



**MILITANCY AND FEMALE HEROIC RECONFIGURATION IN THE NIGER
DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA: AN ECO-FEMINIST DISCOURSE OF
AHMED YERIMA'S *LITTLE DROPS***

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Abstract

This paper is an eco-feminist discourse of Ahmed Yerima's play Little Drops with regards to female heroic reconfiguration in the militant Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The aim of the paper is to examine the phenomenon of militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and how it reconfigures the females towards heroism, through the lens of Yerima's play Little Drops. Being a textual analysis, the paper adopts qualitative research approach, with the primary text Little Drops as the primary source of data, and other reference materials in print and on the internet as secondary sources of data. Close reading and critical analysis and writing are employed as methods of data analysis in this paper. Some of the key findings in this paper show that, Yerima sees collective action by women as key towards female heroic reconfiguration. Also, the paper finds out that Yerima through this play sees a filial connection between women and the natural environment. Hence, they share in the pains of plunder and devastation of the environment. Again, the study finds out that Yerima uses his play Little Drops for a radical dismantling of patriarchal tradition in order to achieve female heroic reconfiguration in a militant environment of the Niger Delta and other such militant eco-systems. The paper concludes that Yerima's Little Drops as a literary drama is quite apt in conscientizing women on how navigate towards survival as heroines in militant environments.

Keywords: Militancy, Heroic, Reconfiguration, Eco feminist, Niger-Delta

Introduction

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is richly endowed with crude oil and aquatic resources. However, overtime, this naturally endowed region of the country has been a paradoxical theatre of oil and blood wealth and guns; thereby rendering lives of the people of the region vulnerable, especially women, children, and youths. Complaints of marginalization, exploitation and neglect of the people of the region by government, private expatriate and local oil companies, who are engaged in crude oil exploration and exploitation there, have culminated into serious tensions, violent agitations and conflicts by militant groups like, the Nigeria Delta Volunteer Force; Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta; Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People and their likes. Such agitations find expressions through oil pipe lines vandalism, oil bunkering, kidnap for ransom, arms struggle and other forms of violence and social vices.

Ahmed Yerima, through his play *Little Drops*, gives a vent to another dimension of violence in the Niger Delta of Nigeria, with reference to how the violent militant eco-system of the Niger Delta impinges on women, thus leading to their heroic reconfiguration in such a militant environment. Though not a self-professed feminist, the plights of women in the volatile and militant ecosystem of Nigeria's Niger Delta, obviously inspired the writing of *Little Drops* by Yerima. Thus, in his prefatory note Yerima states, "My new play is about people. People who touch my heart and draw me close towards shedding little drops of tears. In their unique fearsome life, they shed more ... of blood ... of Ogogoro ... of rain ... and of life. And yet sadly, no one hardly talks about them. They are the women. These are the people in my new sad ... very dark play".

This paper therefore seeks to examine the phenomenon of militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and its concomitant effect of reawaking women and re-aligning them in the pantheon of heroes and heroines.

Living in a militant environment is characterized by life of victimhood and conscious adjustment towards heroism. (Hajira & Jacob 348-363). This paper therefore, is aimed at examining the phenomenon of militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and its concomitant effect of re-awakening women and re-aligning them in the pantheon of heroines and heroism, as dramatized by Ahmed Yerima in his play *Little Drops*.

Being a textual critique, the paper adopts qualitative research design. This is because this paper is interpretative as it relies on the content and context of the text under review (Cresswell 21).

The data for this study are sourced through close reading of the play which are also analyzed through critical explication by the authors. Also, the views of scholars found to be relevant to the subject matter of this discourse are also important sources of secondary data.

This discourse is of significance at this material time for the fact that rising waves of insurgency and violence tend to affect women the most, thus rendering them easy victims of militancy Chukuma & Stephen (*Boko Haram Insurgency...*). Nevertheless, the study seeks to reveal how women meander their way in a militant eco-system to attain heroism. It therefore goes to suggest that women can overcome victimhood commonly associated with them in militant environment to become heroines.

Clarification of Concepts

It is expedient to clarify a number of concepts that remain key in this discourse. Among such key concepts is the word “militancy”. Within the context of this discourse, militancy has to do with a state of violent contestations in order to achieve socio-political and economic goals. It is not in doubt that militancy has assumed a global existential problem, (Rokk, *Why War...*; Eikenberry, *Civil Wars and Global Disorder ...*).

In recent times, the world has witnessed cases of militant activities across the globe; such as the Russia Ukrain war Israeli/Palestinian conflicts, America/Israeli vs Iranian war; the militant activities of Boko Haram, ISWAP and killer bandits in the Sahel region of Africa and others. This paper therefore maintains that militancy is an existential phenomenon that predisposes women to the tendency to align to the situation as a means of survival, not as victims but as heroines.

Female heroic reconfiguration in this study reveals how women in desperate situation tend to metamorphose from the position of vulnerability and victimhood to that of heroins. It has generally been argued that the most vulnerable victims of militancy are women and children. Chukwudumebi Madu (*Women and children as victims...*), asserts that women in militant environment are usual victims of abuses, rape, widowhood, displacements and exploitation. Nevertheless these adverse conditions tend to push women to a point of struggling, not just to survive but attain heroism.

Theoretical Perspective

This study is approached from the eco-feminist theoretical perspective. This theory propounded by a French scholar Francoise d' Eaubonne is a synthesis of two theories; ecology and feminism; in essence, considering environmental activism and feminist philosophy in addressing women's concerns in society. In recent times, eco-feminism has metamorphosed into other branches such as liberal eco-feminism, spiritual/cultural eco-feminism and social/socialist eco-feminism. Eco-feminist thinkers are concerned with the relation between women and the environment and how patriarchal tradition has continued to use ecological forces as instruments of oppression against women. Hence, eco-feminism strongly holds the view that women and the eco-system should be treated with respect. The efficacy of deploying eco-feminism in the analysis of Ahmed Yerima's play *Little Drops* cannot be over emphasized. The play is among such other literary canons such as *Oil on Water* by Habila Helon, *How Beautiful We Were* by Imbalo Mbue, *Bewiderment* by Richard Powers, *Canyonlands Carnage* by Scot Graham and others, that engage in environmental activism. In the case of Yerima's *Little Drops*, however, he examines the plights of women in the oil rich but volatile Niger Delta region of Nigeria. This theory aptly suits the methodology for this study, which is qualitative, as we are dealing with pure textual discourse of a play set in an environment of militancy.

Textual Overview of *Little Drops*

Little Drops dramatizes women's struggles in volatile and militant oil rich Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The play opens with sounds of gunshots as Memekize, Mukume, Bonuwo and Azue are women caught up in the web of militancy. Mukume just lost her husband Ovievie on a night of their honeymoon, as rival militants invaded their hotel room and assassinated him. Mukume herself is molested and severally raped that day. She is found by Memekize at the riverbank, who resuscitates cleans and nourishes her. Memekize herself a victim of militancy who has lost her husband and two children on account of war in the Niger Delta, provides refuge for Bonuwo, the school teacher and Azue the queen, who are both on the run to avoid being lynched. As for Bonuwo, she is trying to escape a mob of angry parents who blame her for encouraging them to send their children to school, only to end up being killed by indiscriminate shelling by unknown militants. As for Azue, after the murder of her husband the king, she suffers further losses, as the baby she is carrying dies as a result of the gunshot he receives.

These four women who share the victimhood syndrome of militancy resolve to struggle not just to survive, but to also confront militancy headlong. These women express concern over

the destruction of human and aquatic resources in the Niger Delta, as a result of oil exploration and agitations for resource control, thus reducing the women to widowhood, victims of displacements and economic vulnerability.

Kuru, a male militant, who tries to escape the federal troops with gunshot wounds, attempts to harass the four women at the riverbank. He eventually collapses as a result of bleeding. Memekize saves him by treating him. The women task him to commit himself to peace in the region and to also get other militants to do same. Kuru assists Azue, Bonuwo and Mukume to move out of the militant environment, leaving behind Memekize, who insists on staying behind to salvage life in a militant ecosystem.

Perspectives of Female Heroic Reconfiguration

Through his technique of characterization, Yerima is concerned with constructing female protagonists that would be the major focus of the play. The few male characters in the play like Ovievie, the king and Kuru, who are gladiators of militancy are either mentioned in the course of conversation in the play, or accorded some minor roles in this one act play. This could be seen in page 74, where Mukume mentions how she and her husband were attacked four days after their wedding. In pages 99-102, Ovievie's ghost appears in a surreal conversation with Mukume; that confirms that he has been actually killed by the militants that attack them on their honeymoon. Despite the importance of the king, he is not listed as a character in the play; it only takes a leak by Azue on page 79 for the audience to know how the militants invaded his palace and killed him. Kuru, a militant, is another minor male character that is engaged at the end of the play, from pages 103-115: The deficit and stifling of male characters in Yerima's *Little Drops* is a deliberate act by the playwright to recalibrate female heroic characters in a militant environment. This dramatic technique by Yerima has recourse to the quest of post-colonial literary writers in reconfiguring the hitherto stock identity of female characters in literary writings (Bizimumgu, *Gender Representation in postcolonial...*).

The play attempts to demystify the female victimhood narrative commonly associated with the militant eco-system. Ekpootu and Okpevia (219) argue that in the narrative of militancy in the Niger Delta, women are perceived as victims because most of them lost their husbands and children. They are also displaced from their homes. This female victimhood trope tends to extend beyond the Niger Delta, as Meogaswatta (*Violence as a Site of Women's Agency in War ...*), also submits that the victimhood of women as experienced during the Sri Lankan war extends to cases of abduction and rape, displacements and loss of dear ones. In *Little Drops*,

Yerima reechoes the victimhood trope of women in militant Niger Delta in statements of his characters thus:

Mukume: ...Please! I have been raped three times today already. Kill me instead, shoot me and let me die! (Crying) No! I will not let another man touch me. Kill me first ... I shall die first, not one more finger on me. (Little Drops 68),

In this excerpt one hears and feels the cry and anguish of a victim of rape and sexual humiliation. But in all this, the victim is defiant and willing to resist further molestation. Memekize accounts for her own losses.

Memekize: All my blood, my husband and two sons. They all perished on the same day. During the ... war. That year had started well. It was a good season for lobsters and prawns that year ... The fish was in abundance. It was so good ... I would find myself in little canoe gone to the fish market up to three times in a day. Unknown to us, there was war. How were we to know in this swampy bush? As they jumped in and out of the river, diving ... checking the nets ... dugum! A shell. It tore them to pieces. I never pick one complete. I found a head there ... a limb here ... a finger ... manacled trucks. In the rain, I picked each pieces until had each wooden box full with my hands ... I dug each grave ... and buried them ... (Little Drops, 88).

Memkize graphically recounts the tragic and gory incident that renders her a children widow. Her story is similar with Azue the queen whose husband and baby are killed by militants. These women are indeed victims of militancy. Nevertheless, these women tend to make a deliberate resolve to come out of their victimhood cocoon, thus they discuss among themselves.

Mukume: You hear, mother?... Now I am common ... let me show you how common people stay alive ... living on instincts and a will storm as an ox (Takes a fighting poise). Come! We all have lost something very dear to each of us. I will

not lose my life to those rotten boys who have already killed half of me. I say come! (Little Drops, 86-87).

Mukume's called for collective action by the women is a challenge associated with women in militant environment, who inevitably have to take up the active roles in liberating themselves, thus, stating their heroic realignment. This is in tandem with the assertion of Meaga Swatta, that women in militant environment are coerced by default to engage in militancy for the purposes of survival, revenge for the killing of loved ones response to an ideology or quest for adventure (*Violence as a Site of Women's Agency*).

Eco-feminist critics tend to see a relationship between the exploitation and devastation of the ecosystem with the socio-economic conditions of women. According to Rao Manisha, eco-feminist critics, see the plundering and devastation of the eco-environment through mining and socio-political upheavals as direct phenomena of patriarchal contestations, with the concomitant effects of socio-economic vulnerability on women (Environment, Ecology and Women ...). In *Little Drops*, Yerima draws attention to the above assertion through Memekize who expresses the weight of socio-economic hardships that woman like her are predisposed to, as a result of oil exploitation, militancy and criminality thus:

Memekize: See where I live. My family were fishermen before the other war took them. And I was the best fish seller in this part of the Greek, but now the water is polluted. Oil kills the fishes before we go there. You have no plans for old people like us. And I hear you people kidnap for money. What do you do with the money? (Little Drops, 111).

Memekize decries how oil exploration and exploitation, militancy and criminality have displaced women thereby crippling their economic base. Despite this socio-economic adversity, Memkize remains a benevolent benefactor and a mother to all that come to her at the river bank. Mukume, Azue, Bonuwo and Kuru the male militant, all have Memekize to thank for saving and sustaining their lives at the river bank, as she provides them with yam and gin steadily. In this Yerima create a mythical mother heroine in Memekize, who is a source of nourishment and healing despite the condition she finds herself the end of the play, she prepares Mukume, Azue, Bonuwo and Kuru to escape to a safer place, but she herself decides to remain in the militant environment. This shows the filial connection between Memekize as

an eco-feminist epic heroin with her natural environment who despite the plunder and devastation, she is resolved to salvage what remains of the ecosystem.

Toeing the path of radical feminism, Yerima engage in some radical reversal and elimination of traditional gender roles as a means of advancing female heroic reconfiguration. Radical Feminism according to Guy-Evans (*Feminist: Definition, Theory and examples*) "... is a branch of feminism that seeks to dismantle traditional patriarchal and gender roles that keep women oppressed". In essence, radical feminism seeks to suspend what hitherto a traditional norm, thus paving a way for women to assume some roles that tradition would have not permitted them to take in dramatizing this in *Little Drops*. Yerima brings to an end the patriarchal monarchical generations, via the gruesome and tragic murder of the king of Gbaramatu kingdom by armed militia, and the subsequent killing of the infant prince and heir apparent to the throne, through bullet wounds inflicted on him by the same militants. Memekize, knowing that the kind has been murdered, she frantically tries to save the life of the infant prince so that he can continue the royal lineage, but it is to no avail. With the death of the prince, Azue the queen and Memekize have no option but to perform the burial rites for the prince, with Azue giving the royal orders and Memekize performing the traditional burials rites. Through these symbolic actions by these two women, Yerima suggests the end of a patriarchal monarchical order as a result of violence that terminates the lives of the king and the infant prince, who represents the continuity of the patriarchal royal order. The actions of Azue and Memekize represent bold statements about female heroic reconfiguration, as they take the mantle of leadership in the absence of the men.

Summary/Conclusion

This study engages in an eco-feminist analysis of to Ahmed Yerima's *Little Drops*. The playwright is a prolific Nigerian literary writer and theatre practitioner. This play *Little Drops*, is set in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, a place known for its richness in oil and aquatic resources, but ironically bedeviled by militancy and criminality. This play reveals how women, hitherto known as victims of militancy navigate their ways towards attaining heroic status in such a militant ecosystem of Nigeria's Niger Delta.

The paper, approached through the eco-feminist theory reveals that, Yerima in the play *Little Drops*, believes that militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria has pushed women out of the place of victimhood to that of heroism. Also, the study shows that Yerima's *Little Drops*, advocate for collective struggle by women as a way to salvage themselves and attain heroism

in a militant eco-system, as illustrated in the preponderance of female characters working together in the play. Yerima in *Little Drops* sees a deep filial connection between women and the natural environment. Lastly, the study reveals a radical feminist approach as another means through which female heroic reconfiguration can be achieved in a militant ecosystem.

In conclusion, this paper submits that, militancy is indeed a global existential phenomenon that remains a threat to all people. Ahmed Yerima explores the problem of militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria through his play *Little Drops*. This play is apt in conscientizing women on how to navigate towards survival as heroines in militant environments.

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