

Liminality Space In-Between: A Feminist Evaluation of Primordial and Modern Polarities of the Woman's Journey in the Nigerian Novel

MUHAMMAD ALKALI

*Department of English
Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University
Nigeria*

ROSLI TALIF

*Department of English
Universiti Putra Malaysia
Malaysia*

WAN ROSELEZAM WAN YAHYA

*Department of English
Universiti Putra Malaysia
Malaysia*

JARIAH MOHD JAN

*Department of English
University of Malaya
Malaysia*

ABSTRACT

The option offered by the modern polarity feminist is not with the intent of sounding like magic, but it largely guarantees the disheartened opposite sex to get pretty impressive results with minimal intervention, resulting in relationship satisfaction, intimacy, love, passion, commitment, and trust. In fact, it can boast of decline in marital dissatisfaction as entirely eliminated, although there could be exceptions. This nego-feminist framework is heard throughout the paper interrogating primordialism on womanhood in Nigerian novels into those with opposition motifs to modern streaks which guarantee lively-partnership. The evaluation shows that women generally can reap maximally from the nego-feminist frame.

Keywords: feminism; Nego-feminism; negotiation; Nigerian woman; Nigerian novel,

A JOURNEY OF RELEVANCE

Liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white ... the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. The interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy

(Bhabha 1994, p. 4)

Insidious is the watch word for awaiting a chance to entrap, in our sense, the Nigerian woman to the speciality reserve of the kitchen and the bedroom, which is not only treacherous and harmful but also deceitful as it lures the woman into the lack-lustre backseat in first generation novels in Nigeria. The African woman is intelligently represented in novels through what Gilligan (1982) thoroughly discusses on womanhood based on care ethics, which emphasises matters of empathy and supportive relationships to the man, which, we find, facilitates her for second fiddling ingloriously. Old brigade veterans in Nigeria –Amos

Tutuola in 1952, Cyprian Ekwensi in 1954, Chinua Achebe in 1958, T.M. Aluko in 1959 (in a historical brief with close attention to chronology, yet it does not lay claim to historical completeness) saw to the consistency of severe endangerment of the woman in African fiction.

True, the old brigands may have teamed up to irreverently underwrite primordial female subjugation (whether deliberately or not) but as the decade turns, they are conversely matched by new writers who give the familiar haunted spare-rib an exciting twist. In this twist-team, the female moves into a journey of relevance; a journey of redemption, strongly suspecting woman is under siege of perpetual domination. Thus, as devoted feminists, these second generation writers populated by female writers and critics from the 1970s – Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Ifeoma Okoye, Adaora Ulasi, Zaynab Alkali, Tess Onwueme, Zulu Sofola, Catherine Acholonu, Omalara Ogundipe-Leslie, Christie Ajayi, Remi Adedeji, Audrey Ajose, Teresa Meniru, Martina Nwakoby, Helen Ofurum, Mary Okoye, Helen Ovbiagele, Mabel Segun, Rosina Umelo, and Rosemary Uwemedimo, struggle to reshape second class citizenry of the Nigerian woman. They enviably sought to uncover the root cause of the daughters of Africa's relegation to the backseat.

But, the stress of the investigation of the twist-team begins to take its toll on its need for a stronger relationship with the opposite sex. This is because oppositional feminism has observable limited successes (Raven 2010, Tasker & Dianne 2010, McRobbie 2008). Therefore, when darkness falls and egoistic spectres appear to reach out from the shadows, the frightened feminist world realises it is dealing with powers beyond one sex approach. Another journey, thus, becomes apparent the need for further collaboration, if gender war is to be more meaningful –and that necessarily, will have to be from another generation of writers. The new group's charge is therefore apparent; it must argue for, and they are argued by, both sexes: they call it mutuality of the sexes; others call it Nego-feminism; the discourse of lively life-partners.

NEGO-FEMINISM

The discovery that opens for men and women the way to achieving true womanhood devoid of gender bias, or at the very least, a very manageable gender bias, is the business of Nego-feminism. It appeals to both male and female egos to down tools with the opposite sex and negotiate a common agreement between them in order to take sexism to a higher level. It is, therefore, an observable lead, not only in Nigeria and Africa, but also finding solutions for the woman of the world at large. Nego-feminism by this therefore, steps out of the continent to reach out to the global wo/man. In recasting women, Nego-feminism asks, isn't it a borderless world? Sisterhood is global; hence, the ability to conceive feminism globally and the coexistence of sexes will be decisive for the overheated polity on sexism.

Nego-feminism is more aptly defined by the theorist herself, Obioma Nnaemeka. In her paper, *Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way* (1999) she sees it as “the feminism of negotiation; no ego feminism” (p. 360). The corner stone of the theory then is with issues of soft-peddalling in the game of antagonism with (wo) menfolk so as to recognise a more rewarding equal partnering. Nego-feminism surrounds issues of peace, conflict management and resolution, negotiation, complementarity, give-and-take, and collaboration. It is truly tempting to think Nego-feminism is the exception which proves the rule as it argues simply that it is only weak people that seek revenge; strong people forgive, while intelligent people ignore. It is a feminist approach for feminist social movements, feminist communities, in its power for the woman. And this contradicts Western feminism.

The highly significant attraction of its name, negotiation-feminism, not only suggests the broad range of its tolerance: in one bold sweep it has eliminated so much of the unfruitful

discussions of offensive literatures or the embattled conflicts in novels that give the impression that all men are (potential) rapists and wife-beaters, or at the most, sisterhood or solidarity among women is shown as a possible doubtful source of solace or a vague anchor of hope.

Nego-feminism describes a new paradigm that can, finally, take us beyond ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in an endless ‘gender war’. It proposes that if women and their adaptable selves are really going to take over the world, there is the need to make certain that some men are brought along. This is essentially because feminism is after all about cooperation. As feminists develop alternatives to ease gender injustices, nego-feminists can more reliably renew our energy and remind us that “in the end, the choice of what kind of world we live in is up to every one of us” (Eisler 1995, p. 214).

There is the need, then, for this theory that is better able in looking afresh at old and new works and styles, capable of looking at itself. We will look closely to the old brigade camp first on how they stand with third generation’s air of new woman in new novels by new writers.

THE OLD BRIGADE: THE FIRST GENERATION WRITERS

In spite of the observable ‘injustice’ in the patriarchal world by patriarchal novelists, who are the male writers, the African literary world will continue to remain grateful to them as pacesetters, the first generation writers in Nigeria. We use the word ‘injustice’ because we wish to underscore its debate to achieve the African woman’s evolutionary journey from subjugation to a roadmap of enviable lively life-partnership.

Six decades have now passed since the creation days of modern African literature, but interestingly, ingenuity and verve continue to be brought in, particularly to Tutuola’s ghostliness, rediscovered in third generation novels in Nigeria through its progression in aspect of ‘magical realism’ (Cooper 1998). Indeed, Tutuola’s ghostliness is heavily noticeable and, in fact, more ably mastered in the magical realism works of the South American writers such as Juan Rulfo, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, and the Nigerian Ben Okri. Particularly, Okri’s *The Famished Road* (1991) on ghostliness brought him world fame by winning The Booker Prize. It is African oral word into the written word, manifesting from traditional cultures and gliding into the global trend towards modernity.

In understanding Amos Tutuola’s feminist undoing in *The Palm-wine Drinkard*, consider how, firstly, of all generated discussions from the novel by, for example, established publishing houses, none found *The Palm-wine Drinkard* useful for issues of feminism. Amazon books did not include womanhood among its list of subjects. Suggested subjects by Amazon include and restricted to, folkloric people, magical people, magic or magicians, mythology, (natural) disasters, monsters, Nigeria (ns), and famines.

On his own part, the author, Tutuola who fictionally reproduces his culture, completely destroys the identity of his female in order to teach her more completely the superiority of the male sex. ‘[W]ife’, ‘mothe’, ‘daughter’, ‘lady’, ‘female’, ‘woman’, ‘she’, ‘her’ were freely used in the book but in the retrogressive sense; they in no way brought the African woman out of her doldrums as they may have been portrayed as less visible than men, and their roles were not as important as those of ‘the man’, who is the hero. Tutuola depicts the female characters and female objects in his novel mostly in this traditional way.

Anti-feminist critics should not have imagined that feminist criticism might escape the sweeping attack launched on Tutuola and his *The Palm-wine Drinkard* narration. Yet, some might be tempted to do just that. But the truth is the efforts of first generation writers in Africa like Tutuola and Achebe are parochial, naive, primitive, and foresight less in feminist aspects. The surprise in the works of critics like Orban (2010), Ato Quayson (1997), and the

earliest being from Dylan Thomas (1952), on Tutuola's ghostliness is their total conclusion on his creativity excellence, Tutuola being adjudged the first story teller of Africa. Tutuola's excellence on the second sex is, however, not such people's subject. Tutuola's novel only perpetuates woman disempowerment, slave status, a doormat about the same time that he would have created an empowered woman.

From beginning to end of Tutuola's hallucinatory novel which places the superhuman hero in the most frightening aspects of one quest or another outside the normal village community (Quayson 1997, p.45-6, Palmer 1978, p.17), Tutuola inclines towards the subordination of the woman. Consider the example by Palmer,

[T]he girl in the "complete gentleman" episode in *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* is punished for her disobedience when her handsome gallant turns out to be a skull and the Prince Killer who had hoped to contrive the execution of the Drinkard and his wife for a murder he had committed, is at the end justifiably killed himself (Palmer 1978, p. 16).

Thus, the girl must suffer for her sin, while the super hero continues to be vindicated from one episode to another, emerging wiser and stronger. It confirms African woman in fiction and reality as exclusivist for second fiddling. Consider this too,

"After that he told his wife to give me food"
(*The Palm-wine Drinkard*, p. 11)

The details can be quickly and summarily recalled. It comes after his trickster to get information from the old man (god) that sent him on an impossible mission which asks him to collect for him an undisclosed object (his bell) from a blacksmith in a faraway strange land. The woman cannot partake in the discussion of men. She can only supply food to give men the needed strength to undertake their masculine obligation.

When the hero out of his cunning ways of getting needed information for his survival to unmistakably follow 'Death's road' for his desired destination, he reaches a crossed road and lies on the junction, knowing that will elicit information from any passing villager returning from market. This episode injuriously confirms blame worthiness of mothers when it comes to bad deeds of their children, in contradistinction to good deeds that are credited only to the fathers,

But when all the market goers were returning from the market, they saw me lied down there and shouted thus: - 'Who was the *mother* of this fine boy...?' (p. 12; Our emphasis).

Similarly, Tutuola did not deem it fit to apportion blame to the hero, the man; rather, it is his wife who must bear the brunt of blame for erroneously taking them back to the village of his wife, where they met for the second time, and another ghostly disaster from their unfortunate wicked baby (pp. 35-6). An abnormal child was born, conceived abnormally through his mother's thumb, a buoy, instead of pregnancy through the womb. The baby rose to be a great disaster, not only to the family but the entire community. It will be a great relief to get rid of such babies. This sickening episode depicting the dark history of mind control seems very untimely for patriarchal writing. According to the historian Joan Scott, the construction of Women's History as 'supplementary' or appendages attracts unacceptable disposition to thinking women. Supplementarism suggests, even at ordinary first glance, that value of women's efforts is missing from a greater story. As Scott points out, this should pinch us to ask why the value should be left out in the first place. The methodology has been that whenever it is noticed that a woman is found to be missing from written history, Women's History first describes her role, examines the mechanisms that disallowed her notice, and finally settles for a demand for why the information were blind. In this way, it

challenges commonly held views of the discipline of History, including those interested on studying Women's History such as this exercise.

The intention of this explanatory turn is that Tutuola as the first writer of the first generation writers may have successfully handed over the baton of wrongful feminist undoing to Achebe. Thus, the phallic society produced phallic writers, as it were. The pathbreaker of African literature is undoubtedly Chinua Achebe even that Amos Tutuola started the path. Achebe, therefore, not only continued Tutuola's non-feminist path, but escalated it in new extremes. But it is not our intention to concentrate on Achebe for lack of space.

In a contention, the feminist world has appropriately observed that time has put out the fire in these earlier African writers' creativities for their disservice to womanhood Ogunyemi (1988, p. 60) tells us, "Nigeria is male, a fact that is daily thrust in myriad ways on the Nigerian woman". To emphasise this point he further adds,

The literature is phallic, dominated as it is by male writers and male critics who deal almost exclusively with male characters and male concerns, naturally aimed at a predominantly male audience. The male camaraderie has been insufferable for the few educated Nigerian women (p. 65).

To comprehend debasement and value of shame for female worthlessness, there is in the communities of fantasy (Tutuola) and more agreeable traditional Africa (Achebe), the social commentaries documenting how the African woman has been side-lined in the affairs of the communities. And while non-feminist critics try to give the novels a fair read, they have always tended to place a chasm between the genders and make opposing forces of them rather than encouraging commonality and combined strengths create impossibilities. Tutuola has demonstrated female subjugation through the woman trailing behind her juju man throughout the novel. This has necessarily occasioned a cause-effect response where women in revenge-game seek to out-do men even in matters that, perhaps, they should not have opted for. It is specifically because of heightened patterns and trends of woman trailing after her man that whatever else, the 'backlash' must then be served by women writers. Tutuola's pattern and trend need to be buried deep. The undoing of the first generation writers have, therefore, engendered harsh reaction from the second generation which we now turn to.

FLIRTING DANGEROUS FEMINISM

Following Ogunyemi's naming and division of writers into generations (Ogunyemi 1995), it can be observed that far away from colonial and postcolonial readings is the identification of a new crop of writers. This distinct set of writers can be discussed from the 1970s-1980s. Their works are termed second generation novels. "It was in the seventies that female writers burst into the field of writing and names of Buchi Emecheta, Mabel Segun, Ifeoma Okoye, Helen Ovbiagele, Adaora Lily Ulasi, joined that of Flora Nwapa in the female novelists' scenario". These successors, therefore, are the second generation of Nigerian female writers (Chukwuma 1989, p. 141).

Like Tutuola, the selected female writer here occupies a unique position of pacesetter: Flora Nwapa, like Tutuola, is the first Nigerian female novelist whose work was published, while Buchi Emecheta, like Achebe, is known to have given wider dimension to the spectrum of modern African literature on feminism. Thus, they have provided a new path for succeeding women writers in Nigeria in their opposition to "[t]he rural, back-house, timid, subservient, lack-lustre woman" of the novels of the Tutuolas and the Achebes, which is now "replaced by her modern counter-part, a full-rounder human being, rotational, individualistic and assertive, fighting for, claiming and keeping her own" (Chukwuma 1989, p. 2). Succeeding women writers together, with their repetitions, modifications and individual

signatures, have demonstrated that they belong together; they have constituted second generation writers with anti-masculinist philosophy.

Women's novels presented markers of gender performatives where womanhood is reconfigured as unapologetically central to a discourse of woman. *Efuru* (1966), according to Bryce (2008 p. 55), is, therefore, inter-textually embedded with *Things Fall Apart*, contending that it is Achebe's novel that has engendered a cause-effect social world, i.e. it is costly responsible for the emergence of second and third generation of female writings – as some of these writings are “radical expansion of narrative space”, “the multiplication of voices”, “the re-invention of whole textual idiom”, etc. (Bryce 2008 p. 55) – what Adesanmi (2004) calls “the rewriting of the parameters of politics, history and selfhood which Achebe asks for and prefigures has already, at least at the level of consciousness, taken place” (p. 399).

These new female novelists present heroines who seriously challenge the norm. There are observable aspects of feminist conflicts in *Efuru*. Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* has been a tremendous welcome diversion from the dominant male point of view of Tutuola, Achebe, Amadi, Armah, Soyinka, Ngugi, Beti. As the novel opens, the eyes meet the extraordinary daughter of an extraordinary father, the heroine,

Efuru was her name. She was a remarkable woman. It was not only that she came from a distinguished family. She was distinguished herself. Her husband was not known and people wondered why she married him (p. 7).

And with that said, we exhaust all points of creativity that *Efuru*'s feminist voicing shares with its readers, as the novel could scarcely be less striking. The budding *Efuru* in *Efuru* who is in adolescent age begins hushed discussions with her boyfriend and ends up becoming a truant in her home. And Nwapa makes the father to wrongfully brood over it. Complaining to *Efuru*'s cousin, who also came to inform *Efuru*'s father on her night activity, the father broods,

My brother, help me talk. I am tired of talking. I don't know what is wrong with young people of these days. I noticed that *Efuru* has been coming home late for quite some time. I asked her whom she was seeing so late and she said nothing. *If her mother were alive*, she would have known how to handle her (p. 8; Emphasis ours).

While some people are at pains that their powers have been usurped either by their irresponsible boss or a criminally intelligent junior, it is more painful that some unintelligent individuals have their rights and responsibilities jettisoned by themselves, perhaps, due to ignorance or carelessness or both. So this paper kills two birds with a stone. Firstly, while it is reprehensible for any craft to under-represent the woman such as done by the first generation writers, it is roundly unacceptable to wrongly utilise wrong motifs. What does damage to Nwapa and her novel is her recourse to what she appears to fight against, the ‘male point of view’; it cannot be wished away as a minor issue.

It is the literary historian, Chinua Achebe, who documents the fact that when a child behaves well, fathers are quick to align the child to them, but when the opposite happens, ownership of a child is always pointed to the mother. Thus, when a child is successful, they say ‘whose son is he?’ This precisely is what Nwapa sets up either carelessly or ignorantly, instead of the ‘female point of view’. It is regrettable to the spirit of womanhood that her fate on, “*If her mother were alive*” is used. She might have been misled to think that it is a credit to womanhood, not realising that the very same argument can negate her intention, if we are to apply Achebe's logic. It is least surprising; therefore, that Nwapa's work did not receive the attention of critics as did the works of her colleagues. In fact, even the novels of Buchi Emecheta which came much later have received greater attention.

Ghashmari's *Book Review of Flora Nwapa's Efuru* (2011) can only enhance his stature as a critic of African feminism. But any review of the study must not overlook it as he took Nwapa to task for his earlier praise of her efforts. While Ghashmari's early work is admittedly a one-sided apologia for Nwapa's work, his recent work shows considerable sign of maturity and a critical sense of balance. Ghashmari, a Jordanian human rights activist, now examines Nwapa's canon with the critical eye of a scientist who feels he has a job to do: the sentimental attachment has suddenly disappeared, and devotion to truth has replaced the earlier overprotective attachment to Nwapa whom he had thought as a writer much maligned by critics who did not fully understand her art. It is gladdening that Ghashmari says although Nwapa believes in freedom, it is also not without limits. This is what this paper essentially wishes to underscore. To begin impiously with the flaw of his research, Ghashmari says *Efuru*, the heroine, manifests feminist aspects as she becomes a woman leader and reformist in her community. With exceptions to very few historical women such as, for example, both the Nigerian Moremi and Queen Amina of Zaria, and, the Angolan Queen Nzingha who led a protracted resistance against the Portuguese in Ndongho-Matamba, woman leadership is unAfrican. Its practice is largely unacceptable; it is not the norm in the patriarchal Africa. To borrow this leadership is to borrow Western practice and entrench it in Africa without suspecting. More importantly, the scholarship that has been brought into *Efuru* has only increased its status that is contrary to the appeal of third generation writings that is currently breeding in Africa. *Efuru's* numerous criticisms only mark it as the brand of African feminism that is offensive to the true African female experience.

While Nwapa may have a duty to criticise men for their patriarchal order, *Efuru* in *Efuru* is tragically stuck in an exemplary unacceptable personality presentation. *Efuru* tries to be close to tradition. *Efuru* is 'married' to the woman of the lake (a reason why she loses two husbands and remains husbandless for the rest of her life) instead of choosing her as her worshipper (a reason to which *Efuru's* childlessness is adduced). The latter is more real. It underscores the fact that while Nwapa's novels are village sense novels like those of Tutuola and Achebe, which set primordialism against modernity, the more modern *Efuru* contradicts her stance by supporting primordial aspects. In this contradiction, she shows reverence to the traditions of her people, which she exists to uproot being a catalyst for change in her community. There are three examples.

Firstly, she dumps 'arranged' marriage with her first husband, Adizua, insisting that the marriage will be incomplete if he didn't pay the dowry; she argues (p. 24). Secondly, she succumbs to the painful female genital cosmetics of her primordial people which only by then a woman become fully initiated into adulthood (pp. 11-4). Thirdly, she acknowledges man's right to polygyny, saying, "Only a bad woman would like to be married alone by her husband" (p. 57). Where then is her being a catalyst for change? But this goes to give relevance; perhaps, to another fact that Nwapa's heroines and novels only replicate examples of ironies and contradictions that fill the African feminist space. Necessarily, it goes to stress that womanhood is part of the whole game of contradictions. More particularly, it stresses that Nwapa is only interested in feminism that strikes the nerve which has been overstated for limited achievements (Anene-Boyle 2002, Gallop 1982, Felman cited in Kristeva 1980).

Even more particular is the offer of *Efuru's* superiority to men, especially her two husbands (Adizua and Eneberi whose Christian name is Gilbert) with respect to her mental powers certainly will find practice somewhere outside Africa, and therefore, outside the study's Nego-feminism. The point has been sufficiently made by Sommers on whether colleagues in sex need equality or equity. *Who Stole Feminism?: How Women Have Betrayed Women* and *The War Against Boys: How Misguided Feminism Is Harming Our Young Men* both by Sommers have adequately argued that the sexes are equal but different, observing that contemporary feminism has instilled irrationality in its quest for show down with men. Her

submissions have always been that women need to exercise caution in fighting for their rights.

Also, on feminism as a Western commodity, Nwapa refuses the failure in the first marriage of Efurū to drag her to regrets as she did to her mother-in-law, Ossai, who lives in endless pain and loneliness since being abandoned by her husband who is Adizua's father. Conversely, "Efurū's patience (just) couldn't be tried ... Life for her meant living it fully. She did not want merely to exist. She wanted to live and use the world to her advantage", (p. 78). The question to answer is, is this not a Western commodity (which is oppositional or radical – Arndt 2002, Forte 19, Davis 1996, p. 139) injected into the African fiction? To explain a little further, Nwapa tries very hard to make her heroine a positive figure meriting sympathy. She is a tragic traditional heroine and, tragic novels on feminism have been simply classed as radical materials for feminism (Arndt [2002] taxonomy of African women's writing — 'reformist', 'transformative and radical' tendencies in African women's writing).

Novels that brood in tragedy are trappings for oppositional feminism, which clearly implicates a challenge against the hegemony, a hate project and it will have serious consequences. Yahya (2003, p. 104) also attests to the fact that tragic novels are contributions to the framework of radical feminism. In her review, *The Cord* would be a framework for contemporary feminism where death is the only readily available panacea to Lakshmi (p. 114); powerlessness to subjugation for Leela (p. 110); and resilience to the exploitative pressure of the male class for Kali (p. 112). The three girls are hounded by tragic angst for feminism.

Distinctively, Efurū flouts the very first laws of the tradition and she will pay the price in the end. She runs off with an 'imbecile', a pauper who cannot pay the dowry. These very qualities that dazzle both family and friends set Efurū up as a victim of tragedy. New novels today do not brood in tragedy. This is the new song of Africa, nay of the world, since there is no significant difference in the new songs of the world that are carefully choosing their steps towards new directions. For example, on October 9, 2012, the Aljazeera.com/English ran a documentary programme on rap music in Mongolia at 7.30am-8.00am Nigerian local time. The young musician distanced herself from the tragedy of her people, "I'm not going to make songs about the dark past. I'm going to sing about a bright future." Perhaps, the programme was preparatory to October 11, 2012 as United Nations' mark of International Day of the Girl-child. Discussants fielded at The Stream Aljazeera.com/English talked on the theme *The Ending of Child Marriages* about recognisable attitudinal change by men as new men are more conscious of their responsibilities and as well as participant partners in the march for women emancipation.

It can be concluded on Nwapa, provisionally, on how the world might think about struggles to wrest free from the clutches of women subjugation in the context of oppositional feminism. The novel strives to restore the worth of female dignity to the level of a heightened objection to subjugation. In the restoration effort, the search for self-identity has given appreciable power to womanhood observably excessive, even if a little. This excessiveness, noble as it has its own objectives can be balanced up for greater results as demonstrated in third generation novels exemplified in *Sacred Apples*, which is the next concentration.

EXPANDING FEMINIST SPACE IN THIRD GENERATION NOVELS: HOW MUCH, HOW RECENT?

The existence of third generation writers in Nigeria is not in contest (Nadaswaran 2011, Akpuda 2010, Akosu 2009, Alkali 2009). In pursuit of the goal to locate these writings and writers, the local cultural influences circulating around them are part of Africa's matrix of overlapping 'scapes'. This is further delineated by the writers being young in age compared to first and second generation writers. Almost all the writers have been born since 1960, and thus all topical issues of Africa such as colonialism, independence, and the civil war are

‘known’ only by their echoes across the following decades. Enitan is the heroine of *Everything God*. She clearly states that, “I was born in the year of my country’s independence, and saw how it raged against itself” (p. 330). Kambili is a fifteen-year old heroine of *Purple Hibiscus*. She is also born in the decade following Independence and therefore, a teenage witness to events of the nineteen-eighties.

More importantly, third generation writers and writings have emerged with a different approach to handling issues of the sexed body. They have apparently created distance from excessive demand for freedom. They plot issues on balanced relationship. In truth, the problem, the sticking point, is the founding of such a critique on textual/-sexual difference as a ready-constituted object, such that, enshrined in femininity or any revolving issue are certain key characteristics deemed to be unchanging and essential for these novels.

Third generation novels, according to Bryce (2008, p. 54) which arguably is contestable as the raised cultural markers exist in first and second generation novels also - demonstrate the consequences of forty-year maladministration by both military misrule and democratic rule evident in state corruption, violence, and war on those who were either children or unborn at the time of the events which would set Nigeria on its postcolonial path. But are these novels history? Patently not: Like all good realism, they are powerfully evocative and convincing fictional dramas of individual characters set against realist renderings of a particular time and place.

Bryce suggests that the narrative strategies of third generation novels could be read ambivalently and simultaneously performing new identities while revisioning old ones. Earlier than Bryce (2008), Nwosu (2000) has created enough space for third generation writers and writings. In his observation, they are ‘inexorable’ they have come to stay for good. But this is not to mean that they have dumped the pacesetters. The question of parentage is imperative. So, while the new has arrived and in large number the old never disappear; In consequence, the new never loses sight of Dante, Shakespeare, Achebe, Soyinka, Okigbo, and the like. They are re-echoed anew.

Sacred Apples speaks in new official language and new official thought of feminist whiff in the African novel. It is done in the voice of Nego-feminism that seeks agreeable negotiation between the sexes, what, in the view of Lie, Keong, and Zainudin (2012), would choose to view as “negotiating common grounds” for the sexes. Gender justice is much likely to succeed in considerable measure as, in these new novels; they have provided ways in which emergent feminist wake-up call might improve the lives of Nigerian woman in novels. It is a progression from oppositional feminism as unhelpful to speedy results of woman agenda to a new proposition: negotiation-feminism. It is a theory that illustrates how new African male and female novelists and critics have now distanced themselves from oppositional feminism to a kind of feminism where men and women are seen together finding lasting solutions to their crises since feminism is both the responsibility of men and women.

Following this spirit of female evolution from suppression to oppositional feminism and now into Nego-feminism, Abubakar Gimba’s *Sacred Apples* (1994) will be essential to anyone trying to understand the intricacies of twenty-first century feminism. Partially in *Sacred Apples*’ innovativeness, it is a male-authored postfeminist literature. The choice of *Sacred Apples* is a deliberate one here, therefore, to argue that feminism is not only by and about women as men too have risen in defence of women. Allan Johnson’s *The Gender Knot: Unravelling Our Patriarchal Legacy* (2005) and Gary Lemons’ *To Be Black, Male, and Feminist: Making Womanist Space for Black Men on the Eve of a New Millennium* (1998) published in *Feminism and Men: Reconstructing Gender Relations*, have advanced sufficient arguments for the course of men on women where men have acted not on mere sympathy but rather commitment to gender justice. Providing another backup, *Sacred Apples* is not only male-authored, but also happens to be a recognisable text that early as no male-authored text

with nego-feminist persuasion may have existed before it, hence, its choice for analysis in order to conform with the design of the study which picks forerunners for its first, second and third generation writers.

Roughly recalled, *Sacred Apples* opens with Zahrah's grandmother, Zubaydah, saddened by the hooting of an owl, a signal of impending danger according to an age-long mythopoeia. Gimba follows the myth to reveal multiple jeopardy of 1) mob action by irate students of the Songhaian National University in partnership with the Songhaian Labour Solidarity 2) Zahrah's abduction 3) the burning of her husband's government's car 4) her three children in the car 5) the supposed consequent death of the children, and 6) Zahrah's divorce, all of which relate to the tenets of marriage institution.

As Zahrah's first husband, Yazid, gives no one a chance to patch up the crack in their marriage by divorcing her through three repudiations at a go, Zahrah, the lead female character, sets for home to encounter right through the journey, more hurdles which is topped up later by her grandmother's death. The grandmother has been her protector from psychological tortures.

Zahrah's second husband, Nousah, could not manage the rancour in his polygynous house between his estranged wife, Salma, and the graduate student, Aalimah. Aalimah always openly makes it known to Salmah that she was second in seniority to Zahra and the end game is unrelenting enmity. Zahra wishes to wade into the matter and she speaks to Aalimah,

You are quite young... and in marriage there are lots of pitfalls; moreso in a polygamous setting. You are an intelligent lady. You will come to know them yourself. I'll advise however, in a setting of polygamy like ours, regard it as a federation of states, the states being equal, with the federal government in full charge of all the strings that hold the unit together. The wives are the states, and the husband the central government, the big brother. The states have no business fighting themselves over each other's' status, except to ensure that the central government plays by the rules of the federation (p. 176).

For this intervention, the reader is called upon to consider Gimba's *Sacred Apples*, which excites the readership's 'concern for gender' by demonstrating (using characteristics of Nego-feminism) how the female distances herself from vengeance and anger against her oppressor/rival. This new feminism calls for negotiating space between married housewives.

Sacred Apples like Carol Stewart's *Joseph Andrews and the Sacrifice of Isaac* does not pretend to be a voice for Islamic answers to feminist issues. It identifies a phenomenon within a phenomenon in order to rewrite what, in other discourses (Nkealah 2009), has come to be wrongly considered as injustices of Islam on women.

It might be interesting to note how Gimba brings to relief the over-bearing issue of early marriages,

The moral health of the society at large (Ya-Shareef argues), is more important than the physical health of a few members of that society... and opponents of early marriages often conveniently ignore this ... He did admit that early marriages itself was not a panacea for the rising trend of promiscuity, but would surely decelerate its geometrical growth. And as, he believed the disintegration of the society to this growth, early marriage would most probably put a break on this crumbling process... It was true, he also conceded, that some married women enjoyed the fancy of freelancers, but these had not become a horde as spinsters had (p. 54).

Thus, he juxtaposes the damages of a few members of the society in contradistinction to the recklessness of freelancers. To understand this point properly is to read Överlien (2003). Teenage innocent girls or 'active young women' as labelled by Överlien, would prefer to hit the bars and clubs, and get laid at will, refusing any advice on caution.

At currency of feminist debate is the doldrums of a woman's surname. Since she is by nature directly proportional to divorce by, or death of, the husband (*Sacred Apples* pp. 73-4), what surname should she use? The debate has reached crossword level. In stemming the tide,

Gimba pleads with the world to notice the fact that her husband's name translates to "A small step in marital compromise, but a great leap towards marital subservience..." Therefore, simply "[c]all them by their father's name ..." Gimba refers to a Qur'ānic verse (*Qur'ān*, 3:5). Reason? Gimba explains, "... if a name denotes identity, or ownership, it were better ... to be identified as being owned by our fathers than by our husbands" (p. 74). This brand of feminism amplifies men's 'superiority' to women, 'only as "men are a degree above women' ... a degree of responsibility, not of superiority' (p. 305; Emphasis original).

Using a luring technique to speak to the feminist world when the toll of divorce falls on Zahra, who is asked to release her children to her husband because children naturally belong to their fathers (p. 48), Gimba uses Zahrah's elder brother, Ya-Shareef, to intelligently clear this misconception. No particular parent has the sole ownership of children, and in fact, women have the prerogative of ownership first. In Islam, Ya-Shareef explains, the father only has a chance after a couple of other female relations from the mother's side. Custody of the child under the Shari'a is given to the mother, and this is agreed upon by all Muslim Jurists. It is believed that between a child's father and mother, the mother is closer to it because of the tender and safe hands of the mother after her stomach was the playing centre of it. Those that can have custody of the child after the mother (in hierarchical order) are the grandmother, the great-grandmother, maternal aunt, aunt of the mother, paternal grandmother, father, the child's sister, paternal aunt, the child's niece, and "waliy" (a competent hand after a non-availability of the fore-mentioned), then the father (Legal Literacy Series 6 2003).

CONCLUSION

The major goal of this paper is to offer a 'field glass' for studying African woman's subjugation right from creation time of modern African literature, which has now survived three generation of the writer's vis-à-vis her struggles to redeem her image. Image redemption is a much needed step in reducing sexual tension in our sexual politics. In analysing how the image could be redeemed, the attempt to trace the history of her life from the works of first generation writers who started it all into the second generation that seems to have overshot the boundaries of negotiation into how the freedom could possibly be achieved in the event of practices that lead into breakthroughs is unavoidable. But the gap still remains because the feminine reaction has been thought, if not seen as, hysterical and tendentious in the extreme. This review cannot pretend to be exhaustive. It is difficult, if not impossible to separate what one hears from what one hopes to hear on gender justice, and what is from what ought to be accomplished in exercises like this. Therefore, others may see the nego-feminist novel, *Sacred Apples*, as unaccomplished of the interrogations of Nego-feminism in full. Such critical reaction is encouraged and suggested revisions are expected to pinpoint where improvements are needed most in handling the feminist macabre of the contemporary generation.

REFERENCES

- Adesanmi, P. (2004). Of Postcolonial Entanglement and Duree: Reflections on the Francophone Novel. *Comparative Literature* 56(3), pp. 228–42.
- Ajayi, J. (2003). *Amos Tutuola: Factotum as a Pioneer*. Creative Books.
- Akosu, T. P. (2009). Sustaining Creative Writing in Northern Nigeria. A. In Ismaila, I. Garba, and K. Hamza (Eds.) *Towards Creative Writing in Northern Nigeria*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Ltd.
- Akpuda, A. A. (2010). A Dream Beyond Pyramids: Harvest, Bazaar and Carnival in Nigerian Literature on the Post-Soyinka Nobel Prize Era. *ANA Review. Journal of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA)*. Lagos: Association of Nigerian Authors.
- Alkali, Z. (2009). Sustaining Creative Writing in Northern Nigeria. In A. Ismaila, I. Garba, and K. Hamza (Eds.) *Towards Creative Writing in Northern Nigeria*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Ltd.

- Arndt, S. (2002). Perspectives on African feminism: Defining and Classifying African-Feminist Literatures. *African Feminisms 2, Agenda (54)*: Empowering Women for Gender Equity, pp. 31–44.
- Anene-Boyle, F.A. (2002). A Moderation of Anger: The Changing Perception of Male Characters in Recent Female Writings in Nigeria. A Seminar Paper Delivered at the First National Annual Conference of the School of Languages, Adeyemi College of Education. Ondo, August 13-16.
- Bhabha, K. H. (1994). *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Bryce, J. (2008). Half and Half Children: Third-Generation Women Writers and the New Nigerian Novel. *Research in African Literatures, Indiana University Press (39)2*, pp.49-67. Access Provided by University of Warwick at 02/01/12 4:41PM GMT.
- Chukwuma, H. (1989). Positivism and female Crisis: The Novels of Buchi Emecheta. In Henrietta Otokunefor, and Obiagelli Nwodo. (Eds.) *Nigerian Female Writers: A Critical Perspective*. Ibadan: Malthouse Press Ltd.
- Cooper, B. (1998). *Magical Realism in West African Fiction: Seeing with a Third Eye*. London: Routledge.
- Davis, T. C. (1996). *Extremities and Masterpieces: A Feminist Paradigm of Art and Politics*. Helene Keyssar (Ed.) *Feminist Theatre and Theory*. London: Macmillan.
- Derrida, J. (1982). *Margins of Philosophy*. Trans. Alan Bass Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Derrida, J. (1978). The Theatre of Cruelty and the Closure of Representation. *Writing and Difference*, Trans. Alau Bass. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Eisler, R. (1995). *The Chalice and the Blade*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Euclid, S. (2010). Book Critique: *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. Retrieved January 28, 2013 Yahoo! Contributor Network <http://voices.yahoo.com/book-critique-things-fall-apart-chinua-achebe-6983242.html?cat=38>.
- Felman, S. (1981). Rereading Femininity. *Yale French Studies, 62(42)*. Cited and Quoted in B. Freedman (1990). “Frame-Up: Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Theatre”. In S. Case (Ed.) *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*. Balt., Md., Johns Hopkins Press, (pp. 54-76).
- Forte, J. (1996). Realism, Narrative, and the Feminist Playwright – A Problem of Reception. Helene Keyssar. Ed. *Feminist Theatre and Theory*. London: Macmillan.
- Gallop, J. (1982). *The Daughter's Seduction, Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, Ithaca: New York.
- Gera, A. (2001). *Three Great African Novelists: Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka & Amos Tutuola*. Creative Books.
- Ghashmari, A. (2011). Book Review of Flora Nwapa's Efurū. Heinemann. Retrieved April 17, 2011 http://www.africaresource.com/index.php?option=com_contentandview=articleandid=894:flora-nwapas-efuru-a-book-reviewandcatid=137:literaryandItemid=349.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a Different Voice*. Harvard University Press.
- Gimba, A. (1994). *Sacred Apples*. Ibadan, Nigeria: Evans.
- Kindron, D. (2006). Chinua Achebe's Seemingly Negative Depiction of Women in *Things Fall Apart*. Retrieved January 30, 2013 Yahoo! Contributor Network <http://voices.yahoo.com/chinua-achebes-seemingly-negative-depiction-women-87089.html?cat=38>.
- Legal Literacy Series 6. (2003). *Custody of Children under the Shari'a*. Published by Women's Aid Collective (WACOL).
- Lie, K.Y., Keong, Y.C., and Zainudin, I. S. (2012). Negotiating common grounds and diversity in local-global contexts. *GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies Vol. 12 (1)*, 1-4.
- Lindfors, B. (2010). *Early West African Writers: Amos Tutuola, Cyprian Ekwensi and Ayi Kwei Armah*. World Press.
- McRobbie, A. (2008). *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture and Social Change*. SAGE Publications.
- Mercedes A. A. (2009). Feminist Analysis of Chinua Achebe's Novel *Things Fall Apart*: Womanist Theoretical Take on the Female Character's in Chinua Achebe's Classic African Literary Work. Yahoo! Contributor Network. Retrieved January 28, 2013 <http://voices.yahoo.com/a-feminist-analysis-chinua-achebes-novel-things-3187491.html?cat=38>.
- Mezu, R. U. (1995). Women in Achebe's World. *Womanist Theory and Research. 1(2)*. University of Georgia Press.
- Nadaswaran, S. (2011). *Rethinking Family Relationships in Third-Generation Nigerian Women's Fiction Relief 5(1)*. Igitur Publishing, pp.19-32. Retrieved April 12, 2013, <http://www.revue-relief.org>.
- Nnaemeka, O. (1999). Nego-Feminism: Theorizing, Practicing, and Pruning Africa's Way. Reprinted in *Journal of Women in Culture and Society. 29(2)*. The University of Chicago Press, 2003, pp. 357-78.
- Nwapa, F. (1966). *Efurū*. London: Heinemann.
- Nwosu, M. (2000). The Mapping of a Generation. *Sunday Vanguard. May 7*.
- Ogbaa, K. (1981). An Interview with Chinua Achebe (1980). *Research in African Literatures, 12*, (pp. 1-13).
- Ogunyemi, C. O. (1995). *African Wo/man Palaver: The Nigerian Novel by Women*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Ogunyemi, C. O. (1988). *Women and Nigerian Literature*. Yemi Ogunbiyi. (Ed.) *Perspectives on Nigerian Literature*. Lagos: Guardian Books.
- Orban, J. (2010). Amos Tutuola: A Didactic Style: The Long Trek of Pidgin English in the Western Publishing World (Part III). <http://www.africultures.com/php/?nav=article&no=9387>
- Överlien, C. I. (2003). Girls or active young women? Negotiating sexual agency at a detention home. *Feminism & Psychology*, 13, pp. 345-367. Retrieved on August 10, 2012 from <http://fap.sagepub.com/content/13/3/345>.
- Palmer, E. (1978). Twenty-five Years of Amos Tutuola. *The International Fiction Review*. 5(1), University of Sierra Leone, pp.15-24.
- Quayson, A. (1997). *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Raven, C. (2010). How the “New Feminism” Went Wrong. *The Guardian*. Retrieved March 6, 2013, from <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2010/mar/06/charlotte-raven-feminism-madonna-price?>
- Sommers, C. H. (1995). *Who Stole Feminism?: How Women have Betrayed Women*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Tasker, Y. & Negra, D. (2010). *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and Politics of Popular Culture*. London: Duke.
- Thomas, D. (1952). Review. *The Observer*, 6th June.
- Tutuola, A. (1952). *The Palm-wine Drinkard*. Abuja: Spectrum Books (First Published by Faber and Faber).
- Yahya, W. R. (2003). Patriarchy, Male Sexuality, Oedipal Conflict and Female Subject in K.S. Maniam’s *The Cord*. *3L Journal of Language Teaching, Linguistics and Literature*, Vol. 8, pp. 104-122.

