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RESEARCH ARTICLE

IDEOLOGICAL AMBIGUITIES AND CONFLICT OF IDEOLOGY IN REPRESENTATIONS OF WOMEN IN SELECTED AFRICAN FEMALE AND MALE NOVELS.

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Abstract

The political ideology of women's movements like feminism, womanism, Stiwanism, African feminism and others is to redress the power imbalances between men and women through advocacy of women's rights. But the fact that some women ill-treat their fellow women and even girl children creates ideological ambiguities and conflict of ideology in the political ideology they advocate for. This article focuses on ideology of womanism and radical feminism so as to unfold some causes of ideological ambiguities and conflict of ideology in the representations of women in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and Asare Adei's *A Beautiful Daughter*. The result reveals that social injustice, pride, egoism, revenge and malice make women go against the brainchild of their ideology. The above problems make women enter into conflict with one another and even abuse children. In a nutshell, it is discovered that ideological ambiguities and conflict of ideology have made women expose themselves and their fellow women to men's violence and status quo.

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Introduction:-

Every human society is guided by a set of ideas or beliefs called ideology. It reflects in the mode of functioning of a population or a group of people from one lifespan to another. If the ideology used by a society seems to favour a group of people at the expense of others, it can be countered by another ideology or a set of ideologies because we live in a liberal and democratic world. The advent of women's movements like feminism, womanism, stiwanism, African feminism and others is to expose patriarchal injustice against women in the world, especially in Africa. The above has made the women's movements come up with political ideology that address power inequality between men and women through the advocacy of women's rights. But the fact that some women ill-treat their fellow women and even girl children creates ideological ambiguities and conflict of ideology in the political ideology they advocate for. This article focuses on ideology of womanism and radical feminism so as to unfold some causes of ideological ambiguities and conflict of ideology in the representations of women in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and Asare Adei's *A Beautiful Daughter*.

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Materials and Methods:-

We have used a qualitative method to conduct this research. Our approach is on ideology with the main emphasis on womanism and radical feminism.

Theoretical Framework:-

An ideology, according to Collins Harper's *BBC English Dictionary* "[...] is a set of beliefs, especially the political beliefs on which people, parties, countries base their actions" (1992, p. 574). It denotes "the matrix of beliefs we use to comprehend the world and to the value systems through and by which we interact in society" (Simpson, 1993, p. 78).

In other words, it refers to "the system of beliefs, values, and categories by reference to which a person or a society comprehends the world" (Fowler, 1986, p. 130). Womanism or radical feminism is based on ideologies /concepts which seemly aim to protect the right of women and empower them so that they can feel human as their men counterparts. Orjinta confirms "[...] feminism and womanism are the reactions of women to patriarchal injustice, subjugation, oppression and repression" (2013, 74). Likewise, he further stipulates that

A common characteristic of womanism and feminism is their goal and opinion: the defense and representation of women in society and literature ... The two ideologies are identical in terms of the struggle for economic, social, legal and political equality of the female and male sex.

It is important to clarify that the above definition focuses on the similarity between womanism and feminism. There are differences in both of them. The differences lie in the way womanists go about women's issue and those of men, children and environment. They believe in dialogue and mediation. But the feminists, especially the radical feminist focus on women alone. They do not believe in dialogue. They believe in making justice themselves through violence. That radical position of feminists, particularly radical feminists, makes them disagree with the womanists. Orjinta (2013, pp. 86-7) further argues that "They [Feminists] accuse the womanists of weakness and betrayal: they encouraged the patriarchy and positioned themselves on the side of the men, they are brokers of an old-fashioned, conservative and archaic image of women."

The position of womanists in considering the men and even children has made them broader or larger than feminism, especially radical feminism. Even though womanism is larger than radical feminism by going beyond women's issues, it commonly shares and celebrates women with radical feminism. It is surprising to notice that some women abuse their fellows and even children, especially the female children in their course for advocacy for their rights or empowerment. There comes in the ideological ambiguities and conflict of ideology among women which we examine in the African contemporary female and male novels.

It happens that there are ideological ambiguities and conflict of ideology in the ways the female and male writers represent women in their novels. The female characters portrayed in their novels sometimes serve as the oppressing force to their fellow women or girls. As it is argued by Amouzou "[...] making women enslave other women is problematic" (2014, p.13). Our aim is to underpin the cause for the ideological ambiguities and conflict of ideology in the representations of women in the novels.

Ideological Ambiguities and Conflict of Ideology in the African Female and Male Novels:-

In Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, women in their course for conserving their interest and secret see their fellow woman as a threat. It is the case of Iya Segi who mobilizes the second and third wives of Baba Segi against Bolanle. She fears that their secrets will be revealed if their husband takes her to hospital so as to check the reason why she has not been conceiving like the other wives. The narrator informs the reader through the second wife how Iya Segi is anxious.

It did not surprise me [Iya Tope] when Iya Segi called a meeting on the morning that Baba Segi took Bolanle to the hospital. 'That Bolanle is a trouble-maker', she said. 'She will destroy our home. She will expose our private parts to the wind. She will reveal our secret. She will bring woe' (2010, p. 55).

Iya Segi fears that the doctors will reveal the secrets behind her children's birth and those of the other two wives to their husband. This makes her become harsh and seek all means to destroy Bolanle. It is argued by Ofosu (2013, p.182) that "[...] the domestic abuse of females remains the topmost worry of many female writers" but Lola

Shoneyin has tried to draw critical picture on feminist belief that it is men who always abuse women in marital homes. She has also challenged the feminist tendency that shows women as victims and never perpetrators of violence through Iya Segi's complicity against Bolanle, the fourth wife.

According to Habib (2005) "Feminists have often rejected [...] divisive ways of viewing the world, stressing instead the various shades between female and male, between black and white, and indeed urging a vision of unity rather than opposition." Although the objectives of the womanist and feminist movements are more or less clear concerning the freedom of women from patriarchal oppression, Shoneyin has tried to inform the reader how problem of interest or preservation of self-interest causes division and change of position in the feminist movements. Moreover, she has shown it through Iya Segi who is once portrayed as perfect womanist exercising sisterhood/feminist solidarity towards the second and third wives of Baba Segi but she has radically changed due to her interest that is at stake.

It is usually argued that the love of money is the root of evils. Apart from love of money, preservation of integrity, honour and position of authority can make people do harms to their fellow human beings. People often change the ideology they stand for when their interest is at stake. So interest creates the division, wars and hatred one encounters in the world, especially in the feminist world today. It seems to have motivated the radical change in Iya Segi's womanist ideology.

Iya Segi's change of ideology from womanist concept to radical feminist is shown through her complicity with Iya Femi, the second wife, to kill Bolanle, the fourth wife of their husband. The plot of Iya Segi and Iya Femi against Bolanle has made them poison her food. Luckily, she does not eat the food but it is Segi, the first daughter of Iya Segi who eats the poisoned food. The above act of those women is radical feminist ideology because they believe in making justice through violence and hatred.

The failure, in the radical attempt of the women to poison Bolanle, leads to the traumatic death of Segi. Indeed, we use the phrase 'traumatic death' to lay emphasis on the pain Segi undergoes, after eating the poisonous food, which causes her death. As the reader is informed that "[...] Segi's hair was falling out [...] if she as much as brushed her finger against her ear, her hair dropped onto the pillow like the feathers from a fowl steeped in boiling water"(Shoneyin, 2010, p. 166).

Globally, the womanist concept or feminist ideology is meant for advocating for the rights of women but there are heresies in the way radical feminism functions due to differences among women concerning how to tackle the problems facing them. Ofose (2013, 178) argues that "[...] the aim of feminism as an advocacy for the rights of women, and African feminism as a call for looking at issues bothering them with an African eye." Division, hatred and revenge among the feminists, especially the radical feminists make them lose the sense of humane in the advocacy for women's rights. That has not spared the children from the chaos caused by radical feminists to feminism. According to Adichie "Feminism is, of course, part of human rights in general..."(2014, p. 41).

Children, as human beings, are part and parcel of human rights. They have rights and their rights must be respected by parents, particularly radical feminists. But it is the contrary with the female characters such as Iya Segi and Iya Femi in Lola Shoneyin's novel due to their adherence to radical feminist ideology. The children's rights to life, protection and parental care have been violated due to malice and conflict of interests. According to Article 19 titled parental care and protection of 'The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child'(2018), the indention 1 stipulates that "Every child shall be entitled to the enjoyment of parental care and protection..." Likewise, the article 19 titled Protection from all forms of violence of United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), under the convention of the Rights of the Child stipulates that "Children have the right to be protected from being hurt and mistreated, physically or mentally"(2018). The above rights of children are not respected by Shoneyin's female characters like Iya Segi and Iya Femi.

Just like in Shoneyin's novel, in Asare Adei's *A Beautiful Daughter*, there is case of a woman named Mansa. She ill-treats a girl-child called Baaba who happens to be the daughter of her husband. She sees her as her rival. As the narrator informs the reader through Mansa "[...] Mansa Lamented. 'I'd like to love Sam's daughter but I just can't. I always see myself rivaling her for Sam's love, she having the edge. You should hear Sam talking about this girl'"(Adei, 2012, p. 56). One can remark in the above, envy and jealousy as the reasons why Mansa chooses to destroy Baaba, her stepdaughter.

In short, another reason that leads Mansa to make life uneasy for her is vengeance. She wants to avenge herself on patriarchal social injustice against women with children or divorced women in contemporary Ghanaian society. The social injustice causes stigma to divorcées or women with children who want to remarry. That makes the men folk mock them or refuse to marry any of the above women. But the men with children or divorced men do not encounter the same when they want to remarry. The above problem women face has pushed Mansa to want to take vengeance on the daughter of the man she fortunately marries. Does womanism/feminism give room for women's violence on girl children?

According to Chukwuma "Feminism is a reaction; it is an assertion of being, rights and status" (2006, p. 1). Womanism, as it is argued by Orjinta "[...] is based on gender complementarities, motherhood, family, social and cultural change. Womanism is holistic, and in this sense it stands for the liberation and welfare of women and the holistic liberation of the whole of the African and colored people on the African continent and in the Diaspora: woman, man and child" (2013, p. 83).

The women's reaction that leads to the destruction and violation of children's rights are ambiguous to first-hand ideology promulgated by womanists and feminists. The number one enemy of the feminists is patriarchy but Mansa, as a female character in Adei's *A Beautiful Daughter* does not attack the patriarchal system she acts out her anger on Baaba, her husband's daughter. Nubukpo (1995, p. 59) argues that "Patriarchy, or the political agenda of men thus excluded from the feminist project, matters only to the extent that it constitutes the obstacle to be removed for women's will to self-fulfillment to materialize."

The fact that women aggress children and their fellow women may open the door to men's violence on women. This is shown in the novel when Sam discovers that Mansa maltreats Baaba, his daughter, he quarrels with her to the extent that he exercises violence on her. As the narrator informs the reader:

She [Mansa] can't live here and maltreat my daughter [Sam's daughter], no way!' Sam shouted, withdrew his hand, whirled and, stone-faced, and delivered a kick to Mansa's ribs, kung-fu style. 'Nobody humiliates my daughter...nobody...not even *my wife!*' he declared (Adei, 2012, 50).

Furthermore, the fact that some women plot against or abuse their fellow women because of selfish interest can serve as an open door to men's violence on women. The outcome of the above is shown in Lola Shoneyin's novel through Baba Segi exercising physical abuse on Bolanle, his fourth wife. Instead of Bolanle being rescued from the hands of Baba Segi by her co-wives, they show indifference to her plight. Although Iya Segi knows she is responsible for the charm Baba Segi finds in his room and which has caused the quarrel between Bolanle and him, she pretends to know nothing about the cause of the matter.

Iya Segi was by the door. She saw the opening and jumped in. 'Who can tell why she would do this Baba Segi. She [Bolanle, the fourth wife] wants to kill you [Baba Segi] first and then leave. She is a destroyer-of-home! Why didn't she go to the abattoir if she was thirsty for blood? There is no blood for you here, Bolanle. There is no blood for you here, Kruuk (Shoneyin, 2012, p. 66).

Iya Segi has done the above so as to accuse and destroy Bolanle. Accordingly, the same downgrading attitude is observed with Iya Femi, the third wife, and a fellow complottter with IyaSegi against Bolanle. The narrator informs the reader that Baba Segi is ready to pardon Bolanle and even asking her to go back to her room but to everyone's surprise, Iya Femi catapulted herself towards him [Baba Segi] from the edge of the crowd. 'Go to her room?' shrieked. 'Is it after she has killed us all that you will do the right thing? If this woman [Bolanle, the fourth wife] is allowed to sleep in this house, I will sleep outside with my sons. I will hold a night vigil and pray her out (Shoneyin, 2012, p. 62).

The attitude and reaction of Iya Femi described in the above quotation are contrary to the aim of womanism or feminism despite their difference in ending women's oppression and changing the negative images of women to positive. The representations of Iya Segi and Iya Femi with harshness towards their peer, Bolanle create ideological ambiguity concerning the central task of the womanist and feminist movements.

Moreover, Iya Segi has not only seen Bolanle as a threat but she has also considered Iya Tope of such for being sympathetic and trying to show womanist sisterhood or feminist solidarity to Bolanle. However, she threatens to

ruin her life if she dares expose their secrets: “We are all bound together! And if you [Iya Tope, the second wife] dare to open that stupid mouth of yours, I [Iya Segi] will ruin you myself. I will tell my husband things that will make him wring your neck in your sleep (Shoneyin, 2010, 56).

Merely analyzing the above threat of Iya Segi to Iya Tope, it seems to make the reader believe that the womanist or feminist movement is now meant to women to expose their peers who do not obey to predator/predators. In this context, it seems that the men/husbands are the predators and the feminist movement is the agent that delivers the rebellious women to the predators.

Similar to the case of Iya Segi and Iya Femi molesting Bolanle, one can notice womanist/feminist ideological ambiguity in Grandma’s harsh attitude towards Iya Femi when she is still young serving her, as a house-girl after the death of her parents. Grandma is cruel to Iya Femi, as her house-girl “[...] Grandma scorched me with the iron because I’d burnt a hole in one of her silk blouses”(Shoneyin, 2010, 127)

In fact, the above attitude of Grandma towards the house-girl contributes, in one way or the other, to Tunde’s sexual abuse of her. Remarkably, Tunde is the only son of Grandma in the novel. He has sexual intercourse with Iya Femi when she is still young and still serving the family as a house girl.

It was Tunde, Grandma’s only son, who first climbed between my legs...On this particular night, he came in drunk as usual. He said he’d had a bad night and I should have mercy and let him fuck me. I didn’t scream...I lay down quietly and hid the pain beneath my skin. When he had finished, he embraced me and told me my body was worth paying for (Shoneyin, 2010, pp. 127-8).

Merely analyzing the act that leads to the sexual intercourse between Tunde and Iya Femi, the house-girl, the reader will imagine that there is an accord between the house-girl and him but it is nothing more or less than raping. That is because the argument puts forward by the narrator is downgrading to the personality of the young house-girl. It is as if she is an object and solution to bad night of Grandma’s son, Tunde. Kendall-Tackett argues that “Girls may be more vulnerable to sexual abuse because people who most likely abuse them are right in their homes”(2001, p.124).

Kendall-Tackett further argues that “[...] the effects of childhood abuse can continue well into adulthood” (2001, p. 7). Indeed, the physical and sexual abuses Iya Femi faces in her childhood as a house-girl in Adeigbe’s (Grandma’s) household contribute to her harshness and involvement in domestic violence towards Bolanle, her co-wife. The harsh representations of Iya Femi with her comploter, Iya Segi towards Bolanle confirm the above argument of Kendall-Tackett. In so doing, Shoneyin wants to make the reader know that women are problems to their womanist/feminist liberation in patriarchal African societies. As Uzuegbunam (2013, p. 190) corroborates:

If the owners of land desecrate the land they live in, they would not blame anybody for the land’s extinction. Any house divided among itself can never stand. Thus, if women continue to be their own problem, then the solution of their problems must surely persist overtime.

Surely, the fact that women confront themselves makes them look vulnerable and expose their female rival to oppression in patriarchal African societies. This is shown through Iya Tope inability to firmly defend or rescue Bolanle from the oppressive hand of Baba Segi. That is due to the implication of Iya Segi and Iya Femi in the cause of the matter in Lola Shoneyin’s *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives*. The reader is informed that Iya Tope knelt beside Bolanle. With Baba Segi towering over them, she slapped Bolanle’s cheeks slightly. Tell him, Bolanle. Tell him if you did it. Tell him. He will forgive you. We have all offended our husband before. He always forgives us. Confess to him (Shoneyin, 2010, p.59).

In this contemporary epoch, female inaccessibility to justice...is a prime feminist concern (Ofosu, 2013, p.184). But it is the contrary in Lola Shoneyin’s novel. The ideological ambiguity lies in the fact that woman is the cause of oppression or injustice to her fellow women in contemporary African patriarchal societies. Somewhere, Shoneyin seems to reveal the Ideological ambiguity so as to prove the reader and the feminist movements that justice cannot come elsewhere but from women themselves. Pewissi, (2017, p. 28) argues:

Justice is a medium through which mediation is conducted for the offender and the offended to reinitialize and implement the humane life cooperation, understanding, and partnership as social dictates. The function of justice is to renegotiate life between parties in conflict, to bring social relations to normalcy.

The feminist movements, especially the radical feminist movement, should set up their ideologies on implementation of humane life, understanding, cooperation and partnership so as to obtain justice for the women. The justice women hoped for will come if the women start considering or respecting their fellow women. If not Bolanle would have got the full support of Iya Segi, Iya Femi and that of Iya Tope so as to avoid the violent oppression of Baba Segi, their husband on her. In so doing, the effectiveness of their womanist or feminist ideology will be manifested.

It is argued by Fairclough (1989, p. 77) that “[...] the effectiveness of ideology depends to a considerable degree on its being merged with this common-sense background to discourse and other forms of social action.” It is the contrary with Baba’s Segi’s wives namely Iya Segi and Iya Femi. Pride and envy have brought conflict of ideology among the wives of Baba Segi.

Don’t you see her highbrow and unconcerned eyes? She thinks we are beneath her. She wants our husband to cast us aside as the illiterate ones...As a wife who has recently joined our household, it is her duty to submit to our wishes, not to think she can teach us (Shoneyin, 2010, p. 52)

Moreover, lack of amalgamation among womanist and feminist strategic principles in addressing the problems facing women in their mission of advocacy for women’s rights. As Ofose (2013, p.187) argues “[...] women must take a second look at their own actions if they can win equal rights with men.” Likewise, Chukwuma adds that “There is need also to remove the immoral and murderous options in women’s strive for rights...(2006, p. 12) In other words, lack of humility and sincere dialogue but conflict has made women lose control of their vision of women’s empowerment. Capo-Chichi *et al.*(2016, p.1155) on women’s empowerment uphold that “[...] women as wives and mothers can obtain through solidarity, union and sisterhood if they put aside their differences and join hands together so as to share experience, design a common objective and harness their female power to end patriarchal violence, brutality and oppression.” In this sense, Fairclough (1989, p. 86) stipulates that “The more uniformly the fighting will of a people [women] is put into action, the greater will be the magnetic force of the movement and the more powerful the impetus of the blow.”

As a recall, the act of Iya Segi and those of the second and third wives of Baba Segi used to be in one accord at the beginning, it has radically changed towards the end of the novel. The common accord among the above women has made them be assertive and empowered in their marital home and society. But the conflict Iya Segi and Iya Femi holds against Bolanle make them lose their assertiveness and empowerment to the extent of being reduced to mere housewives. For instance, Iya Segi is said to have “...eight cement shops in Ibadan...”(Shoneyin. 2010, p. 104) When her secrets and those of the second and third wives have been revealed, Baba Segi asks her to close down her shops and relinquish every money she has saved to him. And she accepts the above proposition of Baba Segi with the belief of preserving her household. As the narrator informs the reader on the matter “Iya Segi sobbed silently and said she was just grateful for Baba Segi’s graciousness”(Shoneyin. 2010, p. 244).

The above act of Iya Segi of sacrificing or surrendering all for sake of her household confirms her switching from a radical feminist to womanist. Obviously, it is womanism that promotes mutual understanding and dialogue between the men and women. The cordial understanding between Baba Segi’s wives and Baba Segi in settling their problems confirms Nubukpo’s imagined conversation between the womanism and the male tradition

[...] if Womanism and the Male Tradition were to be roommates or neighbours with trouble pets, I can well imagine womanism telling the Male Tradition “Listen, why don’t you and I sit down and talk and get organized like two decent human beings, so that we can keep your best dogs and my best cars”(1995, p. 65).

In addition, Iya Segi’s decision seems to impact the one of Iya Tope and Iya Femi because they follow her footsteps in surrendering all and themselves to their husband’s decision. In other words, they have accepted the proposition of their husband so as to preserve their secrets and their household. They have also done that in order to prevent their household from shame and mockery: “[...] let us not allow the world to see our shame. Let us keep our secrets from those who may seek to mock us.”(Shoneyin, 2010, p. 242).

Conclusion:-

The political ideology of women's movements like feminism, womanism, Stiwanism, African feminism and others is to redress the power imbalances between men and women through advocacy of women's rights. But the fact that some women ill-treat their fellow women and even girl children creates ideological ambiguities and conflict of ideology in the political ideology they advocate for. This article has focused on ideology of womanism and radical feminism so as to unfold some causes of ideological ambiguities and conflict of ideology in the representations of women in Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and Asare Adei's *A Beautiful Daughter*. The result reveals that social injustice, pride, jealousy, egoism, revenge and malice have made women go against the brainchild of their ideology. The above problems have caused women to enter into conflict with one another and even abuse children. Although ideological ambiguities and conflict of ideology are not womanists' but radical feminists', it has contributed to women's status quo and increased men's violence on women because men do not easily forgive women who abuse their child/children in African society.

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