

## BOOK REVIEW

**Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo: *Mixed Legacies. Poems (2013-2018)***

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Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo is an accomplished academic; one of the few Nigerian female writers whose creative writing combines with public speaking and scholarship to cover practically all genres of literature – prose fiction (the novel and short story), drama, poetry, children’s literature, etc. A teacher per excellence and recipient of multiple awards and international scholar, Ezeigbo is probably one of the most prolific authors in present-day Nigeria: her children’s books alone amount to 26 publications. She also has to her credit 5 novels, 8 poetry collections including *Mixed Legacies*, 2 plays and about 9 non-fiction books. Adimora-Ezeigbo is a professor of English, currently teaching at the Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria.

In *Mixed Legacies* Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo bites deep, with the teeth of an ancient griot, into the past and present of her society. She is concerned with the socio-economic and cultural conditions of her cataclysmic space where people live with ‘mixed feelings’. Adimora-Ezeigbo remains abhorrent of her society’s violence, bloodshed, police brutality, corruption, cultism, ritual killings, boko haram, kidnapping, human right abuses, etc. as she celebrates and eulogizes men and women who have impacted on the same society that has been bedeviled with a lot of ills. *Mixed Legacies* was culled in a ‘mixed blessing’ lab where the poet fingered the exigencies of “Lasting Legacies”, “Terror Legacy”, “Joy Legacy”, and “Hope Legacy.” Obviously not happy with the seeming irrepressible unrests all over her country, Adimora-Ezeigbo with her ‘mixed coat of colours’ drags an entire nation to consciousness dissecting with her poetical tools. To achieve this, the erudite poet provides us with one hundred and eleven (111) mind blowing poems aptly divided into five (5) sections, each comprising closely knit subject matters. As acknowledged by the poet in her preface, seventy of the poems are haiku – a type of Japanese poem with three lines consisting of five, seven and five syllables – that are thoughtful, provocative and humorous, and they also cover a wide variety of topics.

The first section, “Lasting Legacy 1: In Memoriam” contains 9 poems with ‘Flight of the songbird’ being the very first poem in the collection dedicated to Kofi Awoonor, a Ghanaian poet and author who was killed in the September 2013 terrorist attack at Westgate shopping mall in Nairobi, Kenya, where he was a participant at the Storymoja Hay Festival. Adimora-Ezeigbo bemoans the “sudden flight” of the Ghanaian “great songbird” whose death was orchestrated by terrorists. The poet in a grand ode recognizes the contributions of Awoonor in the literary and political development of Ghana and by extension, Africa. The poet laments on the level of insecurity and violence in Africa which Awoonor himself had warned against but it eventually consumed him:

You foretold the danger of the ‘new way’, not our way  
You saw the merchants of violence in our street  
You raised the alarm but no one heeded your cry

Until violence came to roost in the guise of a demented sect  
Hoisted upon our bemused people by misguided fanatics. (3)

The poet contends that the activities of the terrorists have erupted to violence such that “they pulled down the house of multiple rooms” which has made the people abandoned at “cross-roads”. The poet promises that Awoonor’s contributions will live on as “we must surely adopt and uphold” his shining legacy.

In the poem “Double-eagle departs” a tribute to another literary icon in Africa, Chinua Achebe who also died in 2013 though in March, and few months earlier than Awoonor. The poet expresses her grief at news of Achebe’s death which “came suddenly”. Adimora-Ezeigbo recalls how Achebe’s demise had thrown the entire African Literature Association’s conference holding at Charleston into a great turmoil. Achebe’s death was a great loss to the literary world and the poet does not comprehend why death should take such a great asset. To underscore the vacuum that has been created by the death of one of the greatest novelist, poet, and critic to have come from Africa, Adimora-Ezeigbo asks many unanswered questions:

The Reaper invaded the literary community to steal a valued griot  
How does one begin to understand?  
That your inspiring presence is lost forever?  
That your gentle and winning ways, always visible,  
Have found a new realm to glow and shine?  
That the great storyteller has joined the ancestors? (5)

The preceding poems in this section are all tributes to iconic heroes and heroines in the literary world who in one way or the other had influenced as well as contributed meaningfully to the all round development of Nigerian and African literature. They include: Buchi Emecheta, Isidore Okpewho, Abiola Irele, Ben Obumelu, Austin Chukwu and the poet’s beautiful mother whom she says “Green leaves reminds me of the youth in living things/The exhilarating pleasures of growing up, of new beginnings...” (15).

In the second section of the collection under review, entitled “Lasting Legacy II”, the poet makes out time to celebrate and pay homage to the living. Adimora-Ezeigbo no doubt puts to rest the aged-long sentiments that Africans do not appreciate the heroic feats of their own when they are life. Through a praise-singing technique, figures like Chukwuemeka Ike, Femi Osofisan, Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare and other notable writers and scholars who have made their marks in the development of African literature. In “Farmer-born, nature-nurtured” a parody to Osundare’s popular poem “Farmer-born, peasant-bred” in the collection *The Eye of the Earth*, which Adimora-Ezeigbo incidentally dedicates to Osundare, the poet reminds her colleague in both the art and profession that though he might have been born by a farmer, his poetic dexterity comes from mother-nature who has nurtured him to be a “Wordsmith” who shapes words just like a blacksmith does with his tools. The poet recalls her first encounter with Osundare at the university “In the hallowed halls of the premier institution/Some three and half decades in the past” (27). The poet has so much praise for Osundare that she uses some of his poetry collections – *Homecoming*, *Village Voices*, etc – as puns in the last stanza of the verse to pray for him

As a talented and widely read poet, Adimora-Ezeigbo in the next section in the collection entitled “Terror Legacy: Terror Haiku Poems”, employs the poetic model known as haiku to lament the atrocities committed by herdsmen on their fellow humans. “Herding sacred

cows/raping devalued women/killing men like goats” (41). The poet warns these heartless herdsmen who value cows and devalue humans that nemesis will soon catch up with them for what they are doing on their people. The poet calls the terrorist herdsmen “Tabula rasa” whose minds is filled with crimes – rape, stealing, killing, etc – yet claim that they are killing people in line with their religious inclinations. The poet laments of the government’s inability to do nothing about the terrorist attacks and urged them to “restructure in peace/or cause conflagration” (42). The deadly sect called Boko Haram has also become a nightmare “Today’s koboko” – a kind of whip used to flog cows and sheep - to the safety and well-being of the people. They made it known to all who wish to know that the existence of the deadly sect is probably the beginning of the endtime. In poem 21 in that section, the poet calls on “Women of the world/ A great time to be woman/ March to murder rape” (45) and in poem 42 “Women of my land/ You hail your cruel oppressors/ Who deflower your girls” (49). This is a call not to relent in their pursuit of justice despite they (women) being the most vulnerable in all these insecurity matters. The women are raped, killed, made widows and even have their daughters deflowered against their wills by these deadly Boko Haram. The poet reminds women their roles as nation builders and therefore should rise to the occasion as the men are “castrated” while women are the ones who suffer the consequences. The poet cautions the government for her inability to protect her people; through her revolutionary consciousness and as a front liner for women emancipation, she encourages women thus: “Global rage, we’re done!/ We’ll dismantle Patriarchy/Global women’s rage” (48). In so many instances, Adimora-Ezeigbo cries out to so many ills and vices that is politically evolving in Africa which has made it a home of bloodbath.

The poet makes good and conscious use of simile, metaphor, oxymoron, synecdoche, alliteration, assonance, onomatopoeia, sarcasm, irony, pun, etc. as ingredients for the preparation of this delicious poetic meal. Style wise, Adimora-Ezeigbo has come to be associated with verbal playfulness and wit associated with the oral tradition. In the fourth section in the collection entitled “Joy Legacy: Sunshine Haiku – The Beauties Around”, the poet shows the soft, lovely and human side of her as she resonates her personal experience in many lovely moments and places. To begin this beautiful section, the poet invokes her muse “Come Spirit of deep/to me the repentant one/waiting at your door” and beckons that the muse knock her together for her to be happy for the “new dawn” (55). In poem 3 of this section, the poet recalls her times in Edinburg, a town on hills that windy and “home to rich gardens”. Those that have personally encountered the poet are quick to admit this glaring quality of human milk of kindness, family oriented and love for nature and nurture. Having encountered her as a senior colleague for about four years and as my teacher, reading this section “Joy Legacy” in this collection made me shout “quintessential Amazon.” The ease with which she handles her beautiful memories and its subsequent appropriation from the real life into literature makes one wonder at her passion for creativity. In this section, she does not lament but smiles with nostalgia as she “... feeds on memories/Days spent on a diet of thoughts/About joy and pain” (56).

In “Hope Legacy”, Adimora-Ezeigbo continues to x-ray her society in order to purge her from certain anomalies such as police brutality on helpless citizens, bribery and corruption, etc. The poet also appreciates love as a beautiful thing. In “Crossing Boundaries”, which was inspired after reading Gabriel Garcia’s *Marquez Love in the Time of Cholera*, the poet admits how love holds us “spellbound in the ethereal zone”. She goes on to question the rationale behind hinging love to age. “Tell me, what has age got to do with love?! This question breeds controversies” (59). In “Ode to self-defence”, the poet bewildered by the mistreatment of the common man

by some law enforcement agencies, advocates that it is not bad for such individuals to resort to self-defence if need be because it is the violent attacks on armless citizens that has given rise to this.

If you deliberately choose to attack me/You may consider me helpless,  
defenceless/ With a body like mine so soft, so rounded/You may label  
me a fruit tree to be plundered./These are your thoughts, but mine are  
different/I'm a lone hiker traversing the road of pain/Violence is a  
memory that invokes nightmares/But I've learned to stand my gro-  
und and strike back. (61)

Adimora-Ezeigbo continues to mirror her society from different angles. Her love for the cities of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom and Abakaliki in Ebonyi State, Nigeria is not hidden. Little wonder did the poet place the renditions of these two beautiful cities the page next to the other. Though both have different climate conditions, the weather of one and the rhythms of the other give the poet something good to cherish about. Such environments, apart from their serenities give one hope for a better living and state of mind. In "Live with passion for the Land" a poem dedicated to the Nigerian youths, the poet-mother encourages the youths not to give up for fatherland but to take a giant leap because it is their time to do so. "... the bud of your life blossoms/Now is your time to unfurl... Today is tomorrow's yesterday/Walk to your neighbours from other cultures/And say to them, 'You and I/ Belong together and own the land'" (81). There is a call for unity by the Adimora-Ezeigbo to the youths of her society. Rather than destroy what collectively belongs to them due to religious and cultural differences, the youths should see the power of unity which is the only thing that gives rays of hope and sunshine.

In the last of the poem in the collection entitled "Light at the end of the tunnel", Adimora-Ezeigbo extols that despite the ugly situation in her society, it will rise again. "Our country will bloom again/we will gather blossoms to brighten/our days by the river of life" (83). Having taken us through the journey of her mixed feelings for her country and the social challenges, unrest and other crimes that seem unending, the poet gives us soothing words to relax our troubled hearts. "... Forced migration will cease/The strong will stay, the young will find work/Sex slavery and sexploitation will perish...Perditions that push the youths to the brink" (83).

*Mixed Legacies* is undoubtedly a chronicling of the fortunes and misfortunes in our society. No doubt, we have had it rough but there has also been moments and people worth cherishing against all odds. Treating, as it were issues of insecurity, cultism, police brutality, kidnapping, rape and all manner of crimes, on the hopeful side, the poet also beams her poetic torchlight on love, family, nature, unity and thoughtful wishes. *Mixed Legacies* is a most precious offering from an old, practiced hand. It is an important and useful collection that encapsulates our collective problems, progress and peaceful co-existence. It is a thought posed on the nation's "prevailing preference of violence to peace and order, a call to all and sundry to embrace the things that sustain life rather than things that destroy it. The mixed feelings in *Mixed Legacies* make it a must-read for every literary scholar, as well as any social conscious minded person. It is my expectation that the next poetry collection of Akachi-Adimora-Ezeigbo will take us to the realization of "Hopeful and Peaceful Legacies".