

GENDER AND CREATIVITY: THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF NIGERIAN FEMALE WRITERS

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ABSTRACT: *Argument on the eroding creative prowess among Nigerian writers of the contemporary period has been rift in recent writing of Charles Nnolim. The basic tenet of his argument is that the “fleshly school” of writers focuses on women, wine, club and fun and therefore “lacks fiery, vituperative and caustic commitment of the older generation”. The ideological trust of this research opposes this view. Available evidences in the last two decades reveal that literary creativity has received a boost in the hands of Nigerian female writers whose thematic pre-occupation centered on gender theories and gender-related issues. Nigerian writers like Zulu Sofola, Tess Onwueme, Irene Salami-Agunloye, Tracie Chima Uto-Ezeajugh, Julie Okoh, Chimamanda Adichie , to mention but a few have established themselves as creative genius, winning National and International Awards. Presently, gender equality has assumed a central stage in the world political and literary scene, it is therefore unfair to regard such huge creative output as “trivialities” simply because they address issues that affect mostly women. This paper seeks to evaluate the contributions of these women to the growth of world literature in general and Nigerian creative writings in particular and concludes that the corpus of works by most of these writers is great works of arts in all ramifications.*

KEYWORDS: Gender, Creativity, Nigerian, female, Writers

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria nation enjoys a reputation all over the globe as bedrock of creative geniuses. This excellent identity and recognition no doubt emanate from her contributions to the world heritage of letters”. Darah (xv) Indeed it is a thing of proud that among the world inlligentia. We can place Nigerians. Nigeria is not just a giant of African in terms of her “wealth of the nation” (according to the Economist, Adam Smith) but also a giant in the world literary scene. Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (55) attest to this fact. “Nigerian Literature has grown to become as great as the nation that has produced it” Early studies by Abilola Irele (1982) and Bernth Lindfors (1999) also attest to this fact. It is in the light of the above reality that recent lamentation from a crop of fore fathers of Nigerian Literature on the “decline in quality out-put among the present generation of writers came as a surprise. Charles Nnoli,(2005) in his article title “ African literature in the 21st Century;

Challenges for Writers and Critics” claimed that African literature of the 21st Century has suffered a setback on account of “dearth of quality literary output” that can stand the test of time. For him, There is no thematic focus ---. Now we find that after the military, people don’t have a focus any more. That’s why I call them “fleshy school”. The focus is now women, wine, club, fun etc. (See Onukaogu and Onyerionwu 100)

Again, Femi Osofisan’s article title “Theatrical Life after the General” claims that “We are dramatics with no visible heirs”. (xxiii) A lot of reactions have trialed these statements but I will cite only two of them. Nwankwo (27) argues persuasively that the older generation of writers deeply worried by lack of “heirs” are looking in the wrong direction since the generation in question is the product of “inter-culturality” which according to him is populated by “not only hybrid constructs of once familiar but also liminal fellows that are neither exactly like their parents nor like the parents of others who they are persistently copying”. Earlier on, Nwankwo presented reasons why the bulk of blame of “failure heaped on the present generation of writers is uncalled for. Unlike the famous literary giants of the first and second generations, the present generation is not invited to expensive and open-ended residencies in elite universities around the globe. ... They do not receive grants to write and produce plays for educational institutions overseas. Hence they move to other mediums other than life theatre: such mediums are Nollywood, Stand-up-Comedy. Similarly, Uzoatu (2008) in answer to Nnolim’s “fleshy school” argues that there is never a time in Nigerian Literature where presentation of sexuality was lacking. I want to state that sexuality is the genesis of Nigerian Literature. Apart from Ekwensi, work such as When Love Whispers, and Isidore Okpewho’s account of Nigerian / Biafran War in The Last Duty is not far from being a pornographic novel. In his long account of love expenditure between Aku and the cripple, Odibo, he described vividly the intricacies of such amorous affairs.

The last time I have visited, she had an ear of her cloth stretched over her lion. But now she is bare. I felt the temper rise in me, and I my whole being quiver...I could no longer remain standing up-right. I began to run my lustful breath over the length and breadth of her body. I took in now familiar yet fresh fragrance in full measure, losing my head in the welcome reverie...I lifted my hands and, still bent over her, I proceeded to run the tips of my fingers over her warm skin and particularly over her, glowing mounds of her breasts, then down to the pebble- smooth roundness of her thighs. ...I was about to lift my frame and retreat, when suddenly she shot out her arms and held on me,”Please!.. Don’t stop! Come on now”... With one hand she suddenly grabbed hold of my member...She threw her legs apart. P. (180)

Again Femi Osofisan’s Mid-Night Hotel portrays the Lady Legislature as a whore. Her manner of whoring suggests rotten pleasure of concupiscence and is also far from being decent. Night club, drinking, whoring etc to my observation has been part and parcel of Nigerian Literature and not an exclusive invention of the present age. Chinua Achebe once said that “There is need for us to know where the rain started beating us” If as Dan Izabaye will like us to believe that “Nigerian Contemporary Literature “lacks the fiery, vituperative and caustic commitment of the older generation” (106). The questions begging for answers are what kind of the socio-political environment did these crops of writers inherited. Secondly, what kind of educational system did they inherit? Are there no possibilities that these writers are actually depicting their personal experiences? These are questions we need to ask ourselves and the task before us is not to apportion

blames. However, let me say from the onset that it is not the intension of this paper to divulge into fault findings and controversies. I have merely cited the above observations to authenticate my standpoints on the conception of the Contemporary Nigerian writers.

What actually is creativity? The lexeme in English word creativity comes from Latin term “creo” meaning “to create, make”. Like many other concepts, creativity has many definitions. Csikszentmihalyi sees “creativity as “any act”, idea, or product that transforms an existing domain into new one”. Creativity is also defined as “the process of producing something that is both original and worthwhile” or characterized by originality and expressiveness and imaginative”. These qualities can be seen as yardsticks for measuring creative endeavours. From this point too, I agree with Karin Baber that “all Literature is ideological”. According to him, “every work of Literature reveals a configuration of beliefs and assumption about the nature of the world”. (207). Creativity of any kind is associated in time and space and progressively rooted in styles. T. S Eliot writes in affirmation to stress this point. “A great poet, in writing himself, writes his time”. The “time” refers not just to the period; it metaphorically alludes to socio- physical environments of the writer. What is often refers to as setting or background in Literature. In order words every literary work is a product of time and environment. The writer’s cosmic philosophy consciously and unconsciously is shape by his environment. Consequently, critics of various shades and sympathies ought to recognize this.

Olu, Obafemi, in his book, Contemporary Nigerian Theatre; Cultural Heritage and social Vision (1996) maintains that “The issue of ideological departures between the old generation and the younger generation of dramatists have continued to generate debate” (Obafemi,12) He categorically grouped Nigerian dramatists into the first, second and third generations of writers. The first generation, are Wole Soyinka and J. P Clark Bekederemo and their idealistic visions are based on the “animalistic metaphysics and ritualistic folklorism”. The second generation advocates social revolution thorough collective will of the masses. Femi Osofisan , Bode Sowande and Kola Omotoso are reputed for this. They direct their energies in raising mass consciousness for positive revolutionary alternative....Tropical issues such as armed robbery, students rampage, class struggle, corruption, fierce anti-capitalism and feminists concerns form the themes of their writing. (62)

Serious creative endeavor by Nigeria women can be traced back to 1966 when Flora Nwapa wrote her first novel Efuru. She unconsciously put into writing her personal life experiences. Unfortunately many critics were not comfortable with this. She narrated this experience in her interview with Ezenwa-Ohaeto thus Nwapa The novel was quite different from what had been written. The protagonist was a woman and a woman for the first time was writing about her fellow woman. The male critics at that time were not used to that sort of a thing and some people even asked me why I should write about a woman.(24)

In other words, rancor, bitterness and prejudices trail the first attempt to write about Nigerian women. This also points to the fact that patriarchal ideology is a dominant ethos in Nigerian society. As such, prejudices against women are extended to their writing. It is obvious now that issues concerning women and sex have never receive a good applaud in Nigeria Literature. In dramatic genre, Sofola was also a pioneer and was attacked for daring to write about women. Her

works King Emene: the Tragedy of Rebellion, The Sweet Trap, Wedlock of the Gods etc have variously pursue women agenda. Sofola embarked on the reconstruction of image of Nigerian women in male dominated society. Her presiding ideology is based on the premium that African women should study the traditional system and place of women as defined by it. It is strictly for this reason that made Olu Obafemi to aver that Sofola's populist Theatre remarkably identified as ideology of conformism. I propose that the presiding ideology in Sofola's theatre is ideology of conformity within which the issues of the status of women in society and cosmic harmony within the "traditional order" are circumscribed. Indeed there is no absence of ideology or mediation in Sofola's dramatic works per se, as alleged by Dunton, Omotoso. The issue is what value systems are espoused and evinced in the works?

Other women writers never lost focus on writing women into social relevance. Today, there are many women writers in Nigerian with good prospects. Ekwierhoma, (9) explains the reason for women's writing. "... These works also seek to equal right of women with those of men and to remedy whatever masculinist views in and on dramaturgy that has sort to relegate the women to the realm of dramatic portraiture". Salami-Agunloye (121) puts it more succinctly. "Women playwrights have mastered the language and words used against them, with this knowledge; they challenge the master's craft. One major female stereotyping common in male creative works is portraiture of women as whores and prostitutes. The woman parliamentarian in Osofisan's Midnight Hotel Awere, is a prostitute "sampling all men" before she discharges her constitutional duty. In Birthdays are not for Dying, Kunle's wife, Bose is a whore and she traversed through the universe seeking for sexual pleasure. Till date, men see single women as available sex commodities. Emeka Nwabueze's only woman in his Parliament of Vultures is not only a prostitute, but also a nincompoop. Mrs Omeaku (aka Madam Hoo Haa) was cast in bad fate. She is nothing short of a monster. Her cantankerous habit, her illiterate mentality aptly conveys the message on the kind of excuses and pretenses that men proffer to deny women active position and participation in politics. Even in Nwabueze's Spokesman of the Oracle Nneka, the biological mother of Ikemefuna is morally debased; sleeping even with her son. The character, Demoke in Soyinka's Dance of the Forest is a prostitute. In male-centred writings, women are inferior, second class citizens and sexual objects. They are often treated as slaves, the wretched of the earth and properties to be acquired by men. Chinua, Achebe in Morning Yet on Creation Day argues that "the worst thing that can happen to any people is the loss of their dignity and self-respect". Borrowing from this aphorism, I dare say that women creativity is aimed at restoring the dignity of women grossly bastardised and scandalised through malicious mis-representation and interpretations in men's Literatures. From the female perspectives, the message is clear. Women are not beast of burden. They are not dogs either. They have dignity and self-respect. Through obnoxious cultural practices such as impose polygamy, rap, child-marriage, sexual harassment, negative widowhood practices, female genital mutilation etc women are oppressed in patriarchal society. Female creativity set to correct these anomalies.

Deconstructing Gender in Nigerian Female writings

Tess Onwueme's literary expedition began as early as the 1980s. She came into prominence when there were few female writers in Nigeria. The Broken Calabash (1984) treats women oppression from radical ideological stance. The wind of change dangles between positive variables and

negative variables. In The Broken Calabash, the crisis is initiated by cultural infiltration and assimilation in Isah land. Chief Raph is Ona's father and a convert to Christianity. But he practice neo-paganism. As a fair weather Christian he also experiments with tradition. Chief Raph believes in "Idegbe philosophy" which encourages a woman to remain at home and give birth for her parent especially in a situation where her parent has no male child. This practice still persist till date among the Igbos especially Anambra Igbos. Ona the heroine in the drama describes this as "sanctioned prostitution" (Onwueme 64)

Go Tell It to Women is a feminist drama of class struggle that borrowed extensively from the Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed directed towards the oppressed poor rural dwellers. Some local female characters are endowed with strong physical attributes. The new yam festival provided ample opportunity for Daisy and other urban women to visit Idu and talk to the rural women on the western concept of "Women Empowerment". This ideology is a reflection on Maryam Babangida's Better life for Rural Women launched in the early 1990s. On one hand the drama is a critical evaluation of similar government project in the nation. Though the government programme is targeted at the "poor rural women, urban women who formed the cream of the society hijacked the programme for their selfish ends. The two women, Daisy and Ruth are not actually protecting and promoting the interest of women. This is evidence in their relationship with Yemoja whom they oppress. Through the activities of these women, Onwueme boldly makes a distinction between two groups of women. And from there emerges these theories which Catherine Simpson (1981) refers to as bourgeois feminism and lesbian feminism. Daisy and Ruth practice lesbianism and in the process relegate Okei, Daisy's husband to the background. The rural women succeed in disrupting the much awaited launching of Better Life at Sheraton Hotel with their cultural dance. The elite women propagate both bourgeois feminism and lesbian feminism. On the other hand, the rural women, Yemoja and Adaku embrace womanism. The collapse of "sisterhood" is as a result of obnoxious activities of the elite women. This is similar to Utoh's women in Who Owns This Coffin. At the end of the play, the message is clear. African women are not in support of Eurocentric-kind of feminism which encourages vices such as lesbian and homosexual.

Empowerment and development are serious economic variables of sustenance in the world economy. They require consistent planning, execution and evaluation and therefore cannot be left in the hands of incompetent women or even men found to be morally bankrupt. Thus the playwright message is relevant for Nigerian nascent democracy. Economic planners need to evaluate the goals they set up to achieve in any given project in order to save funds. The playwright lays emphasis on building solid political structure. This explains the reason for the inclusion of Umuada, cultural political pressure group by the playwright in resolving the issue at stake is to bring to fore all the controversy and argument that there is no organized political structure in most African states hence the Europeans came as a political messiah to establish them. This is a fallacy because in Igbo culture for instance, Umuada or Umuokpu wield the highest political power. Raymond Okeke holds this view. Any indigenous female of a place is "nwokpu" or "okpu" in the place. Okpu is one of the pressure group in Igbo that is recognized. Okpu issue is dreaded and handled with all amount of carefulnessin Igbo. No Igbo man will sleep with a curse from Okpu unless he is absolutely confident that the curse is not justified.,(72)

The position of Onwueme is that African women have political power and there exist political structure of Umuada for instance before the coming his powerful political structure does not discriminates against class etc. Rather it becomes a big Iroko tree that shelter all and sundry. In order words social and political consciousness is not a prerogative of the educated and urban women. The rural women are highly political conscious and Nigerian history vindicates this notion. Onwueme calls for caution in propagating and assimilating foreign values that may not elicit positive change in our society.

Irene Salami–Ogunloye as a critic and a writer seems to write from personal experiences. Virtually all her plays have feminist under tones. She derives more from history than from any other sources. Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin, presents us with a historical story of Queen Idia, the Warrior Queen of Benin Kingdom. She was married to the Oba of Benin whose son, Osawe later became the Oba Esigie of Benin in 1504AD. According to Benin tradition, the Queen Mother dies along with her husband as custom demanded. But Queen Idia refused to die and insisted that she has a right to live. Her refusal set the conflict in the drama in motion. The dramatist describes the concept that gave birth to tradition of “Death of a Queen Mother” The concept of “exist” “transition” and “entrance” “birth”. In Benin culture (like in most African culture), the death of a king is regarded as a transition to the land of the ancestors. “This passage” continues “tripe tic cycle of the living, the dead, and the unborn. This concept which Soyinka explained vividly in many of his writings is aimed at bringing harmony between man and gods. It could be argued therefore that the tradition of “death of the Queen Mother “ practiced by ancient Benin Kingdom of which Irene writes about stems from this age long belief on the interaction with dead ancestors. The sacrifice of the Queen Mother therefore is seen as a sacrifice of atonement

Soyinka theorized on “traditional kingship ritual of transition”. Ogunian Theory illustrates a cordial relationship that exists between “man” and his “ancestors” represented by gods and deities like Ogun, Obatala, etc. Soyinka’s Death of a King’s Horseman illustrates this ritual more vividly; Elesin Oba is supposed to die along with the king to complete the ceremonial ritual of passage but when he hesitates to do so. His son Olunde commits suicide to complete the ritual sacrifice of the passage of the king. This philosophy received a bash in Salami’s Idia, The Warrior Queen of Benin. The playwright insists that such tradition is archaic and out-dated. She therefore clamored for a change.

In More than Dancing, she warned the women to desist from being merely spectators in political scene and learn to become fully involve in political business. In her mind the women had danced enough for their male folk during political rallies and election and she calls on them to go into mainstream politics in order to reclaim their humanity. This clarion call is quickly adhere to by the women and is made evidence in The Sweet Revenge.

Sweet Revenge is an example of changing patterns of women participation in Nigeria politics. Augusto Boal’s Poetics of the oppressed opined that “Theatre is a weapon; only the oppressed can wield it”(3). Salami’s Sweet Revenge. The drama shows how Irene Salami has fared in recording the dynamics of the social history of Nigeria’s contemporary reality. It indeed represents a reflection on a positive shift which is gradually seeing women in political key positions in Nigeria. Sweet Revenge depicted the temper and sensibility of her age and society especially as regards

gender equality through equal distribution of economic wealth. The battle by Nigerian female writers to write women into positive relevance unarguably takes radical stance with the entrance of women into politics. From total passivity to aggressive politicking, Nigerian women are gradually emerging from their shadows. In reality more and more women have entered the political race in Nigeria and in some cases displaced their male counterparts. A few examples will suffice. In 2003 State House of Assembly Election in Anambra State, a female candidate displaced her male opponent in what seems a fierce electoral battle in the field. Njideka Ezeigwe wrestled her political opponent through the court and was able to clinch the party ticket and position till the end of their first term tenure. She even emerged for the second time in another party in the most controversial 2007 Election in Nigeria". There are other notable women politicians who flawed their male counterparts in political election. April elections 2011 represent a total shift in the pattern of politics in Nigeria as more women got elected position in both state and Federal Houses of Assemble.

In treating contemporary socio-political reality in Nigeria, Salami challenged misogynist, and indeed the generality of the populace to the fact that "dehumanization of human beings is evil that cannot promote good social and human relations. Sweet Revenge as the title of the play suggests, is a metaphorical satire for intrigues and squabbles that characterized most family affairs. In the play, it is a sweet revenge for the heroine, Aisosa as she replaces her husband in the Senate when the later was recalled by his community. The playwright once again presents us with another bizarre account of man's insensitivity and subjugation of women. Sota Ojo marries Aisosa, a consultant gynecologist but stops her from practicing her profession in order to take care of their children and attain to other domestic chores. However, when he travels to United States of America for further study, he marries Cheryl, a white woman. By the time Sota comes home and becomes a Senator, he disowns Aisosa. Then, he drives her and their four children away from the house which Aisosa inherits from her parents. Cheryl later discovers that her husband is a "bigamy". She goes in search for her co-wife and apologies and then sues for divorce before going back to Europe. It becomes a double tragedy for Sota when he is recalled from the Senate by the women of his constituency. Sequel to this, Salami encourages women to emerge from their shadows and contribute their quota for the growth of our society. "Our foremothers were known to have accomplished great things; displayed exceptional skill and talent, stood up against oppression, injustice and contributed much to the society "(99). Sweet Revenge presents us with a new class of women; made up of women of substance, glamorous power brokers. Aisosa is a consultant gynecologist and later a Senator. Madam Power, Power is a political activist. These modern women represent a new breed of empowered women. They are educated elites and they represent beacons of light to their generation. Through dent of sheer hard work these women attain a greater height. Education is believed to be highly responsible for this great achievement. Many women writers such as (Ezenwanebe185) attest to the fact that" Empowerment of women through formal education, is endorsed as the most viable means to make them economically self-reliant, equipping them with the power to redefine private life and engage effectively in public sphere". Salami has written extensively opposing all forms of women stereotyping in Literature, film/Home video.

...When women are protagonist, it is always to pursue a negative cause. Projecting this image convey a picture of women as incapable of occupying leadership positions and therefore with poor

sense of direction. This depicts an air of men's superiority and female inferiority. While men are subjects, women are made objects in these movies. The men are put in the pedestal while the women look up to men for sustenance (148).

In Nigeria, Placement of women in key position of government has remained a far cry. For instance, Between 2005- 2009 when Chief Obasanjo was the president, out of one hundred and nine Senators in Nigerian National House of Assembly, only nine of them were female. It may also interest you to know that some of the outstanding ministers in Obasanjo's cabinets were women. "If it is true that harmony in the family system promotes stability and progress in society, it is also evident that no society can develop its national consciousness in a healthy manner without the active and full participation of women in its cultural, political and intellectual life"(142)

Julie Okoh is also another established Nigerian playwright, critic and director of Theatre. She has the pedigree to become one of the most celebrated African female playwrights of the Modern Theatre. Gender issues in the hand of Julie Okoh takes psycho- social dimension. Like a social scientist, she develops interest on wanton abuse abuse of femininity; especially women sexuality by men. The corpus of her works centered on the effects of female genital mutilation on the girl – child, rape, incest and infidelity. These form the major themes in her dramatic works especially Edewede and In fullness of Time. In Edewede, we are meant to see this through the discussions of Edewede and Ebun. According to Edewede, "circumcision has destroyed many women in this village". They suffer from different types of infections and complications after operation" (29). In fact from the conversation between the two it is clear that many promising young girls have fallen victims of the exercise:

Ebun: On that point, you are right. Some even carry from it that disease they call AIDs...

Edewede: Do you remember Akalo?

Ebun: Yes I do.

Edewede: She died of VVF.

Ebun: VVF. Tell me, what does that really mean?

Edewede: Vesico- Vaginal Fistula...(29)

Edewede set the pace for mobilization and conscientisation of women to consider the dangers of the excise pose to their total wellbeing. Introduction of the victim of circumcision is meant to appeal to our consciences to see reason for its abolition. This is in line with Anote Ajeluorou's submission that Edewede is an early denunciation of evils of female genital Mutilation. A theme that receives more diplomatic exploration in her, In the Fullness of Time.

In the Fullness of Time, she treats some of the issues that encourage and reinforce marginalisation and subjugation of women especially in this part of the world. Obnoxious traditional practices, marriage and men infidelity are some of the teething problems treated in the drama. There is a dramatisation of sex, tradition and class as instrument of oppression. Central to Julie Okoh's In the Fullness of Time are cultural practices that subjugate women. The theme of the drama revolves round Female circumcision also known in medical terms as female genital mutilation. World Health Organisation (WHO) defines female genital mutilation as "procedures that intentionally alter or injure female genital organs for non-medical reasons." Similarly, (Mudiare 366) maintains that it is "the removal of part of or the whole of the organs of the female genitalia, such as clitoris,

the labia minora, majora and mons pubis” the playwright gives exposition to the health/morbidity, religious, psychological, moral and even financial hazards of female circumcision. It contributes to high rate of female mortality leaves women with psychological torture as is the case with Etusi and Esele . (Iwokwagh 164) observers that health experts have identified some of the health problems associated with FMG.

These include, haemorrhage, shock, acute urine retention, injury to adjacent tissues, infection, fraction or dislocation, damage to perineum or anus, vulval tumors, painful sexual intercourse, frigidity and infertility, risk of transmission of blood-borne diseases such as hepatitis B virus (HBV) HIV, etc. Other complications are chronic infection and virginal discharge, vessico- vaginal fistula (VVF), recto- vaginal fistula (RVF), vulva cysts and abscesses.

The argument here is that female oppression begins from the cradle. Mutilated genital prevents libido in women and inflicts psychological trauma in women. It is a deprivation of a woman’s sexual right. Okoh has previously in her drama alert us on the danger of female circumcision. In relating her writings to the female body and female sexuality she awakes the consciousness of her audience on the feminine essence. Recently, medical experts have discovered that the practice of female genital mutilation can lead to health complications which can even cause permanent infertility in women or outright death. These problems include Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), infections such as tetanus, haemorrhage, acute anaemia, vesto-vaginal fistula, recto-vaginal fistula etc. Female Genital Mutilation or female genital cutting, popularly known as female circumcision or clitoridectomy in medical terms is defined by World Health Organization (WHO) as “all the procedures involving partial or total removal of external female genitalia or other injury to the female organs for non-medical reasons”. Data from World Health Organization states that between 100 – 140 million females in the world have been victims of the practice. The report also suggests that every year about three million girls are at risk or are subjected to some form of FGM/C. the report also indicates that the practice exist in 28 countries of the world including Sub-Saharan Africa, Northern Iraq, Europe, USA and Australia.

Female genital mutilation is practiced in most culture because it is seen as a rite of passage from adolescence to womanhood. For some, the practice helps them to preserve ethnic identity. For instance, “Beta Israel” are said to indulge in the exercise as part of Ethiopia identity. Others claim it prevents lasciviousness. Agikuyu of Kenya holds tenaciously to this practice so much so that they gear at any girl who is not circumcised. Ngugi (68) writes that Agikuyu of Kenya has a song “Muthirigo” which they sing in mockery to an uncircumcised girl. The song goes like this: “I will never pay bride-wealth for an uncircumcised girl. My mother is circumcised, my father is circumcised... An uncircumcised girl is foolish”.

Feminists believe that such taunting and semantic derogation has both psychological and social impact on girls. In the first instance, the target is to intimidate and force total compliance to the status quo.

Closed Doors revolves around men’s continuous exploitation, molestation, intimidation and harassment of their female counterparts all in a bid to satisfy their sexual urges. The play is set in a nursing home where pregnant young girls are assembled and subjected to either abort their

pregnancies or face the pangs of delivering the baby who would be sampled for adoption. The philosophy and method of adoption as portrayed in the drama run contrary to the dictums of African culture and tradition. Sequel to slave trade, child adoption is not a common practice prompting in most African society particularly here in Nigeria. This is why the Igbo aphorism that Children are not brought and sold in the market because they are not article of trade held swage then. There in the nursing home known as Goodwill Nursing Home, the inmates namely; Tracy, Bola, Eki, Amina, and Belema recount their terrible and pathetic ordeals in the hands of their respective male predators. Through their narration, one discovers that these young girls have been sexually abused and molested by men who parade themselves as masters and superiors. In the process, these young girls find their strength and the motivation to put their ugly past beyond and forge on life. At the end, the police surround and evade the nursing home thereby grinding its illegal operation.

In the hand of Tracie-Utoh Ezeajugh Feminism takes new meanings and shapes. From writing back, to adaptation, historicization and epic film- drama. Beginning from our Husband Has Gone Mad Again (2001) to Nneora: an African Doll's House (2005) and Olamma (2011) her latest play. The play Nneora: An African Doll's House (2005), which is an adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House, portrays Utoh-Ezeajugh as one of Nigerian's committed feminist playwrights as she proffers solutions to gender imbalance Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again (2001); Utoh's inversion of Ola Rotimi's, Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again raises moral questions on issues of oppression. Our Wives... presents "feminist activists" political agitators who hide under the banner of "Women Liberation" to disrupt public peace. They are charlatans, nerver –do- well, social misfit, nincompoops, opportunist, morally debased women. Their stock in trade is to lord it over their husbands in order to sustain their ego. In Our Wives ..., there is a total reversal of gender role. Women are endowed with men's "attributes" and "responsibilities" and vice versa. While Ene and Irene pay their house rent, electricity bills and children's school their husbands: Inyang and Gambo are their houseboys and take instructions from their wives on how to cook food, wash plates and even clean the kitchen. Nwanya, (123) opines that "From Irene, Ene, Ifeoma to Funmi, the playwright paints a gloomy picture of a "bunch of charlatans and sadists in their frenzy." The whole picture is that of female gender at variance with their male counterparts."

As expected this role inversion irked most dramatic critics who argue against the backdrop of the play's realism. Subversion of gender roles with the aim of reversing gender stereotyping in favour of women they argue is not in turn with human culture let alone African custom and tradition. But juxtaposition of female empowerment vis-à-vis male empowerment is to set a standard for proper evaluation. Genevive (173) shares this opinion, "Utoh's Our wives Have Gone Mad Again is a conscious subversion of the patriarchal tendencies found in Rotimi's Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again and their transference to women population" (173). She argues further that "by reviewing the importance of economic dependence on men, Utoh inversely underscores the harm the same kind of dependence can cause women (174). However, Utoh-Ezeajugh's Nneora: An African A Doll's House is a departure from the brutal and radical feminism discussed above. It represents what Akoh and Ewrierhoma refer to in their various writings as "Emergence of African Feminism and Womanism" (4). Nneora... is an adaptation of Henrick Ibsen's A Doll's House. As a "character" and a "theme" of the drama, Nneora is reminiscences of hope-hope for the down-trodden, the dejected of the society. It also represents hope for the future. "Nneora" suggests

“universality.” The lexicon “Nneora in the Igbo language means “Mother of All” and can symbolically mean “Good Mother” (Nwankwo 180) The dramatic actions of the character, Nneora is a source of inspiration to the less privileged ones like Mama Uduak. In her immediate family, she becomes a link between her frustrated husband Ikenna and her children when the latter denounces them. The attitude of Nneora portrays an ideal African woman and mother par-excellence. At the beginning of the play, she becomes a philanthropist, solicitor and advocate. She pays Ikenna’s accumulated debts and consequently saves him from humiliation in the hands of Mama Uduak. She also gets him a bank job. But Ikenna never reciprocates this gesture positively. Instead he casts aspersions on his wife’s shop, and children and even blames her for giving birth to “four noisy” girls (36).

The most recent play of Chima, Utoh- ezeajugh, Olamma (2012) is perhaps her most engaging feminist work. Olamma as an epic film-drama borrowed extensively from history especially the history of Mary Mitchell Slessor who stopped the killing of twins in Africa. And the scourging influenza of 1914 that wiped out the some Igbo communities. Thus the drama was set in the pre-colonial Igbo period. The Igbo society of which Chima wrote about was a very rudimentary one indulging in all manner of sharp primitive practices such as selling people into slavery, inter-cine-wars, exchange of women for ritual purpose, human sacrifice and above all killing of twin. The play opened with the advent of emissaries from Ugwunzu who feel aggrieved over the murder of one of their daughters by an Umungwu hunter, Odidika. He conspired with some elders to give Olamma, his late brother’s only daughter to them. Odidika has already sold his nephew, Obiechina into slavery and is ready to inherit his brother’s property but for the smartness and bravery of Olamma. The story progresses to substantiate the fact that women are intelligent, wise and competent human being capable of contributing meaningfully to the growth and development of the society. Olamma of course escaped from the hands of Ugwunzu warriors and runs to Matron Florence Mbano. The white woman Matron Florence trained her and she becomes an important personality in her community bringing changes and modern development. Thus through the efforts of women, killing of twins and many other traditional practices were abolished. Above all, education and empowerment of women received serious attention. Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh’s feminism moves from radical confrontationist to womanist/ accomodationist.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Nigerian writers especially the dramatis develop progressively from drama of conscientisation to drama of positive action. From feminists propaganda to feminists realism and from theorising to practical experimentation. This is true of Sofola whose presiding ideology of Sofola is conformity. Onwueme preaches complimentarily of sexes. For Julie Okoh, where complimentarily is impossible separatism will be inevitable. Tracie Utoh-ezeajugh presiding ideology is womanism/ Accomodationism. In spite of their feminist stand, there are unmistakable affinities between the contemporary and the older generation of writers. For both Clark and Soyinka ritual form is the strong determinant of their quest into their understanding of cosmic totality and human essence. These women have through their various feminist philosophies captured the dynamics of their present scio- political realities. The manner in which they choose to do so is insignificant as long as the message get to their audience.

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