

Masculinity: The Male in the Hands of Female Writers a Study of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*

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Abstract— Masculinity is a set of qualities, characteristics and roles generally considered typical of, or appropriate to a man. This research investigated and analyzed how a Nigerian female novelist depicts masculinity in her selected novel. This is with a view to appraising the representations of different aspects of masculinity, particularly in terms of the sexist notions of power, sexuality, emotion and poverty. Feminism and Masculinism are used as the theoretical frameworks due to their relevance to the interpretation of the selected text. The Nigerian novel purposively selected is AkachiAdimora-Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*. The contours of manliness take on an intriguing stereotypical and sexist complexity in the selected novel, as they are replete with stereotypical sexist virtues and rigidly differentiated roles ascribed to a man, including assertiveness, strength, sexuality, authority, virility, possessiveness, protectiveness, and insensitivity. The forms of masculinity that recur in the novel include hegemonic, dependent, ambivalent, collapsed and liberated. Abazu is "collapsed", while Itheme is "ambivalent". The male characters have their individual masculine idiosyncrasies, and the female characters have their distinguishing own gender roles. The complexities of male roles therefore confirm the pluralistic and slippery nature of masculinity.

Keywords— Masculinity, Nigerian novel, female writer, male characters, gender roles.

I. INTRODUCTION

The study of masculinity in literary studies is no longer new as even other areas of gender studies such as emasculation is now being studied by literary scholars. There is no gain say that Africa is a patriarchal society and that gender differences are still evident despite the development and advancement that has come to Africa. Scholars have since established that masculinity is a study that deals with the study of male and what is considered acceptable male characteristics and attributes. Masculinity is a

The Last of the Strong Ones is a historical novel which tries to reenact the history of the traditional African society by looking at conflicts between the people of Umuga and the white colonialists from the point of view of a female author. Newell¹ (2008) describes AkachiAdimora-Ezeigbo as an academic researcher and a prolific writer who rewrites history to include a female presence (89). Ezeigbo begins with a prologue which is also a flashback at the early days of Umuga during the invasion by the colonialists. The narrator flashes her mind back at the advent of the colonialists as she tells us how she urged her people on the need to document the life history of prominent daughters of Umuga as it was of the view that their history and that of Umuga is likely to be misrepresented or distorted by Europeans who had found their way into their midst. To achieve this, and to preserve the history and tradition of the people which is about to be distorted, twenty women and sixty men are chosen to document the history and experiences of the people.

In reading this text from a masculine point of view however, the concern is not to look at history but the representation of male characters by a female author who has created strong female characters. The four major female characters are women of high repute, women created with a will and zeal to excel irrespective of whether they have male companions or not.

In the text, a total of sixty-four (64) male characters are created and almost all of these characters have some form of identity of their own. The male characters that played vital roles in the life of the four main actors of Umuada² (the Oluada³), formed the focal point of the study. Other

¹Newell, Stephanie. *The Past in the Present: Adimora-Ezeigbo's Woman-Centred Frameworks in The Fiction of AkachiAdimora-Ezeigbo*. Lagos: African Cultural Institute, 2008.

² Association of daughters (nwada is the singular form)

³Top women representatives chosen from the four villages of Umuga. They were the voice of the women.

male characters created were generally viewed from the lens of masculinity as contained in the table below.

Table.1: Male characters in *The Last of the Strong Ones*

S/N0.	NAME	DESCRIPTION	MASCULINE TYPE
1	Obiatu	The handsome husband of Ejimnaka, a strong figure of a man and a good example of what a husband should be.	Strong, exemplary leader (12), industrious, hardworking (29-30), romantic (31), confidant (34), fearless, committed, skilled (30), gentle (35), analytical and organised (35).
2	Okwara	One of the corrupt warrant Chiefs	Oppressive, influential (8), rich (13), greedy (16)
3	Dim	One of the deposed warrant Chiefs, brother to Ejimnaka	Oppressive, exploitative (8-9), greedy (16)
4	Ozigbo	One of the deposed warrant Chiefs	Oppressive, exploitative (8-9), greedy (16)
5	Uzuegbu	One of the deposed warrant Chiefs	Oppressive, exploitative (8-9), greedy (16)
6	Onyirioha	One of the deposed warrant Chiefs	Oppressive, exploitative (8-9), greedy (16)
7	Ezeukwu	The rich and influential father of Ejimnaka	Strong, difficult, wealthy, strong will (22)
8	Abazu	A titled chief and member of Obuofu.	Sharp mind (13),
9	Okoroji	One of the youngest Obuofu titled chiefs.	Loyal, analytical (13), fearless
10	Cheke	A titled chief and member of Obuofu whose younger brother is married to Onyekozuru's second daughter	Analytical, wise, fearless (14)
11	Nwokike	A dark-skinned, wiry body, Obuofu titled chief.	Thoughtful, analytical, fearless (14)
12	Ofoka	The soft-spoken titled chief and member of Obuofu	Wise, influential, brave, analytical (14-5)
13	Nnaji	A man of few words, but full of action. He is a titled member of Obuofu	Independent, trustworthy, intelligent, secretive, fearless (15)
14	Durunnu	The good-looking and gallant master-builder. Member of Obuofu. Called a ladies' man by the whole town	Handsome, skilled (15), fearless.
15	Okonta	A short and muscular middle age member of Obuofu who has two titles	Strong, powerful, rich (15), fearless warrior (16)
16	Alagbogu	A wealthy titled chief, Ejimnaka's first husband.	Strong, confident, wealthy, titled chief, (25), arrogant, fearless (24), oppressive, dictatorial (25)
17	Nweke	A member of Obuofu very dedicated to the cause of the land.	Patriotic (16)
18	Ezeogu	He was first among those who suggested that Kosiri should be chased out of the land.	Kind, good-natured, fearless (16)
19	Lotom	The District Officer	Exploitative, oppressive, authoritative (17)
20	Gadina	The Resident	Exploitative, oppressive, authoritative (17)
21	Ezeukwu	The father of Ejimnaka, rich in land; one of the largest land owners in Umuga	Strong, fearless, strong-will (22)
22	Nnanna	The young man who had a fight with Ejimnaka by dealing her a hard blow or two below her chest (31)	Bully, powerful, sexual (31)
23	Umeozo	The elderly husband of Onyekozuru. One of the largest land owners in Umuga (43-4)	Wealthy, diligent, dutiful, sociable, sexually active (44)
24	Obidinnu	One of the largest land owners in Umuga.	Wealthy, hardworking, influential (44)
25	Ezekwesiri	One of the largest land owners in Umuga.	Wealthy, hardworking, influential (44)
26	Udoye	The eldest son of Umeozo.	
27	Udumaga	Had plenty of lands to himself (44)	Hardworking, rich, sexually active (48)

28	Nwafo	Umeozo's relation, a friend to Obiatu.	Hard working, intelligent (53)
29	Egwuagu	The man who unjustly drove his wife away and threw her belongings in the courtyard (59)	Violent, harsh (59)
30	Ezeigwe	Father of Onyekozuru, the master black smith whose skill baffled even the spirits (60)	Skilled (60), open minded (42), hardworking yet poor (43).
31	Orizu	The letter writer who misrepresented the people of Umuga (64)	Learned, deceitful (64), evil/wicked (65)
32	Ezeala	A titled chief and member of Obufo	Brave, strong (68)
33	Nlebedum	The grandfather of Chieme. A great warrior and farmer (81)	Hard working, brave, fearless, strong, influential (81).
34	Okezie	Younger brother to Chieme's father (77)	Authoritative (77), irresponsible, lazy, hard-drinking, pleasure-loving (81).
35	Onuoha	A relation of Okorie's	Brave, analytical (78)
36	Odum	The first son of Onuoha. One of those that supported Chieme's mother (Mgbeke) against Okorie, her husband (78)	Brave, analytical, courageous (78)
37	Iwuchukwu	Chieme's husband, an only son of his parents.	Supportive, analytical, reasonable, hardworking, patient (84-5)
38	Osondu	Chieme's eldest brother (81)	Brave, courageous, daring, supportive, hardworking (81)
39	Okorie	Chieme's father	Poor, authoritative, irresponsible, lazy (78, 81).
40	Onwukwe	Chieme's uncle and Priest of Idemmiri (91)	Analytical, wise, kind, patient (92-3)
41	A man at Umukokwa	The rich man who lost his first wife at whose burial Chieme first performed alone (4-5)	Wealthy, hardworking, influential (95)
42	Ngonadi	The butcher who joined Kosiri's religion	No description whatsoever.
43	Abara	The man manacled by the diseases of the scrotum (Ibi) that also joined the Christian religion (100)	Hard working, friendly, open minded, sickly (100-1)
44	Alakuku	The tallest man in Umuga; when he walks, he is like a bamboo swayed by the wind (101)	Tall, thin, without strength (101)
45	Chibuka's father	A leader of the masquerade cult that receives ancestral spirits at home. Had only one wife (104)	Poor, skilled, wise, spiritual, a leader, sexually active (104)
46	Igwe Anoka	The wealthy Igwe of Agbaja who Chibuka stayed in his compound	Wealthy, influential, supportive, nice, hardworking, kind, strong, generous, liberal yet strict (104-5)
47	Igwe Anoka's third son	Eyiuche's husband and third son of Igwe Anoka	Rich, hardworking, kind (105)
48	Iheme	Husband of Chibuka, who was quiet and rarely smiles (110)	Hard working, quiet, rich, unpleasant (110), reticent, solemn, difficult (111), secretive, good appetite, self-sufficient (112), violent (113), miserly (114), sexually active (116).
49	Nnatu	Iheme's first son, and horn-blower for the Igirigi dance group – the most popular in Umuga (117, 119)	Bold, courageous (117), pleasant, humorous, kind, hardworking, industrious, humble (118).

50	Osita	Iheme's second son.	Aggressive, spiteful (118), violent (119).
51	Ezeobi	The sixth and youngest son of Iheme (121)	Helpful, kind (121)
52	Dibia from Agbaja	The Dibia taking care of Iheme during his ill health	Spiritual, skilled (121)
53	Dibia from Umuga	The other Dibia taking care of Iheme during his ill health	Spiritual, skilled (121)
54	Ibeto	The father of Abazu.	No description whatsoever
55	Obi Okongwu	Obiatu's close friend in Agbaja.	Trustworthy, fearless, helpful (128)
56	Obinna	One of Ejimnaka's sons that took her to the hospital of the Kosiri (134)	Strong, agile (134)
57	Nwako	Another of Ejimnaka's sons that took her to the hospital of the Kosiri (134)	Strong, agile (134)
58	The School Teacher	A native of Onucha that showed the Kosiri round the destroyed school premises (143)	Skilled, learned (143)
59	The Church Teacher	A native of Ofesi that equally showed the Kosiri round the destroyed school premises (143)	Skilled, learned (143)
60	Obidigbo	The builder that had converted and joined Kosiri's religion.	Brave, skilled, hardworking (151)
61	The Kosiri	The white man that came to inspect the destroyed school property (143)	Warrior, fearless, fierce, impatient (143)
62	The Kosiri 2	The more simply dressed Kosiri that was the leader (143)	Fearless, leader, authoritative (143)
63	Captain Gunn	The Commander of the Kosiri's government in Umuga.	Commander of other men
64	Ezechukwu	A notable son of the land who was sent secretly to Awka only never to return.	Brave, intelligent, hardworking (165)

Obiatu: The Good Example of a Husband

The first male character to be x-rayed is Obiatu, the husband of Ejimnaka and the leader of the Obufo.⁴ He is a great man and in all ramifications successful. The first description of him is on page 12

A strong figure of a man, with the shade of light skin that had a reddish tinge, Obiatu was very attractive, especially to women.... He was a fine specimen of manhood and an exemplary leader. Umuga was fortunate to have a man like him as one of its voices. Though middle-aged, he was still in good fettle – sporting a firm and robust body. His muscles were taut and rippling almost like those of a youth (12).

This description already says it all for Obiatu: he is young, successful, a titled chief and leader, good looking and also loved by all. The first day Ejimnaka set eyes on him was the same day she fell in love and desired to have him for she “had seen all of him”(26). This also confirms that Obiatu is endowed beyond words, thus sexually appealing.

... I saw a young man tapping wine.... He did not see me, but I saw all of him and was struck silent. For a long time I was transfixed with astonishment and admiration. His skin had a reddish ochre-coloured tinge...his well-formed body was naked... (26).

Ejimnaka confirmed she could not sleep that night as what she saw appealed to her and she desired to have him at all cost (27). Even his laughter mannerism had a great effect on Ejimnaka.

Obiatu also has several talents: he is a good wine tapper (26), a farmer (29), a wood carver (30), a good warrior and he set up the guild of craftsmen (36). He is said to excel in all. He is a very romantic character who is not shy to express his views, who also usually has a good laugh.

Our evening meal over, he pulled me up and onto his lap.... He was stroking me all over in the manner of the *uri*⁵ patterns that adorned my skin (31).

⁴Inner council committee of Umuga

⁵A plant whose fruit juice is used to adorn the body: the juice is also used in the visual arts like painting.

He is a man with a large appetite and who is good at keeping secrets (pp. 34, 35, 39). His marriage to Ejimnaka is a good example for people to follow in Umuga. With this couple, peace and love always radiate around them:

We watched them and marveled at their close relationship. Their marriage was unique in Umuga. Who did not know it? People would say: “if you want to know how good marriage works or tastes, go to the home of Obiatu and Ejimnaka.” (146-7)

The only form of challenge encountered by the couple in the text was the inability to have a male child. Obiatu however refused to bow to cultural and societal pressure to marry a second wife.

In every area of life, Obiatu can be said to have excelled considerably well. He is a man not quick to anger, and therefore, there is not a single scene of wife beating and battering in Obiatu’s household, rather there are scenes of laughter, love and forgiveness.

Alagbogu: A Valiant Male

Alagbogu, Ejimnaka’s first husband was Ezeukwu’s childhood friend, and he is old enough to be Ejimnaka’s father. He is a strong man and often difficult to deal with especially with Ejimnaka, who is quite free spirited in her ways. His exploits in the war between Umuga and Umuihite contributed to his fame. He is a man that was domineering in all his ways and expected Ejimnaka to come back to him after she left. He is a man very sure of himself. Ejimnaka was his fifth wife, thus he is a very successful man, a hegemonic male that believes in traditional masculinity. He was described as an old jackal meant to devour Ejimnaka (24). As strong free-spirited as Ejimnaka was, Alagbogu was able to curtail her excesses, thus the reason for the collapse of their marriage. He is a man not prone to being at a woman’s beck and call.

...expected Alagbogu to come with his relations and a keg of palm wine to take me back in accordance with our tradition. But Alagbogu did not budge. Word came that he was telling his friends he had no intention to come for me. He was confident I would crawl back to him. (25)

The author makes this character to be a no-compromising, unbending and thus portraying what a cultural masculine man is.

Ezeukwu: The Strong

This character is created to be a strong character, yet it is said that his daughter Ejimnaka can easily influence him, being his favourite child. It can be considered strange that a female child, despite being the only female child of that

wife, who has two sons (23), will be the favourite child in Igbo culture, thus confirming the author’s intention of intentionally creating a weak male character. He is described as a strong man, who is often difficult to deal with, yet Ejimnaka has a way of getting him do her dictates.

Ejimnaka goes ahead and describes him in these words:

... I hardly had problems having my own way with him. He doted upon me and I did not scruple to take advantage of his great affection. He was a strong man and often difficult to deal with; but his will **would always melt (emphasis mine)** like jelled palm oil in the heat of my entreaties. Ezeukwu, the one who would not allow wine to go to his head even if he drank kegs and kegs of it; and yet his teetotal minion would become intoxicated. He was like *apiti*, the clay-like substance, which I could mould into any shape with my bare hands (22).

This character is an intentional creation of the author just to give Ejimnaka that freedom, strength and strong-will, and in the process his masculine qualities contradict with what Ejimnaka is able to do with him. Ejimnaka further goes on to confirm that his wives practically eat out of his hands, therefore confirming his hegemonic masculine traits, yet, he eats out of hers:

I hated being any man’s appendage. I could not entertain having to eat out of any man’s hand or being under his heel all my life, as my mother and my father’s other wives had been to Ezeukwu (22).

The psychology of the author comes into focus here, as she is all out to create a weak male character just to achieve her aim of empowering the female characters and making some of them dominate the male and in the process, challenging cultural norms. This is however not to say that such characters do not exist in reality. Male characters can have female children as their favourite, but that is not to say that the female child will have a better placement when it comes to assets or property of the father.

Ezeigwe: The Hard-working Father of Onyekozuru

Ezeigwe is depicted as a not very successful man when compared to some of his peers, yet he is a man who is able to cater for the needs of his household: ‘though we had enough food at home, my father was not well-to-do. He had no real property especially land and livestock’ (44). He is a blacksmith by profession, though also into farming: ‘My father was a blacksmith, but he did not make enough from it. So he farmed and tended crops when he was not at the forge’ (43). He has three wives, several children, he is hard-working and brought up his children by educating them on

the roles culture and society expects of them as both male and female.

I used to enjoy going to talk to him there and help him blow the fire. But he discouraged me and put me off with the words, ‘Onyekazu, this is not a woman’s work. Go back to your mother’s hut’. My brothers and my father’s sons were allowed to stay on to learn as long as they wished (43).

He is a man who loves his food, thus his preference for Onyekozuru’s mother’s cooking, for she is a great cook (42). He also arranges the marriage of Onyekozuru to Umeoze without consulting her or her mother. It is said to be the exclusive domain of the male to determine who his daughters marry without their questioning it. Thus, in summary, he can be termed a hyper male as regards all other aspects besides wealth acquisition.

Umeozo: The Arrogant

Umeozo was an elderly man when he married Onyekozuru (43), a wealthy man who had given Ezeigwe a large piece of farm land, which he had cultivated for years. After the marriage, he released the land to Ezeigwe for keeps: ‘indeed, he gave away that piece of land to my father, after our marriage (44). He is said to have ‘a robust appetite and was still quite active’ (44). He is a very hard-working man even at that age of his life and equally takes out time to socialise with friends: ‘He farmed diligently and dutifully and had booze of palm wine with his friends every Nkwo market day’ (44). He treasures the family unit, thus takes out time to play with his children on a daily basis as ‘he enjoyed to have them crawl over him as he sat in his obi’ (45). He is kind-hearted.

He is a very wealthy man, though he maintains a low profile. He is successful in every word:

Umeozo had large hectares of land. He was one of the largest landowners in Umuga. He was as rich as men like Ezeukwu, Obidinnu and Ezekwesiri, though not as well known as they were. His two sons had plenty of land to themselves...Umeozo set aside plots of land for my two sons. (44-5)

He is a man who plans ahead of events, and encourages his wives to be imaginative and hard-working, thus at his death his wives had no reason to fret or suffer. He indeed has excellent masculine qualities. And like all traditional men of his time, he does not go out with his wives, and if they go out together, the wife will walk a few paces ahead of him as culture permits:

My husband did not take me out. The only times we went on an outing together or were in company of each other were during funeral ceremonies or during

farm work. If we were out for a funeral, I would carry a keg of palm wine on my head and he would walk with dignity, a few paces behind me. We never walked even once beside each other or held hands... (46).

He indeed is a traditional masculine conformist.

Abazu: The Sterile Man

This is a titled chief and one of the leaders of the land. He is ‘a man who is known for his lateness to meetings. He has a sharp mind, though, and often gave useful advice when the need arose’ (13). He is a noble man, one that the people respected and who represented extended family at meetings. He is considered very successful

He is an important man in Umuga today. Even then he was a rich man and had some qualities that our people respect in a man. He became a titled man too at an age most men still struggle to find their feet. He was always chosen to represent the extended family in matters relating to the settlement of quarrels, land dispute and divorce (50).

Despite all of these qualities, it was established that he was sterile and could not father a child of his own, thus the reason he married a slave woman. This information was kept secret until his verbal attack on Onyekozuru, who could not stomach the insults, thus spill the beans by letting out a secret of about thirty years.

He said when he was a boy he had a severe attack of mumps which later left him sterile. The dibia who treated him had told his parents he could never fertilize a woman (51).

I did not tell the world you are an empty shell. You are only a big drum that is hollow inside. Yet you have the temerity to talk when men talk. You are not a man... you are not a man. Your strength displays itself only in appearance; in reality it is like air. It is as hollow as the inside of a bamboo (67).

As stated earlier, Virility is an important indicator of masculinity and it must be shown not just through marriage to a female partner, but also through the ability of the male to impregnate the latter. With this revelation, Abazu’s sterility puts his masculinity to question. He loses all the initial respect in his society, as merely possessing male genitalia does not accord privileges; rather, it is the dividends from such possession that does. When this long kept secret was thrown in the open, he attacks Onyekozuru and eventually commits the abominable act of suicide, as he could not imagine the shame of being termed a female-male will bring to him. It is his arrogance and the thought of relinquishing his masculine status in society that leads him to suicide. Sterility, it is seen, is enough to strip a man of all

his cultural and societal privileges in a traditional society unlike in the civilised society when it is not of any major consequence.

A man's or woman's reputation could fizzle out in a moment like soap bubbles when a serious crime such as murder, theft or treachery was committed. Umuga tradition did not spare criminals. The current crime was one of self-worth, but that did not make it any less destructive of a reputation. Impotence or sterility in a man brought humiliation and loss of self-esteem among our people. We feared for Abazu- that man of strong passion who enjoyed basking in the people's praise like a python in the warmth of morning sunlight (69).

The Unsuccessful Okorie, Father of Chieme

Okorie is father to Chieme, an unsuccessful man whose name the daughter refused to use but prefers to be called the daughter of Nlebedum and Nnuola (her grandparents) due to his failure in life. He is a typical example of a failed male who can neither provide for his family nor protect them. The wife is left with the responsibility of working and catering for the family:

My mother was a busy woman. She spent much of her time working on the farm (in the planting and harvesting seasons); buying and selling in the local market...What was left of her time was devoted to caring for father and us – her six children (75).

He is a supposed 'industrious'⁶ man who abandons the family most of the year working as a sawyer in Igeduland, a job that did not fetch much money as he is unable to support the family and the responsibility is left to his wife. Despite all of his weakness, he still wants to be respected by his wife as he laments from time to time:

I am the one that married you and brought you into this house...I am your husband and you must not forget that. I am the one to make all the decisions in this house. You are growing wings. Your duty is to obey (77).

This is a failed male who does not earn respect but seeks it. This is a classical example of a failed man. Though he expresses anger by shouting on his wife oftentimes, he ends up being at her mercy. As a result of his failure, Chieme says:

⁶His life style does not depict he is industrious as he is poor and unable to tend and cater for his household. Rather, he gets his hand cut while working at the saw mill.

'I was not going to be called Chieme, daughter of Okorie and Mgbeke. I preferred to trace my lineage straight to my grandparents – Nlebedum and Nnuola... Nlebedum was a great warrior and farmer. Nnuola was a leader of women and excelled as a dancer' (81).

He is an example of an "ambivalent" male in a male harness. He is trying to cling onto some invisible power. After failing to fit into the hegemonic masculinity, tries to reformulate a new field of masculinity that will fit. In his marriage, he keeps reminding the wife how he is the man of the house, how he is supposed to be respected and he gives strong orders. He uses violence as a tool to exert pressure and instil fear in search of masculine privilege, arrogant and wants to hide his aggressiveness into being loners.

The Gallant Igwe Anoka

Igwe Anoka is a very rich man and in his home there was always more than enough for people to eat. He is a kind, yet strict man who treats his wives with respect. He does not ask for respect but earns it. He is well respected and loved by all. He is a man who believes in the dignity of the female gender, thus their freedom to be what and who they wish to be. Igwe had a very large compound and all his wives and children lived there (105). In his home, one rarely go in search of firewood or water as he has slaves who do the menial jobs. In his home, he has pet names for all of his wives and these women spend more time taking care of their bodies. He is everything a hyper or hegemonic male should be and even much more. He can be said to have been liberated by his social standing (wealth), therefore extending more freedom to the female folks in his household.

Theme: The Loner

Iheme is Chibuka's husband, a man who does not believe in prolonged courtship. He has a slender body, which gives him a young look even though he is not as young as he looks. He is quiet and rarely smiles. In fact, he is what can be termed a sadist. He is a hard-working man who has a large barn to show for his hard work. He also rears animals

... Iheme was a hard-working man. Everybody said so. I had noticed his large yam barn when I visited him. He had more yams in his barn than any of the men I knew except, of course, Igwe Anoka of Agbaja whose yams could fill a whole village (110).

He cuts across as a difficult character that is unpleasant. He is a man who is totally self-sufficient and does not believe he needs anyone to help him. He only married his wife, not for love or companionship, but because it is a cultural requirement and for another requirement of rearing children and this explains why he resents his wife so much (113).

As a man quick to anger, he sees nothing wrong in beating his wife even when her crime is no crime:

I laughed and half expected him to join me. But his reaction took me by surprise. He moved over quickly and grabbed my hair. He pulled my braided hair violently as if he was going to pull out the braids from the root. I cried out in pain and fright. “Never do that again!” he roared. He pushed my head away and I cowered before him. ... After this incident, I learnt to keep away from him as much as possible (112-3).

He threatens his wife for taking tubers of yam from his barn when he did not give them to her himself, for he sees it as a challenge to his maleness:

‘Since when did you become the man in this house?’ He demanded. “Who told you you can take yam from the barn? Let it not repeat itself.” (115)

Even at the point of sickness and death, he is still disdainful and more resentful of his wife and those around him; his inability to cater for himself psychologically nauseates him.

As a self-sufficient and active man, he did not know how to cope with a disease that made him dependent on others. He could not deal with it and became more cruel, peevish and bitter (121).

He is seen crying in silence as the suffering gets unbearable, yet he is unable to speak out his mind for the fear of being termed a weakling. This is a man who protects the traditional masculine belief even at the expense of his life. He prefers to die in silence than have a woman tend and fend for him (123). He is an extremist, even in the implementation of traditional masculine ideas.

II. CONCLUSION

With the creation of different male characters with varying degrees of masculine traits, Ezeigbo tries to balance the male characters she creates with the four strong female characters, while also stressing the point that both genders have different roles to play in society. Just as she creates a strong character like Obiatu, she complements him with an equally strong and free-spirited Ejimnaka; as she creates the sterile Abazu, she equally creates Chieme, a woman who never saw her period and therefore never conceived of a child. Ezeigbo, it can be said probably did not intentionally or unintentionally demean the male characters she created but simply tried to paint a picture of the different types of men one sees in society therefore confirming verisimilitude between characters in literary works and real live characters. The male characters however have their individual masculine idiosyncrasies, and the female characters have their distinguishing own gender roles. The

complexities of male roles therefore confirm the pluralistic and slippery nature of masculinity.

According to Newell (2008), quoting Ladele’s(2007) personal correspondence with Ezeigbo says she however acknowledges the influence of women writers in shaping her authorial consciousness: ‘I create strong women characters, not just as role models alone, but because many of them exist now and in the past. They are real! They were real’ (89) and this is confirmed strongly by this research. In as much as she is a feminist, she is said to ‘espouse an integrative and accommodationist brand of feminism: what she has articulated as “complementarity”, firmly located within the socio-political structures of an African realism’.

In all of the affairs of the land, the women are shown to play specific roles while the men equally have societal assigned roles. Ezeigbo however confirms the superiority of men by creating more male characters in her work and at the same time having more male representation in the running of the affairs of the land. During the war, both genders were given the roles to play to ensure victory, and at the end, when the men were taken away, the women were still seen running the affairs of keeping alive. These aspects of male and female demonstrate that there are multiple gender roles (applying to both gender) that have not been static and that there are transitions and transformations brought about by colonial and postcolonial realities that influence gender roles and positions in varying degrees across communities.

REFERENCES

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- [2] Newell, Stephanie. “The Past in the Present: Adimora-Ezeigbo’s Woman-Centred Frameworks” in *The Fiction of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo*. Lagos: African Cultural Institute, 2008.