

Charting the Growth of Gyno-Texts in Nigerian Prose Fiction

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Abstract

Several studies have been done on the subjugation and oppression of women in African literature as portrayed in gyno-texts written overtime from the continent. Quite a number of these studies refer to the change in the perspective of the woman writer, with only a few actually identifying and naming the changes as appropriate. These few have done their classification based on the study of gyno-texts from the entire African continent as a homogenous entity, whereas the development in the consciousness of the African woman writer has been different across countries and genres.

This paper therefore, examines the growth in the consciousness of the woman writer in Nigeria prose fiction (an imaginary story, usually written, that someone tells in everyday/natural language) with a critical analysis of *Efuru*, *Joys of Motherhood* and *Everything Good will Come* as it identifies and names the various phases based on the observed differences in the thematic and stylistic pre-occupations of the authors.

Introduction

Gyno-texts are texts written by females which give voice to the female story and perspective. They originated as a result of feminist ideology; this is in a bid to write the female perspective into history and to correct perceived misogyny against the female gender. Chikwenye Ogunyemi affirms this when she states that, “for a novel to be identified as feminist... it must not just deal with women and women's issues but should also posit some aspects of a feminist ideology” (64).

Gyno-texts in Africa do not have a dense and long antecedent as their Anglo- American counterpart because most of the nations within the African continent are grounded in a history that is basically oral. It was the invasion of the Arabs in the eleventh century and the Europeans in the fifteenth century which were spread through conquest, trade and colonization that actually brought the greater part of the continent the art of writing either in Arab or in any of the language of the colonizers.

Due to the difference in the relationship of the different African countries with the countries that conquered or colonized them, there is a marked difference in the evolvement of writing in different parts of the continent. Depicting this difference, the editors of *Women Writing Africa West Africa and the Sahel* notes that:

... The types of texts unearthed and gathered in both regions spoke volumes about the different histories of colonization in the southern and western parts of Africa. (XXV)

African literature is heterogeneous and in no aspect is it more glaring than in the study of Female writings. While in Nigeria, the publication of the first woman-centered novel has been located in 1966; our Francophone counterparts within the same West African region could not make such a claim until 1980 with the publication of Mariama Ba's *Une Si Longue Lettre*, which was translated into English in 1981 and titled *So Long a Letter*.

The expansion of the feminine consciousness has also been asymmetrical, as works from the Francophone divide of the continent has been radicalised over two decades ago with overt use of sex as a symbol and the tilt towards homosexuality. This is exemplified by Calixthe Beyala's first novel titled *C'est le soleil qui m'a brûlée* (1987), which was later translated into English in 1996 with the title *The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me*.

The need therefore arises for the charting of the growth of gyno-texts in Nigeria, with emphasis on prose fiction because of the volume of prose works that had emanated from the country and the difference in the level of consciousness of female writers across the different genres of literature.

The Growth of Gyno-Texts in Nigerian Prose Fiction

The first phase in the growth of the Nigerian female writers' consciousness can be located between 1966 and 1970. This phase is not populated as it is occupied mainly by *Efuru* and *Idu* both written by Nwapa and published in 1966 and 1970 respectively. Both works occupy a position that should not be lumped up with other texts in a bid to beef up the number, as they are rooted in the traditional setting of the author. They are compendiums of cultural practices as undergone by women in the pristine Nigerian society, with the main purpose of recreating the experiences of women in the traditional society with minor infiltration of other cultures in the assessment of the people.

These texts are aimed at defining who the woman is within the traditional setting, in contrast to earlier definition by Nigerian male writers who portrayed women as weak, dependent, whores and voiceless. Nwapa states her motivation for writing as the quest for the representation of women as she saw them within her community, which is not tainted by western education or value. She therefore sets out to correct perceived lopsidedness in the presentation of her heroines. She endeavours to create heroines that are resourceful, industrious, successful, respected and influential within their community.

In *Efuru*, the strength of women is illustrated as the men's dependency on their wife is highlighted. Nwashike Ogene, laments his inability to handle his daughter's late night-outs because his wife was dead as he says, "if her mother were alive, she would have known how to handle her" (8). Ukachukwu, Adizua's father also came back to his wife when he was ill and needed care and love; he didn't go to a dibia (A native doctor) himself, instead he came to his wife to take him to one. In the same vein, Adizua is portrayed as a man that depends on a woman for his livelihood; at first it was his mother; then Efuru; then the woman he eloped with, as pointed out by Ajanupu when encouraging Ossai to go and look for her irresponsible son, she says, "... he leans on these rich women not because he loves them, but because they are rich" (80).

The women in the text also lean on the male folk, not as a sign of weakness on their part, but in a bid to show the bi-partite constitution of the Nigerian society. It demonstrates that men and women live in complimentary capacity as typified by Efuru and her father's relationship. Nwashike Ogene through his lifetime was a pillar of support for his daughter. At the point when she evaded custom by going to live with a man who couldn't pay the dowry, he did not embarrass his daughter, he sent people to appeal to her and when she refused he did not take any harsh step as expected by the society.

Apart from this, when the dowry was eventually brought he accepted it with joy and was a confidant and counselor to his daughter when she was in search of a child and at the disappearance of Adizua; he never blamed her for her choice of husband, but shared in her pains and gave her succor when she needed to leave Adizua's house. His house was always opened to her even after his death when she needed to leave Gilbert's house.

Another example of camaraderie between the male and female is typified in the relationship between Efuru and Dr. Uzaru; her childhood friend who she discusses her troubles with and has enough confidence to take people to for medical treatment. The doctor is portrayed as someone who is sympathetic (96-97) towards Efuru's plight and is secured enough to accept Efuru's superior argument without showing any sense of anger or intimidation; he accepts her as a human being with the right to her own opinion. At the time of Efuru's barrenness in her second marriage she trusts him enough to note that 'he was the only one who could help her' (141).

Therefore the text can be said to show a level of interdependence between males and females; as men and women are shown living together in mutual respect and equality. This can also be observed in the relationship between Nwosu and his wife Nwabata. Nwosu refuses to go for the operation recommended by the Doctor for his ailment because his wife opposed it; he had to convince her to accept before he eventually went for the operation at Onicha.

As much as the text foregrounds the interdependence of men and women, the economic independence of the woman is also projected. Efuru is portrayed as having enough money through her trade to lend to Ogea's parents, as she also gives out to charity as typified in the payment of Nwosu's hospital bills and the returning of Nnona's money that was stolen (171). Other female characters in the text are also portrayed as being diligent in the trade of their choice as they make their livelihood from it; even Nwabata was shown to have been a successful trader before her marriage to Nwosu who made her leave trading to follow him to the farm, a step which eventually led to their impoverishment.

In this phase, people are judged on their own merits based on their action or inaction, thus, brutality, sexism, gossip and all forms of bad behaviours is not shown as the domain of a particular sex; as Adizua's farm mates talk about his laziness when he is not in their midst, like the women also discuss Efuru's barrenness and closeness to her husband when they see her from afar. The story of the woman who stole in the hospital is also recorded to emphasize that not all women are saints, as the story of the man that dared anybody to come near his baby and wife because the boy was born with teeth was also recorded to portray the valiancy of men as Efuru says of the man that 'he must be a remarkable man' (170) in response to Nwabata's statement that the mother of the child was strengthened to go against custom by her husband.

The culpability of women in relegating their sex to the second position is also a feature of this phase, as typified by Nwasobi's statement in consoling Efuru at the death of her daughter when she says, 'A girl is something though we would have preferred a boy' (72) and Omirima the gossip who told Amede (Efuru's second mother-in-law) that it 'is annoying when some women have about six children and all of them are girls. What one will do with girls I don't know' (184). This shows that the belief that a boy-child is better than a girl-child is perpetuated by women.

Another characteristic of this phase is that texts are compendiums of cultural practices. *Efuru* opens with the reference to the practice of paying dowry before a woman can be wedded by a man. It shows that importance is not attached to love as a prerequisite for marriage rather the emphasis is on the payment of the dowry to the wife's family. Despite the fact that Efuru took her life into her own hands by going to her husband even without the payment, yet for the first time the two of them "felt really married" (24) after they had fulfilled tradition by paying the dowry after living together for about a year.

Efuru also goes through the pains of circumcision as it was done for every newlywed wife in her community, without any negative comment about it from the author or resistance to it by the heroine. The only remarks made are the evils that befall women who refuse to go through this rite. Ajanupu's comment about circumcision as "what every woman undergoes" (15) states the obvious without passing any form of judgment as she encourages Efuru to bear the pain. This statement is salient as it shows the writer's intention at not castigating the society for this practice as Ajanupu is portrayed as the outspoken and liberated woman in the novel.

Likewise, polygamy is presented as the norm as Efuru keeps reiterating that she is not averse to her husband's marriage to another woman as only a bad woman keeps her husband to herself, a claim she actually confirms by marrying another wife for Gilbert. Marriage is also portrayed as a necessity for a woman, though they get a rough deal most of the time, as Efuru states concerning the generality of women that "marriage is a necessary evil for us" (97).

Obligatory motherhood is another practice that is ventilated in this text. In spite of Efuru's goodness and industriousness she goes through untold pains and humiliations brought about by her inability to have a child. Gossips have a field day in making her life miserable as the importance of children is foregrounded in the text. Efuru gives a summary of her people's perspective concerning barrenness as she states that, 'her people did not just take it as one of the numerous accidents of nature. It was regarded as a failure' (164).

The avoidance of sexual issues and sex organs is also a trend in this phase. In describing his ailment, Nwosu in response to his wife's embarrassment at the question by Efuru about the location of the illness in the body says:

If a disease does not hide itself, I won't hide it either ...
Efuru the pain is below my navel ... and he tried to indicate
the place (92).

In describing the illness to the doctor, Efuru says it is 'some swellings' (97), while the doctor on his part describes it 'as something to do with the male organ' (97). Also, the sexual life of any of the character was not alluded to. This is in accordance with the traditional values of the people who do not discuss their sexual issues nor mention their sexual organs, but only refer to it with euphemisms.

This phase also projects the accommodationist approach of the female writer in Africa, as the protagonist is well loved and accepted into her husbands' family, so much more that after she had left Adizua, Ajanupu her aunt-in-law was still her confidant and friend. Also, when Ossai (Adizua's mother) was ill, after she had left the compound she was still the one who took care of her. Confirming the practice that a woman does not just marry a man but she marries his entire family alongside.

Furthermore, reference to the impact of western civilisation is negative; as it is shown that traditional Nigerian women are hard-working whereas the white woman and the African western oriented woman are not. The Nigerian woman that tries to emulate the laziness of the white woman is berated. Omirima the gossip talks of her daughter-in-law who sleeps until daybreak because she went to school. She succinctly captures the underlying difference between a black and a white woman in stating the negative influence of western education on her daughter-in-law:

She learnt it from the white woman... women of our town are very industrious. They rise when the cock crows. Husbands of white women are rich, so their wives can afford to be lazy. An idle woman is dangerous. (194)

The hardship experienced by the people is also, blamed on the incursion of western education into their borders which had invariably resulted in children flouting the ancestral laws and incurring the anger of the gods. Omirima once again gives the example of three school girls who she saw going to fish on Orie day, an act that is against the dictates of Uhamiri-the water goddess. She states that such actions explains “why there are no fishes in the river”, with the resultant effect of “poverty in the town” (195).

Consequently, this phase is tagged the phase of self-definition, as the texts are geared towards defining who the woman is from her own point of view. It does not set out to antagonize the norm or to pass a judgment on the culture of the people as the author tries as much as possible not to be judgmental in her presentation of facts; as there is a kind of peace in the acknowledgement of, and submission to, female limitations.

The second phase in the growth of gyno-texts can be situated between 1971 and 1990. Texts in this phase projects the clash between traditional values and the encroaching western civilization, which was brought about by the influx of Nigerians from the rural areas into the urban cities, a situation that was borne out of their belief of getting better jobs and earning greater wages in the urban centres.

They present the effects of this clash of culture on the woman, as they portray how she is trapped within traditional institutions as she is expected to blend with the new society that is just emerging; thus illustrating the double yoke of oppression on the woman, as she is both oppressed by traditional values and the emerging western culture. Writers in this phase go beyond presenting who and what the woman is, to questioning the status quo. They project women who follow tradition and are swallowed by it, and women who kick against tradition vehemently and are still destroyed by the system which they kick against.

Due to their knowledge of the kind of audience and critic they were writing for, they could not boldly project women who fought against the society and won, but they subtly did this by creating an alter-ego who always achieves some sort of victory against the society as she is able to live her life outside established institutions. This alter-ego though free, always sacrifices her reputation on the altar of social expectations in order to attain this height of freedom, thus confirming the stereotype of early male author's like Cyprian Ekwensi in *Jagua Nana* and his other texts that a woman cannot live outside this established institutions except she is a prostitute.

In this second phase, women writers usually starts their work with a picture of the traditional society, projecting and portraying how life was lived before the advent of western civilization just like the first phase, this can be seen in *The Joys of Motherhood*, a classic example of prose fiction in this phase by Buchi Emecheta, where traditional practices such as, way of greeting, marriage practices, polygamy, slavery, ability to will oneself to death, burial practices as it pertains to women, beliefs about virginity, child-marriage and the refusal of marriage for a daughter as typified by Ona and her father-Obi Umunna's relationship is shown.

The works however differ from those in the first phase as they go beyond presenting the case, to portraying how the women are negatively served and affected by these customs. Agunwa, Nwokocha Agbadi's first wife became ill the night he decided to "amuse" himself with his mistress in his house. The authorial intrusion about what people said insinuates that this illness that eventually led to her death was caused by Agbadi's thoughtlessness. As she says:

"... but a few had noticed that it was bad for her morale to hear her husband giving pleasure to another woman in the same courtyard where she slept..." (21).

Idayi also corroborates this line of thought as he subtly accuses his friend that Agunwa was in the courtyard when "you and your Ona woke the very dead..." (22). Ato also speaks about the way women in the traditional polygamous setting live in lack of sexual attention by their husband, as she says, "You forget that like you I was brought up in a large compound and have seen neglected wives all my life. You have the same look in your eyes, seeking something yet not knowing what" (76). This statement makes it known that even in the traditional setting; women in polygamy do not enjoy the institution as much as earlier texts will have us believe. The bitterness, rancor and strife associated with polygamy are well typified in the relationship between Adaku and Nnu Ego.

Apart from showing how they are negatively affected by these customs, this phase goes further to show that these beliefs are not sacrosanct. The belief that a woman who gets married as a virgin will bring forth babies early as expressed by Agadi when he says, “when a woman is virtuous, it is easy for her to conceive” (31), was shown as untrue, as Nnu-ego who was confirmed to have been a virgin by the presentation of six full kegs of palm wine by Amatokwu’s family to her father could not give birth to a child in that family, whereas she easily got pregnant as Nnaife’s wife despite the fact that she did not marry him as a virgin.

The practice of burying a woman who has sons for her husband in his family house as she is referred to as a “complete woman” (22) is also undermined in the text, as Nnu Ego in spite of having three living sons for Nnaife “had to go and live with her own people in Ogboli” (223) due to prevailing circumstances, she eventually died unsung and unloved by the roadside.

Also, the belief that a woman with male children will be catered for by them in her old age is subverted in this text, as Oshia and Adim both live overseas without any correspondence with their mother. This action leads to her mental instability and eventual death in spite of her daughters’ care for her as she could not bear the silence from these sons whom she has sacrificed herself for.

The influence of western civilization in subverting the custom and belief system of the traditional society is established as the men leave traditional male roles for the women to perform as they integrate into the newly introduced western culture, though they insist that the woman still carry out the roles laid out for her by tradition with the newly acquired roles.

The text shows how the incursion of western civilization helps in tightening the noose around the woman’s neck as she loses some of the benefits the traditional society accords her without losing any of its duties and acquiring more duties from the newly accepted way of life. This is typified by Nnu-ego’s obligation of leaving her bed for her co-wife, Adaku, on the latter’s first night in their house in Lagos, while she and the children had to sleep on the floor. This situation is unlike the traditional polygamous setting where each wife has her own hut. As she reasons on page 137 that, “it seemed that all she had inherited from her agrarian background was the responsibility and none of the booty”.

In the same vein, after Dr. Meers and his family left Nigeria, Nnu Ego became the breadwinner of the family. This act negates the traditional norm, where the man has to provide the basic amenities for his wife and children. That this is brought about due to the influence of the city is stated in Nnaife’s thought on page 87:

Nnaife did not like this arrangement ... Not only did life in Lagos rob him of his manhood and of doing difficult work, now it has made him redundant and having to rely on his wife.

This pattern repeats itself again at the conscription of Nnaife into the army. By the time he returned, he had acquired new ways and confidence so much so that he gives house-keeping allowance that he knows will not be sufficient for his large family, without any feeling of remorse. He also abdicates more responsibilities, like the payment of Adim's school fees to Nnu Ego without any remorse as shown the first time he had to leave her with the responsibility of catering for the family.

The way modernity builds a gulf between husbands and wives is also highlighted by the narrator in *The Joys* as she states that:

Like other husbands and wives in Lagos, Nnu Ego and Nnaife started growing slightly apart....Now each was in a different world. There was no time for petting or talking to each other about love. That type of family awareness which the illiterate farmer was able to show his wives, his household, his compound, had been lost in Lagos, for the job of the white man, for the joy of buying expensive lappas, and for the feel of shiny trinkets. Few men in Lagos would have time to sit and admire their wives' tattoos, let alone tell them tales of animals nestling in the forests, like the village husband who might lure a favourite wife into the farm to make love to her with only the sky as their shelter, or bathe in the same stream with her, scrubbing one another's backs. (52)

The way Nnu Ego was treated shabbily by Amatokwu due to her barrenness in the village and Ego-Obi's treatment by the Owulum's is replayed in the life of Iyawo Itshekiri in Lagos as she is described as a woman who has been "mellowed by the constant beatings of her husband" (105) and was called "Iyawo" because of her inability to have children. This goes to attest to the adoption of traditional patriarchal values into the modern system of living.

Beyond the portrayal of a clash and a synthesis of culture which inevitably gives birth to new problems and values for the woman as well as transferred problems from the old culture to the new one, texts in this phase question accepted norms like marriage, polygamy and motherhood which seem to be the core cultural belief about the female gender. This is revealed through the protagonist reflection on their lives in a bid to show how they have been negatively served by the culture they believed in and tried to uphold. A standard example this is found in Nnu Ego as she soliloquises:

God when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage? After all, I was born alone, and I shall die alone. What have I gained from all this? Yes, I have many children, but what do I have to feed them on? On my life. I have to work myself to the bone to look after them, I have to give them my all. And if I am lucky enough to die in peace, I even have to give them my soul... When will I be free... (186/187)

In this phase also, sexual escapades are mentioned and described. This is exemplified by the description of the sexual encounter between Agbadi/Ona (20) and Nnaife/Adaku (40); writers in this phase discuss the sexual relationships of their characters, for example, Nnaife is said to have slept with Nnu Ego through-out the first night she was brought to him in Lagos (40); Ato pleads with Nnu-Ego to allow her husband "sleep with her" (79) at the death of Ngozi. One thing that stands out about the sexual encounters in this phase is that it is always instigated by the men for their own pleasures.

Texts in this phase bring different perspectives into the woman story; this is in a bid to give various options to the reader and to allow for an evaluation of how each character deals with her issues. Though at the end of the texts the heroines choose to stay in their repressive marriages, there is always a portrayal of another character that bursts the seams of marriage and motherhood to obtain independence and true joy. This can be seen in the character of Adaku as she leaves her marriage to get a better life for herself and her children, though she had to live with the stigma of being labeled a prostitute by the society. Adaku is also portrayed as a woman willing to send her children to a boarding school in a bid to have time for herself and a business, unlike Nnu Ego who wraps the responsibilities around herself until they choke her.

Apart from this, other minor characters are portrayed who understands the change that has come, yet accepts it as they negotiate their life acceding to culture where it conforms with their life but accepts the inevitability of change when they are faced with it. This is shown in the character of Mama Abby, who though a single parent took great care of her son and eventually reaped the fruit of her labour, as her son took very good care in her old age.

Consequently, this phase can be called the phase of self-estimation. As these writers estimate the position the society allots to women and in the process judge the gender bias of the society which they find wanting. They also go beyond this appraisal of the society to actually suggest possible ways of achieving victory for the woman-being, though their suggested solutions are negotiated within the space allotted to women in the society.

The emergence of a new wave of writing by the Nigerian female author that is undergirded by feminist ideology is located in the 1990s, and this growth has expanded into the early part of the 21st century. Gyno-texts in this phase are written mainly from the diaspora about the Nigerian woman, an example of which is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's, *Half of a Yellow Sun*. It's an obvious departure from earlier phases as it present pictures of women who took concrete actions towards their emancipation and the liberation of fellow women.

This phase in the growth of the African woman writer's consciousness is populated mainly by writers in the diaspora that are either born by elite parents in the urban areas of Nigeria before they chose to travel out of the shores of the nation, or those born in the diaspora. Other examples apart from Adichie include Sefi Atta, Sade Adeniran, Simi Bedford, Helen Oyeyemi, Diana Evans, and Unoma Azuah. The few females who still write from within the shores of the nation include Akachi Ezeigbo and Ifeoma Okoye.

These crops of writers from the diaspora do not have first-hand knowledge of the norms and mores of the traditional Nigerian society, neither do they have an in-depth knowledge of the lower social class which forms the majority of the Nigerian population and they acknowledge this in their writings. This is exemplified by the statement of Olanna when contemplating over Amala's attitude towards Odenigbo and her newly born baby that, "how much did one know of the true feelings of those who did not have voice?" (256), and her musing over how growing up in a room apartment with one's entire family, has been for Arize and her brothers. (44).

They choose not to give a picture of their own life as a microcosm of other women's life in the nation because they understand the error inherent in presenting their own story as a representation of every Nigerian woman, as stated by Adichie in a podcast where she says, "The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story." (2009).

As much as they declare their ineptitude in affairs pertaining to all women in the nation, they still go ahead to paint pictures of the kind of women they know and identify with. That is, the middle class hybridized new woman, who lives in an amalgamated world of western and traditional values.

They create women that question the patriarchal society and leverage on their western education to subvert patriarchy and assert themselves in every way. In *Half*, Olanna and Kainene are able to create a niche for themselves due to the western education they had acquired. Olanna is able to pick up a job at the University of Nsukka to the chagrin of her parents as well as stand up to Odenigbo when the occasion arises. This is in contrast to Amala, the uneducated young girl brought by mama who acted in fear of Odenigbo and never imagined questioning Odenigbo over the use of her own body, as observed by Olanna on page 256, "she has not said no to Odenigbo because she had not even considered that she could say no. Odenigbo made a drunken pass and she submitted willingly and promptly: He was the master, he spoke English, he had a car. It was the way it should be".

Lara Adebayo is another character in the text that holds her own in the midst of men because she is as knowledgeable as they are on whatever subject they choose to debate upon in Odenigbo's sitting room. She is not intimidated nor silenced as she airs her view without any constraint, either such view is in conformity with popular opinion or not. After the war, she was one of the early callers at Odenigbo's house, symbolizing her courage in returning to the war torn city in spite of being a Yoruba woman without the fear of been molested or ostracized.

Unlike earlier authors, writers in this phase set the bulk of their work in the urban cities as typified by Adichie's choice of location, as the remotest town she mentioned in the war-torn Biafra is Umuahia, which today is a state capital with the bulk of action taking place in Nsukka, Lagos and Kano. The only village referred to in the text is Opi, which though not far from Nsukka stands in stark contrast to the University town, as Ugwu's amazement at little things such as running water, electricity, the assurance of meat for everyday meal, the white ceiling, the soft mattress, e.t.c. which he saw in Nsukka shows the reader those things were novel to him. This shows a sharp comparison between the rural and the urban settlements, magnifying their differences.

Apart from this, the fact that they write from the diaspora, brings about an "exilic consciousness", which gives room for a privileged perspective that brings about incisive and critical insights of the state of the country. Nuruddin Farah accentuates this when he says, "For me, distance distills; ideas become clearer and better worth pursuing. (2007: 183). He continues by explaining how distance helps in creating a more vivid picture when he says, Memory is active in exile. (2007:184). Due to the fact that these writers are not enmeshed in the fight for survival that is going on in the nation, they have the needed distance to look back over what they know of their nation and draw comparison with what is happening in their nation of residence; this enables them draw vivid pictures of the corrupt practices prevalent in their native country and its effect on the people.

This distance gives them the ability to discuss socio-political and economic problems of the nation in details. They do not gloss over socio-political issues as they affect just their characters, but they go the extra length of drawing the political picture of the Nigerian nation, reverting to historical occurrences, its effect on the people and their reaction. Their characters are located within historical events and this helps the stories attain realism.

Half is located within the pogrom and the Nigerian civil war, bringing to life the events leading to the war, and painting in vivid pictures, life on the Biafra divide of the nation during and after the war. Through the individual story of each of their characters, they bring the collective story of corruption and wanton disdain for human life of those in public office to limelight. They have been able to traverse the private sphere from which earlier female authors wrote about domestic issues to the public sphere where they take up national issues dwelling on the postcolonial disillusionment that pervades the nation.

In a bid to foreground the authenticity of the historicity of the stories, authors resort to the use of dates in the writing of their stories. For example, *Half* is situated in the 1960s. Readers are made to know this not only by the stories that are told but by the division of the story into parts which are named by the date's i.e, the early sixties and the late sixties.

Apart from the in depth analysis of socio-political issues in the nation, another thing that sets writers in this phase apart is their overt use of sex as symbol. Unlike earlier female writers in the nation, who avoid detailed analysis of sexual scenes, these writers go all the way in painting a vivid picture of the sexual activities of their characters. A reading of *Half*, shows a conscious effort by the writer to depict sexual scenes and thoughts in details. At first reading, one is confronted with sex in its raw state, a situation that is in contrast with earlier Nigerian female writings as the act of sexual intercourse between characters are not just mentioned but graphic details about the position taken during the act, the kind of sound made by the participants, the location where the act takes place and the frame of mind of the participant is projected.

Through Adichie's depiction of sexual encounters, she is able to underscore the sameness in human beings irrespective of social status or ethnic differences. The same way, Kainene determines when to have sex with Richard both from the upper echelon of the society is the same way Chinyere decides when to have sex with Ugwu, both of them house helps, representing the lower stratum of the society.

During the civil war also, Ugwu and his fellow Biafran soldiers rapes a girl at the bar, a deed which is also done by Nigerian soldiers to Anulika his younger sister. Through the depiction of such acts, the writer is able to achieve her aim of showing that human beings are basically the same as they all have the same capacity to love, hate, have sex, eat, sleep and die.

Aside from highlighting the uniformity in human beings across class and race, she also uses the sexual scenes to subvert male supremacy, as the women are depicted as the initiators, while the men just follow, wherever they are led by the women. This is typified by various sexual scenes between Olanna/Odenigbo, Olanna/Richard, Kainene/Richard, Susan/Richard and Chinyere/Ugwu. In spite of Ugwu's fantasy of having sex with Nnesinachi, he never thought he could walk up to her and tell her, until she gave him a come-on sign. In this phase men are depicted as not having enough clout to actually demand for such a relationship honourably. The only time men take the lead in sexual issue is when they resort to rape.

Furthermore, writers in this phase, discuss alternative sexual preferences that were hitherto not mentioned or sidelined in previous works. Ugwu masturbates to get sexual relief at night in the village and when Chinyere refuses to show-up for a quickie in the boys' quarter at Nsukka. Adichie's continual reference to this sexual habit in her works is also worthy of note, as Eugene confesses to masturbating in *Purple Hibiscus*, while going to any length to ensure that his children never falls into such a temptation.

Likewise, Father Marcel in *Half*, abuses the little girls kept in his care in the refugee center managed by Kainene sexually. The manner these writers' rent the veil over issues that have hitherto been kept under wraps is a way of bursting every limitation that had been placed over women writings by tradition. As they have been able to lift the curtain over the dirty linens of the society. Showcasing the society as it is and not as an idyllic society with no stain or rumple.

Apart from taking the lead in sexual relationships, the female characters in this phase resist any act of infidelity on the part of the man. In *Half*, Olanna leaves Odenigbo's house when she finds out that he had been cheating on her and eventually gets even with him by sleeping with Richard. The opportunity to pay him back in his own coin helped her to overcome the sense of betrayal and to set herself free from the captivity of pain, sorrow and regret. In describing the sexual act with Richard, the essence of the action for Olanna is succinctly captured;

...and it was as if she was throwing shackles off her wrists, extracting pins from her skin, freeing herself with the loud, loud cries that burst out of her mouth. Afterwards, she felt filled with a sense of well-being, with something close to grace. (238)

When she eventually returns to Odenigbo's house after he had pleaded with her severally, she was sure that he too will join her in the struggle to preserve what they share because "his certainty had been rocked" (251)

Kainene on her own part punishes Richard by burning the manuscript of his unfinished work which he had titled, *The Basket of Hands*, when she finds out he slept with Olanna. When Richard gets to know of what she had done, he was not even mad at her, rather, he felt a soar in his chest of emotions" (264) because he was sure that she will not end the relationship, just as Odenigbo could not get angry with Olanna, when she told him about her escapade with Richard. Susan also gets angry and throws glasses when she perceives any form of flirtation on the part of Richard anytime they go out together, with such scenes ending with Richard's penitence and apology. Here, the women do not accept infidelity in docility but they fight and ensure the men pay for their betrayal.

These writers preach the gospel of reprisal, attack on any form of betrayal and the need for women to defend themselves both emotionally and physically. They do not agree with the concept of submissiveness which Nigerian culture teaches concerning women or the idea of a woman's life ending in sorrow because of a man's action or inaction. They project characters that resist oppression and subjugation in all its forms as they believe that a woman is not an appendix to a man but a separate entity that has the capacity of living life to the fullest on her own. Auntie Ifeka, in *Half*, gives a summary of this thought as she states when talking to Olanna that "you must never behave as if your life belongs to a man...Your life belongs to you and you alone (230).

Another point worthy of note about these writers is their use of the first person narrative technique. Through this style of writing, they buttress the point earlier made that they do not speak for all women, but through the polarity of characters that says the story, they are able to bring various perspectives by different women across all walks of life into the story.

Not only do these writers assert themselves through their characters actions but they also assert themselves in their use of language. They no longer write everything in English language but they code-mix and code-switch. They also use indigenous languages without interpreting such. This shows their confidence in their native language. Furthermore, they write conversations after which the reader is made to know that such a conversation was made in the indigenous language. Another characteristic that seem to run through quite a number of texts in this phase is their interrogation of the Bildungsroman to amplify the metamorphosis of the Nigerian woman from childhood to adulthood, from innocence to understanding, from dependency to independency. Through the physical growth of the female characters in the texts, they are able to establish how these characters grow from naivety to an understanding of their own mechanics which enables them to eventually assert their personhood. This is typified by the growth of Ugwu in *Half*.

In spite of their projection of women who assert themselves in the society, they still present women who stick to their male partners in spite of all odds and yet contribute to the society in one way or the other; this is in accordance with the culture that holds marriage as a sacred institution. This can be seen in the examples of Olanna and Kainine whom in spite of every odd sticks to their male partners. Olanna goes a step further by entering into legal marriage with Odenigbo after the Amala saga. Auntie Ifeka is also shown to be in a marriage that presents a blissful picture, a step followed by her daughter Arize as her young marriage was illustrated to be premised on love, so much so, that the husband stands up for his wife when his mother does anything that makes his young wife uncomfortable due to her inability to get pregnant in the first three years of their wedding. Olanna records that,

...he asked his mother to stop visiting. He asked her, too, to stop bringing foul-smelling concoctions for Arize to drink in bitter gulps. (133)

Unlike earlier writings where the story ends on a note of soliloquizing which only brings to bear the pain and loss felt by the protagonist, these writers allow their protagonist to look forward to a better tomorrow which they feel in their bones even when prevailing circumstances around them points the other way. *Half* ends on a note of a promise of a rebirth, as Olanna looks forward to an afterlife when she and Kainene will be reunited as sisters once again.

However, the tendency to proffer the solution of travelling out of the country in a bid to either gain more confidence in tackling issues at home or attaining the elusive Golden Fleece is high in these writings. Most times, it seems the writers do not find a way of given voice to the voiceless except they leave the shores of the nation. Olanna and Kainene had to travel to the United Kingdom to study, before they eventually came back to Nigeria as liberated women.

This tendency can be linked to the place of publication of these texts as they are published in the diaspora. The writers tend to the glorification of the west as the place for the acquisition of knowledge that will ensure the liberation of the woman; as most of them are writers from the diaspora, they are unable to see how emancipation can come from within. Thus their writings are affected by their place of residence and publication.

Conclusion

This study has stratified the growth of gyno-texts in Nigerian prose fiction. It has identified its evolvement from the stage of self-definition where these authors portray women that live within acceptable social norms, to the stage of self-estimation where women question their placement within their social milieu and accept their limitations or sacrifice their person or reputation in a bid to resist it, to the stage of self-assertion where they proclaim their personhood without the fear of friend or foe.

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