

## Cultural Feminism in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*

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**Abstract.** The play reflects the life and quest of Lejoka-Brown for political power by possible means available within his reach. Numerous works have been written on the play with little attention paid to comparing the wives of Lejoka-Brown. A critic derides Lejoka-Brown, about his military intelligence in outsmarting everybody. Observing that he has domineering and tyrannical influence over his own family, which would be counter-productive if such leadership style is transferred to the political office. Another scholar explores the idea of gender equality, which suggests that the text possesses an utopic gender framework, by proposing that men and women are equal. One other critic reveals the motive of Lejoka-Brown in joining politics, as not for patriotism but to serve as a means to an end. His campaign strategy portrays him as a man who cannot differentiate between being a politician and a soldier. The paper adopted textual analysis as method of data collection, while cultural feminism is used as the theoretical framework for analysis. Cultural feminism attributes to the distinctive and superior virtues in women. The drama is purposely selected for its content on the attributes of women. This study compares and contrasts the virtues of Liza and Mama Rashida along with Sikira. These intelligent women marry the same man, although Liza is literate, while Mama Rashida and Sikira are not. Liza resolves to remain with her husband after being voted out of office, but in contrast, her mates choose to pursue their life ambitions in business and politics respectively.

**Keywords:** Politics, military, wives, virtues, intelligence

### 1. Introduction

The play focuses on the personal life and ambition of Lejoka-Brown, a Nigerian soldier returnee from the

Congo, where he served. Polygamous marriage is very common in many African cultures. The women involved in such union play important role in its success or failure. Lejoka-Brown marries three different women under different circumstances. These women have different backgrounds. He meets Liza, a Kenyan national and nurse, while serving under the United Nations in Congo. Their affair metamorphoses into marriage. Liza is unaware that Lejoka-Brown has a wife (Mama Rashida) waiting for him in Nigeria, before marrying him. Lejoka-Brown's brother died in a train accident, so their father, out of pity for the widow, who is considered to be a very decent woman, marries her off to him. After returning home, Lejoka-Brown's desire to go into politics grows without bounds. In order to guarantee his party's success at the polls, it is necessary to enlist the support of women. He therefore marries Sikira, the daughter of the President, the Nigerian Union of Market Women. Our focus is on Liza, Mama Rashida and Sikira. They are all intelligent women married to the same man, although Liza is literate, while Mama Rashida and Sikira are not. The arrival of Liza into the household of Lejoka-Brown influences the perceptions of Mama Rashida and Sikira about achieving their goals in life. Both of them become enlightened about women rights, and adopt some expressions and ideas from Liza, which prepare them to pursue their life ambitions in business and politics respectively.

Afisi, (2010) stresses that the leadership roles women have played in the development of various African societies cannot be underestimated. The contributions of women towards the social, economic, political and educational developments of African societies cannot also be gainsaid. In fact, traditional African society attached no importance to gender issues because every individual had a role to play both in the family

as well as in the larger society. Each gender had its traditional role in the development of the society. In various traditional African societies, the African woman possessed the power that binds the society together. In fact the survival of the family and the future of marriage depended a great deal on the African woman. Leith (1967: 34) also emphasizes that culturally, African women were the transmitters of the language, the history and the oral culture, the music, the dance, the habits and the artisanal knowledge. They were the teachers and were responsible for instilling traditional values and knowledge in children. Men were also essential in the transmission of knowledge to the youth because they had a different type of knowledge of the earth and environment, and also of ceremonies and traditions that were performed exclusively by men.

Familusi, (2012) discusses the right of African women in a Yoruba context with emphasis placed on two divides of culture as possible agents of women oppression and therefore, its relevance in promoting rights of women. Hence, this is a way of correcting misconception about culture in relation to the gender question. Culture has been variously defined as a way of life of a people. The Yoruba nation like many other African societies is essentially patriarchal; hence men are understood to be more privileged than women.

Such a society is described by (Ubrurhe 1999:82) as that which is characterised by male super ordination and female subordination. Men show superiority over their women counterparts, who are usually relegated to the background. Therefore, socially, politically, economically and religiously women are to a very large extent, disadvantaged since decision were taken mostly by women the males.

## 2. Literature Review

Jegede, (2015) states that the drama specifically satirizes the political corruption associated with the Nigerian society; the major object or subject of attack and derision in the play is Lejoka-Brown. He believes so much in his military intelligence in outsmarting everybody. The playwright lampoons his protagonist's idea about politics with military intelligence and sagacity. That is why Lejoka-Brown insists that politics is a source of wealth-making. In the play, politics is seen as a profession where one loots public fund, a social transformer and image raiser for whosoever is involved in it at the expense of the masses and national security.

It is very clear that Lejoka-Brown's motive in joining politics is not motivated by his sense of patriotism

and service but he sees politics as a means to an end. This informs why he decides to go any length to secure political power. The domineering and tyrannical influence of Lejoka-Brown over his own family, especially his wives, is also satirized. Lejoka-Brown is so over-bearing in his matrimonial home such that one begins to imagine what the situation would look like if he transfers such leadership style to the management of the post he is contesting for. Arrogation and deployment of absolute power in itself is corruption. Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely. This dictatorial tendencies or power absolutism is on its own a form of political corruption and Lejoka-Brown is seriously guilty of that. He acquires women in the play not for the purpose of caring for them but to boost his personal ego, to feather his nest and for his political advantage.

Daniel, (2015) asserts that while exploring the idea of gender equality as presented by the Rotimi, it becomes obvious that the text possesses an utopic gender framework, which gives positive truth-value to the proposition that men and women are equal. However, such value is non-existent in the Nigerian society.

Obuh, (2007) unveils Lejoka-Brown's motive in joining politics that it is not dictated by his sense of patriotism and service but as a means to an end. In Lekoja-Brown's surprise and attack campaign strategy the playwright portrays him as a man who fails to understand the difference between a politician and a soldier. The challenges in polygamous marriage are revealed through the dramatization of incessant quarrels and arguments between Sikira and her co-wife Liza. Sikira and Liza's relationship is that of fear and mutual suspicion. Sikira fears that Liza might overshadow her. Secondly, Sikira thinks that Liza being more educated than herself would become more domineering and overbearing than herself. In order to forestall such a situation, Sikira picks quarrel with Liza at the least provocation. Rotimi indirectly cautions prospective polygamists of the consequences of such a marriage.

## 3. Methodology and theoretical framework

The paper adopted textual analysis as method of data collection, while cultural feminism is used as the theoretical framework. In Lewis, (2019) cultural feminism is a variety of feminism which emphasizes essential differences between men and women, based on biological differences in reproductive capacity. Cultural feminism attributes to those differences distinctive and superior virtues in women. What

women share, in this perspective, provides a basis for "sisterhood," or unity, solidarity and shared identity. Thus, cultural feminism also encourages building a shared women's culture. Cultural feminists also tend to value qualities identified with women as superior or and preferable to qualities identified with men, whether the qualities are products of nature or culture. In the opinion of Serva, (2014) cultural feminism argues that a woman's way of viewing the world is actually superior to men's. This perspective aims to unite all women, regardless of ethnicity, race, class or age. Cultural feminism originally evolved from radical feminism. The movement is about finding ways to make the female essence a more appreciated part of society and using women's special gifts to contribute positively to the world. The belief includes the idea that women in leadership positions would be more likely than men to cultivate a more peaceful, less war-torn world. In the play, Liza shares her knowledge and ideas with Mama Rashida and Sikira and even her husband to create a peaceful environment for everyone.

#### 4. Findings

This paper examines virtues of Lejoka-Brown's wives. Liza's marriage to Lejoka-Brown (a retired soldier) is borne out of love. While he is away in Congo, his father marries off Mama Sikira for him, his late brother's wife. The marriage to Sikira as well, is for convenience sake. In order to achieve his political aspiration, by succeeding at the polls, he marries Sikira, the daughter of a prominent market women's leader.

Lejoka-Brown marries Liza while serving as a soldier in Congo. Liza proceeds to the UK for further studies, while Lejoka-Brown returns to Nigeria. After completing her training as a qualified medical doctor, Liza decides to return to her husband. Her flight arrived earlier than scheduled, and she finds her way to Lejoka-Brown's house. Although Liza's mates have the foreknowledge of her arrival, but she does not know about the existence of her husband's other wives. Eventually this fact becomes known to her, in reaction, she attempts to leave immediately, but Mama Rashida, who offers her a warm reception on arrival, persuades her to have some rest. Mama Rashida is a very kind hearted woman. She ceaselessly treats Liza, Sikira and their husband with love and respect. Sikira on the other hand, has develop disdain for Liza, even before her arrival, and doesn't hide her feelings:

**Sikira:**

I've slept more nights with the master than you have, therefore... by native law and custom, I hold a senior

place in this house. Whether you like it or not! (Rotimi, 1977:25)

**Liza:**

More wh-at?...Native law and what! Where are my things? Get me a taxi, would you please? Well...phone one, please, phone. What room are my things in? (Rotimi, 1977:25-6)

Mama Rashida intervenes, and attempts to calm down Liza.

**Mama Rashida:**

Sister, I beg of you...do not let anger turn your head inside out. Have patience, I pray you. Come with me to the kitchen and get some salt and pepper in your stomach... you can think things over while you are eating (Rotimi, 1977:26)

**Liza:**

Think things over! Oooh no. There's nothing...totally, clearly, absolutely...nothing to think over, Mama. I cannot...and will never surrender my person to be devoured in this...blatantly decadent, third rate domestic circus! Nor will I ever condescend to sharing the same monster of a husband with that...smutty, ill-bred, foul-mouthed, uncouth, mangy, grossly ribald, whipper-snapper of a chipmunk! (Rotimi, 1977:26-7)

Mama Rashida finally reveals her true status in the house, adding to the state of shock Liza finds herself in, when Liza inquires from her who she is?

**Mama Rashida:**

Why? Didn't the master tell you that too?... By the grace of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Providing... Toh! I'm his first wife, o! (Rotimi, 1977:27)

The circumstance leading to Lejoka-Brown marrying other women is explained to Liza by Mama Rashida. The long period of separation is a factor, even though their husband marries other women. Mama Rashida echoes his commitment to the marriage with Liza, who still feels betrayed by his action. After Lejoka-Brown returns home, Liza confronts him over his marriage to other women. In response, her husband claims that as an African, he has a right to marry as many wives as he can handle.

**Liza:**

Now, you listen to me, buddy, and man, you listen good! When I Elizabeth Tayanta, married you in the Congo, I had the impression that I was entering into a union with you alone, and you with me. Never did I once imagine that I was doomed to becoming one of your three sacrificial slaves in this... Our marriage was performed in Court. In the Congo, under the French Law: one man, one woman (Rotimi, 1977:32).

In spite of how Liza has been traumatized, and in an endeavour to perform the duty of a loving and caring wife to her husband, she advises him on political, social and health issues.

**Liza:**

You must try to control your temper. After all, remember, you'll soon be one of the leaders of a great African nation. You must learn to control your emotions. Apart from the fact that wild displays of angry emotions can make you a social nuisance, you must realize the grave harm anger does to your health. For instance...your pulse-rate now gives cause for alarm. Your adrenal glands, on top of your kidneys, are working themselves terribly hard. Your liver too is being badly affected, so are your nerves. What will happen next? Psychosomatic breakdown! (Rotimi, 1977:40).

Liza extends hand of friendship to her mates. She enlightens Mama Rashida on the necessary steps to be taken in order to ensure the success of her business. Though Sikira is also present during this chat, it accorded her the opportunity to speak out her mind as well, thereby creating a more peaceful atmosphere in the house. Liza engages Mama Rashida in a discussion.

**Liza:**

Your next problem will be to create the Demand. The best way to do this is to lower your prices so more people can buy eggs. With your chicken house now, you can make more eggs to sell than anybody else in your market (Rotimi, 1977:47).

**Mama Rashida:**

I lower my prices, for Demand. I shall have more eggs for supply. Heey! My sister, may Allah grant you His blessing. May Allah fill your womb with children, plenty children until your supply becomes greater than the Demand! (Rotimi, 1977:47-8).

Sikira reveals the reason why she has been hostile to Liza. In contrast, Liza ask why she has such feeling even though they have never met. Liza in addition educates Sikira on moral and civil matters.

**Sikira:**

Hm! You know, Sisi Liza, I was afraid when I heard you were coming from America o! Well, they say when African woman go to England or to America, or so-so-and-so, they come back wanting to be Headmasters, and kicking everybody round and round (Rotimi, 1977:48).

After the argument Liza had with Lejoka-Brown over his dishonesty with her has subsided, she sews a dress for Sikira, which she wears to check its fitness. The two women engage in a conversation. Liza gives first impression she has about Lejoka-Brown's household.

**Sikira:**

You are a strong woman, with a strong heart. Sometimes I wish I, too had your kind of strong heart so I could tell our husband to go to hell! (Rotimi, 1977:53).

**Liza:**

That's silly, it isn't right for a wife to tell her husband to go to hell, without a reason. You must have a good reason for doing so, otherwise it's sheer rudeness (Rotimi, 1977:54).

**Sikira:**

But he acts rudeness-like to me sometimes. Then I feel like even running home to my mother. Oohh, but you're leaving him. If you can leave him, I can leave him too (Rotimi, 1977:54).

**Liza:**

Sikira, he lied to me, At least, you knew he had two other women before you married him. But me...He didn't tell me anything. When I walked into his house three weeks ago, I took you for a housemaid, and thought Mama Rashida was a washer-woman or something... It all goes to prove that Mr. Rahman Lejoka-Brown does not have any respect for my feelings. I believe a woman must try to be a loving, loyal wife. On the other hand, the husband must show some respect for the wife. After all... men and women are all created equal (Rotimi, 1977:54).

**Sikira:**

Men and women are created equal! Sisi Liza! Suppose we form a party? For politics! All women in Nigeria. Then we become Prime Ministers and campaign for election. Then we sing... Freedom, freedom, Everywhere there must be freedom (Rotimi, 1977:54-5).

Lejoka-Brown on arrival, watches Sikira prancing. He inquires what the matter is, and Liza responds that the woman is simply happy. Lejoka-Brown is not expecting the response he receives. He probes Sikira further inquiring how much she has won at the lottery.

**Liza:**

Must happiness depend on money? She is happy to be alive and free. I see nothing wrong about the acquisition of some knowledge in the basics of freedom. Fundamental human rights- irrespective of race, sex or creed. Particularly, where the students involved in the acquisition of such knowledge happen to be the wives of a freedom fighting hero on the national scene (Rotimi, 1977:56).

Mama Rashida demonstrates selfless act by calling the attention of her husband to the departure of Sikira to her mother's house. She similarly urges Lejoka-Brown to take action in preventing Liza also from leaving. Mama Rashida unveils a plan to expand her poultry business by relocating to Abule-Oja. According to the information available to her, the chickens will grow better, land is cheaper and life is peaceful over there. Lejoka-Brown grants her request.

**Mama Rashida:**

So, if my lord will talk to Alhaji Mustafa who has plenty land to supply, and if my lord will ask him for demand, he will sell it to us for capital. Now, I can then go to the village farm and start my big new trade there. My lord can come to see old Mama Rashida and her chicken farm in Abule-Oja whenever he wants (Rotimi, 1977:72).

Sikira resolves to pack out of Lejoka-Brown's house to dwell at her mother's residence. Her mother, Madam Ajanaku is the leader of National Market Women's Union. This woman threatens to withdraw her union's support for the National Liberation Party of which Lejoka-Brown is the flag bearer in the forthcoming election. Some conditions are set for the party, if it still needs her union's support. Firstly, Lejoka-Brown must be voted out of office, and secondly a female candidate must replace the ousted party member. Eventually Sikira emerges as the new candidate replacing Lejoka-Brown.

**Sikira:**

Rise up! All women of our land! Rise up and vote for freedom, or forever be slaves! Vote for me! It is true I am a woman, but that does not matter. It does not matter, because why? Men and women are created equal (Rotimi, 1977:76).

Liza breaks the sad news of her husband's impeachment from the party to him. She advises him to be calm. He consequently lays out the plan for his future with Liza.

**Lejoka-Brown:**

Elizabeth, I'm really very sorry for everything that has happened. I'll go back to the cocoa business. No more monkey politics for me. But first I'll build you the clinic I promised. On this very land. I'll make sacrifice to my fathers, and then break down this old house. I'll build a new one on its soil. Three stories. You'll use two for the Clinic, and we'll live in peace on the top floor (Rotimi, 1977:75).

The peace that has been evading Lejoka-Brown's home finally returns there.

**5. Conclusion**

This study establishes that Lejoka-Brown's wives are from diverse backgrounds, but they each bear their uniqueness. All of them demonstrate reasonable degree of intelligence. Liza makes herself to be understood by her mates. She is not only friendly towards them, but also imparts knowledge to them. Liza, Mama Rashida and Sikira these intelligent women marry the same man, although Liza is literate, while Mama Rashida and Sikira are not. Liza resolves to remain with her husband after being voted out of office, but in contrast, her mates choose to

pursue their life ambitions in business and politics respectively.

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