



Female Writers in Modern African Literature a Study of Seff Attas Everything Good Will Come and Akachi Adimora Ezeigbos Roses and Bullets

Okoro Henry Okechukwu

Department of languages, Federal Polytechnic Oko Anambra state

Abstract

This study examines the works of two female writers in modern African literature: Sefi Atta's "Everything Good Will Come" and Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo's "Roses and Bullets." Through a close analysis of the novels, this study explores how the authors portray the experiences of women in Nigeria, the challenges they face, and the strategies they use to overcome them. However, this research work exposes the various cases and conditions noted to the African women in their different societies in Africa. This study becomes a yardstick through which these African female writers like Sefi Atta and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo project the lives of those women in Africa who are under such unfavourable conditions. Through the events and actions of their characters, they picture African women as they censure in a world of realism. Through the lenses of feminism, the said cultures and traditions humiliated the African women in both Everything Good Will Come and Roses and bullets. Conclusively, this research work is based on the previous facts raised by other researchers to bring to light the evils of African traditions and their effects on women using feministic approach as its theoretical frame work. The study also highlights how the authors use their writing to challenge patriarchal norms and highlight the resilience of women in African societies.

Introduction

Female writers have played a significant role in modern African literature, bringing attention to issues that affect women in African societies. In this study, we examine the works of two prominent female writers in Nigeria, Sefi Atta, and Akachi Adimora Ezeigbo, and their portrayal of women's experiences in Nigerian society. Atta's "Everything Good Will Come" and Ezeigbo's "Roses and Bullets" provide a unique perspective on the challenges faced by women in Nigeria and their resilience in the face of these challenges.

Many studies on gender have examined patriarchy, subjugation, and oppression of women in various forms and from several points of view (Akorede 2010, Opara 2008, Oko 1996). Most of these past studies focused on the stereotypical representation of female characters in male-authored texts. They all aimed at achieving self-definition and selfactualisation for women. However, the Nigerian women novels have grown beyond the stage of examining female characters who are docile and look up to man for their day to day survival. This is because such representation projects the negative portrayal of womenfolks as inimical. The new paradigms in feminist

characterization help to plead women cause. This is mostly done by focusing on the following topics such as education and career; activism and participation. This suggests that Nigerian women writers are not backgrounded to the kitchen but foregrounded as leading characters in both men and women writings. It is not surprising therefore, to see that some (though very few) of the male writers are gradually changing their styles of writing, as they now paint positive images of women in their works. Nowadays, most African female novelists stereotype men in their writings as a means of "launching back an attack on them". Men are given roles like rapist, armed robbers, hired assassins, cheaters, and unfaithful husbands. Meanwhile, to have an effective complementarity and inclusion of both sexes in the struggle for survival by the nation, it is necessary to reconstruct the identity of the male characters in Nigerian women novels and vice versa. This study, therefore, examines the portrayal of the male and female characters in selected novels of two female writers with a view to unmasking men's stereotypical minds towards women and vice versa. This study also aims to analyze the

portrayal of women in these works and their contribution to modern African literature.

African feminism is an African brand of feminism which developed as a result of the reservations of some African women (like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Buchi Emecheta, Molara Leslie-Ogundipe, Mary E. Modupe Kolawole and so on) to feminism. African feminism was founded in the early twentieth century by women by such by Adelaide Casely-Hayford, a Sierra Leonian (www.msafropolitan.com). These women believed that feminism was a Western movement, and as a result, it only considers the situation of the White women. The need to propound a theory grounded in Africa and which could represent well the situations of the Black women led to the emergence of African Feminism. According to Nnolim (2010:115), African feminism centers on “the contours of the feminist literary landscape in Africa, in general, and Nigeria in particular, present a panorama of undulating topography. It is a house divided against itself and at present looks uncomfortably like the leaning Tower of Pisa”. Since then, African feminism has focused on women related issues.

The major subject matter of female writers in the world of literature was for the emancipation of woman from every form of ill-treatment and mischief which mere tradition reduced them into. In the real sense, women were subjected, suppressed and subjugated by their male counterpart just because tradition made it so. They could not share a better place with the men. The above view gave the female writers in Africa a platform through which their protests were felt heavily. This group of female writers was first called feminists because they focused their writings and arguments etc. on what they called “feminism” which aimed at emancipating the womenfolk totally from the slums of life and giving them a better position to enjoy everything that life offers.

However, in the world view, feminism means the movement which supports equal rights for women with their male counterparts as propounded by Charles Fourier, the French philosopher. But the approach of female writers in Africa towards feminism differs from the western notion. It also differs from culture to culture, from society to society, from race to race and people to another. No

doubt, feminism to western writers is a movement or struggle to have equal rights with the males. Equal right in marriage, politics, economy etc. but to female writers in Africa, their protest is to be recognized and emancipated from all forms of subjection, subjugation, prejudices, suppression, oppression, ill-treatment that they were meted with. To a great extent, the African women were stench in the hand of tradition, norms and culture. In fact, they had no breathing space to complain and have their feelings expressed. This is so because their voices and opinions were not allowed nor permitted to be heard or aired. In the light of the above revelation, so many notable African feminists arose and fought against women subjugation and were happy to be celebrated among women folks.

It is therefore worthy of note to say that feminism gave birth to whatever positions that our women especially those of them that are in the literary world occupy today.

BIOGRAPHY OF SEFI ATTA

Sefi Atta was born in Lagos Nigeria, in 1964, to a family of five children. Her father Abudul-Aziz Atta was the secretary to the federal government and head of civil service until his death in 1972, and she was raised by her mother Iyabo Atta. She attended Queens College, Lagos and mill field school in England in 1985; she graduated from Birmingham University and trained as a chartered accountant. She moved from England to the United States in 1994 with her husband, GboyeyaRansome-Kuti, a medical doctor and son of profession OlikoyeRansome-Kuti and they are blessed with one daughter. She currently lives in Meridian Mississippi.

Sefi Atta delved into writing while working as a C.P.A in New York and in 2001, she graduated from creative writing program at Antioch University Los-Angeles. Her short stories have appeared in literary journals such as Los-Angeles review, Mississippi review and world literature today possible, her books have been translated to several languages. Her novel include Bit of difference a (2009)Swallow (2010), Everything Good Will Come (2005). Her short stories collections include News From Home (2010), An Ordinary

Legacy, The Muson Festival, Muson Centre (2010), The Naming Ceremony, New World Nigeria.

Her selected awards and recognitions include Wole Soyinka prize for literature in Africa (2006), Noma award for publishing in Africa (2009), Caine prize for African literature, shortlist (2006), PEN international David TK Wong prize, 1st Prize (2005), BBC African Performance, 2nd prize (2004), Glimmer Trains very short fiction Award, finalist (2003), Red Hen Press Short Story Award, 1st Prize (2003), Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon (2010), Northern Western University (2008), University of Southern Mississippi (2008).

In a nutshell, Sefi Atta is one of active Feminists in modern African literature. Her works and numerous contributions have no doubts aided to the promotion of the life standard of womenfolk's in contemporary African literature.

BIOGRAPHY OF AKACHI ADIMORA-EZEIGBO

Prof Akachi Adimora was born raised in Eastern Nigeria, but now lives in Lagos. She is the first child of Joshua who was the secretary of a country council and Christiana Adimora and has five siblings. Raised partially in a rural community and partially in the city, she combined these two factors, as background and setting for children's stories and adult fiction. Though born in Eastern Nigeria, she has lived in different parts of the country-East, North and West; she has traveled exclusively in most parts of Africa, Europe and in the U.S.A.

She obtained her Bachelor of Arts (BA) and Master (MA) degrees in English from the University of Lagos and her PhD from the University of Ibadan, Nigerian. She also has a post Graduate diploma in education (PGDE) from University of Lagos.

She is a lecturer, writer, novelist and critic. Essayist, journalist and administrator, she was appointed a professor of English at University of Lagos in 1999. She has taught in this university, in the department of English, since 1981. She headed the English department in 1997, from 2002-2005 and 2008-2009. She is happily married to Professor Chris Ezeigbo and they have three children.

Her novels include the following: House of Symbols (2001), The Last of The Strong Ones (1996), Rituals And Departimes (Short Stories) (1996), HazinaIliypjikwa (1996), Echoes in The Mind (1994) The Prize (1995), Rhythms of Life.

Her non-fiction include: A Compassion to the Novel, Legal: Visit a Books (1998), Gender Issues in Nigeria- A Feminine Perspective (1995), Fact and Fiction in the Literature of the Nigeria Civil War, Lagos: unity publishing and research company (1992).

Akachi was national treasurer of the association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) from 1995-97, and vice president of WRITA (women writers of Nigeria) from 1998-2000 apart from publishing over thirty academic papers and hearing her short stories appear in five anthologies, she has published twelve books. In 2001, AkachiAdimora-Azeigbo was awarded the highly sought after ANA/spectrum prize for her book, House of Symbols, and the Zulu Sofala Prize for women writer for the same book, which the literary magazine, lumina, described as a profound work of immense significance which fills aching vacuum in African literature. In 1994 she also won first prize in the WORDOC short stories competition.

EVERYTHING GOOD WILL COME - SEFI ATTAS

Sefi Atta's everything good will come is a narration of the consciousness of a growing child. The narration is in the first point of view. The writer made it a point of duty to present the central character's consciousness boldly as she matures to become conscious of the African woman.

"In my country, women are praised the more they surrender their right to protest in the end they may die with nothing but selflessness to passion to their daughters, a startling legacy that tears down a perched throat" ... (177)

The novelist used the historical knowledge of a post-colonial Nigerian experience as narrated by Enitan protagonist, who realized the marginalization of women.

This novel enlightens readers about the happenings of Nigerian states as well as draws readers into its historical contextual environment and the attendant emotional and structural break down of human relationships. Enitan is born into a Nigerian state riddled with ethnic and religious differences; these religious and ethnic differences are however stifled into cataclysmic emotion when political underpinning is considered. The narrator understanding of the unnecessary centre of Nigerian state by the colonial masters, without taking cognizance of the ethnic differences prevalent in divers' societies is valid, even in today's work.

For so many Africans, growing up wasn't easy; they were made to become "born again" by the wheels of the cane in the name of corporal punishment and discipline. The African child is also left to find out things for him or herself. This leads to questioning the unpredictable of moral upbringing.

Only the strong would survive, the rest would spend their lives searching for initiatives. This was what it took to raise an African child, a village of bearers, and yet if someone put their hands around a child's neck, and applied the slightest pressure ... (133)

Enitan also finds herself struggling with the concept of religion and morality. The incessant conflicts in her family further heightened the deteriorating health of her sickle-cell brother, who eventually passed on, is worthy of mention. Her mother an escapist, seeks succor from marginalization and a broken marriage, in a white garment church, she transforms from the once glowing young wife into a "wild Christian; a strict and bottled admixture of holiness and bottled-up grievances. But she however still holds on to traditional beliefs as she kills a fowl to rescue her daughter fertility.

Enitan grows into womanhood under the influence of her carefree childhood friend Sheri who lends her a shoulder in her search of "womanish freedom." She is made to realize the limitation of the female gender; a situation where she is reserved for the status quo from childhood: a shallow education limited by

dreams of childbirth, wedding and graduation, finally a ridiculous transfer to the royal office of the kitchen.

She learned forward. "Maybe you don't know this because you were raised by your Father, but let me tell you, now, to save you from unnecessary headache in the future. Forget that nonsense. Education cannot Change what's inside a person's veins... (16)

Governmental issues are on the front burner of the novel as she harps on the manipulation of the constitution by politicians and ruling hands. The author also makes worthy mention of the inconsistencies of tradition. Political will is being transferred from the hands of corrupt politicians to the hands of heart-hardened military coup-plotters who are bent on arresting, manning and eliminating helpless civilians. The military barges into the hallowed gates of leadership, their reason being that the politicians were corrupt but their "reign" was uncensored, unchecked and unencumbered.

Hassan, a brigadier Sheri gets involved with, represents not only the power opulence of military rule in the military regimes but also their chauvinism. In fact, he portrayed the archetypal male who limits the aspiration of women: who sees them as slaves and "commodities or thing flies"

After what my eyes have seen? If am not crazy, what else will I be? He is jealous of me. Can you believe it? He is jealous of my success. With all he has. He wants me to have nothing, except what he gives me... (170)

The problem or crash between Sheri, and her man or husband ensured after brigadier Hassan made his intention clear to Sheri. He wanted her to stop her business and get fully entangled in the home chores but she desired the opposite. It was so uncalled for that Hassan hit Sheri as their sharp misunderstanding increased to a greater range. Sheri who has white blood running in her vein could not bear the sight of such hitting, that she struck brigadier Hassan with a pot of soup. It is obvious an ideal African woman won't hit back at her husband rather she runs amok in anger or apply another measure to have him punished.

Rarely would African woman confront her man in such provoking situation except those who have drunk from the well of civilization. Enitan envisaged her friends' capacity to resist this ugly scene the way she did.

It is only a coward that beats a woman but this understanding seems not to govern the minds of average African men in their treatment of women.

The novel *Everything Good Will Come*, also extrapolates on the life of the artist and how the economy determines their livelihood. This artist is left to wallow in poverty amid surplus creating skills. They are not totally accepted in a society where money is a basis for corporation, friendship and societal acceptance, all thanks to the politicians. This artist is emotional and caring but most importantly, sympathetic about the suffering of the populace, that is what led uncle Alex, Enitan father's friend, in the first part of the novel 1971 to join the civil war. Uncle Alex will remind readers of one of Nigeria's poets, Christopher Okogbo. But in the same vein, the artist also leads a careless life, as Mike Mukoro reflects an artist who not only engages in the act of creative drawings and fine sculpting but also involves in flirtation ardour.

Another ineluctable part of the work *everything good will come*, is the showcase of Lagos life in both "the good old" "the "the bad old" the socio-economic travails of the middle class logicians who like to show the exquisite places and purchase suspected expensive commodities. Activism is also a constant message in the work, as a female character plays her role in national emancipation. Amidst her sufferings she forges ahead and wins new converts of which none of them was Enitan. She however admits that it is not worth dying for a country that does not appreciate the developmental activities of her life is another serious issue mentioned in this work. Here, women are treated like rags and broken teaspoons. This perhaps might make the reader pardon the author's strong feministic tendencies.

ROSES AND BULLETS - AKACHI ADIMORA EZEIGBOS

AkachiAdimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*, is a novel about war and love. Roses represent love and bullets represent war. It's a story of love and being

loved. In this novel, love is engendered by tumultuous situations of war, the genesis of both the birth and death of love.

The novel reveals the saga of how many mostly women are turned apart by civil war that broke between Nigeria and the republic of Biafra as it was called. Amidst the strifes and flaks contending for national unity and advancing of the new Biafra nations is the swayable love of Ginika and Eloka. The love Ginika is deprived of in a street father, Ubaka, is salvaged in the arm of Eloka the would be husband and attentive nature of her brother Nwakire and her cousin brother Udo. Ginika's dream of nuptial bliss with Eloka is riddled with the invincible force that characterizes the war. The war situation has earlier marred her academic pursuit as she was to seat for West African Examination Certificate (WAEC), Ginika will hope of returning to school when the civil contention stops. She will also nurture the faith of reuniting with her love-turned-soldier when Biafra finally gained independence. As the character of Ginika and Eloka are bedeviled with these marshy hope and murky circumstances, only the flailing consequences of war will define who they eventually become.

Though this novel is wrapped around the hackneyed story of the Biafra war, it does not aim towards achieving reckoning of horrible civil war struggle rather, *Roses and Bullets* successfully attains the closure of the grim reality of women horrifying condition in civil disorders or war.

After professing so much love for Ginika, Eloka abandons Ginika his wife at the time she needs him most. This adds to the verisimilitude of the novel. Thus, rather than depict life as it should be life it depicted as it is:

I love you too, my darling “her he ached for her love of him and she wondered if this was a good sign. It seemed to her that pain and pleasure, sorrow and joy an indistinguishable part of the love... ()

By implication, the author does not force upon the reader a particular point of view; hence she reveals her understanding of the fact that every human being is a free agent.

With the desire to escape the harsh criticism of her mother-in-law, Ginika attends a gig with friend. An officer drugs her and has canal knowledge of her and she gets pregnant for an unknown officer. The panic in her voice made her say the following:

I can't explain it but I think someone had sex with me. She started trembling. "how can you say this? Who could have done that? "didn't you lock the door? "then remembering, Janet said "Oh you couldn't have locked the door, as you were fast asleep when I left you... (371-6)

The child dies. Ginika losses all: her-in-laws, her family and friends, even her love, Eloka yet she doesn't lose all. She still has the precious gift of life. Roses and bullets portrayed characters whose life depicts and represents in general the severe suffering, trauma, panic, sorrow, maltreatment, preasure, discomfort that women are faced in times of war. In this novel, women are seen as the weaker vessels that cannot carry weapons and ammunitions to nengage the enemy vandals rather many of them were displaced of their homes and communities in the pogrom as federal Nigerian armies determine to erase any thing Biafra. Women dominate the camps the camps they think safer for them and their children.

"Women carrying loads and dragging their children along, children trotting beside mothers and older siblings, some crying it was a distressing sight the village has not yet been hit but the sound of shells was driving the villagers away... (414)

The young girls in their quest to survive the dominating hardship of war fall prey of rape and many other sexual discrimination and harassment. It is disappointing that the Biafra soldiers who supposed to seek for safety of their sisters helped to worsen their unfavorable situation by forcing so many of them into an unholy sex which often result in unplanned pregnancy. Ginika is not the only victim of sexual abuse, discrimination or harassment by Biafran solders, Boma has to live in such condition as she was also pregnant by an undisclosed

soldier, and was deserted as shelling and air raid of Nigerian army salvaged Biafran domains. Captain Akudo who is addicted to sex was one of Biafran soldiers who molested and harassed Biafran young women. To him, women are useful objects to be exploited sexually. The civil are accorded him such opportunity to insert the following:

*“Women were beautiful
object to be ravished and thrown away... (489)*

The most severe part of the condition is what men especially some weaklinh among them who escaped conscription recruitment into Biafran army do their wives. It is disdainful that in such awful and awkward or clumsy condition of war, men pregnant their women. In the novel, situation had it that many of the women died of pregnancy, child bearing, hunger, delivering premature babies as they had deformed fetus swimming in their wombs. They also go about sheltering their sick and malnourished babies who suck empty breasts to the expense of their mothers. Kwashiorkor was the dominant and general sickness that almost every Biafran child suffers.

It is just nthe end of war, Ginika’s only desire is redeem her marital honour when her husband ElikaOdunze comes home. She hopes for forgiveness when Eloka listens to her woes. She dosen’t need the the love of Sule Ibrahim to be whole. All she hopes for is the unfastening of the burden that weighs her soul. That Sule Ibrahim circumcises himself before she gives him attention is just a scarecrow she puts up to remain Eloka’s own.

What could she say to put him off, to him? What reasons could she give him to make him understand how impossible it was for her to marry him or be his women? An idea occurred to her and she... (473-5)

She has no hand in his death Sule Ibrahim is a subject of his foolery. Why should he have been driven by infatuation to circumcise his genitals at his age?

Literature as a laboratory where life-past, presents or yet to come is examined plays a momentous role. *Roses and Bullets* reveals that wars are recurrent features of the history of people all over Africa and the world but women have had to suffer huge loss about all that war offers.

CONCLUSION

The rise and development of women in African societies have been monumental and presidential fact that worth's studying today. Notably, the issue discussed in the cause of this study reveals that African women are considered inferior or second hand citizens, powerless and insignificant in so many areas of life especially in tradition as discovered earlier in the previous chapters, yet with all these, they are exploited and milked of their worth and values to the favour of their male counterparts.

Female Writers in modern African literature felt its high time they started confronting every practice that aid to the problems and protracted struggles of African women. They do this presenting and portraying female characters as their major characters in opposition to any condition that is not to their good.

Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and AtachiAdimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* are good examples of what the female writers do in modern African literature. Sefi Atta portrayed Enitan and Sheri in the positions that help them to confront and oppose injustice and evils done to African women likewise AkachiAdimora-Ezeigbo who also presented Ginika as a subjugated character in *Roses and Bullets* who swims in the ocean of crisis caused by war. She is both victim of love and war but most awesomely, she developed a rigid manner and principled attitude that helps her to wriggle out of her problems. This is to prove that rarely do the female writers allow their characters in their numerous literary works to wallow to death in any condition they find themselves.

Conclusively, this chapter geared toward establishing the ability of the female writers in Africa to expose and agitate over every form of women marginalization as that will destroy the rising peace, harmony and unity among men and women in African continent. This re-echoes the state of art as the

researcher effortlessly and immeasurably contributed to the existing body of facts successfully.

References

- Adimora-Ezeigbo, Akachi. *Roses and Bullets*. Lagos: Jalaa Writers' Collective (2011).
- Abrams, H.M. *A Glossary of Literary Terms and Definition*. 3rd ed. New York: Dover(1986)
- Akoredo, Y.O.O. and A.A.Asiyanbola editors. *The Feminist-Womanist Dialectic*. PortoNoso(1986)
- Achebe Chinua. *There Was A Country*. New York: Penguin Press, 2012.
- Atta Sefi. *Everything Good Will Come*. Lagos: An Imprint of Kachifo, 2006.
- Chuma-UdehNgozi.*Echoes of a New Dawn*. Onitsha: Malchjay Publishers, 2007
- Trend and Issues in Nigerian Literature*. Onitsha: Malchjay Publishers, 2001.
- Collins Thesaurus English Dictionary*.Santiago De Chile: Harpercollins Publishing, 2002.
- Ezeigbo-AdimoraAkachi.*Roses and Bullets*. Lagos: Jalaa Writers Collective, 20121.
- Jennifer Broady de Henniferetal. *An Anthology of Contemporary Voices*. Loyola University Chicago: University of Wisconsin press, 2010.
- Mills Heward Marilyn.*Cloth Girl*. London: Little Blown and Co, 2006.