

Culture of Silence in Alifa Rifaat's *Distant View of a Minaret*: Complicity or Complacency?

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D.O.I: 10.5281/zenodo.8278003

Abstract

This paper examines the culture of silence that seizes female characters in the face of oppression and neglect sustained by the Islamic cultural milieu in which the literary production is set. Using *Distant View of a Minaret*, the study employs a qualitative approach which involves literary text analysis in an attempt to unveil Alifa Rifaat's complicity in the culture of silence that pervades the North African clime where the stories are based. Through character analysis and reactions to issues of patriarchy which receive little or no resistance, the paper discovers that Rifaat's approach to the myriads of women oppressions by men is that of non-confrontational and silence. With the author's conformity with the status quo ante, attention is further concentrated on the culture of silence as a disposition unequivocally promoted by the author. The paper concludes that Rifaat's approach is a far cry from the radical feminist dispositions of West, South, East, and Central African literary zones. The paper affirms that the author is complicit in the docility that defines women's reactions to their oppression in the novel. It was, therefore, suggested that Rifaat's non-confrontational approach should be theorized and localized within the context of the Islamic religious socio-cultural setting. So doing, it will serve as a starting point in the goal of defining the nature and character of women liberation not only in Egypt but other Islamic socio-cultural climes North of the Sahara.

Key words: Complicity, Culture of Silence, Non-confrontational, Oppression, Radical Feminism

1.0 Introduction

Rifaat's novel is a collection of about fifteen stories of different thematic thrusts and plot development. The stories are not directly connected in terms of plot, but there is a sense in which general plight of women under the Islamic principles can be generalized and deduced. It is important to note that Alifa's approach to marginalization and ill-treatment of women and general apathy that greets such abuse in the *Distant View of a Minaret* is a clear departure from approach to such issues by feminist writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head, Flora Nwapa, Akachi Ezeigbo, J.P Clark, Irene Isoken-Salami, Nawal El Sadaawi and a host of others.

To do this, there is the need to situate the novel within the context of the Islamic socio-cultural setting and the author's background informed by the Islamic injunctions as contained in the Quran and Hadith of Prophet Mohammed. However, pre-Islamic marriages reveal the subjugation of women as a cultural heritage. According to Jawad (1998):

Women...were in subjugation either to their kinsmen or their husbands. They were considered a chattel to be possessed, to be bought, to be sold or to be inherited...women were considered a liability to their own tribes...Such a deplorable situation illustrated that the rights and the liberties of women in those ancient societies were not only trampled upon, but were entirely denied to them.
p.1-4

Julien (2017), however, opines that:

Myth and rituals have been misinterpreted as persistent reminders that women once had, and then lost, the seat of power. This loss accrued to them through inappropriate conduct. The myth constantly reiterates that women did not know how to handle power when they had it. The loss is thereby justified so long as women choose to accept the myth p.166.

In both the Qu’ran and Hadith are contained instructions on the rights of women, polygamy, divorce, compromise and conflict in Islamic marriages. For instance, many Islamic scholars have interpreted differently the Quranic injunction in Surah2 verse 228 that says “All women shall have rights similar to rights given them according to what is equitable. But men have a degree of advantage over them” (emphasis added). Surah 4:34 continues the same line of thought when it says “Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to the other.” Some see this disputable injunction about superiority as a degree in intelligence while others view it as a degree in superiority. However, a liberal interpretation of verse4:34 suggests that the man should be seen as the chairperson Jawad, (1998), Mayer, A. E. (1995) and Mernissi, F. (1994), rather than a superior gender lording it over their women counterpart.

The interpretation given to what the Quran or the Hadith says about women and their rights in an Islamic marriage provides a platform for feminists to take a critical look at the plight of women in such unions. It must be noted that feminist writing and criticism in Africa have come a long way just as the tempo of its discourses in the overall interest of women in Africa. In some climes, the texture of such discourses has assumed radical posturing until in recent time when there seems to be a new direction that finds expression in feminist theories adaptable to the African socio-political milieu. Sotunsa, M and Yacob-Haliso.O (2012) opine that the awareness that the West (Euro-America) cannot speak authoritatively for Africa as well as the need to integrate theory with practice forms the basis of the search for alternative terminologies which adequately address the specificity of African female experiences”. p.96. This does not suggest that African women are beating a retreat, rather it is a way of re-strategizing in order to position the African woman for the challenges of the twenty first century for global relevance. According to Iniobong Uko (2006):

Evidently, the coming of age of African literature is identifiable by the true and pragmatic feminization of the literary vision as a way of correcting absurd female images in African literature and culture. Here, the female writer explores the inner fibres of the androgynous ideal, thereby establishing and justifying the position of women. p.82

Three female groups are known to be active in African gender discourse and they are ‘African female writers, scholars and critics’ who identify themselves with feminism; those who are cautious of the implications of the feminist tag and...African females who choose to proffer alternative concepts to the theory of feminism” p.96. Whether subtle or radical, as a female writer, Alifat Rifaat, a North African literary artist, is expected to take a stand; one that will advance the interest of the African woman no matter the level of intimidation or hostility.

1.1 Egyptian Literature

The history of Egypt will not be complete without a brief overview of its literature. Egyptian literature traces its beginnings to ancient Egypt and her rich cultural artifacts which gave rise to some of her earliest known literature. Indeed, the Egyptians were the first culture to develop literature as we know it today; that is in book form. This is evident in the translation of literary works titled *Ancient Egyptian Literature.Vol.2 translated by Bashir Hassa* (Lichtheim, M. (2019). According to him the selected texts provide a spectrum of the Egyptian literature of the period, including private and royal inscriptions, hymns, instructions and tales.” p..243. Literature is an important cultural element in the live of Egypt. Egyptian novelists and poets were among the first to experiment with modern styles of Arabic literature, and the forms they developed have been widely initiated, throughout the Middle East. The first modern Egyptian novel *Zaynab* by Muhamma Hysayn. Haykal was published in 1913 in the Egyptian vernacular. Egyptian novelist Naguib Mahfouz was the first Arabic – language writer to win the Nobel Prize in Literature. Egyptian women writers include Nawal El Saadawi, well known for her feminist activism and Alifa Rifaat who also writes about women and tradition.

The most popular literary genre among Egyptians is vernacular poetry represented by the works of Ahmad Foud Negon (Fagumi), Salah Jaheen and Abdel Rahman el – Abnudi.

Finally, it must be said that Egyptian popular culture is flourishing in the area of a robust media, cinema, music, museums and tourism.

2.0 Framework for the Study

The framework for this study is a blend of strong voice in feminist gender discourse termed radical feminism and indigenous feminist theories that advocate mutuality and interdependency.

For instance, Radical feminism projects the strength of womenfolks beyond the usual stereotypical representation of women as weak and subservient. It rejects the subjugation and oppression of women in any relationship. It holds that discrimination against women remains the most fundamental oppression in gender discourse. For radical feminists, patriarchy, male domination and masculinity privileges conspire to oppress the woman (Enns,1997). The struggle against patriarchal principles of domination and oppression form the basis of Radical feminist's advocacy both in politics and interpersonal relationship. Although some proponents of indigenous African feminist critics are cautious in taking on patriarchy frontally, they do not condone it. The idea of proffering indigenous alternative feminist theories does not suggest their support for patriarchy, rather it is to domesticate feminist theories to suit African peculiar culture. For instance, Sotunsa (2012:101) identifies Motherism, Womanism, STIWASM, Negofeminism, and Snail Sense Feminism of Acholonu (1995:110-111), Kolawole (1997:34), Okonjo Ogunyemi (Kolawole 1977:36) Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:1), Nnaemeka (2002:12) and Ezegbo respectively.

Catherine Acholonu actually set this tone in her attempt to unveil patriarchy as an inappropriate concept in African socio-cultural setting for its Eurocentric posturing because men and women co-exist. According to her:

Patriarchy, the system that places men on top of the social ladder seems to be an inappropriate term for describing the organization of the social systems of the African peoples. This is because several Africans societies reflect systems with ranging degrees of dual sex hierarchies in which man and women exist in parallel. And complementary positions and roles within society (Acholonu 1995:6)

To stem oppression of women in any guise, they advocate a total realignment, reorganization of the society by removing masculinity privileges and power that concentrate power in the hands of men, and in its place canvasses pro-feminist ethics of mutuality and interdependency (Campbell & Wasco, 2000; hooks 2000).

The approach canvassed in this paper, therefore, is such that women are recognized on the strength of what they can offer and at equal terms. However, this will be done not by violent agitation but a systematic way of working with men to cohesion and peace. It requires a systematic way of reinventing matriarchy or what Alice and Goettner-Abendroth (2020) termed mother-centered societies, based on material values: equality, consensus finding, gift giving and peace building by negotiations. The result, according to them will give birth to “a gender-egalitarian society, in which each gender has its own share of power and action; societies that will be characterized by matrilinearity, matrilocality and women as keepers of the land and distributors of food based on a structured gift economy.”

3.0 Literary Text Analysis

The study employs literary text analysis of excerpts from the primary text, *Distant View of a Minaret* by Alifa Rifaat. The fifteen stories that make up the totality of the novel are subjected to critical analysis to determine the complicity and/or complacency of the author especially on the thorny issues of women oppression and subjugation in the novel.

3.1 Frustration, Oppression, Diminished Self-esteem and the Trauma of Widowhood as Women Experiences in *Distant View of a Minaret*

Frustration cut across the novel in the relationship between man and woman as it touches the image of the woman in the home. The major concern here is Rifaat’s zeal in exposing the inequality, oppression of women, the patriarchal privileges that Islam confers on men on the one hand and her lame duck or feeble response to such feminist concerns on the other. For instance, in the story titled “Distant View of a Minaret,” from where the titled of the novel is coined, the pain of the unnamed woman who lives with the frustration of her lack of sexual fulfillment calls for critical appraisal. The woman who has never been sexually satisfied lives in muted silence while the burning desire for her husband to meet her emotional need sexually, rages. She could not tell her husband because of the negative way he will receive it. However, when she summons the courage to tell him, he makes her feel embarrassed as the man shouted at her:

Are you mad, woman? Do you want to kill me? It was as though he had made an indelible mark of shame deep inside her, so that whenever she thought of the incident she felt a flush coming to her face p.2

This kind of response coming from her husband is enough to give her psychological disorientation and wounded self-esteem. In fact, what used to give her joy is a wonderful opportunity to have an overview of Cairo city, with the buses and several minarets spread across the city. But with industrial development, that dream is gone, except for a single minaret at a far distance. Hope of a better tomorrow dims when one afternoon as she brings coffee into the bedroom, she finds her husband lifeless. She remains calm, pours herself a coffee while she tells her son, Mahmond to call Dr. Ramzi. The humiliation the woman suffers remains a kind of pain for the reader as Rifaat never gives the appropriate response to redress the woman's negative image arising from her treatment by the husband. This pain also resonates in Bahiyya's agonizing experience where sorrow, weeping and gnashing of teeth have been the only experiences she could remember in her entire life. In the story titled "Bahiyya's Eyes," the narrator Bahiyya reveals how she is born into agony from birth, the reason why she loses her sight. She recounts her ordeals and concludes that weeping has its ugly side which is blindness. She says of her blindness:

It will come from the tears I have shed since my mother first bore me and they held me up by the leg and found I was a girl. The whole of my life I went on crying and how often my mother'd tell me not to but it wasn't any use. pp. 6-7

In "An Incident in the Ghobashi Household," Rifaat reveals the intricacies of frustration that usually become the lot of a family where the father figure is missing. Ghobashi has just travelled to Libya for a greener pasture when after a few months the wife, Zeinat wakes up to discover that their unmarried daughter is four months pregnant. Dazed, Zeinat says:

How strange ... are the girls of today! The cunning little thing was hanging out her towels at the time of her period every month just

as though nothing had happened, and here she is in her fourth month and there is nothing showing. p.25

Because of the shame and what the father's reaction will be when he eventually returns, the girl thinks it would be better;

If my foot were to ship as I was filling the water jar
From the canal and we'd be done with it p.25

But the mother has a better idea and it is that the girl, Ni'ma would go to Cairo, have the baby there, then come back with the baby while the mother wraps some clothing, around her tummy to pretend as if she is pregnant. The idea is that when the husband returns, she would tell him, it is their son and not their grandson. In consolation, Zeinat asks: "Isn't it better, when he returns, for your father to find himself with a legitimate son than an illegitimate grandson?" p.27

Another major feminist's concern the author glossed over is forced marriage. The author's presentation of this serious issue is such that the women involved willy-nilly marry whoever their parents dictate. The surprising thing about it is that Rifaat makes no effort to question or resist this prevalent marriage of the young girls against their wish via authorial comment or lucid presentation of character with appointment with karma. For instance, Bahiyya is forced to marry another man instead of the boy she actually loves. In no time, this man dies, turning Bahiyya to a widow. According to her, what befalls her is nothing other than fate which no doctor can diagnose or cure. She says:

Daughter, it's all written on the forehead and there's not a doctor
alive or dead can change fate p.6

He describes as pathetic the loneliness of a widow, without any man to share her pains and travails and she concludes that both her life, including her youth, have been a tale of woes and a complete waste.

The pain of widowhood is another serious issue in Rifaat's artistic creation. The agonizing and psychological pain of the narrator in "Telephone Call" is pathetic and heart wrenching. It is the

story of a woman (narrator) who loves her husband so passionately and has not come to terms with reality of his death. She stays awake throughout the night expecting a phone call from her husband. She says:

I walked towards the little side table ... and with a steady hand raised the receiver to my ear. As I had expected, no voice broke the silence. I held it closer to my ear, thinking that maybe there would be the sound of breathing, but even this I told myself would not happen. What was happening demanded a high degree of faith on my part. p.13

The death of the husband becomes a devastating, shocking and painful experience that leaves an indelible mark in her heart. She carries this pain about with dejection and hallucination such that she appears to be going mad. Having gone through the emotional torture of a false belief that the phone call is from her deceased husband, the narrator realizes unfortunately that the call is from the telephone operator, who directs the call wrongly to her. She concludes that “live and death were both a matter of faith” p.13, therefore asked for Allah’s forgiveness for asking for too much. She says:

Though the tears were running down my cheeks, I finally felt at peace with myself in submitting to what the almighty had decreed. p.16

The treatment of widowhood seems to be all pervading in the novel probably because Rifaat herself is a widow, a kind of re-enactment of her personal experiences. For instance, the world of Widad, a widow who lives alone to take care of her chicken and the property her late husband left behind is presented in a fascinating way that reminds one of many sides to widowhood, the nostalgia of old love and the bitterness of forced marriage. Widad lives a solitary life and hardly gets in contact with people except when she sits outside to greet passersby. Her childhood lover MitWalli comes back to ask her hand in marriage at old age, which Widad says is too late. She had loved MitWalli but forced to marry Ahmed. MitWalli says:

You know, Widad that my wife, the mother of my children died and I'm on my own. And you know I've always loved you and wanted you...p.111

Ah! She exclaimed. "Have some shame man! Have you come to tell me things you should have said thirty years ago? Why didn't you go to my father at that time? You come talking of love when I've got one fact on the ground and one in the grave? p.111

In the author's treatment of widowhood, there is an attempt to link widowhood with loneliness especially that suffered by Kareem's abandonment of his wife. In "Thursday Lunch" Kareem has not been a good husband to the narrator who feels she is growing older than her age as she turns 50 years. She realizes that, these days to keep good friends who are reliable and trustworthy is no longer possible. She wishes to share her burden (the frosty relationship between her and her husband) with somebody. Though every Thursday, the narrator has lunch with her mother which does not provide a platform good enough to share her burden with her. She says:

Yet in her presence, I was still that little girl who didn't dare tell her when she had her first period and instead confided in her elder sister, with whom I had remained so close until her recent death p.19

In deep thought, she wishes she could pour out her internal pain to a mother so close yet very far from her as a soul mate. She confesses:

I wished that it were possible, just for once, for us to make contact and for me to talk openly to her about my bewilderment as I faced a problem whose dimension I couldn't define. p.21

While still lost in thought, she is jostled to life by her mother who reminds her that Thursday marks her father's 24 years memorial. Her mother has been living in her own pain too:

For the past 24 years as she confessed to her daughter. “Today 20th of May, is the anniversary of your father’s death... Today is Twenty-four years since he died, and not a day he passed without my thinking of him. p.22

For mother and daughter, it is a case of different stroke for different folk.

Rifaat explores husband tyranny as a feminist issue of serious concern in *Distant View of a Minaret* where the usual conspiracy of silence becomes so evident. For instance, she empathizes and shares in the agony of a woman married to an irresponsible husband who has little or no feeling for his wife. “Badriyya and Her Husband” is a short story of Badriyya, a faithful virgin despised and taken for granted by her husband, Omar. As an irresponsible man, Omar has just returned from prison for stealing some worthless tires but instead of returning to the warm embrace of her wife makes straight for master Zaki’s café to celebrate his release.

Although the mother does not approve of Badriyya’s marriage to Omar who she calls a fool, Badriyya believes Omar needs everybody’s love. She says:

Please, ma, please try to understand. Omar’s is not really bad and now more than ever, he needs help and understanding from us both. He always used to feel that you were against our marrying. It would help him a lot if he felt that you wished us well p.30

Rifaat’s style of leaving matrimonial palaver hanging in the balance without proffering any solution or pathway usually leaves the reader confused as to what she actually wants to achieve with her erring male characters and their women under oppression. For instance, Badriyya, a virgin, has never had sex with her husband, Omar who insists they still have a lot of time. Even when she is told at the shop where she has gone to buy cigarette for him that Omar is a womanizer, “she asked herself how it would be possible for her to find the strength not to open the door to him.”p.37. One would have expected that any woman would react with the revelation from Umm Gaber who says:

Girl wake up I tell you. The whole place knew about him even before you married. Prison’s just made it worse. That husband of

yours, if he were a woman, would have been pregnant years ago.

p.37

She merely leaves the packet of cigarettes on the counter and turns away, end of protest.

Juvenile love and abuse also find expression in Rifaat collection of stories. Dalal, her little sister and Mahmoud provide the pranks young lovers play on their parents in order to go out and explore. However, such adventure usually goes awry as Mahmoud loses control and crashes into a hedge while quarrelling with Dalal on the wheel.

Rifaat's approach to the serious issue of domestic violence is not any different from her usual way of hanging issues without attending to them. For instance, the heroine, "Mansousa," an emotional story of a legend who becomes the victim of a wealthy man who engages her husband in bean farm. While the husband is away in the farm, the wealthy man comes to shower gift on the stunningly beautiful woman. The visit becomes public knowledge and her husband, Sayyid becomes the butt of scathing jokes and ridicule. Although no one could tell whether anything happens between them, speculations are rife that they engage in dalliance no one can explain. Sheikh Zeidan, however, says:

Allah alone knows whether she gave in to him, - women aren't to be trusted – or whether perhaps he took her by force and the poor girl kept quiet about it, for such as her are weak and vulnerable

p.21

The usual culture of silence that has come to be entrenched in *Distant View of a Minaret* makes Mansoura endure the intimidation of her husband's boss who eventually kills her. Mansoura tells her husband to stop the work with Hindawi, her husband's boss on the ground of loneliness. When Hindawi, her secret admirer, no longer has access to her, he corners her by the canal as she goes to fetch water. While he struggles with her at the canal, her foot slips and she falls inside the canal. It takes days for her to be found dead with a swollen hand. The husband, Sayyid, is

suspected. He confesses to have killed her so he can come back to avenge her death. He is given three years imprisonment. Sheikh says:

Sayyid didn't kill her or do anything of the sort.
Pride made him confess so that later he could take his revenge on
the real murderer p.52

However, the heroine, Mansoura comes back to avenge her own death, as Hindawi is crushed mysteriously under a bulldozer.

...the pipe fell full on Hindawi. We managed to shift
the pipe from on top of him but there was no hope
Just before he died, he looked up at the bulldozer.
Perhaps for him the arm of the bulldozer had become
the swollen arm of Mansoura with the rusted bangles p.54

Sheikh says Mansoura's is revered by all for her ability to avenge her own death. Hindawi's death is strange if Rifaat's style of making her male characters escape physical punishment or revolt from their violated women is anything to go by. Once again, Rifaat's Hagg in the long night of winter is representative of irresponsible men who take their wives for granted. Hagg sneaks out of bed beside Zenouba to have philandering with their servant girls. Zenouba has not been finding Hagg pleasant on bed, partly because the marriage has been wrong *ab initio*. She is forced to marry Hagg, a cousin, in order to keep their head in the family. Tired of her husband's loose and irresponsible behavior, Zenouba asks for divorce which he refuses on the ground that her father did it, while will she allow him to do that to her. Zenouba is infuriated with the answer she gets from her mum, when she asks whether her father also womanized. Consider their conversation as the mother says:

All men are like that
Even my father?
The mother sipped noisily at her tea before
answering: Daughter, he too was a man. Allah
have mercy on him and show him His favours. p.57

She thinks the husband has changed at a point, but suddenly the new servant girl becomes insolent, refusing to accept her orders and the reason is instructively best known to her.

Zenouba has no choice than to accept to live with Nargis, the servant girl, assuring her:

Don't be afraid, Nargis ... Take off your night dress
so you can wash my back...
I hope you'll be happy here, Nargis. God willing, you'll
Stay a long time in this house. p.58

The treatment of Aneesa and the narrator in a quiet village where her husband is transferred to, provides the readers an opportunity to see another dimension to Rifaat's treatment of female character. Rifaat would only be spared the accusation of lesbianism because of her non-western exposure, if one considers the narrator's affair with the snake. The singular act of creating a female snake as a replacement for the husband of the narrator and the amorous satisfaction she derives from the snake lend credence to lesbianism charge. The snake tells her: "My beloved, she said. I shall appear to you in beauty's most immaculate form" p.75.

According to the snake, "perfect beauty can only be found in women"p.75 and she implores the narrator to yield to her in order to taste undreamed happiness. She says:

After that we began the most pleasurable of love affairs, wandering together in worlds and living on horizons of dazzling beauty, a world fashioned of jewels, a world whose every moment was radiant with light and formed a thousand shapes, a thousand colours p.75

For the first time in her life, the narrator experiences true love from the snake which has bore a hole on the wall. When her husband kills a snake around the house, he breaks the pact between them, a situation which the narrator mourns for days on end.

Marriage as a sacred socio-cultural relationship hallowed by all religions echoes so much in the novel. So, it becomes a stigma for a 70 year-old woman to still remain a spinster. Rifat takes her reader down the flat in Nakshabandi Street where we meet Aziza, a seventy-year old spinster who lives with her nephew, Mahmoud and their servant, Waheeba. She hardly goes out except leading women to mourn in funerals. She has attended countless funerals and prays so much prayer that she no longer heed muezzin's call to prayer as she says she had prayed the prayer of generation next. She saves huge amount of money for Mahmoud but out of fear, chooses to keep it secret, including her knowledge of Mahmoud's secret love for Waheeba. Above all, her suffering and reproach as a spinster come at a cost one of which is psychological pain that will make anyone lose hope. This explains why the Muezzin's call to prayer no longer excite her.

This is the only situation when Rifaat attempts to resolve issue of feminist concern. This time, she stylishly concludes by making Witwalli happy in her dream, in the arm of her first love as she sees Widad in her courtyard with arms outstretched, like scare crow protecting her chicken. Death is one phenomenon that Rifaat treats with levity while it ravages marriages in the novel. This accounts for the numbers of widows in the novel. What is, however, intriguing is the simple and less serious manner death strikes in the homes of the victims devoid without the usual tears, sorrow and fear. In *Distant View of a Minaret*, the husband of the narrator passes on while she wants to pour him a coffee. To confirm the no-big-deal posturing, she pours herself a coffee as a way of calming herself. Using the old narrator, an old woman who sees herself as a burden to her grown up children, the author allows her pass on without the sting of death.

She is lost in bed until her brother comes with his wife with whom she has not got along. A strange woman enters and begins to undress for her, unable to resist the touch, hence she surrenders to the funeral ritual. She says: "a feeling of peace flowed over me and I abandoned myself to the hands of the woman" p.116. "The Degrees of Death" teaches a young girl how cheap life can be as demonstrated by the death of the rabbit her grandmother buys for her. She is shocked to see a baby rabbit's throat slashed by Nanny Zareefa, in what appears as her first

encounter with death. She feels guilty for not shouting to rescue the poor rabbit. It dawns on her that there are degrees of death, for animals and even between man and others.

4.0 Findings, Conclusion and Recommendations

Rifaat tries to espouse so many contentious issues about contemporary feminist concerns in *Distant View of a Minaret*. In fact, the fact that the novel is set in North Africa with Islam as a defining factor that shapes the texture of oppression, humiliation and agony speaks volume about the vulnerability of women forced to swallow the humble pie.

What, however, remains worrisome is Rifaat's usual zeal and bravado at exposing the excesses of the oppressive men with little or no effort at liberating them. The author comes across in the novel as one who promotes oppression of women by encouraging silence in the face of mitigating challenges to the African woman. Hers is a form of revolt that does not suggest a rejection of the status quo but a conformity with the privileged position conferred on men by the Quran and its selfish misinterpretation by those who do same for advantage.

Indeed, one would have expected some bold statements in terms of character portrayal and appropriate response to serious issues of obvious abuse and neglects in Rifaat's *Distant View of a Minaret*, but that is not to be. Rather, women under oppression, widows struggling to survive harsh economic realities, those whose husbands have abandoned their culturally and economically assigned roles of bread winners, and women who are taken for granted in this role reversal are merely revealed without any resolution. Her characters are made to be victims of fate and bent to the whims and caprices of desperate and arrogant men. Rifaat could have done better in *Distant View of a Minaret* than merely presenting to the reader, naïve and idealistic women like Badriyya or gullible Zenouba wife of a womanizer.

In all, *Distant View of a Minaret* is a conservative but an authentic African voice north of the Sahara. Her non-confrontational stance also bears relevance with Sotunsa's theory of Iwa Lewa

Obirin, that is as an expanded, researched, polished framework in a literary cum religious space allowed by Islam, Christianity and traditional African culture. The study, therefore, submits that as a creative artist, Rifaat is not only complicit but complacent in the treatment of serious issues of feminist concern. This non-confrontational posturing in the face of oppression and patriarchal privileges, promotes a culture of silence that turns women to slaves under good masters. It therefore suggested that female creative artists should project female characters who will be a strong voice against a status quo the makes women subservient.

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