


<p>Breaking Hegemonic Walls and Asserting the Female Self in Toni Morrison’s <i>The Bluest Eye</i> and Akachi Ezeigbo’s <i>Roses and Bullets</i></p>		<p>Literature</p> <p>Keywords: self-assertiveness, hegemonic bottleneck, Snail Sense feminism, patriarchy.</p>
<p>Ene, Edem Ekpo</p>	<p>Department of English and Literary Studies. University of Calabar. Calabar. Nigeria.</p>	
<p>Nathaniel, Ojima S</p>	<p>Department of English and Literary Studies. University of Calabar. Calabar. Nigeria.</p>	

<p>Abstract</p>
<p>This paper interrogates the challenges confronted by the black woman in the American society and Africa in asserting her distinct self. It equally highlights the procedures adopted by the major female characters in Toni Morrison’s <i>The Bluest Eye</i> (1970) and Akachi Ezeigbo’s <i>Roses and Bullets</i> (2011). It investigates the mechanisms adopted by the female characters particularly the protagonists in combating the hegemonic bottle necks against their self-assertiveness right from the family, which is a microcosm of the larger society to the external societal occurrences such as war. The paper adopts Ezeigbo’s strand of feminism which is snail sense feminism. This strand holds that the female must adopt the tactics of the snail with a well lubricated tongue in negotiating her right in a patriarchal conscious society. It also adopts Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytical theory in investigating the whys of the protagonists’ actions. The significance of this essay lies in the fact that beyond the emphasis on war, it explores how the female fights both internal and external oppositions to her self-assertiveness in the two novels. Through the utilization of the qualitative research methodology, the paper comes out with the finding that the black female in America and Africa has overtime made progress in her quest for self-assertion starting with the afro-futuristic trait of Claudia to the blossoming of self-assertion in Ginika in Ezeigbo’s <i>Roses and Bullets</i>. The style of both Morrison and Ezeigbo are identical as they explore the lexical items of Ebonics and Igbo respectively in their selected novels.</p>

INTRODUCTION

The struggle for the asserting of the female self seems to have been a major thematic preoccupation of literature the world over. The female gender over the years has struggled to break through the walls and barricades that have been consciously or unconsciously erected against her by a societal construct that seems to be unaware of her presence in the society. This struggle is not limited to the African woman alone but indeed extends to the black woman in particular and the woman in general. The black woman across the globe has struggled from these myriads of multilayered and multifarious barricades over the years. In Africa the battle started from the point where the woman has to fight and break the wall or barricade of invisibility. The black woman was never perceived to be in existence except when such a perception was to facilitate or advance the agenda of patriarchy.

The journey of the black woman’s struggle has been very long but, despite this, the black woman had remained resolute and determined to seek and obtain a space where she can assert herself despite the societal hegemony that seems to be standing against her. The assertive black woman has evolved from the depth of oppression, brutality, subjugation etc. At a point, the walls that confronted the black woman seem to have been marriage and motherhood. Hence, the black woman was considered an obnoxious being if she was not married at a certain age or if she had no child after marriage. From this wall raised against the woman, she was forced to accept marriages that were clearly unequal yokes. As a matter of fact, many marriages were contracted without her

consent. The black woman had to accept such contracts as a way to escape being viewed as an outcast in the society. This is what Helen Chukwuma meant when she says in “voices and choices” that the black woman is “the quiet member of a household, content only to bear children, unfulfilled if she does not and handicapped if she bears only daughters. She was not part of the decision making both as a daughter, wife and mother even when the decision affected her directly” (215). The nefarious patriarchal construct seized upon this to make the marriage home a hell of no return to the black woman. This is what Buchi Emecheta addressed in *The Joys of motherhood*. Nnuego was satisfied to stay in a marriage where the husband had no understanding of the word husband except that proffered by the unhealthy societal construct that imbued him with authority without responsibility. The devil’s elbow of marriage was confronted by Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru* and *One is Enough* through the characters of Efuru and Amaka respectively. Just when the black woman seems to be breaking loose from the above, the battle had shifted to the sex of the child she brings forth. If she gives birth to female children alone, she was looked down upon.

The problem of the black woman seems to be multilayered and complex. She is prone to physical, psychological and mental abuse by the patriarchal construct. These have received great attention by feminist critics and writers alike among whom are: Mary Wollstonecraft, Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir, Helen Cixous, Lucey Irigaray, Julia Kristeva from the West and Flora Nwapa, Obioma Nnaemeka, Chikwenye Ogunyemi, Grace Okereke, Tonia Umoren, Helen Chukwuma, Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie, Mary Kolawole, Catherine Acholonu, Chioma Opara, Akachi Ezeigbo, Ama Ata Aidoo, Zaynab Akali etc from Africa. This paper focuses on the dimension that Ezeigbo gives to this issue. In her works, Ezeigbo gives vent to the problem of the woman and particularly that of the black woman. This she does in her novels: *The Last of the Strong Ones* (1996), *House of Symbols* (2001) *Children of the Eagle* (2002), and of course our text of interrogation, *Roses and Bullets* (2011) etc. Equally, Toni Morrison has given vent to the struggle of the black woman in the American society in several of her novels including, *Sula* (1973), *Song of Solomon* (1977), *Beloved* (1987) and *The Bluest Eyes* (1970). The duo are basically pursuing the interest of the woman not for herself alone but for the entire society. They advance complementarity and mutual respect for the sexes. Particularly, Ezeigbo, is known for her distinct strand of feminism which is “Snail Sense Feminism” which holds that for the woman to be able to overcome all the patriarchal hegemonic bottle necks that are erected against her in the society, she must, like the snail with a well lubricated tongue, navigate the paths to her self-actualization. The two writers whose novels are under interrogation are known for their creative ingenuity which has won them several prizes.

The two novels by these authors under interrogation in this paper are *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison and *Roses and Bullets* by Akachi Ezeigbo. *The Bluest Eye* is a novel that seeks to establish an authentic parameter for the judgment of true beauty and virtue in the American society where physical beauty (blue eyes) is erroneously upheld as a standard for beauty. Through the character of Pecola, the protagonist, Morrison portrays a black female character who is in search of beauty with the wrong parameter. She inadvertently does not arrive at her dream as everything around her seems to crumble. She is abused at home and abroad. She is raped by her

own father and deceived by a seer. She does not come to the flowering of her dream of having the bluest eyes and being the most beautiful person in the American society. Wilfred D. Samuels and Clenora Hudson-Weens note that: “In Morrison’s first novel, *The Bluest Eye*, the pivotal idea is the domination of blacks by the existing American standards of beauty: blue eyes, blond hair and white skin” (10).

This problem is predicated upon the interracial turbulence that exists in the American society between the two races; the black race and the white race. The black female therefore would have to fight this racial turbulence in order to assert herself. More specifically, Pecola would have to define herself if she must get to her dream. Unfortunately, her dream is illusive, prejudiced and dictated by racial biases that are against the Blacks generally and the black woman particularly. She is seeking help from captivity from her captor who finds delight in keeping her in perpetual servitude. Pecola fails because there is no way she can outsmart her captors by using the parameters instituted and enshrined by the same people who have enslaved her.

However, in Ezeigbo’s *Roses and Bullets*, Ginika’s quest and struggle for self-assertion is not carried out within the parameters of the societal or patriarchal hegemony. In fact, Ginika breaks patriarchal codes and construct in order to assert herself. This is seen in her marrying Eloka at a time her father would not hear about the issue of marriage for her, her struggle against the subjugation and dominance of her mother-in-law, her pursuit for economic independence in embarking on a very risky trade journey and her resolve to return to school to accomplish her dream of being a graduate.

The two authors whose novels are under interrogation are feminist writers. Their type of feminism seems to share similarity. Morrison’s kind of feminism holds that the woman should not be held bound by traditions that reduce women to seekers of love, marriage etc. She holds that the woman has as a responsibility to break these hegemonic traditions against herself and enjoy the liberty that comes from her actions. She has done this consistently in her novels and characters. Sula, particularly in *Sula* is a typical example. On the other hand Ezeigbo is a feminist who advocates that the woman must adopt the snail sense in negotiating her path toward self-actualization and assertion. Both writers therefore are agitating for the freedom of the female both in the American society and in Africa.

Feminism is a theory that seeks equality among the sexes. Its methods of investigation of the literary text is basically to highlight those obvious and susceptible measures adopted and enshrine in the societal consciousness which are injurious to the woman and her self-actualization. This quest is based on the fact that the woman and the black woman in particular, over the years has been subjected to the patriarchal will and dictates. This position is asserted by Sarah Grimke when she avers that:

All history attests that man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish gratification, to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrumental in promoting his comfort: but

never has he desired to elevate her to the rank she was created to fill. He has done all he could to debase and enslave her mind: and now he looks triumphantly on the ruin he has wrought, and says, the being he has thus deeply injured is his inferior.... (qtd in hole and Levine. 534).

Feminism is an ideological disposition that seeks to venerate the woman to her rightful position. On the other hand, Psychoanalysis interrogates the ‘why’ of human behaviour as well as personality. It is a theory which holds that human beings react or act based on a precedent of actions and experiences in their lives. It is a pattern of interpreting the text base on the analysis of the character’s psychology as well as that of the society where the art emanates. For the psychoanalytic critics, art is an avenue for the purgation of repressed emotions or drives. Sigmund Freud believes that an individual is made up of the instinctive drive, (i.d), the ego and the super ego. These three exist as checks on one another toward the wellbeing of the individual. The interplay of the i.d, ego and the super ego is succinctly explained by Abang Isangedigi when he avers:

The id is the first in human development. It is the raw instinctive drive for need gratification. As the individual matures in age, the ego emerges. It is the object reality for need satisfaction.... The super ego is a moralistic system. The conscience that monitors the rightness and wrongness of the thoughts and actions of the ego. (5)

The major proponents of this theory are, but not limited to, Sigmund Freud and Carl Gustav Jung. We will follow the artists as neurotics who are purging their individual and communal unconsciousness from the suppressed desires and as a means of walking themselves back to sanity.

Breaking the walls of multi-dimensional racial and domestic Violence in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* and Ezeibo’s *Roses and Bullets*

In this essay the choice of black women characters is predicated upon the belief that the injurious treatment meted out on the black woman is not as those suffered by their white counterparts. Pecola, for example, comes from a family that has the name Breedlove, yet what is bred is hatred. She is denied any feeling of love from her family. The father, Cholly Breedlove, himself a product of a broken home, is devoid of any sense of family love being himself denied such. He therefore does not know how to give love to his children even when he has the desire to do so. Instead of love, what is provided in the family is hatred. The children are set against themselves and against their parents. The relationship between Pecola’s parents is far from love. They fight often and quarrel. Equally Claudia’s family is no better. Very early in the text, Claudia notes: “My mother’s anger humiliates me; her words chafe my cheeks and I am crying” (*Bluest...*, 11). The family is more like a battleground with commands and orders from the elders to the younger ones. There is no role model, no mentoring and advice for the young ones. “Adults do not talk to us, they give directions. They issue orders without providing information.” (*Bluest...*, 10).

It is against this intoxicating atmosphere that Pecola finds herself alongside other black women like Pauline, her mother and they must fight to break free from its hegemony as they strive towards self-assertion. Pauline is not yet given the love that she deserves as a wife. She is not provided for and to make matters worse, she is physically abused by her husband who beats her often. She, in an effort to have her way, has learnt to fight back. The children are not viewed better than mere objects like clothes and windows. Claudia notes that when Mr. Henry visits them, they are not even introduced to him as children of the house: “Frieda and I were not introduced to him—merely pointed out. Like, here is the bathroom; the cloth closet is here; and these are my kids, Frieda and Claudia; Watch out for this window; it don’t open all way” (*Bluest...*, 15).

Pecola must then combat all these issues including the hatred and rape of her father if she must actualize herself. But this will not happen because she has erroneously been brainwashed into believing that the only beautiful thing is the fair white girl. Her illusions are a result of the racially controlled hegemonic society and their standard for defining true beauty. Pecola’s quest for bluest eye is illusive, fantastic and unrealistic. The battle therefore is to be conquered first in her psyche. Unfortunately, this does not appear to be possible. The racial hatred that Pecola has for Blacks and their kind of eyes is a self-hatred and no one can come to self-assertiveness who hates that self. Pecola’s fancy with the American standard of beauty is revealed in her love for the cup with the image of Shirley’s face. Claudia notes on this thus: “Frieda brought her four graham crackers on a saucer and some milk in a blue-and-white Shirley Temple cup. She was a long time with the milk, and gazed fondly at the Silhouette of Shirley Temple’s dimpled face.... We knew that she was fond of the Shirley Temple cup and took every opportunity to drink milk out of it just to handle and see sweet Shirley’s face” (19-23).

In contrast to Pecola, Claudia does not love with the white American dream and standard of beauty and essence. She sees nothing in white girls as to make her desire to be like them. In fact, if she sees anything, it is disgust and vagueness. Concerning Shirley that Pecola is so fascinated about; she says “I hate Shirley... I like Jane Withers” (*Bluest...*, 19). Claudia though younger than Pecola and her sister Frieda, seems to be completely set for her black self-actualization in an environment that seeks to make her do the opposite. She states clearly and unequivocally “I had not yet arrived at the turning point in the development of my psyche which would allow me to love her. What I felt at that time was unsullied hatred. But before that I had felt a stranger, more frightening thing than hatred for all the Shirley Temples of the World”. (*Bluest...*, 19).

In order to have her dreams actualized, she breaks hegemonic expectations in the society. At a particular Christmas, for a Christmas gift, she was given a “blue-eyed Baby Doll”. This was what the society prescribed to be given to a black girl. Implicit in that gift are several layers of meaning that deplete the black child’s self-worth. Inherent in it is a bold statement for her to ape the white girls and see them as objects of perfect beauty and self-satisfaction. But Claudia is very assertive of her black self unlike Pecola.

Claudia's depth of the black self love is so strong and her determination to fight against anything that stands against the assertion of that self is equally strong. Her fight is against the whole world who upholds "the blue-eyed, yellow-haired, pink-skinned doll" as a standard of beauty for the black child. In order to assert herself, she has to break into pieces that symbol of beauty as perceived by the world around her. That in itself is a fight, as grownups will berate her for such actions. But she does not care. She notes closely that their notions of the doll as a symbol of beauty is actually as a result of an unfulfilled longing to be loved and appreciated. But Claudia is self aware and resolute in asserting that self. In reflection, after being criticized for destroying the doll, Claudia has to take it upon herself to define beauty, self actualization and happiness from her black point of view. She does not want the American dream of owning properties, houses etc. She wanted to feel. Hence:

...I did not want to have anything to own, or to possess any object. I wanted rather to feel something on Christmas day.... "I want to sit on the low stool in big Mama's kitchen with my lap full of lilacs and listen to big Papa play his violin for me alone" (Bluest..., 21-22).

This feeling is counter polar and counter ideological to the society around her. Yet in order to free herself completely from this hegemony, she goes physical. She transfers the impulse of hatred to physical attacks on white girls and she finds delight when they cry. Claudia's self-assertiveness must be critically investigated and commended. She grows up in a society where blacks in general and black women in particular are made to see themselves as inferior humans. She grows up in the society where even adult know little about self-love or are too afraid to love the black self. But the society is not even a big issue as the family, the home front. Pecola suffers from self-hatred because nobody seems to love her like they love the white girls. Pecola's family members go with the Breedlove name but they actually are devoid of any iota of love. In fact, Pecola asks "How do you do that? I mean, how do you get somebody to love you? (Bluest..., 32). As damaging to a child's psyche as the racial hegemony is, even more damaging is hatred runs in the family. Pecola just like Claudia is exposed to this in her own family. In fact for the Breedloves, it is noted that "...and they stayed there because they believed they were ugly.... Then you realized that it came from conviction, their conviction. It was as though some mysterious all-knowing master had given each one a cloak of ugliness to wear and they had each accepted it without question" (Bluest..., 38-39). It is this acceptance that made the difference between Pecola and Claudia and it is that which set Claudia apart as an assertive feminist. She was unlike Pecola not ready to hide or conceal her true identity only occasionally peeping out from behind it. The Breedlove family seems to be out of tune with life if there is no trouble in the family. In fact the child narrator notes that "To deprive her (Pauline) of these fights was to deprive her of all the zest and reasonableness of life". (Bluest..., 41-42) and concerning Cholly, the father of Pecola and the husband of Pauline, his attitude towards the person that ought to receive the highest love is paradoxically captured thus: "He poured out on her the sum of all his inarticulate fury and aborted desires. Hating her, he could leave himself intact" (Bluest..., 42). It is this socially and psychologically intoxicating environment that Pecola will have to break free from to assert herself.

Unfortunately, she fails in this endeavor. She fails because she pursued a dream bottled up in an elusive container. She is raped by her father and she gives birth to a still born baby. However, it is important to point out that she did not fail in totality. By sheer divine ordination, she is vindicated with the death of her child. How was this done? Every soldier of any society who fights to preserve the life of the citizens and to ensure the continuity of such a society is protected and provided for by the government of that society but the woman who gives birth and nurtures life for the same purpose of societal continuity and life preservation is in the contrary not protected. Instead she is abused, trivialized and left to her fate. Therefore, the death of Pecola's child is a providential assertive move at resisting the societal prejudices and injustice against the woman. Pecola's seeming failure is remedied in Ginika. Ginika equally grew up in a very socially intoxicating environment but she, unlike Kambili in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Pecola who could not chart her path successfully, broke the multidimensional family hegemonies that were injurious to her self-actualization and assertion. The filial disconnect in her family is noticed early in the novel. Her father wrote a letter to her and instead of ending it as a father; he wrote his name in full. This singular act has layers of meaning behind the metaphor of his name. It reveals the official atmosphere that pervades the house which is intoxicating to a child's social interaction with her parents. Ginika is denied the parental affection she deserves to help her develop psychologically. It is important to point out that this officiality in the family does not spell freedom but dominance and restriction. At the surface, one may be tempted to think that the act of writing his full name instead of the filial appendage- your father, gives her the freedom to decide but this is far from being the case. In fact, it is the opposite. On this issue Aunt Chito notes "Hmm, this certainly is an order" (19). It is an order against self-assertion. It is an order against being herself. It is an order into the prison of patriarchal dominance. It is an order against what she loves doing and where she loves to stay. It is an order against contributing her quota to the society. It is an order against that which gives her joy and satisfaction in life. Ginika is therefore faced with these myriads of patriarchal oppositional realities couched in a cryptograph of silent but poisonous and numbing words that she must resist if she must assert herself. This of course, is not a simple task just like Chito notes "Getting him to change his mind on any issue is harder than climbing *Ugwu Nwosa* -that dreaded hill in Amo-Oyi" (*Roses...19*). Ginika is not alone in this fight. Other girls around her will have to break their own patriarchal wall constructed with different kinds of materials ranging from male dominance to the perception that male children are superior to females. This is depicted in the relationship between Ona and Obika; "should a girl not assert herself?" he (Uncle Ray) asked. "What do you think nwayi Oma?" he was smiling at Ginika. "I think she should. Anyone who feels like it should assert himself and herself". "You two have a right to think what you like, but I would not like my daughter to be too forward", her aunt declared" (*Roses... 198-199*).

The battle for the assertion of the female self is therefore a multilayered ordeal on a lane filled with tacks and splinters. The female being must arm herself most importantly with psychological weapon of the snail sense which spells resilience, tact, doggedness, persistence,

perseverance and a never - giving - up spirit and of course, and, most importantly, wit and cunningness in order to go through this lane and conquer at the end.

It is important to note that the bottlenecks against the female self assertiveness placed before Pecola in Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* are not entirely different from those before Ginika in Ezeibo's *Roses and Bullets*. The only difference between the two characters is in their psychological dispositions towards these walls. Whereas Pecola desires to stay with Marie, China and Poland, she is unable to garner the psychological radicalism that they possess to free herself from the injurious and intoxicating racial American society and the Breedlove home. This is what qualifies Ginika as an assertive representative of the female gender.

The Wall of War: Physical War and Psycho-Emotional War

The problem which started at the family latter got magnified in the larger society. The family therefore is a microcosm of the larger society. The analogy is drawn from the forceful resistance of Ginika's father to her desire for freedom in Enugu to the Nigerian nation's declaration of war on Biafra when she desired freedom through seceding. Ginika is faced with the microscopic as well as the macroscopic resistance to her self-assertion. The declaration of war on Biafra has a deep personal and emotional as well as psychological counter balance effect on her sartrean pursuit.

Then Nigeria declared war on Biafra and schools were closed and students sent home. Her dream of taking her higher school certificate examinations in December was aborted. Only five months away. Ginika sighed deeply at the thought. It was the frustration of all her ambitions. Her shoulders heaved with gushing unspoken mood swings did not go unnoticed (Roses...30).

She is "smuggled away from her dream" both in the family and in the larger society. However, just like the Biafran state will not just sheepishly surrender to the Nigerian state without putting up a fight no matter their military strength, Ginika, for the first time in her life summons up the courage to challenge her father. "I am tired, tired, tired of it all" she screamed, "why are you doing this to me?" she even raised her voice. "Take me back to Enugu" she cried. "I don't want to go to Mbano! Did you hear me? Take me back to Enugu!" (*Roses... 32*).

Just like Darlene is made an emotional dumping ground by Cholly in *The Bluest Eye* who becomes frustrated with his failures and impotence in the face of white racial hegemony, Ginika is also made one in her own house where she is supposed to be given protection from the emotional excesses of outsiders. Apart from being blamed for her mistakes, she is also blamed for others' mistakes. When Nwakire decides to join the military against his father's wish, Ubaka vents his anger on her:

You will not read it? You are both the same, are you not? He sneered. "Tell me, was he right to treat me, his father, with such disrespect? Such callousness- how can one understand it? I don't know what I did to you two to deserve the way you treat me. Both of you have been rebellious time and time again... I am sure you knew he was going to do this, did you not? He could not have done it without telling you, could he? (Roses... 111).

One wonders why Ginika will be at the receiving end here. The information of Nwakire's joining the army came to Ubaka the same way it came to Ginika. This act by Ubaka accentuates the injustice of patriarchy to the female gender. Ginika must therefore chart her path snail sensibly away from this kind of injustice. Hence "Ginika returned to her room as a thought hammered in her head. Surely she would now leave Mbano for Ama-Oyi as there was little to detain her here" (*Roses... 111*). The root of this emotional abuse is in the fact that the woman is seen as object that does not deserve emotional consideration. As object therefore, she must be used for the advancement of patriarchal visions. This assertion is validated when we consider even the names given to some characters in Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*. Eloka's mother's name is Akunnaya, meaning "her father's wealth". So even when the child was born, the parent (father) had already objectified her.

The abuse of women by men cuts across ages from the babyhood to adulthood, the female gender is denied freedom and her personal dignity is trampled upon. Ginika came back late from a party and her father had to carry out a virginity test on her. This is the height of emotional and physiological abuse and an affront on her dignity as a girl. This singular action created enmity between her and the father that became very difficult if not impossible to erase. "She whispered several times, "I hate you!" she was sure she would never forgive him. She would remember this ugly incident all her life, this violation of her body." (*Roses... 149*). This abuse of women is not just perpetuated by parents alone but even spouses. Eloka, for example, becomes so uncomfortable by the way his father treated his mother as "an inferior other". This denial of love and affection when demanded by the female always results in abuse on the female gender. In *The Bluest Eye*, Pecola yearns for the love of the Breedloves and particularly that of her father. At the end, the only period when her father seemed to be moved with fatherly love towards her, ultimately led to her rape by the same. For Ginika, it is the murder of the chord of filial bond that was sprouting between her and her father. This was occasioned by the virginity test he carried out on her after she returned from the only social event he permitted her to attend. The depth of this in the psychic landscape of Ginika is captured in the quote: "Ginika smiled ruefully at the irony of the situation: The first time her father readily consented to her attending a social gathering alone ended in a fiasco--damaging the fragile bond that linked them as father and daughter". (*Roses.... 153*). This denial of love and the quest for it seems to be the fiber that holds the tapestry of the two novels.

Pecola's quest for true beauty and love runs from the beginning of the novel to the end. This is equally applicable to Ginka. This quest therefore becomes a big wall that the two

protagonists must pull down. Pecola, she could not overcome this wall but for Ginka, she broke through and got her liberty.

Ginka, a representative of the female gender continues the quest for her self-assertion, actualization and freedom until she is married off to her prince charming, Eloka. With this, she feels disentangled from the chains and restriction of her family. She feels her dawn of happiness has finally come. “Now she had settled down to what she believed will be a blissful married life in spite of the war raging and claiming more lives and territories, in spite of the sorrow and misery spreading over the land like an epidemic” (*Roses... 276*). Nevertheless, the reality of her new challenge towards the full actualization of her dreamed joy and freedom was just around the corner. This time around, it is spearheaded by fellow women like her--her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. Ozioma on hearing that Eloka swept their bedroom, notes “mama will have a fit if she hears you swept your room” “she will say you are spoiling your wife” (*Roses... 277*). The marriage institution, she did not know, is actually a site for the perpetuation of patriarchal dominance. Grace Okereke in her essay, “*Feminist Consciousness in Flora Nwapa’s One is Enough*”, on this issue of the marriage institution as a prison notes that the marriage site “...is the site of woman’s multiple lack—lack of child, lack of power, lack of voice, lack of space, lack of peace, lack of happiness” (94).

This continues to increase as the mother-in-law expects her to be pregnant. She does not see the reason for the presence of a wife without a child. The climax of it comes when Eloka visits from the war and leaves without getting Ginika pregnant. The insistence on the sustenance of the human race through the woman is not followed up by the protection of the woman. Ginika is not protected nor cared for by her mother-in-law but she insists that she must get pregnant and give birth to a child--a step towards the continuity of the human race and by extension patriarchy.

Female survival strategy in the two novels

To combat the many challenges confronting the female gender in the fight for self-actualization and assertion, the female must develop a survival strategy. Ginika and Pecola seem to toe the path of Ezeigbo’s philosophy. They do not out rightly fight the men for nothing but they do so in order to make meaningful contribution to the society. So, even when they adopt some resisting measures in asserting themselves, such should not be seen from a negative or personal light but from the point of contributing to the advancement of the society. On this issue, Ezeigbo notes:

The snail is wise, sensitive, resilient and dogged or determined. Nigerian women are all these and more. They work very hard, are tenacious and patient. However, these virtues must not be seen as a weakness on the part of the woman. Rather they should be seen as a way of strategizing to complement the man and join forces with him to develop the society for the benefit of all (29).

It is in the light of the above that Ginika in Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* and Claudia in Morrison's *the Bluest Eye* fight for their self-assertion. It is not for themselves but for a space to contribute meaningfully to societal development. Their resistance, if they are contributing to societal development, is a call on the society not to operate with double standards. The first survival strategy adopted by Ginika is that of resisting being a stooge of her father perpetually.

Ginika never finds satisfaction in whatever she is forced to do by her father no matter the level of success she records in them. When she is forced to train as a special constable at Mbano, she never pursues it to the end even when she is doing well at the work. However, the tone of success and encomium poured on her when she was helping aunty Chito in baking cannot be overlooked quickly. Equally, when she goes to Ama-Oyi and joins Eloka in rehearsing the drama he wrote, she has great joy and success, hence: "For the first time in her life she was doing exactly as she wanted without hindrance. She was frightened at the burden of freedom, the air of liberty she breathed in Ama-Oyi (*Roses...* 226).

Therefore in trying to free herself from the tentacles of her father's over protectiveness, Ginika realizes that it is only in breaking the patriarchal hegemony of being a stooge to her father, which is actually draconic and injurious to her self-actualization, that she can experience true liberty and freedom. Equally, Claudia has to break the American societal expectations of her concerning the kind of gift she should expect for Christmas. She breaks the doll given to her because she does not want to be a stooge of the American racial society. Ginika's desire to break the patriarchal wall of her father's autocratism is revealed in her declaration to marry Eloka. She is persuaded by the father to forget about the idea of marriage and the father expects her to take that hook, line and sinker. However, she has progressed from that level of dogmatic subservience to an unequivocal and active architect of her destiny. Hence:

They sat for a while in silence. She knew he expected her to accept his words as final and leave his room but she had not finished yet. "Papa I have made up my mind to marry him. I love him very much. Please do not stop me. If anything happens, you should not blame me" (Roses 250).

Apart from the resistance of the patriarchal order or expectation of the female sex, she has to equally develop other survival strategies to combat the nefarious plurality of her problems. Ginika moves from one problem to another. She moves from parental dominance to parental abuse and then to in-laws' "wahala" and just when she is trying to free herself from the last, rape – a product of the patriarchal construct came up. How does she combat the rape, unwanted pregnancy, the loss of a beloved husband, abandonment by her angry father and an unsympathetic stepmother and still live her life intact in the midst of all these? The fight that faces her is enormous. For this reason, therefore, she must not depend on a single survival measure.

The female gender has been re-evolving, reinventing and re-strategizing in order to still assert herself. She does this through female bonding. Female bonding as a strategy for the assertion of the female self is upheld by critics and writers alike. On this issue, Grace Okereke again notes:

Female friendship serves as a balm over the wounds of marital abuse and betrayal of women. It also opens up new vistas of life for the brutalized woman whose narrow vision in the domestic hearth had bereft her of meaningful communication and growth outside the home (99).

This is portrayed in her relationship with her girl-friends including Philomena, Tonye, Anna etc. Even when her relationship with Philomena is not given a warmth hand of fellowship by her parents, she insists and keeps inviting her to the house. It is very clear here that she has progressed from the subservient Ginika to the assertive one. By her insistence on Philomena coming to the house because of what she benefits from their relationship – the liveliness and joy that Philomena’s presence brings to her, she reveals her desire to chart her path towards self-assertion irrespective of any opposition. Apart from friends, her relationship with aunty Chito and by extension her late mother, is equally an assertive move calculated at ensuring her freedom from male dominance. This bond is revealed when we look at how Ginika chooses the dress she will wear to the dance party:

She had debated with herself whether to wear it or the one her father had also bought on the same occasion – Christmas. He always gave her as well as Nwakire a new outfit every Christmas. Auntie Chito did the same, explaining that her sister – their mother was not there to give them Christmas presents so she had to do it on her behalf. Ginika would wear her dress afterwards pretending it was from her mother (Roses 145).

This attachment or bond is because of the fact that her aunty has a way of giving her an atmosphere that allows the birthing forth of her best. It is also noted that when things couldn’t get worse for Ginika, it is aunty Chito who takes her in when she is raped, impregnated and thrown out of her in-laws’ house. She takes her in irrespective of the hardship in the land. She even abandons her own problems – the disappearance of her husband - to comfort Ginika in her time of grief and even accompanies her on her journey to search for Eloka at the war front. Equally relevant in this bond is the relationship she holds with her grandmother. These two women comfort her and give her the strength to continue her fight against the draconian and nefarious structure of patriarchy which is instituted to clip her wings of self-actualization. Hence:

Four months had passed. Ginika thought they were the most difficult months in her life. Things had gone from bad to worse for her. Rejected by Eloka’s family, abandoned by her angry father and unsympathetic stepmother, she had clung to the only two people who gave her unflinching support -- her aunt and her grandmother -- with

whom she had lived since her father-in-law threw her out with the connivance of her mother-in-law (Roses...409).

The myriads of walls and their labyrinthine nature against the female self-assertiveness are threatening enough to discourage any chicken-hearted female from taking a step. However, the assertive woman is that woman who is not intimidated by the storms of the walls that are confronting her but is intrepid in taking steps to free herself. If she succeeds, fine. If she lands in a bigger turbulent sea, she would have become stronger through experience to swim through such a sea. Hence, the assertive woman is not mono-linear in fixation in the survival strategies she adopts but an avowed iconoclast against the dogmas of patriarchy. It is these attributes which Ginika possess that help her to adopt the third survival strategy--economic empowerment in the fight against patriarchy. The female gender is often calumniated as an economic dependent on the man; Ginika must therefore reverse the order if she must have her dreams actualized. She has to face the challenge of insufficient food and other necessities not just for herself but for the entire family: her aunt and her children and her grandmother. She is denied the supply of relief materials at the WCC unless she sleeps with the officer. To combat this, she has to device a means. If she has to take a high risk with her life to get this wall broken down, then so be it. She will not willingly sell herself because of her economic incapacitation or because of a war she did not cause. She therefore embarks on an economic journey to buy good to come and sell in order to make ends meet. She does this despite the warning of Achara about the danger in the journey. Just like Achebe has noted that since the hunter has learnt to shoot without missing, the bird must also learn to fly without perching. In the same vein, since patriarchal construct has learnt to exist without failing to abuse the woman, the woman must also learn to exist in the same society without allowing herself to be abused. Though the business trip failed, Ginika does not give up hope. She re-strategizes for her economic empowerment by frying *Akara* after the war. The assertive woman is ever calculative, proactive, innovative, re-inventive and economically optimistic. Ginika has to calculate to know what to do to sustain lives after the war.

Ezeigbo in all her corpus seems to be upholding that if the woman must actualize herself, she must be economically independent. This she advocates through such characters as Chime in *The Last of the Strong Ones*, Eaglewoman in *House of Symbols* etc. Ezeigbo's position is in line with that of Simon de Beauvoir when she avers that:

...civil liberties remain theoretical as long as they are unaccompanied by economic freedom... it is through gainful employment that woman has traversed most of the distance that separated her from the male; and nothing else can guarantee her liberty in practice. Once she ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles; between her and the universe, there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator (689).

Just as Ezeigbo has done in other novels like *Children of the Eagle* in creating the character of Ogonna who became economically independent through education, she creates in

Ginika a potential educated woman whose education and economic strength break patriarchal walls militating against her. One of the dominant stylistic strategies employed by Ezeigbo and Morrison is the journey motif and explorative adventure. Ezeigbo explores the lexical items of Igbo while Morrison explores Ebonics in their selected novels. Ginika keeps traveling from one place to another in quest of self-actualization. Even when she was still under the tutelage of her father, she shuttles Enugu, Mbano and Ama-Oyi. Again, her business trip is one of the explorative adventures in this text. For Pecola, her continuous journey to China's apartment and Churchhead buttress this point. This movement away from the site of discomfort and dominance towards a more psychologically accommodating one is interpreted as a quest towards self-actualization.

Conclusion

The walls against the black female gender across the globe have been very intoxicating and dismantling. Nevertheless, the black woman has been systematically overpowering and breaking every wall that stands as an inhibitor to her self-assertion and dream actualization. From this exploration, it is revealed that despite the walls, the black woman is ever unrelenting, reinventing and re-strategizing in order to surmount these walls. The interrogation here reveals that for the black woman in America, the major walls seem to be racial prejudice as well as the black male insensitivity to the protection of the black woman. For the black woman in Africa, the walls seem to be multidimensional, ranging from economic incapacity, cultural norms and biases to several others. The assertive black woman's vision is to turn the table of these walls that inflict psychological numbness on her in the pursuit of her self-assertion. She does this through radical and calculated resistance to the patriarchal order, female bonding, economic empowerment and education.

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