

## **J. O. J. Nwachukwu-Agbada**

J. O. J. Nwachukwu-Agbada is Professor of African Literature in the Department of English, Abia State University, Uturu, Nigeria. His most recent work is on Chinua Achebe. E-mail: jojagbada@yahoo.com

## **'Daughteronomy': Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, domestic amazons and patriarchal assumptions in *Children of the Eagle***

### **'Daughteronomy': Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, domestic amazons and patriarchal assumptions in *Children of the Eagle***

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo is one of the outstanding vibrant feminist voices in Nigerian literature today. Her trilogy that started in 1996 was completed in 2002 with the publication of *Children of the Eagle*. In this novel she underscores the possible place, and role of *umuada* (women married out of a kin-group) and *alutradi* (women married into a kin-group) in a quest to dismantle patriarchy in her Igbo land. The novel interrogates patriarchal assumptions about women while pointing to hitherto uncelebrated facets of female panache and comportment in an otherwise unfavourable social and cultural matrix. In this essay, 'daughteronomy' refers to her dialogue with daughters married in and out of Umuga in Igbo land and their enlistment in the struggle to topple male supremacy. *Children of the Eagle* fictionalises dimensions of what women know, expresses resistance to the male predispositions towards women while applying tropes that seek to foreground these imputations. **Key words:** "herstory"; Nigerian novel; Nigerian women writers; patriarchy.

### **Preamble**

The temper and texture of Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's feminist discourses in *Children of the Eagle* (2002) seem to have been greatly influenced by the feminist critical outlook in the West of the 1970s, which had sought to expose "what might be called mechanisms of patriarchy, that is the cultural 'mind-set' in men and women which perpetuated sexual inequality" (Barry 2002: 122).<sup>1</sup> This pursuit was to a great extent a critical exertion by female, and/or gynandrist critics whose searchlight foraged for these social and behavioural infelicities largely in the literary outpourings by male writers. By then women writers, particularly African women writers were few and far between. Apparently Adimora-Ezeigbo is not seeking to locate Barry's delineations in any of her works as such; she has instead used her novel to negate certain patriarchal assumptions about women while not missing out on any opportunity to project the hitherto uncelebrated superior facets of female panache and comportment in an otherwise unfavourable climate of mutual social and cultural mistrust. It is writers like Adimora-Ezeigbo who make Carole Boyce Davies (1986: 10) glow with elation when she remarks that these days "African women themselves are beginning to tell

their own stories." What the author has done therefore is to fictionalise dimensions of what the female elite complains against male predispositions towards them while applying tropes which seek to foreground these imputations.

### **The author: Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo**

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo may have written pieces of creative writing even in her secondary school days but we never got to meet her as a writer until well into her forties, that was in the early 1990s when she had become a Senior Lecturer in the English Department of the University of Lagos. In other words, she went into creative writing more or less as a specialist in literature and must have allowed her theoretical and practical knowledge of literary techniques to have a bearing on her writing. Combining her creative writing with her traditional skills as a critic, her prose works come to us virtually 'well-made'. Currently, a full professor, she has, apart from a copious publication of critical essays, chapters and books, and poems in various journals, three collections of short stories, three children's books and four full-length novels, the first three being a trilogy.

### *Children of the Eagle* as part of a trilogy

Although *Children* can be read in its own right and understood on its own terms, it is still necessary to point out that the novel is the last of Adimora-Ezeigbo's trilogy of fictions centred on the generations of Umuga women spanning over a hundred years. Preceding this novel are *The Last of the Strong Ones* (1996) and *House of Symbols* (2001). The three novels are interrelated, featuring major characters, largely females, who belong to the same genealogy but who represent different prongs of the battle against patriarchy. Thus it is the same 'war of the sexes' running over generations, each generation faced with its challenges. In other words, it is 'herstory' told in three eras of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial settings.

In *The Last of the Strong Ones*, Ezeigbo depicts the centrality of women in the core of Umuga traditional existence before the coming of *kosiri* (the white man). What could better prove that than the fact that at this time, the four daughters of Umuga – Ejimnaka, Onyekaozuru, Chieme and Chibuka – through their activism became members of "Obuofo" (custodians of the ancestral staff, *ofo*), which was largely a male prerogative? In *House of Symbols* a daughter of one of the four "strong ones" called Ugonwanyi (Eaglewoman) is both the matriarch and the protagonist. As the author speaks of her, "Eaglewoman is a solid rock that gathers moss. Around her, green and yellow moss blossoms in a thick furry mass at all seasons [...] People obey her and dance to her tune" (*House*, 99). With respect to *Children of the Eagle*, Eaglewoman is still around but having lately aged, has retreated, enabling her four daughters to prowl

about as it were. When Amara, one of the four Okwara daughters, learns that the concrete markers on the disputed land involving their family and the Umeakus may not be erected until a male child of the Okwara family is present, she roars: "Here is my mother – as old, if not older than Pa Joel and here are my big sisters and I, yet you want us to wait until my kid brother returns home or until we send for our cousins before you erect the boundary markers on the disputed land. It doesn't make much sense to me." (316).<sup>2</sup>

### **'Daughteronomy' and the place of daughters in Igbo culture**

The use of the neologism, 'daughteronomy' in this essay is no more than a pun on Deuteronomy of the Holy Writ of the Christians. The biblical Deuteronomy simply means 'second law', having been proposed after the laws found in the books of Leviticus and Numbers. Thus one considers as 'daughteronomy' Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's advocacy of an alternative proposal to the established rule of patriarchy. Like we are informed by one of the Bible commentators, the authors of Deuteronomy "placed on the lips of Moses the very discourses they themselves wanted to address to the people." (*Christian Community Bible* 2004: 217). In like manner, the author of *Children of the Eagle* places on the lips of the four daughters of Josiah ("Osai") and Ugonwanyi ("Eaglewoman") the message of a new redemption, which can only fructify when women and the larger society are re-educated to enable the former to enjoy a more qualitative existence. It needs to be pointed out that Ezeigbo's obsession with placing *umuada* (daughters married outside Umuga, the kin-group) and *alutaradi* (women married into Umuga) at the centre of her feminist discourses is certainly due to the fact that in Igbo culture the two categories of women can be both weak and strong at the same time, depending on the amount of organisation, education and information at their disposal. *Umuada* still unmarried, are virtually silent, occasionally thought to be expendable, and often regarded as potential foreigners. Yet, in families without a son like the Okwara family, a daughter could give birth to the male heir just as Obioma does – though inadvertently – for her family. However, whether as *umuada* or *alutaradi*, they can exert sufficient force as a pressure group when they bunch together and confront improprieties or misdeeds being perpetuated by the men. It is the efficacy of this potential that Ezeigbo discovers and explores in each of her novels.

It is important to remark that the case often made of Igbo culture being rigidly male-centric is of recent origin. The Igboland of pre-colonial times, and even colonial times had an auspicious place for women. Understandably, women of the period rose to fill the place with sufficient pomp and grace, achieving considerable impact. V. C. Uchendu, one of the earliest Igbo writers on Igbo culture, remarks as follows:

The African woman regarded as a chattel of her husband, who has made a bridewealth payment on her account, is not an Igbo woman, who enjoys a high

socioeconomic status. She can leave her husband at will, abandon him if he becomes a thief, and summon him to a tribunal, where she will get a fair hearing. She marries in her own right and manages her trading capital and her profits as she sees fit [...] [Women] can have leasehold, take titles, and practice medicine. (Uchendu 1965: 87).

A younger Igbo anthropologist, this time a female, writes in this vein:

Sex was not forced on a woman; she was constantly surrounded by children and other people [...] The sanctity of motherhood meant that women were treated with respect. One woman might desire an intense relationship with her husband, another might see marital obligations as a necessary but loathsome duty. Some might abandon their relationship with their husband and shun "men and their trouble". Indigenous architecture and male/female polygyny made these choices possible. (Amadiume 1987: 114).

The reason for citing these two specialists on the Igbo culture is to show that women in Igboland had not always been a helpless sex as recent Igbo feminists are wont to paint them. As indicated earlier, women as a collective constitute a formidable force in the politics of any Igbo clan. And as I had had to state elsewhere,

In practically all Igbo communities, women in their natal villages – addressed as "umuada" or "umumgboto" – wielded legal, decisional rights comparable to those of a modern supreme court. The "umuada" were last arbiters; they equally had right to intervene, even uninvited, when they believed that there had been a miscarriage of justice. (Nwachukwu-Agbada 2006: 82).

One can in fact say that Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, reclining on the Igbo estimation of *umuada* and the potential of *alutaradi*, may have compelled the Okwara daughters to return to Umuga with a view to righting some of the wrongs against women in their natal domain. Although the Okwaras had returned for a few days to mark the fifth year anniversary of Osai's death, and to honour Eaglewoman, their mother, on her birthday, the task their creator set them to do, is that of re-education, of implementing her canons of 'daughteryonomy'.

### **Ten patriarchal assumptions and the feminism of re-education**

By 'patriarchal assumptions' one is referring to certain givens in Umuga which the Okwara daughters through their educative thrusts – overt and covert – come to confront headlong or come to show that they need not exist in a particular manner. At each turn they experience these assumptions, they repudiate them or challenge their illogical substructure.

The first of the assumptions is that brute strength matters. The daughters take up the challenge of destroying such an assumption. The activities of the Umeaku sons in uprooting boundary markers between their land and Osai's show that they believe that raw strength is supreme. "That evening," Eaglewoman reports to her daughters, "they stalked this piece of land like beasts of prey, killed and uprooted all the markers. Their shouts of abuse filled the air, some of it directed at me personally, the rest at my departed husband." (71).

The Umeaku sons did what they did because there was no male in the Okwara family strong enough to challenge them. In a tone of helplessness Eaglewoman, now ageing, laments: "What could I do? I have no husband or grown son to fight for me?" (71). However, the Okwara domestic amazons take up the challenge. We are informed "Nnenne bites her lips in an effort to suppress her rising anger" (72). Ogonna, the eldest daughter, "clenches her hand as if preparing to punch someone." On the part of Obioma, she shakes "her head in disgust at the sight before them, wondering how anyone could commit such a senseless act" while Amara is said to have shouted 'Hey' twice "in utter disbelief" (72). These gestures show how impassioned injustice can be, whether it is directed at a male or a female, whether one has sufficient physical strength to fight it or not.

The second assumption is that "women are not permitted to approach *Ogunano Ezeala* directly or address the council." Eaglewoman expresses this fear in front of her children who are bent on calling the Umeaku sons to order. Eaglewoman may have been an adventurous woman beyond the manner women in her younger days carried themselves about, particularly with respect to economic independence and moderating her husband, in old age she seems to have turned male-centric, pleading for calm and readily turning the other cheek as it were. However, "children of the eagle" challenge her new frame of mind. They not only reject their mother's notion, they equally turn down the suggestion that Pa Joel represent them before *Ogunano*. Amara cries, "At this time and age women are not allowed to approach a group set up to keep peace in the town?" (74). Nnenne insists that "we must direct our grievance straight to these men" (74).

Soon an idea is struck. Their solution is brainpower, the use of the word. They construct a letter, which ensures that "we'll communicate with them directly as well as have a record of our petition and our demand for justice in case we need to go beyond the council to seek justice at a later date." (74). Earlier Nnenne had said to the other daughters, "I assure you that if justice fails to materialize at this level [*Ogunano*], we'll take the case to court" (74). Much later in the story, their letter wins for them a permanent solution to the land matter between them and the Umeakus. The solution is the erection of permanent markers on the boundary between the two lands. The answer to the land dispute – erection of pillars separating the two parcels of land – was suggested by the Okwara daughters in the letter to *Ogunano Ezeala*. Thus the claim by one of the

representatives of *Ogunano* that the four sisters “acted like men” (315) is faulty; instead they acted like women! The reason is that men would have first resorted to the use of brawn rather than brain before settling for a compromise in the end.

The third assumption is that in land matters, males must be present before a land case can be resolved. This is another patriarchal claim, which the Okwara sisters are determined to debunk. At the erection of the permanent pillars on the disputed lands, a representative of *Ogunano* insists on Nkemdirim, the male heir to the Okwara family, being present. When he learns from Eaglewoman that “my son has not returned home yet,” he retorts: “He should be here while the markers are being erected.” The daughters are incensed. Nnenne speaks on behalf of the other sisters: “He’s only a child and there are five of us present to represent the family.” However, as far as the emissary of peace is concerned, this is not enough. For him, not even ten women are equivalent to a man! Grunts the representative, “Your brother may be a child but he is a male. The land in question belongs to him: it is his inheritance. Whoever hears that land issues are settled in the presence of women in Umuga?” (315).

Knowing that this is a battle he could never win, the representative quickly accepts the exit provided by Pa Joel with his smooth speech:

Ogunano Ezeala knows and you too know that there is no difference between the Okwara family and my own family. I have been like a father to all his children since Okwara rejoined the ancestors. I represent them in everything and have often spoken for them in the meetings of Ogunano Ezeala, especially as the only son of the family is still a minor. (315).

The representative’s quick acceptance of Pa Joel’s suggestion indicates that patriarchy is losing out. Thus the compromise that “you [Pa Joel] will act as the family’s representative as well as Ogunano Ezeala’s is only a face-saving device. Any wonder that upon the exit of Pa Joel and the other emissaries of peace, Amara, *l’enfant terrible* of the family, asks: “How can one have respect for a tradition that denies women the right to be treated decently as human beings?” (317).

Fourthly, patriarchy assumes that a son is more valuable than all daughters added together. As already indicated during our discourse on the peace mission of *Ogunano Ezeala*, the verbal as well as body language of its chief representative is that in land matters a son could be more important than many daughters put together. However, the fretting by Eaglewoman over Nkemdirim’s non-return to participate in the family celebrations of end of that year seems to insinuate that a son is more valuable than daughters. For instance, on hearing that Nkemdirim had been involved in a motor accident even if not fatal, “Eaglewoman slumps sideways: her head falls against the arm of the chair.” (373).

Yet Nkemdirim is still an adolescent, a schoolboy. The expectation of the family is that the future fortunes of the family rest with his survival and longevity. Thus the news of the accident involving Nkemdirim is a big blow to Eaglewoman in particular as she bears the greatest pain with regard to the family inheritance. Yet Nkemdirim is the biological son of one of the Okwara sisters, adopted as it were by Eaglewoman as one of her direct children, having beguiled the people or so she thought. The daughters are all accomplished: they erect a storeyed building at the Osai compound and install a generator, drive their own cars and ensure luxury all around them. Chiaku can afford to return for the family festivities from England with her white boyfriend in tow. Although one may say that Eaglewoman's worry is the way a woman is supposed to feel if she is about to lose a child, any child, she is certainly worried because of the threat of losing a family heir. Upon hearing from Nkemdirim that he is after all safe and alive, Eaglewoman quickly pays a visit to Osai's grave and intones: "Osai, our son is alive and well." (397).

The fifth assumption is that an 'Okoroigwe' or indeed heroism is a male affair. Aziagba, the grandmother of the four sisters used to tell them stories about the war, which the white people "waged against Umuga people" (328). They were stories "about the exploits of our ancestors Obiatu and Okoroji, the War Commander of Umuga." So moved was Nnenne that years later she was to write *The Epic of Okorigwe*, Okorigwe being another name for Okoroji, "the legendary figure in Umuga tradition whose story makes the head swell with wonder and admiration." He is said to have had the strength of a demigod in whose names songs were composed.

However, at the height of Aziagba's excitement as she narrated the Okorigwe tales, Nnenne was to ask her grandmother if there had not been "female heroes – heroines" or put more directly, "Was there no female Okorigwe?" (329). The grandmother answers rather innocently that she does not "remember any female Okorigwe." But Nnenne is striving to make the point that whereas in Igbo cosmogony "things in the universe stand in pairs [...] if something stands, another like it stands next to it to complement it" (330), the impression is often given that all heroic acts are of male origin. Yet "a woman who wishes to live a fulfilled life expends her time fighting many battles: winning some, losing some." (330).

Thus Obuof Day is for these domestic amazons, a fulfilled and fulfilling one as their ancestresses – the four *oluada* – were honoured. For the sisters it is a day of restitution for the 'female Okorigwes' of Umuga. Nnenne had earlier promised herself that she "would go in search of a female Okorigwe because she was convinced she existed." On the one hand, "if she did exist, then I must find her, I must excavate her and bring her to limelight like her male counterpart," and on the other, "if indeed she did not exist, then I would invent her – create her in my stories, in my writing" (329). Luckily the Obuof Day partially fulfils that dream. This is because it is on this

occasion that the four *Oluada* “who deserve honour have been formally honoured at last.” It is at this ceremony that the Eze of Umuga confers “posthumous chieftaincy titles on both male and female Obuofo who led Umuga with wisdom more than half a century ago. They died in the service of their fatherland.” (302).

Sixthly, it is expected by patriarchy that women must not nurture individual character. It is in fact a factor of their subservient places in their family that the *alutaradi* (women married into Umuga) “bunch together, wear the same clothes, hoping that sheer number might do the trick” (101). In other circumstances already pointed out above, bunching together would work, but in a calm, peaceful climate of everyday life, Nnenne, the voice currently criticising Umuga women for dressing alike, cajoles their “herd mentality”. The truth is that most Umuga women are ensconced in the “prison of low self-esteem, which blights their psyche. Submerged by culture, women inevitably become self-effacing, lacking self-confidence.” (101). It then suits the men if women “abhor individual action or self-determination.” (101).

The women’s low self-esteem, coupled with their low education, makes it difficult for them to realize themselves fully in the utmost sense of the expression. For instance, they hardly knew the best way to “cook vegetables without losing the vitamins.” (102). Ogonna, the eldest of the Okwara sisters, is up to teach some Umuga women who visit them how best to prepare vegetables, “depending on [...] whether you want them crunchy or soft.” (102).

Their poor life-styles are responsible for the way the women look. In the presence of the four daughters of Okwara whose looks are clearly different, one Umuga woman could not help to remark: “Take a look at your bodies; they exude oil. Not a wrinkle on any of your faces.” (108). For such a remark to be made, it is likely that the female guests and the Okwara sisters may have been within the same age bracket. Another Umuga woman observes: “Take a look at my *kpakiri-kpakiri* skin; it is hard and rough like the bark of a tree.” The four sisters educate the village women on how to eat healthily and exercise regularly for “the body to remain youthful” since if the “body is well cared for, it rebuffs the attack of invading diseases.” (110).

The seventh assumption by the regime in Umuga that the author sets herself the task of disproving is that it is a man’s prerogative to enjoy sex. She does this through the re-education of women on the principles of sexual enjoyment. Nnenne advises the rural women to be sure that in bed none must allow her husband “to grab all the pleasure” because “the pleasure is not all his. You have a right to some of it. You should ensure that you get it, or there should be no business at all.” (113). One woman confesses of her own experience whenever she is in an act with her husband: “my spirit stands aside to watch [...] like the ghost of a newly dead person [...] watching the funeral rites.” (113). A heart-to-heart talk takes place between the Umuga women

and the “daughters of Obidiegwu Okwara” on how to improve sex enjoyment within marriage. The women’s vote of thanks rendered by the vocal Akuoma is evidence that some re-education has taken place: “We thank you again for what we learnt today. Tonight, when I throw my right leg and then the left one at my husband, and reach out to him with my arm, I will be properly armed to defeat his astonishment or disapproval. I may even go further than that and lick his lips.” (117).

Part of the re-education is, eighthly, the emphasis the Okwara sisters place on women’s economic independence. “We urge each one of you to find something to do to generate income for yourself so that you can take care of yourself and your children...” (118). This is because as Aziagba would say: “a woman who waits for a man or a husband to supply her needs, ends up cooking only water in her pot.” (119). And of course with economic independence a woman can easily assert total control over her body, as to how and when it is to be used.

Part of the strategy for the maintenance of patriarchy is fear, particularly among women and children in Umuga. Thus when a bull is on the rampage, it is widely believed that Osai’s ghost is loose, and moreover on the warpath. In recent times, every now and then an unknown creature haunts Osai’s home. This creature comes in the dark and “nobody in this house knows what it is; we only hear its cry. We are too frightened to try to find out what it is” (162). Patriarchy encourages fear and superstition because that is part of its method to keep the women and children in their places. In the case of the experience of the Okwara family, rather than come to their help by really locating the source of the “frightening and earth-shaking crises,” some (particularly men) are saying that “[Osai’s] spirit inhabits this wild creature and harasses the neighbourhood.” (162).

However, on another day when “the roar of the beast” is heard again, the domestic amazons, their mother and Okon, their male servant, take the bull by the horns by going after the creature! Incidentally they discover that it is indeed a bull belonging to a shrine in another village that may have gone berserk.

The ninth assumption is that when a man dies, it is the wife that should be held accountable. An assumption of patriarchy in Igboland is that a man never dies without the wife or wives knowing something about it. There is no written law about this, yet if his death is to be investigated, the wife or wives are the first suspects. In Igbo tradition, the ‘investigation’ is self-conclusive; it is assumed that once the man dies, it is the widow who would have arranged for it in order to benefit from the wealth he would have left behind.

In spite of her having lived happily with the husband, Eaglewoman is equally asked to perform the widowhood rituals, which are demeaning to the bereaved woman. For instance, she is expected “to perform the three-day ritual lament at

cockcrow, after the burial." (161). During this time she is supposed to howl "like a hyena for three days." However, her daughters intervene wondering "why on earth" Umuga should "want to sustain such a horrible custom" (161).

Ironically, it is the *umuada* (ex-maidens married out of Umuga) that insist on Eaglewoman performing the "horrible custom" in addition to the locusts they turn out to be at the burial of Josiah Okwara. For more than two weeks the *umuada* descend on the bereaved family "eating and drinking in my house at my expense, without giving a thought to my agony or depression." Not only are they guzzlers, "they complained that the food given them was not big enough. Sometimes they rejected the food, threatening to desert the funeral rites and rituals." For Eaglewoman, it is real torture. For instance, "the one-year mourning period I was confined at home aggravated the pain in my knees. See where it has left me." (161).

The final and tenth assumption is that no woman is worth her achievement except she surrenders her body in exchange for progress or promotion at work. One of the odds against women in a typical Nigerian workplace is what some of their male bosses take them to be. Even when such women show evidence of some acumen, their promotion in the job place is often predicated on the amount of sexual gratification they are willing to grant their male superiors. This is Adanna's case, even in a university setting where promotion is supposed to be largely based on intellectual productivity. As Nnenne reminds her other sisters as they take a march round the village, "You remember Adanna had to leave her university job to form a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO). Her action was a result of the harrowing experience she went through in her university, especially in her department." (203).

Adanna used to be a hardworking academic but she is however shoved out of the university system "more or less by a lustful and spent professor who headed her department at the time. He couldn't forgive her for spurning his amorous advances" (206). Nnenne complains to her sisters that she is so concerned about the female students who are "rather more vulnerable" to sexual harassment at school. The truth is that at work or school, "sexism brandishes its tyrannical side like a weapon, against woman" (205). Such is Adanna's commitment to gender equity that she founds an NGO called Gender Equity Watch (GEW) with which she "promotes qualitative research into gender issues and the dissemination of that research to government and its agencies, to industries and the private sector, in general." (208).

## Conclusion

Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo is a writer committed to the conscientization of fellow women and the enlightenment of men. Her tenor is controlled, mature and persuasive. One agrees with Femi Osofisan (2004: 39) who remarks that while Ezeigbo may be

“vociferous” in insisting on the “empowerment of women” and also in her condemnation of “their marginalization in a male-dominated society,” she is not “for all that an iconoclast or phalrophobist. She protests and denounces, but her goal is negotiation, compromise, reconciliation.” In fact her pitch in *Children of the Eagle* reminds one of the Egyptian writer, Alifa Rifaat, who while not confronting Islamism, slightly parts her veil to whisper veritable protests into the ears of Moslem husbands in which she urges them not to deny the humanity of their wives (Nwachukwu-Agbada 1990: 108–10).

In *Children of the Eagle* Ezeigbo propounds ‘daughteronomy’ by using four sisters as vehicles of dispersing the nebulous clouds of patriarchy over a part of Igboland. The four daughters of the Okwara couple, enjoy sisterhood, and with their sisterhood they launch out a quiet reform of the retrogressive traditions in Umuga. Each of these women may have had her own marital problems, probably with the exception of Nnenne; they, however, come to Umuga for a few days casting behind them these problems just to unmask patriarchy and its assumptions. The impression they create is that so much can be achieved by women in a bid to weaken patriarchy, in the effort to raise the consciousness of the rural women, to challenge non-progressive customs, to repudiate certain assumptions and to enrich the material and sexual lives of women. This Ezeigbo does through her implementation of the feminism of re-education.

## Notes

1. This is a lightly revised version of a paper presented at the African Literature Association Conference held at Western Illinois University, Macomb, Illinois USA, 22–27 April 2008.
2. The plot of the novel centres on the Josiah Okwara family, now run by Ugonwanyi (Eaglewoman), a strong but responsible wife who although loyal to her husband and the culture, nevertheless took decisions that placed her in a class of her own. In a culture in which inheritance is patrilineal, Eaglewoman is anxious over who will take over from her since Osai (Josiah), her husband, was already dead and the many daughters were married off. The only one, one who could stand in for the family is not the many Okwara daughters – even all of them together – but a boy borne out of wedlock by one of the daughters. It is against this cultural contradiction, its injustices and assumptions that Adimora-Ezeigbo directs her novel. Henceforth page references refer to *Children of the Eagle*.

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