

A Cultural Study of Race and Identity in the Novels of Lesley Lokko

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Abstract: The literature of the Third World deals mainly with culture, society and humanity, representing all major undeveloped, underdeveloped and developing states across the world. Basically all the sub-Saharan countries and Indian sub-continent continue to witness the cultural and social glitches ever since centuries. Though they have widely been explored in cultural, sociological and literary perspectives, still the problems continue to persecute the afflicted communities. As a feminist Lesley Lokko depicts the black women and their struggle to prove and gain their identity against the racial and gender tides. It is one of the major blatant evils in the process of recognition, assimilation and entitlement of identity for the black women. The article attempts to study the novelist Lesley Lokko in a feministic perception through her female characters who have doubly been discriminated by racism and cultural and social forces with reference to culture of Africa, racial discrimination, female identity struggle by the Africans in Ghana and Africa, the UK and the US portrayed in her novels. Lokko depict their struggle to establish their identity and destiny that embodies the major constituent of this research aiming to find their feminist struggle.

Key words: Culture of Africa and Ghana, racism in Africa, female identity struggle, recognition, assimilation.

Introduction: Race and identity encompass major components in the African literature, the former recoils even today from the First to Third Worlds for the African people are scattered all over the world specially the US and the UK forming the latter a significant factor for their recognition and assimilation. The world heads to a composite development in all respects absorbing even the African community but the question remains whether their 'black identity' that is their 'race' is categorically accepted and recognized. The answer would be 'still there' in many respects. Many writers have embodied and continue to embody this issue as an emblematic anguish so is Lesley Lokko along with racism represents female identity struggle for their recognition and assimilation. Lesley is one of the established writers who was born and brought up both in Africa and the UK experienced racial discrimination from her childhood in both places. Her experiences have established a

tangible element in her works by posing a challenge to the literary circles and the society that the race and female identity problems continue to cringe our order and need to be addressed anew.

Disucssion: A Ghanaian born Scottish architect, academician and novelist; Lesley Naa Norle Lokkko aka Lesley Lokko was born to a Ghanaian surgeon and Scottish housewife; she grew up and spent her childhood shuttling between Ghana and Scotland. She was sent as a boarder to the Malvern School for her A Levels, learned Hebrew and Arabic in Oxford further pursued her PhD in University of London. While studying the languages, she dropped the course in midway and followed her boyfriend to the US where, she was, she grieved, ‘duped, tricked, bamboozled, ripped off, rescued and challenged,’ what influenced her writing. She is the eldest of the five children two brothers and two sisters shouldered their responsibilities. Even during the boarding school she attended, she felt a clear sense of her black identity and a challenge of identity imposed from outside than a sense to herself. She resigned her regular university job to continue to the full time writing still to be associated with teaching she lectures in South Africa, the UK and the US.

Articulating about her diversion and interest in writing novels, she says, the institutional resistance of architecture that discomfited her as the wrong discipline led her to writing novels. Her childhood experience in Ghana coupled with fiction opened for her new way to see a different world. Lesley feels that the fiction offers the best mode of expressing her world of Ghana and Scotland featuring race, identity and diaspora in terms of the black women. Her experience as a middle-class black woman and international traveller has left her with an impression of what it is to be an outsider, and this has, she admits, influenced the themes of her books. She found the British boarding school cliquey as an outsider. But at the same time, she expressed grief over the grave picture of race and class in Africa which were not so intertwined as in the US or the UK or other part of the world. The school she attended, some girls were racist in a way but very classist too but a plenty of them believed in the Empire and treated her as a bit of a colonial. It figures as a theme in her novels further adding spice to the entertainment.

She wanted to shy away from the word racism to the African-Caribbean professionals as being viewed beyond narrow cultural boundaries. This racist experience, she experienced with a publisher who discouraged her by his comment ‘as a Black writer she would sell 300 copies on the ‘Black Interest’ shelf – this was shocking for her what forced her to question about the ‘Black Interest’. She echoes this frustration of the African-Caribbean writers, burdened with

the expectation from the predominantly white industry that their work should reflect some homogenised ‘black experience and interest’, especially racism. Lesley depicts the blatant picture of racism, ‘It is a culture steeped in secrecy. There are a lot of things that are not expressed and lots of shame. So I thought it would be interesting to look at what it is like to

grow up in a culture where nothing is said but everything is seen.' She does not refuse to be recognized as a black woman but questions the literary circles and publication houses and their hypocritical prejudice for the black writers to always voice the pain of the place they belong to. Further the bias is witnessed flawed only in the case of the black writers whose existence and voice are somehow defined by the racism unlike Asian, Bangladeshi or others. Lesley Lokko combines the portrayal of her architectural passion and culture with the themes of cultural and racial identity as the dominant factors of her novels along with love, friendship, relationship and betrayal, and democracy and corruption are also laced through. Racism follows female identity struggle with the migration of the Africans to the European countries specially the US and the UK. The female characters in Lesley's works strive to establish themselves on the foreign land and encounter severe racism. Racism and female gender both flinch the female characters.

Sundowners is a turbulent life story of the four best friends over three decades, the story moves from a boarding school in rural England to the heady days of freedom in South Africa driving their life with upside down. So is the *Saffron Skies*; a moderate autobiographical story with resonances in Lesley's interior life; she draws upon people she knows for some of her characters' traits. The novel deals with the racism, rape etc. Lesley being Ghanaian herself embodies the issue of racism based on her own experience. It is a story of Jewish Max and his wife Angela and mistress Francesca. The women are after Max to fulfill their love and ambition, Francesca seeks for an opportunity to establish her life. In *Bitter Chocolate* Laure, Améline, Melanie; the girls are in search of their lives. These young girls are apparently all unrelated to each other but with one common goal to find something that make their life complete ie their destiny. The novel also seeks to explore love and superficial practice of marriage. Laure and Ameline struggle in their lives due to their skin colour, their lack of knowledge, their language barriers and the place they come from; symbolizing racism. Like shame is conveyed as, 'The kids in his high school would call him 'Aids Monkey''. This was from black kids, so there was a huge amount of shame about his origin.' Here Lesley draws on her own experiences bringing the book life and colour.

Rich Girl, Poor Girl; Nic, Caryn and Tory: three girls; lifetime friends exhibit a story of glamour, ambition, greed, and power sweeping the action from London to Zimbabwe to Paris. Each of them seeks to ascertain their identity. *A Private Affair* - Sam Morland has looks, a glittering career, two homes, a sports car and plenty of money but husbandless finding one, Abby Barclay – the perfect army wife, Meaghan Astor also an army wife, Dani Tsemo young and beautiful – all have different stories and dreams but that one right man enters their lives to wreck them all. *An Absolute Deception* – is Lesley's another saga of racism, identity, friendship, relationships and betrayal. Anneliese Zander de St Phalle is one of the world's most celebrated fashion designers, keeps her secret hidden even from her daughter is found trapped by a woman who she despises, the latter attempts to foil her plan.

Little White Lies - Rebecca, the protagonist of the novel seeks to find her identity for herself. As a docile daughter, she shoulders responsibilities of a daughter, wife and mother and pleases them all. She finds herself in a fix as she has to please herself. She begins to wonder whether she will ever have the chance or the courage to please herself. *In Love and War* is another saga of Lesley in which Lexi Sturgi a news correspondent braves in the man's world during a war period in the world's most disturbed regions to cover and provide the news channel. She is associated by Jane in stormiest circumstances. They dare out on the operation to prove their worth and create their image without challenging or harming the male fraternity.

And *One Secret Summer* is a story of a perfect family of three sons exhibiting a thin line between love and hate. The three Keeler sons bring three very different women who cause, into the heart of the family what witnesses a fall of the family. It reflects the story of an increasingly globalised society.

Conclusion: Study of primary works of Lesley and their analysis in terms of race and identity is extremely essential, it helps understand not only Lesley Lokko but all the writers representing the cultural and social issues across the globe. While Lesley Lokko has extremely depicted herself as one of the major characters along with other characters with utter inhuman cruelty. All nine novels including her last book *In Love and War* published in 2014, are highlighted as the masterpieces evidencing the culture, race and identity in view of female characters in the novels.

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