

**KWAME NKRUMAH UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE
AND TECHNOLOGY, KUMASI**

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

KNUST

**THE PRESENTATION OF THE AFRICAN WOMAN
IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH,
AMMA DARKO'S FACELESS, AND
MARJORIE OLUDHE MACGOYE'S COMING TO BIRTH**

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH,
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REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY IN ENGLISH

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DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis is my own original work. Where reference has been made to other people's views and analysis, acknowledgement has been given. This thesis has not been presented, in whole or in part, to any institution for any degree.

KNUST

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I declare that I supervised the student in undertaking the thesis submitted herein and I confirm that the student has my permission to submit it for assessment.

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Date

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DEDICATION

To the first Papa Kwasi, and his wife, Aunty Serwaa

To the second Paa Kwasi, and his sister, Maame Serwaa

To Kwame (C.O, C Snaiper, Jay Dizzle, “Me Love”)

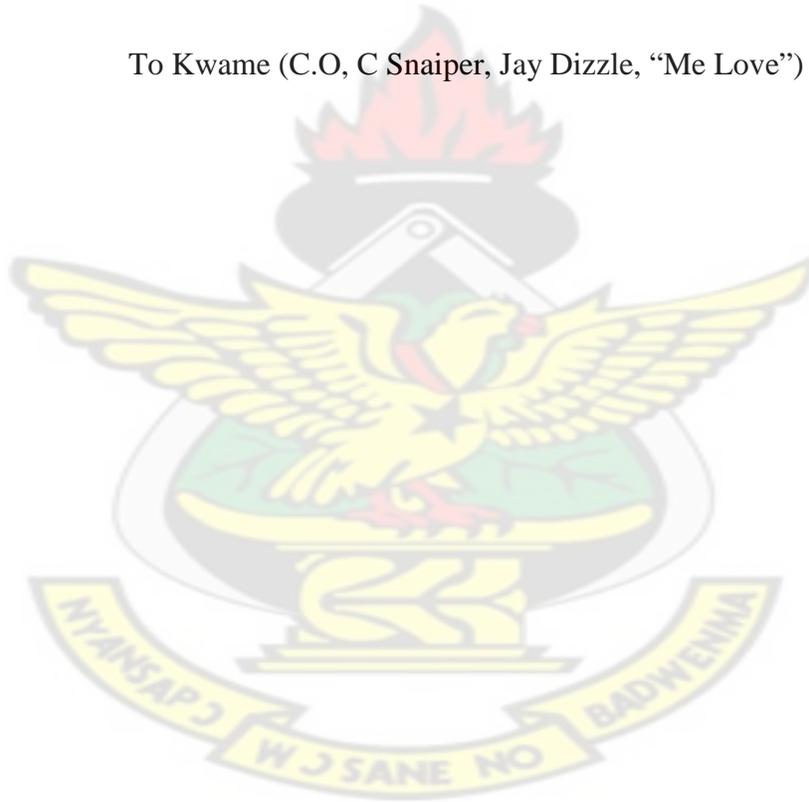


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ABSTRACT

From time immemorial, men have been seen as breadwinners and women as trainers of children, cooks and providers of ‘a haven’ for their husbands when they returned home from work. The perception of and stereotyped attitude towards roles played by men and women have helped to sustain discrimination against the woman at home and at the workplace. The Victorian age saw a rise in gender polarization, when women were expected to stick to a defined sphere of domestic and moral duties. Lives of women were (and still are) often portrayed in negative terms. Although it is difficult to generalize about the lives of women from different cultural, racial, economic and religious backgrounds in a century of steady change, women are agitating for a change in status in various ways where generalizations can be made. However ‘the woman question’ has been seen as a tendency to define the role of women in terms of domesticity.

Often, African women are treated as second-class citizens, disempowered and subjected to all kinds of discrimination and oppression. Truly, they have borne the brunt of poverty as economic systems exploited their labour and impoverished them at the same

time. John Mkunú feels that this notwithstanding, prescribed gender roles restricted women to domestic circles:

as mothers and nurturers, being seen as of lesser importance and value than the tasks of men. Women were said to be natural nurturers and domestic laborers while men were perceived to be natural leaders and decision-makers. These roles were reinforced at home, at school and through the media, thus restricting women's self-perceptions, disempowering their social and economic potential and limiting the possibilities for their future.ⁱ

The contributions of the African woman in the home, in food production, and to the national economy are acknowledged all the more these days. To the editor of *Feminar* (Launch Issue), this is mainly because of her "own energetic efforts to organize, articulate their concerns and make their voices heard... women communicate about everything".ⁱⁱ This implies that the world can no longer ignore the woman when she wants to be heard. If in today's world, "women influence a staggering 80% of all car sales, they buy 60% of all new cars, choose 80% healthcare plan, 88% buy kitchen appliances, 89% plan the family holiday and women make 94% of all choices relating to the home and family"ⁱⁱⁱ, why then is society still patriarchal in its attitude towards women? Are the roles of women in today's writings reflected in these statistics?

It is believed that dealing with the root causes of the conditions women face or go through is a step towards Africa's development and renewal. The empowerment of women being part of the central millennium development goals, it is imperative that we see the woman increasingly and continually empowered in literature, by both women and men. The literature domain has ceased to be one of solely men. Female writers are not only increasing, they are talking about their concerns as women, disproving the

misconceptions some male writers have created about them. Likewise, male writers are beginning to cast women in more empowered roles like workers, responsible mothers who make informed choices, and helping to empower other women, not just portraying them as victims of marriage and other cultural prejudices.

This thesis has therefore analyzed the works of one male and two female authors on their presentations of females. Both male and female authors not only empower the female characters but also let them take control of their destinies. Sometimes, the “weaker sex” surprisingly has more willpower than her male counterpart. Surely, if literature is a reflection of society, then, society is coming to terms with the changing role and status of women. In the words of Dr. Margaret Ogola, a Kenyan paediatrician and writer:

The woman is the heart of the family, and the family is the corner stone of society, therefore it is very fitting that we should be ... seeking new ways to enhance her well being, natural talents and gifts.

The woman is a powerhouse of creativity, development and peace. Conflict between men and women is therefore unnecessary because a woman brings an equal and powerful complementarity to the common human condition. Women have been entrusted with the capacity to transmit life which is the most precious gift that any body can give or receive. Without life no other good is possible.^{iv}

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

According to Gwendolyn Mikell, the emerging women's movement across Africa is quite like its counterpart in the Western world.¹ They are both based on the same ideology: the ideology of the woman as a sexual being. The continent's political unrests and cultural milieu have helped to shape this ideology. These critical events have created political spaces in which the woman can act to effect a change in her structural position within the society.

Thus, Adeola James in her work In Their Own Voices observes that women can be understood if more is read on them from a variety of sources and if there are defined approaches for commenting on them.² This is why she has catalogued interviews with various African female writers. Through that project she has realized that these writers are as equally concerned as men "to articulate and denounce the poverty, corruption and destructive practices that have impeded development in Africa."³ Yet she feels female writers are more intimate in the way they treat love and death, transcendence, and the struggle to rise above the traditional limitations that oppress women and hinder their development: "Their pervasive themes can be summarized as the shared journey towards a new dawn for women in Africa".⁴

Certainly, more and more women are getting involved in medicine, social issues, politics and other leadership positions. These women are venturing into domains previously known to be male-dominated. As women access rights formerly denied them, they also protest against any move to take away from their rights. The world is coming to terms

with the 'intrusion' of the female in a male-dominated world, as women play more active roles in the society, the economy and on the political scene.

Again, in the preface to her book, Re-Creating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations, Ogunjipe-Leslie equates the ability to speak, to act and to live joyfully with empowerment. The result of this empowerment is social recognition and dignity.

To her, the literary work of a female says a lot:

Our work, writings and exhortations as women in various forms and media show that we want to end our silences and speak our truths as we know them. We wish to have the power which positively promotes Life in all its forms; power to remove from our path anything, person or structure which threatens to limit our potential for full human growth as the other half of Life's gendered reality; power to collapse all screens which threaten to obscure our women's eyes from the beauties of the world.⁵

Previously, it was mainly African men who presented the African woman in their novels and even then, African womanhood was second to "numerous other concerns". Thus they created "a male dominated and male-oriented society". The women fulfilled traditional roles. This in a way *diminished* the woman and she did not feel she fit in the man's world and so saw "her femininity as consisting precisely in her cheerful acceptance of and willingness to fulfill her allotted role".⁶

Nowadays, accomplished female writers strongly challenge this notion. They present a woman who is not only very aware that the system is unfair but is also longing to be fulfilled in herself, "to be a human being not merely somebody else's appendage".⁷

Gloria T. Hills has rightly noted in her editorial in *The Black Scholar* that the boom of female writers in the last decade marks a major dramatic change in the literary world.⁸

This thesis is thus guided by the following research questions: Is the modern female facing similar challenges in the patriarchal society as her counterpart in the pre-twenty-first centuries? Has society recognized (or is society ready to recognize) the positive contributions of females to their communities? If it was possible for women in the pre-colonial era to make positive contributions, in spite of patriarchal hegemonies, what stops the modern woman from rising above 'mediocrity' and refusing to be 'other'? Are male writers, in the light of various positions of authority and leadership held by women, creating such strong female characters in their works? Is it a question of whether the male is being challenged for authority by the female, or is it just a female's quest to be recognized as a human being who goes through equal emotional, economic, social, religious and psychological challenges as her male counterpart? If literature is a reflection of society, are female characters in modern African novels, by both men and women, reflecting the kind of roles, contributions, choices and challenges the modern woman goes through?

Various literatures have tried to address these questions. In this wise, in Women in African Literature Today (Vol.15) E. D. Jones, the editor, agrees that African women writers have been neglected by journals critical studies and anthologies authored by men partly because of traditional African attitudes towards women, and maybe partly because women writers were few. This might have been because writing and education are bedfellows and for some reasons the education of African women greatly lagged behind that of men. Yet, since the 1970s, quite a number of African women writers have come out with highly accomplished works. In these works women are not only adequately

treated; issues that affect them are also objectively analyzed. Yet Jones does not comment on the kind of female characters male characters create.

Additionally, James (1990) reveals the two things women writers feel are major irreversible “accidents” in their lives: being African and being a woman. She identifies common themes of African female writing as the devastating effect of Africa’s contact with Europe, an effort to restore Africa’s cultural heritage from the injuries of colonialism and the problems of polygamy, infidelity, corruption and abuse of power, and the anomaly of human sacrifice. The language is influenced by culture and the mother tongue: “the language is often therefore replete with oral tradition, proverbial sayings, information passed down from elders, colloquial reportage...”⁹ In fact, the woman’s voice is generally subsumed under the massive humming and bustling of her male counterpart, who has been brought up to take women for granted. Even their contribution is “grudgingly acknowledged”.¹⁰ However, we do not read much about whether those interviewed see the affirmative female character as a threat to male ego, or that she wants her male counterpart to recognize her as an equal fellow human being with rights.

Subsequently, it is believed that “the situation of women is the key to a critique of society. If that is the case, what women writers have to say about their societies should receive serious attention instead of the general disregard or head nodding that is usually the case”.¹¹ To James, the problem is that women have hardly been listened to because the noises of men have drowned out their voices in every sphere of life, including the arts. Yet, the woman is also an artist and she is endowed with a special sensitivity and

compassion that enable her to create things. This imbalance has contributed to the underdevelopment of the continent. A nation's development is based on how it treats its women.

Thus, Ogunjipe-Leslie in her article, *The Female Writer and Her Writing*, believes that being committed to womanhood means destroying male stereotypes of the woman. However, this becomes very difficult when the females who are supposed to do this feel they are being feminist, something they denounce. Perhaps this is the result of male intimidation over issues of women's liberation and feminism. The males do this through ridicule, aggression and backlash making feminism something bad. Yet female writing is nothing short of the word feminism itself – the concern for and deep understanding of experiences and fates of women in the society.¹²

Evidently, quite a lot has already been written on how African women have been presented in African literature so far. In an interview with Ama Ata Aidoo, Adeola James proposed that “men present women in their own image of them” and then asked Aidoo her opinion on this proposition. Aidoo replied that

“if I write about strong women, it means I see them around. People have always assumed that to be feminine is to be silly and to be sweet. But I disagree. I hope that in being a woman writer, I have been faithful to the image of women as I see them around, strong women, women who are viable in their own right” and that “traditionally a woman is supposed to be nothing more valid than a mother”.¹³

For Ama Ata Aidoo, having central female characters is because she is a woman. For other female writers this may also be the case. What about the male writers? Do they

still relegate women to the background or now give them more active and even central roles in their writings?

So, James (1990) quotes Aidoo in her book To Be a Woman: “To date, nobody, least of all women themselves, can remotely visualize a world in which the position of women has been revolutionized”.¹⁴

Naturally, society has the general attitude of seeing women as the weaker sex. James (1990) draws Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie’s attention to a statement by Simone de Beauvoir:

Man reserves for himself the terrors and triumphs of transcendence; offers woman safety, the temptations of passivity and acceptance. He tells her that passivity and acceptance are her nature. Simone de Beauvoir tells her it’s a lie, that her nature is complicated and various, that she must escape, liberate herself, shape her own future, deny the myths that confine her.”¹⁵

Then, James wants to know what Ogundipe-Leslie has done to liberate herself from any myths that have confined her as an African woman, when she compares her generation with that of her mother’s.¹⁶

Sure enough, Ogundipe-Leslie feels her generation is better off than her mother’s, though “the average middle class woman still values marriage and children over and above everything... hence she is willing to accept any humiliation from a difficult husband. In that, she is not different from our mothers, and **don’t forget that women like you and I are not the norm. We are not in the majority**”¹⁷ (emphasis mine). To her, divorce among illiterate women is higher because these women see marriage as “a pragmatic arrangement”. This is because the withholding of anything such as food or money, which they feel is their due from the husband, merits divorce.

It is not surprising then that Ogundipe-Leslie has resisted discrimination against women from her childhood. She was fortunate to have a “conscious mother, reading progressive and left literature, feminist writings and historical documentation of women’s lives”.¹⁸ This, however, has been a life of trial and error, since certain situations demand that you make a decision you are ready to die to defend. This is how she liberated herself. Again, “work liberates, that as the Yorubas say, ‘The palms of your hands never betray you’ for much of the acceptance of indignity by women is the fear of not being supported, of losing food and shelter and later their children. Children are used to blackmail women unconsciously.”¹⁹

Indeed, Ogundipe Leslie agrees with the picture of a wife in The Palmwine Drinkard: One of the best and most correct images of the Yoruba woman of all classes: *a courageous, resourceful woman who dares situations with her husband, who works at anything and willingly changes roles with him when the need arises*. To her there are other kinds of African women, but such qualities do exist among some African women, who “do a great deal for their husbands and children; sacrifice what they have in cash and kind, only for them to be cast aside later or forced into polygamy with younger women as new wives”²⁰. Nevertheless, she does not offer a solution on how to get the suffering majority to refuse to be ‘other’.

Formerly, the educated African man had the preserve of portraying the African woman and “reasserting her presence”.²¹ To Anthonia C. Kalu

because African thought remains significant to post-independent existence, literature and literary criticism,

contemporary African literature must continue to engage viable African literature through continuous examination and portrayal of the realities of the new dispensation... A major concern here is the re-entrenchment of women and/or female-related aspects of selected statements into contemporary discourse.²²

Nevertheless, activist Feminists²³ argue that only the African woman can adequately explore her experience. Missionary feminists²⁴, however, hope to give the African woman a new direction towards a better life. They explore issues like polygamy and mothers who want their daughters to strictly adhere to traditional beliefs and practices. In their literature, they want to put the women in the centre as a way of articulating the inequalities they go through. The African woman must develop into an independent individual. Neo-colonial feminists²⁵ add that the African woman's ability to adapt to changes in society must come with empowerment in the society. There is the need "to identify locations for change and new methods of survival in the postcolonial state".²⁶ These result in changes at home and in the workplace. The African woman must have a sense of self and be conscious of her identity. Her feelings are a major target of neo-colonial feminists, who have also noticed an "absence of an autonomous viewpoint about women in the works of male authors. African feminism²⁷ seeks to readdress the consequence of colonialism, which made writing a male-dominated activity; this, in turn impeded the education of the African woman. It was thus difficult to understand the advancing position of women as society kept changing. African feminism "emphasizes the need for an extension of boundaries so as to facilitate the validation of [the woman's] participation... [and] asserts the African woman's narrative and viewpoints as routes to understanding her experiences".²⁸ There is an emphasis on understanding African cultures and social systems. This feminism believes that before colonialism there was

knowledge on resolving gender conflicts. Women should not accept to be just the “other”; neither should they endorse their own subjugation. However, these feminists do not really acknowledge the gradual trend of male writers giving roles of leadership and self consciousness to female characters.

Besides, Carol Mandi, editor of *Eve*, an East African women’s magazine, is quoted thus: “There are reasons from a hundred years ago that are not relevant today for Africans. Our challenge is to pick the good from the bad... We can’t stop being African women just because we are suddenly thrust into the modern world. What next? They will tell us to stop breastfeeding in public? No way.”²⁹

In addition, Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye (1996) has observed that women have often been presented as “frustrated and deprived”.³⁰ She admits that though this is sometimes true, there have been also points in history when “some, with outstanding gifts, have made their names in administration, business, or the arts. True, they lacked – and most men also lacked – the opportunities offered in modern times for specialization and publicity.”³¹ In her observation she is silent on how the modern woman optimizes the opportunities she has.

Moreover, Katherine Frank, writing on *Women Without Men: The Feminist Novel in Africa*, believes that male written novels focus more on social, historical and political issues rather than personal or domestic ones.³² These writers also present women in their relationship to men: as a daughter, wife, or mother. These women are on the outer edges

of the plot, and never fully participate in the novel. Frank also refers to Kenneth Little's analysis of the male presentation of the female in the novel: "girlfriends or good-time girls, workers such as secretaries or clerks, wives and other male appendages, and prostitutes or courtesans".³³ Yet, the question is what effect is expected to come out of creating strong female central characters.

No wonder Mary E. Modupe Kolawole (1997) states that "whereas most female writers embody some aspects of feminine consciousness, others are not emphatically interested in projecting strong female awareness and viewpoint".³⁴ Most of the early African literature "luminaries" were men and they chose to present a patriarchal world. This is because the traditional society they dealt with was patriarchal. Recently, there are some exceptions of men that are sympathetic to the cause of women. Some create a central space for women but do not necessarily reveal their strengths. There are other men who understand and show some "sincerity in the need to portray female characters as active heroines making meaningful contributions to their societies".³⁵

One such man is Chinua Achebe. In his earlier works, women lived in a world of "male chivalry and macho heroism"³⁶. This is not surprising since novels such as Arrow of God and Things Fall Apart dealt with a traditional African society. Wives cowered before their husbands, like Okonkwo's wives.³⁷ The rough way men handled women showed male prowess and proved men were invincible. Women were only feared in roles such as priestesses, as exemplified by Chielo, in Things Fall Apart. In Arrow of God, patriarchy and male domination are on the rise. Women are basically presented as 'voices', 'ears', and 'eyes'. In No longer at Ease, we see Achebe beginning to give some

attention to women. In this story, the role of Clara is delicately interwoven with that of Obi Okonkwo. This helps to bring out her strength of character. She exhibits self-esteem in her refusal to be “an appendage to Obi Okonkwo’s dream”. She analyses every decision before taking a step, and does not take advantage of Obi Okonkwo, as is presumed of women to take advantage of men’s love and patronage. Obi’s mother also warns that she will kill herself if he marries Clara. To Kolawole, Clara and Obi’s mother “have moved from the initial social space and traditional conditioning created by Achebe”.³⁸

Interestingly, the mark of pre-colonial Igbo society, which was the strong outgoing Igbo woman, is not reflected in Achebe’s earlier works. It is believed that colonial rule not only brought an imbalance in the political, social, religious, and economic lives of the Igbo, but also “marked the beginning of the end for the traditional roles and statuses of Igbo women”.³⁹ Before colonialism, the contributions of the women to the community were recognized. Differences between men and women were appreciated and it was accepted that each gender had different needs. Thus, there were two different but equally powerful and autonomous political systems that handled the affairs of men and women separately. An Igbo woman grew up with confidence and courage because she knew she could always support herself and her children. In addition to cooking, housework, and taking care of children, a woman/ wife was also expected to work and contribute to the needs of the household. G.T. Basden, an Iboland archbishop, states that, “Women who worked hard were appreciated and a husband showed his appreciation of the wife’s services by giving her a present occasionally, usually in the form of a wrapper [an article of clothing].”⁴⁰

Accordingly, in A Man of the People, as in Anthills of the Savannah, Achebe presents women as protagonists. Beatrice in Anthills of the Savannah inspires the men around her, especially as she tries to get them to mend their relationships that are falling apart. She and Elewa try to show the dawn of a new era for women in a so-called man's world. It is believed that through the novel, we are being informed that gender issues have one thing in common with colonialism: they need new solutions. The old ones cannot adequately solve these issues.⁴¹

In view of this, Elvira Godono gathers from Achebe's African Short Stories that women represent "incarnations of 'the last hope for the restoration of the natural order in life and in every sphere of life'".⁴² She believes Achebe, through his work, admits that male domination has resulted in numerous wars, hunger, power struggle and death. This means there is a need for "women and motherist leaders".⁴³ Referring to Prostitute by Okello Oculi, and In The Castle of My Skin by George Lamming, Godono is of the opinion that these stories show powerful roles of women, who are not portrayed as just mothers. In this she echoes Achebe who points out that the African feminine differs greatly from the western counterpart:

Achebe seeks to link... the question of African women's roles to the larger problems of the post-colonial nation... The women, who have simultaneously broken the rules of race and gender... embody hope for the future of the nation. This assertion that women are integral in the building of the new African society emphasizes the damaging effect of oppression outside the colonized-colonizer relationship... Achebe goes beyond the notion of conflict to propose that hope lies not in separating women's

issues from society's issues, but in integrating them, and in looking to women continually in the process of social change."⁴⁴

Besides, Claire O'Sullivan, looking at presentations of women in post-colonial African literature, tries to analyze how renowned authors such as Achebe and Soyinka portray women in their work.⁴⁵ For her, it is important to study how post-colonial women are presented in African literature because "the role of women is very much in transition... as are the societies themselves". O'Sullivan argues that Achebe and Soyinka are passionate about reviving the African identity, and their works – Things Fall Apart and Death and the King's Horseman, respectively – appeal to Africans to take pride in "pre-colonial African traditions". However, these works do not place any significant value on the role of the African woman in post-colonial Africa. Women in Things Fall Apart are in the shadows, are passive, and are even regarded as part of a man's possessions. In Death and the King's Horseman, women are relatively insignificant until the last scene, where after the man has failed to make the necessary sacrifice, the woman steps in to save the day.

Indeed, as has already been explained on page 10, later works of Achebe progressively acknowledge more active roles of the woman. O'Sullivan acknowledges this as she examines Anthills of the Savannah. She explains that in this novel, Achebe's "treatment of women... [reflects] a better understanding of the diversity of real women".⁴⁶

Other male writers such as Isidore Okpewho, Sembene Ousmane, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Mongo Beti and Henri Lopes have contributed to the enhanced role of women in the African novel.

Moreover, Rose Ure Mezu suggests that the masculine nature of the Ghanaian and Nigerian cultural milieux has created great literary debates concerning female subordination and oppression. Ghana's fate is softened by the presence of matrilineal societies while Nigeria is basically masculine biased. In her article *Women in Achebe's World* Mezu presents the concerns of Ama Ata Aidoo and Flora Nwapa, that "the helpless, dependent, unproductive African woman" is an image created by European imperialists based on the model of their own women.⁴⁷ Yet, it is believed that Buchi Emecheta and others insist that the dictates of the African tradition compelled the woman to take up subordinate sexist cultural roles. Mezu adds that colonialism made these traditional roles worse. The colonialist education gave rounded education to males and home enhancing skills to females.⁴⁸ Yet, we are not told the link between colonialism and patriarchy.

So, Flora Nwapa, in Efuru, departs from the traditional portrait of the African female. Efuru (the protagonist) not only chooses her husband, she also marries him without the usual dowry payment by the male. She actively makes decisions instead of being "a passive victim of a masculine based cultural universe. However, after a life of infertility and infidelity, she dedicates her life to being a priestess.

Yet, Nwapa was for a long time the only female African writing against patriarchy. She was joined by Ama Ata Aidoo, and later by Buchi Emecheta. Nigerian critic, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi describes Nwapa and Emecheta thus: “if Nwapa is the challenger, Buchi Emecheta is the fighter... For the first time, female readers through female characters are aware of their subjugation by their fathers, uncles, husbands, brothers and sons”.⁴⁹

Similarly, Mariama Ba, famous for her So Long a Letter, argues through her protagonist (Ramatoulaye) that a woman has a right to choice, and that the husband and wife – not wives – is a significant unit of the larger family. Mariama Ba has been supported by Sembene Ousmane in empowering Muslim women and fighting against cultural values that no longer matter. Ousmane also through his novels, such as God’s Bits of Wood and Xala, states that women hold the solution to polygamy. That is to say, women should get the courage to give their husbands an ultimatum should they decide to marry another wife / other wives.⁵⁰

Also, Rose Ure Mezu creates a female hall of fame, as if to say the female has proved her worth in the physical world and the literary world:

Achebe’s priestess Chielo, Nwapa’s Efuru and Ghanaian novelist Ayi Kwei Armah’s Anowa in Two Thousand Seasons [have] become the literary forerunners [of heroines in the modern African novel]...

In East Africa, Mwana Kupona, a literary woman in non-literate times, adopts the gender-specific form of “utendi” as a creative medium and, in her poem addressed to her daughter, teaches the young female generation how to

manipulate even their patriarchal society in order to survive and achieve self-awareness and empowerment. Thus an early traditional woman poet writing in a heavily sexist setting is rehabilitated as a model of African creative process that later generations imitate.

In the field of politics, women participated and even led the way in nation-building. In male-dominated cultures, Queen Amina of Kano in Nigeria ruled and expanded the boundaries of her territory. Queen Kambassa of Bonny defied her gender-structured society to become Queen and to rule, believing that there should be no gender dichotomy of activities.

Creative pioneer and independent-minded Omu Okwei of Osomari during colonial times built up an extensive commercial empire trading with Europeans in tobacco, ivory, textiles and alcoholic drinks. Today, a marble statue is built in her honor and a street named after her in Onitsha, the big commercial city on the Niger River.

Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, mother of Fela Ransome Kuti – Africa's great Afro-Juju musician, rebel and political activist – did not have to be a radical feminist to register great achievements: she formed market women unions, cultural organizations to redress social injustice, especially to women, and the Commoners' People's Party. She suffered arrests, harassment; finally dying, thrown by agents of the then Nigerian military government from an upstairs window of her son's house – the Kalakutta Republic; and thus she died a martyr to women's cause.

These are women who in less-gender-friendly times bravely exploited the resources available to them to show leadership. Their areas of achievement include war, rulership, politics art, commerce, education and social welfare. They were not tokens but true examples of many women of energy, vision, resilience, and resourcefulness functioning in traditional societies. Certainly, this female dynamism of a historic past can serve as a paradigm for 3rd Millennium women's activism.⁵¹

Still, Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye (2003) is of the opinion that it was the habit of most feminist writers to compliment their male counterparts by often presenting women as “frustrated and deprived”. This, however, is sometimes the fact:

Women, as managers of their own homes or someone else’s, have generally found themselves fully occupied... But we must not look at history as though prehistoric man was waiting for the invention of the matchbox to relieve him of the need to conserve fire.⁵²

Oludhe Macgoye not only addresses the plight of women in her book but also gives us a female protagonist. Surprisingly, works of Grace Ogot (also a Kenyan) are described as hardly gender sensitive. These works do not present women in roles other than the stereotyped traditional inferior ones. In her essay “Conflict or Compromise: The Changing Roles of Women in the Writings of Rebekah Njau and Grace Ogot”,⁵³ Margaret Reid examines conflicts of traditional values and modern urban issues confronting Kenyan women. Reid states that Ogot and Njau’s writings seek to sensitize the society on socio-gender issues of which the mass of Kenyan women are not even aware: “the confusion and disillusionment about gender roles, the powerlessness women feel in traditional setting, the lack of choices of a family support system available to them in urban settings, the inevitable clash of old and new cultural values.”⁵⁴ These female novelists portray a traditional culture that merges with a patriarchal system to even deny work as a source of power for the modern Kenyan woman. Certainly, Macgoye’s stories reflect such issues.

Interestingly, Ngugi wa Thiongo (and his counterpart Chinua Achebe) has been commended for statements which indicate his commitment to gender reform⁵⁵. In

Detained⁵⁶, Ngugi's prison diary, Ngugi writes of Wariija: ...*heroine of toil... there she walks haughtily carrying her freedom in her hands*. Ngugi confesses that

Because the women are the most exploited and oppressed section of the entire working class, I would create a picture of a strong determined warrior with a will to resist and to struggle against the conditions of her present being.⁵⁷

He goes on to explain that there still seems to be an inclination towards male domination because his "class dialectic leaves no room for the female other".⁵⁸ His only weapon is to create a female character that is "equal" to her male counterpart – thus, the character Wariija, a gun-toting revolutionary. In Ngugi's estimation, a strong determined woman is to all intents and purposes a man. It stands to reason that Ngugi's resolve about the female is quite different from Ogot, and even Buchi Emecheta. While they re-write nationalism, he re-writes woman.⁵⁹

In the same way, Eszter Lindholm-Csanyi in her paper *The Powers of the Weak: Representations of Women's Power in Kenyan Literature* (2009) postulates that there have been a lot of changes with respect to gender relations in Kenya. She continues:

Consequently, the inferior images of women in postcolonial literary works are undergoing gradual alterations as well. They are moving from the margin to the center in literary representations and strengthening their positions in gender relations through their feminine power, resistance and empowerment. . . I have studied the origins of their power to see to what extent it stems from modernity, from the influence of Western ways of thinking, and to what extent women rely on traditional practices and customs preserved and transmitted by generations and from pre-colonial times to the present. . . Overall, the findings have indicated that women's power originates from... the traditional customary resources, and the new opportunities of modernity, imported ways of life. In Macgoye's novels a

greater emphasis is placed on women's empowerment through education and their personal ability.⁶⁰

On the other hand, Alex Wanjala tries to investigate the effect of rural-urban migration on African culture, the effect of Western education on African women, as well as the effect of traditional attitudes to polygamy, childlessness in marriage, and the girl child.⁶¹ Using books by Mariama Ba and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, Wanjala argues that the Senegalese and Kenyan societies, respectively, are reflected by these authors because they had “had the privilege of being members of the traditional society, and the new society that emerges in the post-colonial period. They are, so to speak, the spokespeople of the African woman”.⁶²

Again, J. Roger Kurtz (1998) suggests that up to now no Kenyan novel has been through a thorough yet scholarly examination. Most of the studies so far either look at an author or a particular theme, or even address “a few salient Kenyan texts as part of a broader, continent wide or regional study of African writing”⁶³. Yet, for over thirty five years the Anglophone Kenyan novel has been through development. This is more of a reason why this study explores Macgoye's novel.

Notably since Kenya attained independence in 1963, these texts relate to the post independence era. A notable feature of these texts is their emphasis on the city. Some writers like Macgoye use the city to show how “ordinary Nairobians manage to find hope and home in this often hostile environment”.⁶⁴

Further, Jean F. O'Barr refers to Claude Wauthier's observation that one of the major themes in African literature is disillusionment with the post-independence era.⁶⁵ Wauthier states that "the conflict between African tradition and a technical civilization, which culminated in the rebellion against colonial domination... the path to be followed depended upon Africans themselves..."⁶⁶ O' Barr thus feels Wauthier's analysis can be widened to include women and their impact on African literature. To her, women discussed the themes of "conflict and disillusionment" in the areas of social life in general, gender roles in particular. Novels by the female writers thus show how women understand the issues that affect them and the way they handle these issues when the "changing social milieu militates against any consensus on alternatives".⁶⁷

O' Barr reveals that Kenyan women writers come out with novels about the reaction of individuals and communities to change. Whatever the plot, the novel basically looks at the strategies employed by the women to cope with their unique situations. Particular stages in the life of a woman are dealt with: the female child becoming a woman, the woman's interpretation of marriage, blending a career and personal life. The way these Kenyan women write proves that females have a different perspective from men, even on the same topic or issue. Apart from creating female central characters, these writers present female characters that have a form of feminine consciousness. As they deal with multiple issues they sometimes play multiple, as well as contradictory, roles.

In any case, Ify G. Achufusi feels there is the need to look at the female in African literature because African societies are yet to accept that 'the woman's self actualization

is no longer dependent on her biological role of reproduction”.⁶⁸ Also, it is time for African societies to re-examine “the most basic tenets and concepts governing the functions and the actual essence of man/woman relationships”⁶⁹ to enable a re-evaluation of the position of the woman. Achufusi explains:

Such a re-evaluation is crucial, especially considering the fact that our society is fast changing and that most of the basic assumptions which direct the said relationships have taken on entirely new shapes and therefore new values. Unfortunately most discourses, social and economic, overlook the very glaring changes in the society and base their analysis on the man/woman relationship and the pre-change situation. Thus, such analysis takes as the norm the very conditions which must disappear in order that the subjugation of more than half the population, the women, may cease.

One such condition is that which bases the woman’s value in her society only on her reproductive capability – both the reproduction of the actual human beings and that of the labour force⁷⁰, thus recognizing this biological function as the woman’s only contribution towards the development of her country. Such submission limits her self-actualization and stifles her talents.⁷¹ (p. 102)

Even so, in Contemporary African Literature and The Politics of Gender Florence Stratton looks at male and female African writing. She proposes that the female writes to improve the definition of the contemporary African literary tradition, such that it includes women writing. Thus far, to Stratton

... dialogic interaction between men and women’s writing is one of the defining features of the contemporary African literary tradition. Such a redefinition has important implications for both critical and pedagogical practices. What it indicates is that neither men’s nor women’s writing can be fully appreciated in isolation from the other.⁷²

This implies that writings of both men and women are needed to fully analyze and appreciate the issues affecting one or both of the sexes.

This thesis, therefore, discusses the works of one male author and two female authors: Chinua Achebe, Amma Darko, and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye. Achebe's Anthills of the Savannah helps us trace how much the African male author has come to terms with the more assertive manner women present themselves. It is believed that Chinua Achebe has been so influenced by the Beijing Conference and the various leadership roles being taken up by women across the world that he lets this reflect in his latter novels, especially Anthills of the Savannah. Although female writers like Ama Ata Aidoo present very assertive and positive minded women in their novels like Our Sister Killjoy, Amma Darko's Faceless was chosen to allow us also come terms with women who still choose to be passive and remain in the background in the midst of the changing role and status of her sisters. Coming to Birth is the first novel of Marjorie O. Oludhe (who is even Kenyan by choice) but it enables the reader enter the life of a girl as she matures to adulthood in order to participate in the everyday challenges women face and everyday choices they make.

Chinua Achebe was born on 16th November 1930. He is Nigerian, from Ogidi in the Anambra State. He is not only accomplished, but also the foremost Nigerian novelist with an international reputation.

Likewise, Bernth Lindfors, writing on 'The Palm Oil with which Achebe's Words are Eaten', states:

If ever a man of letters deserved his success, that man is Achebe. He is a careful and fastidious artist in full control of his art, a serious craftsman who disciplines himself not only to write regularly but to write well. He has that sense of decorum, proportion and design lacked by too many contemporary novelists, African and non-African alike. He is also a committed writer who believes that it is his duty to serve his society. He feels that the fundamental theme with which African writers should concern themselves is: that African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity.⁷³

After graduating from University College, Ibadan, he worked as a broadcaster, and later became Director of External Broadcasting (1951-1967). After the Nigerian civil war (Biafra War) he taught in both Nigerian and American universities. His first novel, Things Fall Apart, is the result of his "indignation at European representations of Africans in fiction".⁷⁴ Apart from novels, Achebe has poems and essays to his credit. He has served as co-editor of several novels, and serves as editor of *Okike: Nigerian Journal of New Writing*. Published in 1987, Anthills of the Savannah is his latest novel.

Next, Amma Darko has established herself as an accomplished female writer after Efuwa T. Sutherland and Ama Ata Aidoo. She has been praised for her "considerable skill in portraying the plight of women and young girls in a merciless world dominated by greedy, irresponsible and often cruel men in their life".⁷⁵ Faceless is her third novel after Beyond the Horizon and The Housemaid.

Amma Darko was born in Tamale in 1956, but later on moved to the Ashanti Region. In 1980 she received a diploma from the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (then The University of Science and Technology) which enabled her to work for the Technology Consultancy Centre. In 1981 she travelled to Germany where she stayed for some time. Currently, she lives in Ghana where she works as a tax inspector. She is inspired by this work because she deals with interesting cases and people. She is married and has three children⁷⁶.

Her writing⁷⁷ has generated much interest and discussion. Though Amma Darko loved books she did not get access to them as she was growing up. She wanted to read books about the experiences of ordinary Ghanaian people. Thus she began to write books of her own – as a radical solution to her problem.

Her first book, published initially under a German title *Der Verkaufte Traum* (Schmetterling Verlag, 1991), was consequently published in English as Beyond the Horizon (Heinemann, 1995). It is the story of a Ghanaian woman who finds herself in a German brothel through a marriage fraud. The book was ranked among the Top Twelve of the 1995 Feminist Book Festival in Britain. Her second novel, The Housemaid (Heinemann, 1998), explores the complex relationships in contemporary rural Ghana where modernity, delivered through the media, increasingly penetrates tradition, but finds little nurturing soil for lack of education. Her third novel, Faceless (Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2003) tells the story of street children in contemporary Accra. With a sense

for naturalistic detail and humour, Darko explores the vicious circle created by the worst injustice while placing the story into a larger socio-political context⁷⁸.

In an interview with Patrick Muana, Amma Darko confesses that she is

“first and foremost a storyteller who feels inspired to create stories out of pertinent issues. As an African woman also, I feel inclined toward working around female issues. I don't know where that places me in the writing world's classifications, but I definitely do have some reservations about carrying the tag of 'feminist writer'. The context in which the Western world perceives the term does not prevail here. Feminism is sort of placed in a tight and narrow square box. One perceived or labeled as a feminist whatever, is judged to be this aggressive man-hater who at best is a lesbian and who can be as worse as a butcher of masculinity. I tell stories and comment on situations. I would be completely satisfied to be perceived simply as a voice.”⁷⁹

She also believes that her stories mostly “reflect the reality and male hegemony is a reality which manifests in various ways and forms in different cultures, societies and situations. The Ghanaian woman lives with this her way.”⁸⁰

Then there is Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye. Macgoye is a British by birth and Kenyan by choice. She went to Kenya in 1954 as a worker of the Church Missionary Society. Six years later she got married to a Luo (Kenyan) medical officer, Daniel Oludhe Macgoye, and the two have four children. Coming to Birth is her debut novel, and it won her the Sinclair Prize for its social and political significance.

Her novel, Coming to birth, is a story in which certain opportunities present women the means to control their own lives. It shows that women can “produce” without men, where production means, to a large extent, creating a home. She is also a poet, but her poems have often been perceived as too political.

Generally, the three chosen novelists present the African female in an African community. In the structure of the African community, the family is seen as “the primary social unit”⁸¹; thus any discussion with a bearing on the family needs to be done “with some seriousness and due regard for its integrity”.⁸² One such matter is gender relations: the way men relate to women and the way women relate to men. It is believed that African societies have been organized in such a way as to “exploit and abuse women, sometimes in unimaginably inhuman ways”.⁸³ The women either had no say in the matter or were forced to accept their lot. This means that the African woman’s freedom is tied to the civilization of the African man “out of [his] traditional ways... into Western habits of the mind”.⁸⁴ Owomoyela feels that these notions prove that there has been a “misrepresentation of the *regard* of the woman in Africa.”⁸⁵

The thesis is thus built on the hypothesis that the African woman is a complement of her male counterpart but can only function effectively in the space and understanding he gives her. Any step outside the given platform is sure to meet patriarchal opposition. This is based on the concept that established patriarchal predetermined hierarchies can only be changed or disrupted as women take their destinies into their own hands, without waiting for society to hand this destiny to them.⁸⁶ This change is facilitated through the

weapon of writing, as female and male writer represent women who positively take charge of their lives and make informed choices. Therefore, our contention is not just to say that there is the need to give a more positive representation of the African woman; this is being done, and this thesis has tried to analyze her re-presentation in Anthills of the Savannah, Faceless, and Coming to Birth.

First, Anthills of the Savannah basically revolves around three classmates, who in one way or the other are involved in managing the state called Kangan. Christopher Oriko, the Minister of State and Ikem Osodi, the journalist, try to battle their rights and independence against the ever dictatorial president, His Excellency. This battle results in discord, treachery and even death. Intertwined in their story are the women involved in their lives, who show “Achebe’s understanding of women’s roles in a postcolonial nation”.⁸⁷ There is Beatrice (popularly known as BB), the girlfriend of Chris; there is also Ikem’s girlfriend, Elewa. Through these two main female characters Achebe extends the changing status and role of women to ones of decision making, power and influence. To achieve this effect, Achebe takes us into the world of Beatrice, a very intelligent woman (who has a first-class honours in English) with a powerful position, a Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance. She is a symbol of the female with principle and determination to make it in the face of political harassment and a male-biased society. Then there is the salesgirl whose boyfriend is the editor of a national newspaper. The disparity enhances the intrigue in the story. These two women interestingly survive their male counterparts, whose beliefs and values make them enemies of His Excellency.

Second, Faceless is a story of Fofo and her family – Maa Tsuru, her mother and Baby T, her sister. Though mainly seen as a story exploring the day to day life of street children and the hazards they go through, the story can also be seen as a young girl’s struggle to survive in a ruthless patriarchal world. To be able to do this, she has to think, talk, and act like an adult. She is ready to fight a system of corruption that even grownups like her mother, Mama Abidjan and Maami Broni accept or encourage. In her fight, Fofo wins the support of MUTE, an NGO that is interested in social, moral, and other human issues. With additional support from the media, represented by Sylv Po, female empowerment (through education) is enacted and the controversial male dominance questioned.

Third, Coming to Birth is a story that traces the development of Paulina Akelo, a young naïve girl from rural Western Kenya in the city where she goes to join her husband, Martin Were. It is about her “experience of maneuvering through and eventually overcoming, in however limited a fashion, the constraints of a profoundly patriarchal society”.⁸⁸ Her perception of herself changes as her relationship with her husband takes a downward trend. This trend is a result of years of marriage without any children. Martin goes on to take a second wife, and Paulina is also caught in the web of an extra-marital affair. In spite of all these, Paulina’s resolve to get training and be economically empowered, as well as the experiences she goes through in her marriage, make her not only independent but also mature. Macgoye herself has emphasized that in the story, the consciousness of the protagonist grows, and she becomes empowered, and thus ends up

as a changed woman. This new woman eventually becomes sounder socially, emotionally and economically than her husband when the two get back together again, after years of divorce. This time there is even the promise of the long awaited “gift of God” – a child.

Accordingly, Anthills of the Savannah, Faceless, and Coming to Birth are discussed in Chapters Two, Three and Four respectively. Particular attention has been paid to how the authors of these books each adhere to the traditional notion of a woman or reflects the changing perceptions and status of women.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

CHAPTER TWO

ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNAH

It is believed that in Achebe's first novels women were hardly given any assertive or leadership role. However, it is believed that he is

no longer at ease in his creation of women with limited roles. The walls of the harem confining women have fallen apart and Achebe can no longer hold on to the peripheral role that is contrary to the reality of the African woman in changing society. Women are therefore seen participating dynamically in and activating social change.¹

This chapter, therefore, analyzes the roles the main female characters play in the novel. The analysis tries to prove the kind of departure Achebe has made from his traditional stereotyping of females. However, the lives of these women are interwoven with those of their lovers and their president. The chapter, thus, does not ignore these male figures, but also shows how the male-female relations enhance Achebe's new portrait of the African woman. This analysis hopes to answer whether society has recognized (or is ready to recognize) the positive contributions of females to their communities, and whether the male is being challenged for authority by the female, or it is just the female's quest to be recognized as a human being who goes through equal emotional, economic, social, religious and psychological challenges as her male counterpart.

In Anthills of the Savannah there is one outstanding lady, Beatrice, and two other ladies whose lives are intertwined with hers: Elewa and Agatha. Miss Beatrice Nwanyibuife Okoh is a very intelligent woman who is educated at Queen Mary College, University of

London. She has first-class honours in English and holds a powerful position as a Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance. Eugenia C. Delamotte (1997) has rightly observed that hierarchies in society have defined women as subordinate. This has resulted in a lot of restrictions for the women. However, “women’s resistance to restrictions placed on their work and education – justify women’s transgression of boundaries that limited what they could learn and do”.² Beatrice’s friends call her BB or B for short.

Obviously, the life of Beatrice sets the platform for the picture of a modern woman in modern times, not a modern woman trapped by traditional restrictions and conventions. First of all, her father has many daughters and waits for the birth of a son. When Beatrice is born, he accepts his lot and names her *Nwanyibuife*, meaning “a woman is also something”. Through Beatrice’s father, Achebe shows the world acknowledges that, after all, it is not a crime to be a woman; and that being a woman should not limit you in what you can do. Beatrice lets this reflect in her life – she graduates with a first class honours. When the president wants her to be his bedmate, she almost forgets her resolve to rise above the norm and initially takes advantage of him by arousing him sexually. It is the norm to expect young ladies to be parasites, thinking of what profit they can make out of their male hosts. However, when Beatrice shamefully realizes what she is doing and tries to warn His Excellency not to let his weakness for women lead him to commit certain blunders, she is disgracefully walked out of the Presidential Retreat. Perhaps Sam’s refusal to heed to her advice leads him to his death. Through the president’s (male) weakness, we see Beatrice’s (female) strength.

Again, Beatrice's decision to finally to stand up to the president creates the picture of the woman who not only knows her rights but also exercises them. This might be a way of portraying what true democracy is all about. Rohini Hensman proposes that democracy should not be limited to an electoral process only. It should also reflect "in the broadest sense of the right of people, in both theory and practice, to control their own bodies, movements and lives, and participate in decisions to the same extent that they are affected by them."³ Thus, Beatrice has a right to who should 'control' her body and life – and definitely, it is not the president.

Further, though the male may be after the female to satisfy his sexual appetite, it cannot be ignored that some females also use sex to benefit from the wealth and property of some males. So, the males may be "adventurers, swindlers, thieves, speculators", but the erotic women can "induce" males to lawfully "scatter their patrimonies".⁴ Such females are often regarded as evil or bad. Yet, it cannot be ruled out that there are those females who:

appear at some other setting – at home with their fathers, brothers, husbands, or lovers – as guardian angels; and the courtesan who "plucks" rich financiers is, for painters and writers, a generous patroness. It is easy to understand in actual experience the ambiguous personality of Aspasia or Mme de Pompadour. But if woman is depicted as the Praying Mantis, the Mandrake, the Demon, then it is most confusing to find in woman also the Muse, the Goddess Mother, Beatrice.⁵

This implies that the choice of the name *Beatrice* for the central character is Achebe's confession that there is another side of the female that he has not presented before – a side that might be difficult to admit – the female who understands her identity and voices her opinions. He even makes Beatrice narrate the story of her life. In her narration, she points out how people want an opportunity to call her “the latter-day Madame Pompadour’ who manipulated generals and patronized writers”.⁶ Perhaps, they expected her to take advantage of His Excellency's interest in her or of Chris' position as a minister of state. Beatrice does not see herself as ambitious in this way. She explains that she has been in her own world for a long time: *uwa t'uwa* (world within world). She will not kowtow to patriarchal norms but stick by her beliefs. Achebe lets Beatrice tell her own story to show that it is time women were given the chance to talk about what concerns them. Beatrice is the re-presented woman who can talk for herself and make herself understood.

Moreover, Beatrice – with her interest in politics – represents the woman who is not just interested in beauty, marriage and children. When Ikem and Chris argue about the forty-five million Naira that was spent on refurbishing a twenty million naira edifice (the Presidential Retreat), she agrees with Ikem who thinks the President is ‘retreating’ from “the people and their basic needs of water which is free from Guinea worm, of simple shelter and food...and forget about the very people who legitimize... authority”.⁷ She is able to help Chris hide when he goes against the dictates of the President and his life is in danger. She also plays a mediatory role as she tries to get Chris and Ikem to settle

their differences, and patch up with Sam, their friend who is also the President of the country.

Thus, Beatrice is the woman with the art of reconciliation; however, her attempts to get Chris and Ikem to patch up with Sam fail. Her perspectives are not taken into consideration. Odubogun P. K observes that sometimes views of females in political positions are ignored and this attitude restricts the females' ability to "influence political, social and economic structural functions".⁸ Odubogun further postulates that it is not enough for a woman to be in a political position. Rather, women should work hard towards "a participatory and accountable democracy... if their empowerment is to be actualized".⁹ At the end of the story, we see the rise of Beatrice and the fall of men.

Equally, Beatrice finds herself as a mate in the alliance for change. Hensman does give credit to female historians who have helped to establish that at certain periods in time, women played a major role in resistance struggles and national liberation movements.¹⁰ Beatrice helps Chris to search for Ikem when it is discovered that Ikem is missing from his flat. Again, Beatrice helps Chris to hide from the military when he is declared wanted by the state.

Furthermore, through Beatrice, the society's traditional expectation of the female is revealed. It is a general perception, which some females also have, that a woman should marry anyone at all rather than die a spinster: Better marry a rascal than grow a moustache in your father's compound; better an unhappy marriage than an unhappy

spinsterhood; better marry Mr. Wrong in this world than wait for Mr. Right in heaven; all marriage is *how-for-do*; all men are the same...¹¹

Also, Beatrice gives the example of her friend, Comfort, who is twenty-six and yet she is unmarried. When Comfort's fiancé takes her to his village to greet his kinsmen, an aunt of his remarks: "if *ogili* was such a valuable condiment no one would leave it lying around for rats to stumble upon and dig into!" The aunt, a fellow female, looks down on her kind because of the age at which she is still unmarried.

Therefore, it seems that the problem is not just that a woman should just get married, but be married early. It is as if that is all that a woman is born for. This is the expectation all over the world. Is it any wonder, then, that females do not really aspire to occupy top positions or even find work to do at all?

Besides, the sarcasm in Comfort's speech gives a hint that women should not be perturbed about the age at which they get married. Comfort takes the sarcasm in her fiancé's aunt's words and gives it to him by inferring that if she is the condiment, then he is the rat. Thus, it takes two of a kind to walk together: if *ogili* is not respected, neither is the rat. This is a point her fiancé's aunt misses.

Interestingly, John Charles Hawley has observed that common paradigms in American culture perceive the woman as incomplete without a man, the married woman as selfish without children, the single woman as predatory, the working woman with children as a neglectful mother, and the woman generally as a threat to be controlled through sweet

talk, beating or coercive psychological manipulation.¹² Hawley (1996) quotes Helen Chukwuma thus:

If a woman keeps her place without asking questions, then she is being cultural and nonwestern. If she asserts herself, that is, if she is feministic, then she is deviant, unAfrican and accultural. This then is the bane of feminism in Africa... everywhere.¹³

In view of this, Beatrice has definitely decided to put her career first and, maybe, last as well. This type of thinking – when men think every woman wants to have a man in her life to feel complete – is “a piece of male chauvinist bullshit”.¹⁴ She explains that this attitude is not a foreign thing; a by-product of the Beijing Conference. She has a personal experience of male chauvinism while she grew up in her father’s house. Bayo Ogunjimi believes that

“the dominant patriarchal presence of the military, and the masculine society created in its wake... is linked, both directly and indirectly, with the conventional, non-military family setting: the relationships between husband and wife [Beatrice’s father and mother], father and children [Beatrice and her father], mother and children [Beatrice and her mother], the central personality of Nigerian politics, dominating the mental, social, cultural, political and economic activities of the family [Sam, His Excellency].”¹⁵

Hence, Ogunjimi quotes Jeff Hearn (1987: 93) that when the state acts as “the great collective father-figure”, it acts as a father wherever there is an absentee father.

Besides, the female has been portrayed as a sexual being, a source of satisfaction for the sexual desires of men. The president demonstrates this when he virtually commands Beatrice to his residency at Abichi, under the guise of a party of some sort, and then asks

to go to bed with her: *And then came the master's voice summoning me to have my turn in the bedchamber of African polygamy.*¹⁶ Though she initially almost succumbs to the temptation to yield to him, she is finally able to boldly talk back to the President when Chris and Ikem are afraid to do same. Perhaps there is an interface between traditional patriarchy and the modern political dispensation where men use the political platform to show off their masculinity. Thus, they assert their father-figure through their positions and offices in the state, the professions and the law.

Likewise, Mercy Amba Oduyoye has observed that the previous humour that went along with teasing women is fast disappearing, as such remarks that smack of sexism and male domination hurt. Women thus no longer pretend to be submissive, as is demonstrated by Beatrice's outburst at the president when he invites her to his bed or her disapproval of buttock-smacking at the office. Oduyoye argues that women in Nigeria have realized that they are side-lined when it comes to politics, and so they need to work hard if they are to play a part in the country's economic development.¹⁷ Many factors are, however, responsible for the present status of women in the political scene:

“their inequality of access to the modern sectors of the economy, the persistence of an ideology of male dominance, an increase in the costs of domestic labor, an inability to pay hired hands or acquire modern technology, the progressive breakdown of cooperative efforts in the traditional sector, and the conflict in being both wife and employee. Indeed, this is true throughout Africa”.¹⁸

So, when Beatrice, Elewa, Chris, and Ikem meet Mad Medico at his house, the latter makes remarks that show his perception of women – perhaps a reflection of the more

general perception. To Mad Medico, a woman just lights up a man's gloomy and dark world. He had found His Excellency a woman before: "The least I could do was fix him up with a warm friendly girl to cheer him up. Nothing serious."¹⁹ Mad Medico is still elated about how happy His Excellency had been with the girl who had managed to "cheer him up".²⁰

To boot, in Anthills of the Savannah Achebe further illustrates his changing perception of women with the story of Idemili. Interestingly, Idemili does not seem to approve of a man's desire to take the *ozo* title, the highest title in the land. If she finds anyone unworthy of the title, "she simply sends death to smite him and save her sacred hierarchy from contamination and scandal".²¹ For a nation like Nigeria, which is *steeped* in patriarchy, it is paradoxical for a female to have a hierarchy that a man can, as it were, contaminate. Idemili's distaste for male authority is revealed in the word "smite". Even death is at her beck and call, such that she can send it to do her bidding – against man. This can happen within three years of taking the title: Such is Idemili's contempt for man's unquenchable thirst to sit in authority over his fellows.

Consequently, Beatrice is seen as "the fulcrum of social change right in the nucleus of socio-political schema".²² Sometimes her role locates her at the top of *an anthill of change*, like Idemili, as she attempts to shape and mediate the realms of power between Sam, Chris and Ikem. As the power struggle between the once friendly trio Sam, Chris and Ikem intensifies, she warns these three:

I see trouble building up for us. It will get to Ikem first. No joking, Chris. He will be the precursor to make straight the way. But after him it will be you. We are all in it, Ikem, you, me and even Him. The thing is no longer a joke. As my father used to say, it is no longer a dance you can dance carrying your snuff in one cupped hand. You and Ikem must quickly patch up this ridiculous thing between you that nobody has ever been able to explain to me.²³

Perhaps Sam's death is a punishment for wanting to take advantage of Beatrice – Idemili's verdict against the insatiable male.²⁴

Accordingly, the proverbial sexual appetite in a man turns him into “the odorous he-goat” who plants “his plenitude of seeds from a huge pod swinging between hind legs into she-goats tethered for him in front of numerous homesteads”.²⁵ The passive voice is used when it gets to she-goats, meaning someone or something is responsible for the females' behavior, but the male is responsible for his own behavior. This might be a pointer to the idea that the woman has no choice in this matter. Otherwise it is the result of “man's unquenchable thirst to sit in authority on his fellows”.²⁶ Another instance of the sexy female is given when Beatrice notices how a male lizard “furiously” chases its female counterpart “as male lizards always seem to do”.

Yet again, through Beatrice, Achebe paints a picture of a woman with emotions, capable of feeling and loving, not just an object to satisfy male desire. Beneath all this “strength of a woman” is the female lover. This side of Beatrice is revealed through her amorous relationship with Chris. After her experience at Abichi, Beatrice breaks down at what she sees as Chris' lack of concern about her welfare. As he tries to console and reassure

her of his love, they end up on her bed. Achebe tries to describe the emotions of a woman in love:

[They] fell in together into the wide, open space of her bed and began to roll over and over until she could roll no more and said: 'Come in.' And as he did she uttered a strangled cry that was not just a cry but also a command or a password into her temple. From there she took charge of him leading him by the hand silently through heaving groves mottled in subdued yellow sunlight, treading dry leaves underfoot till they came to streams of clear blue water. More than once he had slipped on the steep banks and she had pulled him up and back with such power and authority as he had never seen her exercise before... Would he survive? This unending, excruciating joyfulness in the crossroads of laughter and tears... And now he was not just slipping but falling, crumbling into himself.

Just as he was going to plead for mercy she screamed an order: 'OK!' and he exploded into stars and floated through fluffy white clouds and began a long and slow and weightless falling and sinking into deep, blue sleep...he woke like a child cradled in her arms and breasts, her eyes watching anxiously over him...²⁷

Even in her amorous stupor, Beatrice still has the strength to “command” Chris, telling him what to do and when to do what. Perhaps, Achebe wants to dispel the popular notion that the man is always in charge when it comes to sex. Also, Achebe describes Chris’ experience more than Beatrice’s. One wonders if a male writer can adequately describe female emotions during sexual intercourse.

Fascinatingly, Mary E. Modupe Kolawole remarks that:

Beatrice Okoh is depicted as a shaper and a sharpener of consciousness in her relationship to Ikem Osodi and Christopher Iriko. She is a source of motivation, inspiration, and encouragement to Ikem, the artist and social conscience, and to Chris, the political conscience.

Although unacknowledged, she is also a motivator of the head of state of Kangan to an extent. Achebe creates in Beatrice a conservative but extremely intelligent girl. Chris describes her accurately as “beautiful without being glamorous. Peaceful but very strong. Very, very strong.” Her strength of character and genius give her an indispensable central role.²⁸

In contrast, there is Elewa, a sales-girl in a Lebanese shop. She is the daughter of a market woman. Her literacy or illiteracy level is betrayed by her language. She only speaks Pidgin English. Elewa is the girlfriend of Ikem Osodi, Editor of the *National Gazette*.

Elewa has her own view of the suffering woman: *But woman done chop sand for dis world-o... Imagine! But na we causam; na we own fault. If I no kuku bring my stupid nyarsh come dump for your bedroom you for de kick me about like I be football? I no blame you...*²⁹

Definitely, she is not as educated as Ikem but she is able to match him in debate.

‘Imagine... To put a girl for taxi at midnight to go and jam with arm robbers in the road.’

‘You know very well, Elewa, that there are no more armed robbers in Bassa.’

‘The woman dem massacre for motor Park last week na you killam.’

‘Nobody will kill you, Elewa.’

‘*Nobody will kill you Elewa.* Why you no drive me home yourself if say you know arm robbers done finish for Basa. Make you go siddon.’

‘I can’t take you home because my battery is down. I have told you that twenty times already.’

‘Your battery is down. Why your battery no go down for afternoon when you come pick me.’

‘Because you can manage a weak battery in daytime but not at night, Elewa.’

‘Take your mouth comot my name, ojare. Tomorrow make you take your nonsense battery come pick me again. Nonsense!’³⁰

Women do have the ability to reason things out, no matter how low the level of their education. They are not just passive beings who need others to make decisions for them.

Indeed, the friendship that grows between Elewa and Beatrice reveals a lot about the levels of strength women have. When Ikem's death is announced and Beatrice finds Elewa in her apartment, Beatrice feels it is not time to be a coward but a time that "would demand brutal courage... from the likes of Elewa and herself" (p. 170). Surprisingly, after Beatrice breaks the news of Ikem's death to Elewa, it is Elewa who proves stronger. To the author, "strange are the ways of deep emotion" (p.170). Beatrice is the one who starts to shed tears. This shows that strength comes in different shades. There is social strength, financial strength, political strength – all of which Beatrice may have – and then emotional strength, of which Elewa has more. This is again proved when State Security makes a surprise call at Beatrice's residence, after Chris goes into hiding. When the unexpected visitors knock on the door and Beatrice agrees to open the door, her hands shake so violently that she is not able to do so. She is clearly shaken by the turn of events. This is surprising, considering her ability to calmly take the President's rebuff when she does not let him use his political power to take advantage of her. It is Elewa who grabs the keys from her to unlock the padlock and open the grill. Elewa's action "shocked [Beatrice] into calmness".³¹ Elewa even ignores her companions *order* to go inside. Perhaps Elewa's social status and the recent death of her boyfriend made Beatrice underestimate Elewa's resolve. Later on Beatrice comes to appreciate that it is perhaps these qualities that endeared Elewa to Ikem.

Furthermore, Agatha, Beatrice's maid, represents the female who gives herself the role of social critic who does not necessarily contribute to improving a female's lot. Her attitude to Beatrice reminds Beatrice of Comfort's fiancé's relative, who was disgusted that a girl of twenty-six could still be unmarried. Agatha frowns upon Beatrice receiving male visitors, seeing it as very sinful, and develops an antagonistic attitude towards her employer any time there is a male visitor in the house. Achebe ironically labels the tense mood Agatha creates as *Girls at War*. Agatha's attitude gives Beatrice a flashback about her childhood. Her mother never got used to having another daughter, the fifth in a row. She had hoped for a son instead. Her disappointment developed into a grudge. So great was her grudge against her daughter that one day when she came crying out of her husband's room and Beatrice hugged her, she pushed her daughter so violently away that she hit her head against a wooden mortar. So then, women do not always warm up to their own kind; they sometimes create painful conditions for the other. Maybe, a study could be done into the factors that account for female rivalries and female-female invectives.

These three women, especially Beatrice and Elewa, show that there is a diversity of women in the real world. However, when they come together, they help each other overcome their peculiar trials in life – showing the power of female solidarity.

Remarkably, the male characters in the novel also help the author to highlight the stronger role of women. Chris sets the political stage for Beatrice. He confesses that he,

Ikem and Sam are so connected that “you cannot tell the story of any of us without implicating the others. Ikem may resent me but he probably resents Sam even more and Sam resents both of us vehemently”.³² When Chris fails to pay heed to Beatrice’s prophecy, Ikem is killed and he suffers next. By this Chris proves how accurate female intuition is. Again, after his death, Beatrice collaborates with Adamma, the girl Chris tried to save (he was killed in the process) and other males – Emmanuel Obete, President of the Students Union; Braimoh, a taxi driver; Captain Abdul Medani, who brought the news of Chris’ death – to spearhead a restructuring of national unity: *to appease an embittered history*.³³ Emmanuel describes Beatrice as “a captain whose leadership was sharpened more and more by sensitivity to the peculiar needs of her company”.³⁴

What is more, Ikem tells Beatrice she has opened his eyes to the truth about women. It is a bit surprising since he has his match of a woman in Elewa, his girlfriend. This perhaps indicates that education has something to do with the world accepting the new woman. The educated female elite are responsible for getting the rest of the world, including the illiterate female majority, informed about the new role(s) of the twenty-first century female. To Ikem, the ability to shower and go to bed alone is what the norm should be; one’s girlfriend should not spend the night at the man’s house. Thus, for Elewa not to understand this, and wish to sleep at his house proves that women are their own enemies. What Ikem may be failing to see is that men and women have different perceptions about the same issue. This is probably because he never really had any regard for a woman: “*Ikem doesn’t say much to any girl. He doesn’t think they have enough brains... women do not feature too much in his schemes except as, well, comforters.*”³⁵

As a result, in Ikem's love letter to Beatrice, he points out:

I can't tell you what the new role for Woman will be. I don't know. I should never have presumed to know. *You* have to tell us. We never asked you before. And perhaps because you've never been asked you may not have thought about it; you may not have an answer handy. But in that case everybody had better know who is *now* holding up the action.³⁶

Again, Ikem rightly admits to BB that he had been wrong in adopting the macho, male chauvinistic attitude that he had so often displayed toward women and for such a long time; when addressing the university students, he proposes a line of action that would have been relevant and applicable to any segment of the community:

I have no desire to belittle your role in putting this nation finally on the road to self-redemption. But you cannot do that unless you first set about to purge yourselves, to clean up your act. You must learn for a start to hold your own student leaders to responsible performance; only after you have done that can you have the moral authority to lecture the national leadership. You must develop the habit of scepticism, not swallow every piece of superstition you are told by witch doctors and professors. I see too much parroting, too much regurgitating of half-digested radical rhetoric. . . . When you have rid yourselves of these things your potentiality for assisting and directing this nation will be quadrupled. . . .³⁷

Although no one key can unlock all the doors to a writer's meaning, this passage provides a very good access to a convincing interpretation of Anthills of the Savannah. Ikem, for all his human flaws, is one of the most likable Achebe characters; he seems to point out in word and action that there must be a new beginning, a new line of action, for the millennium. Unlike characters such as Odili in A Man of the People or the man who

is the symbolically named protagonist in The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, Ikem is quite specific about what can and should be done. Through Ikem, Achebe acknowledges that women now have a chance to define their own roles. Men, or society for that matter, will no longer do that. So, if women decide to resign themselves to the traditional or stereotyped roles, they have no one but themselves to blame.

As fate would have it, when Chris Oriko and Ikem Osodi are killed as they resist the abuse of power, they are survived by their girlfriends, Beatrice and Elewa respectively. Beatrice is entrusted with her community and has the task of restoring political sanity, something the men in her life could not do, or were unable to do. This illustrates, as intimated early on, that male domination has resulted in numerous wars, hunger, power struggle and death. This means there is the need for “women and motherist leaders”.³⁸ Ogunjimi³⁹ makes another interesting observation that “war is a patriarchal and masculine institution bringing havoc to the family structure... The responsibilities of childcare and general survival rest with women, who are not recognized.”⁴⁰

Consequentially, by insisting that they name the baby themselves, Beatrice and Elewa propose that a new era has dawned; there is a new approach to gender issues – a female no longer needs to be in the background, waiting for (major) decisions to be taken by the male. Without a man she is as capable as he is or should have been.

She [Beatrice] picked up the tiny bundle from its cot and, turning to Elewa, said: "Name this child."
"Na you go name am."
"OK. You just saved a false step, anyway. Thanks. I will start afresh. . . .

There was an Old Testament prophet who named his son The remnant shall return. They must have lived in times like this. We have a different metaphor, though; we have our own version of hope that springs eternal. We shall call this child AMAECHINA: May-the-path-never-close. Ama for short."

"But that's a boy's name."

"No matter."

"Girl fit answer am also."

"It's a beautiful name. The Path of Ikem."

"That's right! May it never close, never overgrow."

"Das right!"

"May it always shine! The Shining Path of Ikem."

"Dat na wonderful name."

"Na fine name so."⁴¹

Additionally, Douglas Killam and Ruth Rowe (2000) suggest that the naming of Elewa's baby at Beatrice's flat is symbolic.⁴² Family members are not really consulted or given the chance to fully participate and by the time they arrive, the baby has already been named *Amaechina*, meaning "may the path never close". Killam and Rowe believe that this act reflects the Igbo culture, where there is a fear that the derelict homestead can be choked with weeds. This shows how much these people dread anarchy. Killam and Rowe (2000) thus argue that the act is "self-validating, particularly since, despite her education, Beatrice contemporizes both Idemili and the priestess Chielo of Things Fall Apart".⁴³ Also, her role implies there can be "genuine moral order" when ordinary people are allowed to fulfill their destinies, instead of being controlled by "anarchic leaders and obsolete customs". This idea is buttressed by the central role given to women, especially Beatrice and Elewa. These women are among classes that are marginalized by colonization and neo-colonial culture.

In this respect, this thesis contends that Elewa's baby girl, Ama[echina], will be raised in an environment that recognizes the potential of the female. The baby is thus surrounded by saviours. Elvira Godono has rightly noted that women are now portrayed as representatives of "the last hope for the restoration of the natural order in life and in every sphere of life".⁴⁴ For characters such as the baby Ama, her mother Elewa, BB, Braimoh, and all of the other survivors of Chris and Ikem -- those who will most likely continue fighting for the ideals for which Ikem, Chris, and others fell -- Ikem's words are both an inspirational legacy and a call for action. The oppression described in this work is not new. What is truly innovative is the creation of a new breed of fighters for justice - - male, female, young, old, urban, rural, illiterate, literate, middle class, working class, and so on - who are going to pool all of their resources and use all just weapons of war to overcome tyranny. Fittingly, the baptismal ceremony for Ama[echina], the daughter of Ikem and Elewa (two fierce warriors for justice if ever there were warriors) serves as the starting point for this new beginning: "... in you young people the world has met its match. Yes! You have put the world where it should sit."⁴⁵

Accordingly, that Amaechina will grow up in a world different from that of her parents and grand-parents, a world "which belongs to the people of the world not to any little caucus, no matter how talented"⁴⁶ (to quote her late Uncle Chris), is not in doubt. In the concluding scenes of the novel, Achebe emphasizes the point that it will take not only various committed groups and classes of society -- especially people of goodwill and fierce commitment -- to bring about positive change but also a real struggle for justice on all fronts.

This attitude can be likened to the therapy Efua Sutherland⁴⁷ prescribes for the survival of society as a whole in Foriwa. Adetokunbo Pearce puts it this way:

For a people to make progress, it must do away with sexism, tribalism and classism. It must involve all its members in a communal effort to continuously rebuild itself... Tradition is the root of a people's culture, but it becomes retrogressive if treated as an end in itself. Tradition should be viewed instead as a foundation that must be built upon by each succeeding generation.⁴⁸

In this fashion, as Ghana celebrates Kwame Nkrumah's Centenary⁴⁹, Salome Donkor writes on *How Nkrumah empowered Ghanaian women*⁵⁰. This article is basically about women being active in (Ghanaian) politics: how they began to get involved and how well they are doing. It is believed women have the potential to contribute immensely to governance. This role of women on the political scene of Ghana began to be felt as women lent support to the main political party then: the Convention People's Party (CPP). These women were traders, educationists, nurses, broadcasters, judges, lawyers, from all walks of life. Some of these women even offered financial assistance to the party. Others also "stood shoulder to shoulder with their male counterparts like Kofi Baako and Sacki Schek". Nkrumah appointed women⁵¹ as propaganda secretaries, and these women took care of the party's Women's League. In spite of women's contribution, there was no woman in the cabinet of Ghana's first republic. Thus, a bill was passed in 1960 to favour this cause of women. It was the Representation of the People (Women Members) Bill. The result was ten women being elected unopposed as MPs in that same month the bill was passed. More than fifty years down the line there

still remains much to be done “to ensure an effective representation of women in politics and other equally important sectors”.⁵²

Similarly, Oduyoye (2000) remarks that generally, Nigerian women are becoming more and more aware that they have been sidelined in the political arena and that they need to become an integral part of the nation’s development:

Many factors, though, converge to isolate women from the centers of power: their inequality of access to the modern sectors of the economy, the persistence of an ideology of male dominance, an increase in the costs of domestic labor, an inability to pay hired hands or acquire modern technology, the progressive breakdown of cooperative efforts in the traditional sector, and the conflict in being both wife and employee. Indeed, this is true throughout Africa.⁵³

Correspondingly, Adaku T. Ankumah writes:

Revolutionary activists have traditionally not considered women a potential revolutionary force since revolutions are generally considered a masculine activity. Even when women have joined the ranks of the revolutionaries, they are not wholly accepted by the predominantly male group who regard their contribution as negligible. So-called progressive writers like Jean-Paul Sartre do not escape from this unfavorable characterization of women in revolution. In his play *Dirty Hands* (*Les mains sales*), a play which focuses on contemporary politics and set in an imaginary formerly Eastern European country, a young bourgeois intellectual named Hugo Barine is forced to kill the secretary of the Communist Party, Hoederer because the secretary is in favor of cooperating with their political enemies, the Conservatives and Fascists. Hugo, though, is distrusted by the Party officials like Louis because of his bourgeois background. His former girlfriend and Party member Olga teaches Hugo the fundamentals of revolutionary ideology and encourages him when the leaders of their group give him up as a good-for-nothing intellectual anarchist. However, she is considered

emotionally and intellectually inferior by Hoederer because she is a woman. He expresses this position in a lecture he gives Hugo after they have determined that it was a woman who threw the abortive bomb into his office:

Hoederer: Do you know why she missed us? I'll bet she shut her eyes when she threw the bomb.

Hugo: Why? ⁵⁴

Indeed, Beatrice and Elewa are very unlike the women who lived in fear of men, like Okonkwo, who used iron hands to deal with them. This attitude meant a lot of things, including the notion of “male prowess and invincibility”. Achebe’s attitude to women before Anthills of the Savannah has been described as ambiguous, ambivalent and ironic. “For once we see women emerge from the hard cells of the anthill. At certain times, they stand out, conspicuous, invincible and resilient against the burnt-out landscape of the savannah”. ⁵⁵

Yet, in his Doctoral thesis titled “The Linguistic and Pictorial Representation of Nigerian Women’s Assertiveness in Selected Nigerian Newspapers, Daniel Iyabode⁵⁶ asserts that:

Women were frequently ‘themes’ in 73.1% of the clauses, but the qualitative investigation showed that this position did not guarantee their always being in charge. Generally, ...verbal choices in sentences depicted women, vacillating between empowerment and disempowerment, consistently using self-effacing modal verbs, for instance: had to, couldn’t say, would have loved to; and intransitive verbs such as suffering and feel (guilty)... Women are key contributors to their continued non-empowerment through negative linguistic and pictorial representations that suggested their acceptance of the patriarchal status quo. The Beijing Conference on women empowerment is yet to impact the current linguistic and pictorial self-

representations of Nigerian women in selected newspapers. Women's verbal and pictorial choices in media discourse should therefore become more positively self-assertive to project true empowerment.

Interestingly, Achebe worked as a journalist for some time. In Anthills of the Savannah, we have two journalists: Chris and Ikem. Chris is a former editor of a national newspaper, whilst Ikem is the editor of a national newspaper. In the light of Iyabode's assertion, this thesis examined some portions of the text where Achebe passed comments on the life of the main female character in the book, as well as where Chris and Ikem analyze women or are engaged in conversation with them, and where the women articulate themselves. Thus, we considered Beatrice's autobiography and conversations with other people:

The strange feelings I *had been* nursing... p. 72

My first act of rebellion *was to bring* a wan smile to my face... p. 72

I simply *could not muster* anything you could call enthusiasm to sustain an exchange...p. 77

I *was hanging around* as I was fond of doing... p. 85

So I *threw* myself between this enemy and him... I *did* it shamelessly...

And was I glad the king was slowly but surely responding... pp. 80-81

There were times I *suspected* that he may have flogged our poor mother... p. 86

I *had* this strong suspicion nevertheless... p. 86

Beatrice Nwanyibuife *did not know* these traditions and legends of her people... p. 105

The verbs used (in italics) are not self-effacing modal verbs. Rather these verbs display strong will and independent thinking. Even other male characters see her in a very positive light.

Her father had deplored the soldier-girl who fell out of the trees. Chris saw the quiet demure damsel whose still waters nonetheless could conceal deep over-powering eddies of passion that always almost sucked him into fatal depths...⁵⁷

So, a few times the passive voice is used: *When she was marched through the ranks of her erstwhile party comrades like a disgraced soldier...*⁵⁸

This is indicative that no matter how independent the female may be, society will keep trying to keep her in the background, sometimes. At other times, females contribute to the “negative linguistic and pictorial representations that suggested their acceptance of the patriarchal status quo”:

But then... why should I ask the world to interrupt its business for no other reason than to find out what one insignificant female did or did not do in a calamity that consumed so many and so much? A little matter of personal pride for me perhaps but so what?⁵⁹

Nonetheless, it has been argued that when males write about women, the men take “a far less sophisticated view of women’s lives and see them as secondary figures in the environment of males”.⁶⁰ In his presentation of the female characters, it is evident that Achebe tries to give a holistic picture of the modern woman. We are taken into her emotions, her thoughts, her reactions. We see her make and take decisions, retaliate, and initiate change. Again, she is put in the same environment and put to the same tests as

her male counterpart. Surprisingly, she survives that pressure which eliminates her male counterpart. Uzoechi Nwagbara rightly comments that:

Chinua Achebe has deftly refracted the rise of new Nigerian women, who are generation changers. Beatrice represents Achebe's new women; her portraiture in the novel interrogates postcolonial Nigerian politics of disempowerment, marginalisation, shrunken public sphere and gendered space that occlude good governance.⁶¹

Perhaps, Efo Mawugbe lends support to his counterpart, Achebe, by the roles he gives Nana Yaa and her daughter (who pretends to be a son) Owusu in his award winning play In The Chest Of A Woman. Nana Yaa insists on being given a right to also contest the throne of the land, teaches her daughter turned son to behave like a man in order to achieve her aims. But then it could be argued that the females had to play the game according to the rules of men, that Owusu could not contest the throne as a female. Thus, a better platform still needs to be created for women to be accepted as equally able contestants of the same positions as their male counterparts.

Anyway, the world is changing and the roles of women need to conform to the modern needs of the world. Affairs of women are an integral part of the nation's progress and development. As women speak out, the world needs to recognize her voice and give her a chance to compliment her male counterpart, for the male and female are two different but inseparable parts of a whole.

Consequently, in Chapter Three the thesis continues to explore how the modern woman challenges systems of patriarchy, whether the woman is willing to speak out against

gender discrimination and if the woman's voice, when heard, changes the traditional concept society has about her.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

CHAPTER THREE

FACELESS

In Amma Darko's Beyond the Horizon, it is believed that she speaks strongly against the "traumatically silenced and sexually exploited"¹ lives of (black) women. Similarly, in Faceless, women like Maa Tsuru, Maami Broni, and younger females like Baby T are exploited (in one way or the other) and are silenced, for they lack the boldness and moral courage to talk about their plight or change their predicament. Baby T could be said to represent the beautiful and young, but illiterate and ignorant females whose naivety makes them prone to such exploitation.

The prime question that surfaces is, is there in Faceless, as in Beyond the Horizon, a character “who despite the painful, frustrating, and humiliating experience of prostitution... written on her body, on her sexuality in particular, keeps reclaiming and reconstructing her own private space, her own freedom, and her financial independence?”² Other questions that this chapter addresses are: Is the modern female facing similar challenges in the patriarchal society as her counterpart in the pre-twenty-first centuries? If it was possible for women in the pre-colonial era to make positive contributions in spite of patriarchal hegemonies, what stops the modern woman from rising above ‘mediocrity’ and refusing to be ‘other’? Who really is *faceless*: women silenced by patriarchy, or irresponsible men covered by patriarchy?

For a start, Maa Tsuru demonstrates that even in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, women still suffer greatly at the hands of men. Maa Tsuru’s mother, as a result of Maa Tsuru’s father’s decision to abandon her, utters a curse against all “his descendants”. Interestingly, though Kwei (Maa Tsuru’s lover) constantly makes her pregnant each time and does not really make any effort to take care of her, the pregnancies or the children, Maa Tsuru still allows Kwei into her life. After having four children with her, Kwei abandons her, using her mother’s curse as an excuse. He is not alone in this as his own mother helps him to be irresponsible by also using the same grounds of a mother’s curse. In this tangle, it is a bit difficult to determine whether the male or the female is to blame in this game of irresponsibility. Later on, perhaps out of the need to fulfill her sexual desires, Maa Tsuru invites Kpakpo into her life. Maa Tsuru is presented as a helpless woman at the mercy of the men in her life. She has four children but with different men.

What, perhaps, is most pathetic is that she is irresponsible towards her daughters for the sake of her relationship with her second lover.

Thus, Mary Wollstonecraft tries to explain the emotions that make some women as helpless as Maa Tsuru:

Common passions are excited by common qualities – Men look for beauty and the simper of good-humoured docility: women are captivated by easy manners; a gentleman-like man seldom fails to please them, and their thirsty ears eagerly drink the insinuating nothings of politeness, whilst they turn from the unintelligible sounds of the charmer – reason, charm he never so wisely. With respect to superficial accomplishments, the rake certainly has the advantage... Rendered gay and giddy by the whole tenor of their lives, the very aspect of wisdom, or the severe graces of virtue, must have a lugubrious appearance to them... Without taste... for taste is the offspring of judgment, how can they discover that true beauty and grace must arise from the play of the mind/ and how can they be expected to relish in a lover what they do not, or very imperfectly, possess themselves? The sympathy that unites hearts, and invites to confidence in them is so very faint, that it cannot take fire, and thus mount to passion. No, I repeat it, the love cherished by such minds, must have grosser fuel!

The inference is obvious; till women are led to exercise their understandings, they should not be satirized for their attachment to rakes; or even for being rakes at heart, when it appears to be the inevitable consequence of their education. Those who live to please – must find their enjoyments, their happiness, in pleasure! It is a trite, yet true remark, that we never do anything well, unless we love it for its own sake.

Supposing, however, for a moment, that women were in some future revolution of time, to become, what I sincerely wish them to be, even love would acquire more serious dignity, and be purified in its own fires; and virtue giving true delicacy to their affections, they would turn with disgust at a rake. Reasoning then, as well as feeling, the only province of woman, at present, they might easily

guard against exterior graces, and quickly learn to despise the sensibility that had been excited and hackneyed in the ways of women, whose trade was vice; and allurements, wanton airs. They would recollect that the flame... which they wished to light up, had been exhausted by lust, and that the sated appetite, losing all relish for pure and simple pleasures, could only be roused by licentious arts or variety. What satisfaction could a woman of delicacy promise herself in a union with such a man, when the very artlessness of her affection might appear insipid? Thus does Dryden describe the situation,

----- 'Where love is duty, on the female side,
'On theirs mere sensual gust, and sought with
Surly pride.'

But one grand truth women have yet to learn... In the choice of a husband, they should not be led astray by the qualities of a lover – for a lover the husband, even supposing him to be wise and virtuous, cannot long remain. Men, for whom we are told women are made, have too much occupied the thoughts of women; and this association has so entangled love with all their motives of action; and, to harp a little on an old string, having been solely employed either themselves to excite love, or actually putting their lessons in practice, they cannot live without love. But, when a sense of duty, or fear of shame, obliges them to restrain this pampered desire of pleasing beyond certain lengths, too far for delicacy, it is true, though far from criminality, they obstinately determine to love, I speak of the passion, their husbands to the end of the chapter – and then acting the part which they have foolishly exacted from their lovers, they become abject wooers, and fond slaves.³

Furthermore, Baby T, Maa Tsuru's elder daughter, is raped by Onko, a neighbor, but Maa Tsuru is silenced with a paltry sum from Onko. Perhaps, if Kpakpo had been taking care of her and, at least, the two children she had had with him, she would have been able to stand up to Onko and demanded for justice. As a result, Baby T is compelled to live with Maami Broni (whose preoccupation is to gratify the sexual longing of her male

clients in exchange for her material needs), where she inevitably has to enter prostitution, under the guise of being a househelp for Maami Broni, on the premise that she lured Onko to have sex with her. She is even accused of tempting her stepfather to have sex with her. Baby T's "sacrifice", eventually is what feeds Maa Tsuru, and even Kpakpo. Surprisingly, Maa Tsuru is none the better for it. Her last two children still cry from hunger and she locks herself up in the room all day long.

Accordingly, Maa Tsuru, Maami Broni, and Baby T are representative of pornography – where pornography is defined as when “women are presented dehumanized as sexual objects, things or commodities; or women are presented as sexual objects who enjoy humiliation or pain; or women are presented in postures or positions of sexual submission, servility or display.”⁴ Kpakpo's initiative to make a deal with Poison to trick Baby T into prostitution may affirm Maria Frias' observation that Darko's writing aims to designate African women as active subjects, as recalcitrant rebels, and victim-survivors who are portrayed as being foremost in offering resistance to sexual/colonial domination.⁵ Pornography depicted in this sense is not an offensive display of nudity, but a way of showing that females are still exploited sexually, and when this happens the general public still wants to find a way to cover it up, as if the female in question deserves it or should accept it as the norm.

Likewise, Elaine Showalter quotes Irving Howe's⁶ interpretation of Michael Henchard's ability to sell both his wife and his daughter at a fair for five guineas⁷:

To shake loose from one's wife; to discard that drooping rag of a woman, with her mute complaints and maddening passivity; to escape not by a slinking abandonment but through the public sale of her body to a stranger, as horses are sold at a fair; and thus to wrest, through sheer amoral willfulness, a second chance out of life – ... this stroke [is]... so insidious attractive to male fantasy...⁸

Hence, Showalter comments that there is not enough evidence in the novel referred to above to suggest that Susan, Michael's wife was "drooping complaining or passive".⁹

She thinks that her role is rather passive because she is a woman with a child; thus, she cannot even dream of a second chance in life. What male critics do not comment about is that Michael does not only sell his wife, but his daughter too: "patriarchal societies do not readily sell their sons".¹⁰ So we do not read of Maa Tsuru selling her sons; she just allowed them to go away. Baby T, however, is an avenue for financial gain.

Yet, Maa Tsuru's silence and Maami Broni's passive attitude when Baby T is forced into prostitution makes one question whether the females are equally offering a helping hand to sexual/patriarchal domination. Unfortunately, when Baby T decides to stand up for herself she is beaten and threatened by Poison and moments later dies at the hands of Onko, who wants to take a few of her pubic hairs for a ritual. The cause of death is established when a male nurse explains to Aggie and Vickie (workers at MUTE) that Baby T died from a fatal head injury that caused bleeding on the left side of her brain – a gaping wound to her head. Baby T can be said to illustrate the female who either succumbs to male dominion or is crushed by it.

Even so, Baby T's role as a prostitute, to Odile Cazenave, classifies her as a marginal character. She believes that through marginal characters the author is able to "take a sharp look at certain forbidden areas that these same characters allowed the author to approach".¹¹ Baby T's portrait enables Amma Darko to delve more deeply into the exploitation of women by the familial and social system. That is why Cazenave believes that "this trope illustrates certain social phenomena, in particular the subscription to appearance and semi-prostitution as a normalized means of financial support. According to this system, the woman is supposed to maintain the family by marketing her own body."¹²

On the other hand, Madhu Kishwar in her article *Feminism, rebellious women, and cultural boundaries: rereading Flora Nwapa and her compatriots*, states that feminists critics of African literature have observed that female writers demonstrate a far better understanding of females than men.¹³ In this wise, female writers create a semblance to reality with diverse female characters. The writers do not eliminate women who "slander, backstab, and cause pain to one another"¹⁴. There is woman-on-woman violence and abuse. In *Faceless*, there are females who strip their own kind of honour, especially the more helpless ones:

It is a formidable task to begin to just try to assign reasons, let alone attempt to comprehend why a middle-aged woman who could be somebody's mother or grandmother, who probably is indeed somebody's mother or grandmother, would allow her conscience to sink so low as to agree to put a girl who could be her daughter or granddaughter, into the trade of prostitution without qualms, and make it her task to train a young girl to become good at trading her body for sex...

Like all the other middle aged women occupying the six-room compound house brothel, Maami Broni, like Mama Abidjan, was an old 'graduate' of Ivory Coast's red light district. It is no secret that the trade is cruel to age and uncompromising to wrinkles. A middle aged woman could have accumulated all the 'know how' of the trade's tricks and all the acrobatics and styles of the act. Still a man would go for youth. 'Body call!' So the middle aged like Maami Broni, on their return from Abidjan in Ivory Coast or Agege in Nigeria, or wherever it was they went to hustle, usually set up camp, hunted novices and launched their own sort of 'intermediate technology transfer' programme. Normally, the seasoned middle-aged woman takes on the young girls initially as househelps. While carrying on their normal jobs as househelps, the 'apprenticeship' training is subtly launched. The girl could be washing the dishes somewhere behind the house and the Madam would approach her and say something like, "Mr. K needs a bit of help to relax but I have a headache. Can you go into the room and see if you can give him what he wants?"

Backpass!¹⁵

On the whole, the more elderly women like Mama Abidjan, Maami Broni, and Maa Tsuru justify the oppressive attitudes of males. Their indifferent attitude towards a subservient role of women not only shows how willing they are to accept their lot, but also how unprepared they are for a more positive image or role. Let us take, for instance, Baby T's first 'backpass' (when Maami Broni gives her a 'client'). Maami Broni has been told that Baby T is already offering herself to men. However, when after the backpass Baby T cries torrents, Maami Broni realizes she had been lied to. Yet, Maami Broni decides to help Baby T cope with the situation by introducing her to the "devil's weed" (marijuana). Interestingly, we read that though *she may have desired to let Baby T off, the decision was no longer hers. Poison was the boss. Only he could let Baby T go*¹⁶. For the sake of her 'business', which is her means of survival, she allows her

fellow female to continue to be oppressed / possessed by a male. Instead of passing on virtues to the younger generation, the older generation of females is teaching “young and pretty ‘pupils’” how to rob themselves of any value they could have had:

While her mother is stuck up somewhere in their poor village thinking that her daughter who was taken up by this ‘kind and considerate’ relation to the city to help her ‘get on in life’ was probably at that moment learning how to join the seams of a *kaba* together, the daughter may indeed be busy building a clientele of her own. Eventually, she begins to make more money than her Madam, as men prefer her young taut body to that of the older flabby Madam.¹⁷

Likewise, Maa Tsuru allows her two sons to leave home because of her desire to be with Kpakpo. Also, Kwei’s mother persuades her son to abandon a woman he has four children with, all in the name of a curse. It can be concluded, thus, that selfishness is a root cause of the suffering females go through. Perhaps this may justify why some critics are of the opinion that females are their own enemies.

All the same, modern African authors have returned to more traditional themes, albeit from a different angle. One of such themes considered by Amma Darko concerns child and parent relationships. The domineering attitude of mother over son illustrates that the complexity between mother and son has been demystified. The mother is seen to have “castrating power”, especially over her son’s conjugal relationship. Interestingly, while Kwei’s mother derides her son to save him from trouble, Maa Tsuru keeps Baby T in trouble because of financial gains. Could it be true, then, that “African women’s priorities begin and end in relationships”?

Moreover, Cazenave also propounds that female novelists are now also exploring mother and daughter relationships, where ambiguities, tensions and malaise arise “as a result of the mother’s exploitation of her daughter. [The novelists] have examined various forms of exploitation of woman within the society, marriage and the family”.¹⁸

When Fofu confronts her mother over Poison’s near rape attempt and his threat, mother and daughter get into a battle of words that leads to a revelation of Maa Tsuru’s exploitation and abandonment by her lovers. It also leads to a revelation of Baby T’s murder. Maa Tsuru displays discomfort at how Fofu wants her to take control of her own destiny and stop putting herself at the mercy of the patriarchal system and suffering abuse at the hands of men.

In addition, Cazenave suggests that though marginalized characters reveal how difficult it is for a woman to make a decision and choose the direction of her life, characters like Kabria demonstrate “a transitional phase that contributes to shape... the birth of a new feminine African novel”¹⁹. Kabria challenges the traditional ideas that restrict women in social and familial roles. Even Fofu’s bold attempt to look like a male pickpocket illustrates this opinion.

Hence, Kabria is the model of the woman who uses education to fight against the stereotyped jackets sewn for females, which include being a sex tool. Kabria plans to educate her first daughter when she discovers Obea has material on PPAG and Sexual health. Kabria takes us into her thoughts:

One could never be sure of Obea's generation. They were a different ball game altogether. When she was Obea's age, she used to wait to be asked questions by her parents before she answered. And when she did, it was with her hands behind her and her head bowed as a show of respect. Her children, nowadays, sometimes looked her straight in the face and bawled out replies to questions she was still formulating in her head. They say to her with ease of a downward flow, things that took her all the bravery she could summon to even just fantasize about saying to her mother. Her own mother never talked about boyfriends with her, let alone sex. She lived, it seemed, under the assumption that Kabria would never talk to a man till the day she was destined to marry; when the Holy Ghost would somehow conjure the most befitting groom by her side to exchange her 'I do' with. And although Kabria would be doing and saying and learning everything for the first time, she would get it all right and crisply perfect. Well, those were the days.²⁰

Certainly, the sarcasm here shows that instead of doing the intended good, this attitude is not realistic and definitely not ideal for the upcoming generations of the youth: Now her children were living with a threat called AIDS. So, what her mother in her time could afford not to talk about with her as a growing daughter, she has no option but to talk about it with her growing daughter. If Kabria does not become pragmatic, she might destroy her daughter instead of saving her. If times have changed, mothers have to also change their tactics, and society must also change its stand about women.

Nevertheless, in the midst of this call for change, there is the unchanging stance of patriarchy. Mercy Amba Oduyoye writes that patriarchy reflects "systematic and nominative inequalities and subordination".²¹ Rosemary Agonita however tries to situate the cause of patriarchy: marriage is a contract which brings about patriarchy.²² Kabria's marriage elucidates the attitude of a patriarchal society. Kabria's husband socializes with

his friends and explains that it is “to release tension” and that “every man needs to hold onto his sanity”. Kabria thus wonders which of them really needs to release tension:

Whether it shouldn't be she, who after having been labeled as the weaker sex, had to, in spite of a full time job, perform all of her traditional duties at home without an iota of relief. Every day after work, while Adade set off on route to go and release his tension, she had to go and pick up the children from school, head straight for home, change clothes, and go to the kitchen to see to dinner. Only to have him declare first thing on arrival at home after releasing his tension, ‘Oh, Kabria, I am so tired!’²³

Previously, the role of women especially wives, seemed to be limited to childbirth, taking care of the home and the children. Her lack of education ensured that she could neither fight for her “rights” nor participate in matters affecting her directly and indirectly. In today's world there are still women of this category, represented by Maa Tsuru. Yet, there is also the female who is not just a bearer of children and the manager of the home; she also has a career, just like her male counterpart – Kabria and other workers of MUTE. However, she is still expected to fulfill her “traditional” roles. Though by the turn of events the world recognizes that she now plays an active role in society and the economy, it still holds on to her submissive role as wife and mother.

Definitely, Kabria represents silent resistance to patriarchy. Her frustration (indicated by the words *fumed* and *Gosh!*) is that society always talks about the *good wife* and never the *good husband*:

But inside she fumed at her recollection of all that long and easy talk about how if a woman wanted to keep her marriage always fresh and her husband all to herself, she had better make him feel good at home. ‘Welcome him home with a smile,’ they say, ‘look good for him. Wear

mini skirts for him if he loves seeing you in one. Pamper him. Do him this. Do him that. Gosh! Who pampered her when she returned home tired from work, only to go and continue in the kitchen while trying to explain the word 'abandon' to their son? Who met her with a smile? Who wore Levi's jeans and an open neck polo shirt, which she loved so much on men, for her?²⁴

Thus, the alleged report, that African women work sixty-seven hours a week while their male counterparts work for fifty-five hours, makes Kabria wonder if men are not the weaker sex.²⁵ Simone de Beauvoir thinks women "have learned to turn toward [men] a changeless smile or an enigmatic passivity".²⁶ Women are good at hiding their true feelings because from their youth, they are taught "to lie to men, to scheme, to be wily. In speaking to them she wears an artificial expression on her face; she is cautious, hypocritical, play-acting".²⁷

Besides, Kabria's fight against patriarchy is evident as she tries to get Ottu, her last born, to understand that both male and female are significant in society. The attitude of Ottu, Kabria's only son, offers an insight to society's attitude to females. Ottu gloats over the fact that he is the only boy among his mother's children, and perhaps this is the reason why she has only three children. He compares himself to a friend, whose mother kept giving birth until she had him. This friend's grandmother boosts his ego by saying things like

"... he is special. Veeeeeeery special."

"... by coming a boy, he earned his mother plenty of respect and also ended her pains... When you are bringing forth a baby, they say it is painful. Veeeeeeery painful.

"... had my friend not come as a boy, she, being my friend's father's mother, would have insisted and ensured

that my friend's mother continued to bear more and more children till she bore a son... And because of that, his mum never punishes my friend..." (pp. 37-38)

Without doubt, the simplicity of his language as he contests his need to be treated special reflects his innocence. He is being indoctrinated by a society that naturally assumes and supports the superiority of the male. What different view is Ottu expected to have when he grows up? His friend's grandmother is also indirectly educating her female grandchildren to accept being "other" in the society. This might be the kind of education Maa Tsuru received, which has made her very careless with her children. Though Kabria does not come out on a large scale fight she does keep reclaiming and reconstructing her own private space and freedom. Kabria insists that "every child is special" and so parents should not have six children just because they want to have a son.

For this reason, writing on *Gender, Feminist Theory and Post-Colonial Women's Writing*, Nfah-Abbenyi refers to Donna Harraway's explanation that historical systems of sexual difference have created a situation where "men and women are socially constituted and positioned in relations of hierarchy and antagonism".²⁸ Elaine Showalter also comments that gender has been a tool the Anglo-Saxon discourse used to represent "social, cultural, and psychological meaning imposed upon biological sexual identity."

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Even so, the importance of "female bonding" is brought to the fore through the character called Fofu. Through her, with the help of Kabria and MUTE, Amma Darko speaks out

where African women have been traumatically silenced, and provocatively resists sexual and derogatory stereotypes of women. Thus she subverts, challenges, and revises “traditional passive roles assigned to women”.³⁰ Interestingly, MUTE is quite a paradox, for it is anything but mute. Kabria does not rest until the murderer of Baby T is found. MUTE serves as a voice for the voiceless, a saviour for the perishing – fighting the battles of and rescuing people like Fofo. Chris, in Anthills of the Savannah, tries to be a saviour for a young girl who was about to be raped, but loses his life in the process. Workers of MUTE, women to be precise, also fight to save the lives of the young lady Fofo, and survive the system. Yet, one can argue that the women are not in it alone; Sylv Po is also part of the women’s league all along.

Moreover, Fofo also demonstrates that even when society or circumstance does not move in her favour, she still has a choice. The novel begins with the words “She **chose** to spend the night on the old cardboard laid out in front of the provision store...”³¹ This shows how irresponsible her mother, Maa Tsuru, is. Instead of facing up to her responsibilities by finding a means to fend for herself and her children, she blames her plight on a curse and lets Baby T bear the brunt of it. Maa Tsuru worsens her plight by living with men who are as irresponsible as she is, men who think they can live life without sweating. So, Naa Yomo rightly points out:

“The only reason why my six living children are all living in their bungalows, is because, after the death of our fifth child, my husband, God bless his soul, stopped nurturing his superstitious mind and focused more on facing up to his responsibilities.”³²

In effect, Naa Yomo and her husband have chosen to do something about their situation. Likewise, Fofu chooses to open up to MUTE and is eventually rescued out of her predicament. Even Baby T chooses to rebel against Poison and Onko. Unfortunately, it leads to her death. All the same, her death leads to a chain of events that lead to the betterment of her junior sister.

Furthermore, the constant clash between the males and females in the story illustrate Oduyoye's belief that:

the language used in describing women in both traditional and modern social structures and the position of women in the economy and the society belie the statement of African men that African women are not oppressed. When I look at the mold in which religion has cast us in place, our political powerlessness, and the daily diminution of our domestic influence by Western-type patriarchal norms, I call what I see injustice...

Among the Akan, traditions that melded psych-religious and politico-economic needs formerly generated a parallel scheme of female power (blood) and male power (semen). Today, this scheme has been all but abandoned in favor of a typically monolithic patriarchy that has been reinforced by colonialism.³³

Also, this shows that the image of the female is yet to be redeemed from one of a sexual being who is there for the gratification of the male's desires. Maa Tsuru herself abandons her daughters for a man who eventually abandons her and the children he had with her. Fofu accuses her:

“After all that he did to Baby T? To us all? He left? And you stood by and allowed this smallish man to leave? Just like that?”

Tears welled up in Maa Tsuru's eyes. She did not speak. She couldn't.

“What made him leave, mother?” Fofu howled on, “And before he left, did you remind him of what you did for his sake? What you sacrificed? Did you?”³⁴

However, it is believed that a number of factors are responsible for why women continue to stay in dysfunctional or abusive relationships.³⁵ Among these reasons are the denial that she is being abused because she accepts that she is a second class citizen, financial support she gets from the man, fear, love, religion, children, family, and no place to go.

Apparently, Ms. Kamame helps Sylv Po to explain society’s take on the role of the mother and the effect of single parenting on children. To Ms. Kamame, when fathers are irresponsible, mothers become “the only caretaker of the child’s emotional or physical or financial needs, or all three combined. That means performing the tasks of two”³⁶. This is like when someone is overloaded with a burden at the first feeling of tension in the neck the person would want to “unload”. Unfortunately, the load refers to children. The problem seems to be traced to ignorance and attitude. For hardly are the females who are caught in this storm, knowledgeable about family planning or safe sex.

“If women who should act mature are not, can you imagine what is going on out there with all the immature but sexually active girls? But the question of attitude also has to do with most of the distorted beliefs and perceptions. The equating of the essence of womanhood to reproduction. Let’s have a litmus test here. Who is frowned upon more in this society? The single unmarried mother or the childless married woman?”
“The latter,” Sylv Po replied.³⁷

Clearly, the discussion reveals that there is the need to prove womanhood to the extent that a young girl does not mind getting pregnant, irrespective of whether she can take

care of the child or not. Thus, children become “trademarks”. Otherwise, Maa Tsuru would not have continued to give birth to two more children when her four older children “were surviving on the streets”.

Definitely, Sylv Po shows that men are equally responsible in the fight against the oppression of women. He creates the platform for Mrs. Kamame to explain the situation of street children, especially on issues creating and affecting street girls. Again, Sylv Po could be said to represent the role of the Ghanaian media in support of the cause of women. Indeed, Ghana today has a lot of females, who in one way or the other, are involved in the media to educate, emancipate and empower females from all walks of life. We can talk of Gifty Anti and her show, *The Standpoint (Listen to the feminine side)*. This show not only broadcasts women and girls, but also men, who try to get the Ghanaian society to understand and adapt to the changing roles of women in Ghana and the world. Nana Oye Lithur, a female rights activist also has a column in *the Daily Graphic* where she, among a host of legal issues, defends and promotes the cause of women.

Correspondingly, there are sister organizations that MUTE represents; for instance, the Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre (GSHRDC), the Women and Juvenile Unit (WAJU), and the Domestic Violence Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU). These organizations are up in arms against violence against women and children (and men), educating females on their rights and encouraging those who are abused to talk about what they are going through so that they can receive the necessary attention and

help that can give their life a new meaning, devoid of abuse, violence, suppression and discrimination. However, sometimes, it is difficult to access responsive justice, especially where the justice system is expensive and there are limited resources to protect victims. Possibly, that is why Fofu and Maa Tsuru were reluctant to open up to workers of MUTE. Fofu and her mother felt nothing positive would come out of it.

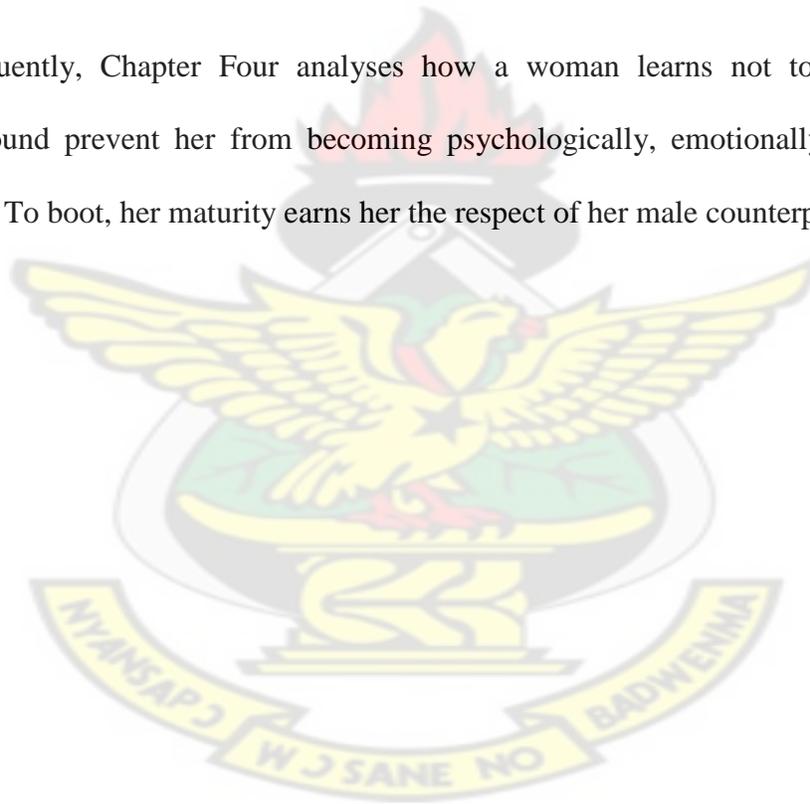
GSHRDC undertakes research on females who are abused and is in the business of rehabilitating the victims, sometimes setting the victims up in a business. This is so that they do not depend (solely) on a male who may take advantage of this dependence and abuse them. Some are abused in situations similar to Maa Tsuru: when they ask for housekeeping money, money for ante-natal care, or even complain about having more children than what the couple can (conveniently) cater for. GSHRDC has documented³⁸ that abuse is not only physical; it is also psychological, sexual, economic, and sometimes is exhibited in some traditional practices like tribal markings and forced marriages. 33% of violence against women and children is physical, whereas psychological and sexual violence account for 27% each.

Equally, there are other organizations like FAWE and various NGO's who are also concerned about helping bright but needy girls to advance in life.

Thus, in Faceless we are confronted by females of diverse backgrounds and experiences: females from the rural and humble background, and females with a more determined outlook on life. Overall, though the nature of their problems varies, their stories connect

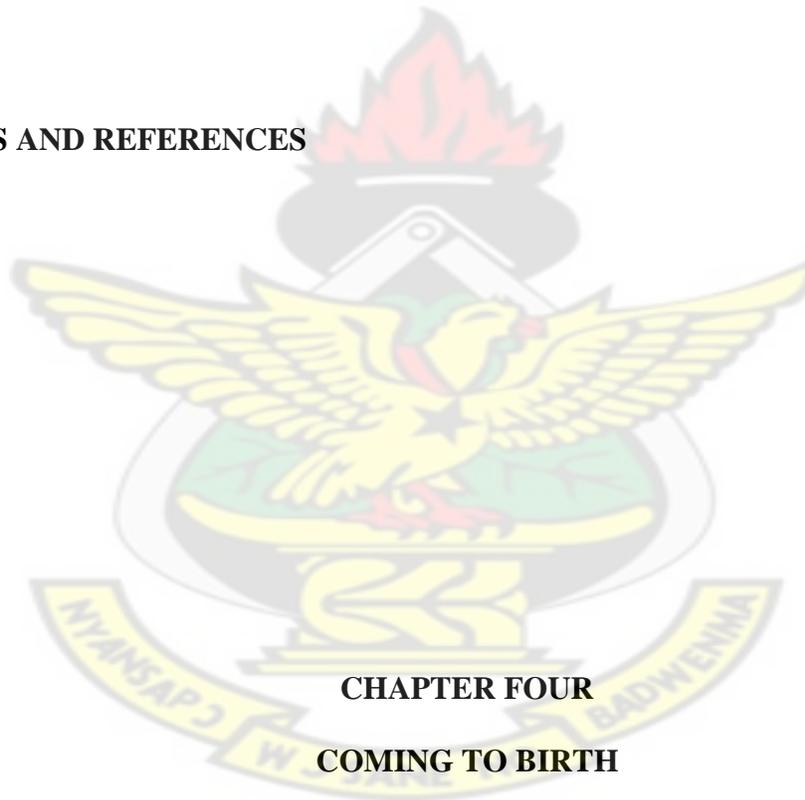
to paint a picture of a society that seeks to exploit her, to deprive her of moral and financial support by using familial disintegration as a threat. These characters fight against a form of patriarchy that could be defined as a “pattern of oppressive governance by men with little regard for the wellbeing or personal fulfillment of women, for the more significant values”.³⁹ As some of the characters revolt and challenge this system, we come into contact with the emerging African woman, born out of a desire to show her humanity, alongside that of her male counterpart.

Consequently, Chapter Four analyses how a woman learns not to let her humble background prevent her from becoming psychologically, emotionally and financially mature. To boot, her maturity earns her the respect of her male counterpart.



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NOTES AND REFERENCES



CHAPTER FOUR COMING TO BIRTH

This chapter also tries to answer if it is possible for the modern woman to rise above ‘mediocrity’ and refuse to be ‘other’, to make positive contributions in spite of patriarchal hegemonies. The question of whether the male is being challenged for authority by the female, or whether it is just the female’s quest to be recognized as a

human being who goes through equal emotional, economic, social, religious and psychological challenges as her male counterpart does is tackled as well.

Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye uses the character of Paulina Akelo to show how a female handles issues in her life from a female's perspective. These issues range from her childhood to adulthood, quite unlike the already grown up Beatrice in Anthills of the Savannah, or the child Fofu in Faceless. The dominant picture of Paulina in the story is one of a naïve girl growing into an independent and an assertive or authoritative woman. This image is often unacceptable within the social norms that define womanhood. Thus, this chapter looks at how the female resists racial and sexual violence when she decides to fight against the “normal” image of a woman, as well as how well she maintains herself in this revolution. Another thing that is considered is whether or not this image of “Miss Independent” conforms to African ideals, since this novel is situated at a time when Kenya was fighting for independence. In the discussion of the stages in Paulina's life, the chapter considers not only what marriage means to a woman, but also the question of social identity, that is, whether and how a woman can be a social being in her own right or whether she needs a man to be considered whole, to redefine and reaffirm her psychological, emotional and social identity.¹

To begin with, the question of social identity, that is, whether and how a woman can be a social being in her own right or whether she needs a man to be considered whole, to redefine and reaffirm her psychological, emotional and social identity, is debated through the kind of relationship Paulina has with Simon, who is a clerk in the health department, as well as a school mate of Paulina's elder brother. He has three children

with his soft spoken wife Martha. The argument Simon advances is an argument that Paulina agrees with:

“a married woman denied a married woman’s rights and respect, in custom she should seek a child where she could. She had a right... And she knew that there would be shame but not, for a barren woman, the public evidence of shame, and she bridled at his comfort and cast her eyes down and ceased to resist... she knew without words being said that she would come again. She could not pretend that she could any longer do without.”²

Similarly, Martin Were, Paulina’s husband, also feels it is his right to have another woman in his life, when Paulina re-locates to her homeland, though he hopes to get a child by such a relationship. After years of living with several women and being still childless, he makes a comeback into Paulina’s life, albeit subtly. He starts it all by asking her to keep an eye on his briefcase and a box of books. In six months, he has fully moved in with her. Paulina does not try to resist his moving in with her, and even accepts that it is her turn to be the wife. To be accepted in the society and to qualify for a job, a woman requires the support of a husband as well as a brother-in-law, dignity and the signs of wealth.³

Nevertheless, both Martin and Paulina demonstrate that the man needs the woman just as a woman needs a man for psychological and emotional fulfillment and identity. Even socially, a man’s identity cannot be totally complete without a woman. As Martin expects Paulina at the station for the first time, he thinks: ... *but now she was coming and he would be a man indeed.*⁴ By this, the character of Paulina reveals that women are not subservient and subordinate to men. Women are rather a complement to men;

women build and boost men's self esteem. Perhaps, Martin's maltreatment of Paulina is his failure to understand that men and women are different in nature and in the roles they play, but are complementary to each other's total identity.

However, there may be instances of women that disprove this theory. Ahoya, Drusilla and Miriam are a few of the many other women who do not have husbands, yet they seem to be content. Ahoya explains "God can look after us in all that is needful".⁵ Perhaps it is also a case of personal identity and personal acceptance, and not so much of what society thinks. It is women like Ahoya, Drusilla and Miriam who take care of Paulina when she first comes to Nairobi. When Paulina gets lost, they help her get home and even check on her to make sure she is faring well. This is another case of the benefits of female bonding (already discussed in the previous chapter).

Moreover, there is the issue of child-bearing as a component of a woman's identity. When Paulina and Martin visit her in-laws, she realizes that they are disappointed she is not even pregnant, even though they do not verbally express this feeling. The chronology presented at the beginning of part six of Chapter Two shows the kind of desperation the couple is going through because they had been childless for seven years:

In April 1961 he went home on leave and expended all his affection on Paulina, who had done so well, but although she wrote to him whenever someone was travelling to Nairobi there was no hint of a pregnancy. In August 1961 she visited him and he went home again in Christmas and the next April, but to no effect. In May 1962 he came back to Nairobi to find the house dirty and rent and charcoal

owing so he kicked Aduogi out... the thought nagged him – he had no dependents other than the sisters wanting school fees.⁶

Evidently, Paulina has to get through a battle of ridicule because she is childless, even after many years of marriage. She even has to stand against advice to try to get pregnant by another man. Nevertheless, having no child gives her more time to study and she improves faster than her colleagues:

Her course results were good and she was appointed club leader at the centre nearest her husband's home. There was even talk of setting up a second centre, which would have brought her earnings to a fabulous total in the as yet undemanding village economy. Naturally there were strong objections from the committees to her appointment, but the European leader brushed these aside. To appoint a slip of a girl? One who was not sidetracked by old-fashioned ways and was still full of enthusiasm. A childless woman? All the more time she would have to apply herself to the work. A young woman *away* from her husband? But all the women were away from their husbands. That was Luo custom, the European explained, and they preferred it so. The wife was then like a single woman, occupied and earning money. (A fat lot she knew about.) A person without influential relations? Of course. That was to be the mark of the new society.

The inevitable happened. Balls of crotchet cotton disappeared from the stores or turned up, tangled and muddy, in the corner of the classroom where the club met. Rumours ran round about a liaison with the lecherous brother-in-law who had pestered her before. A crazed old woman was encouraged to hang about the homestead telling stories of unresponsive wives who had been threatened with barrenness. But Paulina's mother-in-law backed her up, out of liking for the girl and appreciation, also, of her contribution to the home, and she mastered her temper and got good results from her club and literacy classes. She never went back to Kariokor.⁷

Correspondingly, Maja-Pearce advances this argument:

Women use pregnancy or childrearing as escape from faltering careers and props for faltering marriages. Fear of public humiliation can drive women to retreat to a private realm, like a cocoon-like security and more control over their destinies in that their actions need be filtered and approved only by their husbands.⁸

Though, initially, Paulina is bothered by her childlessness, but she soon learns to live with her situation. Paulina proves that knowledge is power as her course empowers her economically and takes her mind off her childlessness. Her relationship with Simon is not for her to get a child per se, but to fill an emptiness of belonging.

This picture of Paulina is contrary to the Paulina the author allows us to when she first comes to Nairobi at the train station:

It would be her first time on a train. She could probably count the number of times she had been in a motor vehicle, even. How Nairobi and his mastery of Nairobi would overwhelm her! She was sixteen and he had taken her at the Easter holiday, his father allowing two cattle and one he had bought from his savings, together with a food-safe for his mother-in-law and a watch for Paulina's father. They had made no objection to his marrying her then, on the promise of five more cows to follow.⁹

Obviously, Macgoye also takes pains to let the reader see the naivety and frailty of Paulina at the beginning of the story, perhaps to allow for comparison on how much she has grown during the latter part of the story. She complies with the kind of society she has been born into. When she gets to Nairobi, she is stressed and unwell, more so because of her young pregnancy: ... *she had to set down her burdens to go andretch at the side of the road, and Martin even offered to take the suitcase in his hand, but she*

*was ashamed to be seen with him carrying it, and she said she was better, if only he could lift it up for her*¹⁰. She had been trained to take orders and accept abuse. When she loses her way home after being discharged from the hospital, Martin accuses her of infidelity and not only beats her up, he locks her up as well. His anger is evident in the words he uses: “slut”, “whore”. To Paulina, being locked up in the house is equal to being locked up in a prison, an experience she had been through the day before. After the beating, she is told that if she is a good girl she might get pregnant again. The ugly nature of the violence is revealed as she wonders if “she would die of his beatings here where there was no tribunal to appeal to”.

Interestingly, Ahoya plays the role of the indifferent female society to female subjugation as she helps Paulina to get through the first shock of a “loving” husband beating his wife. She even reminds Paulina about the tradition where the husband gives his wife a traditional beating in front of the guests. This is done so that in the case of his demise, the wife will not complain that her “new husband” is the first person to beat her. However, after the confirmation of their wedding, he beats her again when he finds her weeping because she realizes she is not pregnant, though at first she thinks she is.

Subsequently, we see Paulina trying to fit into her husband’s life. She makes mistakes and often offends Martin, who often sees these offences as unpardonable. He beats her in return. This violence is examined in the light of female subjectivity. Just what are the dynamics of female oppression and submission in post colonial Africa? Andrew H. Armstrong expresses that sometimes it is as if the female body has been marked as “a

thing to be violently ‘written’ on and as a site of amputation and disablement”.¹¹ Thus the silence of the female is the result of masculine violence.

Considerately, Hawley (1996) quotes Ama Ata Aidoo’s reaction to physical abuse:

We’ve had an article in the papers recently about how wife beating is African. Now, is wife-beating African? Of course it isn’t. In some African societies again, for example, the Akan, physical abuse was grounds for divorce... Men beat their wives in London, in New York. You have to look at it across the whole spectrum of human experience.¹²

As a result of the frustration she feels, Paulina moves to a new town and starts a new life. As a young woman of twenty-four, she lives alone in her official house. She is able to bring women together, to give them programmes, to buy in stores and collect fees: “this also was an acceptable part of the newness”.¹³ Sharon Verbe in her article *Feminist and Womanist Criticism of African Literature: A Bibliography*, quotes Rosemary Moyana thus: “Those women who struggle without giving up hope, herald the impending change... change in attitude for both men and women as they evaluate and re-evaluate their social roles.”¹⁴

Apparently, this picture of the African woman trying to assert herself against “historically determined insignificance” is recurrent in Buchi Emechetta’s novels. This type of woman is “self constituted through the suffering of nearly every form of oppression, a self that must find its voice in order to speak not only for itself but for all others similarly oppressed”.¹⁵

Thus, in Jean F. O'Barr's article *Feminist Issues in the Fiction of Kenya's Women Writers*, she reveals three main concerns in the fiction of female Kenyan writers: how female children become women, what marriage means for women, and where women's work fits into their lives.¹⁶ She also observes that female writers tend to "all write from the woman's point of view, sharply underscoring the idea that the female perspective... may be different from the male perspective on the same topic".¹⁷

Later, when she and Martin finally get back together, the issue of a child is no more a measuring rod of her womanhood. Nevertheless, finally she becomes pregnant with the child she so desperately longed for at the beginning of their marriage; this adds to Paulina's newly-gained self-confidence. Based on this, Carol Boyce Davies describes Macgoye as one of the African women writers who portray

... women in various struggles for self-definition. A character's ability to define herself is shaped both by her understanding of the boundaries by which society circumscribes her and by her ability to transcend those boundaries and attain self-actualization while remaining nonetheless within her society.¹⁸

Hence, Paulina stands as a good example of such a woman, who creates new space for herself in her community without threatening the basis of Kenyan society. The protagonist feels the time is right for changing her own position, since so much changes have occurred in public life during the years of the Kenyan Emergency.

In this wise, Paulina is the image of a woman who acknowledges that the road to independence might mean standing on the shoulders of others. Revolution does not

come easy. Paulina first worked for the Okelos: cleaning, washing and minding children, a job she describes as 24-hour-a-day duties. To Mrs. Okelo, time does not exist for other people. When the Okelos move to Mombasa, Paulina does not go with them for fear of being a servant all her life and she decides to rather work for Mrs. M, wife of a sitting MP who has just moved to a new house in Nairobi. Mrs. M is “fully occupied, as big people’s wives are, but also more concerned than some about the running of her household”.¹⁹ She employs Paulina as a “general factotum” to look after her children, to attend to her guests, to supervise the cook, and to put finishing touches to the housework. The position she gives to Paulina in a sense makes a slave of Paulina. Nevertheless, the position also helps Paulina to be a “big” woman of her own: “in fact she enjoyed her time of power rather resenting the extra work”.²⁰ It is by enduring the extra work that she earns her “independence” that makes Martin in a way depend on her: he now lives in the accommodation she has by reason of her job.

Then again, Mrs. Okelo and Mrs. M are a sort of platform on which Paulina can aspire to carve an identity for herself, even if not complementing a “husband” as is the case of these two role models. By working for them Paulina matures to the extent of replying her employer boldly. This happens when Mrs. M complains about her work schedule though she does not want to settle for a life at the countryside. Mrs. M asks “Oh Lord, why don’t we go back to the village?” Paulina points out: “Because you would be brewing the beer and carrying the man’s chair for him if you did.”²¹

In addition, Paulina's mother represents the dignity and nobility of a woman in the midst of tradition. We learn that

... after thirty years in that homestead, seventeen of them in which she reigned supreme, her father-in-law and his wives now dead, her husband constantly away, the decision hers to plant, to harvest, to store, to sell (only once he had renewed the house in that time and arranged about the dowry cattle), she had momentarily become the household head, a person to be consulted and deferred to.²²

Conversely, after the death of her husband, Paulina's mother is no more expected to tear her clothes off as a farewell gesture to her husband. It is believed that "you took from custom what suited you".²³ The paradox is that the only thing that saves her from being inherited is that she has male sons. Paulina's mother's choice of what to take from custom demonstrates that tradition and culture did not necessarily deprive a woman of the right to be her own person. This is contrary to the often propagated gospel of how African tradition and custom made a servant of a woman and always relegated her to the background. Paulina's mother had even become a household head (even if it was only for a short period). It is not surprising then, when Ogunjipe Leslie argues that the "loss" of economic, political and social agency of the African female indicates that patriarchal structures are western imports.²⁴ She suggests that "the British swept aside previous female political structure in the society, replacing them with completely male structures and positions."²⁵

To this end, Jean F. O'Barr explains that the "quadruple bind" of Kenyan women is that these women "see themselves performing traditional roles... without traditional resources... while at the same time they are undertaking modern activities... while being

deprived access to modern support systems”.²⁶ Katherine Frank, however, feels that if only African women are now taking active and shared roles with men, they are also finding a destiny of their own, “a destiny with a vengeance”.²⁷ Frank asserts then, that women are creating a world without men, just like Ramatoulaye in Mariama Ba’s So Long a Letter. Nevertheless, Frank agrees that it is one thing to live a life without men and another to try to demonstrate that “a woman’s worth is not inextricable from her relationship with men”.²⁸

Generally, at the end of the story, there is a reversal of roles: instead of the woman moving into the man’s home, the man rather moves into the woman’s home. Again, the status quo has been reversed: Martin moves in on Paulina’s terms. As Oduyoye puts it: “A woman is simply a human being; she does not have to prove that her way of being is as human as that of a man. Her destiny as a woman is not derived from a man’s destiny”.²⁹ When Paulina mediates in a fight between three children, possibly averting an ugly scene, the story is given media coverage. When Mr. and Mrs. M express that the cause of such disputes among street children is a matter of jobs, homes and responsible parenthood, Paulina thinks otherwise:

“I don’t think it’s self-respect they are lacking in... It’s other people’s respect. And therefore they find it hard to respect grown-up people themselves... I reckon I’ve had a lot of time for thinking – years and years for it... And these kids have more thinking-time than is good for them, too. It’s my business who I buy a cup of tea for, and who I give my name to, if it comes to that”.³⁰

Therefore, Mr. M tells his wife, “It looks as though you’ve got yourself a new woman”. Paulina has come to birth: thinking and reasoning for herself, choosing to mature

through her life experiences, rather than be crippled by them, as is the case of Maa Tsuru in Faceless.

So, to Petra Bittner³¹, Macgoye is more concerned with the development of the nation as a whole than with individual life stories. She occasionally chooses the female perspective to explore the problems involved in the emancipation of a nation from its former oppressors and parallels it with Kenyan women's struggle for equal rights with the male population. Equally, in her review of Coming to Birth, Denolyn Carroll identifies images of pregnancy, labour, miscarriage, infertility, birth and death as images associated with the birth of a child.³² These images emphasize the 'coming to birth' of Paulina, as well as Kenya.

Although she does not fully share the views of many African women writers on the primary importance of women's liberation, Macgoye qualifies as a post-colonial writer defined by Michael Harris as "writing in a realist tradition blending fiction and history to recreate the past, a collective past that is".³³ Macgoye achieves this by enriching the text with historical facts from the Emergency era elaborating on the party politics of the time, explicitly mentioning different events finally leading to the promulgation of the Kenyan Constitution in 1964. In this way she demonstrates the resourcefulness of the country in achieving independence without hiding the problems that developed in the process. Thus, Paulina is a metaphor that is used to bring Kenya's history to life: Paulina's city life that begins so perilously is shown to grow with the challenges, finally creating a self-conscious young individual who stands up for her rights.

Globally, a few branches of the United Nations are involved in women's empowerment, notable among which are the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) and the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), which firmly believes that the empowerment of women is vital for population control.³⁴ UNIFEM, CSW, INSTRAW are mostly concerned with policies that promote roles of women outside the matrimonial home. These agencies are popular for campaigning for women's social and economic rights (including the provision of credit for women in developing countries), the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979), and enhancing women's role in development, respectively.³⁵

Similarly, in West Africa, as is happening all over the world, women are developing a sense of leadership potential within them, and are throwing away the traditional veil that used to limit them to the kitchen and make them subservient, as well as second class citizens. Her Excellency Ellen Johnson Sirleaf is the first African female president and she has undoubtedly inspired many women to take up leadership roles. In her inaugural address, she acknowledged the presence of the African Union of Women Parliamentarians, showing that women are not only breaking the traditional jinx but are united in pursuit of new roles. In Ghana, more and more women are taking up or are being assigned roles in the public and political spheres: Speaker of Parliament (Justice Bamford-Addo), Attorney-General (Mrs. Betty Mould Iddrisu), Chief Justice (Mrs. Georgina Woode), Deputy Minister of Works and Housing (Dr. Hannah Louisa Bissiw),

Minister of Trade and Industry (Hannah Tetteh), Minister of Youth and Sports (Akua Sena Dansua), and the first female vice-chancellor of the University of Cape Coast Mrs. Naana Jane Opoku-Agyeman). There are also the various female Members of Parliament.

Also, there is the need for organized bodies to fight the cause of women. Women of various backgrounds and experiences should also come together to support, encourage, and create acceptance for each other³⁶, to help gain liberation from all sorts of oppression for all women.

Apparently, males and females need to face and accept change in the status, identity and role of the woman in modern times. Mr. M demonstrates this as he leans on his wife's support in his career. The couple both enjoy the prestige that comes with Mr. M's post as both play their different but corporate roles. Women who have embraced the opportunity of roles outside the home (like Mrs. Okelo and Mrs. M) are role models for their sisters in the struggle. Their success or failure will determine how well and how fast the patriarchal society adapts to this changing status of the modern woman.

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CONCLUSION

Few African literary genres that support the African woman's participation in the (re)creation and maintenance of societal vision and this provides evidence of her silencing and apparent invisibility in Africa's encounter with the West.¹ Her participation is more overt in the postcolonial arena. Although African writers did not exclude her from the emerging culture that impressed African experience for a largely external readership, her portrayal became problematic in the contemporary setting which devised rules for her participation in the new dispensation. This seems a minor problem except that the task of reasserting the African woman's presence was left to western educated African men who, themselves, were inadequately inscribed in the new dispensation. Burdened with the responsibility for self-reclamation and the risk of a lost homeland, a significant number of early writers overtly articulated the African male.

Indeed, for a long time, portrayals of the African female in this postcolonial arena resonated with the concept of community and/or the female principle. Although most

post-independent Africanists are aware of the dynamism of art in African society, that knowledge is rarely used to foster the new African narrative agenda in accordance with traditional norms. This is because an acceptance of the colonial experience required that most elements within the ancestral heritage be reconceptualized as obstacles to creativity and advancement. Consequently, most contemporary narratives re-examine the known African world or explore the reinvented terrain circumscribed by the colonial encounter. Beatrice, Fofa and MUTE, as well as Paulina illustrate the ability to challenge the status quo and to take charge.

This is what Mariama Ba propounds; that women

take charge of their destiny in order to disrupt the patriarchal establishment's predetermined hierarchies. She urged women to use their writing as a weapon that (re)inscribes African women in such ways that transgress and shelter hegemonic (male) representations... (they have) delivered into the African women question, broadly, vigorously, and on their own terms.²

Thus, the authors of the examined works have also situated the women in their cultural milieu, each demonstrating peculiar cultural limitations, as well as general patriarchal boundaries. Mariama Ba again says in an interview with Harell-Bond:

We cannot go forward without culture, without saying what we believe, without communicating with others, without making people think about things. Books are a weapon, a peaceful weapon perhaps, but then, are a weapon.³

This is not done by the female authors but by male authors such as Achebe as well. Monica Bungaro has observed that more and more male authors portray female characters in a search for self-definition "as a progressive development that affects both

their external and their internal lives”.⁴ To Bungaro, this demonstrates that male authors are gradually not only understanding but also accepting a change of gender relations “and the whole process of women changing things for themselves”.⁵

Having analyzed the images of women in contemporary African literature, we want to reconcile the titles of the selected novels to the images of women which the thesis propounds.

In fact, the word *birth* in the title Coming to Birth reminds us of a new born baby. A child is finally born after nine or ten months in the womb. All that while it is getting ready to survive in the world; it develops all the organs to be able to live outside the womb. So all the experiences Paulina goes through sort of prepare her to survive without her husband. Even when they come back together again, she now has the upper hand.

In a more general sense, it could be said that there is a coming to birth in all the three novels that have been discussed. In Anthills of the Savannah Elewa and the patriarchal society (represented by Elewa’s uncle) come to birth (come to a realization) that the female is capable of far more than she is given credit for. In Faceless society is being urged to come to birth. Fofo was just a child but she rose up to do something about her sister’s death. By her collaboration with the workers of mute, a lot of child injustice is brought to light and she could look forward to a better life than living on the streets.

Next, we could say that the females are the anthills in Anthills of the Savannah. In Ikem Osodi's Hymn to the Sun, he states: "the trees had become hydra-headed bronze statues so ancient that only blunt residual features remained on their faces, like anthills surviving to tell the new grass of the savanna about last year's bush fires."⁶ The females survive the males and even have a duty to help the society come to terms with the new roles of women.

Besides, in Faceless perhaps females were being portrayed as *faceless*: faceless because they have no identity and no voice in the society. Chinyere Grace Okafor, in her article *Rewriting Popular Myths of female Subordination*, writes that: "women's struggle for their rights is a common enough feature of daily life in West Africa. Some women do not enter the world positively, however, abandoning the struggle for progress and achievement."⁷ Maa Tsuru, Baby T and other females of their type are never heard. Were it not for MUTE and the media, no one would really have had any interest in Baby T's death; it would have been regarded as the death of another street child. But then if there are saviours like MUTE in the system, are females still 'faceless'? The title could therefore probably be ironical, perhaps to say that women are **not** faceless after all. The *faceless* ones are really the irresponsible men like Maa Tsuru's second 'husband' and Poison, who just use females for their pleasure and then disappear leaving nothing but pain behind. They are not around to *face* the consequences of their actions.

Furthermore, Mezu proposes that writers like Ama Ata Aidoo and Flora Nwapa have always detested the image of a "helpless, dependent, unproductive African woman"⁸ that

was created by Europeans, who treated their women that way. Carolyn Kumah also thinks that the way society receives works by female authors and the roles women play in these works reflect society's general attitudes to women.⁹ Overall, the novels discussed have shown how individuals and communities reacted to changing conditions and the women who changed in these conditions. These conditions include power struggles, dilemmas of modernization and remembrances of the past. The women in these novels used different strategies to cope with their situations. Thus, we might not be able to group all women in one particular category. We could, however, "look at each woman's (or set of women's) place in the life cycle and the social structure."¹⁰

Actually, Chinua Achebe acknowledges the new roles of women by creating heroines, who not only rub shoulders with their male counterparts, but also outlive these males. Achebe makes Beatrice excel academically, and makes her bold enough to articulate her views and advise her male counterparts. Elewa does not have the academic stamina yet she is intelligent enough to debate decisions taken by her boyfriend. She is not the proverbial do-as-you-are-told African woman; this woman knows she has a right to expression. These two women demonstrate that where there is a will, there is a way. They were willing to risk their lives and stand beside their men in the battle of democracy. This is unlike the traditional notion of men at war, women at home. Funny enough, when the battle is won, the women are the last *men* standing, for now they must take charge of what men were originally supposed to do – like naming a child.

Indeed, Amma Darko recognizes that though this is a new dawn for women, not all women have woken up to that reality. There are even some women who do not even embrace this dawn and even justify the patriarchal attitudes of their male counterparts. The economic and emotional depressions some women experience are deep enough to retard a total empowerment of women. It is a gradual process. Men like Sylv Po may acknowledge the new roles women are playing, but there will still be others like Adade who will hold on to the traditional portrait of a woman, no matter what role she plays outside her matrimonial home. Therefore, female empowerment and emancipation is a gradual process, which requires more education on the female to female level, like workers of MUTE getting Maa Tsuru to be more responsible for her daughters and herself. Yet, in spite of women like Maa Tsuru, Amma Darko has been able to add her voice to the debate that it is unfair to still label all women, especially those in the third world countries, as “weak, emotional ... ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-borne...”¹¹

Moreover, Marjorie O. Macgoye believes it is not enough to reserve certain domains for men. The man may be the head of the house, but he cannot do without the assistance of his wife. Sometimes the economic headship may fall on the woman, as happened in the case of Paulina and Martin. Mrs. M assists her husband in his political position though she is not the appointee herself. Also, Mrs. Okelo and Mrs. M cannot play their “more positive” roles without the assistance of Paulina. Thus, the women higher up on the ladder should not spite those lower down, but should encourage them to climb higher;

for what affects one can affect the other. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson rightly comment that

The absence of men, whether through struggle, death, migration, or abandonment, is critical to the position of women in many developing countries. Women's writings from the third world which are representations of the social and political struggle in those countries challenge certain presuppositions of Western critical theory as well as literary and ideological conventions that organize the articulation of these issues.¹²

On the whole, it would have been a biased argument if only female writers gave their fellow women more positive roles. Since the male writers like Achebe and Ngugi also assign more positive roles to women, and make them challenge the status quo, it could be said that the voice of the woman has long been heard. This voice has been a voice against sexual and economic exploitation, a request to be given the chance to contribute their quota to family and society, a plea to be seen as people with feelings, fears, aspirations and ambitions like their male counterparts. Thus, these women are not to be taken for granted, cast down trodden upon or rejected in any form. In addition, these women want to be valued as beings capable of making and taking decisions which create better opportunities and results than men. Moreover, given the same opportunity and circumstances women are able to perform as equally well as, if not better than, their male counterparts.¹³

Therefore, we suggest that more writers (both male and female) could create more female characters with more positive roles to reflect current trends in female participation in family and nation. Women's issues should be seen as an integral part of

society's issues; so, women should be seen continually in the process of social change.¹⁴ Some of these characters should be part of non-fiction stories, be they in drama, prose or poetry. This would enhance the new image of the twenty-first century woman, so that this image would not seem like one drawn from wishful thinking that can never become a reality. Again, writers could learn to be more sensitive in their use of the English Language, particularly. This is because society is used to generic forms like *man* and *he* that refer to both sexes. Perhaps the feminine gender should be applied more aptly to refer to females. Society is also used to categorizing certain jobs for men or women, as the case may be, so that when women hold certain positions or react more assertively in certain situations, even fellow women are astounded. More female characters should be given these seemingly astounding tasks so that society adapts more readily to real life situations. However, since most norms affecting women are dictated by the family writers need to be conversant with the dynamics of family relations, if they are to reflect the improvement of women in their respective societies. Organizations promoting the cause of women could sponsor publications of books and productions of films that enhance a more positive image of women and girls, and speak against traditional gender stereotyping.

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APPENDIX

MESSAGE TO REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN¹

Black Women, Black Women,
Hold your head up, and look ahead.
We too are needed in the revolution.

We too are strong
We too are a threat to
the oppressive enemy.
We are revolutionaries.

We are the other half
of our revolutionary men.
We are their equal halves
may it be with
gun in hand,
or battling in streets
to make this country a socialist lead.

Sisters, let's educate our people.
Combat liberalism, and combat male chauvinism.
Awake our men to the fact that
we are no more or no less than they.
We are as revolutionary as they.

For too long, we have been alone.
For far too long
we have been women without men,
for far too long
we have been double oppressed,
not only by the capitalist society,
but also by our men.

Now we are no longer alone,
our men are by our sides.
We revolutionary men and women
are the halves of each other.
We must continue to educate our men,

and bring their minds from a male
chauvinistic level to a higher level.

Our men need, want and will
love the beautiful children,
that come from our fruitful wombs.

They need our trust and encouragement
as well as we need theirs.

Need us to educate,
them, the people and our children
as well as we need them to educate us.

Sisters we are being called by life itself.
We are being called by the revolution.

We are mothers of revolutionaries,
with us is the future of our people.

We, my sisters are mothers of revolution
and within our wombs is the army of the people.

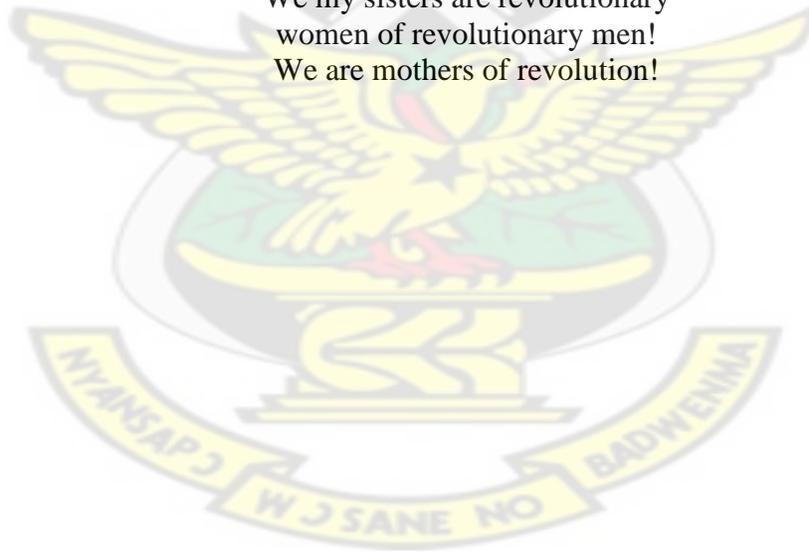
Sisters! Revolution Is Here!

Bring Forth The Army!

Bring Forth the Guns!

We my sisters are revolutionary
women of revolutionary men!

We are mothers of revolution!



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¹⁹ Adeola James, 69-70

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²¹ Anthonia C. Kalu “Women in African Literature” – www.india-seminar.com/2000/490/490%20kalu.htm

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²³ A prevailing view in African literary criticism is rooted in the need to create a niche for the female African writer and critic within the contemporary literary tradition. This approach develops out of the years of silence and struggle that many African women scholars experienced in the academic arena. However, this school’s argument ignores the fact that the creation of mythic African womanhood is coextensive with the proposal that the African woman’s world be seen through her own eyes. By assuming a universalistic approach to liberation, women’s emancipation, African liberation and African women’s emancipation, this approach evokes a veneration of the African woman with ‘mountains on her back.’ It uses a postcolonialist feminist ideology that prompts a metaphysical filter of inclusion by exclusion, to set up barriers similar to those whose elimination remains part of its agenda. But stated commitment to the cause of the African woman’s liberation is usually present as a major concern. Borrowing from activist oriented ideologies, this research programme (re)defines the African woman’s world for her, setting parameters that are based on what she ought to see rather than on her reality. However, this school admits the existence of pockets of power which ‘allowed’ women by recognizing aspects of women’s participation in decision-making institutions within traditional African communities. Generally, it faults all men for

keeping power to themselves and, in particular, African men for not decrying debilitating African traditions that seek the perpetuation of oppressive roles for the African woman.

²⁴ This approach seeks to redirect the African woman toward a better way of life. It explores issues like the brutality of polygamy; the unreasonable expectations of mothers who cannot bear to see their daughters choose different lifestyles; the inability of the modern African woman to make up her mind about feminist ideas and attitudes and, of course, 'female genital mutilation'. It convinces by promising to 'put [African] women at the centre...' and '... rais[e] consciousness ... "through the" articulation (of) the inequities they experience in fictional form ...' Using the consciousness raising approach, it evokes the need for a 'crucial union of westernized, feminist and African culture...' Crucial to this school of thought is the idea of the African woman's development into an independent individual. However, her independence requires the negation of African concepts of sharing and community because these tie the woman to tradition. Adherents to this school assume the African past is predictable and pernicious and they seem surprised at the African woman's inability to cope in a transitional society that lacks autonomy and access to self-validation mechanisms at the international level. Efforts to authenticate supportive traditional structures are interpreted as lack of creativity and incipient romanticism. Also problematic for the African woman involved in the conversion process is the identification of the contemporary African male as a 'modern' man who is nevertheless distinct from modern men.

²⁵ Identifying locations for change and new methods of survival in the postcolonial state are the major focus of this school. This school points out the African woman's lack of development in sophisticated thought and action, insisting that adaptation to changing norms must be accompanied by attainment of power within the changing society. Changes in the domestic arena and the work place are emphasized. Rarely confrontational, neocolonialist feminism focuses on the African woman's sense of self, her identity. Consequently, the major targets are her feelings and knowledge of security in African constructions of knowledge. Rather than acknowledge that the western

educated African has developed the capacity to straddle two or more cultures, neo-colonialist feminist thought maintains that such ability predicts the absence of a significant African worldview. This kind of argument precludes the possibility that pre-colonial African thought is receptive to ideas about women's autonomy, and concludes that feminism *per se* is foreign to the African woman's experience.

²⁶ "Women in African Literature" – www.india-seminar.com/2000/490/490%20kalu.htm

²⁷ African feminism explores the inscription of the African woman on the continent and the Diaspora. Recognizing her circumscription in many areas of contemporary experience, it emphasizes the need for an extension of boundaries so as to facilitate validation of her participation as woman-as-woman. African feminism asserts the African woman's narrative and viewpoints as routes to understanding her experiences. African feminism usually adopts an explanatory stance and emphasizes understanding of African cultures and social systems.

²⁸ "Women in African Literature" – www.india-seminar.com/2000/490/490%20kalu.htm

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³³ Jones E.D, 1990, 15

³⁴ Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. Womanism and African Consciousness. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1997, 93

³⁵ Kolawole, 1997, 93

³⁶ Kolawole, 1997, 111

³⁷ However, it cannot be ruled out that Okonkwo is overbearing, and wants to be seen as courageous primarily because of his desire to be seen to be different from his father, who was considered a failure.

³⁸ Kolawole, 1997, 111

³⁹ www.bookrags.com/history/ibo-women-of-nigeria/

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⁵⁰ www.w.mich.edu/dialogus/texts/godsbitsofwood.htm

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⁵² Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye (1996) p.6

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⁵⁴ Rosalyn Terborg-Penn & Andrea Benton Rushing, N. Pag.

⁵⁵ Florence Stratton. Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender. London: Routledge, 1994, 158

⁵⁶ Florence Stratton, 158

⁵⁷ Florence Stratton, 158

⁵⁸ Florence Stratton, 158

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⁶¹ Alex Wanjala, in his paper on *A comparative look at the cultures of Kenya and Senegal through Coming to birth by Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye and So long a letter by Mariama Ba* presented at the French Cultural Cooperation Centre (FCCC), Kenya, during for a dubbed “A celebration of the written word: Women in focus through literature and art” where a series of debates and presentations on feminine literature by authors, literary critics, literature dons, and arts and culture experts took place.

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⁶³ J. Roger Kurtz. Urban Obsessions Urban Fears: The Postcolonial Kenyan Novel. Oxford: James Currey, 1998. 1

⁶⁴ J. Roger Kurtz. 1998, 5

⁶⁵ Jean F. O’Barr *Feminist Issues in the Fiction of Kenya’s Women Writers* African Literature Today (15). Ed. E.D. Jones. London: James Currey, 1987. pp. 57-59

⁶⁶ Claude Wauthier. The Literature and Thought of Modern Africa, 2nd ed. London: Heinemann, 1979. 17

⁶⁷ Claude Wauthier, 1979, 17

⁶⁸ Ify G. Achufusi *Feminist Inclinations of Flora Nwapa* in Critical Theory and African Literature Today. Ed. E. D. Jones et al. London: James Currey, 1994. p.102

⁶⁹ E. D. Jones et al, 102

⁷⁰ According to A. Eldhom, Harris and Young, who distinguished three aspects of reproduction, the reproduction of the labour force refers to the process by which the products of procreation become workers; e.g. schooling, imparting to them skills necessary to participate in the agricultural process

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¹³ John Charles Hawley, 1996. 127

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²³ Anthills, 114-115

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²⁹ Oduyoye, 1995, 158

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³¹ (Department of English and American Literature, Technical University of Berlin), *Literary Traditions in Contemporary Anglo-African Fiction* His project focuses on novels and short stories of contemporary women writers who migrated between Great Britain and African countries. The analysis concentrates on British and African literary influences in their texts and the problem of categorization that comes with it. This paper selects two writers: Doris Lessing and Marjorie Macgoye. Their works are especially challenging since they cut across all conventional modes of representation, showing women between two very different cultures. Critics time and again are at a loss categorizing their work. In this paper he focuses on one story by Doris Lessing and one novel by Marjorie Macgoye extracting the different literary traditions that are part of their fiction, paying special attention to the construction of female identity

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