

Women Academe and Criticism of Nigerian Culture: The Input of Mabel Evwierhoma through Theatre Scholarship

NWAGBO PAT OBI

National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO)
No 23 Kigoma Street Wuse Zone 7, Abuja-FCT,
Nigeria

pachnwan@yahoo.com or
nwagbo2001@gmail.com

08032959851

Fidelis Chukwujekwu Ndigwe

Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam-
Nigeria
Fidelcnn007@gmail.com...08037116607

Abstract

The giant strides to be taken in becoming an academic do not just entail acquiring knowledge through formal education but demand further steps to master, philosophize and profess knowledge. Apart from the credentials to show that quality conditions were fulfilled in a higher education, volumes of well researched publications in peer review academic journals are vital. In Nigeria, when this form of learning came through colonial education women were not as privileged as men to acquire it immediately. So, men become educated first, hence were the first set of academics. Subsequently, women joined this league of educated men in the academic world. The utilization of this knowledge by both men and women in academic community encroached on culture, its administration and expression. In this instance, issues in various endeavours, including academics are expressed through culture of criticism and criticism of culture. This study examines women's academic world and their efforts in criticizing Nigerian culture with a focus on Mabel Evwierhoma's involvement using theatre scholarship. The theory of Cultural Studies as it relates to cultural criticism specifically feminist criticism will be adopted to explore cultural feminist thoughts of Nigerian women in the academics with Evwierhoma's input as a focus. The study finds that since the inception of feminism in Nigeria, women have deployed its scholarship, to criticise culture. Women in the theatre have used every available tool including creative writing, critical writing, research, pedagogy and philosophy to highlight cultural values that favour women. Evwierhoma has made a robust impact in this regard.

Keywords: Culture, Femism, women, theatre

Introduction

Issues about men and women have continuously taken the centre stage in every culture and area of life to the extent that ideologies resulting from views on male and female are in constant discourse. Indeed, gender question has occupied major topics in all fields of studies, where each wants its argument to be superior. In the academic circles this gender debate pitched the female academics against their male counterparts in terms of critical standpoint. The women in the academics, theatre arts inclusive have pursued their points of view through criticism of cultural practices that marginalize them using creative and critical writing. This has given rise to a lot of women-centred theories which form tools of cultural criticism. Women in the Nigerian theatre practice and scholarship have reflected and deployed these theories in their creative and critical engagements. Evwierhoma has really

made strong impact in this regard through critical establishment in which culture remains her springboard.

Towards a definition of Women Academe, Criticism, Culture, Theatre and Theatre Scholarship

Women Academe; these are the women in the academic world or university circles or an academy and they engage in scholarly activities where they fulfill multiple roles of teaching, research and writing. Through these they serve both to the university and the profession they belong. It takes a cumulative process in the academe before an output like running an experiment, doing a field study, writing a book, carrying out research etc is accomplished (“American Psychological Association/Women in Academe” 2). The formation of the umbrella body of Nigerian women in the academics, National Association of Women Academics (NAWACS), the Association’s motto and objectives will help in understanding what the women academe stand for, because as Dairo and Rasheed put it:

NAWACS came into existence after a group of eminent women scholars from the University of Jos came together in 1996 to consider the need to form an association to encourage, provoke and uplift the academic pursuit of women in Nigerian Universities with a view to attending to the peculiar challenges faced by women academics within the university system. NAWACS Motto is Empowerment, Development and Excellence, while its aims and objectives are to: promote awareness of female educational development and facilitate the empowerment of women etc. Indeed, it encourages women to be creative, write and form their own perceptions (227-228).

Criticism; is to appreciate and interpret; hence Haywood posits that criticism is when a literary critic, appreciates, explains or interprets a literary work, where he or she brings to bear its meaning, production, aestheticism, and historical value. Formally, the word is applied to persons who are publicly accepted in a recognized capacity, such as professional employment, graduation from a course of study, etc., to give critical commentaries in one or any of a number of specific fields (“Definition of Literary Criticism”, Haywood). Theatre practice and scholarship cannot do without criticism, because theatre is an area that criticizes and is criticized and through the ages it has had critics. In an interview with Ohaeto, one of Nigeria’s most controversial literary critics, Charles Nnolim, as a result of this avers that the indispensable feature of criticism to the arts has underscored the complementary relationship between creativity and criticism as well as between the creative writer and the critic, who is also the writer that uses various channels, including the journals, media, either electronic or print to communicate his or her critical judgment (142). Smiley classified the critics into four according to their functions; they are (a) The reviewer, (b) The critic (c) The scholar (d) The theorist. The scholar critic who is a dramatic scholar works slowly and carefully as he involves himself or herself with historical or analytical investigations about a play or a playwright (Smiley 237).

Culture; in answer to the question, what is Culture? Oatey posits that Kroeber and Kluckhohn, the American anthropologists; in what they regard as culture core concepts, critically reviewed the concepts and definitions of culture in 1952 and concluded that culture

is a notoriously difficult term to define. Consequently, they compiled a list of 164 different definitions of culture. Also, Oatey further asserted that Spencer cited Avruch to provide an historical perspective to some of the ways in which the term culture has been interpreted to refer to the academe. These are exemplified in Matthew Arnolds' *Culture and Anarchy* (1867), where culture is referred to a special intellectual or artistic endeavour or product, what today we might call "high culture" as opposed to "popular culture" or "folkways" in an earlier usage. Also, as pioneered by Edward Tylor in *Primitive Culture* (1870), culture is referred to a quality possessed by all people in all social groups, who nevertheless could be arrayed on a development (evolutionary) continuum (in Lewis Henry Morgan's scheme) from "savagery" through "barbarism" to "civilization". According to Tylor culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.' (Tylor cited in Avruch 6). Shettima avers that Tylor's definition of culture has been widely accepted and used throughout the decades because of its all-inclusive nature; incorporate the material, tangible elements as well as nonmaterial intangible elements (68). This informs why Shettima referred to Newman to define culture as what consists of all products of a society that are created and shared and such products are both material and non-material aspects of human social life (Newman 96 cited in Shettima 68).

Theatre and its Scholarship; Nwabueze highlighted how theatre became an academic programme. According to him, theatre as an academic discipline received its first impetus in the United States of America. This is because the earliest known intrusion of Drama into the University system was pioneered in 1906 by George Pierce Baker at Harvard University. On the other hand, earlier in England, the situation was different because Dramatic activities were accepted as part of undergraduate student leisure interest and was eventually given official impetus in 1855, thus establishing The Amateur Dramatic Company at Trinity College, Cambridge University (Nwabueze 8). Citing Coggin, Nwabueze further averred that this Company operated in the University Arts Theatre and "served the double functions of repertory for the town and good plays for the schools" (Coggin 221 cited in Nwabueze 9). Then in 1885 the Oxford University Dramatic Society was formed, and that further helped to boost the fortunes of drama. However, it is important to note that in the United States of America Baker started teaching Drama in one of his classes, English 47, which he eventually renamed 47 Workshop. He later made a proposal for the establishment of a Department of Drama in Harvard but the University saw the venture as experimental and the proposal was unsuccessful (Nwabueze 8-9).

With this, Adelugba asserted that Theatre Arts Studies have come a long way, from Baker's struggle for the acceptance at Harvard and Yale in the United States of America as a proper part of university studies (1). In 1914, Thomas Wood Stevens established the first degree programme in Drama at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. In 1924, with an endowment by Edward S. Harkness, Yale University established a Drama programme in the School of the Fine Arts. George Pierce Baker happily migrated to Yale the following year to head the new department. Furthermore, in England, in 1950, with a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation of New York, the University of Bristol established and inaugurated the first department of drama in an English university. The man instrumental to the birth of the department was Professor Glynne Wickham, and to show his

intellectual attachment to the discipline, he promptly gave his inaugural lecture, thus becoming the first professor to give an inaugural lecture in Theatre in a British university. Incidentally when the Drama programme was established in the University College, Ibadan, Professor Wickham was appointed the first External Examiner in Drama (Adedeji 6). The first School of Drama in the Nigerian University system was established at the University College, Ibadan. This was a result of a visitation conducted in 1961. By 1962, the University obtained a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation of New York for the purpose of establishing the School. In October 1963, the school was officially opened for academic work (Nwabueze 8-9).

However, to determine what constitutes scholarship, the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching in 1985, began to explore notions of scholarship in the academy, the relationship between teaching and scholarship, and the connection between the academy and its community. Ten years after in 1995, the Carnegie Foundation published *Scholarship Assessed* precisely to address the question of how to establish “criteria of ‘excellence’” for the evaluation of its broader categories of scholarly activity (“Scholarship for the Discipline of Theatre: Association for Theatre in Higher Education” 1). The members of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education (ATHE), responding to this standard initiated the drafting of its White Paper on “Scholarship for the Discipline of Theatre.” Subsequently they came out with a document which highlighted the concept of scholarship for the theatre, which includes:

1. The scholarship of discovery.
 2. The scholarship of teaching and learning.
 3. The scholarship of engagement and
 4. The scholarship of integration.
- However, the unique culture and context of each academic institution, and the priorities of each Theatre unit, will determine the relevance and value of the proposed standards in any given setting (“Scholarship for the Discipline of Theatre: Association for Theatre in Higher Education” 10).

It is necessary to explain that scholarship of discovery is where new and unique knowledge is generated as research and publication, creation of original work. It traditionally includes: theatre history, critical theory, performance studies, studies of plays, artists and theatrical artifacts, performance in historical contexts, dramaturgy and dance studies. Then scholarship of teaching and learning is where bridges are creatively built between the discipline and the student’s learning/understanding. Scholarship of engagement is where the emphasis is on the use of new knowledge in solving society’s problems, or in creating civically engaged citizens. Here there is application and practice. Examples of this kind of scholarship include: applying professional practice to production such as dramaturgy, professional service such as editing a journal or organizing a scholarly meeting, leadership of scholarly societies, organizing a young playwrights’ festival to achieve a measurable increase in the involvement of young people in the arts. Scholarship of integration is where new relationships among disciplines are discovered or created. It has to do with cross-, multi- and inter- disciplinary scholarship. Examples in theatre is; the application of cognitive theory by a theatre scholar to illuminate the learning of acting, a collaborative investigation by an education scholar and a theatre scholar of how theatrical models and methods might enhance

the teaching effectiveness of university professors etc (Scholarship for the Discipline of Theatre: Association for Theatre in Higher Education, 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10)

The Theory of Cultural Studies

Kellner cited in Obi avers that most forms of cultural studies, and most critical theories, have engaged various multicultural theories, to enrich their projects and researches. These they derived from the new critical and multicultural discourses that have emerged since the 1960s. Thus, transdisciplinary cultural studies draw on a disparate range of fields to theorize the complexity and contradictions of the multiple effects of a vast range of forms of media/culture/communications. Consequently, cultural studies operates with a transdisciplinary conception that draws on social theory, economics, politics, history, communication studies, literary and cultural theory, philosophy, and other theoretical discourses. What this means is that among other things cultural studies delineates how cultural artifacts articulate social ideologies, values, and representations of gender, race, and class, and how these phenomena are related to each other. Situating cultural texts in their social context thus involves tracing the articulations through which societies produce culture and how culture in turn shapes society through its influence on individuals and groups. There are indeed many traditions and models of cultural studies, of which feminist cultural studies is one. (Kellner 27-28 cited in Obi 25-27)

Cultural criticism and Feminist criticism; Cultural criticism is associated with formal cultural and literary scholarship, as well as other non-academic forms of criticism achieved through writing. In effect, cultural criticism is the practice of describing, interpreting, and evaluating culture (<http://www.slideshare.net/susiswo/cultural-criticism>). This means the concept of culture and its criticism invoke different things in human minds sociologically, anthropologically and scientifically, academically among others (Aliyu 14). Feminism has its origin in the struggle for women's right. It is cross cutting theory in contemporary scholarship and it is intertwined with the question of women. So, its criticism especially in literary circles confronts patriarchal values as it attempts to unveil the prejudices embedded in the appreciation of arts and cultural artifacts. It exposes how the linguistic medium promotes and transmits the values of male domination (Sotunsa 1, 2, 8)

Towards a review of Women Academe and Criticism of Nigerian Culture through Theatre Scholarship

To underscore how women in the academics have not relented in expanding knowledge about their experience through criticism of culture and culture of criticism Gayle and Coppelia referred to by Sotunsa averred that:

Feminist literary criticism is one branch of interdisciplinary enquiry which takes gender as a fundamental organizing category based on two premises; inequality of sexes is neither a biological nor a divine construct. Male perspectives assumed to be universal has dominated fields of knowledge. Hence feminist scholarship serves to correct these and restore female perspective by extending knowledge about women's experience and contributions to culture (Gayle and Coppelia 1-2 cited in Sotunsa 8)

Doofan and Alachi strongly agree that why it was necessary that the correction and restoration of female perspective be effected was because traditional African culture encourages patriarchy, which manifest in male dominance and female subjugation. In Nigeria, this contradicts chapter 11 (2a and 3a) of 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which states that every citizen shall have equal rights, obligation and opportunities under the law (192-193). With this Kafewo contends that man in the definition of culture is only used in generic term to denote humanity because women posses and create culture as well. As such culture is what invests all social institutions with dignity and stability. The term captured this when it was first used by the pioneer English Anthropologist Edward B. Tylor, in his book, *Primitive Culture*, published in 1871 as noted in our definition of culture by Tylor earlier (Kafewo 28). What Tylor's definition means is that both men and women can apply the knowledge of culture in any society they find themselves. To further validate this, Kafewo looked at culture from various perspectives: education and science, technologies and material production, aesthetics and the arts, cosmology and belief system and literature to arrive at the fact that; education and science involves knowledge, skills, ideas and perceptions learned in practice or abstract, formal or non-formal etc, aesthetics and the arts involve concepts of beauty and finesses; dance, music, drama, painting, sculpture, architecture, decoration, dressing etc while Literature is about Literary production in oral or written form, including calligraphy and pneumatic (Kafewo 28-29).

From the point of view of literature, dance, music, drama which theatre belongs, the efforts women make to stamp their own cultural authority is obvious in using Theatre scholarship in the University, as Tess Onwueme explained in an interview about what led her to dedicate her play *The Reign of Wazobia* to Anna Kay France and Kendall. She said it was because both of them are radical women scholars and professors that she met in the USA who teach and promote women drama. According to her, she stated that she met Anna Kay France in October, 1988 when Kay organized and hosted the first International Women Playwright's Conference in Buffalo, New York. Onwueme's play *The Desert Encroaches* was the play selected from among the six international plays to be showcased in the conference. Then in 1991, Kendall, was the Head of Department at Smith College, one of the most prestigious Universities for women in the USA, aside teaching Onwueme's plays in the Theatre Arts Department, invited her to give a major lecture and to let the students interact with her (Adeoti 48). This authenticates that women who write plays are into theatre scholarship, because the creation and production of performance work, central to the activities of many theatre academics, can be considered a form of scholarship. The Carnegie Foundation categorizes creative work within "scholarship of discovery." They write that scholarship of discovery "comes closest to what academics mean when they speak of research, although we intend that this type of scholarship also include the creative work of faculty in the literary, visual, and performing arts." ATHE accepts a given creative work, including playwriting, dramaturgy, design, acting, or directing, potentially as fitting into the kind of scholarship in which its performance fulfills guidelines, that depend on department and the university (Scholarship for the Discipline of Theatre: Association for Theatre in Higher Education 15)

In line with this, Dairo and Rasheed mentioned Female writers in Nigeria who engage this kind of theatre scholarship through other forms of writing and are also playwrights including Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh and Julie Okoh as those produced by NAWACS. They have grown as the voice of female writers (227). Okafor who observed that gender question in

recent times has taken the front stage in African literature and criticism as a result of some efforts of women he described as militant and prominent female writers and critics, where the same Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh and others as a theatre academician belong (138). The efforts of Utoh-Ezeajugh with playwriting are highlighted through a study of her two plays; *Our Wives Have Gone Mad Again* and *Nneora: An African Doll's House*, where the analyses of female scholar critics who agree with Utoh-Ezeajugh's views on the play were highlighted (138). Indeed, the analyses of these female scholar critics who agree with Utoh-Ezeajugh's views make them theatre scholar critic who Smiley describes as those who carefully studies dramas and explains their structural or textural natures, and their writings appear in professional journals, in books, and in orally presented papers. The theorist stands at the greatest distance from the individual play but his or her influence is heavy on the playwright as he or she writes either retrospectively and individually. Most times he or she could address himself or herself to the future as he or she writes deductively, and some attack both past and present (Smiley 237).

Molemodile points out that these emerging female voices have followed the pace set by Zulu Sofola, the first published Nigerian female dramatist and a university scholar whose theatrical works probed, criticized and analyzed the position of Nigerian women and their concern with regard to their own living and dynamic culture. Sofola, through these educated women on what they were, what they are, and what they should aspire to be. This informed why her works focused on the traditional setting, contemporary times and today's female writers; especially theatre scholars are emulating her in their efforts to criticize culture (66). This is in tandem with UNESCO's definition of culture as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or a social group and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs (Williams 14)

Salami-Agunloye, recognized with this definition and also confirmed Sofola's matriarch figure and role for the female theatre scholars and writers in Nigeria, asserted that, her criticism of culture lies in Sofola's creativity as demonstrated in her dramaturgy, which with it has a remarkable difference. And for many years, Sofola was the only female playwright but subsequently she was followed by Tess Onweme (1983), Stella Oyedepo (1982), then Catherine Acholonu (1985), Irene Salami-Agunloye (1986), Julie Okoh (1988), Folashade Ogunrinde (1990), Chinyere Okafor (1996), Onyekachukwu Onyekuba (1990), Tracie Utoh Ezeajugh (1999), Charity Angya (2000), Folake Ogunleye (2002), Flora Nwapa (1993) is known to have published three plays shortly before her home calling in 1993, Anuli Ausbeth-Ajagu (2003), Rosemary Asen (2005), Bose Tsevende (2006), Bunmi Obasa Julius Adeoye (2007), Uduak Akpabio (2009), Zainabu Jallo (2009) etc in recent years these women writers made their creativity a relevant aspect of dramatic theory and criticism and as such can no longer be pushed or left unacknowledged (123). Asen avers that these women are involved in literary productions that serve as a forum for women's study, as they provide information about women's culture that is different from men. In their critical endeavours, they have provided criticisms that reflect female gender to deconstruct masculine ideology, referred to as phallic criticism (172).

According to the Lacanian psychoanalytic theory, the phallus is the primary signifier in the symbolic order of language, which organizes human experience. This is corollary to the practice of in some religious system in which the phallus is venerated as symbolizing power

in nature. What this means is that women lost out completely in the scheme of things when the culture of writing was introduced and reserved for the male (Akachi-Ezeigbo 80). So:

Women writers are resolved to challenge and erase the stereotypical presentation of women and in its place present women who are resilient. Women playwrights have mastered the language and words used against them. Writers like Tess Onwueme, Chinyere Okafor, Irene Salami-Agunloye, Julie Okoh, Charity Angya, Tracie Utoh-Ezeajugh and Stella Oyedepo construct new, assertive femininity, which they endow with positive power. In doing this, the female writers now try to dismantle the gender codes inscribed in the male tradition. They resort to rewriting negative portrayals and creatively express their disapproval and correct the misrepresentations of women. With this, women have invaded the literary space dominated by men as writers and critics; they have brought new angles and insight into drama (Salami-Agunloye 121)

Sotunsa cited Kolawole to observe that with this, the search for a meeting point between theoretical gender analysis and practice continues to animate scholarship in Nigeria (Kolawole 1 cited in Sotunsa128). What can uphold this is adding value and maintaining good quality, which are all about appreciation. It is this nature of appreciation Ekwueme describes as meaning: to value, to regard, to recognize, the good quality in something or somebody. It is also the ability to judge something rightly in order to understand and enjoy same. So, it is a process of exhibiting and/or expressing one's feelings, responses and values for an art piece (aural, movement or visual) which manifests as a result of having a right attitude towards a particular art, some knowledge of concepts, skills, values, medium and process of performance, language used in the art, the cultural origin of art, and the function of art in the lives of the people and the community. In other words, in appreciating a piece of art work like music, drama or dance the strengths and the weaknesses are discussed; the good qualities are recognized (Ekwueme10). This means that women must appreciate and recognize the strengths and good qualities of women in the works written by women.

The Input of Mabel Ewrierhoma in Criticism of Nigerian Culture as a Woman using Theatre Scholarship

The story of Mabel is not in her meteoric rise but her strong presence in theatre scholarship. She will most likely be found at every major conference and workshops representing the female voice. Many have started seeing her as taking up the mantle left by the late Professor Zulu Sofola. She may not be the only one but her voice remains consistent and resonant. Her two papers at the conference of Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists (SONTA) were gender related and one of them had to do with Zulu Sofola and her cultural concerns, which Mabel extends (“An Emerging Voice of the theatre,” an interview in *The Comet* with Olayiwola Adeniji, Friday July, 1999, 28)

The above underscores Ewrierhoma's input in criticism of Nigerian culture as a woman using theatre scholarship. With the view that the gender term, feminism originates from the West, Ewrierhoma has always believed that to some extent it is alien to the African

context, which Nigeria is inclusive. This informs why in her critical studies in most scholarly presentations and publications on gender issues, she makes attempts to trace the evolution of the concept, with the assertion that it has undergone through different interpretations by diverse groups and womanism was the one that can relate to African experience because it is purely cultural in context. ("An Emerging Voice of the theatre," an interview in *The Comet* with Olayiwola Adeniji, Friday July, 1999, 28). Womanism being a term coined by the African-American poet, essayist, novelist and activist, Alice Walker, is rooted in black woman's history in racial gender oppression, and she took the term from the southern black folk expression of mothers to female children "you acting womanish." To her womanish means mature, responsible, courageous behaviour of adult females as opposed to frivolous behaviour of girlish females. It presents a vision of women and men of different colours coexisting the way flowers do in a garden yet retain their black cultural distinctiveness and integrity. Also, it provides avenue to foster strong relationship between black women and men, hence it is a theory that highlights peculiar gender issues in Africa and African in the Diaspora (Asen 173)

For Evwierhoma, to a large extent, sometimes the uncomplimentary portrayal of women in the theatre cannot be divorced from the influx of foreign culture, because at the time Africans started writing, most of them have the dreamlike imagination of the African woman. Meanwhile, Africa was seen as a woman who cared for her children, but with time, literature of the colonial times gradually began to portray women from the European perspective. As a result of this, those warlike heroines who actualized themselves by helping to prevent the degeneration of the society politically, economically, and socially were no longer seen or talked about ("An Emerging Voice of the theatre," an interview in *The Comet* with Olayiwola Adeniji, Friday July, 1999, 28)

Talking about these women and other emerging women voices have dominated Evwierhoma's theatre scholarship, lectures and practice. She has used this to make input in criticism of culture in addition to carving culture of criticism noted at the level of African theatre practice. Salami-Agunloye in her introduction to the book *African Women: Drama and Performance*, which she edited, listed some critical works on African theatre in which Evwierhoma's two critical books are mentioned. The books mentioned are Llyod Brown's *Women writers in Africa*, Juliana Nfah-Abbenyi's *Gender in African Women's Writing*, Kenneth Little's *The Sociology of Urban Women's Image in African Literature*, Florence Straton's *Contemporary African Literature and Politics of Gender*, Uko Iniobong's *Gender and Identity in the works of Tess Osonye Onwueme*, *Feminism in Literature* by Helen Chukwuma (ed), *Writing African Women* by Stephanie Newell (ed), *New Women's Writing in African Literature (24)* by Ernest Emenyonu (ed), *Ngambika* by Carol Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves, *Nigerian Women Writers* by Henrieta Otokunefor and Obiageli Nwodo, *Women in African Literature Today 15* by Eldred Jones, Eustace Palmer and Marjorie Jones, *Nigerian Feminist Theatre* by Mabel Torbrise, *Female Empowerment and Dramatic Creativity in Nigeria* by Mabel Evwierhoma, *Women's Spaces, Women's Vision (Politics, Poetics, and Resistance in African Women Drama)* by Katiwiwa Mule (xvi).

It is important to note that Mabel Torbrise is the same Mabel Evwierhoma. She is nee Torbrise. It is worthy of note that in the above works listed Evwierhoma's two works are purely on drama and theatre. In both books, Evwierhoma underscored how women react to dramatic creativity by means of critical engagement on the cultures presented in the text and

context, which negatively, adversely, harmfully, and unfavourably affect them. In *Nigerian Feminist Theatre: Essays on Female Axes in Contemporary Nigerian Drama*, Tobrise collected, her essays previously written for presentation sat conferences or as chapters in books spanning for the period of eight years of teaching and researching in women centred drama. The 74-page book of seven chapters in foregrounding an alternative system of approaching women-centred discourse, generated understanding of women-centred aesthetics in dramatic creativity by theatre practitioners and scholars in Nigerian theatre (Tobrise iv). Evwierhoima in *Female Empowerment and Dramatic Creativity in Nigeria*, used six chapters to do an appraisal on women related ideologies with critical attention of how they affect culture and also how culture affect them. She did an extensive study of thirteen of Tess Onwueme's plays to show how committed women are in women on issues that affect them in Nigerian culture through theatre scholarship in their academic enclave.

Indeed, her scholarly posture has journals and other books, and among her book-length studies are *Essays and Concepts on Society and Culture* (2004), *Issues in Gender, Drama and Culture* (2002), with Gbemisola Adeoti, she also co-edited for Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), the proceedings of the colloquium in honour of the 26th anniversary of Wole Soyinka's Nobel prize investiture, *After the Nobel Prize: Reflections on African Literature, Governance and Development* (2006). Indeed, she has carved a niche for herself as one of the most enterprising dramatic critics in Nigeria with her research interests and successes in the area of feminist drama and socio-political and cultural imperatives of contemporary gender studies (Onyerionwu 582)

Evwierhoima's article in *African Women: Drama and Performance*, titled "The Rising Profile of Irene Salami Isoken and New Nigerian Women Centred Drama", captures the profile of Salami-Agunloye as a Nigerian female academic and dramatist rising on the horizon of Nigerian drama, where she has written five full length plays and nine collections of short plays. In fact one of her plays, *Abigirls*, was commissioned for the first International Conference of the National Association of Women Academics (NAWACS) in 1998. Meanwhile, to bring out the academic depth and cultural predilection of this article, Evwierhoima mentioned the remarks of University scholars who commented on the theatre scholarship qualities of Salami-Agunloye. Prof. Steve Oga Abah, a theatre scholar from Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, descried Salami-Agunloye in Ewierhoima essay as a senior academic who has track record of good work that is useful in contributing to the development of scholarly activities in the University. She is one playwright who is in the process of defining a new interpretation and engaging in interrogation of the status of women in society. Similarly Prof John Illah of the University of Jos noted that Salami's profile as an emergent second generation post-war Nigerian dramatist is that of an ideologically committed artist drawing inspiration from the recurring folklore of women in full view, garnered from direct participatory experience with women on the farms, market and academia (Evwierhoma 30).

In an article, "Gender-Specific Proverbs in Ola Rotimi's Plays: An Interpretative Analysis," she examined gender-based proverbs in Rotimi's Plays with reference to *Kurunmi* and *Ovoranmwun Nogbaisi* to determine their cultural implication as they affect both patriarchal and matriarchal leanings. She observed that a lot gender toned proverbs are direct and interactive, because African proverbs are gender-specific and most of them show the relationship between the sexes, they prove the sexist learning of most societies. (93). Furthermore, Evwierhoma also represented the opinions of great theatre scholars like Prof

Dapo Adelugba about Salami-Agunloye's plays; *Emotan* has come at an auspicious time in Nigeria (indeed Africa's) development; at a time when we are celebrating the strength of women as equal partners in building a new Nigeria and a valiant female. Salami's *Emotan* thus offers its readers and audiences, a new lesson (Evwierhoma 32). Salami-Agunloye puts the views of Evwierhoma thus:

In assessing the works of Irene Salami (-Agunloye) as a key player in new Nigerian women-centered drama, Mabel Evwierhoma says that Salami-Agunloye's voice can no longer be muted in an attempt to make contemporary the issues highlighting or helming women as Evwierhoma analyses the characters in her plays and concludes that male hegemony can only last as far as women permit it (xv)

To show that one-way women theatre scholars should not to permit the male hegemony to persist, Evwierhoma asserted that even in the midst of men, women must involve themselves in their chosen area of scholarship. Why it was necessary was because where women are involved there is some level of silence. There are some latent, peculiar issues that people do not acknowledge where women are concerned. Evwierhoma observed the peculiar problems women have in terms of when activities in the academic circles involve traveling out and other academic assignments, women are confronted with a conflict between domestic and professional callings. Nevertheless, Evwierhoma carries on with the academic activities like supervision of doctoral thesis and masters project in theatre arts. In addition to these, she engages in teaching in which she has taught in the University of Ibadan (Onyerionwu, 582, 589).

Also, at the moment, Evwierhoma is a Resource Person at the National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) Training School, Abuja Study Centre, where she teaches the students of Post Graduate Diploma in Cultural Administration (PGDCA), the course Culture and Gender Studies (PDCA 718). The course examines the role of culture in gender construction and gender politics. It also considers various concepts and notions of gender for the development of society and their implications (NICO Brochure for Course: Description of Courses 11). Mrs. Jane Anigala, the class Governor of NICO Training School, Abuja Study Centre 2013/2014 set in an interview said theatrical traits are obvious in Prof. Evwierhoma when she teaches Culture and Gender Studies to the PDCA students. This is because; "she cites examples from the theatre though she is so versatile in accommodating other areas of life as they affect gender. Most times in the class, we are meant to act scenes from plays that dramatize gender issues" (Nwagbo Obi, interview on Evwierhoma, Culture and Gender with Jane Anigala in NICO Training School, Abuja Study Centre, 5th May, 2015).

Mrs. Francisca Okoro, a PDCA student corroborated Anigala's views saying: "Indeed, there is that mannerism of theatre scholar in her teaching style. Her gesticulations when she is teaching are really dramatic. The way she critically elaborates issues to the understanding with examples from Nigerian culture is unique. Indeed, we appreciate her style of teaching. It is really theatrical" (Nwagbo Obi, interview on Evwierhoma, Culture and Gender with Francisca Okoro in NICO Training School, Abuja Study Centre, 5th May, 2015). Indeed, what the students said applies to scholarship of teaching and learning which involves works or exercise that deepen people's understanding of teaching and learning in the

discipline, or sharpen focus on student's learning. The scholarly teacher, therefore, is a self-reflective teacher who identifies a problem related to teaching and learning in addition to researching potential solutions and trying them out (Scholarship for the Discipline of Theatre: Association for Theatre in Higher Education 9, 10)

Conclusion

We have attempted to examine women in the academia and their efforts in criticizing culture with a focus on how Mabel Ewrierhoma is involved through theatre scholarship. The efforts of the women are obvious both in creative and critical writing. They have created strong voices with militant postures in their views. However, for this to be sustained, the women must deter all odds that debar them from partaking in various writing, scholarly and university engagements. With this, such lamentable situation over women's background and paucity of critical works on women's creativity and theatre will be addressed. It is recommended that emerging women scholars should study the creative works of fellow women.

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