

FEMALE WRITERS, AS BUILDERS OF AFRICAN SOCIETY: A CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SOME WORKS BY FEMALE WRITERS

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Abstract

In recent times, Female African Writers have been on the vanguard of the pursuit for an ideal family unit. The essence is to ensure that there is harmony in every home: for it is only then that the nation can develop. This article is therefore, an attempt to explore how the writers have tried to achieve their aspirations by exposing the evils that occur when young ones engage in premarital sexual relationship. The theory for the investigation is sociological theory which enucleates /explains the inevitable relationship between art and society and how art deliberately redefines a world that has detailed and sustains the one on course. This investigation discovers that in life everyone reaps whatever he/she sows. The inevitability of seed time and harvest time becomes the watch word of every living being. That whoever jilts a lover for selfish reasons for instance goes with a curse which shows later in life. Hence the need for good or proper parenting. It also stresses that importance of children, youths and adults living a Godly life. This concept will be screened through Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *The Things Around Our Neck* Razinant T. Mohammed's *A love like a Woman's and Other Stories* and Sophia Obi Apoko's *Broken Pearls*.

Key words: Ideal family unit, premarital, jilts, a curse and good parenting

Introduction

“TRUTH TO TELL, Tell It Early, Tell It All, Tell It Yourself”. Apology to Lanny J. Davis (1990:3) whose notes from his White House Education titled TRUTH TO TELL, will serve as a pivot on which to begin our discussion or navigation on the call for a revision of the

feminist tendency, exposing how most women destroy their lives, those of their husbands and children and indeed the African society and the need to reconstruct the various chambers of our beings in order to live a fulfilled life.

Davis book, one described by Tom Brokan as an instructive and cautionary tale of the constant struggle to know the truth of what is going on at the highest levels of government (the blur) explains what the family unit still struggles with. The truth of the matter is that some women in their attempts to exact their authority over their husbands for whatever reason empowers their children to disregard their fathers, thereby becoming spoilt, and their husbands for fear of being seen as mistreating their wives compromise, throwing the ideal to the wind. This accounts for the highest level of insecurity in Nigeria and Africa today. It also explicates the need for women to be careful about their choice of a husband

To explicate how women are destroying Nigeria's commonwealth, and the possible way of putting things right, Chimamanda Ngozi Achebe's *The Thing Around Your Neck*, Razinat T. Mohammed's *A Love Like a Woman's and Other Stories*, and Sophia Obi-Apoko's *Broken Pearls* will serve as the primary texts.

Theoretical Framework

This research is anchored on sociological theory propounded by Kenneth Burke a 21st Century literary and critical theorist. This theory talks about the inevitable symbolic relationship between society and literature. Sociological critics see art as a perfect manifestation of the society. This is because literature and society function within each other.

Clement Chukwuka Idegwu (2024) citing M. H. Abrahams posits that "sociological critics treat a work of art as inescapably conditioned in the choice of its subject matter the ways of thinking. It in corporate's its evaluations of the modes of life it renders and even in its formal qualities by social, political, and economic organization and forces of its age (271)." Sociological criticism truly gives a candid

account of societal events fictively. To a very great extent it presents a true-life record of oneself, and society. Joseph Carroll (2014) agrees to the above postulation by thus:

Fictional stories create virtual worlds and enable people to explore possible forms of experience. Authors of stories and plays typically have exceptional insights into the sources of human behaviour and the qualities of experience. Usually, readers are invited to share vicariously in the experience of characters and to respond emotionally to the characters (33)."

Mohammed and Bala' Saye (2021) unequivocally buttress our argument thus:

Literature has always been to the writer the first medium of expression either of pains or happiness through the process of creativity using language as a mechanism. It expresses these feelings in relation to the author's immediate society cutting across all spheres of life- love, hatred, politics, family, belief, leadership, ecology: These feelings are either hidden or apparent (102).

Akporokah Harrison Alerie and Monday O. Akpojishi, (2017) corroborating above argues that:

Sociological criticism is a literary critic which is directed at the understanding or placing of literature in a larger context. Sociological criticism analyses how the society functions in literature and how literature works in a society.

The above postulations truly demonstrate that sociological criticism encompasses the social context of a literary artist and literature. It indeed explicates the fact that the social context of an author remains parts of its interpretative factors and process. This is why, this article's perception remains that the sociological theory will help explain the need for proper parenting among other things in order to create an ideal society.

Textual Analysis

The lives and welfare of future generations depend on how effective we are today as parents in training our children. Make no mistake about it: the quality of our parenting today will be reflected not only in the lives, values and attitudes of our children but also in the lives of their children and their children's children. Our success or failure as parents will have long term, multigenerational consequences. This is why we must be very careful to get a good handle on training and learn to raise our children properly.

Myles Munroe (2007:33) in *Principles of Training Children* as stated above explains the danger of poor parenting. He succinctly expounds that lack of effective parenting no matter who may be responsible for such lapses has multigenerational consequences on the family and society.

Most women's indulgence in their children's criminality has been a major cause of the insecurity in Nigeria and Africa as a continent by extension, over the years. Even from Adam's, women have always encouraged evils not bothering how much it destroys the society. In Genesis 27, Rebekah encouraged Jacob to cheat on the brother Esau. When Jacob complained that he might be caught, she replied: "Let his curses be on me, dear son. Just do what I tell you. Go and get the goats, so Jacob followed his mother's instructions (p35) *The Living Bible Paraphrased*. Since this instruction was given to Jacob with an unimaginable audacity by Rebekah and executed with same, just to undo her first son Esau, women have always been partners in crime against their husbands and the good of their families.

Adichie in *The Thing around Your Neck*, her first collection of short stories explores these vagaries within the family, explicating how much we are undone as a people. In 'Cell one', the first story in the text, one sees how Nnamabia's mother aided and abetted crime.

When at eleven, Nnamabia broke the window of his classroom with a stone, my mother gave him money to replace it and did not tell my father. When he lost some library books in class two, she told her form-mistress that our

houseboy had stolen them. When in class three, he left early every day to attend catechism and it turned out he never once went and so could not receive Holy Communion, she told the other parents that he had malaria on the communion day. When he took the key of my father's car and pressed it into a piece of soap that my father found before Nnamabia could take it to a locksmith, she made vague sounds about how he was experimenting and it did not mean a thing. When he stole the exam questions from the study and sold them to my father's students, she shouted at him but told my father that Nnamabia was sixteen, after all, and really should be given more pocket money (pp6-7)

The above extract is Adichie's way of demonstrating how some mothers nurse and nurture their children in criminality. It shows how women encourage their children to do evil and prevent their husbands, and fathers from punishing them for such wrong acts. The ideal mother and wife irrespective of her educational or social status strive to inculcate the ideal into her children and ensure the strict adherence to such values. Unfortunately, some mothers are far from the ideal, hence some of the youths are into crime.

African literary writers, like their counterparts in other parts of the world, are in the vanguard for the desired change. Alex La Guma (1972:93) in an interview with Robert Serumaga states that he writes: to expose the situation with a view of changing people's ideas about what is happening or their acceptance of ideas, so that they can move forward to take down the barriers which exists "The relevance of Alex La Guma's postulation above is that until people are able to free themselves from whatever bondage they are in, or expunge from their brains, ideas that stunt their growths and development, and plant the ideal and live same, things can never work well for them. Chinua Achebe (1990:15), the doyen of African Literature in an interview with Charles Rowell corroborates Alex La Guma by arguing that people are expecting from literature serious comments on their lives. They are not expecting frivolity. They are expecting literature to say something important to help them in their struggle with life.

This is what Adichie and the other choice writers in this discourse are trying to do with their explication of the evils of poor parenting. In fact, Achebe (1990:88) quickly adds that Literature gives us a second handle on reality so that we can turn to art and find a way out of any quagmire in which we find ourselves. Owing to poor parenting occasioned by his mother's indulgence, and deliberate attempt to lord it over her husband, Nnamabia, graduated from pilfering in the house to a higher level of crime for example

The first time our house was robbed, it was our neighbor Osita who climbed through the dining room window and stole our TV, our VCR, and the Purple Rain and Thriller videotapes my father had brought back from America. The second time it was my brother Nnamabia who faked a break-in and stole my mother's jewelry. It happened on a Sunday. My parents had traveled to our hometown, Mbaise, to visit our grandparents, so Nnamabia and I went to church alone. Nnamabia left without a word after about ten minutes. He came back just before the priest said, The Mass has ended. Go in peace. I was a little piqued. I imagined he had gone off to smoke and to see some girls, since he had the car to himself. (3)

Adichie's characterization of Nnamabia shows how the young boy becomes stone-hearted and sees crime as beautiful. The first thing that would crop into the reader's mind is to find out how he would be punished. And when he was questioned "stared at my father with dramatic, wounded eyes and said, I know I have caused you both terrible pains in the past, but I would never violate your trust like this (p4), then walk out of the room. He only came back two weeks later "smelling of beer, crying, saying he was sorry and had paroled the jewellery to Hausa traders in Enugu and the money was gone..." (p4). Adichie, also skilfully presents Nnamabia's mother's personality, that peculiar trait of women which is detrimental to the wellbeing of the society thus: "How much did they give you for my gold? My mother asked him? And when he told her she placed both hands on her head and cried, Oh! Oh! Chimegbuo my God has killed me! It was as if she

felt that the least he could have done was not a good price. I wanted to slap her” (p4). The narrator, Nnamabia’s sister feels bad the way their mother, reacts to the situation. Her mother’s annoyance that the stolen jewellery would have been sold at a higher price makes the narrator want to slap her.

The effects of poor parenting by some mothers could be seen when the narrator tells us that Nnamabia stole or “did it because other sons of professors where doing it. This was the season of thefts on our serene Nsukka campus still when their professor parents saw one another at the staff club or at church or at a faculty meeting, they continue to moan about riffraff from town coming into their sacred campus to steal (p5) This indeed is poor parenting. Instead of punishing their children for crimes committed, though with love, you find professor parents moaning about riffraff from town. Though, Lydia Taiwo, as cited by Derenle Animasaun (2018:17), states that “the old practice of long held view of spare the rod and spoil the child no longer holds water, this is redundant, and ineffectual, because she is a lady whose scars run deep and the extent of what she endured in the hands of her parents, the physical scars, all over her body and most horrendous and shocking are the patches on her head where there should be hair, like that of a burnt victim, as posited by Animasaun. It is instructive to state that her case was child abuse and not correction. Her parents pretended to be correcting her while they abused her just like the professors who pretended to love their children while they destroyed their future. It is instructive to stress further that child abuse is quite different from correcting a child to make him or her useful to himself or herself and the society.

The culture of pretence by the professors in the university is disheartening. Albert Einstein as cited by Aloysius Attah (2018:19) stresses that the world as we have created it, is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking. As long as mothers indulge their sons or children when they steal, and fathers, for fear of the world seeing the cracks in their marriages, cultivate the culture of silence things will always go wrong. Hence Wole Soyinka

(1977/1990:5) posits that the man dies in all who keep silent in the face of tyranny. This could be seen by Nnamabia's arrest three years later in his third year in the university and locked up at the police station (p7), and the audacity with which he talks about his exploits:

Nnamabia smiled and said in Igbo that he had slipped his money into his anus shortly after the arrest at the bar. He knew the policemen would take it if he didn't hide it and he knew he would need it to buy his peace in the cell. General Abacha was impressed with how I hid my money. I have made myself amenable to him. I praise him all the time. When the men asked all of us, new comers to hold our ears and frog-jump to their singing, he let me go after ten minutes. The others had to do it for almost thirty minutes." (p. 11)

Even as he shamelessly explains his exploit in the world of crime, his mother hugged herself as though she felt cold and his "father said nothing, watching, carefully(p. 11). The narrator, on her part, imagined her amenable brother rolling one-hundred-naira notes into thin cigarette shape and then slipping them into the back of his trousers to slide them painfully into himself (p11). Nnamabia's parents' action above leaves much to be desired. K. Anyidoho, warns of the consequences of such collaboration and the culture of deceptive silence thus:

Beyond the delight of tears, beyond the passionate intensity of countless orgasms, the future of our children of our own morality and ancestry awaits our constant vigilance and into harvest joys without the planter's diligent labour of love. Until we come to this understanding as parents, as family, as community, we will forever stand condemned by the anguishing the eyes and the voice of our children, forever guilty of the nurturing of prospective soul(s) into the devouring Jaws of the streets.

Adichie, in 'Imitation', one of the stories in the collection, explicates how ladies and women happily commit adultery with married men, and feel pain imagining their husbands do same with other women:

“She wonders if he is alone, or if he is with the girl with the short curly hair. Does this girl clutch her pillow in sleep? Do this girl’s moans bounce off the vanity mirror? Does this girl walk to the bathroom on tiptoe as she had done as a single when her married boyfriend brought her into his house for a wife-away weekend?” (pp. 30-31). Here, the author addresses women’s major pain in life. They accuse men of seeing and regarding them as articles of trade, cheating on them, and mistreating them among other things. They never for once examine themselves to find out how they are their greatest enemies. Obiora’s wife, whose married boyfriend took home for a wife-away weekend, conjugated on the man’s matrimonial bed when she was a spinster, now imagines someone doing it to her. Nkem agonizes over her husband’s relationship with other women in Lagos. She failed to realize that there is retributive justice.

The beauty of Adichie’s story is that it tells women that whatever one sows one reaps. She explains how Nkem, now Obiora’s wife, dated married men before Obiora. What single girl in Lagos hadn’t Ikenna, a business man, had paid for her father’s hospital bills after the hernia surgery. Tunji, a retired army general, had fixed the roof of her parent’s home and bought them the first real sofas they had ever owned. She would have considered being his fourth wife if he were a Moslem and could have proposed. But Tunji did not propose. There were other men after him, then she met Obiora” (p31)

The above makes it very glaring that there is need for a revision of the feminist tendencies. There is no way women as spinsters would sow seeds of discord in people’s homes, have fun in couple’s matrimonial beds in their a wife-away weekends having seduced men making them act stupidly, without harvesting the fruits of such inglorious acts when they get married.

Adichie, in furtherance of her attempt as a female writer, an indispensable porter in rebuilding the highly battered African society, in “Tomorrow Is Too Far,” another story in the collection, demonstrates that women destroy themselves and their world by making their children hate and destroy each other. “It was the last

summer you spent in Nigeria, the summer before your parents' divorce, before your mother swore you would never again set foot in Nigeria to see your father's family, especially Grandmama. You remember the heat of that summer clearly even now eighteen years later". (p187). In this story, Adichie explains the problems of mothers-in-law and how they destroy marriages. The extract explains how embittered the woman is towards her mother-in-law's, her interference in their marriage and the eventual divorce. The writer further demonstrates how this Grandmama sowed the seed of discord among her grandchildren which made them destroy each other.

Grandmama cracked the coconuts against a stone, carefully, the watery milk stayed in the lower piece, a jagged cup. Everybody got a sip of the wind - cooled milk, even the children from down the street who came to play, and Grandmama presided over the sipping ritual to make sure Nonso went first. It was the summer you asked Gradmama why Nonso sipped first even though Dozie was thirteen, a year older than Nonso, and Gradmama said Nonso was her son's only son, the one who would carry on the Nnabusi name while Dozie was only a nwadiana, her daughters son. (P 188).

It is very disgusting to see a grandmother, a supposed Sage deliberately planting seeds of discord which will soon engulf and destroy the entire family. According to the author "it was the summer that your hate for your brother Nonso grew so much you felt it squeezing your nostrils and your love for your cousin Dozie ballooned" (p188). And immediately after this, she carried out her plot and destroyed Nonso, her elder brother. The narrator explains her action thus:

Grandmama was inside cooking and Dozie was standing silently close to you, your shoulders touching, when you suggested Nonso climbed to the top of the avocado tree. It was easy to get him to; you only had to remind him that you were the better climber...' You asked him to go first ... You waited till he was nearly at the top, till his legs hesitated before inching further up. You waited for that short moment

when he was between motions ... Then you screamed. "A snake! It's the echieteka! A snake! ... in those few seconds, Nonso looked down at you and let go, his foot slipping, his arms freeing themselves ...

You don't remember now how long you stayed looking at Nonso before you went in to call Grandmama, Dozie all the time silent beside you. (P 195 - 196)

It is indeed with great agony that one navigates this terrain of how mothers deliberately destroy that which they would have built with all their lives. Proverbs 14 v 1, the Christian creed reads "A wise woman builds her house, while a foolish woman tears hers down by her own effort" (P 807)

Done with Adichie's explicit explication of how women deliberately destroy our society, I wish to expound how Razinat T. Mohammed corroborates our stand that women must examine themselves, know how much wrong they have done, and come to terms on how to begin the difficult task of rebuilding our nation and continent. In *Love Like a Woman's and other Stories*, her debut collection of short stories, she explicates how women either through foolishness or foolhardiness destroy themselves and bring pains to their loved ones. In "A Love Like a Woman's", she writes: "She had been married for eight months to Abbas, a young and curiously handsome man of twenty nine. She adored him and had objected to discouragement from her family that the man was unable to steady himself upon any particular trade, having refused formal education of any sort. Abbas was the man for her and nothing could change that" (p37).

The author tells her readers how Dije's choice of Abbas for a husband was without her parents' blessings. The credentials of the young man as the author explains portends evil. Joseph M. Marshall III (2006:119) opines that "Death is often the consequences of choices we me make" (119). He further adds that "we may die by accident, disease, in war, from old age, at the hand of someone, or by our own hand. The manner of our death is often the last judgement others make of us. But

I think if we are to be judged it should be how we lived” (PP 120 - 121). This is why none is surprised when Abbas almost killed her for coming to him without invitation. “As Hassan dragged Dije from the position where she had fallen, the old man saw blood from her underneath her wrapper and shouted heatedly” (P 41). That was how she lost her pregnancy. Unfortunately for her, she failed to learn her lessons and accept that she had made a wrong choice of a husband. Marshall III above is right in his postulation, for Dije’s choice of Abbas as a husband caused her-her life:

By the time the old man, Falmata, Hajara, Rabi and others rushed into the room with their lamps and torchlights, it was only Dije’s slit throat that gaped at them. The freshness of the wound contrasted with the damp, stale smell of the dimly lit room. The smell of death filling the room, hung in the air as if the chamber were some sort of gallows. (p 51)

Dije’s choice was her undoing. Dije married Abbas out of foolishness. Abba’s mother, like other women in their destruction of our commonwealth, knows her son’s mental state, and Abba’s father who knows very well that Abba’s irresponsibility could get the better part of” (40) him, allowed Dije to marry their son. It becomes more disturbing when one knows that: “Ever since, the girl Dije discussed the conditions her son had laid down she knew that all was not going to be well. His withdrawn self of the past weeks had only left her in humble supplication to God to do a miracle in the life of her son. In his childhood, he had launched some inexplicable violent attacks on his playmates..... (PP 40 - 41).

The question is where is Abba’s mother’s love for her son and Dije, her daughter - in - law? How does she know and believe in the God of her faith. If Dije, her daughter - in - law could sincerely explain the conditions given to her by Abbas, why will she not explain to her, the mental state of his son to enable the girl thread cautiously? A woman who allows her son to murder his wife is far from building a nation. Most of our female writers have gone a long way to the level of putting sentiments aside, and are today addressing sensitive issues of

our collective endeavour. The crafting of their characters is done in such a way that characters are realistic enough that they represent our collective errors, and the ideas and ideals we need to strive to achieve. Laure Clemence Cakpo – Chichi Zamou, C’elestin Gbaguidi and Alfred Djossou (2017:30) bring to fore Luckas’s observations of what writers need to do:

Characterization that does not compass ideology is not complete. Ideology is the highest form of consciousness; ignoring it, a writer eliminates what is important in delineation of character. A character’s conception of the world represents a profound personal experience and the most distinctive expression of his inner life, (ideology) at the same time, it provides a significant reflection of the general problem of his time.

Razinat T. Mohammed is consciously aware of this, for she ensures that each of her characters embodies a unique living experience, an ideology. Her characterization of Dije and Abbas’s mother is meant to show that what Dije and her likes call love is foolhardiness and utter stupidity. And Abba’s mother’s supplication to God for a miracle in her son’s life is mere pretence, a wicked act and a demonstration of one on self-destruct. The author when asked by Ismail (2010:38) “what was the most crucial period of your life as a writer, and critic? replied that “ as a critic, I think that my anti – feminist stance, that women are their own problem ,is crucial to my life as a critic”.

In “Something to Live For,” another story in the text, the author explains that women compromise a lot, an act that is detrimental to their wellbeing. According to her:

Afi avoided his face at first without knowing why. He continued to ask questions and she simply looked away from him. She was angry with these strangers for saving her life. The man came close enough and sat on the edge of the bamboo bed beside her and wistfully, she looked away again. She could not tell how the man looked except that he was a man. Like the one from whom she was running earlier that morning After a while, he got up and walked out.... She

could not quite tell his face but she knew that whoever owned that figure must be a confident and strong man who could rescue a drowning woman out of that cold water. (PP 10 – 11).

Here, the author skilfully describes a situation where a young woman has been tormented by the husband to the level of attempting suicide. The author tells us that “she did not want anyone to see her or even suspect what she was about to do to herself.” (P9) This tells us her level of frustration. Pondering on what the young man who rescued her must be doing “in the jungle at that crucial moment of her life and what he thought he was doing diving to get her out like that, as though he was asked to,” (P11), she felt the need to appreciate him for bringing her back to her misery” (P 11).

“Your husband? You are married?”...

“Yes! With a daughter all against my wish,” she answered with eyes blurred by tears

“Then why did you want to take your own life? At least, you could live for your child if not for the rest of the world,” he said still holding on to her hand.

“I wanted to experience a new life different from the one that I know”

“A new life in death?” he asked, surprised.

“Yes! Did they not say that life beyond this misery is blissful and pain – free,” she retorted, for the first time, looking him in the eyes. (P12)

Albert Camus’s postulation as cited by Abigail Trafford (2004:14) states that “in the depths of winter I finally learned that within me there lay an invisible summer.” Camus’s argument is true for Afi who in the depth of winter realises how she could reorder her world and her daughter’s who symbolises the future of other women: “She... for the first time that day, was grateful that the man outside had rescued her from the cold hands of death. She suddenly realized that her daughter stood a better chance with her alive than dead. At least, she could ensure that the girl did not experience the kind of fate that

human contrivance had prescribed for her. She, unlike her docile and morbid mother would protect her daughter to the end. (p.13).

Afi's argument on why she needs to go back to her husband chosen for her by her father and "her docile and morbid mother," is tenable to an extent. At least, Abraham Lincoln, as cited by Donald Trump (2005:47), posits that "I don't think much of a man who is not wiser than he was yesterday". Though we could accept that Afi seems to be wiser than she was yesterday by vowing to ensure that her daughter will not be forced into any marriage by her father and that she will not be ghoulish like her mother, her safety remains a major issue. If she goes back to Uduma, her husband, and gets her throat slit, the way Abbas in the previous story, killed Dije, could her dreams be fulfilled? This is a multi-million naira question which she must answer as quickly as possible.

Another thing that complicates her life, the author succinctly relates to her readers thus: "She had always known that not being in love with Uduma and having to live with him was painful but did not realize that loving an unavailable man was even more painful. But the decision, which she had taken, difficult as it may seem was the best in the circumstance because she did not want his feelings to be hurt by the unfortunate fate governing her life". (p18)

Afi's decision to go back and be hurt "by the unfortunate fate governing her life" (p18) seems the author's deliberate attempt to explicate the state of the African women and the burden of taking the right decision in life. She stresses that women's greatest problem is their inability to take the right decision. The writer, like other African female writers in their attempt to create an ideal society ensures that the entire story occurs in the protagonist's dream. She concludes the story by saying that Uhuru is still far away. Afi instead of pondering on how to live a fulfilled life, quite different from the pains of the older women, her mother's generation, "when she discovered the wetness on both her face and pillow" ((18) merely wonders and reflects "on her escapism and the mysteries of the other existence" (p18). It shows the non-preparedness of the female folks to be realistic in life.

Done with Razinat T. Mohammed's postulations of how to transform African women for good, I wish to *analyse Sophia Obi-Apoko collection*. In "Mamayo", Obi-Apoko, takes her readers into how happily married women destroy their families heartlessly. She explores Mamayo's sexual adventures and how she got ruined.

In the time past her life was entirely concentrated on her family - the wellbeing of Bassey and the kids were her priorities. Though she was aware of her beauty, but not in a conscious way that she would spend hours on end in the salon or in front of the mirror making up...

"Rhoda, "She called her maid.

"Ma"

"I'm going to visit my sister. Take care of the kids and make sure you lock the gate and doors, I'll be back soon", she instructed nineteen-year-old Rhoda and drove off.

Rhoda knew her madam would not be back that night but she answered in the affirmative out of politeness. For some months now the urge to question her madam's attitude had painfully tugged her heart, but had not found the courage to do so. Whenever she opens her mouth, Mamayo's stare shuts it. (p12).

Here, the reader finds once a virtuous woman turn into a whore, not bothering about the consequences of her actions. Mamayo, whose entire life concentrated on the wellbeing of her kids and Bassey, her husband could now tell lies about her movement simply because she is going to spend the night with Mike Mba, an act which her culture and religion condemn in very strong terms. Her actions are so disgusting that their housemaid got so disturbed to the point of trying to question her. And each time Rhoda wants to talk to her conscience, she stops her with her stares. It pains Rhoda that "this meticulous woman she had lived with for eight years had been acting weirdly". (p12) Why: "her changed attitude not just to her but to her kids as well" (p. 12) she pondered endlessly. It is also more disturbing when one realises that "Mamayo considered her marriage to Bassey an answered prayer; his caring and kind nature was all she had wished (p14) and had

seen Bassey as “the first man to tenderly teach her the intricacies of a man, woman relationship” (p 14) only for her to go the way of the world. The author further tells us that “even when their three kids came in-between, the lovely feelings they shared never diminished” (p 14).

Mamayo, like Eve, destroyed the garden of love, or Eden she was created to enjoy. She pulled the walls of her love and life down by her flirting with Mike Mba, a married man. “Be careful, you are flirting with calamity. Her inner voice had cautioned but she shut it up, telling herself to be grateful to have found what brightened her day...” (p19)

Obi-Apoko, like other female African writers whose intent is to explicate how the African women has wilfully destroyed their society and how to go about rebuilding it, skilfully ensures that her characterisation is perfect. Mamayo in her depressed state failed to pick her husband’s call which made him “plead with his elder sister staying in Abia State to check on his family” (p. 36). This is indeed a man’s love for his wife and children. On arrival three days later, she noticed the gloomy atmosphere and insisted that Mamayo must be taken to the hospital a sister-in-laws’ love for the mother of their children.

Mamayo was admitted and was advised to rest, while the nurses took blood samples to diagnose her ailment... when the doctor arrived about an hour later, Mamayo’s was asleep... the doctor beckoned on Mamayo’s sister-in-law who followed him quickly to his office.

“We are still carrying out other tests, but she seriously needs rest. Anxiety is not good for her condition, not at this early stage. She also needs good food to save the pregnancy,” the doctor revealed.

“What pregnancy?” the lady growled surprisingly,
“Mrs. Bassey is about thirty-one days pregnant”, the doctor further hinted with a broad smile.

“But how, she couldn’t be...” she stopped midway gazing at the doctor.... (p. 31).

In “Beyond the Smiles” Obi-Apoko further highlights how women’s choice remains their greatest undoing. Muna’s choice of Uche inspite of her friend’s warning is her greatest undoing.

“Muna,... something strongly tells me that Uche is not your match. You’re almost thirty-three and successful too, so all you need is an ideal man. Remember your Mum’s prayers for you. I bet she would be happier in the bosom of the Lord to see you marry a man who fits you. But I strongly feel that Uche does not possess the qualities of a marriageable guy. Girl, shun him and wait for a while. God will definitely bring your match and mine too.” (p.115)

That was a good counsel from a good and committed friend. A committed friend will bluntly tell you where you are wrong. It is an act of love to ensure you do not make more mistakes. Muna’s reply to Rosy’s admonition demonstrates her friend’s commitment, good intention and her being impervious to correction. Here her: “Rosy, sometimes I don’t like this blunt attitude of yours. How long do you think one has to wait for her match...? So let me try him out. Besides, age is not on my side; I just have to hook up with a guy” (Pp115-116). And when Rosy further cautions that it is “Not just any guy” (p 116) Muna hung up on her.

And this to a great extent affected her relationship with Muna. However, two years after Rosy’s wedding, Muna called and explained how a school mate of theirs whom she met at the mall introduced her to a seer. The seer instructed her to fast and pray for fourteen days from six in the morning to six in the evening. That was how the cat was let out of the bag. An argument ensued between Muna and Uche her husband. She later slept off on the sofa only to be “jerked back to reality by a shrill voice...” from the right wing leading to the guest rooms. (p 124). She was shocked when she “saw a female figure entering Uche’s room” (p 124). Typical of every woman, she reacted.

Rosy, I was angry when I stormed into Uche’s room, my mind set on tearing the lady apart. But I came to an abrupt halt when my eyes met a body on the centre table...”

“Rosy, my housemaid, lay stiff as blood dripped from a cut around her neck into a white bowl on the floor.’... totally dead” (p 125).

The events that followed later were indeed, agonizing. “Uche and the woman just disappeared,” (P/ 125) and Muna states that their “cars were complete in the compound and the gateman said he never opened the gate for anyone... Uche’s mother and her children used the opportunity to chase me out of my matrimonial home.” (p 125) Muna was dumbfounded on further revelation: “He sacrificed the children in your womb for his wealth and long life. You couldn’t have been able to be pregnant as long as you were married to him. His wealth came from your womb. He married you for the richness of your womb, the man revealed to me”, (p. 126).

The Pastor – priest further gave a harrowing revelation to Muna when she visited him a second time. He divulged that Muna’s maid was killed so that her blood and private parts would be used for sacrifice”, to make her forget her encounter with the pastor=priest. Today Nigerians are worried about how women are daily killed and their private parts taken by their assailant. Even women’s pants are stolen for rituals. This is why Obo-Apoko strongly condemns this aspect of our society. Allwell Abalogu Onukaogu and Ezechi Onyerionwu (2009:20) corroborate African female writer’s argument on the need for African women to critically examine their stand and work towards rebuilding our country. According to them: “Art has proven to be a most effective medium of achieving change, stability, progress and even order in society. Most artists, beyond seeking to create beauty and entertainment for their audiences, have used the medium of their art to express their opinions about their immediate and other society.” They further argued that “these opinions range from those seeking to point out certain practices that the artist cannot predicate the growth and development of the society, to those constituting outright protests against real and perceived enemies of the society.”

Conclusion

How will it be possible for a child to be stable if he or she lives in an unstable environment? It must be terribly confusing and upsetting for a child. Why is it so confusing for them? Because each parent gives them different rules, different environments, and different methods of discipline” David Burrows’ (2007:96) postulation above is typical of what our choice female writers try to explicate in our attempt to rebuild the African society. There is an urgent need for proper parenting if we are willing to sing Uhuru. And to do this, mothers should not play chess with the future of their children by playing the head of the family which is unnecessary. While fathers should be courageous enough to discipline their children and not shy away from their duty post for the fear of their wives.

In conclusion, therefore, our submission is that there is need for complement between couples rather than the battle field each family has been turned into in name of feminism.

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