



**FEMINISM & BLACK WOMEN'S  
CREATIVE WRITING**  
**Theory • Practice • Criticism**

**Aduke Adebayo**

**FEMINISM AND BLACK WOMEN'S CREATIVE WRITING**  
*(Theory Practice and Criticism)*

**ADUKE ADEBAYO**  
*Editor*

**PUBLISHED BY AMD PUBLISHERS IBADAN**

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

*AMD Publishers*  
*P. O. Box 98*  
*Agodi, Ibadan*

© *Aduke Adebayo 1996*

All rights reserved. This book is copyright and so no part of it may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, electrostatic, magnetic tape, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the express written permission of the publisher who is the copyright owner.

ISBN 978-2816-48-5

WEMILORE PRESS (NIG) LTD. 02-8103819 IBADAN

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to thank first of all my colleagues who have contributed articles in this book. It has always been my dream to author a book on Feminism in African Literature. I therefore started this project in 1993; but as I intensified my research on feminism, I realised that it is, to borrow the words of Chinua Achebe, like a mask dancing. If you want to see it well, you must not stay in one place. In other words, to fully appreciate my subject, I realised that it must be viewed from different angles. In 1995, I reached out to various persons who responded warmly. The result is this rich harvest of ideas.

My dream was about to be aborted when the publishers who had earlier signified their interest in my project developed cold feet because of the declining economic situation in the country. My profound gratitude goes to the following eminent persons who provided me with the moral and financial support to realise my dream at last.

Thank you:

- Chief Lere Adebayo
- Alhaji Arisekola-Alao
- Sir Dele Ige
- Chief Richard Akinjide
- Alhaji A. K. Akintoye
- Chief Rotimi Obeisun

May you all be richly blessed.

Aduke Adebayo

## CONTENTS.

Adebayo Aduke	1:	Introduction
Elizabeth Ogini	11:	Feminism then and now: A historical perspective
Joseph Ajibola Adeleke	21:	Feminism, black feminism and the dialectics of womanism
Adebayo Aduke	37:	Tearing the veil of invisibility: the roles of West African female writers in contemporary times
Sanya Osha	57:	Feminism or cynicism in Mabel Segun's <i>The Surrender and Other Stories</i>
Remy Oriaku	72:	Buchi Emecheta: If not a feminist, then what?
Emelia Oko	91:	The female estate: a study of the novels of Buchi Emecheta
Chioma Opara	110:	Clothing as iconography: examples of Bâ, Aidoo and Emecheta
Duruoha S.I	126:	The language of Flora Nwapa's <i>Efuru</i> and <i>Idu</i> a study in ambiguity
Nduka Otionu	134:	Colour me ba(r) d: Orality and the feminist question in Zaynab Alkali's <i>The Stillborn</i>
Chioma Opara	153:	The emergence of the female self: the liberating pen in Mariama Bâ's <i>Une si</i>

---

*longue lettre* and Sembene Ousmane's  
*Lettre de france*"

- Emelia Oko 168: Eros, psyche and society: narrative continuity in Mariama Bâ's *So Long a Letter* and *Scarlet Song*
- Aduke Adebayo 178: The African mother, her changing perspective in West African fiction
- Sola Olorunyomi 194: No woman, no mask; Ki-Yi M'Bock and the recommendation of a gendered drama
- Pius Adesanmi 201: The fire this time: discourse of the body and "scrotophobia" in the works of Calixthe Beyala.
- Bukoye Arowolo 220: The Black Caribbean woman's search for identity in Literature.
- Joseph Ajibola Adeleke 229: Female Stereotypes in chicano/a literature: a study of six modern novels

### Notes on Contributors

- **Adebayo Aduke** is a Reader of French and Comparative Literature at the University of Ibadan. She has published several articles and a book on Francophone African literature. Her research interests are in women's writing and the novel.

- **Adeleke J.A.** lectures at The Nigeria French Language Village, Ajara, Badagry. His area of specialisation is emergent literatures and feminism.

- **Adesanmi Pius** is a graduate student of the Department of Modern European Languages, University of Ibadan. He majors in the post-colonial discourse on African Literature.

- **Arowolo Bukoye** teaches Francophone African and Caribbean literatures at the University of Ilorin, Nigeria.

- **Duruoha S.I** is of the Institute of Foundation Studies in the Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port-Harcourt. His research interest is in literary stylistics.

- **Ogini Elizabeth** lectures at Edo State University, Nigeria. She teaches literary criticism and Afro-Caribbean literature.

- **Okon Emelia** is a senior lecturer of English literary studies at the University of Calabar, Nigeria. She has published several articles and two books on the West African novel. She specialises in the African novel and the sociology of literature.

- **Olorunyomi Sola** is a popular culture scholar and a poet. He currently works as an editor with *The Monitor* newspaper in Ibadan.

- **Opara Chioma** is a senior lecturer of English at the Institute of Foundation Studies in the Rivers State University of Technology, Port-Harcourt. She has published many articles on feminism which is her main area of research interest.

---

- **Oriaku Remy** is a lecturer in the Department of English, University of Ibadan.

- **Osha Sanya** teaches English at Ladoko Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomosho, Nigeria. His insightful articles have already appeared in various literary journals.

- **Otono Nduka** is of the Department of English, University of Ibadan where he is currently working on a doctoral dissertation on oral literature and the popular media. He is also a poet and he heads the Arts and Culture desk of *The Post Express* newspaper.

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY



---

**NO WOMAN NO MASK: KI - YI M'BOCK AND THE  
RECOMMENDATION OF A GENDERED DRAMA**

Sola OLORUNYOMI

**BACKGROUND**

*Village Ki Yi M'Bock* is an artistic community found in 1985 by Ms. Werewere Liking. Located in the Riviera deux section of Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, the Ki Yi group is conceived by Liking as a Pan African movement on contemporary artistic creation.

In this effort, Liking hopes for an aesthetics that can unite in one oeuvre the creativity of writers, poets, plastic artistic artists, actors, singers and dancers with a view to presenting a "Utopia" of a new Africa that would at least dream for herself.

A confessed pan Africanist, Liking revealed during our interview sessions that her earliest influences have come from the likes of Kwame Nkrumah, Nnamdi Azikiwe and Patrice Lumumba. She did not read about them, she listened to their heroic exploits from songs carefully weaved by women of her ethnic background. What she learned about African culture, invariably, came from such sources. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that her creative work has been largely dedicated to African women; women who strove to create the image of a great Africa within their children's minds.

A native of Cameroun, Werewere Liking left her country at the age of twenty seven for Côte d'Ivoire. She exhibited as an artist in Abidjan in 1975 as part of a series of international exhibitions. She returned to Côte d'Ivoire in 1978 to work at

the University of Abidjan, Cocody doing research into negro-African traditions and aesthetics for six years, before founding the Ki-Yi group. The references for the groups numerous performances are usually drawn from the diverse texts and nuanced sub-texts of these negro African aesthetics.

*Ki-Yi M'Bock* means knowledge of the universe in her South Cameroun Bassa Language. In the context of artistic creation, however, the micro-village operates as a community in a living and work space equipped with infrastructure for creating, promoting and diffusing art.

There is an art gallery, a museum, a photographic and audiovisual laboratory, studio for sculpture, painting, weaving, sewing... Besides the home-made costume for each show, a commercial clothes label now exists: Ki-Yi lines, a new source of income in addition to the famous dinner-shows where they serve dishes made along traditional recipes from all over Africa.

#### NO WOMAN NO MASK:

Of particular interest to our investigation in the first instance, is the use of the physical mask by women in Werewere Liking's performances, an environment that has proved very hostile to such an experiment.

An initial attempt by a woman to be the bearer of the mask, only as a theatrical realisation, generated serious uproar against Bernard Zaourou Zadi's *Didiga Theatre* in Côte d'Ivoire.<sup>1</sup>

In the second instance, we hope to show that Liking's performance goes beyond a physical realisation of the mask. The mask for Liking is also a conceptual metaphor for the evolution of a black aesthetics.

The mask in traditional society could serve as a symbol

of gender power relations. Among the Dogon, for instance, women born during the sixty yearly *Sigui* initiation ceremony are allowed to wear the mask. But the *Sigui*-license granted Dogon women born in this era is indeed an exception in the region. Gender disequalisation has been effected with the mask. Even where the woman, as among the Dogon, had been the originator and agency of mask's medium, she was promptly emasculated from being its bearer once the mask became a source and symbol of communal authority. After this, at best, she was confined to the mask of revelry.

#### THE NEW MASK

The mask is a code that is capable of embodying both sacred and profane contents. The mask does not offer itself to simple literal interpretation. In the mask is concealed a plethora of meanings waiting to be decoded.

As a store house, it is a repository of ancient and current knowledge such as myth, legend and history. Beyond this, it also harbours society's cultural sensibilities, its aesthetics, which invariably straddles all the genres.

In other words, the undecoded mask is fossilised message, a single instance that is representative of other instances, other spaces and climes, other times. Though its language may be cryptic, it is obviously multivocal. This derives in part from its primary intended meaning, and also from other meanings invested in it in the process of interpreting its idiom.

Such dispersed meanings have been accounted for by problems of distance and dislocation - such as we find with the black slaves in the new world, or simply arising from the limitation of the human memory.

What the mask seeks to capture invariably corresponds

with the African's total universe of man as outlined by John Mbiti.

- God as the ultimate explanation of the genesis and sustenance of both man and all things.
- Spirit being made up of superhuman beings and the spirit of men who died a long time ago.
- Man, including human beings who are alive and those about to be born.
- Animals and plants or the remainder of biological life.
- Phenomena and objects without biological life.<sup>2</sup>

There are, broadly speaking, two types of masks. One represents a living person and therefore serves profane uses, mostly entertainment and amusement. The other type is employed for the purposes of ritual. There are however moments of dilution of forms. By virtue of designation (e.g. invoking the spirit of the dead to enter into the masquerade during the dance), the mask and the dancer are sacrosanct.

The process of deriving meaning from the mask in dramaturgic sense is that, once the mask serves as the primary genre, then consequently a dramatic genre is constructed from its code. The dramatic genre becomes transformed historically as it develops in new situations and environment. In this sense, the mask serves as the enabling conceptual metaphor of African and black drama itself.<sup>3</sup>

Liking draws her inspiration from diverse sources as far flung as Mali, Nigeria, Cameroun and Zaire. The Igbo *Egwugwu*, Dogon *Kanaga* and Bambara *Chiwara* are some of

her references, drawn into a medley to express her Pan Africanist aesthetics. Even as dramatic rituals, these masks share something in common: *Nommo* energy. *Nommo*, a concept of the Dogon language, denotes utterance-power, the "magic" force of the spoken word, the sacred instance of word's efficiency, word as latent energy.

In the creation myth of the Dogon, *Amma*, the only God, created the earth as woman, and then married her. His seed *Nommo* is water and fire and blood and Word. *Nommo* is the physical-spiritual life force which awakens all 'sleeping' forces and gives physical and spiritual life.<sup>4</sup> Beyond being invested with utterance-power *Nommo*, like the Yoruba *Ase*, is the invocatory gift of its mask medium. Its ultimate theatrical direction is to reveal and invoke the reality of the particular mode that it has ritualised. It is a theatre style, as Jahnheiz Jahn has observed, that depends on power and power invocation. It is word power; it is dance power; it is music power.

The themes of her production are quite diverse. They range from the struggle of the African woman in contemporary society to Pan Africanism. There are also environment related themes and social dilemma narratives. Her 1985 "*Mixed-Up Woman*" narrates the instance when a woman is 'latent energy' invested with enormous power by the cultural context. Thus, we find a woman who does not need power because she is herself - power.

"*Caesarean*", 1986, explores Africa's vicious circle which makes her tomorrows difficult to have a natural birth, while "*Sing ve Mura*", 1990, is a hymn dedicated to African and universal Woman. A measure of her diversity is seen in the environment sketch, "*A Touareg Married a Pigmy*", 1992 a musical comedy about desert and forest meeting...

By 1992, Liking refocused her imagination on the diverse social malaise in the continent. "*Widow Dilemma*" is about the condition of the African woman up against some strange traditions, while "*Ya Match*" is a lyric choreography on the subjects of money and misery. This concern spilled into 1993 when "*Water Hero*" was produced, and she denounces the evils of sorcery.

"*Cradle Awakening*", which was premiered in 1993, was taken on tour to Accra, Ghana in 1996. This theatrical concert, in a way, marks the group's recent musical inclination, and what it has achieved in two years with Zairean musician Ray Lema. In this performance, Liking stresses the fundamental spiritual nature of the universe, as well as the attendant belief that man is essentially spirit.

In the movement dedicated to the late Osagefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the stage grew dim, the drums slower, pace heavy and studied, with the visage of the lead actor becoming sombre - as the cast floundered, eyes dilated, with hands stretched skywards groping, groping, and asking: what happened to the continent he slaved for?

The *Ki Yi M'Bock* theatre repertoire is indeed multinational both in content and in form. While the persistent message is the integration of the African peoples, the aesthetics of delivery is drawn from different sources in the continents.

Costuming at any session is always a pool of Africa's medley of histrionics. The stage is adorned with raffia stripes, gourds and rattle gourds, cowrie shells and the like. The *Attoungbian drum* - the conveyor of secrets, the *tam-tam*, maracas and flutes carved locally, are some of the musical equipment used.

In one breadth, Liking pushes to prominence Kuntu

drama; Kuntu being a Bantu concept of evolving the African aesthetics. This is given meaning to by her mask code of presentational style, buttressed through action, structure, characterization and audience reaction. Beyond this, she has an approach of theatre which is global. Apart from a stage direction that uses the technique of theatre-within-theatre, which is quite close to the griot tradition, she is associating theatre, dance, puppetry and choreography into a refreshing and distinct African carnivalesque aesthetics. However, her idiom is no longer the old mask; rather, we are now presented with a reconstruction of the mask code in the context of popular arts, now a code capable of empowering womanhood.

#### NOTES

- (1) Zadi, who is also the current Minister for Culture in the country, said the impulse for his action is that since we are no longer in traditional times, the mask should be revised. According to him, writers could know about tradition, but they are not compelled to respect it.
- (2) John Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy*. Garden City: N.Y. Doubleday and Company, 1970, p.20.
- (3) This is the thrust of Harry Caruba's argument in his Ph.D thesis "Mask and Meaning in Black Drama: Africa and the Diaspora" University of Ibadan, 1988.
- (4) Jaheinz Jahn attempts to evolve critical terms from the African Cultural environment in *Muntu*. New York, Grove Press, 1961.