

BOOK REVIEW

Ethics and Human Rights in Anglophone African Women's Literature: Feminist Empathy
By Chielozona Eze. Chicago: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. xiv + 230 pp.

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While African women's literature has been analysed from a feminist point of view, including by Florence Stratton (1994) and Stephanie Newell (2017), the discussion often latches onto post-colonialism. Eze brings a new angle to the topic by utilising empathy as a tool to analyse the evolution of feminist African literature, relating as an African man to the suffering of African women by putting himself in fictional characters' shoes. Each chapter discusses different aspects of human rights, with an emphasis on women's bodies being subjected to pain.

The first chapter discusses the ideology of "writing back" to the West, which Eze deems outdated. He supports his arguments by citing an overwhelmingly-Western list of scholars while making little reference to African thinkers. He does, however, compare the concept of human rights as understood by African activists with western thinking. Eze concedes that his personal views on human rights do not parallel those of Micere Githae Mugo and Desmond Tutu. He notes that their understanding of the subject "risks subsuming the individual within a collective 'we,' which might in turn be guided by the abstractions of ideologies" (23).

Chapter Two discusses works by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Using her TEDx talk "We Should All be Feminists" to raise his argument, Eze states that feminism is fairness and demands that men and women are treated equally. He elaborates, "Moral equality requires that men and women be held accountable for their actions as adults. If one is to be judged as a responsible adult, one has to act without coercion" (45).

This is echoed in Chapter Three where he refutes allegations that writers NoViolet Bulawayo and Chinelo Okparanta "[replicate] the colonial image of Africa by indulging in pornographic portrayals of violence and misery" (69). Eze rightly argues that the writers are merely interested in depicting the pain and oppression inflicted upon African women. However, he fails to discuss significant details of the backgrounds of these writers who are both based in America and are products of the country's education system.

Eze's views urges African society to reflect on harmful traditional practices within its cultures as Chapter Four discusses female circumcision through texts by Nnedi Okorafor and Warsan Shire while Chapter Five looks into the ways women are abused through polygamy as portrayed in Lola Shoneyin's novel and selected short stories by Petina Gappah. One of the shortest chapters in the text, Eze reiterates that women are the victims of political dysfunction in Chapter Five.

Chapter Six analyses Chika Unigwe's novel, *On Black Sister's Street*, and the enslaved female body. Eze likens human trafficking in Unigwe's text to transatlantic slavery, deemed "one of the grossest instances of the abuse of people's rights in history" (147). He urges readers to see the urgency of human trafficking and argues that the behaviour of African pimps, as depicted in the novel, should be criticised as heavily as transatlantic slavery.

In Chapter Seven, Eze suggests that the practice of human rights "liberates not only the individual, but also society" (165). Although explored in the preceding chapters, the idea is emphasised here as the works of Sefi Atta shows how the private affects the public sphere in regard to human rights. Subsequently, the final chapter commends Patricia Jabbeh Wesley's poetry for bearing witness to the suffering of her countrymen. Eze states, "Jabbeh Wesley attaches the reappearance of hopes for the healing and reconstruction of her Liberian world to people's ability and willingness to truly experience the painful process of grief and...to allow compassion and empathy to guide their relationship to others" (206).

Although critical of sexism within African culture, some of Eze's arguments insinuate that African women invite mistreatment due to their own ignorance, and that postcolonial analysis of the experiences of African women is inferior to contemporary Western ideas of feminism which emphasise individualism. Meanwhile, communal identities are embedded in the lives' African women and Eze's does not address this reality or how issues should be seen through an intersectional lens. I am also not convinced that empathy alone can be utilised as an effective

theoretical framework when it comes to feminist studies, particularly as Eze does not admit that he benefits from male privilege, and is thus able to confront issues at arm's length. Eze's work could also be improved if he platformed African thinkers that are more aware of the sensitivities revolving the issues at hand. However, Eze still raises important questions that contribute to the discussion of African feminist literature as a whole.