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**WOMEN REPRESENTATION IN CONTEMPORARY NORTHERN NIGERIAN  
GYNO-TEXTS: AN ANALYSIS OF *SURGEON'S WIFE* BY AZIZA IDRIS  
MUHAMMAD**

<sup>1</sup>Adamu Isah Babura Ph.D, <sup>2</sup>Inuwa Mahmud and <sup>3</sup>Nabulisi Bala

<sup>1</sup>Department of English and Literary Studies, Bayero University, Kano

<sup>2</sup>Department of English Language, Kano State College of Education and Preliminary Studies

<sup>3</sup>Department of English, Sa'adatu Rimi College of Education, Kumbotso, Kano State.

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**Abstract**

For many decades, women have undergone poor and stereotypical representation, particularly in the works of Nigerian male writers. This is partly as a matter of the patriarchal culture of African societies and partly as a result of the misogynous disposition of some male African writers, who consciously or unconsciously depict women at best as housewives or at worst as prostitutes. They represent women in their characterisation as being economically unproductive, socially dependent and matrimonially unfaithful, such that they contribute little or nothing to their individual family and even the larger society. Angered by such misrepresentation of women in andro-texts, venture into the literary world with the intention to correct and safeguard the already tarnished image of women. Thus, this paper appraises the portrayal of women in Aziza Idris Muhammad's *Surgeon's Wife* (2012) by deploying Liberal Feminism as the analytical tool. The paper found out that the author uses her maiden novel to rewrite the stories and create true image of women. Through the heroine of the novel, Zahra Abdulqadir, the author stresses the need of education to women, as Zahra and her friends occupy prime positions due to the equal educational opportunities they enjoy with their male counterparts. They become indispensable for societal development. However, the paper discovered that the author through Zahra's incapacity to purge the love of Ja'afar (her erstwhile-husband, who utterly betrays her) from her mind, confirms the vulnerability and powerlessness of women as the heroine fails to live independently without man. This impliedly suggests that for women to bail themselves out of patriarchal bondage, they should inevitably curtail their excessive love for men which is one of their greatest weaknesses.

**Keywords:** Women, Contemporary, Northern Nigeria, Gyno-Text, Surgeon's Wife

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**Introduction**

In his introduction to "Meaning in the Repressed: A Critique of the Characterisation in Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn*", Bature Umar intimates that, "Literary texts that are written by feminist African writers like other texts are open to a number of interpretations for their patriarchal, cultural and social gender politics" (2020, p.133). Umar's observation is lucid as the portrayal of women especially in contemporary northern Nigerian gyno-texts has received (and still receives) a critical

applause not only at national level but also at international level. Texts written in English from northern Nigeria are set out to rectify the lopsided and derogatory roles ascribed to women as chattels, worthless, docile, passive and irrelevant in virtually all the works authored by early African male writers. These roles became recurrent to a point of stereotype, as Muhammad and Muhammad (2016, p.341) explain:

This stereotype depiction of the African woman in literature appears

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to have been accepted by the women and the society at large, but the early female writers in African and Nigerian literature now counter it in their respective views.

Thus, from the publication of Zaynab Alkali's debut novel – *The Stillborn* in 1984, female voice (in English from northern Nigeria) is privileged to be heard in the literary arena. Since then, female novelists from the region such as Hauwa Ali, Aishatu Gidado Idris, Hajara Abubakar Sadiq, Binta Salma Mohammed, Hauwa Mohammed Allurawa, Talatu Wada Ahmad, Bilkisu Abubakar, Asabe Kabir Usman, Razinat Talatu Mohammed, Zahra Tabi'u, Nana Aishatu Ahmad, Maryam Bobi, Maimuna Bala, Hauwa Mohammed Sambo, Saliha Abubakar Abdullahi Zaria, Rashida Lawal, Hadiza Isma El-Rufai, Safiya Ismaila Yero, A'aisha Abdulkareem and Aziza Idris Muhammad, among others, have emerged and focus on the predicament, subjugation, humiliation and marginalisation of women in their society. These writers have joined hands with their Southern counterpart notably Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta and the more recent writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche to reposition, rewrite and reshape the distorted image of women evidently depicted by the early Nigerian male writers like Amos Tutuola, Cyprian Ekwensi, Chinua Achebe and Elechi Amadi in *Palm Wine Drunkard*, *Jagua Nana*, *Things Fall Apart* and *The Concubine* respectively. Chinadu (2019, p.187) notes that:

The entry of the women writers into the literary scene is one positive feature of Nigerian literature. The women writers have successfully carved out a 'spacious creative room' of their own through their various robust ways in negotiating a powerful voice for women, to correct the

negative perception of women in both the male fictional world and the society.

Earlier on, critics like Ogunyemi (1988), Ogunipe (1993), Acholonu (1994) and Newell (1997) have expressed the need for women to write and correct those perceptions that writing is a private preserve of men and correct the erroneous images of women in male writings. As Mohammed (2007:47) bitterly laments:

Although women played significant roles in history and culture, the male writers of Achebe's era conveniently ignored them. It was not until Nigerian women themselves woke up to their inner cries by beginning to write the woman's own travails from the point of view of women did, we start to have proper representation of women in Nigerian Literature...

Compellingly, women need to come into the writing arena not just to write about themselves but substantially to correct the lopsided stereotypical image of women in the phallic terrain. This is in line with Othman and Mohammed (2017, p.210) who assert that "There is the need to explore and bring to the fore women's hidden strengths and latent powers hitherto circumvented by tradition." Or, as Usman (2006, p.163) succinctly expresses that:

The era has come for women to say 'NO' to the stereotype roles earlier assigned them by society. The society should appreciate women who are economically, politically and socially independent and should regard

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them as partners in progress and not second-class citizens.

In view of the above references, female writers both from southern and northern Nigeria felt the need to reverse the 'biased view' that early Nigerian male writers write about women. In other words, women writings from Nigeria came up as a repudiation of the traditional portrayal of female by male writers and critics over the years. The male dominated writings (especially those written by the Nigerian writers) reflected women as inferior and of a lower class. According to Abdulkarim (2020, p.171):

Women are ranked lower than men in all the indices of development in the country. They are systematically relegated to inferior positions. Writers, most especially females, have contributed to the development of African Literature by writing stories revolving around the predicament of women in African societies as reflected in their female characters... Their aim is to have powerful and outspoken female characters. Eventually, this female silence was broken by early African writers such as Nadine Gordimer, Flora Nwapa, Bessie Head, Buchi Emecheta and Zaynab Alkali. Their writings arose out of the desire to address issues relating to female subjectivity.

In essence, women writers came up with their own perception of women and tried to advocate for the right of the woman as being no different (if not exceptionally better) from the man. It is against this background that this paper deploys liberal feminism as the

analytical tool and critically examines the representation of women in Azizah Idris's *Surgeon's Wife* (2012) and depicts how she employs it to graphically portray the life of an educated, assertive and independent beautiful Fulani girl, Zahra Abdulqadir, who right from her family outshines all her brothers in intelligence and popularity; eventually specialises as a gynaecologist.

### **Azizah Idris Muhammad: The Emergent Female Voice from Northern Nigeria**

An indigene of Bauchi State and Hausa by tribe, Azizah Idris Muhammad is a relatively recent female writer in English from the populous northern Nigeria region. She started A.T.B.U Staff Primary School and finished at Gombe Children School, Gombe. She proceeded to F. G. G. C Bajoga, Gombe. Thereafter, she attended Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi, where she obtained M.Sc. degree in Computer Science. She is currently studying Islamic Psychology at the Islamic Online University.

As a bilingual writer, Azizah has published fourteen novels in Hausa and two novels in English. The write ups include *Halin Zuciya*, *Sabuwar Rayuwa*, *Halin Ko in Kula*, *Alamarin Zuci* and *Halin Girma* are some that were published in Hausa language, while the ones written in English are *Surgeon's Wife* (2012) and *A Sackful of Wishes* (2018). Though her first novel, *Surgeon's Wife* is scarcely known within the critical fraternity. Her second novel, *A Sackful of Wishes* is more applauded by critics. Some of the critical works on it captured titles such as "Sexism and Construction of Boundaries through Language: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Azizah Idris' *A Sackful of Wishes*" (2019) by Fatima Inuwa and "Female Resilience in Azizah Idris' *A Sackful of Wishes*" (2020) by Khadija S. Abdu.

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Azizah is currently the Secretary Gombe State Writers' Association and is a member of Mace Mutum Writers' Association. In addition to that, she runs a culinary school in Gombe, where she now lives with her husband and three young children.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this paper is Feminism, specifically Liberal Feminism. Before going into its premises, it would be useful to pause and say one or two words on feminism in general. Etymologically, feminism comes from Latin word *Femina*, meaning woman. It is an ideological movement aimed at changing the existing power relationship between men and women. Many writers of literature continue to stress the need to update the images of women in their literary works. The emergence of the women movement that seeks to advocate for changing the roles of women to a fair status is what is described as feminism, a movement that Bressler (2003, p.145) traces to the Seventeen Century. This is evident in the works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Margaret Fuller, Simone de Beauvoir and Susan Gilber. Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Virginia Woolf's *A Room for One's Own* (1929), Beauvoir's *A Second Sex* (1949) and Showalter's *A Literature of their Own* (1977) discuss and raise concern on the way women are oppressed and how they are considered inferior or secondary. Feminism, so to say, is the principle which stipulates that women have political, economic and social rights equal to those of men. It is also the movement to win such right for women. In the words of Alkali (2007, p.131) "Feminism can be read into any text that has a female character."

As the type of feminism, liberal feminism primarily focuses on women's ability to show their concern for their liberation. Moore and

Bruder (2005, p.450) explain that "Liberal Feminism has its root in some very traditional American notions: Freedom of choice and equality of opportunity". Advocates of this theory like Mary Ritter Beard, Julia Lathrop and Shana Alexander among others claim that gender differences are not all that different—their common humanity supersedes their procreative differentiation. If women and men are not different, then they should not be treated differently under the law. Women should have the same rights as men and the same educational and work opportunities. Thus, the main contribution of Liberal Feminism is showing how much modern society discriminates against women. On his part, Wilson (1996, p.9) describes "Liberal feminists as those seeking to increase opportunities for women through legislative changes and educational reform." He further states "Both liberal feminists and radical feminists are concern with the unequal balance of power between husbands and wives although they explain its basis differently."

Significantly, liberal feminism is characterised by the belief that women have the power to achieve equality. However, equality is not the issue alone in feminism. It is generally rather about rights of women and representation of women in arts. Thus, feminism as a social theory is a reaction to stereotype of women, whereby women are seen as indeterminate human beings, vulnerable, dependent, gullible, voiceless, meant to bear children and to take care of the family; all these deny them a positive identity and fulfillment of what they want to become in life. In other words, it insists that all that is needed is to change the status of women and the existing laws that are unfavourably to women's conditions. By and Large, liberal feminism focuses on women's ability to show and maintain their equity through their own actions, choices and discovery of self. It looks

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at the personal interaction of men and women as the starting ground from which to transform society into a more gender equitable place and it projects gender complementarity and gives room to caring and nurturing of children (Hooks, 1984:45).

The tenets of Liberal Feminism as listed by Wilson (1996, p.10) include issues relating to women's actions and choices. It also examines representation of women in literature by men and women, then power relations both in texts and in reality, with a view to break them down, seeing reading as a political tool and showing the degree of patriarchy. Liberal Feminists also believe that gender prejudice is based around individual ignorance. Therefore, they see education as a valuable tool in the battle against discrimination based around ignorance.

### ***Surgeon's Wife: A Synopsis***

Set in North-Eastern state of Gombe, *Surgeon's Wife*, Azizah's first published novel in English recounts the romantic and matrimonial life of Zahra Abdulqadir, a beautiful young Fulani girl, who is blindly loved by Ja'afar Ahmad, the uncle of her intimate friend, Maryam. She gets married to him before she graduated from the University of Maiduguri, where she reads Medicine. In one of her holidays, she paid an unscheduled visit to him at his office only to catch him flirting with a co-worker. All efforts to apologise for his unbecoming behaviour prove abortive. Left with no option, he divorces her. Zahra spent good seven years without entertaining any suitor again until Alhaji Labaran, an elderly good Samaritan comes to her life. She accepts his proposal, introduces him to her family and the wedding day was fixed. However, on the wedding day, elders of Zahra's family explain to Alhaji Labaran that Zahra still loves her ex-husband dearly. Being kind enough, Alhaji Labaran

understands the situation and withdraws. Zahra is eventually remarried to Dr. Ja'afar and after two years, she gives birth to twins – Nurudden and Munnirah. Friendship, love, marriage, betrayal, divorce and female education are some of the issues dexterously addressed in the text.

### **Zahrah Abdulqadir: A Symbol of an Educated and Assertive Woman**

*Surgeon's Wife*, Aziza's first novel in English, tells the story of a beautiful Fulani lady, Zahra Abdulqadir, who right at the familial level outshines all her brothers in intelligence and popularity. These two unique qualities of her coupled with her striking beauty make her even more popular in school. The former endears her to the teachers and the latter to her fellow classmates. The text records that:

Her father called her "Ummi", while the rest of the family and neighbours all called her Zahra, the eyes of the house. Zahra was very intelligent girl who was also responsible and cared a lot for her family. She was always top of her class in all activities, whether it was quiz competitions, debates, or other intellectual events. Everybody loved Zahra. When she reached her senior year in secondary school, she just knew she wanted to be a doctor in order to help ease the pain of those in need of her assistance (p.5).

As a daughter of a petty grocer, Zahra realises that her ambition of becoming a medical doctor may not be attained. Luckily enough for her, the secondary school she graduated from sponsored her to study medicine at the University of Maiduguri on account of her remarkable performance.

Like female writers, the author equips and energises the heroine with all that it takes to be independent in all the sense of the word. More than her striking beauty, her indefatigability, industry and intelligence make her not just independent on her ways of life but equally able to fend for others especially her close female friends. Pointedly, the author's portrayal of woman in a better and more dignified image stands in total contrast to the usual manner of male African writers' negative portrayal of women. Lucidly, through the personality of Zahra, it is discernible that far from dependent, passive and submissive, women are indeed hardworking and broad-minded. That is why Zahra surpasses all the men right from their home up the university. She works harder than them being more brilliant. Her mother proves this when she says to her:

It's okay, I want you to know that your father and I have always been proud of you and we know that you are capable of doing anything that will make us happy, I am always praying for the best to come your way (p.20).

Being a serious and determined, Zahra rejects outright all suitors whom she considers as a source of distraction to her study and or puts her nascent ambition of becoming a doctor in jeopardy. Contrary to her expectation, Ja'afar Ahmad, the uncle of her intimate friend, Maryam appears to be persistent type. He begs Maryam to persuade Zahra to register his words. He laboriously keeps trying till he steals his way to her life as a prospective suitor. Thus, he serves as an antithesis to Zahra. He selfishly chooses not to keep his words (never to date any girl until he graduated) and this surprised his friends the most. However, the thoughtful and considerate Zahra manages and controls Ja'afar's love and never let it affect her study.

Zahra too loves Ja'afar but she is in control of her feeling and is more emotionally stable than Ja'afar. In other words, she possesses a good sense of judgement which makes it easy for her to restrain her love in a way that she puts reason and conscience over and above just love and passion. Commendably, she values impeccable manners, filial piety and family itself more than love and her personal interests. Thus, in spite of the deep feeling she has for Ja'afar later in the narrative, she puts it aside and considers her family at top priority in everything she does. This is how considerate and reasoning women are in the standpoint of female writers as depicted in many gyno-texts like *Surgeon's Wife*. Zahra like Efuru in Nwapa's eponymous novel is reasonably assertive, psychologically intelligent, filially pious and socially independent more than any of the male characters in the novel. Such remarkable portrayal of women in gyno-texts is a direct counter to the negative portrayal of women in andro-texts like Achebe's *Things fall Apart* (1958) and Yari's *Climate of Corruption* (1978).

Mindful of her family financial hardship, Zahra delays Ja'afar's marital proposal until the time she is satisfied that her parents are no longer under any economic hardship. She is always ready to sacrifice anything for any of her siblings not to talk of her parent. Thus, even when she is asked to grant her consent concerning her love for Ja'afar before the wedding date is fixed, she still feels so worried about her parents' penury. Only her lovely mother convinces and consoles her before she accepts. The excessive love the couple has for each other compelled many of their family members to conclude that nothing will separate them except death. Unfortunately, Ja'afar's terrible act of deceit separated them not the innocent death, so to say. She catches him red-handed flirting with a co-worker when she pays him an

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unscheduled visit at his office as reveals in the narrative:

She knocked lightly on the door and opened it just to hear Ja'afar flirting so openly with another woman, at the same time holding the woman's hand! Jamila, you know your beauty mesmerises me. She just couldn't believe her ears. Was this Ja'afar talking to another woman like that? When he noticed her in his office, all hell broke loose for him. He didn't know if she heard him or not, but by the look on her face she surely heard him. She turned to leave the office when he came after her, shouting her name (p.38).

Ja'afar's ungodly act of seduction before her face reveals to her his true identity. She realises that the hearty mesmerising love words he usually tells her are just like a mere bait he cunningly employs to lure any girl he wants to deceive. She bitterly says to him:

You know what? You disgust me! Dr. Ja'afar Ahmad and I regret the day I got married to a lying loser like you. The next time you think about ever letting your hands touch me again then you should be ready to see my dead body... I regret the day I got married to a lying loser like you. I am done with you; I don't want anything to do with you again what so ever (p.41).

Clearly, Ja'afar's horrendous, horrible and horrifying betrayal separated him with Zahra. She spent seven sequential years before she forgives and reconciles with him. This time, he is loyal to her and is ready to do anything to please her.

Remarkably, *Surgeon's Wife* has a female protagonist in the person of Zahra Abdulqadir who is portrayed and developed by the author to focus on and address some of the challenges faced by women especially young ladies before and after marriage in contemporary Hausa Muslim society of the northern Nigerian region. Thus, in line with liberal feminists' ideology, Zahra is educated, decisive and determined. Liberal feminists view education as a potent tool in the battle against discrimination of women in a patriarchal society.

Significantly, it is pertinent at this juncture to, analogically, draw our attention to the exploration of a similar thematic exploits of the assertive, intelligent, virtuous and reasonable women. Zahra and Dija Garba in Kamal's *Silence and a Smile* (2005) share some personality trait in common. Both of them are educated and married for love and never for money. They are also very obedient and respectful to their mothers and always ready to share their joy and sorrow together. Equally, they make their conscience their armour and make their family's need at top priority to their personal interests. To be precise, Zahra and Dija are complete opposite of Hussaina in Gimba's *Witnesses to Tears* (2007), who lacks motherly care and affection which resulted her falling deeply in love with a notorious pretender, Lahab and her so-called 'responsible' father fails to call her to order in the name of love. As a result, she is embroiled in matrimonial quagmire and eventually becomes the "Witnesses to tears" signified by the title of the novel. Not only that, it is important to state that, in terms of industriousness, hard work, doggedness and determination, Zahra is a carbon-copy of Nana A'i in Alkali's *The Virtuous Woman* (1986) and Rebecca in Jatau's *The Hound* (2014).

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### Mardiyya and Hajiya as an Embodiment of Marital Peace

The portrayal of Mardiyya (Zahra's mother) and Hajiya (Ja'afar mother) depicts the author's concern about the indispensable role mothers play in the upbringing of their children and in the maintenance of peace and harmony in their family. Differently put, they are microcosmic of ideal women and motherhood in the society. Although they come from different family background; Mardiyya from a poor working-class family and Hajiya from a rich and influential family and each married in the same social class she belongs to, yet the marriage of their children brings them closely together. Clearly, they share some sterling qualities and other personality traits in common in spite of their class distinction and marital echelon.

To begin with Mardiyya, a personification of an ideal mother, the wife of Mallam Abdulqadir, who has given birth to five children (four boys and a girl). As a mother with deep love and serious concern for her children, Mardiyya always supervises Zahra's relationship with Ja'afar more noticeably when her daughter continues to collect toshi gift from Ja'afar and still delays the marriage proceedings because of the poverty in their family. She calls her to order and also convinces her that the family is not in epileptic state of economy now. This justifies how honest Mardiyya is in the upbringing of her children particularly Zahra, who is about become a potential mother. Pointedly, Mardiyya's love for her children does not in any way blindfold her in calling them to order when the need arise. Like Hafsa, Dija's affectionate mother in Kamal's *Silence and a Smile* (2005), Mardiyya too does all she possibly can to ensure that Zahra is safely married. In essence, Mardiyya discharges her duty as mother diligently. She purposefully employs friendly and cordially manner to

relate to her daughter in order to understand her better and to guide her on how to go on with marital life. The text records that "This has become a daily grill between her mother and her; she always talks to her about setting down and giving her some beautiful grand children" (p.20).

With this close intimacy between Zahra and her mother, readers could be wondering how such loving mother allow Mallam Abdulqadir to chase Zahra from home when she comes for solace after she caught her husband flirting with a co-worker. In reality, Mardiyya is helpless as Zahra. If she insisted and stand against her husband's off-hand decision, he would have driven her from the house too and this not only affect Zahra but also her other children. Undeniably, Mallam Abdulqadir's unsympathetic nature and wickedness in his marital life compel critics like Yacim (2012:52) to conclude that:

The marriage institution places the Nigerian woman at a disadvantage as it looked at from the angle of "divine" and so a woman who is not married is not seen as responsible in the society. The woman is expected to stay in the marriage whether it is pleasurable or not.

However, in a form of advice she tries to make him see reason but the autocratic householder warns her menacingly. He says to her:

"Mardiyya send her out of my sight or you would see the worst side of me" (p.45).

Yet Mardiyya says to him:

"Let her stay the night for her to cool off."

But her autocratic husband has no time to register what she says. Being the personification of marital peace, Mardiyya reluctantly succumbs to the wish of her self-opinionated though it is not the right thing to do. She only chooses to obey him in order to

safeguard and bring peace to the entire family. She says to Zahra;

“Have patience my dear. Everything will be alright” (p.45).

Revealingly, Mardiyya, as the custodian of marital peace, manages to live relatively happy with her authoritarian husband. Except for Zahra’s conflict, there is no place in the narrative she argues with him solely to keep and maintain peace and stability in the family at the expense of her freedom. She is so accommodating in a way that she is exempted from decision of her children. Even when her daughter’s fate is decided wrongly to her face, she relaxes and exercises patience in the name of marital peace.

On her part, Hajiya, Alhaji Ahmad Dikko’s wife equally symbolises marital peace and stability. Her husband unlike Mardiyya’s is educated. He gives her freedom and companionship so much that she is not only influences his decision but also takes the decision on his behalf. She can decide and undecide many family issues because Alhaji Dikko treats her as a partner in progress not as subordinate as Mardiyya is being treated by Mallam Abdulqadir. Also, Hajiya is never lenient in giving her children good upbringing. That is why they are always very careful in avoiding things capable of making her angry.

As a good mother-in-law, Hajiya treats Zahra very kindly like her biological daughter. She does anything possible to keep her happy. In that, she is a carbon copy of Hajiya, Audi’s mother and Dada, Abdullahi’s mother in Kamal’s *Life Afresh* (2012) and *Somewhere Somehow* (2019) respectively. Hajiya’s kindness to Zahra does not end there. She often advises her on how to lead a happy marital life. She affectionately says to her:

Zahra’u you are now also my daughter. So, I have to tell you that being married is not an easy

task. I have been married for more than thirty years, weathering through all the rise and falls of marriage and I am proud to tell you that it is patience, endurance, love, respect and trust, that kept us together. So, I oblige you to do the same and your marriage will be a great success (p.36).

This is a clear manifestation that Hajiya is an ideal woman; indeed, a role model for the young women like Zahra to emulate. She empathises with Zahra’s plight more than any other character in the novel, Zahra’s mother inclusive. She does not only exonerate her from all unfortunate events but also seems to be so angry with Ja’afar for being the root-cause of all the predicament and ordeals Zahra has gone through. Except for Hajiya’s empathy, Zahra could have committed suicide due to the apathy her father showed her the time she needs lullaby and comfort most in her life. Evidently, Hajiya was disturbed most when Zahra left Ja’afar. Her happiness was only restored and registered boldly on her face the day Zahra remarries Ja’afar after she left him for seven years. Yasmeen, Ja’afar’s sister says to Zahra:

You know, I’ve never seen Hajiya so happy as today. She said her dream had finally come true. When you left, everybody was sad and Yaya Ja’afar went out of his mind... Zahra smiled faintly. She knew her in-laws loved her since the day she become part of the family in the first place and she loved them too. Her problem wasn’t with them, because Hajiya loved her as Umma would and Abba would do anything for her happiness and she never lacked anything when she was around them (p.100).

Pointedly, Hajiya like Mardiyya serves as an embodiment of marital peace, because Both of them are good elderly women and also the custodian of peace and virtues which they always strive to pass such qualities to the upcoming younger generation. Hajiya, so to say, is a replica of Mardiyya in terms of peacekeeping only that Hajiya is lucky to marry an educated husband as she enjoys freedom which Mardiyya utterly lacks. Hajiya's freedom and free-hand to make decision on behalf of the family does not make her feel so proud or take a selfish decision as Mallam Abdulqadir does. Likewise, Mardiyya does not feel let down by the total rejection of her decision by her self-opinionated husband to make her neglect her duty of maintaining peace and stability in the family. Thus, the author through the portrayal of Mardiyya and Hajiya vividly pinpoints how responsible women are in peaceful co-existence in their family. Through the paramount roles they play, the author maintains that when women are given freedom and free-hand as Hajiya's, the family is likely to live happily and the children enjoy good upbringing full of love and discipline. Conversely, when such freedom is denied to them and their advice is rejected just like Mardiyya's, the family still enjoys a relative peace and happiness as they struggle to keep the family together in the face of all the ordeals and intimidations through patience, perseverance, tolerance and accommodation, qualities that many men lack.

### **A Portrait of the Young and the Old Male Characters in the Novel**

The portrayal of male characters in *Surgeon's Wife* expressly depicts the attitude of the writer towards men in her story. While the female characters are positively portrayed, the male characters, on the other hand, receive negative portrayal virtually the same as Zaynab Alkali and Bilkisu Abubakar's

depiction of male characters in their works such as *The Stillborn* (1984) and *To Live Again* (2007). To be precise, there are two categories of men in *Surgeon's Wife*: the young and the old. Yet their attitude to women is closely the same. Aside Alhaji Ahmad Dikko who commands much respect in the community for the services he renders particularly to the indisposed members of the community being a retired medical doctor and to some extent Lukman, Zahra's brother, whose house she resides after she left Ja'afar, other male characters in the text have a blot on their character. For instance, Ja'afar Ahmad is portrayed as a very dishonest, deceptive, inconsiderate, unfaithful and ungodly young man. In the first place, he vows never to date any girl while still a student in university. However, when he sees Zahrah, he is no longer himself again. Zahra's striking beauty mesmerises him so much that he completely fails to maintain composure and focus anymore. Not only that, he cannot do anything meaningful other than daydreaming on her. Had Zahra rejected him as she did to her other suitors, he would have ruined his life by committing suicide or something to that effect. Zahra, a woman, is more emotionally stable and more in control of her feelings than Ja'afar. To convince Zahra to accept his love, Ja'afar says to her:

I won't distract you in any form. I just wanted you to know that since the day I met you, I've sleepless nights. You are the only person I always think about: I find everything you do interesting. I think it's love at first sight and I want to know what you feel about me? (p.15)

As the eldest son in his family, Ja'afar is expected to shoulder many responsibilities or at least help his father in the service for the community. Very much unlike his father,

Ja'afar only cares for himself and his love for Zahra, nothing more. He respects no social virtues and religious precepts. Also, being a remorseless opportunist, unfaithful and machievelian, Ja'afar does not only betray Zahra but also try to deceive Jamila, his co-worker, whose beauty he said mesmerised him just as Zahra's initially. Now Zahra is no more beautiful in his sight. He engages Jamila in an illicit affair.

Also, Mallam Abdulqadir, Zahra's father is portrayed as indifferent and unsympathetic. His iron-fisted rule in the house is comparable to Eugene Achike, Indo's father and Maryam's father in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), Kamal's *Women without Borders* (2010) and Ibrahim's *A Weird Hope* (2012). He does not allow his wife to make any decision even in the marital affairs of her only daughter. Whatever he says suffice and all that matters to him is for Zahra to forever remain in her matrimonial home regardless of whether she enjoys the marriage or otherwise. Even when Zahra candidly reveals that she rather dies than follow Ja'afar back to his house, Mallam Abdulqadir dogmatically and apathetically remain adamant. He chooses to make provision for her funeral than let her spend a single night at his house. He indifferently says her;

“Then I will make preparations for a white cloth and a clay pot for your funeral” (p.45). Even when Ja'afar notices the obvious danger and says to Mallam Abdulqadir that he will come back tomorrow and fetch her, the remorseless old man remains merciless and unapologetic. He angrily says to Ja'afar; “She will leave my house today! If she wants, she can kill herself at your house” (p.045). That is why Zahra chooses to drop from a moving car in order to die but she does not and only sustain serious injuries. What an unjust and highly self-opinionated father who blindly side with his deceptive and wicked

son-in-law at the detriment of his biological daughter?

Likewise, Alhaji Labaran, Zahra's elderly suitor is portrayed as deceiver and betrayer like Ja'afar. He keeps deceiving Zahra by bringing his to her to make her think that his family is peaceful, hence he takes them by the consent of his wife. And at the same time, he betrays his wife by pretending that he takes them on a visit to his relatives or for a shopping. When his wife discovers that she wildly challenges him for it and threatens to kill the prospective bride if she dares marry her husband because of marital jealousy. Pointedly, Alhaji Labaran is not as a good Samaritan as he pretends just for withdrawing his marriage proposal to Zahra. But in reality, he only withdraws when he discerns that a double tragedy awaits him: he will utterly be rejected by his loving wife and at same time be spurned by Zahra whose mind longs for her ex-husband.

### Conclusion

So far, the paper has extensively dwelled on a thorough examination of the women representation in gyno-texts of Aziza's *Surgeon's Wife*. Their representation is evidently favourable as they are portrayed to play important and indispensable roles for the development of their individual family and society too. As mothers, women are embodiment of marital peace and happiness. As daughters, women are considerate and obedient to their parents as Zahra is always ready to make a great sacrifice for her family and considers it first above her personal interest. As wives, women like Mardiyya and Hajiya are faithful, loving, caring and above all peaceful and thus provide such a happy family full of love and care. Clearly, women received a good and just portraiture, which is diametrically opposed to the poor, stereotypical depiction they undergo in the

andro-texts as earlier pointed out. On the whole, the paper concludes that the author like the heroine of the text has utterly failed to maintain her stance of championing the course of women as strong, determine, level-headed and capable of making irrevocable decision like Zahrah in Gimba's *Sacred Apples* and Seytu in Alkali's *The Descendants*. Instead, the women (especially the heroine) portrayed in the text are irresolute and narrow-minded as Zahra's 'blind love' for Ja'afar makes her to cry uncontrollably on her wedding day with Alhaji Labaran. Her unquantifiable love for Ja'afar is comparatively similar to that of her namesake Zahra in Mohammed's *Travail's of a First Wife* (2015) whose love for Ibrahim makes her abort multiple pregnancies simply because he does not like a child. In essence, *Surgeon's Wife* heroine is portrayed as so weak and incapable of leading a life independent from man – the betrayer of trust.

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