

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ON FEMALE NIGERIAN WRITERS

EDITORS
Olorolapo OJEDIRAN
Oluwatomi ADEOTI

Ed. Olorolapo OJEDIRAN
Oluwatomi ADEOTI

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES
ON FEMALE NIGERIAN WRITERS

ACP

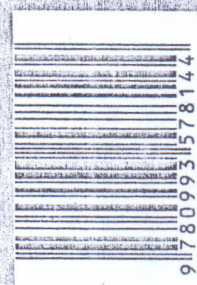
ALPHA CROWNS PUBLISHING LTD

About the Book

Since the 1970s, a significant number of writers have commented on the culture of patriarchy and female identity within the Nigerian society and the role of women in developing a new society. Many of the writers have written from the theoretical perspectives of feminism and gender discourse. Most female writers agree that women and classism are inextricably bound together and cannot be ignored in the exploration of gender discourse. Thus, the feminist theories from different perspectives have helped the black women writers to reflect on dominant discourses to create a self-defined voice for themselves as authors and critics. Their own meaning of womanhood through the prose and narratives.

In this book, female scholars and aspiring writers examined, interpreted and analysed the works of selected female writers from feminine perspectives. The role of the writers are on areas that cover different theories, narratives, experiences and stories as the black feminine, mother and celebrant female, analysis through an depth language and textual analysis. Significantly, this book highlights vital and frequently undervalued creative contributions of female writers who have made the Nigerian literary field vibrant and alive.

Professor Victoria A. Olorun
University of Lagos, Nigeria



ACP

ALPHA CROWNS PUBLISHING LTD

ALPHA CROWNES PUBLISHING LTD

Gender Studies

Publisher/Editor

Alpha Crownes Publishing Ltd

107 Windmill Street

Rochester, United Kingdom

in conjunction with

Department of the Performing Arts

University of Ilorin, Nigeria

This book is copyright.

No part may be reproduced by any process without written permission.

Enquiries should be made to the publisher.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

First published by Alpha Crownes Publishing Gender Studies Series in 2018

Price per copy: £19.99 / N10,000.00 (plus postage)

ISBN 978-0-9935781-4-4

© 2018 by Oludolapo Ojediran, Oluwatomi Adeoti and individual authors

© Cover Design & Book layout: Tokunbo Esho

Printed by Etchwise Consulting Ltd.

books.etchwiseltd.com

10987654321

CONTENTS

Introduction: Critical Perspectives on Nigerian Female Writers, By <i>Victoria A. Alabi</i>	v
Language Reconstruction and Female Creativity, By <i>Oludolapo Ojediran</i>	9
Women, Socio-Political Issues and the Nigerian Experience in Tess Onwueme's <i>Reign of Wazobia</i> and <i>Tell It To Women</i> , By <i>Oluwakemi Mercy Emmanuel-Olowonubi</i>	31
The Dramaturgy of Radical Conscientisation in Irene Salami's <i>Emotan</i> and <i>Idia: The Warrior Queen</i> , By <i>Lauretta Ike</i>	48
Language, Culture and Common Ground in Irene Isoken Salami's <i>Emotan</i> , By <i>Oluwatomi Adeoti</i>	69
Gender Issues in Stella Oyedepo's <i>Brain Has No Gender</i> , By <i>Florence A. Elegba</i>	96
Female Representation and Objectification in Zulu Sofola's <i>The Sweet Trap</i> , By <i>Bassey Nsa Ekpe</i>	115

frequently underrated creative contributions of female writers who have made the Nigerian literary field vibrant and active.

Professor Victoria A. Alabi
Department of English,
University of Ilorin,
Ilorin,
Kwara State.

ONE

LANGUAGE RECONSTRUCTION AND FEMALE CREATIVITY.

By Oludolapo OJEDIRAN

Introduction

African continent has produced many women writers including Zulu Sofola, Tess Onwueme, Ama Ata Aidoo, Efua T. Sutherland, Ifeoma Okoye, Nadine Gordimer, Stella Oyedepo, Grace Ogot, Bessie Head, Zainab Alkali, Julie Okoh, Sefi Atta and Rose Mbowa who employ their writings to develop ideal opportunities for women to enter the academic and literary world. This creates the means for them to engage in different political, economic, social and cultural discussions that have been male dominated. Most of these women writers use their works at different levels, to explore the politics and dichotomies involved in the female-male relationships at several stages of life. In Nigeria, Salami-Agunloye (2011: 123) observes that, "for many years, Zulu Sofola (1971) was the only female playwright on the Nigerian stage. She was later followed by Tess Onwueme (1983) and Stella Oyedepo, (1982)". These were mainly the female playwrights until other writers such as Catherine Acholonu (1985), Irene Salami-Agunloye (1986) and Julie Okoh (1988) emerged in the late 1980s.

During the 1990s and beyond, other women writers such as Chima Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh, Osita Ezenwanebe, Onyeka Onyekuba, Bunmi Obasa Julius-Adeoye and Bose Tsevende joined the male dominated domain of creativity. The work of most of these female writers helps to create active reconstruction in the lives of women whereby they can interrogate, navigate and activate their visibility in the public sphere. This collection does not only praise women's essential difference from the patriarchal stereotypes of women, it re-values women's writing and culture which deals with the use of audaciousness as an element in women's language, as portrayed by female writers. The essays in this book explore identity in relation to gender as being culturally constructed rather than being biologically determined which is examined with socially imbibed language. While the essays share the concerns of feminist theory of women's creativity, they also examine the socio-cultural and historic-political functions of women seen through the prism of their language.

Although the theories of gender, language and culture inform a framework of reading works by the female writers, this does not interfere with the interpretations as it goes beyond any of the theories. Accessing the discourse of female writing in the Nigerian society, writers such as Zulu Sofola, Julie Okoh, Stella Oyedepo, Tess Onwueme, Irene Salami-Agunloye, Zainab Alkali, Sefi Atta, Onyeka Onyekuba, Sade Adeniran, Chima Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh, Osita Ezenwanebe amongst many others question the socio-cultural layout of what it means to be black and female, and what it connotes to be a female writer in a patriarchal society. Through their various themes, these playwrights discover the relationships amongst language, gender and culture. With the creative portrayal of these interlinks amongst the three, the

writers recognise that gender as a social construct has incorporated the problem of language, identity and autonomy. The writers' use of language is analysed as an individual's identity beyond the communication of idea. Also, language is presented as the creation of ideas that can also destroy the male gender if not carefully used; and the laid down moral culture that is meant to govern 'self' especially the female gender. Rather than seeing language from stylistic, pragmatics and lexical structure, language in this book is divided into two sub-categories:

- i. Language of power, authority and politics
- ii. Language of ego and sexism

Language Craft in Women's Writings

From the sociolinguistic view, language is governed by social conventions where the social structures account for the meanings of language use which invariably allows women's outward identity to be seen as socially imposed to protect her patriarchal stand. Such patriarchal stand is a gendered attribute which feminist theory hopes to eradicate, to help women perceive themselves as capable human beings rather than accepting themselves as the opposite of men.

This is evidenced by the works of sociolinguists like Robin Lakoff, Dale Spender, Deborah Cameron, Jennifer Coates and Julia Wood who believe that language plays an important role in human communication be it written or oral within the society. As Carby (1987) observes, black women had to confront the dominant domestic ideologies and literary conventions of womanhood that excluded them from the definition of women through language to gain public voice as orators or published writers. Although much have been said and written about

language, such language tells of the social involvement among human beings within the society and allows them to understand one another.

While Lakoff (1973, 1975) proposes two different styles of language as neutral language and women's language, she also observes that women's language is weak because they use more of question tags, empty adjectives, fillers, qualifiers and other features of women languages. Lakoff (1975: 4-5) identifies the goals in assessing a woman's language as threefold:

To provide diagnostics evidence from language use on gender inequality; to discuss whether anything can be done on gender inequality from the linguistic end of the problem; and to provide, not the final word on sexism and language, but a goad to further research.

Although Lakoff claims specialised vocabulary, expletives, empty adjectives, tag questions, intonation, super-polite forms, hedges, hypercorrect grammar, joke-telling and humour as introspection and linguistic intuition in women's language, the main criticism of this position is Lakoff's negative evaluation of women's language. She argues that such usage displays elements in their lexical, syntactic and pragmatic use of languages that distinguishes women's speech from that of men's which invariably creates negative effects on women's style of language.

While Lakoff sees language as a sexist medium of representation, her elements of women's language create a sense of exaggerated politeness that make women's language different from men's language. This roughly corresponds to the Danish grammarian,

Jespersen's (1922) view that women speak more softly and politely than men, use diminutives, construct their sentences loosely and with hanging phrases and sentences. Jespersen's features of women's speech create the usual stereotype of the female gender which reinforces inequalities and differences in the society as such language make them subordinate to men. Lakoff sees the marginality and powerlessness of women as reflected in the way they use language and societal perception in relation to the female gender. She observes language is a form of prison, specifically a woman's prison to bring out the disadvantaged positions of women from the political and cultural terms. She acknowledges that women are forced to learn a weak, trivial and deferential style of language use as part of socialisation process, therefore making them subordinates.

Lakoff identifies women's language as that form which places women in a subordinate position from early childhood onwards. Although her claim is that women are denied access to powerful style of speech, her work opens further researches to examine whether what she observes is true or otherwise. The search for the differences in women's and men's language use became an emphasis in different research areas as researchers began to respond to the negative historical portrayal of women. This researches challenge some of the sexist tradition that exist between both sexes and their use of language.

During the 1980s, Spender (1980) describes the vast growing body of research on women and language, identifying two specifically different areas. Firstly, she queries differences in language use between men and women based on their sexuality and that if there are, what does that mean to both sexes? Secondly,

she observes sexism in language, its effects and the implication on feminist theory. Spender does not limit herself to the celebration of women's writings; she goes further to ask probing questions about the power of language on its users in particular women. She asks if linguistic sexism is the cause and effect of women's oppression and when it appears in language use, if women and men should be speaking different languages or dialects (genderlects), what the boundaries are, and how men control language, if they do? These questions were to challenge feminist criticism to investigate gender differences and to find new relationship amongst gender, language and literature.

In the 1990s, Coates (1998) notes that several studies have dealt with men and women talk in terms of phonological, morphological, syntactic or lexical studies, more works have also been done to show the findings based on conversational analysis. Coates sees language as being deficit, which is the notion of Lakoff's view of women's language as being dichotomous in nature. Secondly, she identifies language as 'dominance' in nature. This sees the extension of deficit approach that gender difference in language reflects power differences in society. Coates also views difference as an avenue to gendered speech which shows that men and women belong to different subcultures. This is similar to Tannen's (1990) observation about the differences she sees in conversational style between men (report talk) and women (rapport talk).

Tannen reveals the differences in the usage of men and women's language that while men use language as a form of independence, status identification and maintenance in a hierarchical social order, women use language to develop relationships and

interactions. Coates' fourth observation sees language from a dynamic or a social constructionist approach. This shows a way of shifting gender or acting gender instead of being gendered. Crawford (1995: 17) affirms that social constructionist approach of language identifies that talk is a power resource brought to bear in influencing other people, enlisting their help, offering companionship, protecting ourselves from their demands, saving face, justifying our behaviours, establishing important relationship and presenting ourselves as having the qualities that they (and we) admire. Putting language and gender in a social constructionist framework often generates lots of questions about gender along with the issue of race, class and age.

Language of power, authority and politics

As an avenue of communication, the feminists see that language interprets the whole of human experience, reducing the indefinitely varied phenomena of the world around people, and the world inside of people. Language has been a powerful metaphor in women's discourse, employed to analyse the ways in which women are denied the rights or given the opportunity to express themselves freely within the patriarchal society. Language as means of communication distinguishes human beings from other living things. The ability to use it with clarity, precision and vividness helps to determine the kind of personality and identifies the social status of the speaker. Language is a major component of any human culture that encodes a culture's preoccupations and its values; it is one of the main means whereby cultures and traditions are transmitted to children and other incomers into the community.

Language and culture are interwoven in creativity; therefore, language becomes an influential force in the shaping of writers' works. It is important for them to use this communication power to their privilege and advantage as it helps to communicate effectively. Spender (1980: 97) points out that:

people who have the power to use language advantageously have the potential to order the world to suit their own ends, the potential to construct a language, a reality, a body of knowledge in which they are central figures, the potential to legitimate their own primacy, and to create a system of beliefs which is beyond challenge.

This is applicable to female writers who can redress their situation through the use of language in their creation of female characters. For example, in Zulu Sofola's *King Emene*, Obiageli voices out her view that:

Obiageli: What does it matter what my present station in life is? Whether I live or die makes no difference. Suffering is second nature to me and no one knows it better than you. My flesh has become hardened. Your hands have taught me the value of silent suffering intermingled with patience and hope for peace and justice. I believe that one day the truth about the death of my son will be revealed. That day will surely come and these breasts that nursed my son in vain will flow with the milk of joy. My son will rejoice in his grave for at last the untimely and unjust death will have been avenged (p. 8)

Sofola's dramatic language shows the beauty and catchy exploration of woman's language and how they use it to draw people's attention to themselves. In fact, Showalter (1985: 193) observes that it is not language that silences women in the society, but the restriction placed on women's ability or entitlement to use it:

The appropriate task for feminist criticism is to concentrate on women's access to language. . . on the ideological and cultural determinants of expression. The problem is not that language is insufficient to express women's consciousness but that women have been denied the full resources of language and have been forced into silence, euphemism and circumlocution.

However, the use of positive, creative language by these writers help women to redefine themselves in the society that has limited their ability in history especially in the public sphere where very little is known about women. Showalter (1985: 47-48) notices that:

The history of England is the history of male lines, not of the female. Of the fathers we know always some fact, some distinction. They were soldiers or they were sailors; they filled that office or they made that law. But of our mother, our grandmothers, our great-grand mothers, what remains? Nothing but a tradition. One was beautiful; one was red-haired; one was kissed by the Queen. We know nothing of them except their names and the duties of their marriages and the numbers of children they bore.

This is noticeable in the works of the Nigerian female writers who present situations whereby marginalisation and suppression within narratives makes it difficult for the women to have self and national autonomy. This mirrors Spender's (1980) view that men have been privileged to be the shapers of cultural forms which include language as the most symbolical of all that has excluded women in the production of cultural forms.

Showalter's (1985) discussion about female writings is a call to female writers to explore the positive aspect of women's cultural position, women's language, women's body and women's psyche through their language. Invariably, this becomes a means of escape for them rather than dwelling on the hierarchical and stereotyped nature that has been identified with women in the society. In Showalter's words, the women writers have found themselves in a sense, without a history; have been forced to rediscover the past anew, forging constantly and consciously into their sex roles that make them very valuable to female literary

Importantly, the female writers through their works create determined female characters with roles and situations to help assert their existence in time and history. Ekwierhoma (2003) observes that writing is also an avenue of empowerment for women since it enables the female writer to confront all forces threatening to silence her negatively. For example, many of the Nigerian female writers such as Flora Nwapa, Toyin Adewale, Buchi Emecheta and Mabel Segun have been identified to write on impulse to change the status quo, to interrogate patriarchy, imperialism and Western feminism and hierarchy that involve sexist language. Also, that sexist language should not just be considered from what defines, demean or depreciates women,

that make them invisible, passive or silent, sexism in language can redefine women to inspire resistance and activeness in any socio-cultural milieu. This shows in Ogunsiji (2013: 23) that language is creative, it is elastic. That the finite rules of language can be used to generate infinite number of sentences because language is not biologically inherited but is socially acquired. However, language is a complex whole which is not independent of culture.

Such writings are to correct their low self-esteem which developed from discriminations and oppressions creating a negative identity in the society. The study of women concerning their language use has a long history which exposes the idea that women and men are treated differently through their use of language. For example, in most of the identified female writers' works, language is viewed as a tool of privilege that gives the male characters the social recognition and importance in the communication hierarchy. Cameron (1995) notes that the rules about language and standards of 'correct speech' reveal information about patterns of power and privilege in the society. Women writers from different cultural backgrounds have shown their concern about the manners in which women are (re)presented in language. Penelope (1990) for example has documented that the early encounters women had with sexist language from St Hildegard of Bingen in the eleventh century is an attempt to construct an alternative to non-sexist language.

Rather than creating an alternative view on how women's language is identified and treated in the society, Alice Walker (1983) presents the alternative that sexist language could still be used constructively by women and the society by seeing the capability in the female gender. Although in defining sexist

language, Weatherall (2002: 10) sees it as not just the words used to describe women, but also how such words are used and to what ends they are being used:

Challenging sexism in language and making trouble with words can be an important feminist strategy to engender social change. However, it seems to me that the solutions offered to the problem of sexist language are somehow less important than the issue itself. One reason for this is that there is no simple relationship between linguistic forms and non-sexist language.

Weatherall notes that although words can define, depreciate and demean women but at the same time, may also inspire resistance and rebellion against the negative meaning. Thus, sexist language should not just be thought of as constructing women as invisible or passive and silent. This reveals that silence can be used effectively without having a negative connotation as many writers have portrayed it. In some respect, silence is another form of resistance to a domineering culture where the holders of such culture are always ready to checkmate the female activities. Similar to Weatherall's view, Butler (1997: 2) observes that:

One is simply fixed by the name that one is called. In being called an injurious name, one is derogated and demeaned. But the name holds out another possibility as well: by being called a name, one is also, paradoxically, given a certain possibility for social existence... thus the injurious address may appear to fix and paralyse the one it hails, but it may also produce an unexpected and enabling response.

Butler's observation elaborates the view of some female writers whose works recreate women culturally, mythically, socially, economically, financially and politically within the society that has limited their contributions. They recreate their self to feel great, powerful and highly valued individuals as a means of showing the female worth.

Also, Black and Coward (1998) explain that language participates in the social and has an active role in the construction of its subjects' social statuses. Spender (1980: 52) agrees that language is a weapon that women writers have not been able to use extensively in their fight against sexism. Ekwierhoma (2003: 14) confirms that "the woman writer's inability to use language to her own advantage is likely to obtain in a phallocentric society, where female artistry is often socially inhibited. This inhibition could therefore estrange her from the mainstream of writing and limit her contribution". Apart from the corrective measure achieved by female creativity and writings, Driver (1982: 203) expresses her belief that such writings are genuine consciousness created by women to communicate to their audience. Driver thus asserts "literature as means of giving autonomous value to women's experience by helping women perceive the political, economic, and social expression to which women were subjugated as well as attempt to bring about new standards against which women would be measured. Such experiences and perspectives of women mandate their inquiry into historical priority, universality and overriding importance of patriarchy through their different writings.

This expression elaborates Alice Walker's definition of womanism as seeing the capabilities in women. Writing gives women

empowerment and freedom to think and feel. Freedom to think and feel are parts of the distinct features of the womanist ideology which allows mental, body and personal autonomy. Through such writings, female identity, female dignity, female protestation and female feminine assertive aesthetics are explored. Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (1998: 485) opine that "women's language has been said to reflect their conservatism, prestige consciousness, upward mobility, insecurity, deference, nurture, emotional, expressivity connectedness, sensitivity to others, solidarity".

Language of ego and sexism

Language, however, could either be an expressive or oppressive tool within the society which could determine the linguistic strength of a gender. McConnell-Ginet (1998: 199) explains that using language is a socially situated action, it is clearly embedded in the same socio-cultural matrix that supports sexual bias in the work we do... the expectations we have of ourselves and others and so on. Therefore, language in the society is introduced as a very powerful and significant indicator of status. While Lakoff (1975: 16) identifies language itself as a tool of oppression because women's speech is often "tentative, powerless and trivial", Spender (1980: 52) observes that historically, women have been excluded from the production of cultural forms, and language is after all, cultural form and a most important one. In awkward terms, this means that language has been made by men, that they have used it for their own purposes. Spender however sees language and gender as being interwoven and interlinked by their correlative development through social and cultural practice.

Although this book considers the assertion, it also explores their opposites to justify womanist view of the 'capability' of females

according to Walker (1983). Crawford (1995: 94) identifies this as acting within a social constructionist framework. She agrees that women behave in a certain way not because of their sex, but because they are members of a distinct, culturally salient group who are placed in particular situations and interactions that enable certain behaviours and suppress others. She further asserts that "some girls and boys come to experience intimacy and autonomy differently because the gender system operating at the social, structural and interactional levels recreates the ideology of gender within individuals.

However, language exposes the kind of social being that we are and helps give entry into the patriarchal culture through speech. The problem is that women are marginalised in patriarchal societies, because while men find language as a tool to social entry, women see it as an impossible objective. For most women writers, language is not a tool of recognition of who they are, but a tool of oppression. This reflects Spender's point noted earlier about man-made language and reinforces Deborah Cameron, Jennifer Coates and Deborah Tannen's exploration of written language in particular as an alien concept for women.

Language, like gender, cannot be easily looked upon without reference to socio-cultural factors that determine the perceptions of identity whether personal or national. In line with language creating identity, these women writers do not clamour for a total dissociation from these pasts, but it should be identified as a form of reconstructive continuity that will shape the present. Hence these various factors must be taken into consideration and investigated to some extent in any gender focused discourse analysis. The socio-cultural factors are noticeable in many of their

works like Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods*, Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, Mabel Segun's *Under the Mango Tree*, Julie Okoh's *Mannequins*, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and so on. Many of the works produced by these women writers are their personal and social identity; and reflections as writers, as women and as characters in the larger societies. The female characters in their works are portrayed as multi-dimensional agents who no longer remain marginalised and voiceless. For example, in Julie Okoh's *Mannequins*, Mrs. Adudu refuses to be subjugated by the cultural expectation which celebrates a man's infidelity within the African patriarchal society. At the end of the play she realises she has a brighter and better future without a man while she leaves the house to start a new life. This is also visible in Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods*, when Ogwoma decides to be emancipated after the death of a husband she is forced to marry. She sees it as being limited and voiceless within this culture; she wants her freedom rather than being an unhappy individual throughout her life because of cultural obligation. Ojediran (2013: 58) sees that Sofola creates characters and storyline that are representational; appealing to readers' physicality and emotions.

In line with Okoh and Sofola's view of the female ill treatment in the society, Emecheta (1990: 27) observes the false female characterisation in Chinua Achebe's work which explores the socio-cultural treatment of women in the Igbo community of Nigeria. Emecheta criticises that "The good woman" in Achebe's portrayal is the one who kneels and drinks the dreg after the husband. In Achebe (1964: 42), when the husband is beating his wife, other women stand around saying "it's enough, it's enough". In his view, according to Emecheta, that kind of a subordinate woman is the good woman. Until recently, culturally for example

in some of the Nigerian societies for long time, female children were mainly appreciated because of their monetary value in terms of the price they attract when they get married.

Reading through the works of these Nigerian women writers' such as Ifeoma Okoye, Zaynab Alkali, Teresa Meniru, Lara Daniels, Folake Taylor and Catherine Acholonu, readers see the observations and recommendations of these writers that one of the ways of correcting the faulty image of the Nigerian women is to see from the 'inside', in other words, rendered by women. Although, male writers, including John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo, Femi Osofisan, Bayo Afolabi and Ahmed Yerima, are writing in support of women emancipation, freedom, autonomy, the fact remains that these male writers are writing outside the female body and cannot tell the feminine tales from the feminine view/experience. For example, Ademeso (2009: 29) observes that:

In Africa today, a discourse on feminism as a literary theory cannot be fully held without giving more attention to the position of Osofisan and his treatment of female characters in his plays. He sees women as opposite of men, not in terms of sex or physical outlook alone; he sees them as partners in progress, who could achieve a lot without being wasteful or corrupt. He sees them as having more wisdom than men who use aggression or war in conflict resolution...

Osofisan sees women as people in search of knowledge, liberation and self-fulfilment both in history and contemporary times. However, the works from Nigerian women writers highlight the

exclusion of women from the public spheres, elaborates domesticity and publicise patriarchy. These three avenues, personal expressiveness, emotion and empathy are means through which Walker's view of womanism allows these women writers to use their writings as an avenue to communicate with other women in the society since writing make up the collation of history. Through language use, Nigerian women writers have tried to redeem women's lost history in the literary world and to attain self-actualisation in their various societies. To a large extent, these writers have been able to correct the bias undertone in the cultural description of women that reinforces them as decorative objects whose identity hinges on physical appeal and not what they contribute to the society positively.

Considering this from their works, female writers' language is a means through which female dignity, femininity, protestation and feminine aesthetics are explored while the constraints affecting female creative impulse is discarded. Cameron (1998: 50) observes that:

The great change that has crept into women's writing is, it would seem a change of attitude. The woman writer is no longer bitter. She is no longer angry. She is no longer pleading and protesting as she writes. We are approaching, if we have not yet reached, the time when her writing will have no little or foreign influence to disturb it. She will be able to concentrate upon her vision without distraction from outside. The aloofness that was once within the reach of genius and originality is only now coming within the reach of ordinary women.

Cameron's assertion made twenty years ago, has been an influence in the works of female writers. The use of language both in oral or folktale and written form in these works have created assertive, determined and actualised female roles. For women writers to have been able to use these two forms constructively and effectively show their dynamicity, flexibility, capability and adjustability to the 'male sphere'. Such use of poetic lines and oral forms embrace satirical, overt political and cultural activism that depicts women's plights and collective ethos as well as tools for castigating built in social structures which Kolawole (1997) views as the need of feminine gender by the female poets and dramatists. Apart from writing in different Nigerian languages – Igbo, Yoruba, Efik, Pidgin, or Hausa, for example – the oral narratives and the folklores in these female writings depict their connections with their respective cultures which elaborate their richness of imagination. Showalter (1977) sees that women are been regarded generally as 'sociological chameleons' who take on the class, lifestyle and culture of male counterparts. She argues further about women constituting themselves as a subculture within the framework of a larger society and unifying themselves by values, conventions, experiences and behaviours infringing on everyone. This reveals that there is a gendered use of voice, vocabulary, language, view and knowledge which the female gender adapts to be reckoned with in the society. To this end, this authenticates Simone de Beauvoir (1974: 20) as quoted by Akoh (2015: 159) that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman”.

Conclusion

Enejere (1991: 49) observes that in Nigeria, “the problem of women looms large. Economic backwardness, ignorance, religious prejudice and obsolete ideas about women's place at

home and in society still tell on their position". While Enejere's view is a major concern in the Nigerian society, female writers have tried as much as they can to see that such situations are identified, presented and corrected through their suggested solutions. Such writings surreptitiously influence the society views that these female biological roles are to be used positively and not as limiting key into the social sphere. As these women writers engage in different forms of social mobility, they deal with linguistic aesthetics that revalue their deviated socio-cultural positions. However, this helps them to deviate from the media and masculine representation which has limited them and to create a female gender who is not totally dependent or subservient. It is obvious that more women's works need to be written, showcased, analysed and criticised in the public to promote their involvement in the academic, political, economic, and socio-cultural sphere. This will also help to bring more women's work to the fore front in the literary world.

References

- Achebe, C. (1989). *Arrow of God*. Herts: Anchor Press.
- Ademeso, A. (2009), "The drama and theatre of Femi Osofisan: A critical appraisal". In Emasealu, E. (Ed.), *The CRAB: Journal of Theatre & Media Arts*. Vol. 5, pp. 1-35.
- Akoh, D. (2015). "Gender, sexuality and power in select Nigerian drama". In Utoh-Ezeajugh, T.C. & Ayakoroma, B. F. (Eds.), *Gender discourse in African theatre, literature and visual arts. A festschrift in honour of Professor Mabel Ekwierhoma*. Ibadan: Kraft Books.
- Beauvoir, S. D. (1974). *The second sex*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Black, M & Coward, R., (1998). "Linguistic, social and sexual

relations: A review of Dale Spender's man-made language". In Cameron, D. (Ed.) *The feminist critique of language*. London: Routledge.

- Butler, J. (1997). *Excitable speech: A politics of the performative*. London: Routledge.
- Cameron, D., (1995). *Verbal hygiene: The politics of language*. London: Routledge.
- Carby, H. V. (1987). *Reconstructing womanhood: The emergence of the Afro- American women novelist* (6th ed.). New York: Oxford University Press Inc.
- Coates, J. (Ed.). (1998). *Language and gender: A reader*. New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell.
- Crawford, M. (1995). *Talking difference: on gender and language*. London: Sage Publishers.
- Driver, D. (1982). *Feminist Literary Criticism*. New York: Rodopi Publishers.
- Eckert, P and McConnell-Ginet, S. (1998). *Language and gender: A reader*. New Jersey: Wiley Blackwell.
- Emecheta, B. (1990). *New York Times Book Review*. New York: New York Times Press.
- Enejere, E. (1991). "Women and political education". In Chizea, D.O. & Njoku, J. (Eds.), *Nigerian women and the challenges of our time*. Lagos: National Council of Women Society.
- Ekwierhoma, M. (2003). *Female empowerment and dramatic creativity in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Caltop Publications (Nigeria) Limited.
- Kolawole, M. (1997) *Womanism and African Consciousness*. Eritrea: African World Press.
- Jespersen, O. (1921). *Language: Its nature, development and origin*. Michigan: University of Michigan Library.

- Lakoff, R. (1975). *Language and women's place*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ogunsiji, A. (2013). "The power of language", in Ogunsiji, A., Kehinde, A., and Odebunmi, A., (eds.), *Language, literature and discourse*. Ibadan: Sterling-Horden Publishers. pp. 23-36.
- Ojediran, O. (2013). "Womanist aesthetics of assertiveness on Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods*". *The Performer: Ilorin Journal of the Performing Arts*. Vol. 15; pp. 56-67.
- Penelope, J. (1990). *Speaking freely: Unlearning the lies of the fathers' tongue*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Salami-Agunloye, I. I. (2011). *Challenging the master's craft: Women playwright in the theatre of men*. Boston: Evergreen Books.
- Showalter, E. (1977). *A Literature of their own: British women novelists from Bronte to Lessing*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Sofola, Z. (1974). *King Emene*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books.
- Spender, D. (1980). *Man-made language*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Walker, A. (1984). *In Search of our mothers' gardens: Womanist Prose*. Berkshire: Cox & Wyman Publishers.
- Weatherall, A. (2002). *Gender, language and discourse (Women and Psychology)*. London: Routledge.

TWO

WOMEN, SOCIO-POLITICAL ISSUES AND THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE IN TESS ONWUEME'S *REIGN OF WAZOBIA AND TELL IT TO WOMEN*

By Oluwakemi Mercy EMMANUEL-OLOWONUBI

Introduction

Since independence, what we refer to as modern Nigeria has tactically failed to measure up to the idea of an ideal modern state. Nigerians are confronted with several socio-political issues emanating from the spiral of cultural and religious roots, causing diverse crises. These range from leadership management, resource control, inadequate and justifiable representation, non-equitable distributions of amenities, maltreatment and inhuman behaviour by dominant groups against the minority groups, both politically and socially, which also involve gender disparity between men and women in Nigeria.

Despite the ongoing efforts by women and concerned individuals to salvage womanhood from the stigma of inferiority, little progress has been made to restore the dignity accorded women in pre-colonial Nigeria, before the period of British colonialism and Western imperative. At the time, there were numbers of women of