

The Empowered Women in Ahmed Yerima's Drama

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Abstract

Ahmed Yerima, General Manager, National Theatre of Nigeria and Artistic Director, National Troupe of Nigeria, is one of the few male playwrights who have shown great interest in the female question in contemporary Nigerian society. Most of the female protagonists in Yerima's plays are strong, assertive, educationally empowered women who have transcended the private life to the fore of public life where they contribute to the economic and human development of the nation. But what specifically is the economic and social status of these female characters? How does the playwright characterise them? What is his intention for assigning them the roles they play? And what implication do both have for human development?

The paper therefore offers a critical analysis of the images of educationally empowered female characters in the drama of Ahmed Yerima and the methods used by the playwright in representing them so as to determine the implication of the playwright's style on both the theme of the play and the audience's response as well as the implication of the theme and technique to human and national development. To achieve the above objectives, selected plays of Ahmed Yerima- *The Wives*, *The Sisters*, *Tie Portraits* and *The Mirror Cracks* which lay emphasis on professional female characters are critically analysed to unravel the intricate relationship of subject matter, character and style in determining the over all message of plays and the audience response.

Introduction

Nigerian Women in the Global Struggle for Freedom

Bondage persists only when the enslaved is not ware of his or her predicament; or being aware, lacks the potentials for freedom. Critical appraisal of women in modern society shows they are oppressed, marginalised and subdued to an ignoble position visa-avis the men. The quest for freedom which informs the women liberation movements in the West in early 1960s is codified as Feminism in literary circles. It is an ideology in art and life which exposes the oppression of women and articulates ways for their freedom. Feminism, at its inception is characterised by anger, bitterness and a thirst for revenge. The aim then is to achieve equality of sexes through a denial of femininity, and to bond together in sisterhood to dethrone male supremacy by rearranging the society in favour of women. The first enemy is man who is seen as a symbol of cultural oppression since the society is arranged to his advantage. A battle of sexes ensues. Social roles are rejected; marriage is seen as a trap; pregnancy as a burden; and 'feminine' as a social construct which does not exclude men as women toughen for a defiant battle with men in all spheres of life.

Stella Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy-Cheated* (2002) is a farcical representation of all that radical feminism stands for. Ms. Ara Sharp, who chooses to remain single, gathers women in a sisterhood spirit and forms a women liberation movement, Bumpy-Cested Movement (BCM), aimed at the emancipation of women from the oppressive domination of men. The first enemy mapped out for attack and overthrow is the man, especially the husbands of the members. The first step in the attack is to get toughened through a vigorous exercise that forbids a pregnant woman to utter the word "weak". "Haven't we resolved that the word 'weak' shall

henceforth be pulled out of our vocabulary?" Sharp bellows "I have vowed to myself ", she continues, "if it is my breasts that will be an impediment in the course of this struggle, I will not think twice before slashing them off", Oyedepo (13). All the members are then poised for the battle of supremacy and position. Ashake refuses to cook for her household and prefers, instead, to busy herself applying different make-up to her face and walking about in hot pants; Falilat, wife of Jolomi, takes advantage of her husband's small stature to establish her superiority. On one occasion, she sends her husband sprawling on the floor: "she descends on him raining down pellets of slaps and punches especially around the lower region. Jolomi (her husband) lets out yells and struggles rather desperately" (Oyedepo 33). Ashake, the Tigress, tears her husband's face with her artificial nails. They claim to be "women of sophistication" and "Iron ladies" who go about half naked and take to drinking and smoking. Fiercely arrogant and stubborn, the women use not only physical violence but also verbal abuse and name-calling to champion their cause as they declare "bed and kitchen strike" in order to force men to yield to their demand of equality in all things.

The brand of feminism illustrated in Oyedepo's play immediately gained root in the consciousness of men and women and is taken erroneously as the goal of feminism. Feminism is then seen as a coup against male supremacy and a threat to societal peace. Chinweizu boldly asserts that Nigerian Feminism is a politics tainted by Western "trouser wearing women" (Chinweizu in Odoko 101). In Nigeria, Feminism acquired a pejorative undertone. Many scholars dissociate themselves from feminist struggles despite the fact that Nigerian women suffer the same oppression and marginalisation like other women of the world. There was need to articulate a common ideology for emancipating African women based on African Ideals. As early

as 1975, women from the third world, at a conference in Wellesley, reject the intellectual positions and social attitudes of Euro-American feminists and derived the term "womanism" as an umbrella ideology for the liberation of the African woman in African culture. Whether in the name of Ifeoma Acholonu's "Motherisms" or Obioma Nnaemeka's "Nego-feminism" or Molaria Ogundipe-Lesilie's STIWA (Social Transformation including women in African), African women writers, critics and gender scholars are articulating the African woman's protest against the oppression of her gender and a unique programme for emancipation that does not alienate women from African social and cultural realities. Hudsonweens insists that African womanism is neither an outgrowth of Feminism nor an addendum to it but "an ideology created and designed for all women of African decency. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles needs and desires of African women" (Hudsonweens qtd. in Oloko 245).

Womanism, unlike Western Feminism aims at a general social and cultural transformation. The starting point is not necessarily men. Rather it engages and interrogates culture and sees it as a platform for critical transformation. Womanism opts for an evaluation of men and women that will enthrone complementarity, instead of equality of the sexes. Complementarity implies an awareness that neither men nor women can exist in isolation.

While gender peculiarity is accepted (man and woman are not the same), it calls for an urgent redefinition of social roles in the light of the changes in modern society. Womanism is therefore a call for equity and fairness in the relationship of men and women in order to build a society where men and women co-exist in equal dignity, mutual respect and self actualisation. It is a protest against, and the quest for freedom

from all forms of social and cultural oppression of African women. It makes available to that gender, ways of asserting her dignity and of gaining self actualisation. Kolawole summarises womanism when she defines an African womanist as:

Any African woman who has the consciousness to situate the struggle within African cultural realities by working for a total and robust self retrieval of the African woman is an African or African womanist. (Kolawole 1999: 34)

Nigerian women writers and gender scholars who sympathise with the plight of Nigerian women and employ their art to liberate them in line with the cultural realities are womanists. Stella Dia Oyedepo, Akachi Adimora – Ezeigbo, Tess Onwueme, Catherine Acholonu, Mary Kolawole and others are Nigerian womanists who articulate Nigerian women's yearnings for freedom, build bridges between women and men for a harmonious co-existence and interrogate oppressive cultural practices and norms for a total socio-cultural transformation.

The plight of Nigerian women is complicated by the high level of corruption seen in money politics and decaying social institutions. It is unfortunate that feminism has acquired a derogatory meaning in Nigeria. Many women and even men who are sympathetic about the plight of women are too cautious in using their art to champion a cause they are convinced is worthwhile. This ambivalence gives rise to all forms of misrepresentation and confusion in works that address the female question. This paper seeks to interrogate such misconceptions with a view to pointing the way forward in the struggle for gender equity. It is hoped that Nigerian artists will jointly address the issue of gender imbalance in such a way as to achieve the desired result- effecting mutual co-existence of

men and women based on equity and fairness. This co-existence is imperative for human and national development.

The Images of Empowered Women in Ahmed Yerima's Drama

African plays on women in social relationships locate women within family circles. Yerima is the most outstanding male playwright in the Nigerian theatre that centers his plays on the female question. The plays under study are on women, marriage and family life. Prominent among these plays are *The Wives*, *The Sisters*, *The Portraits*, and *The Mirror Cracks*. The female protagonists of these plays are economically self reliant. Yerima's drama on gender issues interrogate the role of educated women within the family. *The Wives and The Sisters* exclusively have female characters with only references to male. *The Mirror Cracks and The Portraits* portray men and women in battles of position and supremacy and the consequent effect on themselves and their children.

The Wives is a gentle satire on the plight of women as sisters and wives in the family. It is the story of Chief Theophilus Gbadegeshin Olowookere, Auntimi, his sister, and the three wives — Angela (his first wife), Tobi (his third) and Doctor Cecelia, his second wife. Among the four main characters who are all women, Dr. Cecelia's economic empowerment through formal education is clearly emphasised. She is a banker and has an honorary doctorate degree. She had long since (10 years) left chief's home before his death because of the antics of chief and his family. The death of their husband brings together all the women in his life: his three wives and his sister, Auntimi, who all gathered to know what provision is made for their welfare in his will.

The remains of late Chief Theophilus Gbadegeshin Olowookere lies in bed begging for burial while the action of

the play captures the antics of the women as they await the arrival of Seyi, the eldest son who must be there to perform certain rituals; and lawyer Solour Akande, who must read his will before the burial. Auntimi makes mockery of the wives knowing fully well the secret she shares with her late brother. The reading of the will brings about a sudden revelation (a favoured technique in Yerima's drama) that the lawyer, to whom the late chief wills all his possessions, is the product of an incest with his sister, Auntimi. Only Cecelia is able to recover the loan of one hundred and fifty thousand Naira she gave to him.

The play *The Wives*, portrays the plight of women as senseless victims of men's wicked, sexual freedom. The same theme is explored in *The Sisters*, another play that focuses wholly on women. It is the eve of the burial of Funmi's husband, Dipo, His Excellency, the President. The dramatic action, like that in *The Wives*: the women capture not the in state of the present, but Funmi and her Sisters instead of becoming immersed in the burial preparations, saw it as an opportunity to settle some scores among them and review their predicaments in the hands of men. In the play, the three sisters Funmi, Toun and Taiwo try to get over their hidden pains and to re-establish their filial bond by settling their grudges and misgivings. The play concludes with the sudden revelation that both Funmi's husband, and the father of the sisters have children outside wedlock.

While *The Sisters* and *The Wives* deal with women's relationship among themselves, *The Portraits* and *The Mirror Cracks* are centered on relationships between husbands and wives and their impact on one another and the children. *The Portraits* is about family reunion. Ambassador Chief Adetola and Justice Mrs. Adetunji Beyioku have been separated for 30 years. They are brought together at the birthday celebration

of their only child and daughter, Segi. At the party, the couple have time to xray their past life, dialogue and decide to come together again, but it is too late, for when Tola decides to say 'I am sorry', and to cling to the man of her love, he is found dead in his chair. The whole incident bears hard on their daughter, Segi. *The Mirror Cracks* also deals with the failed marriage of Ambassador Ayodele Adegabi (Gabiland Justice Tundun Adegabi). It is the eve of the burial of Major Supoa – a child abandoned by his mother, Tundun, at the age six. His burial brings Tundun back to a home she left 30 years ago. The action captures husband and wife going down memory lane as to the reason for the divorce and its consequent effect on Supo especially as it is confirmed that lack of parental care, especially maternal affection and care, coupled with the evil influences of war have made a monster out of Supo. The couple also discover to their amazement that Supos fame as a gallant soldier is a lie.

All the main female characters in the four plays are empowered through formal education except for Angela, chief's first wife in *The Wives*. In *The Wives*, Dr. Cecelia Olowookered is a banker and Tobi, the third and last wife was an "Air crew executive" (Yerima 25) and Auntimi (Chief's sister), we are told, is "well educated" (41). In *The Sisters*, the three sisters are all well learned and are professional women: Barrister Funmi, her Excellency the wife of president Dipo is a lawyer; Barrister Taiwo, Funmi's crippled sister, is also a lawyer and Toun is a teacher. In *The Portraits*, the main female character, Justice Adetola Beyioku is a High Court judge while her sister Funmi works in the National Arts Gallery. In *The Mirror Cracks*, Justice Tunden Adegabi is a judge of the Appeal Court. On the contrary their husbands have lost grip of active economic life. They are either dead, dying or crushed- Chief Theophilus Gbadegeshin Olowookere in *The Wives* and Dipo, the president,

husband of Barrister Funmi are dead before the play starts and their remains lay in state through out the dramatic action. Ambassador Adetunji Beyioku of *The Portraits* dies in the course of the play while Ambassador Ayodele Adegabi is a crushed man, having lost his only son, Supo. The plays capture therefore the dark moments of the women's lives.

But what role do the women play in the plays in their families and in their relationships with their husbands? Certainly their filial relations are far from being cordial or joyful. Tobi in *The Wives* and Barrister Funmi in *The Sisters* are portrayed as naïve, senseless women who marry with their hearts, not with their heads and hence fall victim to the men's licentious freedom. The men are represented as he-devils: vicious, reckless and deceptive while the two empowered women are represented as victims, but the style of representation undermines audience's sympathy for them. Beneath their pitiable experiences at the hand of the men is a gentle satire which evokes not pity but derision.

In *The Wives*, Oluwatobi (Tobi), a teenage girl of 19years, an air executive, is so consumed in her love for a 75 year old husband that she foolishly accepts his suggestion that she keeps her shape and not bother about having a child. Horribly enough, she never thinks of what will happen to her if Chief her "Tiger", her "Sweet pumpkin" should die. Auntimi, chief's sister, summarises her rightly, as a poor girl. "You are a poor, innocent stupid and foolish girl" (27) and she promptly agrees: "I am the pretty fool ... just a pretty stupid fool..." (45). In the end, she has no place in the will and is thus thrown out, since her Tiger wills all his possession to Barrister Solomon Akande the product of his incest with his sister.

Her Excellency, Barrister Funmi in *The Sisters* is as foolish and as naïve as Tobi. In fact Funmi a sixty year old lawyer does not display her legal knowledge in her marriage. She like Tobi,

married with her heart and allowed herself to be consumed with the love of pomp and pageantry associated with ladies of honour to the extent that she not only neglects her sisters but is also unaware that her husband has a family outside.

The death of her husband exposes the futility of her marital existence. Taiwo her crippled sister, drives the message home when she tells her to her face:

You stayed there so long but spent your time living it all up. You threw the biggest parties, dressed so well, had the best jewelry box, and said nothing, did nothing and now it is all over; you have nothing but five bastard children to show for it. (Yerima 25)

Taiwo offers her a "stiff drink" to enable her "sip him away" (23) for "A woman who goes through thirty years of marriage and ends up inheriting five children from her late husband's concubine on the eve of his burial, deserves a stiff drink" (23). Funmi, like Tobi lost everything through the deception and wickedness of men who marry with their heads and not their hearts. Yet the women are so guilty of uncritical living that there is no sympathy for them. They are simply portrayed as fools. When Tobi says she will never marry again, Auntimi advises her: "You'll marry again, this time with your head... not your heart" (*The Wives: 60*).

The Wives and *The Sisters* present empowered women as fools. Their economic empowerment and education do not help them positively in their marriage. Infact they do not recourse to them in their married life. Both Tobi and Funmi are childless and are not even shown practicing their careers in the course of their marriages. Their husbands are presented as he-devils while the wives Tobi and Funmi are not she-saints but she-fools.

The case is different in the representation of the professional women in *The Portraits* and *The Mirror Cracks*. Tola a 64 year old judge of a High Court in *The Portrait* and Tundun, a distinguished lady in her 50's and a judge of the Court of Appeal in *The Mirror Cracks* are highly educated women. Their husbands, on the other hand, are retired Ambassadors in their 70s Unlike Tobi (*The Wives*) and Funmi (*The Sisters*) who are barren, Tundun (*The Mirror Cracks*) and Tola (*The Portraits*) have a child each – Supo (a male) and Segi (a female) respectively. They are women of letters who know their rights; who have regained their voice through education and employ the powers at their disposal albeit negatively in their family life.

Tola and Tundun, the women of letters, are represented as having lost the gentleness, tenderness and care associated with being female which help women function effectively as wives and mothers. These are qualities termed “softness” or “weakness”, generalised as the essence of a woman, that is, her femininity. Devoid of such qualities, Tola and Tundun display the “iron-lady” syndrome. They lack capacity for emotional feeling but rather are arrogant, proud, stubborn and swollen-headed. Unfortunately, their husbands, Ambassador /chief Adetunji Beyioku (Tola's husband in *The Portraits*) and Ambassador Ayodele Adegabi (Tundun's husband in *The Mirror Cracks*) refuse to have it any other way than the traditional way.

Tola in *The Portraits* is represented not only as stubborn and proud but also as autocratic and petty. Segi, her daughter calls her “The rock of Gibraltar” (*The Portraits* 158). At her daughter's birthday party, Tola refuses that people be served food before the photograph, not even her husband who is on medication, just because according to her, “food before the photographs could smear my make up” (156). The gap and

coldness between the husband and wife is seen in how they address each other as “His Excellency” and “Her Lordship”.

Both women of letters are divorcees. Tola filed a temporary divorce which lasted for thirty years and is brought face to face with her husband at Segi's (their daughter) birthday. Tundun in *The Mirror Cracks* walked out of her matrimonial home, leaving behind her six-year old son, Supo, and only comes back at the eve of his burial. Yerima presents the empowered women as failures in marriage, as people who cannot stay in marriage because they lack the capacity to love, tolerate and endure whatever comes, and the failure has consequent effect on the children. In both plays as in others by Yerima, Highly Educated women are blamed for the failure. Tola in *the Portraits* files for separation because, according to her:

I wanted to be free. I like my freedom. I did not want a man telling me what to do. I hated ... making love when I did not want to... (*The Portraits* 170)

Freedom for her includes freedom from her husband's intimidating personality as an Ambassador thus:

I wanted to be myself not hide under the folds of your long flowing dress... I wanted to be me. We had two huge egos. The spotlight was always on you and all I did was to step aside. (166)

In as much as Tola's reason is unacceptable, her husband, Adetunji equally has an unacceptable view about marriage: “You were supposed to complement me, not establish your own personality to rival mine” he says. (166). Adetunji's words show that he prefers naive, foolish educated women like Funmi in *The Sisters* who did not employ the powers availed her by virtue of her education in her marital life. It is obvious therefore,

that both Tola and Tunji her husband, need to change their views for a successful marital union.

Dr. Cecelia Olowookere could not equally continue to stomach the confusion in chief Theophilus' family in *The Wives*. She is firm and wise enough to leave his home before the madness that erupts after his death. Yet the divorce is undermined by the reason she gives. According to her, she detests "cooking, making love and seeing the inlaws "... I wanted my space, and I wanted also to choose my moments". (*The wives* 40) and she insists she has no regrets.

In representing the women of high learning, the playwright blames them for the failure of their marriages, and its effects on their husbands and children. Even Angela in *The Wives* blames Cecelia, her co-wife, for leaving: "I think Theo started dying from the day you left... as he read the divorce letter from the court, he cried..." (*The Wives* 41). The word "left" is also applied to Tundun in *The Mirror Cracks*. The playwright through the husband tries to heap the failure of the marriage and its consequent effect on Tundun. Adegabi, Tundun's husband, says repeatedly that Tundun left the marriage and blames her for its dislocation of supo's (their son) life and his eventual death. "Maybe all this would not have happened if she had stayed" *The Mirror Cracks* 117). However, it is not really well established in the play how the mother's absence turns Supo into "a certified, self conceited, wild, brutal cold blooded animal" (35). The most convincing argument in the play is that the absence of maternal love, the failure of those who played roles in his upbringing and the evil consequences of war, combined to bring out the animalistic nature in Supo. The overall image of the women of letters that emerge from the plays is summarised by Auntimi in *The Wives* in her elaborate introduction of Dr. Cecelia to Tobi:

I present Chief Cecelia Abikoola Olowookere, the most successful female banker in this country. Mother of two children for our beloved Tiger (her husband). She courageously left this house ten years ago, and has never looked back. A powerful figure for women empowerment, self reliance, advocacy for women, time for change for women... Presently unmarried and may remain so till death do her part, still looking young and radiant as ever... And with her hand firmly on the hoe of progress and success, she has never looked back. (*The Wives* 36 -37).

The above may look like a eulogy of women empowerment to an uncritical mind, but it embodies the playwright's styles of gentle satire, a refined technique of subtly castigating what is disapproved of. The phrases "left this house" (phrases that are also used in representing Tola and Tundun, "has never looked back" "presently unmarried and may remain so..." and "with hand firmly on the hoe of progress and success... never looked back", are highly suggestive and laden with meaning; meanings that are unacceptable for a successful marriage in the African context. They suggest lack of patience and tolerance (left); heartlessness (never looked back). They are western and therefore foreign to Africa, for example "may remain single for ever". The real message of Angela's words is that Cecelia is so married to her work that she does not care about marriage or married life, an attribute unacceptable in Africa and therefore unacceptable qualities in an African woman.

While highly learned women like Tundun (*The Mirror Cracks*), Cecelia in (*The Wives*) and Tola in *The Portraits* are portrayed in obnoxious manner, younger girls and unlearned women enjoy considerable sympathy. They are represented as real victims

and in such a way that evokes genuine sympathy. Hawa Kabata Jones, the teenage girl that is a victim of Supo's sexual violence and who carries his baby in *The Mirror Cracks* is a real victim of war and human viciousness. She is a symbol of humanity that reconciles the family and gives them hope for the future. Both husband and wife welcome her as part of the family. Also Segi, the only daughter/child of Tola and Adetunji in *The Portraits* is well represented as a victim of family breakup; but unfortunately, before she could achieve reunion between her parents, her father dies. The village women in *Aetu*, that is the wives of Oke who are shared by Gbade as part of the properties left behind by Oke are also represented as real victims of an obnoxious culture that oppress women. Gbade, in his act of deriving joy from the women's pains is shown as a beast, a he-devil, while the women's pitiable condition draws genuine concern from the audience.

The art of repudiating learned or highly educated women even when they are victims (example Funmi in *The Sisters*), and sympathising with rural, uneducated and less privileged young girls, implies that economic powers through education is the bane behind marriage failures. Pa Timo, Salli's father in Oyedepo's *On his Demise* states this unequivocally while protesting the way his son, Salli, is minding his baby thus:

See, this is the type of havoc education has done to this society. Women no longer know their responsibility just because they are educated. (Oyedepo 10)

The cases of Tola, Tundun and Cecelia seem to affirm all that is repudiatry in radical feminism dramatised by Stella Oyedepo's *The Rebellion of the Bumpy Chested* which makes Jolomi to insist that "a position of authority does not befit a woman. It mars her femininity" (Oyedepo 2002). Surely the

attitudes of Cecelia, Tola and Tundun are examples of the misuse of the powers of economic empowerment and seems to affirm Akanbi's claims that "Power is not a right property to be found in a woman" (Oyedepo 40), for instead of bringing man and wife together, it tears them apart from each other and from the extended family. Pa Timo laments such gulf between them and their daughter in-law Fola, Salli's wife on issues of widowhood rites. "Education has twisted her mind so much that we can't understand her and she can't understand us" (Oyedepo 33). To continue to dramatised the empowered women as a threat to family life should be discouraged because it has serious implications for womanism as well as for human and national development.

1.1 CONCLUSION

Development involves the gradual growth of a people and the society so that they become better, more advanced, leading to an unfolding of the potentialities of the individuals in that society (Ezeigbo Inaugural lecture 15 – 16). There is no development without change and drama as a representation of life embodies changes in the society. It is important that writers should note the argument of Balogun (51) when he says that

The heroes of the literary works of any group of people are a reliable source of ascertaining the aesthetic preferences of such people... In the second place, the society reveals its biases by the way it reacts either approvingly or disapprovingly of the characters and materials contained in a work of literature.

It is the style of the playwright that conditions audience response whether approvingly or otherwise. One thing stands out in Balogun's apt observation which is, the need to imbue

the heroes or heroines of literary works with those qualities that attest to our aesthetic preferences. The 20th century saw an outburst of the reconstruction of African women, and it is important that it should be done in line with the womanist propositions that guide the reconstruction of African women so that the "new eve" is not alienated from the African context. Surely, Tola in *The Portraits*, Tundun in *The Mirror Cracks* and Cecelia in *The Wives* are not good examples of the "new eve" envisaged by the womanists. However, an artist is free to adopt any approach in recreating reality and may not really bother whether his art satisfies one ideology or the other.

Ahmed Yerima is more of a scholar of gender studies than a womanist or a liberal feminist. African artists are very much interested in the preservation of African culture. The African family must be preserved from the current torrent of westernisation sweeping through it today. It is not surprising that Ahmed Yerima, as an ambassador of African art (being the General Manager of National Theatre and the Director, National Troupe of Nigeria) is concerned with family life, because the African family is the nucleus of African communal life. He is one of the few African writers who devote their art to urge for an evolutionary change in filial relations especially as regards man and wife. Many of his works explore the cultural oppression of women, especially widows and the less privileged women in the society. It is hoped that he will soon join in reconstructing and projecting acceptable women of learning; high society women who are rooted in African culture, who have succeeded in indigenising western education. In a paper "The Emergence of Liberated Igbo Women in Igbo Literature" which the researcher presented at a conference on "Igbo Studies since 1900" organised by the Igbo Studies Association, she argues that the emergence of women like Dora Akunyili, the Director General of NAFDAC, Ngozi Okonjo Iwuala the then Finance

Minister and now Manager of World Bank and other similar women functioning actively in both private and public life can be traced from the writings of Igbo literary artists. From the research, it is discovered that the modern liberated Igbo woman is that woman

Who has succeeded in harmonising the traditional roles of women with the positive gains of western education. In them, the morality, gentleness and care of traditional Igbo women are blended with the economic self reliance, knowledge/wisdom assertiveness and courage of western education into a force that is both captivating and irresistible. (Ezenwanebe 145).

Nigerian drama and theatre can leave such a legacy. Nigerian novelists are already reconstructing the image of African women that can usher in changes in traditional African family living as a force to withstand the demands of modern society. For the interest of human development, African drama should desist from the farcical depiction of women issues and see it as a serious subject matter for theatre, recreated in line with womanist principles in order to recreate economically empowered women whom the audience can identify with.

Notes

¹See Chapter Three of Olu Obafemi's, book *Contemporary Nigerian Theatre: Cultural Heritage and Social Vision*. Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC), 1996.

²This is contained in the Title of a book *The "New Eve" in Francophone African Literature*, edited by Julie Agbasiere in which many Scholars contributed articles on the new images of African women in the literary works of Francophone writers.

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