspective. The feminist perspective becomes indispensable in analysing the works of the authors under investigation not only because the central thematic concerns foregrounded in the text bother on women's issues, but also that the protagonists are women.

Women in male literary works are often portrayed as docile, unassertive and lukewarm. The boys attend schools and eventually become workers, while girls are married off to stay at home, help on the farm and do house chores. Critical decisions in the home are taken by the "man of the house". Very often, the boy is prioritised above the girl; this is because of the parochial belief that the male carries the name of the family. If the girl is placed on the same pedestal with the boy, the family and the society will benefit. An educated woman brings more to the family and society than an uneducated one. Chukukere asserts that:

The ideal female created by male writers in fiction often acts within the framework of her traditional roles as wife and mother. So strong are social values that the respect and love which a woman earns is relative to the degree of her adaptation of these roles (7)

The work traces how African male writers reinforce this particular stereotype for the African woman. Early male writers depict the woman in different roles, however none is desirable. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) describes the woman in very ambiguous terms, portrayed as a character of convenience. She can be at the top, the bottom or anywhere in between. According to Achebe "a child belongs to his father, his father's people and his father's land, wives do the bidding of their husbands, and yet we say "Nneka" (Mother is supreme) (Achebe 94). The woman is at the same time supreme, as well as subordinate and subservient. This kind of ambiguity about the woman is easing away gradually as we will later see.

Reading Nurrudin Farah's works from a feminine point of view reveals that, he identifies with the sufferings of women. He depicts the woman as being culturally defined. In *From a Crooked Rib* (1970), Ebla is aware that there is no friendship between a husband and wife and knows from her experience that girls are materials, to be bought and sold. Farah indicates that patriarchy and its rigidity are connected with the stiff gender roles in Somali society. Farah is praised as one of the few male writers who are willing to criticise the patriarchal system. Critics find traces of both traditionalism and modernism in Farah's works and agree that he is one of African's leading feminist's writers. Sembene Ousmane's *God's Bits of Wood* is another literary work where the woman takes her rightful place because she is empowered. One sees three women emerge as leaders; Maimouna, Ramatoulaye, and Penda.

These male writers empathise with women in their novels. The evolution of the traditional African society into a complex modern one has seen the role of the African woman change dramatically. Her role as a wife, mother, sister, and worker places her on an entirely new platform. The depiction of the woman in literary recreation is, therefore, a reflection of what and who she is in the society.

African women writers are challenging patriarchy. In Nigeria, women's writing has opened up new opportunities and awareness for women. Women's contributory roles in the development of nations have been demonstrated by female writers like Flora Nwapa, who was the first published female writer in Nigeria. She opened a new chapter for African literature, by making women the central characters in her novels. In *Efuru*, *Idu* and *One is Enough*, the female protagonists have troubled marriages because of infertility. The protagonists in *Efuru* and *Idu* are glued to tradition and are illiterates. Amaka in *One is Enough* is an educated school teacher who walks away from her marriage because her husband cannot take her infertility, while he marries another woman to bear him children, she moves on with her life, illustrating where a woman is educated, she always have a choice. Charles Nnolin rightly observes:

As the pioneer female African writer...Flora Nwapa...definitely saw it as her duty to redeem and correct the disparaged and debased image of African women as depicted by sexist

male writers like Achebe and Ekwensi (Nnolin118).

In doing this, Nwapa presents to her readers the better view of African womanhood.

In Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1985), one finds a classic disempowerment of the female. Tambu wishes to attend the local school but is not allowed to do so. Tambu and her sisters are supposed to work on the homestead with their mother. The girls are to learn how to be good homemakers and care givers. It is a role that defines her and at the same time places her at home without the possibility of education and economic independence. To Tambu, education signifies emancipation from poverty and the restrictions of traditional female role. Tambu knows that her chance to escape poverty and support her family is education. The death of Tambu's brother, Nhamo, leads to a dramatic change in her life. She becomes the eldest in the family and her uncle Babamukuru decides that she receives education at the mission school and secures the family's future.

Ama Ata Aidoo, another African female writer, explores women's lives in the Ghanaian society. Her novel, *Changes* (1991), explores the lives of women in marriage, career, and the society. Aidoo creates believable female characters who reflect current gender issues faced by women. Esi, one of the female characters attains fulfillment beyond domestic role of mother and wife, with college degree and a career in the Department of Urban Stylistics. She is portrayed as a modern career woman, educated and financially independent. Christine N. Ohala observes that:

African women's writing has opened up a whole new world of opportunities and awareness for women and the society at large. More than ever before, women have become more conscious of the value of a good education and of the need to resist all forms of subjugation, denial and marginalization (3).

Mariama Ba's *So Long a letter* (1981) narrates the tale of Aissatou and Ramatoulaye who survive the break up and abandonment of their husbands, because they are educated and professionals. This missive between two friends exposes the effects of polygamy, the trouble a woman

goes through when her husband dies, and the insensitivity of African culture towards the plight of the woman. The book shows how the educated woman can be able to overcome obstacles and maintain a sound mind and healthy body.

Post-colonial African novels, unlike the works of pioneers, show a positive portrayal of women. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a contemporary Nigerian writer portrays female characters in new light. *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), juxtaposes the positions of the woman; the victim and the new (educated) woman. Beatrice in the novel personifies the stereotyped African women, subdued and victimized, without a voice. Adichie then introduces Ifeoma and Amaka as Beatrice's and Kambili's opposites. Where Beatrice is silent and suppressed, Ifeoma stands out as a modern woman; strong, independent and outspoken. Ifeoma is highly educated and lectures at the University of Nsukka and supporting her three children without the help of a man. She is a role model for her daughter Amaka and her niece Kambili.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), Adichie continues this positive portrayal of women where one meets Olanna and Kainene. These women are well educated. Adichie uses them to puncture the archaic preference of boys over girls. Adichie assigns women significant roles, making them successful, well-educated and intelligent. She elevates the Nigerian girl to be at par with the boy in the modern Nigeria society.

In *Americanah* (2013), Adichie goes global with her characterisation of the African woman. It is a celebration of a new brand of women, who are not only educated but independent and intelligent. Her main character Ifemelu and other female characters like Uju are portrayed as goal setters and goal getters. Adichie is bold to say that education and sexual freedom go together. She tacitly implies in this scatological work that, the truly liberated and independent woman is the one that determine her sexuality.

Generally, writings from northern Nigeria are starved of critical attention. Aderemi Raji-Oyelade states that:

In the context of modern Nigerian literary tradition, women's writing from the North is subject to double invisibility and double repression. It can be said without contradiction that the 'absence' of women in the nations conventional history is

equalled by the lack of interests in works produced by writers whether male or female, from the North. There is no gain saying the fact that if creative writing in Northern Nigeria, derived from and greatly influenced by Arabic literary tradition, is considered to be in a state of insignificance, and if women's literature in the country is generally under represented, works produced by women from the North are overtly and unceremoniously ignored and repressed by the conventional critical practice of earlier African male scholars. In the traditional history of our literature, the inclusion of efforts by pioneer writers from Northern Nigeria, both male and female, has been negligible (4).

Despite the above assertion, literary artists to come from northern Nigerian include: Labo Yari, Abubakar Gimba, Zaynab Alkali, Bilkisu Ahmed Funtuwa, Hauwa Ali, Razinat T. Muhammed, Ahmed Maiwada, Helon Habila, E.E. Sule, Abubakar Adam Ibrahim and many more.

Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn* is set in northern Nigeria. Li, the main character symbolises the need for change in women's life in the region, where education is lagging behind compared to other parts of the country. Li is adventurous and daring, almost from birth. She represents the spirit of the new African woman, who refuses to be pinned down and suppressed. She educates herself, pursued independence and achieves her dream and assumes the leadership of the family after the death of her father, a position that makes her "the man of the house". Alkali not only creates a character that survives in spite of the obstacles, but describes the means by which women can be changed; education, which gives economic independence. Armed with these, Li regenerates herself and is wise, determined and undefeated.

In *Cobwebs and Other Stories*, Alkali shows that education is the first step a woman should take to be empowered. Mama, the heroine returns to school after she had married and had children. Her father and her husband will not allow her go to school. It is her aunt Hildi, who persuades them to allow her to go, stating that: "For not only are we educating our fathers, but our mothers also. An educated woman is a great investment to her

children, her husband and her parents, but most of all to her country" (Alkali 20).

Alkali clearly suggests that the Muslim woman should be encouraged to attain University education. Alu observes that:

Alkali's fiction fits into the mainstream feminists writers; her fiction occupies a special position in the nation's literature being a pioneer feminist voice from the North... The education of the woman is necessary because of the strictures of the culture in her (community)...she deploys education as a multi-dimensional emancipating liberator to outlaw all inhibitive cultures and traditions in the North and the nation at large (Alu 14).

In Gimba's *Witnesses to Tears* (1986), Hussaina Lahab is a trained nurse. She graduates from Albert Memorial Nursing School, where she develops and shows traits of patience, compassion and highly principled. The issues of women rights and the presentation of their plights as modern women, who work, take care of the homes and children are developed in *Witnesses to Tears*.

In *Footprints* (1998), there is a gender consciousness by Gimba. The reader is introduced to a middle class family that lives modestly. Gimba however, draws the attention of the reader to the growth of Farah. Farah's birth turns to be God's blessing to the family. She is educated and makes her father proud by taking teaching as a career. Gimba is concerned with female political empowerment, the right to rule and be ruled, and the various roles of institutions such as the family. Jameelah and Farah in *Footprints* are portraits of the educated and empowered northern Nigerian woman.

Sacred Apples remarkably has a female protagonist who Gimba uses to discuss contemporary realities of the woman in Nigeria, especially the modern, working, and often single mother and a Muslim. *Sacred Apples* is a northern Nigerian story. Gimba used his religious knowledge to portray the educated contemporary Muslim woman in changing times that have affected the societal definition of gender roles. Zahrah is Gimba's archetype of the ideal woman: educated, enlightened and hardworking. Abubakar Gimba has been labeled a feminist because of such presentations.

All the reviewed works indicate a general agreement that the woman is grossly marginalised in a society she helps to build. The writers also agree that the generality of women are disadvantaged when it comes to the acquisition of education. Stereotypes in skill acquisition persist in the society. Though recent works indicate a shift in how the woman is portrayed. This work observes that a lacuna exists, especially as it affects the northern part of Nigeria. The review shows a general consensus that education is key to empowerment. However, this work pays specific attention to the problem as it affects northern Nigeria, where Islam has a stronghold. The timing of this paper to coincide with the threat that western education is receiving from Islamic extremists makes it all the more important.

3. Education and the Empowerment of the Woman in The Descendants and Sacred Apples

Islam plays crucial role in shaping the life of Muslims. Education is all encompassing; it has philosophical, moral and vocational relevance. Largely due to lack of sufficient knowledge of Islam, many parents think that formal learning is not meant for girls. Islam advocates women's right, especially rights to inheritance. All Muslims are to acquire knowledge; there is no distinction between genders in act of worship or reward. Allah says, "So their Lord accepted of them, never will I allow the work of any of you to be lost, be you male or female, you are one of another" (Quran 3:195). The girl needs to develop intellectually in order to broaden her horizon and make her a better Muslim. Education for the girl alleviates poverty, a recurrent decimal in northern Nigeria. She will not be dependent on either her family or husband.

Alkali's work is symbolically set in Borno State, the northern part of Nigeria to first receive Islam. In *The Descendants*, we see Magira Milli make a case for education, that:

She realized belatedly that her late husband ... and herself, had made a mistake ... He had not allowed his sons to go to school and so, they had perished in that land of ignorance and superstitions, a land of poverty and disease. Only Aji, who... pursue... education, had escaped. She was ready to make amends by seeing that her grandchildren did not walk the same path of their fathers... They unlike her sons, would have options,

and only education can offer them these options (Alkali 14 – 15).

Without education, girls are denied the opportunity to develop their potentials. However, when they are educated, they are as useful as any man. Alkali uses Magira Milli as the authorial voice, to canvass for the education of women. She enumerates the benefit girls receive through education; self-worth and economic freedom. She particularly wishes that Seytu does not only read and learn but becomes a doctor. This will not only elevate the status of Seytu, but will put her on equal footing to compete with other doctors; male or female. She ties education to greatness. To be empowered means to move from a state of powerlessness to a position of power. Education empowers the woman with knowledge, skills and self-confidence necessary to fully participate in the all processes of the community.

Magira Milli, the matriarch of the Ramta family is aware of the importance of giving the granddaughters unfettered access to education in order to develop. The lack of education for the girl or woman denies her knowledge/skills needed to be able to advance in life, like Peni, who leaves school to marry the village butcher, Madu Chima. She regretted later, after two divorces and five children. Magira Milli believes that education is the cure for ignorance and superstition. "She knew education is the master key to opportunities for a better life. Education opens doors and gives an individual option in life. She may have missed those options, but she wanted those options for her grandchildren..." (Alkali 13) Years later, Seytu the granddaughter of Magira Milli graduates as the best student in pediatrics from a medical school. Alkali believes the woman needs education to be accepted and respected.

In *Sacred Apples*, Gimba adopts the use of Quaranic illustrations to base his evidence on the dictates of Islam regarding marriage and education when he argues for the primacy of education in Islam, he quotes that

The first word revealed in our book of guidance is 'read' and not 'marry'. Marriage is therefore secondary to education... the exaltation to 'read' is for mankind to seek for knowledge. Not just religious knowledge but all types of knowledge. Boundless knowledge... (55)

Gimba is firmly against illiteracy and ignorance. It shows in the novel, he utilises events and characters to portray this. He depicts Zahrah, the

protagonist as a knowledgeable, wise, caring wife and mother. She is bold and steadfast, who adheres to her principles and beliefs. She stands as Gimba's modern Muslim woman. Zahrah is presented as the 21st century northern Nigerian Muslim woman who faces many challenges in order to be self-reliant and actualise her dreams. After the divorce with Yazid, she finds something to do, and fends for herself and the children. She confides in Miriam, "I must find a job... not another hubby" (Gimba 75). Zahrah pursues her dreams and did something with her life. This is Gimba's portrayal of an educated woman. Another female portrayal in *Sacred Apples* is Miriam Rashad, a successful modern woman, educated, a working house wife. Gimba portrays her as the custodian of human values and the conscience of the society.

If the woman is left ignorant and backward, the society will reflect this, but if she is educated and advanced, so will her society become. Zahrah says "She would make sure that her daughter got a good education... she would want her to become a professional woman, with a career (Gimba 271). When the girl-child is empowered through education, she will improve, supervise and correct societal foibles. The empowerment will help the woman to participate in every aspect of state without prejudice. Through Zahrah, Gimba eruditely shows his belief in what the society can achieve by allowing the girl-child access education. This becomes her access to personal power and actualises personal dreams. He goes further to elucidate through the characters of Zahrah and Miriam that a woman with education is a plus to her husband, the family, the society and especially to herself. An educated woman will never be stranded or be without options.

Zaynab Alkali and Abubakar Gimba's texts attempt to re-focus attention rather than continue to mourn women's subjection in society, to actually depicting them as striving actively, to overcome such subjection and oppression. It is evident that both writers utilise social realism in their works; sociological reflections of the change in gender roles in the society is echoed throughout the books. *The Descendants* and *Sacred Apples* are directly influenced and impacted by Islam, the dominant religion in the texts. The texts clarify thorny issues affecting the woman; it would appear the region suffers more feminist problems than other regions of Nigeria, these issues include the cultural and religious acceptance of polygamy, early marriage, girl-child education and purdah. Alkali and Gimba

depict women's emancipation through education, particularly western education.

The female characters are employed by the two authors to bring about the emergence of the new northern Nigerian woman. She is portrayed as being in control of her situation and destiny. They maximise opportunities previously denied for self-fulfillment. Zaynab Alkali portrays women as vibrant crusaders, who re-jig social developments. Gimba treaded the same preoccupation by contrasting his protagonist, Zahrah, and Mr. Midioka, her foil character, a symbolic persona representing being average. Seytu in *The Descendants* and Zahrah in *Sacred Apples*, as the main voice of the woman are endowed with strength, they are hardworking and are conscious of their world through education. Through them, one sees the woman assuming a new role and doing so effectively. They present female characters that are self-aware, a consciousness that comes with a search for true identity, an identity that is independent of that of the man, marriage or family. Alkali's Seytu and Gimba's Zahrah share many similarities, both characters experience marriage twice; suffer miscarriages in their second marriage and in both cases the marriages do not end in the metaphorical "happily ever after: The defining moments in their lives is when they stand on equal footing with their male counterparts.

Education for the woman is presented as a tool for liberation from "choicelessness" a tool for personal freedom from ignorance and superstitious primitivism. The professional woman in the novels, like Alkali's Seytu and Gimba's Zahrah and Miriam used professional achievements to pursue feminist, community and nationalist goals. It depicts the versatility of the woman. Gimba and Alkali have shown that marriage, children and self-development are not mutually exclusive. It is important to observe the emergence of a new generation of enlightened women in both works.

4. Conclusion

Zaynab Alkali and Abubakar Gimba are dominant literary voices from Northern Nigeria, these writers reflect the challenges that women face. Alkali and Gimba present strong, assertive, and educated female characters, who make choices that affect their lives. They show the woman overcoming religious, cultural and economic obstacles that militate against her and subsequently playing significant role in the development of the society. The two texts studied emphasise and highlight the ability

women possess to face challenges thrown at them. The authors show how in overcoming such challenges, the woman makes the society a better place.

These fictions chronicle the tremendous and steady metamorphosis of the woman in the society, a corresponding reality of what she is in the contemporary northern community. The contribution of the woman in the society is identified and brought to the fore. She brings change. Her natural capacities like: the maternal instincts, the nurturing traits that make her selfless, her capacity for resilience in the face of opposition, her keen perception of needs, strength of will, resolution, love, compassion and kindness. All these make her a force that keeps the society on the right track, especially where it is coupled with education. It is shown to be the essential means with which the girl-child is empowered with skills, knowledge and self-confidence necessary to actively and fully drive development.

The fictive narratives show the woman determining her destiny. She is breaking the negative control of religion, culture and tradition that are tailor-made to subjugate her. The authors tacitly call for a new paradigm shift, a synergy between men and women, where a better world, with equity, fairness and justice is created. The novels uncover the fallacy of religious and cultural practices which kept women perpetually down for a long time. They call for a harmonious co-existence between the sexes through the provision of education, which creates a level playing ground for genders.

The novels reflect the importance of education for the girl-child in northern Nigeria. They bring awareness that women can contribute meaningfully to the needed development in the nation if empowered with education. They equipped the female characters with sound education to speak out loud, to be heard on economic and socio-political issues. This study finds that the education of the girl-child in northern Nigeria has not been fully mainstreamed, but appreciable progress is ongoing. The girl needs educational encouragement to enable her succeed in all facets of life. The study observes that education is the most important tool in the empowerment of the girl-child in Nigeria, especially in the Northern region.

Alkali and Gimba have created a new image of female characters unlike older depictions, who are no longer dependent or weak. They create images of educationally empowered, independent, and strong

women. These female characters show total disregard for the patriarchal and religious systems and attain positive achievements. The study also presented a viable means to reverse the ugly trend of the North perpetually being regarded as educationally “disadvantaged” region. It shows that educating the woman is educating the nation, as women strive to educate themselves, they thereafter ensure that those under their influence also acquire education and contribute to the society.

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