

AN ANALYSIS OF METAPHORIC EXPRESSIONS AGAINST THE FEMALE GENDER: A STUDY OF SEFI ATTA'S *EVERYTHING GOOD WILL COME*

Nnenna Roseline Uche-Okoro

Department Of English Language and Literature

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Email:ucheokororoseline@gmailcom

Abstract

This paper critically analyses the metaphoric expressions against the female gender in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*. Metaphor is part of our everyday life and it is a matter of language, thought and action. However, Linguistic expressions being containers of meaning equate two things that are not the same even the state of mind. History reveals that the metaphoric expressions against the female are geared towards their tainting, humiliation and oppression. This work seeks to unveil some of them and sensitize the female gender to ignore them and be the best they are created to be. The researcher hinged on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a model that takes account of the social context and explores the links between textual structures and their function in social interaction to analyze the metaphoric expressions in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*. The findings show that expressions against the female gender are culturally and socially inculcated.

Key Words: Critical Discourse Analysis, Metaphors, Social Interaction

Introduction

Language helps in maintaining social relationship. It also aids the stratification of group identity, social stratification and social

grooming. This enigmatic nature of language is evident in its use in virtually all areas of human endeavour. Language however is most often used to alienate the female gender in the society having been oppressed mentally, physically and emotionally. This is perpetuated by choice of language in various interactions. Ogunyemi stresses that;

Language is sometimes used in an oppressive way to tailor the satisfaction of the heterosexual beings and that reductionist concept of subjecting the woman based on genderisation is illuminated when crude words like ‘prostitution’, ‘harlot’ among others are freely used by male chauvinist to poor presentation and projection in some post-colonial literature.(48)

This implies that expressions against the female gender is meant to make the males look, feel, and act superior over the females and buttresses Akujobi’s point that “this expression especially in its metaphoric forms makes one feel victimized, dominated and inferior”(4).

This situation further explains the “unproblematic unity that evokes solidarity of identity in the areas of sex and identity” (Butler as quoted in Ogunyemi, 48). Ogunyemi explains that Butler observes that Witting’s observation of the male gender’s handling of language places the female gender as a subordinate entity and further argues that women are projected as ‘materialists’ when placed as a subordinate but rather, there is need for another order of ‘materiality’. What Butler means is that language is sometimes used in gender and identity to tailor the satisfaction of the heterosexual beings.

Udenweze stresses that;

Our cultural practices denigrate the image and status of women in the society mostly by the language we

use on them because male and female children right from birth are assigned different roles, values and status by the society where they are born by continuous use of different languages meant particularly for each sex group but surprisingly, the female gender is usually addressed using negative metaphoric expressions unlike that used to address the male gender. (1)

Gender based oppression is the “oppression that reflects the existing asymmetry in the power relations between men and women and perpetrates the subordination and devaluation of the female as opposed to the male” (Ngendahayo, 2014). Ngendahayo further explains that gender based oppression exists within the framework of patriarchy as a symbolic system that engenders an array of day to day practices which represent the female gender poorly with the aim of oppressing them and relating them to the background. Gender based oppression comes in form of sexual, physical, mental and verbal oppressions.

The underlying factor in patriarchy is power and status. Stressing further, Ifechelobi (18) says that “traditional African society as a patriarchal society is characterized by current and historic unequal power relations between women and men where women are systematically disadvantaged, subdued and oppressed”. “Patriarchy is a broad network or system of hierarchical organization that cuts across political, economic, social, religion, cultural, industrial and financial spheres, under which the overwhelming number of upper positions in society are either occupied or controlled and dominated by men” (Okpe as qtd in Makama, 117).

In fact, any system that gives men undue advantage over women is considered patriarchal and oppressive against the female gender. A male is considered the head of the household and he controls productive resources, and reproductive capacities based on the notions that he is superior while the female is inferior. Ogbazi wraps it up by saying that “First, Patriarchy, essentially, makes reference to a male-dominated world, a world that has been strengthened by cultural prejudices and assigning traditional gender roles to the male and female sexes” (17).

Oppression breeds injustice which is discriminatory, dehumanizing and inferiority. It is usually imposed by the oppressors upon dominated and exploited individuals. It further serves as a means of enforcing oppression in order to secure advantageous conditions of living for its perpetrators. “Oppression means the exercise of tyranny by a ruling group (men) which creates injustice in other circumstances as well and not only cruel tyrant with bad intentions that oppress people but a well-intentioned democratic society can place system-wide constraints on groups and limit their freedom, choices and liberty” (Young,33).

Metaphoric expressions against the female gender is a form of verbal oppression and manifests in form of regarding the female gender as a sex object/machine, an ever-dependent variable, a money-making machine, a baby factory and an incomplete individual without marriage.

Individuals are part of the society, their existence is shaped and influenced by the language they use and the individual's language use is constrained by the conventional and unconventional provisions of the society they live in. Therefore, part of the individual's approach to issues is conditioned by society, and society thrives on language. In essence, language,

gender and culture are knotted. Language helps in shaping peoples' culture and gender issues are language influenced in line with Cameron's argument that:

Our linguistic habits often reflect and perpetuate ideas about things which are no longer embodied in law, but which continue to have covert significance in the culture. This is one reason why feminists have often paid detailed attention to language and discourse: our ways of talking about things reveals attitudes and assumption we might consciously disown, thus, testifying to the deep-rootedness of sexism. (16)

Conceptual Metaphor as revolutionized by Lakoff and Johnson (1980) “is not just a characteristics of language alone, a mere rhetorical ornament or literary device but a powerful means by which individuals make sense of selves and the world around them” (Ahmed, 90). Zubair (766) observes that “metaphors are reflective of the modes thought of the members of the linguistic community that employ them”. Metaphor, in this view, is seen “not as a literary form or as a deviation from some supposedly literal language, but rather as one of the building blocks of our thinking, at both the level of language acquisition and language-use” (Montasheri,107).Metaphors are used to “enrich language or to understand something abstract in more straight forward terms. It equates two things that are not the same; it goes beyond physical resemblances to compare complex state of feeling” (Ezeife, 143). From the above scholars, it is now clear that metaphor is a daily affair that is already inculcated in our lives and has formed part of our culture.

In Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come*, the writer depicts societal happenings and views about the female gender and

refocuses the attention of the society on the right and correct views of whom the female gender is, using the characters. Cultural beliefs and tradition are interwoven in language which is an aspect of culture. Sefi Atta brings into limelight in a literally discourse what has been inculcated in the minds of the individuals unconsciously but is a major cankerworm that has eaten the society deeply especially the female gender.

However, the social relevance of discourse makes it give rise to the issues of power. Discursive practices can help (re) produce unequal power relations through the manner in which they represent things and people and are happenings that fall into the categories of the (re) production of social, historical and cultural life manifesting not only linguistic mechanisms but also devices of a different order, such as those which reproduce ideology and maintain the power structure. The study of implicit ideologies is a major preoccupation of CDA: a theory that seeks to unravel connections between discourse practices, social practices, and social structures, connections that may be opaque to text consumers. It is important to realize that discursive practice is constitutive of social structures, just as social structures determine discursive practice.

Therefore, discourse is not only socially constitutive but also socially conditioned. That is, it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities or relationships which exist between people and groups of people. The social relevance of discourse makes it give rise to the issues of power. Sefi Atta gives a textual analysis of the social structures and social practices by creating some metaphoric expressions that has been inculcated in the day to day affairs of the individuals.

Woman as Sex toy /Machine- The female gender is portrayed as a body or entity which is composited of sexual meaning. Women

in general are turned into items which men exploit for their sexual pleasure. This concept regards woman as a sex piece; an item to be used as toy for sexual satisfaction by man. In this concept, the woman is exploited for sex by the man. This metaphoric measure is characterized by words/expressions relating to sex, sexuality or the sexual organs of a woman just as the narrator says; "I was walking the streets, one foolish man approached me ... **The fool touched my breasts**, I slapped his face. **He pushed me to the ground.**"... (EGWC,265)

A woman that is faced with the worst difficult time of her life - Lost her husband to the cold hands of death, denied access to her children (a set of twins), stalked naked and alone in a room and forced to drink her late husband's bath water to prove of her innocence. Walking around with sorrow in her heart, she was now approached by a man who only came to take advantage of her. A man who sees a stranger and moves to her directly to rape her is a proof of what he takes the female gender to be - an object for sexual satisfaction. Her rights are never considered.

Woman as Money-Making Machine - The female gender is being portrayed as the bread winner in their families which is originally regarded as the sole responsibility of the males. But the humiliating part of this is that the male gender now shifted the responsibility of providing money for the family to the female gender without any remorse for their idleness or low income but with all pride and arrogance that the female gender should do it as part of their duty. The male gender now approaches a female for marriage with consideration to her earnings and the possibility of inheriting her wealth with the sole reason of being her husband. Sunny, Enitan's father boldly told Enitan this; **My mother's mother was a trader. She saved money for her children's education under her mattress. One**

day my grandfather took the money she'd been saving and used it to pay the dowry for a second wife. (EGWC,151)

Woman as a Baby Factory - The responsibility of procreation is laid on the female gender. Nature designed her with the properties that give her the ability of nursing a younger one in her and bring her/him forth to life. This makes it that whenever a woman is unable to give birth to children, she is always blamed and regarded as the worst and even addressed as so. Worst still, if a woman gives birth only to female children, she is being cajoled, abused and oppressed using different languages. Enitan narrates her ordeal in the hands of her family members, in-laws, friends and even her personal self.

I got pregnant and shortly after had a miscarriage.... I cried until I soaked my pillow. I got pregnant again. This time, the baby grew out of my womb and could have killed me had it not been for one smart doctor. I had to have an emergency operation. The doctor told us my chances of having after that were reduced. 'But keep trying,' he said. A year later, we still were, Niyi's relation began to press, "Is everything all right?" They looked at my stomach before looking at my face. Some scolded me outright. "What are you waiting for? My mother invited me to her vigils; my father offered to send me overseas to see other doctors. I asked why they harassed women this way. (EGWC,185)

Why should Enitan soak her pillow with her tears? This is because she knows that all fingers are pointed at her and has accepted that giving birth to a child is the only proof of being a female.

Sheri who is Enitan's friend stressed it harder when she says;

Better to be ugly, to be crippled, to be a thief even, than to be barren. We had both been raised to believe that our greatest days would be; the birth of our first child, our wedding and graduation days in that order. A woman may be forgiven for having a child out of wedlock if she had no hope of getting married, and she would be dissuaded from getting married if she didn't have a degree. Marriage could immediately wipe out a sluttish past, but angel or not, a woman had to have a child. (EGWC, 105 - 7)

Woman as Ever- Dependent Variable - It has been believed and accepted by the society that the males are superior while the females are inferior and should be dependent on the male gender. The female gender is believed to be receivers of instructions while the male gender is the instructors. Enitan on her bid for freedom and quest for fairness says; “In my Country, women are praised the more they surrender their rights to protest. In the end they may die with nothing but selflessness to pass on to their daughters, a startling legacy, like tears down a parched thwart”. (EGWC, 117)

Enitan complains on why the female gender should be so dependent on the male. A woman's muteness is praised and appreciated but the moment she got an idea to share, it is regarded as abnormal and she is taken to be wild. She however, have no choice than to suffer in silence and also advises her daughters to follow the same footsteps as to avoid being labelled "wild". **"In the end it will be a startling legacy, like tears down a parched thwart"**.

Woman as Incomplete without Marriage - The Oxford English Mini Dictionary defines marriage as “the formal union of a man and a woman as husband and wife” (354). Marriage has been

regarded as the highest honour that a woman can attain. Once a female gender reached a particular age that she is believed to be better positioned by a man's side, it becomes a concern to the female herself, family and well-wishers. They become restless and ready to give her away to whoever that asks for her hand in marriage just to ensure that she is married off else, she will be regarded as an ill-mannered and not fit for any man.

The researcher examines the words of Sheri with the today's happenings in the society. Enitan is married, Sheri is not married. Enitan complains of her experiences in the hands of her husband and reconsiders Sheri as being happier in her unmarried state but unknown to her that Sheri is not happy in her unmarried state. Sheri opens up for Enitan in her words as follows; She shook her head. "It is not easy on your own. Men thinking you want them; women pitying you and not wanting you around their homes. Your own mother talking about you as if you have terminal cancer: Ah Enitan, she's still with us. Ah, Enitan, we pray" (EGWC,245).

Conclusion

Sensitization and Education; The Way Out - The era of limiting the females either with words or actions is obviously over. The females are created with equal biological attributes with the males and so should not be oppressed because of their sex. The education of the female should go beyond acquiring the skills in the kitchen to proper formal education with open opportunities that will help them harness their special God-given talents. A woman lost her husband to the cold hands of death and they wanted her to drink his bath water as to proof of her innocence but she blatantly refused.

In her despair, a man comes to take advantage of her condition to rape her. The man called her hey baby but she immediately let

him know that she must not be addressed in such a manner that she is well educated and knows her rights. "I was walking the streets. One foolish man approached me. He called me Hey Baby". **"I said I'm not Hey Baby. I'm a secretary typist, qualified1988"** (EGWC, 265).

Proper sensitization and education made it happen. Enitan having acquired education made her own efforts at sensitizing Sherifat who is her childhood friend. Enitan counselled Sheri to stop the illicit love relationship she was having with Brigadier, a polygamist and whose first daughter is around Sheri's age. Brigadier keeps Sheri at home for preparing all kinds of dishes for him and his friends and must not find her absent on his return. Enitan counselled Sheri to start –up a catering business with that, she will be getting money to solve her needs and not being a sexual victim to Brigadier for the sake of money. Their conversation goes thus;

Ibrahim wants me to stop my business; what will happen to me when my rent is due? **Bid time, I said. Until your next rent is paid. After that, find more clients. There are weddings, burials, christenings, every weekend in this place. Next year, you 'be paying your own rent. You're bright, you're young and this man is treating you like his house girl...** (EGWC, 138).

Works Cited

Ahmed, Umar. "Metaphor in the Construction of Gender in Media Discourse: Analysis of Metaphors Used to Describe Women in Newspapers". *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies*. 6:1(2018). 88-99.Web.

Akujobi, Remi. *The Burden of Conforming to Culture and Tradition: The Afemai Woman's Experience*.

- Unpublished Article. 2011. Covenant University.edu.ngweb 3/11/2018.
- Atta, Sefi. *Everything Good Will Come*. Nigeria: Kachifo.2006.Print.
- Ezeife, Amaka. C. *Gender ideology and Lexicalisation*. University of Ibadan: PhD dissertations.2013. Print.
- Ezeifeka, Chinwe. *Discourse Analysis: Concepts and Approaches*. Awka: Patrobas Nigeria Limited2018. Print
- Ifechelobi, J.N. "Feminism: Silence and Voicelessness as tools of Patriarchy in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*". *Ethiopia: African Research Review: An International Multidisciplinary Journal*.8:4(2014).Web.DOI <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrrrev.2/10/2018>.
- Makama, Godiya Allanana. *Partriachy and Gender Inequality: The Way Forward*.European Scientific Journal.9:17.(2013).Web12/10/2018.file:///C:/Users/HP%20FOLIO/Desktop/Documents/Download/1161-3466-1-PB.pdf
- Montashery, Iraj. "Figurative Construction of Gender through Metaphor and Metonymy United States".*World Science Publisher*.6.1.(2013).Web.4/8/2018.
- Ngendahayo, J.D.*The Impact of Women Oppression on the Societal Destruction. A Case Study of Chinua Achebe "Things Fall Apart"* (2014). Retrieved on4/8/2018.file:///C:/Users/HP%20FOLIO/Desktop/Documents/Download/412367.html

- Ogbazi, Ifeyinwa. *History and the Voiceless: Yvonne Vera and Postcolonial Zimbabwe*.UK: Lap Lambert Academic Publishing. 2012. Print.
- Ogunyemi, Christopher Babatunde. “The Configuration of Gender and Identity in Nigerian Literature”. *International Journal of Gender and Women's Studies*.2:2. 43-59. America: Research Institute for Police Development. 2014. Web. Retrieved on June 2018.
- Okpe, O. *Mainstreaming Gender in the African Development Process: A Critic of NEPAD and the Women Question*. Nigeria: BSU Press, 2005.
- Thorn Borrow, Joanne & Wareing Shain. *Patterns in Language: An Introduction to Language and Literary Style*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Udenweze, Maureen Uche. *Structures of Female Oppression in Selected African Novels*. Nsukka: MA thesis, (2009).DOI Web.17/8/2018
- Wodak, Ruth.*The Discourse-Historical Approach: Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis*.Eds. R. Wodak and M. Meyer. London: Sage publications, 2009.
- Young, Iris Marrion. *Punishment, Treatment, Empowerment: Three Approaches to Policy for Pregnant Addicts*. *Feminist studies*. 20:1(1994). 33-57.
- Van Dijk, Teun*Introduction: Discourse as a new Cross-Discipline*. *Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. 1.(1991).1-10. Web. 19th October, 2018.

Fairclough and Ruth Wodak. *Critical Discourse Analysis. Discourse as Social Interaction*. Ed. VanDijk.T. London: Sage, 1997.

Zubair, S. "Silent Birds: Metaphoric constructions of literacy and Gender Identity in Women's Talk". *Discourse Studies*. 9(6) (2007), 766-783.