

SEVEN OUTSTANDING NIGERIAN WOMEN WRITERS



A Publication of the Society of Young Nigerian Writers

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Zulu Sofola

'**Zulu Sofola** (22 June 1935 - 5 September 1995) was the first published female Nigerian playwright and dramatist. Sofola was also a university teacher and became the first female Professor of Theater Arts in Africa.

Biography

Nwazuluwa Onuekwuke Sofola was born in Bendel State to parents who were Igbo from Issele-Uku in Delta State. Spending her adolescence and early womanhood in the USA, she studied at Southern Baptist Seminary, earned a BA in English at Virginia Union University and an MA in drama (1965) from The Catholic University of America. She returned to Nigeria in 1966, and was a lecturer in the Department of Theatre Arts at the University of Ibadan, Oyo State, where she obtained a PhD.

She also taught Drama at the University of Ilorin, Kwara state, Nigeria where she was appointed, Head of

Department for the Performing Arts. Sofola was a singer, dancer, as well as a prolific playwright. She wrote and directed many plays for stage and television, including her own work, such as *King Emene*. Her plays "range from historical tragedy to domestic comedy and use both traditional and modern African setting". She uses "elements of magic, myth and ritual to examine conflicts between traditionalism and modernism in which male supremacy persists." She was considered one of the most distinguished women in Nigerian literature.

Sofola's most frequently performed plays are *Wedlock of the Gods* (1972) and *The Sweet Trap* (1977), She died in 1995 at the age of 60.

Selected works

- *The Deer Hunter and The Hunter's Pearl* (1969), London: Evans Brothers
- *The Disturbed Peace of Christmas* (1971), Ibadan: Daystar Press
- *Wedlock of the Gods* (1972), Ibadan: Evans
- *The Operators*, Ibadan: Ibadan University, 1973

- *King Emene: Tragedy of a Rebellion* (1974), Heinemann Educational Books. ISBN 0-435-92860-0
- *The Wizard of Law* (1975), Evans Bros. ISBN 0-237-49951-7
- *The Sweet Trap* (1977); Ibadan: Oxford University Press. ISBN 0-19-575386-X
- *Old Wines Are Tasty* (1981), Ibadan: Oxford University Press. ISBN 978-154-499-6
- *Memories in the Moonlight* (1986), Ibadan: Evans Brothers.
- *Queen Omu-ako of Oligbo*, Buffalo: Paul Robeson Theatre, 1989
- *Eclipso and the Fantasia*, Illorin, Nigeria: 1990
- *The Showers*, Illorin, Nigeria: 1991
- *Song of a Maiden: A Play*, Illorin, Nigeria: Heinemann, 1992.
- *Lost Dreams and Other Plays*, Ibadan: Heinemann, 1992.

Osonye Tess Onwueme

Osonye Tess Onwueme (born September 8, 1955) is a Nigerian playwright, scholar and poet, who rose to prominence writing plays with themes of social justice, culture, and the environment. In 2010, she became the University Professor of Global Letters, following her exceptional service as Distinguished Professor of Cultural Diversity and English at the University of Wisconsin–Eau Claire. She has won several international awards, including: the prestigious Fonlon-Nichols award (2009), the Phyllis Wheatley/Nwapa award for outstanding black writers (2008), the Martin Luther King, Jr./Caesar Chavez Distinguished Writers Award (1989/90), the Distinguished Authors Award (1988), and the Association of Nigerian Authors Drama Prize which she has won several times with plays like *The Desert Encroaches* (1985), *Tell It To Women* (1995), *Shakara: Dance-Hall Queen* (2001), *Then She Said it* (2003), among numerous honors and international productions of her drama. Through her plays, she is able to use the theater as a medium to showcase historically silenced

views such as African Women, and shedding more light on African life. She sustains her advocacy for the global poor and youth, along with the experiences and concerns of the (African) Diaspora in her creative work. In 2007, the US State Department appointed her to the Public Diplomacy Speaker Program for North, East, and West India. The *2009 Tess International Conference: Staging Women, Youth, Globalization, and Eco-Literature*, which was exclusively devoted to the author's work was successfully held by international scholars in the Nigerian capital, Abuja, following the Fonlon-Nichols award to the dramatist. She is regarded as one of the band of more important African authors.

Early life and education

She was born **Osonye Tess Akeake** in *Ogwashi-Uku*, present-day Delta state, to the family of barrister Chief Akaeke and Maria Eziashr. Osonye was educated at the *Mary Mount Secondary School*: it was while at the school that she first dabbled in writing. After secondary education, she married an agronomist, I. C. Onwueme,

and bore five children, during the time she attended the University of Ife, for her bachelor's degree in education (1979) and master's in literature (1982). She obtained her PhD at the University of Benin, studying African Drama. In 1998 she married Obika Gray, a Jamaican political scientist.

Works

- *A Hen Too Soon*. 1983.
- *Broken Calabash*. 1984.
- *The Desert Encroaches* (1985)
- *The Reign of Wazobia* (1988)
- *Ban Empty Barn and other plays* (1986)
- *Legacies* (1989)
- *Three Plays: an anthology of plays by Tess Onwueme* (1993)
- *Tell It To Women: an epic drama* (1995).
- *Riot In Heaven: drama for the voices of color* (1996; 2006).
- *The Missing Face, a play* (1997; 2000).

- *Shakara: Dance-Hall Queen: a play* (2000; 2006).
- *Then She Said It: a play* (2003)
- *What Mama Said, an epic drama* (2004).
- *No Vacancy* (2005)

Sefi Atta

Sefi Atta (born 1964) is a prize-winning Nigerian author and playwright.

Biography

Sefi Atta was born in Lagos, Nigeria, in 1964, to a family of five children. Her father Abdul-Aziz Atta was the Secretary to Federal Government and Head of the Civil Service until his death in 1972, and she was raised by her mother Iyabo Atta.

She attended Queen's College, Lagos, and Millfield School in England. In 1985, she graduated from Birmingham University and trained as a chartered accountant. She moved from England to the United States in 1994 with her husband, Gboyega Ransome-Kuti, a medical doctor, and son of Olikoye Ransome-Kuti. They have one daughter.

Sefi's Lagos-based production company Atta Girl supports Care to Read, a program she initiated to earn funds for legitimate charities through staged readings.

She currently divides her time between Nigeria, England and the United States.

Writing

Atta began to write while working as a CPA in New York, and in 2001, she graduated from the creative writing program at Antioch University, Los Angeles. Her short stories have appeared in literary journals such as *Los Angeles Review*, *Mississippi Review* and *World Literature Today*. Her books have been translated to several languages.

Novels

- 2012 *A Bit of Difference*, Interlink Books, ISBN 978-1566568920
- 2010 *Swallow*, Interlink Books, ISBN 978-1566568333

- 2005 *Everything Good Will Come*, Interlink Books, ISBN 978-1566565707

Short-story collections

- 2010 *News from Home*, Interlink Books, ISBN 978-1566568036

Stage plays

- 2012 *An Ordinary Legacy*, The MUSON Festival, MUSON Centre, Lagos
- 2012 *The Naming Ceremony*, New World Nigeria, Theatre Royal Stratford East, London
- 2011 *Hagel auf Zamfara*, Theatre Krefeld, Germany
- 2011 *The Cost of Living*, Lagos Heritage Festival, Terra Kulture, Lagos
- 2005 *The Engagement*, MUSON Centre, Lagos

Radio plays

- 2013 *The Wake*, Smooth FM, Lagos
- 2007 *A Free Day*, BBC Radio

- 2004 *Makinwa's Miracle*, BBC Radio
- 2002 *The Engagement*, BBC Radio

Screenplays

- 2009 *Leaving on Your Mind* - quarter-finalist for the American Zoetrope Screenplay Contest

Selected awards and recognition

- 2009 Noma Award for Publishing in Africa
- 2006 Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa
- 2006 Caine Prize for African Literature, shortlist
- 2005 PEN International David TK Wong Prize, 1st Prize
- 2004 BBC African Performance, 2nd Prize
- 2003 Glimmer Train's Very Short Fiction Award, finalist
- 2003 Red Hen Press Short Story Award, 1st prize
- 2002 Zoetrope Short Fiction Contest, 3rd Prize
- 2002 BBC African Performance, 2nd Prize
- 2002 Macmillan Writers Prize For Africa, shortlist

Visiting Writer

- 2010 Ecole Normale Supérieure de Lyon
- 2008 Northwestern University
- 2006 University of Southern Mississippi

Atta was on the jury for the 2010 Neustadt International Prize for Literature.

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Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie



Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (born 15 September 1977) is a Nigerian writer. She has been called "the most prominent" of a "procession of critically acclaimed young anglophone authors [that] is succeeding in attracting a new generation of readers to African literature".

Personal life and education

Born in the city of Enugu, she grew up the fifth of six children in an Igbo family in the university town of Nsukka in southeastern Nigeria, where the University of Nigeria is situated. While she was growing up, her father James Nwoye Adichie was a professor of statistics at the university, and her mother Grace Ifeoma was the university's first female registrar. Her family's ancestral village is in Abba in Anambra State.

Adichie studied medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria for a year and a half. During this period, she edited *The Compass*, a magazine run by the university's Catholic medical students. At the age of 19, Adichie left Nigeria and moved to the United States for college. After studying communications and political science at Drexel University in Philadelphia, she transferred to Eastern Connecticut State University to live closer to her sister, who had a medical practice in Coventry. She received a bachelor's degree from Eastern, where she graduated Summa Cum Laude in 2001.

In 2003, she completed a master's degree in creative writing at Johns Hopkins University. In 2008, she received a Master of Arts degree in African studies from Yale University.

Adichie was a Hodder fellow at Princeton University during the 2005–06 academic year. In 2008 she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship. She has also been awarded a 2011–12 fellowship by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study, Harvard University.

Adichie, who is married, divides her time between Nigeria, where she teaches writing workshops, and the United States.

Writing career

Adichie published a collection of poems in 1997 (*Decisions*) and a play (*For Love of Biafra*) in 1998. She was shortlisted in 2002 for the Caine Prize for her short story "You in America".

In 2003, her story "That Harmattan Morning" was selected as joint winner of the BBC Short Story Awards, and she won the O. Henry prize for "The American Embassy". She also won the David T. Wong International Short Story Prize 2002/2003 (PEN Center Award) and a 2007 Beyond Margins Award for her short story "Half of a Yellow Sun".

Her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), received wide critical acclaim; it was shortlisted for the Orange Prize for Fiction (2004) and was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book (2005).

Her second novel, *Half of a Yellow Sun*, named after the flag of the short-lived nation of Biafra, is set before and during the Biafran War. It was awarded the 2007 Orange Prize for Fiction. *Half of a Yellow Sun* has been adapted into a film of the same title directed by Biyi Bandele, starring Academy Award nominee Chiwetel Ejiofor and BAFTA award-winner Thandie Newton, and was released in 2014.

Her third book, *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009), is a collection of short stories.

In 2010 she was listed among the authors of *The New Yorker's* "20 Under 40" Fiction Issue. Adichie's story, "Ceiling", was included in the 2011 edition of *The Best American Short Stories*.

In 2013 she published her third novel, *Americanah* which was selected by the *New York Times* as one of The 10 Best Books of 2013.

In April 2014 she was named as one of 39 writers aged under 40 in the Hay Festival and Rainbow Book Club project celebrating Port Harcourt UNESCO World Book Capital 2014

Lectures

Adichie spoke on "The Danger of a Single Story" for TED in 2009. On 15 March 2012, she delivered the "Connecting Cultures" Commonwealth Lecture 2012 at the Guildhall, London. Adichie also spoke on being a

feminist for TEDxEuston in December 2012, with her speech entitled, "We should all be feminists". This speech was sampled for the 2013 song "***Flawless" by American performer Beyoncé, where it attracted further attention.

Distinctions

Awards and nominations

Year	Award	Work	Result
	Caine Prize for African Writing	"You in America"	Nominated
2002	Commonwealth Short Story Competition	"The Tree in Grandma's Garden"	Nominated
	BBC Short Story Competition	"That Harmattan Morning"	Won
2002/2003	David T. Wong International Short Story Prize (PEN)	"Half of a Yellow Sun"	Won

	American Center Award)		
2003	O. Henry Prize	"The American Embassy"	Won
	Hurston-Wright Legacy Award: Best Debut Fiction Category		Won
	Orange Prize		Nominated
2004	Booker Prize		Nominated
	Young Adult Library Services Association Best Books for Young Adults Award	<i>Purple Hibiscus</i>	Nominated
2004/2005	John Llewellyn Rhys Prize		Nominated
2005	Commonwealth Writers' Prize: Best		Won

	First Book (Africa)	
	Commonwealth	
	Writers' Prize: Best	Won
	First Book (overall)	
2006	National Book Critics Award	Nominated
	British Book Awards: "Richard & Judy Best Read of the Year"	Nominated
	category <i>Half of a</i>	
2007	James Tait Black Memorial Prize	Nominated
	Commonwealth	
	Writers' Prize: Best Book (Africa)	Nominated
	Anisfield-Wolf	
	Book Award: Fiction category	Won

	PEN Beyond Margins Award	Won
	Orange Broadband Prize: Fiction category	Won
	International Impac Dublin Award	Nominated
	Reader's Digest Author of the Year Award	Won
2008	Future Award, Nigeria: Young Person of the Year Herself category	Won
	MacArthur Foundation Genius Grant (along with 24 other winners)	Won
2009	International Nonino Prize	Won

	Frank O'Connor		
	International Short		Nominated
	Story Award		
	John Llewellyn		
	Rhys Prize	<i>The Thing</i>	Nominated
	Commonwealth	<i>Around Your</i>	
	Writers' Prize: Best	<i>Neck</i>	Nominated
2010	Book (Africa)		
	Dayton Literary		Nominated
	Peace Prize		
	ThisDay Awards:		
2011	"New Champions		
	for an Enduring	Herself	Nominated
	Culture" category		
	Chicago Tribune		
	Heartland Prize:		Won
	Fiction category		
2013	National Book	<i>Americanah</i>	
	Critics Circle		Won
	Award: Fiction		

	category	
	Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction	Nominated
2014	MTV Africa Music Awards 2014: Personality of the Year	Pending

Other recognitions

- 2010 Listed among *The New Yorker's* "20 Under 40"
- 2013 Listed among *New York Times'* "Ten Best Books of 2013", for *Americanah*
- 2013 Listed among BBC's "Top Ten Books of 2013", for *Americanah*
- 2013 *Foreign Policy* magazine "Top Global Thinkers of 2013"
- 2013 Listed among the *New African's* "100 Most Influential Africans 2013"
- 2014 Listed among Africa39 project of 39 writers aged under 40

Flora Nwapa



Florence Nwanzuruahu Nkiru Nwapa (13 January 1931 – 16 October 1993) was a Nigerian author best known as **Flora Nwapa**. Her novel *Efuru* (1966) is among the first English-language novels by a woman from Africa.

Biography

Nwapa, born in Oguta, was the forerunner to a generation of African women writers. While never considering herself a feminist, she is best known for recreating life and traditions from a woman's viewpoint. In 1966 her book *Efuru* became Africa's first internationally published female novel in the English language (Heinemann Educational Books). She has been called the mother of modern African literature. Later she went on to become the first African woman publisher of novels when she founded Tata Press.

She also is known for her governmental work in reconstruction after the Biafran War. In particular she worked with orphans and refugees that were displaced during the war. Further she worked as a publisher of African literature and promoted women in African society. Flora Nwapa died on 16 October 1993 in Enugu, Nigeria.

Books

Novels

- *Efuru* (1966)
- *Idu* (Heinemann African Writers Series, No.56, ISBN 0-435-90056-0; 1970)
- *Never Again* (1975)
- *One is Enough* (1981)
- *Women are Different* (1986)

Short stories/poems

- *This is Lagos and Other Stories* (1971)
- *Cassava Song and Rice Song* (1986)
- *Wives at War and Other Stories* (1980)

Children's books

- *Emeka, Driver's Guard* (1972)
- *Mammywater* (1979)
- *Journey to Space* (1980)
- *The Miracle Kittens* (1980)
- *The Adventures of Deke* (1980)

Buchi Emecheta

Buchi Emecheta (born 21 July 1944, in Lagos) is a Nigerian novelist who has published over 20 books, including *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), *The Bride Price* (1976), *The Slave Girl* (1977) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979). Her themes of child slavery, motherhood, female independence and freedom through education have won her considerable critical acclaim and honours, including an Order of the British Empire in 2005. Emecheta once described her stories as "stories of the world...[where]... women face the universal problems of poverty and oppression, and the longer they stay, no matter where they have come from originally, the more the problems become identical."

Early life

(Florence Onye) Buchi Emecheta was born on 21 July 1944, in Lagos to Igbo parents. Both parents are from ibusa delta state Nigeria Alice (Okwuekwuhe) Emecheta and Jeremy Nwabudinke. Her father was a railway worker in the 1940s. Due to the gender bias of the time,

the young Buchi Emecheta was initially kept at home while her younger brother was sent to school; but after persuading her parents to consider the benefits of her education, she spent her early childhood at an all-girl's missionary school. Her father died when she was nine years old. A year later, Emecheta received a full scholarship to the Methodist Girls School, where she remained until the age of sixteen when she married Sylvester Onwordi, a student to whom she had been engaged since she was eleven years old.

Onwordi immediately moved to London to attend university and Emecheta joined him in 1962. She gave birth to five children in six years. It was an unhappy and sometimes violent marriage (as chronicled in her autobiographical writings such as *Second-Class Citizen*). To keep her sanity, Emecheta wrote in her spare time; however, her husband was deeply suspicious of her writing, and he ultimately burned her first manuscript. At the age of 22, Emecheta left her husband. While working to support her five children alone, she earned a BSc degree in Sociology at the University of London.

She began writing about her experiences of Black British life in a regular column in the *New Statesman*, and a collection of these pieces became her first published book in 1972, *In the Ditch*. The semi-autobiographical book chronicled the struggles of a main character named Adah, who is forced to live in a housing estate while working as a librarian to support her five children. Her second novel published two years later, *Second-Class Citizen*, also drew on Emecheta's own experiences, and both books were eventually published in one volume as *Adah's Story*.

Early career

From 1965 to 1969, Emecheta worked as a library officer for the British Museum in London. From 1969 to 1976 she was a youth worker and sociologist for the Inner London Education Authority, and from 1976 to 1978 she was a community worker.

Following her success as an author, Buchi Emecheta has travelled widely as a visiting professor and lecturer. From 1972 to 1979 she visited several American

universities, including Pennsylvania State University, Rutgers University, the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

From 1980 to 1981, she was senior resident fellow and visiting professor of English, University of Calabar, Nigeria. In 1982 she lectured at Yale University, and the University of London, as well as holding a fellowship at the University of London in 1986.

From 1982 to 1983 Buchi Emecheta, together with her journalist son Sylvester, ran the Ogwugwu Afor Publishing Company.

Awards

- B.Sc. (Honours), University of London, 1972.
- *New Statesman* Jock Campbell Award for *The Slave Girl*, 1979.
- British Home Secretary's Advisory Council on Race, 1979.
- Arts Council of Great Britain - 1982-3.

- One of Granta's "Best of the Young British Novelists", 1983.
- PhD, University of London, 1991.
- Who's Who in Anjoma, 2011
- Who's Who in Ibusa, 2011

Works

Novels

- *In the Ditch* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1972).
- *Second-Class Citizen* (London: Allison & Busby, 1974).
- *The Bride Price* (London: Allison & Busby, 1976).
- *The Slave Girl* (London: Allison & Busby, 1977); winner of 1979 Jock Campbell Award.
- *The Joys of Motherhood* (London: Allison & Busby, 1979; Heinemann, African Writers Series No. 65, 1980).
- *The Moonlight Bride* (Oxford University Press, 1976).

- *Our Own Freedom* (photographs by Maggie Murray; London: Sheba, 1981).
- *Destination Biafra* (London: Allison & Busby, 1982).
- *Naira Power* (London: Macmillan, 1982); Pacesetter Novels series.
- *Adah's Story [In the Ditch/Second-Class Citizen]* (London: Allison & Busby, 1983).
- *The Rape of Shavi* (London: Ogwugwu Afor, 1984).
- *Double Yoke* (New York: George Braziller, 1983).
- *A Kind of Marriage* (London: Macmillan, 1986); Pacesetter Novels series.
- *Gwendolen* (London: Collins, 1989). Published in the US as *The Family*.
- *Kehinde* (Heinemann, African Writers Series, 1994).
- *The New Tribe* (Heinemann, African Writers Series, 1999).

Autobiography

- *Head Above Water* (London: Fontana, 1986).

Children's/Young Adults

- *Titch the Cat* (London: Allison & Busby, 1979).
- *Nowhere to Play* (London: Allison & Busby, 1980).
- *The Wrestling Match* (Oxford University Press, 1980).

Plays

- *A Kind of Marriage*, BBC television.
- *Family Bargain*, BBC television, 1987.

Articles

- *The Black Scholar*, November–December 1985, p. 51.
- *Criticism and Ideology*, 1988.
- *Essence* magazine, August 1990, p. 50.
- *New York Times Book Review*, April 29, 1990.
- *Publishers Weekly*, February 16, 1990, p. 73; reprinted 7 February 1994, p. 84.

- *World Literature Today*, Autumn 1994, p. 867.

Mabel Segun

Mabel Segun (born 1930) is a Nigerian poet and writer.

Born in Ondo, Nigeria, she attended the University of Ibadan, graduating in 1953 with a BA in English, Latin and History. She taught these subjects in Nigerian schools, and later became Head of the Department of English and Social Studies and Vice-Principal at the National Technical Teachers' College, Yaba. As a broadcaster, she won the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation 1977 Artiste of the Year award.

Segun has championed children's literature in Nigeria through the Children's Literature Association of Nigeria, which she founded in 1978, and the Children's Documentation and Research Centre, which she set up in 1990 in Ibadan. She is also a fellow of the International Youth Library in Munich, Germany.

In 2010 Mabel Segun received the Nigerian National Merit Award for her lifetime achievements.

Works

- *Conflict and Other Poems* (1986)
- *My Father's Daughter* (1965)
- *Under the Mango Tree* (1979)
- *Olu and the Broken Statue* (1985)
- *The Twins and the Tree Spirits* (1990)
- *Sorry, No Vacancy* (1985)