JENdA
www.jendajournal.com
ISSN 1530-5686
A Journal of Culture and African Women Studies

Jenda: A Journal of Culture & African Women Studies ©
ISSN 1530-5686
Issue. 4. 1(2003)

PARALLEL WORLDS: REFLECTIVE WOMANISM IN BALARABA RAMAT YAKUBU'S *INA SON SA HAKA*

Abdalla Uba Adamu

Ina Son Sa Haka, Balarabe Ramat Yakubu, Ramat General Enterprises, 1999, ISBN 978-33810-5-9, pp 245, Price: N150 (slightly over USD1.00, and about less than £1.00); October 2001, Kano, Nigeria.

Introduction[1]

With *Ina Son Sa Haka* (*I Love Him All The Same*) Ms Balaraba Ramat Yakubu's new novel (Privately published in Kano, Nigeria, 2001), Ms. Ramat returns to a familiar territory she so adroitly explored in *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?* (*Who Will Marry An Ignoramus?*, Gaskiya Corporation, Zaria, Nigeria, 1990). The similarities between the two novels are so striking that, as we shall see later, *Ina Son Sa Haka* is a continuation of Ms. Ramat's autobiographical odyssey into the repressive world of forced marriages among the Hausa. *Ina Son Sa Haka* uses similar plot elements, similar characterization, but different narration.

Also at 246 pages *Ina Son Sa Haka* has joined the ranks of three other "fat" Hausa novels—a trend started by the late Tanimu Bature Gagare's *Karshen Alewa Kasa*, (1980, pp 356) and then sustained by Amina Abdulmalik's *Ruwan Raina* (2000, pp 243) and Sakina A. Aminu's *Ci Talatar Ka*, (? 371).

Ina Son Sa Haka is Hausa reflective womanism – assertive right to freedom of expression within traditional cultures by a woman without being rebellious – (as contrasted with Hausa feminism as seen in elements of Bilki Ahmed Funtuwa's novels)[2] at its most evolutionary form. In analyzing it as a womanist expression, I tend to disagree with Novian Whitsitt's argument that Ms. Balaraba Ramat Yakubu is a Hausa feminist, a view he expounded in his 1999 thesis.[3] As I intend to argue, Ms. Ramat's narrative handling of forced marriage, modeled on her own life experiences, conforms more to a womanist worldview, than a feminist demand for change and equality, as expressed in some elements of her contemporary, Bilki Ahmed Funtuwa (or Aunty Bilky, as she is most popularly known in Northern Nigeria). Two of Walker's explanations/definitions of womanism include:

> Womanist 1. From *womanish* (opposite of "girlish," i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious). A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish," i.e., like a woman. Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know

> more and in greater depth than is considered "good" for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. Interchangeable with another black folk expression: "You trying to be grown." Responsible. In charge. *Serious.*
>
> 2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist, as in: "Mama, why are we brown, pink, and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige, and black?" Ans: "Well, you know the colored race is just like a flower garden, with every color flower represented." Traditionally capable, as in: "Mama, I'm walking to Canada and I'm taking you and a bunch of other slaves with me." Reply: "It wouldn't be the first time."

The key portion that I argue applies to Ms. Ramat's *Ina Son Sa Haka* is my perception of her womanist intentions in describing her protagonist as exhibiting "outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior." We ended up with a protagonist who audaciously, courageously and willfully stood up for her right to happiness within a traditional setting — and along the line, suffering a fate worse than death, and still remaining defiant, and yet paradoxically respectful of the mindset that places her in such position.

Ina Son Sa Haka is a story of forced marriage as well as its consequences. In her condemnation of forced marriage among the Hausa, Ms. Ramat uses strong character development to paint the sheer misery of the victims of such situations. This is what makes Ms. Ramat's novels so different from the rest of the Hausa novelists (with perhaps the exception of Bala Anas Babinlata, author of *Da Ko Jika?, Son or Grandson?* — a gloomy but brilliant novel about a woman who ended up unwittingly marrying her own son). She spends considerable time developing the characters so much that the reader feels a certain empathy for the characters – both villains and heroes.

Again her exploration of forced marriage does not follow the Islamic religious orthodoxy that sees such marriages as permissible on the assumption that since the girl (and as interpreted by some Muslim Hausa who enforce such practices, almost always the girl, never the boy) is too young to understand her mind, the parents have the right to force her to marry the person they want, not the person she wants. A strong assumption behind such forced marriages is that the girl does not have to be happy; even if she doesn't love the enforced husband, it is believed that she will get used to him with time. Clearly in such situations, love and happiness of the girl (and perhaps of the husband) are secondary to the enforcement of parental authority and saving face, especially if the father of the bride had promised her to either his friend, or the son of his friend. Her refusal, therefore, is not an option.

Analytical Framework: Hausa Womanism and Feminism

Womanism as a social concept has a more stratospherically exotic meaning than I intended to use it in this synoptic analysis of two of Ms. Ramat's novels. According to Patricia Hill Collins, the term womanist gained prominence from Alice Walker's multiple definitions of the term "womanism" in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983).[4] Collins identified at least two meanings of the term as used by Walker. The first

sees womanism as rooted in black women's concrete history in racial and gender oppression. Taking the term from the Southern black folk expression of mothers to female children "you acting womanish," Walker suggests that black women's concrete history fosters a womanist worldview accessible primarily and perhaps exclusively to black women. "Womanish" girls acted in outrageous, courageous, and willful ways, attributes that freed them from the conventions long limiting white women. Womanish girls wanted to know more and in greater depth than what was considered good for them. They were responsible, in charge, and serious.[5]

A second meaning of womanism as offered by Alice Walker sees a more politically radical definition of the concept. According to Patricia Hill Collins,

> Walker simultaneously implies that black women are somehow superior to white women because of this black folk tradition. Defining womanish as the opposite of the "frivolous, irresponsible, not serious" girlish, Walker constructs black women's experiences in opposition to those of white women. This meaning of womanism sees it as being different from and superior to feminism, a difference allegedly stemming from black and white women's different histories with American racism." (ibid).

The problems with labels, especially if borrowed from radically different sociological climes manifest itself in attempting to situate Ms. Ramat's two novels within a womanist framework. Indeed as Patricia Hill Collins notes, no term currently exists that adequately represents the substance of what diverse groups of black women alternately call "womanism" and "black feminism." However, as Nombuso Dlamini argues:

> lack of possession of academic terminology such as theory, feminism, critical pedagogy, etc. does not necessarily equate to lack of theorizing about or practicing the issues that the terms embrace.[6]

Working from a Zulu worldview, Nombuso Dlamini then proceeds to show how the persistent pursuit for education and self awareness within the confines of then South Africa's apartheid policies constituted a womanist struggle for self identity. In this essay, I intend to argue that Ms. Balaraba Ramat Yakubu uses elements of womanist perspective in her fiction, and that his makes her different

from feminist interpretation of her works as done by earlier researchers on Hausa prose fiction.

The Novelist as the Protagonist

The sheer misery painted of the forced married household is so total and absorptive, as can only be portrayed in an autobiographical narrative. A brief look at Ms. Ramat's early life in Kurawa, a ward in inner Kano city a stone-throw from the Emir's Palace, reveals how novelists can be autobiographical. In 1970 at the age of 12 and still only in class 4 of primary school, Ms. Ramat herself was forcefully married to a 48 year old man (thus in all respects, an old man) by her aged father. Even the intervention of her senior brother, the late Colonel (as he was then) Murtala Ramat Muhammad (who was later to become the Head of State in Nigeria) fell on their father's deaf ears. She stayed for only fourteen months in the husband's house before being divorced on the grounds of being too young. As she herself recounted:

> "Wani abin bakin ciki a nan shi ne auren da mahaifin nawa ya yi mini bai haifar da komai ba illa bakin ciki da takaici, ina ma ya barni na yi karatuna. Domin ina tunawa a lokacin duk yaran unguwar a gida na suke wasa kuma ni ma zan fita har kofar gida kan titi muna wasan 'yar tsana da su, wanda a addinin da kuma al'ada ba a yarda wani namiji ya ganni ba, amma saboda yarinta ni ce mai fitowa kan titi kowa ma ya ganni. Tun daga wannan aure sai ince daga nan rayuwa ta ta fara rugujewa"
>
> "Catastrophically, my being forced into early marriage led only to sorrow and tragedy. If only (my father) had allowed me to continue with my education! I could recall that when I was in purdah, all the little girls in the neighborhood used to play in my house, and I also used to follow them outside the house to play with dolls. This is against religious and traditional practices as I was not supposed to be seen by anyone being in purdah. But because of my tender age, I was the one coming out on the streets for everyone to see me! It is from this marriage that my life became destroyed…" (Ms. Balaraba Ramat Yakubu, literally in her own words, at www.gumel.com/Hausa/littafan%20hausa/Balaraba-Ramat.htm).

Being a divorcee at only about 13 years, and from such a prominent household made the young Ms. Ramat more attractive. However, her father insisted that anyone wanting her hand in marriage should wait until she become a bit more mature. This is a significant point, and was echoed in Ms. Ramat's semi-autobiographical rendering of her life as the protagonist in *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?* As she stated of her real life:

> "Da na zo gida sai wasu zawarawa su uku suka fito kowa na kokarin a bashi ya aura. Sai a nan ne mahaifi na ya ce wai a barni sai na yi hankali."
>
> "..When I returned home, three men all came seeking for my hand in marriage. My father said for them to wait until I became more mature." (ibid.)

Thus we have a tapestry around which Ms. Ramat wove two stories depicting her own innate desire to get educated despite stiff traditional opposition, and having to stay in a forced married situation despite having an enlightened family and living in the inner city.

Ina Son Sa Haka and *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?* have a lot in common as I said earlier. The settings, however, are different, even if the storylines are the same. *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?* is located in a village in Kano; *Ina Son Sa Haka* is set in the most cosmopolitan part of traditional Kano, Fage (interestingly, less than five kilometers in a straight line from Ms. Ramat's birth place, Kurawa in the city). Thus lest it be thought that forced marriage is only a "village issue" among the Hausa, Ms. Ramat re-created the story in a vibrant and dynamic inner urban setting. In both novels, the parents of the protagonists are not educated; although the father in *Ina Son Sa Haka* is a modern contractor, with a car and three wives (one of whom is the mother of the protagonist); while in *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?* the father is a simple farmer, married to only one wife, but fiercely proud of his modest lifestyle. A point of departure, which portrays *Ina Son Sa Haka* as a millennium novel is that whereas in the latter novel the girl forcefully married to someone is mature at 19 years – full secondary education terminating at 16, plus three years at home before getting married; the girl in *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?* was just 12 years old when she was forcefully married off. Thus to Ms. Ramat, forced marriage is not limited to innocent village children; but can also afflict mature teenage women of the city.

The Cage

The protagonist in *Ina Son Sa Haka* is Fatima, whose father is from Fage in Kano, and her mother from Niamey in Niger Republic. In Ms. Ramat's narration, this endowed Fatima with extraordinary body build and beauty, and made her an object of desire for many "young dudes". Her mother died after Fatima has finished secondary school and subsequently moved in with her paternal grandmother, Gwaggo. Fatima did not continue with her schooling; indeed, Ms. Ramat did not inform us as to whether Fatima has passed her examinations or not. This is an important contrast with *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?* whose protagonist finished her primary schooling quite successfully, and although eager to continue with secondary education, was prevented from doing so; instead she was forced to marry the local dignitary (not for his riches, surprisingly, but because of his tenacity) — an echo of Ms. Ramat's real life experiences.

The antagonist in *Ina Son Sa Haka*, Shehu, is also tenacious in his love for Fatima. Before he married her, she made it clear to him that she does not love

him and therefore will not marry him. Here, Ms. Ramat introduces a contradictory scenario and character development. Shehu is a highly educated young man. After graduating from Bayero University, Kano, he went to Oxford University in Britain for 11 years for postgraduate studies in agriculture (although we don't know what qualifications he earned). It is clear, from *Ina Son Sa Haka* and *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?* that Oxford University is Ms. Ramat's ultimate educational icon. This is because in the latter novel the antagonist also went to Oxford for the same number of years!

Shehu of *Ina Son Sa Haka* came back to Nigeria debonair and "Europeanized". Four years after his return, Shehu saw Fatima in the company of her friends and suddenly fell in love with her. Fatima, on the other hand, simply detested him, and has no particular reason to love him. Shehu adopted two strategies to win Fatima's love. First he endeared himself to Fatima's father, Alhaji Haruna, who subsequently supported his candidature and insisted Fatima should marry him. Already Alhaji Haruna was beginning to get fed up with Fatima's refusal to marry anyone. This is an interesting development because Fatima was neither a student nor working; thus her reason for not marrying remained a mystery, and certainly worried her father.

What made such move more remarkable was that Fatima has no career or schooling to shield her. Further, she had no specific attachment to any particular suitor. She simply refused to get married —unheard of for a girl of her maturity in a Hausa society, where it is expected of a girl to get married at the very least after finishing her senior high school (at about age 18).

Further, she had no specific steady suitor whom she can point as a better alternative to Shehu. Thus when Shehu remained tenacious in seeking Fatima's attention, her father was quite happy and saw him as the only person who should marry his daughter.

When Shehu failed to win Fatima's love, his second strategy was to go to his mother, a believer in Hausa shamanism (*bokanci*) for magic potions to make Fatima accept him. This is a surprising development for a character whom Ms. Ramat painted as "Europeanized". One would have thought that his newly acquired European mindset would have made him accept the simple fact that since Fatima does not desire him, he should give up. It should have certainly removed him as far away from shamanism as possible. Or is Ms Ramat jeering at the shallowness of "Europeanization" of African students?

Shehu's mother thereafter spent a lot of money going to various shamans (*bokaye*) for potions to make Fatima love her son. The potions were given to Fatima through her father, Alhaji Haruna, who will then give the potion to his own mother, Gwaggo, with whom Fatima was staying, and the grandmother will subsequently give it to Fatima. The grandmother was unaware of the nature of the potions that she was giving to Fatima, trusting that since it is from her own father, it is unlikely to be something that will harm her.

A further contrast here is with *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?* where there was no resort to shamanism to make the girl (Zainabu Abu) marry the person her father wanted

her to marry. The father simply married her off. In *Ina Son Sa Haka* we see a womanist developmental theme where the protagonist, Fatima, clearly has the guts to stand up to her father and refuse to allow herself to be married off to someone she does not love. That does not make her a feminist, since she does not subscribe to any particular ideology. She simply does not like her suitor.

The application of shamanic potions continued to such an extent that Fatima will accept the potion directly from Shehu's brother who used to bring it from their mother, drink it, wash the bottle it and continue her business. Is this fatalism at work – knowing that she is trapped in a hopeless situation, or was it that Fatima does not feel threatened by any shamanic potions?

Eventually, the potions seemed to work because Fatima agreed to marry Shehu. However, even after the marriage,

> "duk da Fatima ba ta son Shehu, kiri-kiri ta daure to zauna da shi. Ga shi a iyakacin ranta, ba ta son ta kalle shi, balle ma ta yarda da cewa mijinta ne, amma dole Fatima ta saki, ta yarda, ta hakura, ta zauna matar Shehu." (p. 18).
>
> "although Fatima does not love Shehu, she forced herself to stay married to him. Deep in her heart, she does not even want to look at him; and refuses to accept that he is her husband. Yet she forced herself to accept to stay as his wife."

As Fate Would Have It

Although Shehu has now married Fatima, there was something missing. Getting her to readily consummate their marriage on a regular basis was a problem. He had to plead and even cry, before she could agree to sleep with him. Even then, she usually leaves his room after the event; and has never slept the whole night in his room. Right from this scene, it was clear that Fatima and Shehu occupy a biological cell, where exchange of bodily fluids is the main essence of being together, rather than emotional comfort. This is because every time he wants her, he had to plead and entreat her with talks about how much he loves her. Her reply was standard:

> "kai dai mijina ne, amma ba masoyina. Ai mutum ba ya yin soyayya shi kadai.." (p. 21).
>
> "you are my husband, not my lover. Love is not a one-way affair."

By now Shehu was getting desperate. Clearly he was not getting enough of Fatima, and decided to trick her into staying the whole night with him. He then took her to a movie theater, and laced her drink, a canned soda, with palm wine. She unwittingly, took it, got drunk and dizzy. He then took her back home and straight to his room where he gorged on her to his satisfaction. In the morning, Fatima woke up to find herself naked in her husband's room. She felt raped, used and abused, and challenged her husband as to if that is the only way he could get

her love. She then left the room and after cleaning herself ran away to her grandmother's house.

Ms. Ramat also recounted similar scene in *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?* where the husband, a hulking ugly villager, statutorily raped his young bride (who was the same age with one of his younger daughters). After the rape, the child-bride run home bleeding. Her father drove her back to the husband. In both the two rape scenes (and it is controversial whether a husband can rape his wife in Islam; but in both cases, the wives clearly did not want the nuptial encounter) Ms Ramat handled the narration as only a woman could relate the horror of being violently abused by someone she detests.

Shehu *in Ina Son Sa Haka* traced Fatima to her grandmother's house where he queried her coming out of the house in broad daylight without his permission. As we have seen from the brief flashes of Ms. Ramat's autobiography, this again is a flashback from Ms. Ramat's early life in a forced married situation where as a 12 year old bride, she used to follow her childish instincts and come out of the purdah — a concept she barely internalized — to play with children in the streets.

Clearly Shehu did not think getting her drunk and subsequently raping her was any form of marital crime. A verbal war ensured between them, with the old woman trying to intervene. Eventually, Fatima was forced to tell her that her husband had made her drunk and raped her. This made the grandmother ask him to leave them, and that she would relate the incident to Fatima's father who will make the final decision on the matter. Shehu insisted that she should force Fatima to back home with him; but she stood her ground. He eventually left the house. The grandmother then turned to Fatima and consoled her, saying,

> "Fatima, in dai da gaske kike yi, mutumin nan ya ba ki abin sa maye kin sha, ai ko shakka babu, babanki zai ci mutuncinsa. In ba saukin Allah ba ma, ya raba aurenku."
>
> "Fatima, if it is really true that he has made you drunk, I am pretty sure your father will disgrace him. Indeed, if care is not taken, he may even annul the marriage between you and Shehu." (p. 23)

Fatima's grandmother appears as a collective voice of societal reason — oscillating between traditional acceptance of forced marriages, and yet acknowledging that the girl-woman also has fundamental rights to be respected and protected, and have her opinions accepted. She subsequently acts as an emotional bulwark for Fatima.

Thus Fatima was relieved at the first hint of support she has received from a grandmother who loved her since she was a baby and lost her own mother. She reiterated to the mother that she does not love Shehu at all, and wants a divorce from him. The old woman simply told her:

> "ki yi hakuri, Fatima. Ba a kanki aka fara auren dole ba. In Allah Ya so, za ki hakura da shi. Bari dai ki ka fara haihuwa."
>
> "I am sorry Fatima. You are not the first to be forcefully married. By God's grace, you will get used to him, especially when you start giving birth to his children."

Here we see the central theme of the novel. As I said earlier, in a forced marriage situation, the victim is expected to accept her fate (rarely *his* fate) and eventually get used to the situation. Further, since the entire purpose of marriage, in this world-view, is to produce children, then surely the girl-woman can withstand any misery with a husband she loathes, to produce the desired children. In this mindset, love and happiness are not options. Children are then numerical objectives of cultural landscape, not dynamic potential contributors to a development society. This paradigm, ironically enough, transcends economic status and appears in almost all groupings of Muslim Hausa social clusters.

After Shehu has left Gwaggo's house, he later went to Fatima's father and told a series of lies, insisting that Fatima left his house without his permission. The father was incensed and sent for Fatima from Gwaggo's house. When she came and repeated that her husband laced her drink with beer and raped her, her father thundered at her:

> "Ka ba ta bammin ma ta sha, ai sai ta aiko mana, mu ne za mu je mu binciki tsakaninku, amma ba ta fito daga gidan mijinta ba. Kin ga Fatima, ran da duk kika kara fitowa daga gidan mijinki da sunan yaji, to ba ni, ba ke.
>
> "So what if you had given her palm wine? If it is so she would have sent for us to investigate. Look Fatima, if you ever run out on your husband again, I am through with you." (p. 33)

This was a threat to a curse. He did stop there. He continued with more harangues:

> "Ja'irar banza wadda ba ta son zaman aure. Ki tashi, ki bi mijinki. Ba bammi ba, ko wuta ya baki ki sha, dole ki sha. Tashi ki bani guri, munafukar wofi."
>
> "useless imp, who doesn't want to stay in a husband's house! Get up, and follow your husband! Not just palm wine, even if he gives you fire, you must take it. Get out of my sight, useless hypocrite." (p. 34)

Fatima was devastated, and for the first time in her life since losing her mother, felt utterly alone, since the father she relied upon so much to believe her, has openly disgraced her and forced her back into the unhappy relationship (which he created to begin with). She quietly stood up and went out, crying. In the car on their way back home, a series of dialogs took place between Fatima and Shehu, which characterizes the rest of their life together:

> (Shehu) "…Fatima? Fatima? Ban san abin da ya sa har yanzu zuciyarki ta ki ta amince da ni ba. Ni masoyinki ne, kuma Fatima ni mijinki ne. To yaya kike so in yi?
>
> (Fatima) In miji na ne kai sai me, ni na ce bana son ka Shehu. Bana kaunarka. Ko dole ne soyayyar?
>
> (Shehu) Kin ga Fatima, ki tuna fa ni masoyinki ne. Barci da cin abinci da aikin da nake zuwa, duk saboda ke Fatima ka-sawa na yi. Ina kaunarki. Ina son ki, amma kin ki sauraro na. Har kunya nake ji a wurin abokaina."
>
> (Fatima) Ka saurare ni da kyau ka ji. Don shegen nacin tsiya, ka ki rabuwa da ni. Don Babana yana son ka ni har abada ba zan kaunace ka ba ..."
>
> (Shehu) "…Fatima? Fatima? I don't know why you still don't accept me. I am your lover, Fatima, and I am also your husband. What do you want me to do?
>
> (Fatima) So what if you are my husband? I have told you, Shehu, I don't love you. Is it compulsory that I should love you?
>
> (Shehu) See Fatima, you should remember that I am your lover. I have not been able to sleep, eat or even go to work because of you. I love you, yet you refuse to accept me. I feel deeply embarrassed because of this, especially among my friends.
>
> (Fatima) Listen to me carefully. Because of your tenacity, you refuse to divorce me. Although my father likes you, I will never love you. Ever…" (p. 35)

And life continues. Ms. Ramat then changed her narrative style, and quickly took us through a whole chunk of the unhappy couple's life. Thus in less than two pages we were told of how Fatima gave birth to four children. By then Shehu has accepted that Fatima will never love him, and although he still deeply loved her, yet he is forced to accept that their love would always remain a one-way affair. In the period, Fatima had developed an iron will and started hitting back, physically and verbally, at whatever physical abuse her husband dished out; expressing what Alice Walker would have womanistically call "outrageous, audacious , courageous *and* willful behavior."

Things got to a head when one day after a violent fight, he decided to divorce her (once, which leaves room for reconciliation, rather than the close-door three times). She left the house and went to her grandmother, Gwaggo.

When her father learnt of the divorce, he went straight to Gwaggo's house, found Fatima and thoroughly beat her, without even bothering to find out what hap-

pened. He then asked her to pack her things and he would take her back to Shehu. Surprisingly, Shehu refused to take her and said he had had enough of her. She was taken back to her grandmothers', while tempers cool down.

With this further brutalization of Fatima, Ms. Ramat seems to further paint an uglier picture of a senseless and extreme tradition — Fatima's father and his violent and extremist views are, to Ms. Ramat, further icons of an ugly and unfair system of forced marriages. This is more so because grandparents, especially maternal, in a typical Muslim Hausa setting, are sanctuaries, and there is no basis for Fatima's father to mete out that form of physical punishment — to a grown-up woman with children — in the presence of her grandmother. Indeed, grandparents are seen as spoiling their grandchildren with excessive love, and for that reason the grandparents always provide shelter for their grandchildren. This further confirms the iconic nature of Ms. Ramat's narrative.

In this nightmare scenario, the woman becomes an object of derision. It is instructive to note that Fatima had no mother, and Ms. Ramat gave none of her father's wives an opportunity to be a surrogate mother to Fatima, and at least shield her from some of the father's more violent excesses.

Escape Scenario

At this juncture in *Ina Son Sa Haka*, Ms Ramat introduced the most important motif in the narration. The fact that Shehu has divorced her should have made her happy because it means she is free. However, the rejection by her father snatched that happiness away and made her miserable. While waiting for Shehu to accept her back, she remembered a school friend, a Hausanized Yoruba girl from Ilorin, called Saratu who lived in the city. She decided to stay with her for a few days. As Ms. Ramat narrated:

> "To zuwan Fatima gurin Saratu da kwana biyun da ta yi, tare da ita, ya sa Fatima ta karu da hanyoyin zaman duniya na dogaro da kai, ba lallai sai kana da miji ba.."
>
> "In just a few days of Fatima's stay with Saratu, she learnt the ways of the world, particularly assertive self-independence, without a husband…" (p. 39).
>
> "Dogaro da kai", or self-independence, is a concept laced with multiple meanings; but within the context of cutting off a husband from the equation, can only mean one thing: the oldest profession known to man, or prostitution. It is interesting that Ms. Ramat has to find a non-Hausa character to introduce Fatima to the possibilities of prostitution, as if shying away from the fact that there are genuine independent Hausa prostitutes. Again it is instructive that Ms. Ramat does not adopt either a womanist or a feminist motif to emphasize Fatima's independence and freedom.

Saratu then took Fatima to a friend of hers, Zulai (we don't know whether Zulai is also a Hausanized Yoruba or a pure Kano Hausa for she is the center of all Fatima's solution/problem) who lived in Sabon Gari, the red light district of Kano. Although Zulai was a commercial sex worker, she had a regular boyfriend, Ibrahim, who worked in a bank, and was about to be transferred to Obalande, a ghetto in the suburb of Lagos. She then gives Fatima an open invitation to join her in Lagos anytime she wants. Fatima had by then made up her mind to ran away to Lagos. In such situations, the children are often looked after by the paternal grandmother, who is often brought into the house to look after them until their mother returns, or their father marries another wife.

The choice of a semi-ghetto like Obalande in far away Lagos is a further reflection of Fatima's alienation from her cultural roots. There are many places within Northern Nigeria she could disappear without trace; but she chose an alien territory, as if choosing a battle ground, not wishing to leave home/cultural casualties in the battle that is to follow.

On getting back to Gwaggo's house, she learnt that a search party had gone looking for her since no one knew where she went. Her father was told of her return and he came into the house, breathing fire, and insisting that she should pack her things and be taken to her husband's house, who had by now accepted to take her back. Gwaggo suggested they should wait till evening; the father refused and insisted it has be now. It was then that the old woman, for the first time, sided with Fatima, and told her son:

> "..don me za ka dora mata laifi ita kadai? Ai kai ka jawo mata. Hakuri za a ba ta ta koma, amma ba zagi da tsinuwa ba.
>
> "why should you keep blaming her alone? You are the cause of all this. We should plead with her to go back, rather than abusing and cursing her"

Even then, Fatima told the grandmother that she was running away. The old woman was aghast, and pointed out to Fatima that she has children with Shehu, and pleaded with Fatima to persevere and bring up her children. Fatima retorted:

> "Wallahi, ko yaran ma ba na kaunar su. Ba na son su. Ya rike 'ya'yansa. Ba na son su, Gwaggo. Kuma ni, ke kadai nake kauna a rayuwa ta. Ba ni da kowa, 'yan uwa sun guje ni, kowa ya tsane ni, don haka, ki bar ni na yi tafiya ta."
>
> "I swear to God, I don't even love the children. I don't want them. Let him keep his children. I don't want them. You are the only person I love in my life. I have no one. Everyone has deserted me, and all detest me. So please let me just go away." (p. 41)

This seems a particularly harsh stand, especially for a Hausa woman whose main purpose of staying in a loveless marriage is the children. Later, Ms. Ramat clarified this point by stating:

> "Fatima tana kaunar 'ya'yanta, babu ma irin Samira da Jamila. Amma wani lokacin, sai kiyayyar ubansu ta shafe su, sai ta ji a duniya ko 'ya'yan ba ta son ganin su, har tunani take yi a kan ina ma ba da Shehu ta haife su ba, da ta so su kamar ta hadiye su. Kuma duk da haka a yanzu in ba su yi tankiya da shi a kan wani abu ba, za ka ga tana zaune lafiya da 'ya'yanta, amma da zarar sun yi fada, ya ce 'ya'yansa ne, sai hankalinta ya tashi, ta kora masa 'ya'yan dakinsa. Yanzu kwana biyun nan da ta yi, ji ta ke yi kamar ta mutu a kan rashin ganin yaran. Don dai ba yadda zata yi ne da shi, da sai ta sace 'ya'yan ta gudu"
>
> "Fatima loves her children, especially Samira and Jamila. But because she hates their father, she feels sometimes also that she hates the children. Her wishful thinking was that if only Shehu were not their father, she would have loved them intensely. Even now so long as they have moments of peace with Shehu, she is free with the children; but the moment they go into their perennial fights, he will taunt her saying that they are his children. It is then she will send them away to him. She missed them so much these two days she was absent from them, that she felt like dying. She is trapped, otherwise she could have kidnapped the children and ran away." (p. 42).

Thus even in the lair, some animal instincts are superior to others. Shehu controlled Fatima on a biological leash, threatening her attachment to her children, and using the children to trade peace in the battle zone.

Few months after her return to Shehu's house, she became pregnant with their fifth child. The usual frailties of early pregnancy manifested itself in her, and in her case, made her sleep heavily. It was during one of these bouts of sleeping that Shehu returned to the house and found one of the children crying from stomach upset. Although he had a housekeeper, yet the absence of Fatima to be with the child incensed him. He went into her room, and started beating her. She woke up from a deep slumber, unaware of what was happening. He did not give her a chance to explain or to even listen to what offense she committed. The beating was so thorough that he pushed her on a chair, whose arm struck her stomach. She fell down unconscious and bleeding. He told her to get out of his house, and went out. Few minutes later, as if on cue, Gwaggo came into the house, and found Fatima unconscious and bleeding. Fatima was taken to the hospital where she was operated on. The doctor informed them that Fatima's womb had been damaged, and she would never give birth to another child again.

During her stay in the hospital a series of dramatic dialogs occurred. Shehu visited her – sufficiently remorseful and pleading for forgiveness. Gwaggo threw him out of the hospital room. However, Fatima's father insisted that he should stay, and that whatever happened between them it must have been caused by Fatima. Gwaggo suggested that he should break up the marriage since Shehu had become more violent. Alhaji Haruna retorted that Fatima would only leave Shehu over his dead body. This angered the old woman, who walked out of the

room, since his statement suggested that Fatima is his daughter, and therefore Gwaggo had no control over her at all. When Fatima recovered, the father berated her for not staying with her husband. In frustration, she asked her father:

> "Baba, ni me ya sa ne kullum idan abu ya faru tsakanina da Shehu, ba ka bincike, ka gane mai gaskiya, kullum sai dai ka dinga dora mini laifi?
>
> "Father, why is that whenever something happens between me and Shehu you don't bother to investigate the true nature of what happened; instead you keep blaming me? (p. 53).

The father had no answer to this, and kept quite. He eventually told her that if she ever leaves Shehu's house, then she should find another father, as he would disown her. Eventually Fatima was forced to go back to Shehu's house, after he promised he would not be violent again. On the day of her return, he tried to inject some fire into their life by embracing her. She slapped him hard, telling him"

> "Ni ba matarka ba ce, kuma ba bar kaunarka ba ce. Idan kana son mace, ka je ka auro. Ni zaman 'ya'yana zan yi a gidanka."
>
> "I am not your wife, and I am not an object for your love. If you want a woman, go and marry one. I am staying with you only because of my children." (p. 66).

Life for women in these situations therefore becomes a biological equation of occupying space and time in the same lair as their children; for the household has become an animal cage in which only biological, and not emotional activities take place. That Fatima can hit back at the husband she detests reflects a hardening of will, from compliance to rebellion. I argue, still, that this does not reflect a feminist strategy; just a person cornered and hitting back. For instance, a feminist would consider courses of action that would include legal redress. Even within the Islamic marriage institution, seeking the court to annul the marriage is an option. The fact that Fatima did not follow this path reflects her acceptance of the force of tradition over her, and her helplessness. In this context a womanist accepts the tradition that binds her to roots, while a feminist will seek to change it to reflect a desire for equality and the embracement of any strategy that will actualize this.

Again as usual, Fatima refused to sleep with him Shehu. Few days after her return, he became so desperate that he rushed into her room. Another fight ensured between them. It got so violent that he dragged her out of the house, bleeding, without any shoes or *hijab* (head covering) and disheveled, only in her nightgown, and threw her out and locked the door.

Surprisingly enough, she started towards her *father's* house, not Gwaggo, who had been her refuge all these miserable years. It is not clear why she decided to go to her father's house, especially as he had not been supportive of her. Her obvious first point of refuge would have been Gwaggo's house where she had always

gone to in such situations. This marks a flaw in Ms. Ramat's narration – creating a scenario that is impossible, but necessary to a later plot development, as we shall see.

On the way, she was stopped and picked up by a police security patrol who demanded to know what she was doing outside half-naked and disheveled. She narrated what happened. They insisted on putting her into their patrol car and going back with her to Shehu's house to verify her story. When Shehu opened the door, he told them that he doesn't want her, and that if any of the officers wanted her, he is welcome to her. Again here we see further objectification of Fatima – she was no longer a human being, but like a broken down television, offered to anyone who can fix her. It is with this debasement that Fatima asked them to take her to her father's house.

When they took her to her father's house, he did not allow them in; and the first thing he did was to start beating Fatima. It was only when the police intervened that he stopped. Before he slammed the door of his house on her, he told her:

> "sai dai ki shiga uwa duniya, amma ba gidana ba. Da ma na gaya miki, in kika sake rabuwa da Shehu, to ni ma ba ni ba ke. Banza, 'yar iska, kuma wallahi in kika je gidan uwata (Gwaggo), sai na kashe ki. Tunda karuwa kike son zama, sai ki je ki yi."
>
> "go into the world, but not my house. I have told you before that if you leave Shehu again, I disown you. Stupid hooligan. And I swear by God if you go and tell my mother (this), I will kill you. Since you want to be a prostitute, go ahead."

There was no justification for the father to refer to his daughter's unwillingness to stay in Shehu's house as her desire to be *karuwa* (prostitute). A *karuwa* is an unmarried woman who decided to chose a commercial sex lifestyle, for whatever reason (a married woman in the same situation is referred to as *mazinaciya* — adulteress). Fatima had been obedient to her father, nurturing of her children, and even tolerating Shehu; she just doesn't love him — a fact the father, representing tradition — refuses to understand.[7]

The Escape

Fatima had nowhere to go. All the doors were closed. When the police asked her where they should take her, she became silent. Then, having clearly reached a decision, and with a long sigh (one could almost hear the sigh, like a primeval scream, echoing down the abyss of her empty heart) she asked them to take her to Saratu, her Hausanized Yoruba friend. On getting there, Saratu's parents opened the door and accepted Fatima after the police had told them the events of the night. She cleaned up and slept the rest of the night in Saratu's room.

In the morning, Fatima's father went to Gwaggo's house, as usual to force Fatima to go back to Shehu. He was surprised, therefore, when the old woman told him that she has not seen Fatima, and alarmed, asked him what happened.

He told her, rather sheepishly, that Fatima had turned up at his doorsteps last night and that he had refused to allow her into the house; so he thought she might have come here. The old woman became angry when it became clear that Fatima had disappeared. In a loud thunderous voice, she cast him out of her life with the following curse:

> "Ka fice mani daga gida Haruna. Ba ni, ba kai har abada. Tun da ka kori Fatima, ni ma ba ni ba kai…Allah Ya isa tsakaninka da uwarta. Allah Ya isa tsakanina da kai."
>
> "Get out of my house, Haruna. I disown you forever. Since you cast Fatima out, I also cast you out. God will judge between you and her mother; and God will judge between me and you." (p.74)

This is the harshest *fatwa* any mother, Muslim Hausa or not, can issue on her child. Her mere addressing him by his name — another traditional taboo for mothers to their first children among the Hausa — was enough to sound the bells of doom to him. All entreaties to the old woman to withdraw the *fatwa* fell on deaf ears. The other old people around pleaded with her to forgive him, but she shouted:

> "wallahi ba zan yafe masa ba, sai ya kawo mani ita (Fatima) tukunna. Ta shi ka fice mani daga gida, mutumin banza"
>
> "I swear to God, I will not forgive him until he brings her (Fatima) back. Get out of my house, useless man." (p. 74).

The fact that the old woman was willing to curse her own son over his attitude to her granddaughter reinforces the special status of grandchildren with grandparents in a typical Muslim Hausa setting. Clearly, Fatima's father had gone too far, and all filial bets are off.

It would be the last time anyone would see Fatima for along time in Kano. This marked the point of departure in the broad similarities between *Ina Son Sa Haka*, and *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?* In the latter novel, when the child-bride run away from the husband's house she went to Kano, to her aunt's house and sought refuge there. *In Ina Son Sa Haka*, Fatima decided to join Zulai in Obalande, Lagos and quite simply become a prostitute – after all, it is her father's curse for her to be a prostitute; a vocation more palatable to her than staying in the prison of Shehu's household. It is interesting, however, that nowhere in the narration that led to the decision to do the deed, did Ms Ramat mention the word "karuwanci" (prostitution) even once, preferring to allow the reader to judge Fatima's next possible career moves. Saratu, Fatima's Hausanized Yoruba friend was quite aware of Fatima's mission in Lagos; yet did nothing to dissuade her. If anything, she lent her the airfare and some clothes, and after two days of recuperating, escorted her to the airport for her flight to Lagos.

The Knight in Shining Armor

At the airport's departure lounge, and while waiting for the arrival of the aircraft, a certain Alhaji Sadiq Haruna was accompanied to the airport by three wives and about 13 children – all noisy and boisterous. When Saratu saw them, she told Fatima that she will go and greet the man because she knows him as a Director in the ministry where she served her National Youth Service. After greeting the Alhaji, Saratu went back to Fatima, where Fatima asked her who all those people around were. Saratu informed her that they are his wives and children coming to see him off. He was going to China for a four year course, traveling via Lagos. It was then that Fatima noticed Alhaji Sadiq looking at her. She turned her face away.

Eventually Alhaji Sadiq's crowd left, and he called Saratu to him. When she got there he asked her a series of questions about Fatima, particularly her destination. She told him Fatima was going to Obalande to visit her sister Zulai. Eventually he asked Saratu to call Fatima so that he could talk to them. In a series of conversations, he made it clear that he is strongly attracted to Fatima, and was worried about a lone woman going to Lagos on her own, especially as this was her first time of going there. He therefore offered to pay for her ticket and escort her to Zulai's house in Obalande on getting to Lagos. Within just a few hours of meeting each other, they professed to have already fallen deeply in love to each other.

Here Ms. Ramat introduces Sadiq as a counter-character to Shehu. Whereas Shehu was aggressively tenacious, blinded in his animal desire for Fatima's body; Sadiq was humane. Shehu was too infatuated to Fatima, Sadiq was warm and interactive. And while Shehu made Fatima cry, Sadiq makes her laugh. It is the first time in the entire narration that Fatima actually laughed while in the company of any man (the only two men in her life, her father and husband, horribly abused her, each in his own way). Ms. Ramat's superb character development saw her spending about 1/3rd of the novel in painting the problems of Fatima's household and giving us a periscope view of the individual personalities involved in Fatima's life. It is with background that we can understand Fatima's readiness to accept Sadiq better. Sadiq was the first person who accepted Fatima as a human being, and not as a prize to be acquired (as she was to her husband Shehu, or like an object to be manipulated, as she was to her father).

When they arrived in Lagos, Sadiq took Fatima to Zulai in Obalande. Before they got there, they stayed the night at Ikoyi Hotel, although "nothing" happened even though they stayed in the same room. However, they spent hours recounting their lives. It transpired that Sadiq was extremely unhappy with his three wives and felt trapped into marrying all of them. Here Ms. Ramat used the Sadiq protagonist to judge multiple-wife households quite harshly, a favorite theme with Ms. Ramat as reflected in her other novels. Sadiq's life seemed to have revolved around a slovenly chatter house bursting at the seams with children and dominated by a senior wife with a bitchy foul mouth, and who had tamed Sadiq's two other wives into blind obedience against Sadiq.

In their encounter, Sadiq made it clear that if Fatima does not mind, he wants her to be the fourth wife. He then begged Fatima to wait for him to return from China after two years (when he would come on vacation) to marry her and take her back as his wife. She agreed to wait for him. It is interesting that Sadiq did

not have any inkling about Fatima's intended stay in Lagos, and strangely enough did not ask.[8]

There was a tearful re-union at Obalande between Zulai and Fatima. Zulai at that time was in the company of some three Ibo men. Yet Sadiq did not raise an eyebrow, or even queried the nature of the exact relationship between Zulai and Fatima, accepting simply that Zulai is Fatima's sister. After tearful farewells, Sadiq entrusted Fatima to Zulai, asking Fatima to promise to wait for him.

Zulai wasted no time in introducing Fatima to the shady world of commercial sex industry in Lagos. Her first encounter was with Nasiru "Elvis", a transvestite who specializes in couching *sharaf* (raw, newly arrived) prostitutes into the elegant world of being an object of desire. In two months he taught her deportment and how to be a lady. Her first commercial boyfriend was Chukumeka, an Ibo drug dealer with whom she stayed before being snatched away by his friend Ugochukwu (Ugo), another Ibo, and a gangland boss with specialization in violent armed robbery. Zulai, in the meantime remained faithful to her Hausa boyfriend, Ibrahim, who worked in a bank.

It seems as if Ms. Ramat is telling us that Zulai is happy and steady in her unholy relationship with Ibrahim (at least having discarded all other clients and deciding to stick with him only) while Fatima has to go through cleansing rites to rid her soul of her cultural ghosts. This is because it is instructive that Ms. Ramat was anxious to point out that even Fatima's commercial boyfriends were non-Hausa, as if protecting Hausa men from being active participants in cultural desecration of Fatima. It is further interesting that Ms. Ramat projects this scenario, despite the bruising Fatima received from both her father and her husband — but then these were all done with "accepted" tradition.

Interestingly enough, these are the only two boyfriends, besides Sadiq, that Fatima encountered throughout her four-year stay in Lagos.

Whatever the interpretation, Ugo was clearly in love with Fatima, and treated her well, taking her along on all his violent operations. Not that she became a gangster's moll in the real sense; just that she kept him company while he was "operating" in various towns. Ugo loved Fatima so much that he set up an apartment for her and Zulai in Surelere, another suburb of Lagos where they permanently stayed. During one of his periodic absences, Fatima and Zulai discussed the possibility of being victims of Ugo's gang if something did happen to Ugo. As insurance, they decided to remove all the valuables in the house — consisting of gold and diamond jewelry that Ugo used to give to Fatima — to a bank safety deposit. Few days after this, Ugo himself came into the house triumphant, telling Fatima that this was his most successful night, as he had robbed the British Ambassador to Nigeria and had stolen millions of naira worth of pound sterling. He told her he and his gang are leaving town until things cool off, but he will be back. He gave her about two million naira as insurance for him, if he returns; otherwise, she is free to do what she wants with the money. He also gave Zulai a bit of the haul, and with tears in her eyes, Fatima saw him walk out of the house, as it turned out, forever, for just two weeks later he was arrested and executed.

That night Fatima and Zulai ran away to a nearby friendly *maigadi*'s house (security man) and stayed with his wife. However, she asked the maigadi to go to her apartment with some men and cart out everything they could get their hands on. In the morning, they ran to Ibrahim's house where they sought refuge – possibly from the law.

It was in this period that Sadiq returned. He had already finished his course in China and was still insisting on marrying Fatima. He had kept his promise and sought her after he returned from China two years earlier; but during the period she had disappeared with Ugo on the latter's violent expeditions, and thus Shehu returned to China dejected, but still bent on his promise to marry her. So when he returned, he eventually traced her to Ibrahim's house and after a tearful reunion, told her that he still loved her and want to marry her. She burst out in tears, telling him that if he had known what she had become after his departure, he would not have thought of marrying her. As the protagonist said:

> "In na tuna da abubuwa maras sa kyau da na aikata a rayuwata, su suka sanya na shiga cikin wannan kogin tunani. Musamman ganin na sabawa alkawarin da na kudurta a zuciya ta na mantawa da kowa sai kai."
>
> When I remember the bad things I did they made me go into a deep thought, especially seeing that I have not kept the promise I made to remain loyal only to you." (p. 130)

Sadiq brushed all these aside and declared his undying love to her. Her final plea to him was that:

> "Sadiq, in dai son da kake yi mini da gaske ne, to ka aure ni, ka raba ni da wannan barikin, ni kuma niyi maka alkawarin zan zama mai biyayya a gare ka fiye da dukkan matanka."
>
> "Sadiq if your love for me is genuine, please marry me, and rescue me from this horrible life. I promise to obey you far more than all your wives." (p. 131).

It is clear therefore that Fatima was not enjoying the game, and her disgust for it was probably what pushed her into the arms of non-Hausa "clients" as a reflection of further self-debasement. Sadiq is the moral knight in a shining armor.

Right there and then a double wedding was planned between Fatima and Sadiq, and between Zulai and Ibrahim. It was agreed that Fatima and Zulai should go to Kano, to Fatima's grandmother's house in Fage, and spend the compulsory three month waiting period (*idda*) prescribed for a Muslim woman before getting married, if she had engaged in sexual intercourse with someone other than her husband.

Fatima's return to Gwaggo's house in the company of Sadiq after four years, eight months and seven days (Ms Ramat's careful attention to detail at work here), was nothing less than explosive. Within a few hours the entire neighbor-

hood has heard about it, including her father who rushed to the house, not to welcome her, but to make peace with his mother now that Fatima is back. It was with great reluctance that the matriarch conceded to forgive him.

Fatima's father did not even look at her, talk to her or further acknowledged her existence, a clear manifestation of the extreme alienation Ms Ramat feels between the forces of tradition (as represented by Fatima's father who refused to understand her or love her as a daughter) and womanist tendencies (as reflected by Fatima's rebellion and hatred for the husband her father forced her to marry). Fatima's father there and then promised to Gwaggo never to interfere with Fatima's life and that whatever his mother decided with regards to Fatima's marriage to Sadiq was fine with him.

Another person on whom Fatima's return was explosive was her former husband, Shehu, who on hearing the news of her return, dashed to Gwaggo's to meet Fatima. He then begged her to return to him. In the period of her absence he had married once, but the marriage did not last long, as he as still pining for Fatima. She refused to even entertain his visits, and eventually Shehu became a drunkard, a chain-smoker, developed high blood pressure, had a failed kidney and a cirrhosis of the liver in the bargain. Finally, to everyone's relief, he died. However, Shehu was not the only victim of a forced marriage as we have seen — everyone in the matrix suffers to a degree.

Again here are similarities with *Wai Zai Auri Jahila?* where Zainabu Abu's husband died pining for her, and leaving a final message for her that it is his love for her that killed him.

Ina Son Sa Haka (I Love Him All The Same)

Eventually Sadiq married Fatima, and her entry into a multiple-wife household was not without its problems, especially from the most senior wife, who saw her authority threatened by a more "enlightened" and self-aware woman. The constant cajoling to Fatima from her husband's wives was that he had married a prostitute – a barb that really hurts Fatima and lead to constant quarrels. During one of the quarrels, Fatima walked out of the group, and Sadiq followed her, slipping on a stair and falling down the stairway of his house. He went into deep coma. This singular incidence is the fulcrum of the novel's title, *Ina Son Sa Haka*.

Sadiq was taken to various hospitals where he remained in coma for ten days; during which Fatima was with him always. Her grandmother attempted to dissuade her from the arduous task of doing the *jiyya* (looking after a sick person) for Sadiq since it would be too much for her. After all, as the old woman pointed out, his wives have all refused to offer themselves, in this dialog:

> (Gwaggo) "..Ke daya kadai cikin matansa kike faman zirga-zirga. Duk asibitin nan, ke ce mai zama a wurinsa. Su sauran matan ba sa zuwa sai rana-rana. Ke ma ki yi zamanki, ki huta mana.

> (Fatima) Gwaggo, su je ko kada su je, ruwansu su tunda yanzu bashi da amfani a wurinsu. Ni kuwa Gwaggo, ko me Sadiq ya zama, INA SON SA HAKA (including emphasis).
>
> (Gwaggo) "You are the only one among his wives who keeps shuttling between home and hospital and the only one who stay with him. The other wives visit him only occasionally. Why don't you stay away and rest also?"
>
> (Fatima) "Gwaggo, whether they go or not is their business, especially now that he is useless to them. I, Gwaggo, no matter what Sadiq becomes, *I love him all the same*." (including emphasis as in the original; p. 191).

Sadiq recovered from the coma, but was clearly suffering from stroke, as he could neither speak nor move any limb. He was referred to the University of Ibadan Teaching Hospital for specialist neurological treatment. The hospital agreed to accept him but the family has to settle his bills in full before he could be operated on. The total bill was almost two million naira. After a family council, Sadiq's relations could only raise about five hundred thousand naira, with only one wife giving out her set of gold chains as contribution; the others refused to give anything. When Fatima was asked what she could contribute, she agreed to pay the balance of whatever was needed and to stay with Sadiq in the hospital until all the operations had been done on him. Everyone was thunderstruck. As Sadiq's eldest brother in charge of the collection said,

> (Sadiq's brother) "Fatima, kin san abin da kika fada kuwa? Kina yin maganar wajen naira miliyan daya ne fa."
>
> (Fatima) "Yaya na sani mana. In ka gama hada wadannan kudin, zan shirya, sai mu tafi tare zuwa Lagos, do in dauki kudi a bankina, daga nan sai mu wuce Ibadan din, mu biya su, a fara yi masa aikin."
>
> (Sadiq's brother) "Fatima, did you realize what you have said? You are talking about a million naira."
>
> (Fatima) Yes of course I know. When you have collected all that you can collect here, we will go to Lagos where I will withdraw the money from my bank, and then we can go to Ibadan and pay the hospital so that they can start the operation. (p.190).

Later, Fatima's grandmother asked her where she got all that money. Here reply was simple and straightforward enough:

> "Gwaggo, kudin da na bayar, ina da ninkin-ba-ninkin nasu a banki. Sannan gwal din da nake da shi, ya ninka wannan kudin sau nawa-nawa. Ba na son su ne, domin kudin haram

> ne. Dukiyar jama'a ce. To me zan yi da su? Ba su da wani amfani a wajena, in ban taimakai Sadiq ya sami lafiya ba."
>
> "Gwaggo, I have greatly far more than what I offer to give. Further, the gold jewelry alone I have has value far beyond this amount. I don't want all that wealth, because it was ill-gotten. It belongs to innocent people. What will I do with it? It is useless to me, if I can't use it to help Sadiq get well." (p. 190).

So it was that Sadiq, mute and immobile, was admitted into the Ibadan Teaching Hospital for three months. Fatima was there every day, by his bedside, washing him and cleaning him. His wives visited him only once. Interestingly, Fatima's father did not visit them, even once. Sadiq got better, although like Harrison Ford in *Regarding Henry*, he had to go through extensive therapy to learn to walk and talk again. Eventually they were discharged and went back to Kano.

At home, Sadiq's three wives continued haranguing Fatima, seeing as she was the only one who bothered to stay with him, and their refusal to show care and affection for their husband had become a thing of shame for them. Things reached a head when one afternoon Fatima had to leave him alone for some hours to attend to some outstanding issues. She instructed the most senior wife to look after him. On her return, she discovered that no one entered the room, so much that Sadiq had fallen from his bed covered in his bodily wastes. It was only the arrival of his brother, and later Fatima, who was horrified by what happened in her absence, that saved the situation. After Sadiq was cleaned up, he asked for all the three wives to come to his room. Right there and then he divorced all the three of them. Each of them said they would leave their children behind. Fatima instantly agreed to look after all the 13 of them, employing a series of housekeepers to help along. She is now the rightful queen of the hive.

The only thing that marred Fatima's new-found bliss and happiness was her father's refusal to accept any husband she had except Shehu, who by then had become a virtual lunatic. For instance, when one day she decided to visit her father on learning he was ill, he immediately started taunting her about her devotion to Sadiq. In a voice shaking with sorrow and tearfully, she told her father:

> "INA SON SA HAKA, Baba. Kuma da na rabu da shi gara ma na mutu." (p. 4)
>
> "I love him all the same, father. And I would rather die than to leave him."

The novelist presented this as a sort of prelude, since the entire novel is told in a flashback. Ironically, the day this particular incidence happened was the day Shehu died from the various abuses he incurred on his body and his soul. With Shehu's death, Fatima's father eventually left her alone, although throughout Sadiq's illness, had never visited him. Even during the wedding between Fatima and Sadiq, she was "given away" by her Uncle. Later Sadiq asked her to bring her four children from Shehu's house and add them to his own.

In killing Shehu, Ms. Ramat meted out the ultimate punishment to one of the victims of the whole sordid mess. After ravaging and abusing Fatima for years; Shehu then ravaged and abused his body and his soul, finally destroying himself. Whereas Fatima had a chance to repent and cleanse herself and became literally born again, Shehu had no such chance. And whereas Fatima had Sadiq to hold her in a warm embrace of love and acceptance regardless of what had been, Shehu only the cold stiff grave to become his abode for eternity.

Fatima's wealth (whose source, Sadiq, perhaps tactfully, never questioned) stood her in good stead. She became a transporter with a fleet of buses, taxis and motorcycles. Under the tutelage of Zulai's banker husband Ibrahim, she invested into stocks and shares of many companies. She also gave all the members of her family capital to start one business or other. She even gave her father a vast amount of money (again Ms Ramat did not record his appreciation), and started channeling her energies into philanthropic activities, by anonymous donations to mosque and Islamiyya building projects in Kano and other surrounding cities.

Conclusion

It is clear from *Ina Son Sa Haka* and *Wai Zai Auri Jahila?* that in Ms Ramat's Hausa cultural universe although the immediate victim of forced marriage is the woman, yet there are degrees of suffering along the chain. The stoical acceptance by the women of their fate and the bravery in going about their business reflects a resignation to a system they had no immediate control over. And instead of the universality womanist colorful flowers in Alice Walker's flower garden of the "colored" race, a Hausa victim of a forced marriage is a simply a tumbleweed in the womanist garden — blown about by the wind of tradition in a confined glass cell. A vast array of religious weapons exist for her to fight the misinterpretation of system on its own rules, yet she does not seem to be aware of it. Ms. Ramat probably hopes to be a catalyst in the next stage of Hausa womanism — whatever that will evolve to be.

There are flaws here and there in the narrative and plot elements which the novelist created almost deliberately to make a point. For instance, *karuwanci* (prostitution) need not be the last resort of a girl in a forced marriage circumstance. In the traditional Hausa society, such had been the case in the past. Yet the fact that Fatima was educated meant she could have a series of options, even after running away. She could, for instance, have ran away to Sakkwato, Maiduguri, Zariya, or even remained under deep cover in Kano while pursuing a career or further education. That would have helped a womanist cause. But since Ms. Ramat had exhausted this option in *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?* she seems anxious not to repeat it *Ina Son Sa Haka*.

It is also difficult to understand debonair Shehu's tenacity and infatuation to Fatima. In the narration, Shehu came through as a warm, loving person to both Fatima and their children. His fits of violence were borne out of frustration, itself caused by Fatima's refusal to accept him as a lover, even though they were married. No matter how infatuated, one would have expected him to give up or else,

find solace in his second marriage — as he did on two occasions, only to return in full force.

Another issue raised by the novel is moral. Could ill-gotten be used for redemptive purposes? Fatima's wealth, as she herself admitted was stolen from various people under particularly violent circumstances. She channeled the money to philanthropic causes, rationalizing that :

> "wadannan daloli da Ugochukwu ya ba ta, ba za ta cinye su ita kadai ba, sai ta taimaki Musulunci da su."
>
> "she will not spend these dollars that were given to her by Ugochukwu on herself only; she will further the cause of Islam with them." (p.245)

The Muslim establishment does not accept the idea that blood money can be used to further the cause of Islam. However, an argument was that she could give it away, but would expect no spiritual reward for it, particularly if she did know that the money was ill-gotten.

Ina Son Sa Haka and *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?* novels are Ms. Ramat's autobiographical critique of the forced marriage tradition among the Hausa. Even Zulai's banker husband, Ibrahim, is closely modeled on a contact Ms. Ramat had with a bank (which in the fictional narrative, was where her safe deposit box is) when she was trying to get financing for filming *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?* Only Shehu was missing from this autobiographical cast of thousands — and Ms. Ramat refused to yield much information about her three former husbands, one of whom might have been Shehu or Sarkin Noma Cibi of *Wa Zai Auri Zahila?*

By situating *Ina Son Sa Haka* in a cosmopolitan setting, Ms. Ramat is challenging the paradigm of the Hausa concept of forced marriages being a rustic rural affair. The novel deserves a serious attention for its commentary on contemporary Hausa sociological norms.

The layout and typesetting of the novel is a definite improvement over the standard contemporary Hausa novel structure and marks a significant improvement in the production of Hausa novels. Clearly, the Contemporary Hausa Novel is alive and kicking!

References

Collins, Patricia Hill. "What's in a name? Womanism, black feminism, and beyond," http://www.sistahspace.com/nommo/wom509.html

Dlamini, Nombuso. "Literacy, Womanism and Struggle: Reflections on the Practices of an African Woman," http://www.bridgew.edu/DEPTS/ARTSCNCE/JIWS/June01/Nombuso.pdf

Sheme, Ibrahim. "The Write Stuff," *New Nigerian Weekly's Literary Supplement*, August 1 and 15, 1998

Walker, Alice. *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.

Whittsitt, Novian. "The Literature of Balaraba Ramat Yakubu and the Emerging Genre of Littatfai na Soyayya: A Prognostic of Change for Women in Hausa Society." M A. Thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1996

Notes

[1] I would like to thank Mary Dillard for her valuable comments on the earlier draft of this paper.

[2] Compare, for instance, B.A. Funtuwa's *Allura Cikin Ruwa (Needle in the Water – only the lucky can grab it,* privately published in Funtuwa, Katsina State, Nigeria, 1983), which deals with an aggressive pursuit for a career by a Hausa-Fulanim Muslim woman — a quite revolutionary fictional concept. In an interview with Ibrahim Sheme for the New Nigerian Weekly's Literary Supplement, The Write Stuff, August 1 and 15, 1998, Bilkisu Ahmed Funtuwa explained her motives in creative writing thus:

> I was motivated by three main reasons, all of them based on my feelings for the North. The first is the way girls in the North (of Nigeria) are having their rights denied. You find a brilliant girl with the urge to further her education but as soon as she gets married the husband prevents her from going further. I know that marriage can not be a hindrance to a woman wanting to further her education. In this regard, Southerners are more progressive than us. As such, I realized that through the medium of writing using the little talent God gave me, I could put into the heads of girls ideas-through entertainment and enlightenment-to appreciate the importance of education.

These kinds of messages are seen as feminist — *challenging* the system, rather than acquiescing to the dictates of tradition.

[3] Novian Whittsitt, The Literature of Balaraba Ramat Yakubu and the Emerging Genre of Littatfai na Soyayya: A Prognostic of Change for Women in Hausa Society. A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts (African Languages and Literature) at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1996.

[4] Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983.

[5] Patricia Hill Collins, What's in a name? Womanism, black feminism, and beyond, http://www.sistahspace.com/nommo/wom509.html

[6] Nombuso Dlamini, Literacy, Womanism and Struggle: Reflections on the Practices of an African Woman, http://www.bridgew.edu/DEPTS/ARTSCNCE/JIWS/June01/Nombuso.pdf.

[7] In an interview with Ms. Ramat to discuss this review in December 2000, I pointed out this flaw, and she admitted its presence.

[8] In the same December 2000 interview, Ms. Ramat confirmed to me that the entire story up to this point was based on true events — that there *is* a Fatima (not real name) living in Lagos and who had gone through these stages in life.

However, Sadiq is fictional, and Ms. Ramat introduces him to counterbalance the narrative to give the story a moral ending.