GENDER DISCOURSE SHIFT AND INTRA-GENDER CONFLICTS IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN NOVELS

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A Thesis in the Department of English,

Submitted to the Faculty of Arts

In Partial fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

of the

UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

MARCH 2019

ABSTRACT

Gender discourse in African novels has hitherto been characterised by subjective representations of women by some African male writers and rejoinders from their female counterparts. However, African novelists have been budging from the one-sided narrative of inter-gender conflicts to multifaceted gender representations, culminating in the new trends and shift in gender discourse in the African novels. This shift has attracted little scholarly attention. Gender discourse in contemporary African novels was examined, with a view to establishing patterns of the paradigm shift.

Womanism, which emphasises cooperation, compassion and inter-relationship between sexes, and Marxist-feminism that upholds subversion of social stratification served as the framework. Eight novels were purposively selected from four regions of Africa based on their thematisation of gender issues by male and female authors from each region. The novels were Naguib Mahfouz's (male) *Palace Walk (Palace)* and Ahlem Mosteghanemi's (female) *The Bridges of Constantine (Bridges)* – North Africa; Chika Unigwe's (female) *The Night Dancer* (*Dancer*) and Daniel Mengara's (male) *Mema (Mema)* - West Africa; Njabulo Ndebele's (male) *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* (*Winnie*) and Tsitsi Dangarembga's (female) *The Book of Not* (*The Book)* - Southern Africa; Violet Barungi's (female) *Cassandra (Cassandra)* and Biyavanga Wainaina's (male) *One Day I Will Write About This Place (Place*) – East Africa. The novels were subjected to literary criticism.

Gender boundaries are collapsing in contemporary African novels through the re-examination of patriarchy and polygamy by male and female novelists respectively. *Dancer* and *Winnie* address the issue of marital separation through divorce or death and how patriarchal society perceives single motherhood and widowhood. The characterisation of Ezi in *Dancer* and Winnie in *Winnie* reveals the challenges of societal rejection, deprivation of access to husbands' property which women face following separation from their husbands. *Palace* shows empathy for the suffering, marginalisation and subjugation of the female characters. Mahfouz reveals that culture and religion are often used by the patriarchal society to set the agenda of male dominance in North Africa. *Bridges* portrays the female protagonist as having a questionable character, thus giving an antithetical portrayal of the female protagonist from the same region. Intra-gender and inter-gender conflicts abound in *Cassandra* and *Dancer* respectively*, as portrayed in the conflict between mother and daughter in *Dancer,* while the conflict between step-mother and step-son in *Cassandra* is a new form of inter-gender conflict in African novel. *Mema, The Book, Bridges* and *Winnie* present women characters that project Marxist-feminist ideology of subversion of social stratification in terms of self-confidence and self expression in matters that affect women, their sexual conscription and gender perception. *Mema* and *Place* depict gender shift with male authors appreciating their respective cherished female characters – mothers.

Contemporary African novelists are re-constructing the gender affiliations of their protagonists beyond gender rivalry in their thematics, characterisation and narrative patterns. This foregrounds the viewpoint that African novelists are gravitating towards gender discourse shift in their works.

Keywords: Gender conflict, Intra-gender discourse, Contemporary African novels on gender

Word Count: 473

DEDICATION

To my loving father, of blessed memory – Late Prince Amos Onaolapo Ladeji Atoyebi, whose fatherly tutoring, guidance and inspiration rejuvenated my inner strength in striving to attain lofty heights in life.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CERTIFICATION

I certify that this thesis was written by Mr. Adedapo Olumuyiwa Atoyebi in the Department of English, and Literary Studies, University of Ibadan, under my supervision.

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TABLE OF CONTENT

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background to the Study

Gender, a socio-cultural construct, transcends maleness and femaleness of individuals in a society. A consideration of gender in a society forecloses the perception and reception of individuals based on their anatomy, physiology and biological sexes against the background of the cultural standard. As a socio-cultural construct, many scholars and critics (Akintunde 2005; Emenyi 2005; Olademo 2009; Sotunsa 2009; Akorede 2011), have given a theoretical distinction between sex and gender of individuals. In their arguments, sex of individuals is static irrespective of cultures. Gender, on the other hand, is dynamic: it varies according to respective social norms and cultural standards. Based on the cultural particularity of gender, scholars and critics have investigated the parameters that are used in gender discourse. Among these parameters are masculinity, feminism, hegemonic masculinity, patriarchy and matriarchy as they affect gender construction and perception in the human society. In their arguments, they are of the view that nature, culture and sociology of experience influence how individuals are perceived along the gender line.

Since gender construction in any society is characterised by subjectivity, men and women have been offering series of theoretical and critical standards that can be used in assessing and crtitiquing their gender roles and identities. This phenomenon has resulted in gender agenda setting (a process of instituting the sex and gender role of individuals within a cultural context) in life and literature. This agenda setting is tailored along self-assessment/re-assessment and interrogation of the partriarchal/matriarchal norms that stereotypically re-present masculinity and feminity in socio-cultural discourses. Thus, the manner of discourse of gender issues in the African novel has demonstrated a sort of agenda setting. This set agenda demonstrates different ideologies that are projected by individual writers.

At the commencement of modern literary creativity in Africa, being largely patriarchal, men had had domineering voice, writing with some degree of artistic liberty to create their characters in the way that is suggestive of reflecting patriarchy. In the creation of their characters, male writers engaged in what is considered by many scholars

1

as jaundiced re-presentation of their female characters, defined largely by patriarchal cultural codes of women submissiveness, silences and invisibility.

African literature is consequently an ideological construct. This is because a literary writer writes from individual or social perspectives. Thus, ideology shapes and sharpens the consciousness of writers' artistic and social or critical sensibilities. It foregrounds the writer's interpretive skill of social reality. Ruthven (1984:31) is consequently of the view that:

> Ideology is manifest in the ways we represent ourselves (and represented) to one another; 'sexual ideology' determines, for example, what is deemed to be socially acceptable behaviour for men and women. The function of an ideology is to satisfy the status-quo and to persuade the powerless that their powerlessness is inevitable.

From the above, there are two factors that determine ideology: representation and perception. In the matrix of relationship of individuals and groups in human society, there are bipolar structure, power play considerations and stratifications that strain or strengthen relationship. This is what is found in gendered ideology in which men dominate the spheres of human activities, giving the impression of powerlessness and helplessness on the part of the female gender.

This idea of women inferior status is not new with existing tradition of African novels. In African oral narratives, with specific reference to folktales, there is projection of gender agenda. Some African folktales present the idea of intra-gender and inter-gender conflicts. Yetunde Akorede (2011:80) gives the catalogue and discussion of African folktales that reflect gender construction:

> Many African folktales depict the breakdown of harmony among co-wives. Popular folktales in this category are found especially among cultures and ethnic groups where polygamy is favoured. '*The Missing Calabash', 'The Twin Princesses', The Prince and the Leper', "The Hunter and his Deer Wife", "The Barren Wife's Envy of her Fertile Co-wife, 'The Ugly Queen and the Stone Baby', 'The Wicked Queen', and Agbigbo"* are tales with similar themes about the relationship between women who are co-wives.

These African folktales present the tension and stress in gender relations, particularly between and among characters in those tales. The common type of conflict that is present in these tales is intra-gender. In these tales, the conflicts are often generated by rivalry and envy as exhibited by one of the female characters in these tales.

Since literature is a reflection or refraction of life, how women are presented in the African novel is a representation of the categorisation and perception of women personality and identity by the writer. In most indigenous African societies, women were hardly recognised as individuals with independent existence. It was often taken by a category of male writers such as Chinua Achebe, Toyeb Salih, Ben Okri, Gabriel Okara and Cyprian Ekwensi, etc., that women should always be under the control of men. Thus, women were seen as being passive and docile in their relationship with men. Women were not allowed to speak for themselves from their personal perspectives until more recent times.

Another category of male writers such as Ousmane Sembene, Yambo Ouloguem, Ngugi wa Thiong'O, Ayi Kwei Armah and a few others, not propelled by gender but ideological-based class struggle, had lumped the female characters in their works along with the oppressed class, and assigned them leadership roles in the class struggle for social and economic emancipation of the oppressed and marginalised class.

With subsequent advancement in the gender discourse of African novels, there are Marxist writers who advocate classless society for men and women in the African society. In this category are male and female writers. Novels by male writers in the category of Marxist Feminism include Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross,* Ayi Kwei Amah in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Healers,* and Ousmane Sembene in *God's Bits of Wood* and *Xala.* These male writers assign leadership roles to female characters in the struggle against oppression and domination. This is sequel to the tenets of Marxism which advocates social equilibrium between men and women in modern human society. This position equally shares semblance with the tenets of STIWANISM (Social Transformation including Women in Africa).

With the emergence of female voices in literary production, there have been inter-gender discourses and sharpening and re-sharpening of the thematic thrust and subject matter of literary texts. Women begin to re-create themselves and subvert the presumed

male dominance projected in literature and society. Accordingly, literary representation of gendered ideology is subjective and context-dependent. Therban (1980:79) argues on the subjectivity of any given ideology in human relations:

> Ideologies themselves are equally protean... different processes of interpretation, they have no natural criteria distinguishing one ideology from another or one element of an ideology from its totality. Particularly in today's open and complex societies, different ideologies, however defined, coexist, compete and clash, but also overlap, affect and contaminate one another.

The advent of women in African literary landscape about three decades ago changed the psycho - dynamics of literary creativity from stereotypic characterisation of male and female characters to plurimental characterisation (a form of characterisation which shows dedicated concern for the strength and weakness of the characters in the text irrespective of their sex and gender) of male and female characters. With this process of characterisation, literary writers begin to set agenda for their gender. Through this, they are inviting their readers into their ideological view point to embrace their respective gender inclinations. The female writers engage literature with radical and confrontationist approach to the characterisation of male characters in their fictional works which they see as a rejoinder to how they have been subjectively presented and projected by their male counterparts. African female writers strive to deconstruct and interrogate masculine ideology in their literary texts. African female writers see no justification to keep silent in the face of apparent "tyranny and oppression" on the pages of works by their male counterparts, as well as in the patriarchal society that subjectively presents women as prostitutes, home breakers and trouble makers.

In the gender discourse of the African novels, there are four observed forms of gender ideologies: masculinity (an ideology which favours male discourse), feminism (an ideology which favours female discourse), Marxism (an ideology which repudiates class structure and stratification of any form) and complementarity (an ideology which encourages cooperation and collaboration among individuals despite the differences in

4

their sex and gender). [1] These ideologies textualise male and female experiences in literature and life from perceived subjective viewpoints to uphold or subvert the socio-cultural norms of gender perception. The first generation of African novelists such as Chinua Achebe, Mongo Beti, Cyprian Ekwensi and Ferdinand Oyono have been accused of being masculine in their presentation of women in their works of fiction. These novelists, particularly Cyprian Ekwensi, present women, among other things, as prostitutes and gold-diggers. The novelists with masculine ideology with cultural foregrounding do not positively present women in their novels.

In the 1980s, there was the emergence of female voices in African novels. These female novelists began to query the masculine re-presentation of women in the African novels. The first generation of female writers adopt feminist stance in their novels. They interrogate the masculinity standpoint of the African novels. In their approach, they are separatist. Predictably, they consciously reject the masculine ideology of supremacy. Some female writers in this category include Buchi Emecheta, Nawal El Saadawi etc.

The most recent gender ideology in African novels advocates complementarity. This ideology upholds the view point that there is no need to separate men and women in the society. It proffers that men and women should work together to ensure peace, harmony and development in a society. Female African novelists such as Zainab Alkali and Adimora Akachi Ezeigbo have espoused the ideology of complementarity in the African novels.

With conflicting ideologies in the male-authored and female-authored literary texts, there have been different modes of representation of individuality and identity. In the process of identity construction and presentation, female writers interrogate both phallocentric episteme and the status-quo that uphold male hegemony and suppression of women identity and individuality. This approach is common to the first generation of female writers. These female writers are apparently no more comfortable with the subjective portrayal of women and see a need for a counter-discourse.

Female writers in this first group, include Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta (Nigeria) and Nawal El Saadawi (Egypt). These female writers write with passion and

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[1]These are called ideologies because they represent the belief system and social orientation of a a group of people over a given period of time. These ideologies have advanced to be parts of the parameters which are used in the evaluation of human relations.

commitment to re-invent the African woman identity within specific cultural matrix. In Africa, culture and religions of Christianity and Islam have greatly influenced the perception and representation of women. In the process of redressing this subjective representation of women identity by male writers, female writers of the first generation present men as irrational, irresponsible and inhuman as seen in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joy of Motherhood,* and Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero.*

Literary critics and scholars have, therefore, acknowledged the fact that colonial and gender factors cannot be overlooked in the discourse of African literature. Before the emergence of women writers in Africa, many male writers subjectively present the experiences and personality of women in their literary texts. In the novels of the first generation of African writers, women characters are victims of relegation and poor re-presentation. In these novels (e.g. Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana,* Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart,* etc.), women are rather presented as the passive and docile wives with no independent opinions, and daring ones among them are presented as prostitutes.

The emergence of female writers which offered to de-construct existing image of the African woman in literature led to women writers becoming creators and creatures of their personality. It became apparent what Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) refers to as the dialogisation of the text in which there is usually a counter-discourse in response to an initial discourse. The focus on the female body affords the female writer an opportunity to analyse the great parts women have had in the production and reproduction of meaning as they tend to relate to her sex (Evwierhoma, 2002:22). For this reason, there is a dialogic discourse of gender issues in literature. Female writers see literature as a vessel for making their situations and experiences known from their own perspectives.

From the 1990s, there had been emergent voices on the gendered fiction. These emergent female writers adopt different narrative and discursive strategies to comment on gender relations in society. Their fictional works represent the current trends in women and gender studies in which women's liberation is advocated. They reflect in their works of fiction the factors of women competence and relevance in making change happen in the society and advancing the course of mankind in general. One of the leading figures in this group is Adimora Akachi Ezeigbo with her trilogy: *The Last of the Strong Ones; House of Symbols* and *Children of the Eagle.* The novels in this trilogy point to women

ability to effect positive change in a serious situation and their ability to work hand-in-hand with their male counterparts to resist foreign domination and oppression. The main agenda that can be deduced from this trilogy is complementarity. The novels in the trilogy advocate that for sustainable change to be achieved in the society, men and women should work together harmoniously and complement each other's efforts.

In the twenty-first century, there have been different narratology and discursive strategies on gender perception, identity and roles of men and women in the African society. The fiction writers in this category begin to re-assess the status of men and women in society in order to understand what needs to be done and undone to improve the level of complementarity of the same and opposite sexes in the matrix of relationship. Writers in this category include Chika Unigwe's *Night Dancer* and Violet Barungi's *Cassandra.* These writers, in their fictional works, re-engage layers and levels of gender conflict.

From the reading of the fictions of the past and contemporary female writers, two levels of gender conflicts identified are intra-gender and inter-gender conflicts. Most of the female writers have implicitly or explicitly portrayed intra-gender conflict between co-wives, wives and mothers-in-law, blood sisters and wives, daughters-in-law and step-mothers (and the child). This intra-gender conflict has taken different dimensions that range from bitter rivalry through victimisation to termination of life. The inter-gender conflict that involves men and women takes the dimension of identity construction of women in a patriarchal society. The levels and layers of conflicts are overlapping as traces of inter-gender and intra-gender conflicts can be found in a single fiction. These layers are seen in the inter-locking relationships of husband and wife/wives, co-wives and friends as observed in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* and Chika Unigwe's *Night Dancer.* The deduction, therefore, is that there are apparent overarching conflicts characterising gender ideology in a considerable number of African fictional works.

Since the emergence of female writers in Africa (particularly in the genre of novels), they (female writers) have been writing on different themes and subject matters. The understanding of this situation may inform the classification of the novels of African female writers (specifically how female characters are presented in female novels) by Akorede (2011:127-8):

The portrayal of female characters in creative works by women writers falls into four categories. The first is seen in works where women are heroines. Examples are Efuru in Nwapa's *Efuru* and Adah in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen.* The second category presents women in subsumed roles. An example is Awa; Lis sister, in Zainab Alkali's *The Still Born.* The third presents female characters in what Susan Cornillion (1973:ix-xiii) described as whole people in the process of finding other metaphors for existence. This portrays the female as a person in search of authentic identity for existence. An example is Rama-toulaye in Ba's *So Long a Letter,* Adaku and Nnu-Ego in Emecheta's *The Joy of Motherhood.*

Fourthly, there is the image of the female achiever. One who is determined to achieve, at least as much as men do or even better than the male characters. Examples are in Alkali's *The Still Born,* and Aissatou in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter,* who goes ahead to forge a new life for herself. She becomes rich enough to give her friend a car as gift.

The categorisation of female characters in African novels, as done by Akorede, is germane to discourses on gender agenda in African novels. Women have passed though different phases and situations in the real and fictional world and for this reason, there is a need to engage their identity perception and reconstruction as the case may be.

Considering the subject matter, phases/faces and motif of African fiction from gender perspective, it is argued that there are no significant differences in the presentation and manifestation of gender relations between men and women. What makes the difference in these fictions is the style of presentation. Contemporary fiction writers (male and female) adopt different narratology and discursive strategies in their texts. This development justifies the position of Ibitokun (1988):

> ... no modern writer can claim that he is saying anything new and if he says so, nobody will believe him. What makes a writer great is his blend of medium and message and his artistic bravura: the peculiar and unfamiliar way of saying the familiar thing.... What grows after centuries of tilling is not really message but medium. The day medium attains the cul-de-sac of message, that day is the dooms day of art and the end of our endeavour as critics, readers or connoisseurs. (36)

Emergent novelists have been making frantic efforts to blend message and medium to set the tone and mood of their texts. The aesthetics of the language of the texts contribute to the success of the contemporary fictions. The writers demonstrate the knowledge and understanding of the fact that they can only record success as writers if they are able to maximise the potential of their medium to set the ideology and agenda of their texts. Thus, it is argued that variation in the style of presentation marks the difference in the gender agenda setting (a process of instituting the sex and gender role of individuals within a cultural context) in the past and contemporary African novels.

Gender agenda (a process of instituting the sex and gender role of individuals within a cultural context) in African novels can be read along different theoretical orientation depending on the ideology upheld by respective writers and the theoretical leaning of readers-critics. In the discourse of gender issues in African literature, critics have adopted the tenets/variants of radical feminism, motherism, womanism, queer theory and STIWANISM to read and interpret African novels with gender ideology. Critical discourses on gender ideology of African novels began with the emergence of female writers and critics that are looking for alternative voice in the representation of women identity in a phallocentric society. In their creative texts and critical essays on gender relations in Africa, there are questions on the victimisation, oppression and lack of freedom of women in a male-dominated society.

Feminism, though Eurocentric in origin and practice, kick-starts the pace for gender discourse in African fiction. The operation of feminism is rooted in the imbalance in the relationship of men and women in Europe of the time. In the Europe of pre-feminist movement era, women were denied access to basic necessities of life such as education. Azeez Akinwumi Sesan (2014:138-139) observes the state of education in the pre-feminist movement in Europe.

i.   Women were denied access to education in the formal setting of schools because the phallocentric society saw no value in their (women's) education;

ii. Even with the improved status of women education, they (the women) were not allowed to study male-dominated courses such as Law and Medicine but rather, they were allowed to study courses such as Home Economics and Religious Studies in the higher institutions of learning.

iii.   Women were not encouraged to read and write because the phallocentric society realised that with reading, women would begin to interrogate phallocentric epistemology.

In order to improve their lots and situations in the oppressive male-dominated society, women began to engage in series of self-education that produced different publications. The remote consequence of this self-education in the history of Europe is the phenomenon of *feminist spring,* a term proposed by Sesan (2014:136) "to make reference to series of activism by and among women to interrogate hegemonic masculinity of the male-dominated society".

Owing to different cultural and sociological experiences of women in Africa, Europe and America, there are different gender layers of discourse in novels of these continents. Most of the African novels cannot be read with the tenets of radical feminism. This is because African women are expected to complement their male folks and at the same time live harmoniously with every individual, irrespective of sex, race and creed, etc. For this reason, many of African novels have shown strands of womanism and motherism. This is done in order not to upset or disrupt complimentary relationship among individuals of different sexes.

Setting an agenda for gender in African novels requires a clear understanding of the intricacies of human relationships in the private and public lives. This is because there are different manifestations (overt and covert) of gender oppression, gender marginalisation, gender responsibility, sexuality and gender harmony in literary texts that are within the framework of gender ideology. Thus, reading of African novels should be done along the line of patriarchy, matriarchy, masculinity, hegemonic masculinity and women studies. All these readings will shed more light on the matrix of relationships between men and women in the African society.

There are different ideological constructions of realism and consciousness in African novels rooted in gender discourse. Ernst Fischer (1963), Omafume Onoge (1985) and Ademola Dasylva (2003) have identified the common consciousness in literature. The summary of their propositions is that there are three important ideologies that are common to literary creativity and these are art-for-art's sake, critical realism and socialist criticism or neo-realism. Of the three levels of consciousness in literature, art-for-art's

sake has no relevance in any discourse of African literature.The African arts are functional, regardless of the aesthetic flavour that, at times, may be sufficiently distracting (Dasylva, 2003: 212). He goes further that:

> In modern African literature, critical realism and socialist realism are the noticeable organising ideological realms that foreground the social cum-critical vision of the African writer. The former reflects, re-presents reality as it is. The writer in doing this however, still makes use of existing myths. (212)

Gender discourse in the African novel, therefore, should be influenced by the two levels of consciousness and these are critical realism and socialist criticism.Socialist criticism, on the other hand, perceives literature as historical material with reflective and refractive capacities to influence the long standing status quo.

Through various studies and researches on gender relations, it is established that the raging gender differences in life and literature have taken different dimensions. Since literature is a reflection of life, characterisation of male and female characters in literature, perhaps, has been influenced by life experiences of individual authors. In the light of this, this study critiques gender discourse-shift which is identifiable in contemporary African novels in consonance with gender ideologies identified and upheld by some scholars such as Dasylva (2003), Sotunsa (2009), Akorede (2011).

1.2   Statement of the Problem

The novel tradition in Africa has passed through series of experiences and epochal periods recording the collective experience of the African people. This tradition has, however, benefitted from critical attention and discussion of scholars and critics using home-grown and other theories to address so many issues including the ethics and aesthetics of African novels. The current issue in the discourse of African novel is common motifs (metaphorical representation) in the emergent male- and female-authored novels. This gender discourse shift setting is pursued with obvious disparate passions, vigours and convictions by writers of different extractions along the line of gender, nationality and social groupings.

Similarly, reading of these literary texts is influenced by some degree of subjectivity owing to selective semantic interpretation that a text enjoys with the tenets of

reader-response. One of these problems with the reading and criticism of African novels is that most critics are dictatorial, therefore, subjective in their position and interpretation of literary texts with some biases and prejudices. It is considered by many that reading and criticism of African novels should be done in relation to the text and context through which the layers of meaning of gender structure in relation to the society can be better understood.

A critical study of African novels along gender perspective reveals that there are instances of gender discourse-shift along the subject matter, characterisation and thematisation. The construction of gender discourse-shift in these novels is done discursively to invalidate a pre-existing gender discourse in literature. This phenomenon has now become the concern of literary critics in order to find the nexus of semantic and sociological relationship between the old and the new texts on the one hand, and between the text and the context on the other hand.

Some of the literary critics have, therefore, engaged in the description and discussion of generations of African novels and novelists from the perspective of gender while others have also engaged in the theme studies of African novels. What is common to these critical studies is that they reflect the gender identity of African novels. Considering the genealogy, generation, themes and gender ideology of African novels along the temporal and spatial settings, one may be tempted to conclude that contemporary novelists have passed through gender revolution which has affected their orientation and understanding of life in a patriarchal society.

African novelists respond to the myriad of sociological, economic and political challenges confronting Africa using different narrative techniques. With the use of these different narrative techniques, modern African novelists have become the voice of the ruled and the voice of the voiceless and the oppressed/ and/or the disadvantaged (the class to which women belong to). The representation of women in contemporary African novels has taken various forms of sexual capabilities and gender visibilities as revealed in the characterisation of female characters in these novels.

Despite literary critics' discussion on generation of the African novel and novelists from the perspective of gender, little or no attention is paid to the emerging trend of gender discourse shift and intra-gender conflict.There is apparent gender shift

and a graphic representation of intra-gender conflicts in gender discourse in contemporary African novels, which compels a new direction in the present study.

1.3   Aim and Objectives

Aim

The aim of this research is to interrogate emerging trends of gender discourseshift in intra-gender conflicts in contemporary African novels.

Objectives

The specific objectives of this study, therefore, are:

i.   To establish the fact that some African novels are gender-driven narrative. This is because African novels usually have implicit or explicit gender orientation.

ii. To interrogate the emerging patterns of the paradigm shift in gender discourse in contemporary African novels.

iii. To establish shifts in gender discourse by African male and female writers in contemporary times.

iv. To examine forms and causes of inter-gender conflicts in contemporary novels with related thematic focus.

v.   To critique how gender ideology is (re-)constructed in the selected African novels in relation to the reality of conventional gender construction, perception and representation.

1.4   Research Questions

i.   How has the author represented gender focus of his/her text without heating up gender debates?

ii. To what extent are there gender discourse-shift, in contemporary African novels?

iii. In what ways have contemporary novelists exemplify inter-gender conflicts in their novels with related thematic focus?

iv. In what ways have the re-construction of gender ideology in contemporary African novels demonstrate consistence or deviation from gender reality of the socio-cultural norms that inform the works of fiction?

1.5   Justification for the Research

Researchers and literary critics have done much on the gender issue, and identity question, in African novels. Romanus Aboh (2013) carried out an extensive study on the

identity question on the 21st Century Nigerian novels. In this study, the critic examined recent and contemporary novels written by Nigerians. Sesan (2014) examined how phallocentric epistemology is questioned in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Condition.* The critic studied, among other things, the content and theme of the novel.

Bestman (2012) carried out a re-reading of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* through a womanist lens. This study is concerned with the gender agenda in African novels while identifying the points of divergence and convergence in the gender issues projected in the African novels. The critic argues that Achebe does not negatively represent women in totality in *Things Fall Apart.* She, therefore, cautions that Achebe should not be seen as a misogynist (a hater of women).

Since the novels are selected using the parameters of the region, authorship, nationality and gender in order to cater for all the variables that are central to gender discourse shift in African novels, the attention here is the interrogation of the degree of masculinity, feminity and focus in the African novels.

This study focuses attention on the layers and phases of gender discourse-shift and intra-gender discourses in contemporary African novels. This is because authors have been re-focusing attention from the traditional gender discourse of oppression and marginalisation to gender discourse of cooperation and balanced representation. Besides, contemporary African novelists have been establishing new forms of intra-gender conflicts in their novels.

1.6   Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the outcome of this study will contribute to scholarship in the humanities, particularly, in the academic disciplines of literature, cultural and gender studies as evident in the scope of the research. This study will also assist creative writers on the harmonisation of form and content in the making of literary texts. The findings will also assist policy makers and curriculum developers in re-designing the syllabus and curricular of literary studies in African universities by emphasising texts that project and promote African epistemology and gender equality.

The whole study will form a part of the archival documentation on the nature and form of gender discourse in comtemporary African novels. Furthermore, the findings of

this research will offer a new insight to teachers and students of creative writing on how to improve the quality of their writings.

1.7 Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Methodology

The basic research method adopted is literary-textual analysis.The previous studies on gender are reviewed to identify what has been done and what critical gap exists in the field of gender. Eight novels are selected for this study and they are selected across the regions (East, West, North and South of Africa). The novels are selected using the parameters of gender (male-authored and female-authored novels), years of publication, subject matter and thematic preoccupations.The novels that are selected are Naiguib Mahfouz's (male) *Palace Walk* and Ahlem Mosteghanemi's (female) *The Bridges of Constantine* – North Africa; Chika Unigwe's (female) *Night Dancer* and Daniel Mengara's (male) *Mema*– West Africa; Njabulo Ndebele's (male) *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's (female) *The Book of Not* - Southern Africa; Violet Barungi's (female) *Cassandra* and Biyavanga Wainaina's (male) *One Day I Will Write About This Place* – East Africa. These novels are selected owing to the fact that they approach gender experience in Africa from a fresh insight as well as different ideological and theoretical perspectives as shown in their styles, narratology and thematics. The novels selected are primarily concerned with the gender situation in Africa. The style, narratology and discursive strategies in the selected novels indicate that there are emerging voices and perspectives in the African novel tradition. The novels are peculiarly African without any consideration for European novels.

Theoretical Framework

Marxist Feminism and Womanism are adopted as the theoretical framework of this study because of the centrality of their tenets to the interpretation and analysis of gender-based texts. These theories interrogate class structure and struggle along the line of class (social status of individuals in the human society) and gender. Marxist feminism upholds the tenets of classless society and marginalisation in all spheres of life. Womanism, on the other hand, advocates complementarity and harmonious relationship between men and women. Considering the core tenets of these two theories, they are relevant to the thematic focus of the selected novels for this study.

Marxist-Feminism

Marxist feminism interrogates the class structure in the society along the line of gender and social status. This theory tries to query the oppression and suppression of individuals in the society. The Marxist ideology questions the interpellation that makes women believe dogmatically that they (the women) are inferior to men. Marxist feminism, therefore, raises awareness and consciousness of women and the need for them to resist their subjugation and domination by men.

Feminism: *Movement, Theories and Criticism*

The wind of feminist movement blew across many nations and societies in the world. No one can say with precision and exactness, when the upsurge in the feminist movement began because different epochal events and existential experiences in time and space influenced women concerted effort to fight for their civil, political, economic, human and legal rights.

Before the upsurge in the feminist movement, women had been debased, dehumanised and deprived in the phallocentric socio-economic structure. In the pre- 18th and 19th centuries Europe and America, women were only confined to private spheres of domesticated chores of cooking and sexual gratification of phallic urge. Women had no absolute and unquestionable authorities over their bodies, selfhood and dignity. The public spheres of politics, economic activities, administration, and educational attainment were preserved for men. In the centuries before the feminist movement in Europe and America, there was bi-polar structure of society based on the phallocentric entrenched social codes. This bi-polar structure was patterned after space of operation, socio-political status, visibility, audibility and level of dependence. For centuries, the phallocentric social codes and bi-polar structure "enjoyed the credibility of memory and the convenience of popularity".

The "Feminist spring" (a term proposed by Azeez Akinwumi Sesan (2014:136) to make reference to series of activism by and among women to interrogate hegemonic masculinity of the male-dominated society) of the 18th and 19th centuries began to query the dominant paradigm that had parochial and prejudicial stand-point about women's economic, political, social, and familial capabilities and potentials. Concerted women actions were put in place to redress feminine injustice at the private and the public

spheres of socio-human relationship and to reconstruct the dominant paradigms of phallic ego to induce the commencement of the "socially engineering progress". The dominant paradigms "are not necessarily the most efficient" in the opinion of Lawuyi (2007: 11):

> Dominant paradigms usually tend to last a long while because they enjoy the credit of memory and the convenience of popularity. But they are not necessarily the most efficient. They can, and will, only be replaced by paradigms, which provides better explanations, reveal hidden reality, and engineer better functional efficiency. Such paradigms emerge in the process of confronting them with anomalies encountered in previous practice, and through answers providing a radically altering consciousness. Thus, anomalies are central to the elaboration of paradigms. The more the anomalies discovered, the greater the chance of socially engineering process.

The anomalies observed in the phallocentric social arrangements gave impetus to "feminist spring" to uplift the status of women under the intricate phallic social webs.

Before the "feminist spring" that swept across Europe and America, women identified the fact that political structure and exercise of political rights favoured only men. There was unjust disenfranchisement of women that they could not vote and be voted for. This was a debasement of the status of women to European and American slaves that could not enjoy the rights to vote and be voted for.

Pent-up and accumulated inhuman experiences of women in a phallocentric society motivated women for mob action to agitate for their rights. The crystallisation of collective women experiences of oppression, deprivation, dehumanisation and marginalisation prompted the feminist spring that began in Europe and America in the 18th century. The movement was meant to ensure that the "self-development of people can take precedence over all human material and immaterial desires. Bell Hooks (1981: 194) is of the opinion:

> Feminism is not simply a struggle to end male chauvinism or a movement to ensure that women will have equal rights with men; it is a commitment to eradicate the ideology of domination that permeates western culture on various levels- sex, race, and class... And a commitment to reorganising U.S. society so that the self-development of

people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion and material desires.

In the pre-feminist spring era in the history of Europe and America, there was a male chauvinism stand-point that perceived women as *persona-non-grata*, whose entire life could be manipulated to suite phallic ego.

Owing to different variables at private and public domains of women's life in Europe and America, feminist movement can be grouped into three phases since its inception in the 18th century. The first phase of feminist movement (18th century - 20th century) dealt primarily with suffrage (right for women to vote and be voted for), better working conditions and right to women and girl education. The second wave (1960s - 1980s) was preoccupied with the struggle against social and legal cultural inequalities between men and women. The third wave (from the late 1980s till the current decade) is the continuation of the second wave and re-examination of the perceived failures of the second wave movement of feminism.

The political activism of women against the tyranny of men in private and public domains of their lives began in French after the revolution of 1789 which had created awareness among the French men and women on the need to fight for their rights. Women activism, in the attempts to fight for their rights took different dimensions ranging from self- immolation and self-murder, public demonstrations, protest, and arson to propaganda. For instance, in 1913, Emily Davison made a self-sacrifice under the king's horse. This action had a far-reaching impact on the feminist movement.

The women movement against their disenfranchisement operated under the aegis of suffragette - the name that was first derogatively used in 1906 by Daily Mail. In no time, the name gained currency in Europe (particularly in France and Britain). Prior to this naming of suffragette, Women Social and Political Union (WSPU) had been formed in 1903 under the leadership of Emmline Pankhurst and in her opinion, votes for women was no longer "a right but a desperate necessity".

In her opinion, women should have unconditional right to vote and to be voted for irrespective of the prevailing social and legal structure in the society. Other women's union aimed at fighting for women enfranchisement were Women's Freedom League (WFL) and National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) under the

leadership of Millicent Garrett Fawcett. In America (1869), two women movement were organised to fight for the rights of women to vote and be voted for. These movements were National Women Suffrage Association under the leadership of Elizabeth Stanton and Susan Anthony and American Woman Suffrage Association under the leadership of Lucy Stone Blackwell. In the view of Yetunde Akorede (2011: 15):

> The movement demanded for the amendment of the constitution. They also argued that nothing should stop women from having the right to vote since the 15th Amendment of the American Constitution gave the black man right. The suffragists mobilised the middle-class white woman, black working-class women, and even men (who sympathised with women) to openly protest against the political marginalisation of women.

The effort of suffragette yielded a positive result because many countries in Europe (Eastern, Western, and Central), including America, began to give voting rights to women. In 1883, New Zealand granted women full voting rights while South Australia and Western Australia granted women full voting rights in 1894 and 1899 respectively. America granted women the unconditional voting rights in 1920.

In the 1920s, women had recorded outstanding victories in their demands for unconditional voting rights. Consequently, the women political activism waned down until the 1960s when Betty Friedan published her work- *Feminine Mystique* in 1963. This incisive book created awareness among the women activists that the granting of voting rights to women had not put an end to the exploitation, subjugation and dehumanisation of women in the phallocentric society. In the opinion of Aduke Adebayo (1999: 24), "early women failed to demand for radical changes in the social set-up".

Another important area of concern of feminist movement was education. In the pre-18[tn] century and 19th century in Europe and America, women were denied access to education. Women of the period were subjected to all forms of dehumanisation, "dewomanisation" and sexual exploitation. In short, women were taken as nothing but persona-non-grata. Women's marginalisation in education was so intense that all the doors to institutions of learning were closed against them because the phallocentric society saw no value in the education of women. Even when women were granted admission into institutions of higher learning, they were denied access to study male-

dominated courses such as Law and Medicine. Women were admitted into College in Europe for the first time in 1833 to study Home Economics, Religion and other "female subject" (Ruth Shiela, 1980:9). This situation gave men social and economic advantage over women. According to Yetunde Akorede (2011: 12):

> The initial non-admission of women to tangible courses resulted in the educational marginalisation of women. Men, because of their educational advantage (which was later used as criteria for public office distribution), held positions of authority and leadership in public offices.

During the period of denied access to education, some women with uncompromising stance towards phallic domination of education began self-efforts to get educated in reading and writing. Among such women was Mary Woolstonecraft, "a self-made and politically active woman". Her ambitious efforts brought the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792)* to the light of the day. In the opinion of Watkins (1994:15), the book is the "foundation stone of modern feminism". She argued in the book that women were born into power roles and that the only thing needed to be men's companion was education. She called on women to "acquire strength, both in the mind and body". The book indeed sensitised women to fight for their social, political, economic and legal rights.

Mary Woolstonecraft broke the feminine culture of silence in writing as imposed by the phallocentric hegemony and social order with her publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792. A self-made and self-educated woman, Mary Woolstonecraft took a daring step on a forbidden track of female voice with her publication. The publication attracted to itself mix reactions- men saw it as an assault on their phallic personality and deflation of their phallic ego, while women saw the publication as a call to express dissent against phallocratic socialisation that was prudent at the time. There was, thus dialogic discourses on the self-order of identity and personality of women in social text, andro-text and gyno-text. The book queried the phallocentric social arrangement that perpetuated women to the margins of existence. Woolstonecraft argues in the book that women should be given access to education for them to be companion of men in the socio-economic and political activities. She was of the opinion that "the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human

being, regardless of the distinction of sex". The book has, indeed, been referred to as the "foundation stone of modern feminism" (Watkins, Rueda and Rodriguez (1994:15).

Virginia Woof (1929) also made significant contributions in feminist movement through her writing. In 1929, she published *Room of One's Own* - an essay which was based on two papers she read to the Arts Society at Newnham and Odtea at Girton in 1928. The publication challenged the perpetual inhumanity, subordination and deprivation of women in a phallocentric society. Wolf was of the opinion that without adequate education, whatever a woman writes will be interpreted by the andro-critics with their phallic ego. In the book, Woof observed that 'some strange" phallocentric conspiracy determined the genre through which women should demonstrate their literary capabilities:

> Both in France and in England, the women poets precede the women novelists. Moreover, I thought, looking at the four famous names, what had George Eliot in common with Emily Bronte? Did not Charlotte Bronte fail entirely to understand Jane Austin? Same for the possibly relevant fact that not one of them had a child, four more incongruous characters could not have met together in a room- so much so that it is tempting to invent a meeting and a dialogue between them. Yet by some strange force they were all compelled, when they write, to write novels.

She complains further:

> Had it something with being born in the middle class, I asked, and with the fact, which Miss Emily Davies a little later was so strikingly to demonstrate, that the middle class family in the early nineteenth century was possessed only of a single sitting-room. And, as Miss Nightingale was so vehemently to complain - "women never have an half hour... that they can call their own"- she was always interrupted. People's feelings were impressed on her; personal relations were always before her eyes. Therefore, when the middle-class woman took to writing, she naturally wrote novels, even though, as seems evident enough, two of the four famous women here named were not by nature novelists.
> (Virginia Woof's *A Room of One's Own,* 1929: 69-70)

Woof's remarks may account for paucity of women poets and playwrights in Europe and America. Renowned writers in the 18th and 19th centuries Europe and America were novelists, biographers and memoirists.

In the view of this study, Virginia Woof was being metaphorical with the title of her book. A room connotes an exclusive creative universe, a private space that is far removed from all restrictions to the literary imagination and creative ingenuity of women. Thus, following this line of argument, a room connotes physical space, education, social acceptance and economic strength. All these will coher to enhance creative impulse of a female writer.

Another important writing that impacted greatly on feminist criticism of literature was Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own.* The book traces the history of women's writing by putting the historical development and movement of women's writing into three phases: the feminine phase (1840-1880); the feminist phase (1880-1920) and the female phase (1920-the present). Each of these phases has its peculiar characteristics. In the first phase (1840-1880), for instance, female writers were imitating the literary style and tradition of the established male writers. They also wrote in conformity with the hegemonic norms of phallocentric society by avoiding vulgar and offensive language and/or subject matter. Sometimes, female writers even used men's names (Currier Bell .for Bronte and George Eliot for Evans, for example) to hide their female authorship (Ann Dobie, 2009:107).

In the second phase (1880-1920), the level of awareness of women had increased. They were agitating for equal political, economic and legal rights with men. In the socio-political realm, the leading figures of this period were Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucy Stone Blackwell, Emmeline Pankhurst and Lucretia Mott. In the realm of literature, female writers began to decry the jaundiced portrayal of women by male writers.

The third phase (1920-the present) changed the psychodynamics of literary production, consumption and interpretation. This phase emphasised the fact that female writers should express their own experiences in literature and art. It also emphasised that women should be critical in their reading of literary text to uncover the inherent misogynist presentation. In a technical term, Showalter refers to this as gynocritism- "a

movement that examines the distinctive characteristics of the female experience, in contrast to earlier methods that explained the female by using male models (Dobie, 2009:107).

In *A Glossary of Literary Terms,* M.H. Abrams (2011) is critical about the concern of gynocritics:

> One concern of gynocritics is to identify distinctively feminine subject matters in literature written by women- the world of domesticity, for example, or the subject experiences of gestation, giving birth, and nurturing, or mother- daughter, and woman to woman relations. In which personal and affectional issues, and not external activism, are the primary interest. Another concern is to uncover in literary history, a female tradition, incorporated in subcommittees of women writers who were aware of, emulated, and found support in earlier women writers, and who in turn, provide models and emotional support of their own readers and successors. A third undertaking is to show that there is a distinctive feminine mode of experience, or "subjectivity", in thinking, feeling, valuing, and perceiving oneself and the outer world. Related to this is the attempt (thus far, without much agreement about details) to specify the traits of a "woman's language," or distinctively feminine style of speech and writing, in sentence structure, types of relations between the element of a discourse, and characteristic figures of speech and imagery. (123)

From the above, it can be rightly concluded that gynocritics are particularly concerned about the peculiar experiences of women in life and how this has been represented in literature. With gynocriticsm, it can thus be said that the dominant monologic paradigm enjoyed by andro-texts and andro- criticism later gave way to the dialogic discourses of gyno-text and gyno-criticisms.

Considering the historical movement of feminism, it can be rightly posited that the term feminism does not have a single definition because it connotes different views and ideas. In an attempt to describe what feminism connotes, Ruth Sheila (1980:4) states some beliefs, values and attitudes of some purpose driven feminists and some of these have been highlighted earlier in this study.

From the foregoing, it is also evident that feminism as a concept has a comprehensive scope and description.

Difference in political experience, cultural configuration and historical experience informed different forms of feminism. This phenomenon including racial discrimination in America and colonialism in Africa, was largely responsible for apparent dichotomies between white feminism and black feminism. Accordingly, it can be averred that there is no concept of universal feminism. In black countries and African-America, there has been concept of womanism, Africana-womanism, motherism, and STIWANISM to describe African variants of feminism and feminist ideologies. Nonetheless, there are points of convergence and divergence in the black and white feminism

Marxist-Feminism

Marxism

Karl Marx (1818-1883), a German philosopher, and Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), a German social scientist, are the joint founders of what is called Marxism (N. Krishnaswamy, J. Varghese and S. Mishra, 2005: 97). The core arguments of Marxism are rooted in the socio-political arrangements of the society. Marxists are of the view that different parameters can be used to stratify society into two paradigms of the dominant and the recessive. Marxists, however, are of the view that human society does not need to be stratified because of the fact that the means of production and distribution of resources are expected to be under the control of the public through the designated government functionaries. Thus, Marxists uphold the view point that social being determines the consciousness of individuals in the society and not in the other way round. This social being influences self-appraisal and perception.

To the Marxist, economic base of the society determines the focus and orientation of the society. The economic base of the society is concerned with the materialistic tendency of the society and how this influences decisions. This economic base generates subjective opinion and orientation in the decision on morality of the society. In traditional Marxist thinking, Marx and Engels viewed 'morality, religion and philosophy' as 'phantoms formed in the brains of men' and everything is determined by the nature of the economic base; this is known as *economic determinism* (N. Krishnaswamy, J. Varghese and S, Mishra, 2005: 97). The economic base of the society provides foundation for other structures in politics, religion and literature. Thus, the affairs of human society is determined by who has the control over economic resources.

The material circumstances (the underlying economic conditions of the society) generate a kind of ideological atmosphere known as historical situation. The effect of this situation is the generation of differences between and among individuals at different sides of the pole. Thus, an understanding of the society depends on a reliable understanding of the prevailing economic/material and historical circumstances. Based on the difference in economic opportunities and might, human society is stratified into the bourgeoisie (the prominent/the owners of factors of production) and proletariat (the work force), as well as the dominant and the recessive.

The application of Marxist ideology and theory in the interpretation and analysis of literary texts has become popular among literary theorists and critics. This is because a good work of literature projects a particular ideology. The view of the present study, therefore, is consistent with the view of Dobie (2009:94):

> Although Marxist view about literature coexist comfortably with the principles of some other schools of criticism, they stand in direct opposition to the concerns of the formalists. Marxist critics see a literary work not as an aesthetic object to be experienced for its own intrinsic worth but as a product of the socio-economic aspects of a particular culture. In general, Marxists accept that critics must do more than explain how a work conforms to certain literary conventions or examine its aesthetic qualities. Marxist critics must be concerned with identifying the ideology of a work and pointing out its worth or its deficiencies. The good Marxist critic is careful to avoid the kind of approach that concerns itself with form and craft at the expense of examining social realities. Instead, the Marxist critic will search out the depiction of inequities in social classes, an imbalance of goods and power among people, or manipulation of the worker by the bourgeoisie and will then point out the injustice of that society.

The above position, as maintained by Dobie, shows that there is no egalitarian society in life and society. It is the inequality in socio-political arrangement in society that generates conflicts between or among the two opposing forces.

In literature, therefore, Marxist ideology is meant to sustain or subvert hegemonic ideology. The hegemonic ideology is dominant and it is enshrined in social conditions to the point that the recessive group in the society accepts the hegemonic ideology without

any interrogation. In this situation, the recessive group, though understand their pitiable conditions, engage in false consciousness ("people's acceptance of an unfavourable social system without protest or questioning - that is, as the logical way for things to be", Dobie, 2009: 99). False consciousness of the recessive group of the society is not good for the health of the society because it helps to perpetuate the dominant group in its hegemonic position. In a situation that false consciousness does not have a hold in the society, there are tensions and conflicts between and among different socio-political structures in the society.

With critical analysis of Marxist ideology in literature, it is maintained that literature is social and not personal. The goal of Marxist criticism of literature is to interrogate how the social structure influences the philosophy, ideology and behaviour of individuals in a society. Thus, "the concerns of Marxist critics generally have been primarily social rather than individual exploring the sociology of the text as opposed to the psychology of individual characters" (Roger Webster, 1997: 68). The sociology of the text, however, is done through the analysis of motivations of the author to write the text and the disposition of individual characters in the text.

Since Marxism projects a certain ideology, gender difference and its manifestation in social and literary discourses constitute one of the strategic areas of attention of Marxist. This is because gender discourse in (African) literature suggests paradigm construction between the dominant and recessive groups in the society. This brand of feminism believes in the interlocking relationship between class and gender (Mobolanle Sotunsa, 2009:9). The preoccupation of this brand of feminism is the interrogation of the double yoke that women face in a patriarchal society.

Cultural materialism and dialectal materialism affect the class consciousness of women in patriarchal society. In order to sustain male hegemony in a patriarchal society, men engage in interpellation (the term first used by Louis Althusser to refer to the process in which the working class is manipulated to accept the ideology of the dominant class). The extension of this ideology (belief system) makes it relevant to the discourse of Marxist feminism. In this instance, there is projection of the dominant ideology of male hegemony that subordinates the will of women into the norms and values of patriarchal society. The expectation of the patriarchal society is to make women believe that their

situations are divinely ordained and that nothing can be done to improve the situation. The Marxist feminists, however, do not want to be indoctrinated into the dominant hegemony of phallic ego.

The theoretical and empirical positions of Marxist feminism is closely related to the bourgeoisie type of feminism. This type of feminism underlines the class consciousness of the society along the paradigm of access to power and wealth as well as gender. This bourgeoisie type of Marxist feminism is aligned with socialist stance of feminism, with specific reference to the position of Heleith I. B. Saffioti (1978). This feminist critic is not comfortable with the class divide that undermine the potential and visibility of women in a patriarchal society. Saffioti postulates on the social and economic stratification of women in a patriarchal society:

> Whatever revolutionary content there is in petty-bourgeois feminist praxis, it has been put there by the efforts of the middle class strata, especially the less well-off, to move socially... in this sense, petty- bourgeois feminism is not feminism at all; in-deed, it has helped to consolidate class society by giving camouflage to its internal contradictions.
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> (232)

The internal contradictions in a patriarchal society degenerate into conflicts and social disharmony between and among people of differing ideologies. In the context of this research, the people with differing ideologies are the male and female population of human society. Relating the tenets of Marxist feminism and bourgeoisie type of feminism, it is inferred that "Marxist -feminist consists of ideas that relate to class origins and stratification in the family and economic relations" (Elizabeth Meehan, 1990: 191). Thus, class consciousness and social stratification constitute the components of Marxist feminism. Marxist-feminists believe therefore that male or patriarchal ideas are dominant in the society and female ideas are subordinated to them because they control production (Mabel Evwierhoma, 2002:43).

From the foregoing analysis of Marxist –feminism, it is established that there is a close affinity between Marxism and Marxist-feminism. This is because both ideologies articulate the fact that there should be an egalitarian society. Human society is stratified based on some economic and sociological variables such as access to the means of production and gender of individuals in a society.

African Variants of Feminism

Womanism

Womanism is an Afrocentric variant of feminism. In her clarification of the concept of feminism, Sheila (1980: 4) is of the view:

i.   Feminists value women in and of themselves and for themselves, not in the hypocritical fashion of male dominated culture.

ii. Feminists value and prize the fact of being women as much as being human. They affirm women's capacities to be strong, capable and intelligent.

iii. Feminists value autonomy as individuals and for women as a group, who desire to develop the conditions that will enable women to control their own political, social, economic and political destinies.

iv. Feminists reject attitudes that regard the traditional masculine characteristics of aggression, power and competition as good and desirable; as well as opposed to the traditional feminine characteristics of compassion, tenderness and compromise as weak and ridiculous.

v.   Feminists desire the evolution of positive qualities determined by merit and relative to its effect on the quality of life as it is exhibited by either woman or man. They reject the practice of separating human qualities into two categories:- one for men and one for women and the belief that what is described as the best is exhibited by men.

vi. Feminists recognise that beliefs about women in many cultures are false and based on myths, ignorance and fear. Thus, they believe in the necessity of replacing these myths with reality and ignorance with knowledge, created by women, first for women and finally for all people.

vii. Feminists point out denial of their rights as human beings for centuries. These are rights to vote, earn a substantive living commensurate with their work, freedom to determine whether to bear children, etc; they (Feminists) argue that these denials constitute the concrete instances of oppression.

viii. Finally, feminists recognise women's persistent strength in the face of such oppression and are optimistic about the possibilities of change.

Similarly, Sesan (2014: 136-137) offers five general principles that influence feminist movement and agitation. He is of the opinion:

i. Social arrangements among men and women are neither natural nor divinely determined.

ii. Social arrangements among men and women favour men.

iii. Some social codes and socio-cultural myth of human relations institutionalised and rationalised hegemonic masculinity,

iv. Social arrangements among men and women pigeonhole women to restricted place and sphere of control,

v. There are collective actions that can and should be taken to transform these arrangements into more just and equitable arrangements.

Womanism focuses attention on the peculiarity of African women experience in a patriarchal society. The focus of the theory is the complemetarity between men and women in the African society. The conceptualisation of womanism began with women of colour in America. Among the pioneers of the theory in America is Alice Walker (1983: xi-xii). She describes a womanist as:

> A black feminist or feminist of colour... who loves other women, sexually and /or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility...and women's strength. Sometimes love individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually… Committed to survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist... Womanism is to feminism as purple to lavender.

The above conceptualisation of Womanism by Alice Walker posits that there is no place for separation in womanist ideology. Men and women are expected to work harmoniously together for the betterment of their society.

Furthermore, Ogunyemi (1996) comments on the centrality of cooperation and understanding in the gender relations between men and women in the society. She posits that womanism is:

> A black outgrowth from feminism. Womanism is black centered. It is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism. Unlike radical

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feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women
and black men and black children and will see to it that
men begin to change from their sexiest stand. (65)

Womanism, therefore, deviates from the norms and tenets of radical feminism. It is this deviation that reveals its uniqueness as an Afrocentric theory that is relevant to African gender discourse.

African scholars and critics have not seen much value and relevance of Western feminism to the African reality. They hinge their argument on the disparity between the experiences of women in Europe and Africa. In their arguments, African women face the problems of male oppression, colonialism and racism as opposed tot the problem of male oppression that white women faced. It is based on this that African critics and theorists opt for variants of feminism that will address the realities of African women experience. It can be said that African variants of feminism are culture-specific. The focus of this study, therefore, is on two of the African variants of feminism: womanism and motherism. The analysis and criticism of African literature requires an understanding of the challenges and peculiarities of African women experience within a specific cultural matrix. This position is consistent with the view of Azeez Akinwumi Sesan (2015: 62):

Before a literary critic can do a rewarding criticism of ...
texts, there is a need to have formidable understanding of
the African cultural matrix that conventionalises sex role
and relationship between men and women. African gender
relations emphasise collaboration and cooperation among
men and women in the private and public spheres.

Kolawole (1997) modified the concept of womanism. She does not see the concept from the global perspective. In her opinion, African womanism is the one that takes care of the rights of women of African descents alone. In the opinion of Emezue (2012:41), it is a holistic ideology which accentuates the empowerment of all black people and which lays emphasis on the female sphere.

Alice Walker's (1983) position about womanism, in the opinion of critics bears some resemblance with white feminism, particularly the ideology that encourages lesbianism and homosexuality. In her opinion, Alice Walker describes a womanist as:

A black feminist or feminist of colour... who loves other
women, sexually and /or sometimes, love individual non

sexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female. Womanism is to feminism as purple to lavender.   (xiii)

From Walker's point of view, womanism is in support of homosexuality between females and heterosexuality between males and females. This is one of the basic problems with Walker's womanism. The theory does not actually capture the tenets of African culture. African cultural practices are not in support of homosexuality. The tenets of womanism, as given by Alice Walker, really capture the historical and sociological experiences of African- American women. Unlike white feminism that has separatist stance, womanism is acommodationist in orientation.

In a follow-up study, Ogunyemi (1996: 65) is of the opinion that the goal of womanism is to see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stance. Womanism, according to the critic, is:

> [A] black outgrowth from feminism. Womanism is black centered. It is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism. Unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand.

Ogunyemi's position about womanism has African peculiarity. It really shows that African women want peaceful co-existence between men and women. This is against the radical approach of the white feminism that is separatist in ideology. A womanist is concerned with the preservation of culture and she shows respect for material and immaterial aspects of culture.

Despite the difference of ideology from how Alice Walker and Ogunyemi describe womanism, Kohrs-Amissar (2002) is of the view that Walker and Ogunyemi present womanism as the coming of age of a young woman. She wrote that Ogunyemi and Walker define womanism

> within a black context as the coming of age of a young woman which brings about the emergence of femaleness. Additionally, Ogunyemi believes that the 'ultimate aim of womanism is the unity of blacks everywhere under the enlightened control of men and women[1]. She lays stress on womanism as a black global ideology which encompasses issues of racism, imperialism and sexism (27).

From the position of Kohrs- Amissah, it can be said that Alice Walker and Okonjo-Ogunyemi see womanism as a global movement of black women to fight against male domination and subjugation.

Kolawole (1997) situates womanism within African context. She refers to womanism as Africana Womanism in line with the view of Hudson-Weems (1989) on the assumption that African women have different experiences from their western counterparts. Womanism, as an ideology is designed to cater for the needs and yearnings of all women of African descents. This ideology is grounded in African culture and cosmology. The conclusion is that Africana Womanism and its agenda are unique and separate from both white feminism and black feminism, and moreover, to the extent of naming in particular Africana Womanism differs from African feminism (Alenxander-floyd and Simien, 2006:67). The difference in cultural practices is largely responsible for the difference in western feminism and Africana womanism. Kolawole is of the opinion that Africana womanism is not a new discourse in feminist theory but that it is quite unfortunate that the concept has long been overlooked. She notes:

> African woman's mobilisation and struggle is older than many scholars' acknowledgement. History, sociology and oral literature confirm the long- standing nature of these people's rejection of subjugation and dynamic self assertion and empowerment that have remained largely unnoticed in modern academia. (27)

The above position shows that Africana womanism is not "an addendum to western feminism". It is an independent ideology and movement that reflects the peculiar African women experience on the continent and the diaspora.

In another study, Nah Dove's (1998) "African Womanism: An Afrocentric Theory" credits the contributions of Clenora Hudson-Weems, Ifi Amadiume and later submits that Africana womanism may be viewed as "fundamental to the continuing development of Afrocentric Theory." She writes:

> A concept (Africana Womanism) that has been shaped by the work of women such as Clenora Hudson-Weems, Ifi Amadiume, Mary E. Modupe Kolawole, and others. African womanism may be viewed as fundamental to the development of Afrocentric theory. Africana womanism brings to the forefront the role of African mothers as

> leaders in the struggle to regain, reconstruct and create a cultural integrity that espouses the ancient Maatic principles of reciprocity, balance, harmony, justice, truth, righteousness, order, and so forth. (535)

The above position of Nah Dove shows that Africana womanism is really critical of survival of the race and the continent through understanding and harmonious relationship between men and women. Africana womanism is accommodating. In a simple term, womanism advocates sisterhood; that women should be in unity against the agents of oppression.

Akorede (2011) is of the opinion that black feminism as propounded by Alice Walker and other black feminists are not adequate to capture African colonial and neo-colonial experiences and thus said that Africana womanism points out the inadequacy of black feminism:

> Proponents of Africana Womanism accuse Black Feminist of concentrating on issues that affect Black Americans. They argue that racial oppression and discrimination is central in the discourse because it constitutes an important aspect of the Black Woman's social reality. The proponents of Africana Womanism equally point out the inadequacy of black feminism to justifiably handle issues that affect the African - American and women of the third world countries. (49)

Africa-American women primarily suffered the problems of slavery, sexism and class while women of African descents suffered the problems of colonialism, slavery, sexism, and class. All these problems denigrated the status of women in African society.

Since [Africana] womanism has been theorised in Africa, many female writers of African descents have been appropriating its tenets in the subject matter and thematic orientations of their creative texts. Notable among these writers is Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, particularly in her trilogy.

Motherism

Motherism is Catherine Acholonu's (1995: 110-111) Afro-centric theory of feminism. She is of the opinion that motherism is a multidimensional theory that involves ordering at all levels of human endeavour:

> Africa's alternative to Western feminism is MOTHERISM and motherism denotes motherhood, nature and nurture. Motherism is a multidimensional theory, which involves the dynamics of ordering, creating structures, building and rebuilding in cooperation with mother nature at all levels of human endeavour.

The above view, points to the fact that African dimension to feminism is accommodationist of gender complementarist, and as such supports cooperation and interaction between women and men through marriage.

1.8   Delimitation of the Study

Eight novels are selected for this study and they are selected across the regions (East, West, North and South of Africa). The novels are selected using the parameters of gender (male-authored and female-authored novels), years of publication, subject matter and thematic preoccupations. The novels that are selected are, Naiguib Mahfouz's (male) *Palace Walk* and Ahlem Mosteghanemi's (female) *The Bridges of Constatine* – North Africa; Chika Unigwe's (female) *Night Dancer* and Daniel Mengara's (male) *Mema* – West Africa; Njabulo Ndebele's (male) *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* and Tsitsi Dangarembga's (female) *The Book of Not* – Southern Africa; Violet Barungi's (female) *Cassandra* and Biyavanga Wainaina's (male) *One Day I Will Write About This Place* – East Africa. These novels are selected owing to the fact that they approach gender experience in Africa from a fresh insight as well as different ideological and theoretical perspectives as shown in their styles, narratology and thematic. The novels selected are primarily concerned with the gender situation in Africa. The style, narratology and discursive strategies in the selected novels indicate that there are emerging voices and perspectives in the African novel tradition.

The scope of the study is limited to novels within four regions in Africa, namely: West Africa, North Africa, Southern Africa and East Africa, and does not include Western Europe and American novels.

1.9   Definition of Operational Terms

Gender: This is a term used differently from sex. It covers the studies on men and women with their identity construction and perception in society. The phenomenon of

gender is influenced by culture and sociological experiences of individuals. Sex is natural and biological that no one can help. Gender, on the other hand, is a social construct.

African Novel: This is a form of prose with elaborate setting, character and plot that presents the situation of African person and continent by Africans from strictly African perspectives. It is more complete than novella. The style of novel varies and it combines narrative and descriptive techniques in the course of its writing.

Gender Conflict: This is the situation of antagonism which exists as a result of dominance and resistance between men and women in society and literature. This conflict can take the dimension of intra-gender and inter-gender conflicts.

Gender Shift: This exists when a writer shows compassion and positive feeling for opposite gender in a literary text. This is usually shown in characterisation. Comtemporay Africa novelists have been demonstrating gender shift in their novels.

Gender Agenda Setting: It is a process of instituting the sex and gender role of individuals within a cultural context.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Sociology of African Literature

Literature in Africa has a history and sociology that can be traced to the oral source. This debunks the claim of Europeans and some Eurocentric Africans that Africa has no art form that qualifies as literature. The claim of European scholars about literariness of oral performances and literature of Africa is parochial and degrading. This is only an attempt to privilege writing over speech. In linguistics, communication and literary discourses, it has been established by scholars and critics (Niyi Osundare, 1981, Olatunde O. Olatunji, 1984, Ademola Dasylva 1999 and Adedotun Philip Ogundeji, 2014) that speech predates writing in the arrangement of the genealogy of literary activities. This idea is universal and general across all the continents and countries of the world. The oral stage of literary production, therefore, cannot be ignored. The concern of this study, however, is on the significance of oral stage of literary production in the development of the genre of novel in African literature. The basic role of oral narratives (folktales, legends and myths) in the development and sustenance of the genre of prose fiction in African literature cannot be ignored. This argument is presented because African oral narratives play laudable roles in the development of plot and characterisation of the modern African prose fiction. It is, therefore, incontrovertible that oral and written forms of African literature have corresponding effects on each other.

The disregard for the oral stage of African literature by European scholars could only have been traced to cultural chauvinism (the idea of having the belief that one's culture is superior to another). The Europeans developed a negative concern for the viability of African culture as represented in her literature and the overall belief system. They do not believe that something good can come out of Africa. All that they believe is that Africans are fond of making meaningless sounds and stories to satisfy some unmerited needs. These European ethnographers have overplayed the entertainment values of the collected African oral narratives (with specific reference to folktales) with little or no consideration for their didactic and cultural values. Thus, in the interpretation of these folktales, there are denigration of African personality and integrity

In the process of collecting African stories by European ethnographers, literary enthusiasts and biased annotators, there have been issues of parochial interpretation of African tales. They do not attach meaning and cultural essence to the collected tales. Some of these collectors only engage in these activities to satisfy the needs for entertainment of their European audience and other Eurocentric African audience. In their collection are tales that depict the backwardness and chaotic state of African experience.

This study, however, does not limit its view within the argument of these Europeans and their Eurocentric African scholars and critics. The emphasis on the entertainment value of African oral narratives is too narrow. It is, however, argued here that African oral narratives perform all the utilitarian functions of modern literature in the written mode. This study posits that African oral narratives perform therapautic, didactic, educative and psychological functions along their entertainment functions. It is a misdirected argument for European scholars and their African adherents to posit that African oral narratives have no literary qualities. The utilitarian functions of oral narratives equal the functions that written literature performs, particularly with reference to thematic pre-occupation and the overall plot of the narratives. This position is consistent with the view of Ademola Dasylva (1999: 13-14):

> Indeed, every non-human character is a metaphoric projection of man's behaviour. Therefore, any taxonomy of the theme that must be of critical value must regard fictive characters in folktales as man's proximates. Since the African oral narrative - particularly folktale - has the behaviour of man as its main focus, classification of the theme is better determined by the nature of human behaviour represented by "fabricated" images. The folktale, by tradition, serves as a means of exploring definite dominant imperatives and concerns of man in society.

The deduction from the above position is that African folktales have didactic values that contribute meaningfully to the moral development of individuals. It is also instructive that African folktales have the fictive qualities - imagination and creativity. Folktale narrators create their stories from the collective consciousness and imaginative capabilities of the community. This creativity is aligned with Dasylva's fabricated images in folktales. The folktales narrators fabricate the themes, plot and characters of the tales to project certain ideology.

37

African folktales share the quality of modem novel focus on language pattern, narrative style and plot of the narrative. The language of narrative of folktale is literary with the use of figures of speech, figures of sound and other rhetorical devices. The use of language in folktales has been one of the foci of arguments of Ademola Dasylva (1999: 6):

> Two factors are integral to, and foreground, the characteristic ambivalence of oral literature. They are the imaginative use of language and response-reception in actual performance. The oral narrative, which is our focus in the present study, is a major generic form and, as such, shares the general characteristics of ambivalence, of specialised use of language, and spontaneity of audience response-reception.

The use of language, therefore, in oral narratives with specific reference to folktales reveals the literariness of the text through the use of imagery, symbolism and other rhetorical devices. The audience response-reception is concerned with structure of the oral narratives with focus on folktale.

The structure of folktale has been the primary focus of Vladimir Propp's (2004) argument in *Morphology of the Folktale.* In the paper, Propp is of the view that folktales have various units that constitute their structure, particularly from the theoretical perspective of structuralism. This explains the two-fold quality of a tale: its amazing multiformity, picturesqueness and color, and on the other hand, its no less striking uniformity, its repetition. (Vladimir Propp, 2004:73). With reference to the structure of the folktale, it is the position of this study that African folktales have the qualities of modern written fictions.

Written literature provides another psychodynamics to the reading, analysis and interpretation of African folktales. These psychodynamics are found in the medium and narrative style and authorship. There is a shift from collective authorship of folk tales to individual authorship in the modern written literature. This view is consistent with Ropo Sekoni (2008: 13):

> In oral societies, the infrastructure for producing poetry, story, and drama is available to every able-bodied member of the community, unlike in post-colonial ethos where the means of producing literature are largely alienated from most members of the community.

The inference from the position of Sekoni is that written literature is a literary tradition that is realised in Africa with the factor of colonialism. In the political and literary history of Africa, focus has been on the contribution of colonialism in the development of writing. This argument, however, is not to say that there was no literary writing before the commencement of colonialism and imperialism in Africa. Literary scholars and critics have opined that African literature began with oral tradition and series of verbal performances. In the non-literate African society, oral literature and verbal performances played significant roles in the moralisation, entertainment and education of communities. The pre-existence of oral literature and performances in Africa exemplifies the fact that the idea of literature was not alien to Africa before the commencement of colonialism and Western education on the continent. Even before colonialism began in Africa, there had been literary writings in indigenous languages (Obiechina, 1990).

The point that has been established by scholars, literary critics and historians is that the genealogy of the African novel began with publication of novels in indigenous languages and on African pre-colonial experience (Albert Gerard, 1981; James Hodapp, 2012). The view of Gerard (1981: 147) is therefore corroborated:

> In historical fact, important segments of sub-saharan Africa had been introduced to writing and written literature long before the first white man, whether exploiter or explorer, reached her shores. In fact, one part of the continent (Ethiopia) had produced written works in its own languages even before the earliest literatures appeared in Western Europe in the Celtic and Germanic languages.

The view of Gerard suggests that literary writing in Africa predated colonialism and colonial experience on the continent. It is, therefore, a misrepresentation of fact to say that literary writing, particularly in the genre of novel began in Africa with the colonial experience. Across the continent of Africa, there had been series of literary writings in the novel genre to reflect the cosmology and cultural epistemology of the

African people. From the above position, it is upheld in this study that written literature in Africa predated European colonialism in Africa. It is consequently wrong to closely attach the commencement of written literature in Africa to European colonialism. The argument here, however, is that the novel form is alien to Africa. It began in England with efforts of Daniel Defoe, Charles Dicken and Jane Austin. In Africa, on the other hand, there was the epic tradition (as elsewhere in the world), which is the precursor of African novel.

With colonialism and Christian evangelisation that serve as the precursor of African written literature (in its narrow sense), literary critics and scholars link African literature with European tradition of writing, particularly in the novel tradition. Since then, the novel tradition in Africa has spanned several decades of experimentation in style, form and content. Different opinions and reasons have been advanced about the genealogy and trends in contemporary African novels. These opinions have been informed by some sociological and political factors that define and determine African experience in relation to European contacts in the early 17th century. The Afro-European relations occasioned by exploration, trans-Atlantic slave trade, colonialism and post-colonialism gave a fresh insight into description of the African novel.

Colonialism with its characteristic cross-cultural reference is an important factor in the temporal and spatial description of the African novel because of its dominance in the description of the African experience and narratology across periods and regions. No African country is spared the pains and anguish of imperialism and colonialism. African writers consequently engaged the experience of colonialism in literature across all the genres.

The genealogy of the African novel reveals that some novels were written in African indigenous languages long before the African novel in English language. Among the early novels in African languages are Thomas Mofolo's *The Traveller of the East* (1906), *Pitseng* (1910) and *Chaka* (1925). Prior to the publication of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1957), there had been novels written and published in English language. Among the novels that predated the publication of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* are Casey Hayford's *Ethiopia Unbound* (1911), Kobina Sekyi's *The Anglo-Fante* (1918),

Sol Plaatje's *Mhudi* (1930) and Mabel Dove's *Woman in Jade* (1934). The first Francophone African novel was *Force Bronte* (1926) by Bakary Diallo (Hodapp 123).

Even with the genealogy of the African novel that has been given by literary historians and critics, the colonial factor has been a central issue in the description and discussion of the African novel. Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and later *Arrow of God* have received so much literary accolade owing to the way the two novels treat colonial encounter in Africa. *Things Fall Apart,* in particular, has become the toast of literary critics as the precursor of colonial novels of Africa and about Africa, using a Nigerian ethnic nationality.

Prior to the publication of *Things Fall Apart* as a response to how European novelists such as Joseph Conrad and Joyce Gary had presented Africa from jaundiced view, there had been some writings in the novel form. In some of these European novels about Africa and Africans, the people and the continent of Africa were pictured as entities with void existence. In these European novels such as *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad and *Mister Johnson* by Joyce Gary, the African personality and identity are mutilated and abused. The European novelists that were writing about Africa saw themselves combining the roles of metaphysicians and discoverers writing about the land (Africa) they knew little or nothing about. In the process of writing their novels, the novelists embark upon the explanation and description of Africa they hardly or barely knew as in *Mister Johnson* and *Heart of Darkness.* This opinion is consistent with the view of Michael Echeruo (1973: 3-4):

> Predictably, then, the European novelist of Africa, at his most serious level, tried to combine in himself the interests of the discoverer and the metaphysician. He recorded the lie of the land and described the patterns of its culture, at the same time he philosophised and moralised on the 'fundamental' meaning of the land and its peoples. Always at least by implication, he sets out to present and explain (that is 'discover') Africa to his native reader; its mystery, its meaning, its essential distinctiveness.

The kernel of the position of Echeruo is that European novels on Africa are subjective and parochial about the re-presentation of African identity and personality.

These European novelists did not see anything good about Africa and her people, rather, Africans were seen as the "wretched of the earth".

African writers began to react to the position by systematic deconstruction of the erroneous notion of European writers about Africa in their novels as represented in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God;* Camara Laye's *African Child* and *Radiance of the King;* Mongo Beti's *Poor Christ of Bomba;* Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy* and *the Old man and the Medal,* etc. These writers made frantic efforts to balance Afro-European relations and bring out the power relations between the dominant and the dominated group. In most of the novels by African writers, there are a lot of complications in African experience that make Africans suffer the pangs of pain and anguish in the hands of the minority colonisers. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God,* lack of unity among individuals and communities made the colonial projects in Umuofia and Umuaro respectively to survive. In *Houseboy,* greed and covetousness made Toundi to 'enslave' himself to the precarious colonial situation when he left home.

Accordingly, the sociology and politics of African literature point to four major thematic concerns, as observed by Ola Rotimi (1991:6-7). In the opinion of Rotimi, the four major thematic concerns of African literature are negritude, culture conflict, angst and Utopian models. Negritude, as the first theme of African literature is concerned with issues on the redemption and revival of African culture and integrity. Novels in this category are Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard,* Camara Laye's *The African Child* and Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka.* The themes of the novels and prose fictions of this period present the beauty of the black man's culture.

The primary concern of "culture conflict" the second stage of the thematic thrust of African literature focuses on the attendant tension of contacts between African culture and European culture. The novels and other literary texts of this stage is a sort of "writing back by the empire to the centre" in the words of Edward Said. The novels of this period expose the ills of colonialism and European culture. Novels in this category are Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God,* Mongo Beti's *Mission to Kala,* Camara Laye's *Radiance of the King,* Ferdiand Oyono's *Houseboy,* etc.

The theme of angst, as explained by Rotimi (1991:6) is the blend of two German words (anger and protest). The theme angst is common in the novels that are written

shortly after colonial independence in African countries. There have been traits of bad governance, maladministration and economic mismanagement in Africa after political independence. The consequence, disillusionment, gave rise to anger in the people (Rotimi, 1991: 6). The anger and protest are directed not at the colonialists but the home grown tyrants, despotic African rulers who replaced the "colonial master".

The last stage of the thematic concern of African literature is the Utopian models. Briefly, this is a theme of hope in the face of seeming unrelieved, national despair (Rotimi, 1991: 6). Owing to the problem of bad governance that African masses suffered in the era of self-governance, there is disillusionment that affects their psyche. With an all pervasive disillusionment in a large number of independent African countries, some African writers begin to express hope for a better continent.

African writers, based on their attitude to sociological and political experiences on the continent, can be categorised as situational writers as evident in the evolutionary and emerging trends in the novel tradition on the continent. These African writers are sensitive to the sociological and political experiences that are prevalent. During and after the nationalist movement and the agitation for political independence in African continent, some nationalist leaders and writers alike resort to the use of the novel tradition in the genre of fiction, non-fiction and auto-biography to agitate for self-governance across the continent of Africa. To this end, Ademola Dasylva (2011: 209) corroborated this view:

> During the colonial era for example, the African writer was part of the great nationalists movement, in some cases had played a leading role: Leopold Seddar Senghor (Senegal), Caseley Heyford (Ghana), Nnamdi Azikiwe, Afolabi Olabimtan, Dennis Osadebay (Nigeria), Kenneth Kaunda (Zambia), Jomo Kenyatta (Kenya), etc. The struggle apparently paid off as evident in the political independence that followed in most African states, beginning with Ghana on March 6, 1957.

As a nationalist tool, African novels became potent weapons in fighting colonialism. This is done by presenting the hypocrisy of colonialism and the beauty of self-governance in African states.

Considering the different situations that have influenced African writers in the past and recent decades, Chidi Amuta (1986) identifies three historical phases that African writers have passed through. These historical phases are cultural re-affirmation, identity crisis and post-colonial disenchantment. These three historical phases reflect the prevailing situations of the moment. The critic argued that the first historical phase came about in the 1920s, particularly during the Harlem Renaissance that focused on cultural reaffirmation, reclamation and re-assertion. This situation emanated in view of the colonial structure in African states that gave more privilege to European culture and tradition. During colonialism in Africa, the culture and tradition of Africans were relegated to the background and thus, Europeans were seen as the exotic other while Africans were seen as the demonic other. Consequently, African writers in the first phase began to react to this situation as evident in the plot, subject matter, characterisation and thematic thrusts of their novels.

The second phase identified by Amuta is identity crisis. This phase shows the situation of "double consciousness" of African writers, scholars and intelligentsias that have been exposed to Western education. These writers found themselves at a crossroad of culture particularly between European culture and their indigenous African culture.

The third historical phase of African writers came shortly after political independence of most African countries. The masses became disillusioned with the political leaders and the gross mismanagement of human and material resources of some African countries. Africa novelists such as Chinua Achebe in *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of Savannah,* Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Petals of Blood* and *Devil on the Cross,* Ayi Kwei Armah in *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born, Fragments* and *Two Thousand Seasons,* etc. treated post-colonial disenchantment in their novels. The above discourse on the historical phases of African novels shares semblance with Rotimi's classification of thematic concerns of African literature.

Considering the magnitude of post-colonial challenges that African countries recently face, it can be said that African novelists will only engage in the rehash or repeat of what others have said. This is a central concern of literary critics and scholars. African novelists, since the period of political independence from the shackles of imperial powers, have been commenting on the problems of corruption, poor leadership and gross

maladministration that have been militating against progress and development of Africa. These novelists and other writers only vary their styles and techniques to comment on the socio-political and economic problems of their countries. Styles and techniques thus play central role in the art of novel writing in Africa. Accordingly, Benedict Ibitokun (1988: 36) therefore, corroborated this view:

> ... no modern writer can claim that he is saying anything new and if he says so, nobody will believe him. What makes a writer great is his blend of medium and message and his artistic bravura: the peculiar and unfamiliar way of saying the familiar thing.... What grows after centuries of tilling is not really message but medium. The day medium attains the cul-de-sac of message, that day is the dooms day of art and the end of our endeavour as critics, readers or connoisseurs.

From the view of Ibitokun, as given above, it can be said that there is medium-message continuum. Thus, it can be averred that both have influence on each other for literary success in the art of fiction. Contemporary African novels can be said to be blend of style, content and message to convey meaning to the audience.

African writers, irrespective of regions are concerned with the collective experience of the masses and how this has affected human and capital development on the continent. In the course of recording African experience, some African writers have resorted to the use of history for identity construction. Thus, African writers (implicitly or explicitly) use history continuously in their literary texts. The use of history or historical experiences of Africa is a pointer that history and literature have some symbiotic relationship. It is this symbiotic relationship that may inform the view of Ibitokun (2010: 8) that obsession with history is an attempt to understand and have a control with one's environment:

> An excessive obsession with the past betrays a foetal syndrome, a puerile dread of futuristic and possibilitic horizons, a deft but shameless plunge into spiritualistic niceties and a hidden incapability to lord it over the universe or at least, over one's immediate environment..,

African writers, thus, become advocate of African history through the theme and subject matter of their texts. The core of the view of Ibitokun is that African literary

writers should make their texts relevant to the interpretation of contemporary situations for future possibility. In the use of history, literary writers cannot be absolutely objective because of the interplay of literary imagination and the use of history in the making of the text.

Another important concern of African writers in the evolution and growth of African literature is the gender issue. Literary critics and scholars have identified the fact that colonial and gender factors cannot be overlooked in the discourse of African literature. Before the emergence of women writers in Africa, there were many male writers who subjectively present the experiences and personality of women in their literary texts. In the novels of the first generation of African writers, women characters are victims of relegation and poor representation. In these novels (e.g. *Jagua Nana, Things Fall Apart,* etc.) women are rather presented as the passive and docile wives with no independent opinions and daring ones among them are presented as prostitutes. Thus, male writers present themselves as the creator of their creatures (the women characters).

In the 1980s, there was the emergence of female writers that offered to de-construct existing image of women in literature. For this reason, there is a dialogic discourse of gender issues in literature. Female writers see literature as a vessel for making their situations and experience known from their own perspectives. In the novels written by female writers, men are usually presented as irresponsible, egoistic, incorrigible and unfaithful. Novels in this category are reactionary and they are meant to write back to male writers that have negatively presented women in their earlier novels. Thus, with the consideration of the varied sociological and political factors that inform themes and motifs of African literature it can be said that it (literature) is a collective cultural product.

2.2   Masculinity and Gender Studies

In recent times, attention of experts on gender studies has been focused on the masculinity studies. This development may be informed by the understanding of the fact that gender study involves the study of male and female peculiarities and characteristics. Masculinity studies aim at examining the nature and dynamics of men, maleness and male activities in relation to women and the society. At the inception of gender studies,

however, women attention have been paid to feminist studies because of the misconception that women are the endangered species in a phallocentric society.

African epistemology and social structure favour man in socio-political and economic opportunities. In the European society, particularly in the Victorian English Society, men were given more social, political and economic opportunities. These varying degrees of opportunities for men and women inform feminist and masculinity studies.

Despite the recognition of masculine ideals and powers across the cultures of the world, there are some differences in the degree of measurement of masculine ethics from one culture to another. The yardsticks for the determination of masculinity of individual males can be based on the degree of bravery, adventurism and ability to manage and control precarious situations. In most cultures, men are not expected to show or display emotions. Those cultures regard this as an act of cowardice and an effeminate behaviour. To this end, men do not display/show emotions of fear, pain and any form of discomfort.

Through social conventions and some unwritten moral codes, phallocentric society encourages the suppression of feminine power in socio-political structure and order. With this socio-political structure and order, women are limited to private domains of domesticity and passivity as against the public domain of male activity. Studies of scholars (sociologists, anthropologists and gender critics) such as Stoller (1968) Farell (1974), Chinweizu (1990), Kimmel (1994), Wood (1999), Haywood and Ghaill (2003), Lindsay and Miescher (2003), Sotunsa (2009) and Akorede (2011) have identified the psycho dynamics of male and female perception and reception in a phallocentric society. These numerous studies hinted on the causes, course and social realities of gender polarity and how masculinity is being demonstrated by men in human societies across the globe.

Kimmel (1994:38), identifies two forms of patriarchy in human societies. These forms of patriarchy are discussed along the line of the sphere of masculine influence: (i) public patriarchy; and (ii) domestic patriarchy.

Public Patriarchy refers to the institutional arrangements of a society, the predominance of males in all power positions within the economy and polity, both locally, nationally and internationally, as well as the "genderisation" of those institutions themselves (by

47

which the criteria for promotion, for example, appear to be gender-neutral, but actually reproduce the gender order).

Domestic Patriarchy refers to the emotional and familial arrangements in a society, the ways in which men's power in the public area is reproduced at the level of private life. This includes male-female relationships as well as family life, child socialisation and among others.

Considering the forms of patriarchy identified by Kimmel, it can be said that masculinity is felt everywhere and in every activity in a phalloncentric society. Patriarchy (domestic and public) is sustained and maintained with religious injunctions by the three major religions (Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religions) in Africa. Although the three major religions entrench partriarchal values and contribute to the oppression of women in Africa, they do so through different means (Sotunsa, 2009:33). The means and practices of these three religions favour masculinity in an African society. In the contemporary African societies, masculinity is more pronounced because of the "collapse" of the traditional values and more as a result of modernisation and industrialisation. To this end, this study corroborates the view of Sunday Oke (1996:11):

> Modernisation, proliferation of religions which polluted
> …traditional religion and value systems coupled with mad
> quest for material possession, lack of mutual respect and
> absolute disrespect for the institution of marriage and loss
> of past cultural glory, made women to have problems.

The tenets of those three religions pay more attention to masculine values in private and public affairs. To this end, men enjoy more privileges in marriage than women.Unequal access to economic resources, social and political opportunities gives room for the phenomenon of hegemonic masculinity. Some men are more empowered than fellow men and for this reason they assert their will over the less-privilege individuals among them. In the traditional society, hegemonic masculinity is seen in the mobilisation of physical strength, supernatural power and wealth. This study, therefore, corroborates the opinion of D. I. Jimoh (2008:106-7):

> Traditional forms of hegemonic masculinities, in the pre-colonial period include mobilisation of physical violence and supernatural power in competing for state power and wealth. In short, some of the modes of operation of political actors before colonial rule involved patron-client relations, formation of private armies and group solidarity in exclusively male dominated cultic group.

The above opinion of Jimoh shows that hegemonic masculinity is present in all ages and at all periods. Studies have shown that in hegemonic masculinity both males and females can be victims of oppression. Men with extra social and political opportunities always have the urge to assert their will over anybody within their domains of influence. Instances of hegemonic masculinity are found in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*. The protagonists of these two novels demonstrate traits of hegemonic masculinity in their relationship with male and female characters who do not have the same social and economic might as them.

2.3 Conceptualising Gender and Gender Discourse in Africa

There have been different theoretical and sociological discourses on the meaning of gender and its distinction as opposed to sex. The argument in this direction is based on the consideration of nature and culture. The feminist theorists and gender specialists have opined that the basic feature of sex in human social relations is nature (the factor that is conditioned by the anatomical and biological compositions of humans).

Barbara Eakins and Gene Eakins (1978:4) consider sex to be "biological difference between females and males - differences in the genetic and reproductive functions". What this suggests is that there are physical manifestations of sex in individuals. The physique and the anatomical compositions of individuals in every human society give their clear biological identity in terms of maleness and femaleness.

Similarly, Anthony Giddens (1989:158) is of the view that "sex is biological or anatomical differences between men and women, whereas gender concerns the psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females". There is no significant difference in the conceptualisation of sex, as given by Eakins and Eakins, as well as Giddens. What this suggests is that no person can alter the meaning of the term sex. Irrespective of culture and gender orientation, the term sex has universal appeal and

application in gender discourses. The term, therefore, enjoys some objective meaning and interpretation among feminist, masculinist and gender critics.

Despite the fact that sex has objective interpretation and meaning among feminist, masculinist and gender theorists of different backgrounds, there have been attachment of some socio-cultural limitations to the conceptualisation of sex. The meaning of sex, therefore, is extended to be gender. In this regard, gender becomes a socio-cultural construct that is meant to stereotype sex role and identity within a specific cultural matrix. In the construction of gender and the distinction between sex and gender, there is nature-culture continuum. In the light of this argument, there are ambivalent interpretation of sexual identities of men and women in society. The simple interpretation of the distinction between sex and gender is that nature delineates the meaning of sex while culture delineates the meaning of gender.

The structure of human society reveals inequality and stratification. One of the parameters that is used to measure stratification in society is gender that spells out the sex roles and identities of individuals. Patriarchal society, in its gender construction, favours male hegemony and masculine ethos. Some feminists and gender theorists do not subscribe to the divine theory of male dominance in society. The views of Barbara Lusk Forisha (1978: 68-69) and Marilyn French (1985:65) are representational of this position. In her argument on male hegemony in human society, Marilyn French (1985: 65) is of the view:

> Male dominance is not a reality.... It is not necessary. There are cultures and situations in which males are not dominant. Men are not always stronger than women, nor does the rule of might lead to male dominance per se, but to the domination of certain individuals, males and females (unless females are purposely excluded by consensus of the males) over all others.

Similarly, Barbara Lusk Forisha (1978: 68-69) postulates:

> It is no wonder that men refuse to acknowledge that their position is neither natural nor divinely ordained. If they were to concede that their position is just the result of social circumstances, their superior position would become open to questions and vulnerable.

In order to maintain the gender construct of the society, patriarchal society enshrines chauvinistic position of male hegemony in language and other cultural discourses in order for the male to sustain the Olympian height of gender.

The above position on gender reveals the fact that the conceptualisation and application of gender issues in social discourses is artificial and human. This argument aligns with the position of Beth B. Hess, Markson Elizabeth and Stein J. Peter (1985: 193):

> We become gendered persons living in a gendered world, thinking gendered thoughts. Depending on the culture, these gendered roles can overlap or be so different that men and women have difficulty understanding one another's experiences.

Literature and gender, in recent times, has become one of the research foci of literary scholars and critics. This study aims at investigating the gender perception, reception and stereotypes that have formed the matter and meaning of literary texts. The reference, in this study, is on African literature.

A thorough examination and consideration of gender issues in African literature has revealed a bipolar structure of the literary writers, audience and critics. The gender discourse in African literature has generated the idea of paradigm construction of the dominant paradigm and the recessive paradigm. The idea of dominant paradigm suggests that the societal values favour the operations and activities of members of this group. Members of the dominant paradigm dictate what is accepted as norms in literature and life. The recessive paradigm is dominated and not well favoured in the social matrix and socio-human relations. Members of this paradigm do not enjoy prominence and their fate in literature and life is determined by the norms set by the dominant paradigm. In the discourse of African literature, the dominant paradigm is taken to be male writers that pioneered written tradition of African literature while females/women characters in their texts are taken as the recessive paradigm. This is because the female characters in narrative fictions become the creatures that are created according to the taste and desire of their creators (the male writers).

African literature, at the inception, was under the control and hegemony of male writers that essentially interrogates how Africa and Africans were presented in European

fictions of Africa. Their works, particularly in the genre of prose, question the backdrop portrayal of African personality and identity. Thus, these fictional works are regarded as reactionary. In the construction of the plot and themes of their fictions, these male African writers (un) consciously create female characters in questionable manner. This act of omission or commission by the male writers engineer gender discourse of African literature.

In the pioneer written African prose fictions and by extension African oral narratives, there have been different gender representations of women in the positive and the negative perspectives. This ambivalent portrayal of women by male writers have spurred different responses from feminist/womanist critics of literature. Reacting to how male writers create the image of their female characters, Ellman (1978: 101-102) argues that the way these male writers present women in their literary texts is "substandard and false". She maintains this argument based on the perceived bias of patriarchal society about women personality and identity. It is, therefore, maintained that "the image of the woman in such works is a mere reflection of the society that produced them" (Yetunde Akorede, 2011: 112). The deduction from this position is that literature upholds the values and norms of the society. This is why the image of women in literature is similar to the image of women in life.

Ruth Sheila (1980: 64), on the nature and form of representation of women experience in literature, comments that there are two main forms of representation of women personality and experience in literature. In her position, she avers that there are "serviceable" and "non-serviceable" images of women in literature. In her argument, the serviceable image of women is within the set standard for women in a patriarchal society. In this regard, there are character portrayals of women as obedient and subservient wives, virtuous and chaste women, innocent and righteous daughter, good and the virgins. In many male-authored texts, the ideal young wife is portrayed as submissive, pliable and dependent, almost giving the impression of a half-wit, stupid and unintelligent being (Akorede, 2011: 112). The portrayal of women characters in the light of serviceable image is conforming to the normative standard set for ideal women in a patriarchal society. Through this image, therefore, the patriarchal society attempts to sustain the status quo of female silence and subservience. The non -serviceable image, on the other

hand, is parochial and biased on the potential of women capabilities to advance humanity. The non-serviceable image presents women as individuals with anti-societal values and norms. In this instance, women are presented as promiscuous characters, arrogant, adulterous and reactionary. In her argument, Sheila (1980: 65) summarises the character traits of non-serviceable image of women:

> The patriarchal images of women reflect them as human beings with less intelligence...physically almost disabled, less able physically, psychologically and spiritually; small of body, mind, and character; often bad or destructive.

It is the above non-serviceable image of women in male-authored texts that spurred reactions of some female writers, with specific reference to the sub-genre of novel. This is because "feminist theory rejects the rigid traditional sex based role stereotypes ascribed to women" (Betty Friedan, 1983: 51). The stereotypic representation of women values in literature is an attempt to sustain male hegemony and rob women of their human integrity and dignity. Women, in this instance, are presented as the marginalised group whose views and opinions do not count in the scheme of things in the society.

The three decades of African literature reveal masculine ethos in thematic construction of literary texts. The male authors of this period, particularly in their debut and subsequent novels focus more attention on the serviceable image of women. This is meant to covertly tell women their space and role in real life. In doing this, the male writers, in the view of Okereke (1998: 145) "relegate their female characters to secondary spaces, indeed to literary ghettos, as lovers, bedmates, entertainers and sexual battlegrounds for men in power". The relegation of women identity and person in literary texts of the first three decades of literary creativity in Africa is an extension of the sociology of human relations in a patriarchal society that upholds male dominance and female invisibility.

In traditional African society, the socialisation process of male and female children covertly encourage the centrality of male individuals as against the marginality of female individuals in the arrangement of opportunities and privileges in the society. This position is consistent with the view of Imoh Abang Emenyi (2005: 38):

> In essence, male and female children are socialised differently: the former is groomed to be a conqueror while the latter is trained to serve his needs. The prominence given to male traits and attributes that are positively valued has culminated in the institutionalisation of male dominance. The female is planted in domestic space as a wife and mother...

As part of the institutionalisation of male dominance, male authors, in their early narrative fictions emphasise the serviceable and non-serviceable images of women depending on the ideology that they try to envision. As a way of extending patriarchal domination of women in a gender-biased society, male authors negatively present the personality of female characters in their texts. In the line of this argument, Florence Stratton (1988: 147) is of the opinion:

> Their female characters are enclosed in the restricted spheres of behaviour of the stereotypes of a male tradition, their human potential buried in shallow definitions of their sex. Silence, like the slave woman, by blows, - either to their bodies or psyches - they are forced to submit to the necessity of conforming with the externally imposed requirements of their masculine societies.

The entry of female writers to the literary world in Africa can be traced to 1960s with writers like Flora Nwapa. There was, however, the boom in women literary creativity in Africa, with reference to prose fiction, since 1980s with writers like Mariama Ba (Senegal), Buchi Emecheta and Zynab Alkali (Nigeria), Nawal- El- Saadawi (Egypt), Ama Ata Aidoo (Ghana) and Werewere Liking (Cameroon), etc. These female writers attempt, in their literary texts, self-inscription as against parochial presentation of women identity in the male-authored literary texts. In her appraisal of female characterisation in female-authored texts, Sandra O'Neale (1988: 146-147) states that female characters in female-authored texts:

> Are treated with love and respect. Their physical features whether thin or obese is seldom the issue... (but) the immensity of her willing and sacrificial service for her people and her yearning for a better life for her daughters... grandmothers are redeemed progenitors and socially revered icons.

The deduction from the above position is that female authors are poised to debunk the negative portrayal of women in male-authored texts. They present themselves as a people with facts and figures about the personality and integrity of women in life and literature. For this reason, the life and experiences of women can be best narrated by women without prejudice and bias.

In the female-authored novels, at the early part of the 1980s till the present time, there have been traces of self-inscription in the plot and subject matter of the texts. In doing this, they adopt different discursive strategies and narrative techniques that range from first person through the omniscient narrative technique to the autobiographical style. Aduke Adebayo (2015: 39) comments on the motivation for female writers of narrative fiction and their narrative strategies:

> Most African female writers create out of the necessity to tell their own stories in thinly-veiled fictional forms; seeing themselves as representatives of African women and correctors of certain well-worn prejudices concerning' African women. In short, they tell it as it is. This explains the predominance of the semi-autobiographical mode and the sociological orientation of their writings.

What the above submission suggests is that women have come of age to offer alternative voice on how their person and gender can be read and interpreted in a patriarchal society. This literary practice aims at interrogating masculine ideology in literature that subverts the person and identity of women. Adrienne Rich (1979: 207) justifies the reasons for the literary attitude of women against the masculine ideologies in literary discourses:

> Masculine ideologies are creation of subjectivity: they are neither objective nor value free, nor exclusively 'human' ... we (must) recognise fully the inadequacy for us, the distortion of male created ideologies, and act out of that recognition.

The recognition of the inadequacy of masculine ideologies in literary creativity motivates the dialogic discourses of gender in literary creativity. The idea of dialogism, in the context of this study, is patterned after Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) conceptualisation of the term, dialogism. The core argument of dialogism is heterogeneity and multiplicity of meanings. This suggests that a text has different layers of meaning that align with the

ideologies and artistic visions of various groups in a literary community (the dominant, the recessive, the marginalised, the prominent and the oppressor and the oppressed). Thus, the essence of dialogism or dialogisation of literary texts is the interrogation of the status-quo unlike monologisation of the text that upholds a dominant paradigm. Female novelists, therefore, appraise their jaundiced representation in male-authored texts and thereafter offer alter-native voices. On the dialogisation of texts, Emenyi (2005:18) remarks:

> ... every artistic creation is an utterance which is capable of producing other utterances in reaction to the initial discourse. The interaction between utterances (or voices) which Bakhtin calls "dialogisation" re-lativises the utterances by engaging the different voices in a discursive struggle.

In dialogism, there are differing voices that engage in counter-discursive narration as revealed in their characterisation, thematic construction and subject matter of the texts.

Based on the above position on dialogism and its significance to gender discourse of literature, this study proposes that there is gender agenda in African literature, with specific reference to African novels. This gender agenda is established through the ideology a writer presents/projects in his/her texts. A literary text is an ideological construction and this is revealed in the diction, subject matter, theme and characterisation of the texts. Among the ideology envisioned in literary texts are Marxist, socialist, nativist and gender. The last in the list is the focus of this study.

It is in this direction of gender ideology that this study appraises the concepts of ideology and masculine ideology. This is done within the framework of patriarchy and gynocriticism. Patrick Manning (1974: 239) offers a clear description of ideology:

> a set of relatively explicit and systematic beliefs, from which practical social applications may be derived, which has its origin in the interests of a defined group within a society, and which has a large degree of validity for that group. Each ideology contains a methodology by which society and its changes may be analysed, a statement of the relationship between ideology and social reality, a set of approved values, and a social programme. The programme includes a set of social objectives, a set of tactics for reaching the objectives, a rationale.

Similarly, Malcolm Hamilton (1987: 38), on the meaning and application of ideology in society, states that ideology:

> is a system of collectively held normative and reputedly factual ideas and beliefs and attitudes advocating a particular pattern of social relationships and arrangements, and/or aimed at justifying a particular pattern of conduct, which its proponents seek to promote, realize, pursue or maintain.

From the positions of Manning (1974) and Hamilton (1987), some assumptions can be made about ideology and its relevance in gender discourse. These assumptions are validity, collectivity, group consciousness and practical applicability. In essence, ideology guides and guards social actions as manifested in certain various degrees. In relation to gender ideology, patriarchal society privileges male values over female values. In this regard, masculine hegemony is valid in a patriarchal society while the same society is silent over the identity of women. Among men in patriarchal society, there is group consciousness that upholds the fact that female members of the society should be socialised in a manner that will make them submissive to masculine ego.

The consequence of this group consciousness is that it establishes the parochial view that women are dependent on men for the realisation of their desires. The practicability of gender ideology that supports male dominance is found in the bipolar structure of the African society into the paradigms of exotic (male) and demonic (female). This paradigmatic construction of gender identity and stereotype in the society has gained practical expression and application in art, literature and the society at the micro and macro levels of human relations.

The practical application of gender ideology and identity is found in the orbit of literature. This is because literature is seen as the expression and interpretation of life. Thus, in literary texts rooted and influenced by gender ideology, authors (male and female) offer gender representation of societal tensions and strains of gender in the thematisation of their texts. The female writers, as the marginalised group see their personality battered by the jaundiced gender perception by men and male-authors of literary texts and hence, the need to take actions to correct the anomalies. This decision is, therefore, consistent with the view of Florence Stratton (1988: 147):

> Living in bondage to men, but desiring to live freely and fully, they are bewildered by, or seethe with inner rage at their servitude to a structure of values matched to the needs of others... They are *schizophrenic,* their personalities fragmented by their desire both to accept and reject their conditions.

From the above view, it is argued in this study that female writers suffer from personality/mental disorders influenced by their gender perception and reception in a patriarchal society.

In the construction of gender ideology, literature becomes a tool of (mis-) representation. This is based on the set norms and values of the society. An ideology, in this instance, becomes the philosophy of life of members of the society. Accordingly, a societal ideology is enshrined in the collective consciousness of the people through literary and performing arts that have become important media of cultural expression. In the light of this view, female writers focus on female body for certain epistemological reasons because "the focus on the female body affords the female writer an opportunity to analyse the great parts women have had in production and reproduction of meaning as they tend to relate to their sex" (Mabel Evwierhoma, 2002: 22).

While considering the interplay of gender ideology and relations in life and literature, there are possibilities of gender conflicts. In gender ideology of literary creativity in Africa, there are two broader perspectives of gender conflicts: inter-gender conflict and intra-gender conflict. These conflicts in African novels do advance their plot for the realisation of the novel thematic pre-occupation. Yetunde Akorede (2011:78-193) identifies and discusses different layers of gender conflicts and roles of women in women-women conflicts. In her argument on intra-gender conflicts involving women, Akorede classifies women into three, based on their position and experience in the conflicts. These are women as villains, women as heroines and women as victims. These roles and experiences are independent of another. What is, however, observed is that male characters in African narrative fictions play some roles to create intra-gender conflicts among female characters in the texts.

The female intra-gender conflicts are, in some cases, caused by marriage (co-wives intrigues, mother-in-law/daughter-in-law antagonism, and wife-sister-in-law

conflicts). All these show that there are usually tensions in marriage. The aforementioned forms of marital conflicts have been presented in some African prose fictions by female writers. Buchi Emecheta's *The Joy of Motherhood,* for instance, presents co-wives intrigues through the characterisation of Nnu Ego and Amaka (the two wives of Nnaife). The conflicts of the two wives contribute to the advancement of the plot of the novel. What is important here is that co-wives intrigues/rivalries are not new to the modern African novels. This form of rivalry was common in the subject of African folktales. Moreover, "common themes in many African tales focus on women's rivalry, co-wives' envious murderous tendencies and similar preoccupations" (M.E.M. Kolawole, 1998: 21).

In an attempt to offer clarification on the pattern of women-women relationship in African novels, Akorede (2011: 188-192) prefers friendliness and hostility models of relationship among women: reciprocated friendliness between senior wife and junior wife/ among senior wife, junior wife and mother-in-law, unreciprocated friendliness between senior wife and junior wife, reciprocated hostility between junior wife and senior wife/among junior wife, senior wife and mother-in-law and unreciprocated hostility between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. The critic goes further to identify and discuss the centrality of men to the intra-gender conflicts among women:

> The theory of intra-gender conflict establishes the centrality of man to the disagreement, disharmony and enmity found among and between women. He is unconsciously idolised and his affection becomes a rare gem, which has to be sought after, sought for, and if possible monopolised by the mother, the senior wife or the younger wife. (Akorede, 2011: 193)

From the position of Akorede, it is inferred here that male characters in African novels are trouble makers that cause intra-gender conflicts among the female characters in the texts. There are also some traces of intra-gender conflicts between or among male characters in African novels. These conflicts, however, focus on public issues and some socio-political ideologies. For instance, there is an intra-gender conflicts between Chief Nanga and Odili in Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People.* This conflict is caused by difference in the political ideologies of these two male characters. Besides, there is rivalry between Chief Nanga and Odili over Clara. The lady (Clara), a girl friend of Odili

sleeps with Chief Nanga and this contributes to the conflict between the duo (Chief Nanga and Odili).

Inter-gender conflicts take place between or among individuals with different sexes and in this instance, male-female conflicts. These male-female conflicts in African novels can be husband and wife, brother and sister, father and daughter, as well as wife and brother-in-law. Though this form of conflict is not prominent in African novels, there have been some instances of this in some African novels. In *Nervous Conditions,* for instance, there is an inter-gender conflict between Tambuwal (the protagonist of the novel) and her father, Babamukuru.

There have been different studies on literature and gender. These studies have approached the subject matter from different ideological perspectives, such as women's fate in a patriarchal society and disruption of gender roles as a result of perceived marginalisation, in journals, books and collection of essays. What is, therefore, certain is that one cannot shy away from the fact that literature has provided a platform for the expression and interrogation of gender biases in the African society and beyond. The volumes of publications on gender issues in African literature have offered a view that biological and sociological influences cannot be overlooked in the determination of sex and/or gender of individuals.

The 24th edition of *African Literature Today*, as edited by Ernest N. Emenyonu and published in 2004, focuses on "New Women's Writing in African Literature". This edition contains thirteen articles on literature written by female writers with focus on the subject matter, themes, motif and characterisation. The lead article, by Aderemi Raji-Oyelade, in the journal is on women's poetry from Northern Nigeria. The writer-critic states that he is motivated to write the paper because of the paucity of materials and limited attention given to female poets from Northern Nigeria. He argues that the modern Northern Nigerian female poets write to interrogate the culture of silence they have been conscripted to. Raji-Oyelade (2004:3), therefore, avers "it is an obvious point that contemporary Northern Nigerian literature, in the tradition of several other regional and national literatures in Africa, is largely dominated by men". The basic deduction from the arguments of Raji-Oyelade is that his focus on literature and gender in Africa is sociological, historical and analytical with Maria Ajima's *Cycle* (1996)– a collection of

poetry. Raji-Oyelade, however, does not cover the patterns and dimensions of the inter-gender and intra-gender conflicts in this research work. The present study, therefore, engages selected African novels in critical discourses of inter-gender and intra-gender conflicts bringing out how these conflicts have charted a new discourse in the criticism of gender issues in African novels.

Tunde Fatunde's "Calixthe Beyala rebels against female oppression" is also an important essay in the edition of *African Literature Today, Volume 24*. The essay approaches feminine critique of African literature with radical poetics. Fatunde's thesis in the paper is that Beyala is reactionary in the novel. She condemns the oppression and marginalisation of women folks that constitute the characters in the text. Fatunde also posits in the article that women in Beyala's novel are on the quest for love, justice and happiness. According to him (2004: p. 72):

> Beyala's solution to battered African womanhood lies in the absolute autonomy of the woman vis-a vis the man. She is in favour of Simone de Beauvoir's theory of the complete independence of women as the most viable alternative to their oppression. Most of Beyala's characters desire freedom, happiness and prosperity outside all forms of marital arrangement with men. Her characters permanently distrust men. Even where there seems to be a successful matrimonial home, death comes in to destroy such an arrangement. Consequently, female separatism becomes the only viable option and remedy to female oppression.

Fatunde concludes that Beyala has been deeply involved in the literary creativity about the plights of women and advocacy against the oppression and victimisation of women in Africa with particular reference to Cameroon. In his discussion of Beyala's novel, Fatunde engages the discourse with feminist poetics.

Fatunde's essay, however, does not project serious poetics of gender relation because it is one-sided on the plights of women. The essay presents women only as victims of circumstances in male-dominated society without any consideration for a balanced argument on trans-gender representation of men-women relationship in a patriarchal society. This study, therefore, closely examines and discuss trans-gender relationship of men and women in a patriarchal society.

Mabel Evwierhoma's (2002) *Female Empowerment and Dramatic Creativity in Nigeria* is on the ideological construction on women and gender-based literature. The Book focuses attention on the characterisation of women in African drama with specific reference to the plays of Tess Onwueme. She argues in the book that gender discourse in African literature is ideological. To her, the gender ideology in African literature is a matter of hegemonic construction with male writers maintaining dominant paradigm. She focuses her arguments in the book, therefore, on the ideology of power and powerlessness. Evwierhoma, (2002: p. 231) concludes:

> Tess Onwueme may be credited with being one female dramatist who has consciously treated the woman question, woman-centered ideologies in her texts as she does in *Go Tell It To Women* and *The Reign of Wazobia* irrespective of the obstacles on the way of her creativity. However, Tess Onwueme's future plays are likely to manifest more radical traits, as this text has shown. This is a welcome fact because the time has come, when 'namby-pamby' women should not dominate the pages of play texts and the stages of our theatres.

The kernel of Evwierhoma's and Onwueme's arguments is that women writers, in the attempt to reconstruct their identity and integrity, advances from negotiation to militancy in the thematic concern of their plays.

Evwierhoma's book reveals the trajectory of argumentation in female authored plays with much emphasis on poetics of angst (anger and protest). The whole argument in the book commends literary creative ingenuity of Tess Onwueme as a playwright with great passion to re-write the status and position of women in a patriarchal society. Her argument, however, fails to acknowledge the fact that men and women have complementary roles in a patriarchal society. The present study, consequently, engages the selected African novels in critical discourses to bring out the complementary roles of men and women as revealed in male and female-authored African novels. This is done with close examination of the characterisation and thematisation of the selected novels.

In another related study, Evwierhoma's (2002) *Issues in Gender, Drama and Culture in Nigeria* focuses attention on the gender dimension to literary and cultural studies by considering the fate and situations of women in a patriarchal society. She underlines the fact that there is explosion of silence in the writing of women writers in

Nigerian context. In her argument, she is of the view that the writings of these women writers are reactionary. Women writers have through their creativity attempted some affirmation of their realities, whether contemporary or historical (Evwierhoma, 2002: pp. 50-51). Evwierhoma's view in this other study contradicts her view in the previous study. She argues in this present study that women have accepted their fate and thus stick to the realities of their being and existence. This study, therefore, re-engages the argument that women's status in a patriarchal society is a reflection of socio-cultural order with individuals knowing his/her strengths and limitations. The characters in the selected novels have demonstrated this understanding of the gender relations in a patriarchal society.

Aduke Adebayo's (2015) edited book *Feminism and Black Women's Creative Writing: Theory, Practice and Criticism* contains seventeen essays on the subject matter and thematic concern of women writers across Africa. Some of these essays interrogate the injustice, unfairness and oppression of women in patriarchal society. In this regard, the essays are cross-generic of poetry, drama and prose. Emelia Oko's "the female estate – a study of the novels of Buchi Emecheta" addresses female characterisation in relation to the role of men in her fictional universe (Oko, 2015: p. 91):

> Emecheta's narrative functions on many levels. The five major novels are continuations of a central quest – the investigation of the female predicament, so that the heroines are dimensions of one central psyche. The intellectual oriented Adah, (translate as 1st daughter) a kind of prototype of Emecheta herself probes the root of things, questions the nature of her existence, examines the female estate and conversely the nature of the male existence, and underscores the mutual violence done to both sexes locked in the battle for supremacy where cooperation could have seemed a rationale humane ideal.

Oko's argument above reveals some dialecticism in gender discourse. It is this dialecticism that generates controversies and conflicts in African literature. The position of the critic is that Emecheta presents her own life (indirectly) to the audience.

Like critics before her, Oko is not critical of some sociological, religious and cultural variables which often predetermine gender relations in a patriarchal society. Her reading of the novels for her study is informed by her gender orientation as a woman. In

her argument, she blames men for the oppression and intimidation of women without due consideration for intra-gender oppression and intimidation among women. The present study, therefore, closely examines intra-gender oppression and intimidation in the selected novels and how this development has led to a new discourse in African literature.

Imoh Abang Emenyi's (2005) *Intersection of Gendered Voices* is a book that approaches gender discourses with Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism as the theory of the novel. The theory upholds that the monological discourse of male-authored text has given way to the dialogism with the emergence of female authors. She uses Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, Hansberry's *A Raisin in the Sun*, Jone's *Dutchman* and Sofola's *The Showers*. With the analysis of the texts, Emenyi argues that there is an intersection of gendered voices in African and African-American literature. In her argument on intersection of gendered voices, Emenyi (2005: 163) intones "it may be useful to recognise gender differences, but it is unnecessary to exploit it for the exploitation of any gender."

Though, Emenyi suggests dialogism in her argument in the intersection of gender voices, she does not critically reveal the nature and pattern of dialogism in her selected plays. The textual analyses of the plays do not clearly reveal the inter-gender reactions and counter-reactions between male and female in the selected plays. The plays and their analyses only reveal what is already known about gender relations in art and life. The present study, therefore, engages in a sociological and critical reading of the selected novels bringing out the new dimension and pattern of gender relations which African novelists have introduced into the gender discourse of African novels. The important area that will be examined in this direction is gender discourse shift.

Gender discourse has also found its rooting in drama and theatre. This has been exemplified by the publication of *African Theatre Women* (2002). The book contains nine essays on the aesthetics and dramatics of women writers. The essays in the book do not focus on the review feminist ethos as it has influenced gender politics within the African cultural framework. One of the major concerns of the essays is the analysis of the subject matter of the chosen dramatic and performance texts. Esi Dogbe's article "Visibility, eloquence and silence: women and theatre for development in Ghana". His arguments in

the essay are based on the empirical facts of live performances. He attempts to negate the general opinion that "women are the most vulnerable and disenfranchised segment of contemporary African society" (Dogbe, 2002: p. 85). The concern of the critic is on the use of theatre for development (TFD) for combating Malaria through the exposition of its context, facts and myths. He explains further:

> both field research and documented TFD material showed that the major constraints that women face in their communities are not physical invisibility, but the *difficulty of being heard when they do speak and the lack* of a critical mass of opinion and action to favour their input. (2002:96)

Mike Kuria's "Contextualising women's theatre in Kenya: Alakie – Akinyi Mboya's *Otongolia* and Ari Katini Nwachofi's *Mama ee*" comments on the politics and sociology of theatre practice in Kenya particularly as it affects the conditions of women. The paper queries the subversion of women in politics and social practices. He anchors his arguments on the characterisation, subject matter and the overall thematic concern of the texts. He concludes thus "these two plays should therefore be read as capturing the condition of women in African societies as well as their potential within the dynamics of their cultural and political environments" (Kuria, 2005: p. 57).

Ajoke Mimiko Bestman's (2012) "Reading Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* through the womanist's lens: the imperative of the female principle" offers a fresh insight into the re-reading of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in relation to the characterisation of women in the novel. She negates the previously held opinion that Achebe does not properly and adequately represent women in the novel. In her position, Achebe shows some regard for women characters in the novel. The inference from her argument is that Achebe is presented as a transsexual writer through the characterisation of his women characters. According to the critic:

> We posit that in *Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe paints a patriarchal society where manliness is esteemed without at the same time undermining the respect and role of women. Achebe's position rather than being sexist, as its often suggested, is womanist. In his first novel, he defends womanhood and projects a definitely positive image of women. He demonstrates robustly that where gender collaboration and complementarity are respected, there is harmony. By underscoring Okonkwo's machismo and

terrible subjugation of his wives, Achebe advocates the liberation of women from male chauvinists. We contend that the downfall of Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* is largely due to his denial of the female principle. (Bestman, 2015:170-171)

Put succinctly, all the above stated previous works on gender and African literature have not adequately handled gender discourse shift and intra-gender conflicts in African literature. They overtly or covertly address the issues of sexism and feminine oppression as well as resistance to subjugation in society and literature. This shortcoming in the previous research informs this study. The focus here is to examine and discuss different strategies that are adopted, in recent times, to handle gender issues in African literature. One of these strategies is gender shift (a situation in which a male writer writes in favour of women and uses such writing to agitate for women's rights and vice versa). The recent novels in Africa have also extended the frontiers of inter-gender conflicts with step-mother and step-son intrigues/rivalry. What were common in the past, however, was intra-gender conflicts of co-wives as well as wives and mother-in-laws.

The shortfalls of the above critical studies of gender issues in African literature are that they approached the matter from purely sociological and literary perspectives. What is meant is that the critics do not give detailed insight into the nature, dimension and motivation for the identified gender issues in their chosen texts. Their analyses of the chosen texts are done with surface-structure approach with no indepth critical standard of characterisation. A particular reference is made to Raji-Oyelade's study of the poetry of female poets. The essay is written without a due and critical consideration for the characters in these poems. This is inadequate for a study on the gender ideological orientation of selected female poets as mentioned in the essay. Besides, the previous studies did not give any consideration to gender shift and discourse intra-gender conflicts.

The present study, therefore, is a close critical analysis of the selected novels from the perspectives of gender shift and conflicts. The motivation for this is that African novelists in contemporary times have demonstrated creative ingenuity in their representation of gender discourse shift and intra-gender conflicts as revealed in the plot, thematisation and characterisation of their works.

CHAPTER THREE

INTRA AND INTER-GENDER CONFLICTS IN CHIKA UNIGWE'S *NIGHT DANCER* AND VIOLET BARUNGI'S *CASSANDRA*

Unigwe's *Night Dancer* and Barungi's *Cassandra: A Synopsis*

Night Dancer

Night Dancer focuses attention on the life and experience of the protagonist, Adanma. She (Adanma) is in search of identity and kinship after the death of her mother. The death of her mother offers Adanma an opportunity to know much of her late mother through the 'memoirs' the latter leaves behind. Before her death, Ezi (Adanma's mother) has instructed that the box containing the memoirs should not be opened until she is dead. At the opening of the box, Adanma sees some shocking revelation about her mother's identity, her mother's kin and relatives. She also knows that her father is not dead.

Some aspects of the memoirs are a bit more complex for the understanding of Adanma and for which reason, she makes regular consultation with Madam Gold, her late mother's intimate friend and confidant. Madam Gold sheds more light on some of the issues raised in the memoirs. Thus, with the assistance of Mama Gold, Adanma is able to know the hidden information about her mother. Each reading of the memoirs offers different insights into the life and time of her mother.

The memoirs explain the reasons for Ezi to quit her marriage. With Mike. The primary reason for her quiting the marriage of many years is because Mike impregnates and, eventually, marries Rapu, their house maid. This is an unbearable shock for Ezi. She feels that the next thing to do is to quit the marriage. Despite the appeals of her kins and relatives, especially her father and mother, Ezi refuses to return to the marriage. She resolves to raise Adanma alone. This action of hers severs her relationship with her mother, father, brothers and sisters. In the process of living with her resolution, she becomes ostracised and stigmatised with her daughter (Adanma). She (Adanma) grows without knowledge of any aunt or uncle, no grandfather and grandmother. Ezi also tells her daughter (Adanma) that she has no father. No mother in the neighbourhood wants her

daughter to relate with Adanma. These mothers do not want their daughters to be wrongly socialised into the assumed waywardness of Ezi, Adanma's mother.

The memoirs reveal certain issues about the paternity and kinship of Adanma. With the revelation of the memoirs, Adanma embarks on a journey that will ensure reconciliation with the kins and relatives of her late mother. The first point of call is Papanukwu and Mamanukwu's place. She believes that reconciliation with them will provide her an opportunity to know her aunts and uncles. Besides, she believes that this reconciliation will also avail her opportunity of knowing where her father is. This truly works for her. Papannukwu tells her the circumstances behind the separation of her mother and father. He also tells her the consequences of Ezi's decision to quit the marriage. After this new revelation, Adanma finds time to embark on a journey to Kaduna to reconcile with her father, Mike.

In Kaduna, Adanma meets her father with her step mother, Rapu. Mike is happy to see Adanma because she was still young when her mother put an end to the marriage. Rapu, on the other hand, feels insecure. She feels that Adanma has come to claim the position of her late mother. There is no intimacy between Adanma and Mike, her father because of their long years of separation. She does not enjoy her stay in Kaduna because of the hostility of Rapu. One of the major reasons for Rapu's hostility is the notion that Adanma (Mma) has come to claim part of her inheritance of the father's wealth. She (Adanma) reacts that she does not want any wealth of her father because her late mother has left behind much wealth. With sudden realisation of the circumstances of her mother's desertion of marriage and the unruly behaviour of Rapu, Adanma concludes that her mother is not at fault for leaving the marriage. She calls her fiancé (Obi) that she will leave Kaduna as soon as the riot is over. She also tells her fiancé that she has decided to build her mother's house as custom demands. She is eventually remorseful of the way she has treated her mother when the latter was alive.

Cassandra

First published in 1999 and reprinted in 2003, the novel, *Cassandra* is on the life and experience of the eponymous character, Cassandra, who is also the protagonist of the

novel. Cassandra hopes to achieve a lofty height without the help or assistance of a man. This means that she does not aspire to marry. Her decision, however, changes when she falls in love with Raymond. This love makes her lose balance and all sense of reasoning. Raymond is a divorcee and despite this, Cassandra insists on marrying him. This decision of Cassandra is a genesis of inter-gender conflict.

Though Cassandra is resolute to attain success, she has no control over love. She is unable to control her feelings and emotions. She also fails to listen to the wise counsel of her mother who advised that "You have so much potential for happiness and fulfillment. All you have to do is reach out in the right direction" (76). Cassandra fails to move in the right direction. She fails to query the reasons for the separation between Raymond and his first wife. She is not in good relationship with Steve, the son of Raymond from his first marriage. This is because Steve feels that Cassandra has come to snatch his dear father from him. This is a case of inter-gender conflict between a wife and a step-son.

Analysis and Discussion of *Night Dancer* and *Cassandra*

The novels present gender discourse from different ideological and epistemological perspectives. They provide different layers of meaning on gender issues. It provides fresh insights to gender perception and discourse in African literature, especially daughter-mother conflicts (a phenomenon which is new to gender discourse in Africa). Partly, the novel, *Night Dancer*, can be read as a bildungsroman (a novel of development) with the characterisation of the protagonist (Adanma). She wants to know the real identity of her mother (Ezi) and at the same time, she feels incomplete without the knowledge of her mother. For this reason, she embarks on a journey towards her development with the search for her father and her mother's kins and relatives. Her journey, therefore, can be interpreted as the search for knowledge of self, her father and her mother. It can also be taken as the search for identity. As a bildungsroman, *Night Dancer* has intertextual reference with Tsitsi Dangarembga's*Nervous Conditions* and Zainab Alkali's *The Still Born* that focus attention on the development of their respective protagonists (Tambu and Li). Though the experience of Adanma is different from the

protagonists in the other novels, they all engage in the reconstruction of their gender identity in a patriarchal society.

The novels can be read from two different perspectives on gender discourse. First, the novels can be read from the ideological viewpoint of intra-gender conflicts and, inter-gender conflicts. These different gender conflicts are derived from the characterisation, plot and subject matter of the novels. How the characters in the novels relate with one another contributes to the construction of themes of the novel.

Intra-Gender Relations and Conflicts in *Night Dancer* and *Cassandra*

Night Dancer

Intra-gender relations/conflicts are concerned with the joys, tensions and strains in relationship among characters of the same anatomical sex. In this regard, focus is on daughter-mother relationship (Ezi and Adanma, Rapu and her mother, Ezi and Mamannukwu), co-wives relationship (Adanma and Rapu) and friends (Ezi and Madam Gold). The relationship among the female characters in the novel contributes to the advancement of the plot of the novel and the construction of the novel's themes.

The prominent instance of intra-gender conflict in the novel is the daughter-mother conflict, particularly between Adanma (Mma) and Ezi, her mother. This conflict is generated by the decision of Ezi to quit her marriage with Mike, Adanma's father after the latter's marriage to Rapu. In the course of growing, Mma grows to know only her mother. This creates some social problems for her because no mother wants to relate with her or her mother. She only sees her mother as a prostitute that uses her body to get whatever she wants. It is after her mother's death that Mma is re-orientated by Madam Gold about how she (Mma) perceived her mother. This is aimed at making Mma realise that her mother makes some sacrifice for her to survive. One of the instances cited by Madam Gold is Ezi's encounter with Goody Goody, a creditor that has no mercy. In a bid to support herself and her only daughter, Ezi approaches Goody Goody for short term loan to start a business. The business does not prosper. Ezi is unable to pay the debt and for this reason she is embarrassed by her creditor. The encounter with Goody Goody is one of the trials that Ezi faced in raising Mma as a single mother.

What really generates conflicts between Mma and her mother, Ezi, is the lackadaisical attitude of Ezi to the request of Mma about her own paternity. This request of her paternity is consistent with African cosmology that a child requires both the paternal and maternal lineage. Mma knows that she must have a father either dead or alive. Mma's endless quest for the identity of her father is informed by the ridicule she is exposed to among her classmates in school. This ridicule becomes unbearable at a point that she openly challenges her mother that she (Mma) needs to know the identity of her father. This vehement request of Mma creates a tense situation between daughter and mother:

> Once, in anger, she had shouted at her mother 'I bet you don't even know who my father is!' Casting the worst kind of aspersion on her, hoping that the accusation would force her into talking, into giving her a chance to seek the man out. But her mother had simply laughed that long laugh of hers and said, 'True, I don't know who he is. Are you happy now? You do not have a father. Kpom kwem. Onwe ife ozo?' (*Dancer*, 2013: 21)

The above excerpt reveals the resolution of Ezi not to have anything in common with her erstwhile husband, Mike. She takes Mike for the dead or the unknown. She has failed to realise that her resolution is the abuse of the right of a child. Mma sees herself as incomplete without a father. This is because having a father is the luxury that other children enjoy. Ezi's action, on the other hand, can be interpreted as the interrogation of phallic ego. Patriarchal society is of the view that men are at a liberty to marry more than a wife. There are two options available to a woman in polygamy: endure or quit. Ezi opts for the second option because she does not have the will power to endure the heat of polygamy. Her desertion of her marriage without any hope of reconciliation labels her as stubborn. She is resolute on the fact that she will not return to her marriage with Mike. For this reason, she is not moved by whatever is said or done to make her have a change of mind to return to Mike.

Read from the indigenous cultural episteme, it is argued here that the conflicts between Ezi and her daughter (Mma) is a manifestation of the curse Mamannukwu places on Ezi for abandoning her marriage. When Ezi resolves to desert her marriage, her

mother with her father advises that she (Ezi) should consider the calamity of her action on the chances of her brothers to get wives of their choices and her sisters to marry husbands of their choices. Ezi refuses to rescind her decision and she does not have any re-think. The refusal of Ezi to return to her marriage makes her mother (Mamanukwu) place a curse on her. On her part, Ezi believes that the curse of her mother is the major cause of the strained relationship between her and her daughter Mma. In her memoir, Ezi writes to Mma:

> My mother, not as Christian as my father, blamed it on the carelessness of my personal chi, my personal god. 'Your chi went off to frolic and have a drink the day you were made. It's your bad luck. That's why you're torture to me. May your own children bring you as much unhappiness as you've brought to me. That's all I can wish you if you insist on being headstrong. Maybe her curse did come true. A mother's curse is a terrible thing, even if it is not justified. (*Dancer* 46)

The excerpt above underlines the basic cause of intra-gender conflict between Ezi and her daughter Mma. The deduction from the excerpt reveals the point that the conflict is generational as seen in Mamanukwu-Ezi relationship and later between Ezi and Adanma relationship. The conflict is as a result of differene in ideology and feminine perception in a patriarchal society.

On her own part, Ezi believes in monogamy and this is why she finds it unbearable to live with Rapu, her second wife. The inconvenience of Ezi to live with Rapu and Mike in marriage may be linked to the status and the circumstances surrounding the marriage of the latter. At the inception, Rapu is able to step into the house hold of Mike and Ezi as an unkempt housemaid. Ezi may find the eventual marriage between Mike and Rapu as an assault to her marital right dignity and woman essence as the madam of the house. Ezi feels that with the newly acquired status of Rapu, she (Ezi) will lose her hegemonic control over Rapu. This is because they will begin to enjoy equal right in marriage.

Besides, it can also be interpreted that Ezi feels insecure and threatened with the sudden improved status of Rapu as her rival wife. She (Ezi) is too relaxed in marriage

with Mike without any psychological and emotional readiness for rivalry in marriage. When the eventuality happens, Ezi feels that the right thing for her to do is to quit her marriage. The abandonment of her marriage is the cause of intra-gender conflict between Ezi and and her mother. At the initial stage of the abandonment of marriage by Ezi, her mother appeals to her, however, to no avail. In anger and frustration, Mamanukwu places a curse on Ezi that her daughter will not give her peace no matter how she has tried. Ezi believes that the curse has come to pass because of the troubles she has with her own daughter, Adanma.

The basic reason for the conflict between Ezi and Mma is the difference in ideology. Mma does not like the idea of single parenthood of her mother as this affects her (Mma's) social status. She is stigmatised by neighbours and school mates. Besides, she has lost different suitors. Despite this negative social status of Mma, Ezi (the mother) remains un-perturbed. Instead, her mother always counsels that a good friend will stay by someone whatever the situation is. Mma is not satisfied with this and for this reason, she has a very strong aversion for her mother. In the process of growing up, she presumes that her mother is not genuinely concerned about her (Mma's) social status. On an occasion, Ezi advised her daughter that she should not worry about how she is perceived at the moment by mates and their parents. Owing to the reluctance of her mother to change her attitude towards the way society perceives her status, Mma is of the view that her lot will improve when she grows and she is able to select her own friends without any parental influence. She is, however, pessimistic because the influence of home cannot be ruled out in adult stage. This situation is given credence:

> When Mma became old enough to have friends who did not need to be walked or dropped off by a zealous parent, she was certain her problems were over. Her new friends would judge her on her own merits and not on her (sic). It did not take her long to find out just how wrong she was, to discover that zealous parents made zealous young girls who on the cusp of womanhood were nervous and uptight about the homes their friends came from. Bad homes stank and they did not want to stink. They wanted to attract the right sort of man and the right sort of man did not turn up at Ezi's door. Enugu was too small for girls to be seen in a house of ill repute.   (*Dancer* 68)

73

With the pervasiveness of intra-gender conflict between Ezi and Mma, the latter sees her mother as a stranger. This is because there is no cordiality and friendliness between the mother and the daughter. They live a cat and mouse life. This is why Mma sees her mother as a stranger, particularly, when she wants to begin reading the memoirs of her late mother:

> Shoes. Stranger. Strange. Her mother's shoes. A stranger's shoes. Her mother was a stranger. She was only finding that out now. It was easier to feel compassion for a stranger than for a strange mother. She was finding that out now too. But compassion for a stranger who was also her mother was new. It was strange... (*Dancer* 25)

Another instance of intra-gender conflict is seen in Ezi-Rapu relationship. This is an instance of co-wives conflict. The nature of the conflict between Ezi and Rapu contributes to the development of the plot of the novel. When Ezi realises that she cannot cope with rivalry with Rapu, she quits the marriage. The abandonment of marriage by Ezi shares some intertextuality with the characterisation of Ada in *The Joy of Motherhood*. The case of intertextuality is established between the characterisation of Ezi and Ada, particularly in their attitude to polygamy because "intertextuality de-emphasises the space of discursive evanescence thereby providing a bulwark for inclusivity and heterogeneity of textual relations and meanings for diachronic textual interpretation" (Uzoechi Nwagbara, 2011: p. 84).

The intertextual relations of the attitude of women to polygamy reveals the general modern African women reaction to polygamy. The traditional African family structure encourages polygamy and every woman is expected to endure the strain and stress of polygamy. A traditional polygamous family acknowledges that there are intrigues and stress in polygamy and attributes the success of such home to the ability of women to cope and endure. With education and some economic empowerment, African women began to challenge the phallic arrangement that encourages polygamy. The women, in the process, adopts the dictum of "quit the marriage". Modern women are of the view that love cannot be shared and that the moment a man marries a second wife, love between the husband and the first wife is no more valid. As a reaction, they quit the presumed "loveless" marriage. This is exactly the interpretation of what happens in the

case of Ezi in *Night Dancer*. Ezi quits the loveless marriage between her and Mike when the latter marries Rapu according to the prescribed custom and tradition of the land.

There are some circumstances that surround the marriage of Rapu and Mike. At the initial stage, Rapu enters the home of Mike and Ezi as a house maid with no prospect of attaining the status of a wife. She, however, is able to attain the status of a wife owing to the poor attitude of Ezi in sustaining her matrimony. The first circumstance that precipitates the elevation of Rapu from the status of a house maid to that of a wife is the counsel of Rapu's mother that her daughter should be a good ambassador of her family by warming herself into the heart of her master and the madam of the house. For this reason, Rapu begins to impress her boss with hard work and commitment to duties. Sequel to the counsel of her mother, Rapu feels that she rightfully belongs to the house:

> The first week, Rapu found herself strutting around the house like she owned it. She sat in its deep couches when nobody was around to spy on her. She ran her fingers along the wooden banisters of its stairs. She lay on the deep rug of her room. She could feel its comforting warmth, its magnificence soak into her and she imagined that she was engulfed in a fantastically bright light. (*Dancer* 153)

Ezi does not suspect the hidden intention of Rapu. The latter has come as a usurper. Ezi is unable to suspect the hidden intention of Rapu because she (Rapu) looks innocent and harmless.

The second circumstance for the failure of marriage of Ezi and Mike is connected with the first. Owing to the fact that Rapu looks innocuous, Ezi becomes non-challant about her conjugal responsibilities, leaving the absolute care of the home and even her husband in the hands of the house maid, Rapu. Closely related with this is also the fact that Ezi is lazy. She is bossy and feels that the house maid should do all her chores. The disposition of Ezi gets to the extent that Rapu does the cooking and cares for all the needs of Mike (Ezi's husband):

> Sometimes she felt like the mistress of the house. She had complete dominion over everything that mattered, everything that made one a wife: she cooked, she cleaned. And it was she who Uncle Mike called if he needed

anything. Her mother would be proud of her. She had made
herself indispensable.　　　(*Dancer* 165)

The deduction from the above excerpt is that Ezi has no moral justification to question Mike's decision to marry Rapu. Through her laziness and lackaidiscal attitude to her matrimony, Ezi has given Rapu, the opportunity to intrude into her marriage with Mike.

In her marriage with Mike and with the exit of Ezi out of the marriage, Rapu resolves that she will never allow a maid to do the important aspect of the house chores such as cooking and the overall care of her husband. In her marriage with Mike, therefore, Rapu is too possessive that she does not want anything that can intrude her marriage. This is why she is reluctant to engage the service of a house maid:

Rapu guarded her home with a ferociousness that her husband
had not suspected that she had. When she eventually got a maid,
she would not let her cook nor serve Mike's food. She insisted on
doing that herself.　　　(*Dancer* 204)

The case of Rapu is similar to a proverbial killer that does not want any person to use sword in his/her vicinity. Rapu knows how she gets married to Mike and she has learnt from experience that the tardiness of some wives make them lose their marriages. In African cosmos, it is believed that the best way to capture a man is through what he eats and drinks. It is with the knowledge of this that Rapu neither allows a maid to cook for her husband norto serve the food.

Rapu guards her marriage jealously. She does not want any disruption of the harmony and peace of her marriage. This gets to the point that she is not comfortable when Mma comes to claim relationship with her estranged father. She openly antagonises Mma that she has come to lay claim to Mike's money and property. During an encounter with Mma during her visit to Mike, Rapu challenges:

'Whatever I might have been, this is my home and now you'd do
well to remember it, young lady. You think you can come in here
and hustle your way into the family? Well you are no match for
me. Even your mother was no match for me, as mad as she was.'
Her laughter was crazed.　　　(*Dancer* 238)

Interpreting the above excerpt with the African cultural episteme, the action of Rapu implies that she is not ready to accept Mma as a step daughter. This is largely not un-connected with the educational and social status of Mma. She (Rapu) feels that she cannot be an equal match with Mma. The vituperation of Rapu is a reflection of what is obtainable in the traditional polygamous home. A rival wife usually feels insecure at the presence of a child of a co-rival wife that has attained some level of improved social and economic status. Mike is embarrassed with the vituperation of Rapu. He shouts her down and warns "Don't you ever talk about Ezi like that again" (*Dancer* 238). The reaction of Mike to the way Rapu talks foul of Ezi suggests that he still has some respect for Ezi as his first child. Besides, the reaction can also be interpreted that Mike has a capability of handling two wives at a time.

Apart from her cold attitude towards Mma when the latter pays a visit to her father in Kaduna, Rapu also demonstrates her marital insecurity through the way she treats her friend and confidant, Anwuli. She does not want to take the risk of losing Mike to Anwuli. She feels that the closeness of Anwuli to her home in marriage may tempt Mike. For this reason, she does not encourage a further friendship between her and Anwuli. That friendship had served its purpose and had died a natural death (*Dancer* 205).

Rapu sees herself as being unequal in social and educational status with Ezi and now Mma. This is because she performs poorly and drops out of school. Therefore, she hates the idea of anything to do with school. She is encouraged further in her hatred for school with the attitude of her father to a girl child's education. Rapu's father is convinced by the words of the oracle that Rapu will bring fortunes into the family, educated or not. Rapu's hatred for schooling is vividly captured below:

> School was a torture for Rapu. Teachers complained that she talked too much, laughed too loud and snatched other pupils' property: pencils, erasers, chalk for their slates. Hardly a day went by when she was not at the top of the noisemakers list. Her buttocks hurt from the thrashings from her class teacher who flogged like a cattle herder. Yet she was unrepentant.   (*Dancer* 132)

77

The above excerpt shows that snatching is more or less the second nature of Rapu. Infact, the snatching syndrome appears to be endemic in Rapu's character as same manifests in her recurring disposition of taking other person's property. Given her parental background and upbringing, she is not well-cultured. It establishes the character of Rapu as it is seen in the latter part of the novel. Rapu is an opportunist and she does not want anything to affect her family's opportunity. With the exit of Ezi, Rapu resolves that she will do everything within her power to ensure that the marriage with Mike thrives and survives. Even with the initial threat to her marriage with Mike, Rapu insists:

> If she ever went back there, there was no hope of her climbing up again. And she had to be up. She had to stay up, not just for her sake but for her parents and her children. Her father said that gods had fulfilled their promise beyond his expectations: 'Ah, if only there is a way I can repay Ajofia, oh but I am sure Ajofia is being faced by our ancestors, he could not fail to be for bringing our family so much good news.' (*Dancer* 206-207)

The attitude of Rapu gets worse because of the encouragement of her parents. Apart from the withdrawal from school, as encouraged by her father, her mother also encourages her to warm herself into the heart of the master of the house, Mike. She gets the opportunity of achieving her hidden attention with the tardiness of Ezi. By achieving her hidden intention, Rapu sees herself as a good ambassador of her parents. She knows that with her marriage to Mike, the fortunes of her parents will change for better. She, surreptitiously, imbibes the training of her mother that "'Men are like palm wine', her mother had told her when she was old enough to know" (*Dancer* 161).

Rapu is able to marry Mike because of the poor attitude of Ezi to marriage. The latter does not have respect for marriage. In the first instance, she does not have respect for her husband: she does not cater for the domestic needs of her husband despite the fact that she is a full housewife. She, therefore, fails in her role as a wife and later as a mother. Owing to her failure to carry out her responsibilities as a wife, Ezi requests that Mike should engage the service of a housemaid. This is what gives Rapu the latitude and opportunity to intrude into the marriage of Mike and Ezi. With the engagement of the service of Rapu, Ezi sees herself as a superwoman. In the second instance, Ezi does not

show respect for her marriage and her in-laws. She talks foul of her marriage as against African customs and traditions. This gives Rapu an opportunity to discover the weakness of Ezi. This weakness is that Ezi is not well favoured by her in-laws. Besides, Ezi openly complains about Mike and this is against the custom and tradition of African society. A wife is expected to be submissive to the total ways of life of her husband. Rapu reacts to Ezi's attitude thus:

> In Lokpanta women did not speak to their husbands like that. If they disagreed they saved their anger and their words for when they were with their fellow women. How often had Rapu heard her mother and her friends challenging their husbands in the safety of their kitchens, saying how much they disagreed with a certain viewpoint or opinion?   (*Dancer* 143)

Lokpanta, in the above excerpt, is presented as a traditional African society where women are expected to be voiceless and invisible in public places. Women can talk to any extent when they are together among themselves. This is when they talk and complain about whatever they don't like in their respective marriages. This is a mark of sisterhood. It is through sisterhood that women are free to sympathise and empathise with one another. Through this medium, they muster sufficient courage and confidence in dealing with social and societal issues and matrimonial challenges in a patriarchal society.

The ideal of sisterhood is also seen in the relationship of Ezi and Madam Gold. Madam Gold is a friend that is more than a sister to Ezi. Thus, sisterhood in the context of gender discourse goes beyond blood relations. It shows the bond and close affinity that exist among women of different races, geographical entities, cultural orientations and nationalities. This is the simple interpretation of Ezi-Madam Gold relationship. Despite the attitude of Ezi to marriage and the mind of women in the neighbourhood in Enugu to ostracise Ezi, Madam Gold stands solidly with her throughout her time of trials and travails. This is why she is able to know the life and time of Ezi. She is an additional memorabilia of the life account of Ezi anytime Mma is confused about what is written in the memoir.

In her marriage with Mike, Ezi is unable to project the ideal of sisterhood. This is because of her modern ideal of marriage. She believes so much in the ideal of one wife, one husband living together all alone without the intrusion or interruption of the extended family. For this reason, she has no confidant among her in-laws. Apart from this, it can be argued that Ezi believes that men and women have equal rights in marriage. For this reason, she believes that she has every right to openly condemn whatever she doesn't like in marriage. It is with all this that it is argued that Ezi is not prepared for polygamy.

When Mike gets Rapu pregnant, Ezi finds it difficult to cope with the development and she leaves the marriage. This action of Ezi constitutes the major conflict of the novel. She cannot withstand the intrigues and strains of polygamy. On one of the occasions that she agrees to reconcile with Mike, she gives a condition that Mike should send Rapu out of the home as soon as she delivers her child. This is a condition that may be difficult to carry out because a man is always in charge of his home. The refusal of Mike to send Rapu away makes Ezi not to subscribe or concede to reconciliation with her estranged husband. Even when her mother advises that she should not make herself a loser in her marriage with Mike, Ezi refuses to reconcile with Mike claiming that she is a modern woman that has the courage to abandon any unfavourable condition in marriage. She tells her mother that what Mike does is possible in the traditional African setting. She (Ezi), therefore, leaves the marriage and starts a new life in Enugu, caring and looking after her only daughter, Adanmma. In the city of Enugu, Ezi lives a promiscuous life. She lives on the good will and patronage of men of all sorts of characters. This makes Ezi an outcast among married women in the neighbourhood. No woman in the neighbourhood wants her husband to move near the vicinity of Ezi.

Ezi is able to cope with the life of a divorcee because at the initial stage of her life, she is not too keen about marriage. She does not want to be under the control of any man. This is why she turns down many marriage proposals before the appearance of Mike in her life. Besides, she is a pioneer of a group of women that does not encourage marriage:

> 'I am a pioneer' she said, 'I am one of the few women in my
> department. It is up to us to encourage other women by staying

on and chasing our dreams. And no, those dreams do not include marriage, at least until I have my degree.... (*Dancer* 172)

She feels that marriage will inhibit her bigger plans in life. She sees her marriage with Mike as a sacrifice and a way of fulfilling her traditional role of a woman. The belief of Ezi about marriage is captured further:

> When Ezi met Mike, she liked to say, she had not been looking for a husband. She was not like one of those women who measured their worth by the ease with which they snagged a husband. She had bigger plans; ambitions her parents were convinced were not desirable in a girl. An education was good, they agreed but they came secondary to a husband.   (*Dancer* 171)

It can be deduced from the above quoted instance that Ezi has some disdain for marriage because of her modern notion of womanhood. She does not want her chance and opportunity in life to be limited with the demands of marriage. She therefore sees Mike's impregnation of Rapu as an opportunity to quit her marriage with him.

In her narrative style, Unigwe presents the characters of Ezi and Rapu in opposite directions to set the conflict of the novel and to advance its plot. It is, therefore, pertinent to say that characterisation is important in the advancement of the plot of the novel. In the narrative style of Unigwe, Rapu is presented as a foil/protagonist to Ezi. The view of this study is consistent with the position of Oluwatoyin Bimpe Jegede (2013: 67) on the conceptualisation of antagonist:

> is the character in fiction that stands directly in opposition to the protagonist. There is always a conflict between him and the protagonist. He antagonises every move that is taken by the protagonist.

In the novel, Rapu opposes every move taken by Ezi. She does not pray for the return of Ezi into the family. She finds fault in everything that Ezi does. It is this that advances the plot of the novel.

Despite her recalcitrance in her decision to abandon her marriage, Ezi still has a belief that one day her family (particularly her father, mother and siblings) will forgive her in death. This is why he leaves behind the memoir behind for Mma. The significance

of this memoir is to shed more light on the dark side of her (Ezi's) life. In her belief, her parents and siblings will welcome Mma into the fold of the family when they hear of her (Ezi's) death. This belief is expressed below:

> I secretly hope that when I am gone, they will hear and be sorry and seek you out. I do not want to think that they have forgotten all about me, that all the years we spent together as a family means nothing in the face of my decision. Blood is thicker than water, you hear.   (*Dancer* 48)

Her belief is right because at her death, Mma begins to search for her mother's parents and siblings. It is during this that she comes to the knowledge that Papanukwu and Mamanukwu have for long years longed for her reconciliation with them and her siblings. They expect Ezi to come back home to apologise. Papannukwu tells Mma about the stubbornness of her mother:

> 'It is still her duty to apologise for getting the parent upset in the first place. Such is the nature of our world. Your mother knew it. And every day we waited and hoped. That she should go back to your father or that she would give us the chance to forgive her. But she never did either. She never gave us a chance to reconcile'. (*Dancer* 105)

Ezi, deliberately, refuses to apologise to her parents and refuses to reconcile with her husband. This is because she does not want to be under the control of anybody. She fails to realise that what she aspires to do is alien to African society. A woman is expected to be under the control of a man no matter how irresponsible such a man is. Till she dies, Ezi is resolved in her belief that marriage is not compulsory in the life of a woman.

Knitting together different evidences about the events of her mother's life, Mma arrives at a conclusion that her mother is not at fault for living alone. In her visit to her father's house in Kaduna, Mma realises that Rapu is intolerable and not in a rightful position to contest with her late mother over Mike, her father. By her standard, Rapu is rash and uncouth. It is with this realisation that Mma changes her earlier position. After the burial of her mother, Mma resolves that she will not rebuild her mother's house in consonance with the dictates of the custom and tradition of her people. With the gradual realisation of the circumstances that surround her mother's life, she changes her resolve

and decides to re-build the house. She even blames herself for being responsible for her mother's death. She has this feeling because she refuses to visit her mother at the hospital and at the point of death. She cries that her mother is not alive as at the time that she discovers the true identity of her mother. This situation is given in the following excerpt of the novel.

> She cried for her mother for she could see now, on the woman who was betrayed, who could not stay. She cried for all the times she wished her mother dead. She cried that her mother had left before she got a chance to know her, to appreciate the sacrifice she went through to raise her. She cried until there were no more tears to be found in her. And what tears she had shed burned her face. (*Dancer* 239)

Mma comes to a conclusion that her mother is betrayed by someone that she trusts too much, Mike. It is at this point that Mma appreciates the pain and labour of her mother in raising and caring for her from childhood to the current stage of adulthood. It is now her turn to seek the forgiveness of her mother in death. In an attempt to look for someone to discuss with, Mma calls her fiancé, Obi, to inform him that she is responsible for the death of her mother. She retorts "'I am my mother's daughter, Obi. I killed her, Obi. I wanted her dead.'" (*Dancer* 241). With this sense of remorse, Mma concludes:

> One thing she was certain of was that it was time for her to start repaying her mother. She would match her, sacrifice for sacrifice. Blood for blood. B was for blood. Thicker than water. She would go back to Enugu and start on her mother's house. Her spirit would rest in peace. Her ghost could dance- dance in her red shoes. (*Dancer* 241)

Mma's conclusion resolves intra-gender conflict between Ezi and her daughter, Adanma. It is argued that with this conclusion, the mother and her daughter are at peace with each other.

Ezi is also able to rest in peace in death because her parents express their forgiveness of her (Ezi) misbehaviour. Ezi's parents believe that the coming of Mma is to tender apology on behalf of her late mother. In the interaction between Mma and Papannukwu, the latter states:

> 'Ezi's spirit has sent Mma to us. We accept her apology,'
> Papannukwu said, addressing his dead wife's photograph
> which was being passed from hand to hand. 'Our
> daughter's spirit can now rest in peace. We've forgiven
> her!'   (*Dancer* 109)

The novel also presents inter-gender conflicts as found in Mike-Ezi relationship, as well as Papannukwu-Ezi relationship. This inter-gender conflict is on the matter of ideology, particularly between traditional and modern ideologies of marriage. The conflict is on the modern conception of marriage by Ezi while Papannukwu believes so much in traditional ideology of marriage. Papannukwu expects Ezi to stay in marriage despite the impregnation of Rapu by Mike. This is because traditional ideology of marriage encourages polygamy. Besides, if Ezi leaves her marriage, it will affect the chances of her other siblings, sisters and brothers. With the insistence of Ezi to leave her marriage, Papannukwu sees Ezi as being selfish and self-centred.

Ezi-Papannukwu conflict is a fall out of Ezi-Mike conflict. There is conflict between Ezi and Mike because of the intrusion of Rapu into their marriage. With the lukewarm attitude of Ezi, Rapu is able to get hold of Mike. The whole conflict begins with the temptation of Mike to have a sexual intercourse with Rapu while Ezi is away. The temptation of Mike is as a result of the carefree disposition of Ezi in protecting her marriage. Rapu does all the required responsibilities of a wife except love making between husband and wife. In the course of doing all this, Rapu has been expecting the time that Mike will gesture a love making advances to her. If Mike had not made the love-making advances when he did, Rapu is determined to seduce him at the next available opportunity:

> Seeing Uncle Mike in her room, his eyes looking like those
> of a man who had not slept in many days, she knew where
> her destiny lay. If he had not touched her, she might have
> made the first move. Maybe reached out and touched his
> beard. She was glad when he did. When he held her
> buttocks she knew what was expected of her and so she led
> him to her bed.   (*Dancer* 187)

The description of the physical appearance of Mike shows a man with so much worry on his mind. She goes to the room of Rapu for solace. Mike has his first sexual

experience with Rapu because the latter has warmed herself into his heart. He cannot control his phallic urge and in the process, he indulges in extra-marital sex with his house maid. When Rapu becomes pregnant, Mike becomes confused because of the unpredictability of Ezi's reaction. Hearing about Rapu's pregnancy, Ezi finds the incident unbearable. Instead of tolerating the situation, Ezi opts out of her marriage with Mike.

Mike's action of impregnating Rapu is given different interpretations by people around him. His wife, Ezi, sees his action as an act of betrayal. Besides, she (Ezi) is of the opinion that their marriage has become loveless. Whatever reason Mike gives is not convincing to Ezi. Even when her mother advises her that she should endure the situation and stay in the marriage with Mike, Ezi finds it difficult to cope because she thinks all the time about the love-making process of Mike and Rapu. Ezi gives an excuse that she does not want to do the terrible thing: killing the son of Rapu:

> She feared that if she stayed any longer, she would do something terrible or have something terrible done to her. Every time she heard Rapu's baby cry, she wanted to strangle it, to choke it, to kill the thing that had changed their lives. How could she live under the same roof as it? And even if the baby was not there physically, it would always haunt her. Either way, she could no longer stay with Mike. (*Dancer* 200)

She does not see the impregnation of Rapu by Mike as a mistake. She, rather sees it as an intentional act. For this reason, Ezi expresses her unpreparedness for rivalry and intrigues of a polygamous family. She, therefore, sees that quitting the marriage is the best arrangement for her and her only daughter.

Another interpretation of Mike's action of impregnating Rapu is the quest for a son. The first child of Ezi is a daughter, Adanma. With this, people around believe that Mike impregnates Rapu to get a son. Their belief is confirmed when Rapu gives birth to a son. Nobody condemns the action of Mike because most African traditions respects the birth of a male child in a family. While planning her way into the marriage of Ezi and Mike and into the life of Mike as his wife, Rapu is of the opinion that the only way for her to secure herself in marriage is to offer a male child. "She might be young and

inexperienced, but that much she knew. If she gave him a son, her future would be secured." (*Dancer*, 188).

Chika Unigwe's *Night Dancer* provides a fresh insight into the interpretation of gender agenda in the African novel. The novel makes a balanced case for intra-gender and inter-gender conflicts. The novel presents the known and familiar story of gender relations, particularly in marriage. This position is, therefore, consistent with the view of Benedict Ibitokun (1988:36):

> ... no modern writer can claim that he is saying anything new and if he says so, nobody will believe him. What makes a writer great is his blend of medium and message and his artistic bravura: the peculiar and unfamiliar way of saying the familiar thing.... What grows after centuries of tilling is not really message but medium. The day medium attains the cul-de-sac of message, that day is the dooms day of art and the end of our endeavour as critics, readers or connoisseurs.

Unigwe presents the familiar in an unfamiliar manner. It is this situation that makes a text share intertextuality with the texts that have come before it, though, with a different message. What is presented in the text shares intertextuality with Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joy of Motherhood* and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* where women have been adopting different strategies to cope with the strains and stress of marriage that range from polygamy to the intrigues of in-laws/ rivalry of co-wives, etc.

Cassandra

Given the background of modern demands of women beyond the confines of home, Barungi addresses gender issue in African literature from a fresh perspective. The common trend of gender discourse in African literature is wife-mother-in-law conflict, wife-sister-in-law conflict and co-wives intrigues. On the other hand, this novel presents a new trend in the gender discourse in African literature. Steve gives Cassandra some stress and strains in her love relationship with Raymond. She is able to muster sufficient confidence and resilience in her love relationship with Raymond when Steve is critically ill. This is the only time that Cassandra is able to get more of Raymond's attention.

With a critical reading of the novel, it is argued here that the novelist writes from the perspective of queer feminism. This is because Cassandra is presented as a woman that breaches African norms and tradition about love and marriage. She does the unthinkable and unreasonable. She has a love affair with Raymond's brother, Bevis, to the extent of becoming pregnant through him. In order to cover her illicit affairs with Bevis, Cassandra informs Raymond that she is pregnant. This pronouncement brings a crisis into the love between them. This is because Raymond has been tested and confirmed sterile and there is no way any woman can be pregnant for him. With the death of Steve, Raymond has an option of returning to Cassandra to claim the child that looks exactly like him. He believes that his reconciliation with Cassandra will make him have a successor. This thinking is not practical because he knows his own state of health that he is medically incapable of impregnating any woman.

With the marital infidelity and irresponsibility of Cassandra, there is an intra-gender conflict between Raymond and his brother, Bevis. The latter knows that he is the owner of the child, Benjie, while the former erroneously believes that the child is his. This precipitates the conflict between two brothers. The inference here is that a woman has two 'husbands' – a breach of African traditional norms that encourage polygamy for men and is opposed to polyandry for women. The practice of polyandry for women is against African norm and tradition and in some cultures, it is either banishment from the community or death sentence for the culprit.

Cassandra gives out the secret of the true identity of Benjie to Raymond on his sick bed while the latter is recuperating from an accident. The shock of this revelation kills Raymond. The death of Raymond gives Cassandra and Bevis an opportunity to marry each other. Instead of condemnation, all that Cassandra gets for his betrayal of Raymond is appreciation and commendation from the brother of the late brother, Bevis. This is because of the unusual love and affection between him and Cassandra. Even when Cassandra opines that she expects him to have given up on her long ago, particularly during the time she hangs out with Raymond, Bevis says: "No I didn't because I knew that without you, sweet Cassandra, my life would not be complete. Only you could make

me feel like this, good and absolutely whole" (*Cassandra* 251). Is this love? This is a love that is strange to Africa.

Violet Barungi has evaluated African perception of love with Euro-modernist standard. Her conception of love is that love does all and that with it an individual may lose his/her sense of reasoning. Besides, she proposes covertly that there is no cultural or traditional limitation for any woman in love. Cassandra lives above traditional norm to achieve her goal in love and marriage.

The text confronts issues of inter-gender power struggle in a broader sense. The main character, Cassandra, is determined right from the start, to take the male-dominated society and its rules head on. She is independent minded and ambitious, and wishes to make something of her life "without being beholden to men" (*Cassandra* 13). In order to fulfill her ambitions, she tries to avoid getting involved with men:

> She was committed to making something worthwhile of her life
> and if she allowed anybody or anything to interfere with that
> commitment, she would end up like thousands of other women,
> behind a kitchen sink and a line of dripping nappies. Men were
> the reason why the majority of women were still lagging behind
> in social economic and political development. Once you allowed
> a man into your life, it was goodbye to ambitions of meaningful
> existence.   (*Cassandra* 3)

The above commitment is the backdrop against which the author presents the trials that Cassandra goes through as she confronts the grim realities of life in a society with heavily gendered social structures. Later in the story, we are told that"Cassandra belonged to the new feminine breed which liked nothing betterthan crossing swords with fascist males" (p.142). But the forces that she has to confront are enormous and have historical roots, and not all the women share her views. Marie is good-natured and wishes Cassandra well. But she is concerned that inspite of the odds that they as women have to face, her friend is going about it the wrong way. She regards as foolhardy Cassandra's project of aggressively confronting the male world and attempting to change the rules by which the power games are played. She therefore advises her friend to take a course in Natural Law and History of Creation. She elaborates:

> Men are not women's enemies, Cassandra, they're their
> allies. The two're meant to complement each other, not to
> collide or counteract each other's moves. We cook for them
> and bear their children, and boost their egos and they
> pamper us and sweeten us up by spending on us. Wise up
> girl and take what's your due or you'll end up an
> embittered old maid.   (*Cassandra* 13)

This kind of advice, coming from a well-meaning and reliable friend, tends to complicate the odds that Cassandra is up against. However, she remains a dogged non-conformist.

In Cassandra, Violet Barungi creates a character. She is beautiful and therefore fits into the general stereotype of the beautiful heroine, but she is also strong-willed and independent-minded.People as close to her as her sister Melinda and her mother even consider her arrogant. However, Cassandra has deep-set emotional weaknesses that greatly surprise and even please other characters. When she embraces Tonia, her brother's bride, she is described as stepping out of character (*Cassandra* .85). Significantly also, she sometimes finds herself helpless in the face of inter-gender power complications, and has to uncharacteristically resort to tears. She is reduced to such a situation by a confrontation between her lover Raymond and his former wife Belinda. It is in this state of utter helplessness that she first meets Samantha, in a washroom. Samantha correctly assumes that behind the tears, there is a man. She therefore instinctively offers her an advice:

> You don't have to let him know that he has that much
> power over you. Never let a man know that he is the
> beginning and end of everything for you. … They are bad
> enough without our going out of our way to inflate their
> egos.   (*Cassandra* 44)

The softer side of Cassandra also surfaces when her sister Melinda loses her husband. She sets everything else aside and stands by her, and is the epitome of the compassion that Melinda needs to survive the storm of Horace's death (*Cassandra* 67-8). Also, she later breaks down and cries when her mother gives her the hard mother's talk on the subject of getting emotionally involved with a married man. But all this is nothing compared to the way her feelings for Raymond affects her emotional stability. In her

desire for Raymond, she literally throws herself at George and as good as begs him to make love to her. Later that same night, she brushes aside Raymond's scruples and prevails over him to break her virginity, and thereby usher in a relationship that is to prove quite turbulent for her.

Her relationship with Raymond Agutamba is the beginning of a serious education process that crudely awakens her to other realities of life. Her world begins to undergo a transformation, and she watches with bewilderment as her youthful emotions place her under the control of another human being. Her happiest moments are when she is with Raymond, and in his company, she is a dark outline of her strong-willed self. At this rate, it was becoming increasingly possible for Cassandra to "end up like thousands of other women, behind a kitchen sink and a line of dripping nappies." But as fate would have it, the very house where she experienced so much bliss is where the pain begins when Raymond got to know that she is pregnant.

Raymond is convinced that she (Cassandra) has been dating another man since it was medically established that he (Raymond) cannot father a child; whereas on her part, Cassandra is convinced that Raymond is the only man she has been to bed with.This confusion inevitably leads to their estrangement.The pain and confusion that the separation from Raymond causes is also a great trial on Cassandra's character strength. It is a marvel that she manages it quietly, and even continues to perform at her place of work, albeit with great difficulty. Also, her fighing spirit is not diminished by her emotional turmoil. This is evident in her confrontation with the Doctor who suggests that she terminates the pregnancy (*Cassandra* 146-7), and with Raymond over the fatherhood of the baby (*Cassandra* 165-169).

In addition to Cassandra's emotional turbulence, the novel also deals with several problematic issues in the social and economic power relations between men and women. Much of this debate takes place on the outlines of Cassandra's career path, but it is also easy for the reader to sort out the very general issues that Barungi is presenting for debate, independent of the perceptions of Cassandra the character. While it is possible to accept the male dominance of senior positions at Lotus International where Cassandra works, it is also impossible not to notice the sexual power politics that play themselves out on a daily basis.

When Cassandra joins Lotus International, she immediately becomes the target of the elderly Mr. Wakilo who wants to exploit her sexually. He plans to include her on a team that was to go to Nairobi for a working trip, which was one of his known traps for young female workmates that he wanted to seduce. Cassandra is advised about this, and she manages to get out of it by using the death of a relative as an excuse to avoid the trip. But she is advised that he will soon try again; and in order to be safe from him, she has to team up with someone male that would be perceived as her lover. This would keep off predators like Mr. Wakilo. When Mr. Wakilo goes for further studies, he is replaced as Chief Editor by Mr Ndiwalala; and when Ndiwalala absconds into self exile, Collin Kiiza is promoted to his position. Cassandra considered her work to be just as good as that of Collin, if not better; but she accepts his promotion with good grace, since as Senior Editor, Collin was already a step ahead of her anyway.

However, both Cassandra and other members of the publishing firm were not prepared for the shock that follows. It was obvious to everybody that Cassandra should move into the position of Senior Editor, which had just been vacated by Collin. To everybody's surprise, a completely new man is brought in from outside to become Cassandra's boss. It was bad enough that Cassandra had to devise means of fighting off unwanted amorous advances of the likes of Mr. Wakilo and suffer the humiliation of being denied promotion when she merited it. But she was even more angry that Juliet, whom she despised for her culture of sleeping her way upwards, should treat her with constant animosity because she regarded her as a threat in the competition for Mr. Wakilo's attention. It is her friend Marie who puts the whole thing in perspective for her in the following words:

These office intrigues go on every day, everywhere in the country, if not in the world and there is nothing you can do about them ...(*Cassandra* 16) The fact that a person of Cassandra's strong-mindedness has to attach herself to some male so as to discourage unwanted advances tells a very grim story indeed. So without realising it, she begins to concede that indeed the rules of the game are not the same; at least not yet. But she must survive the present to be able to fight in the future.

The humiliation that Cassandra suffers in being passed over for promotion, in favour of a total stranger, forces even the more mild Marie to open her eyes to the depth of the problem of gendered discrimination. It is in a state of utter frustration that she gives voice to the question that is on everybody's mind: "what could have made the committee disregard Cassandra's abilities?" (184). She then puts the whole episode in a broader picture through the following observation:

> … as a woman the odds were against you right from the beginning … a man always starts out with advantages over a woman. The interviewers are almost always men and it stands to reason that they would favour their own kind. (*Cassandra* 184)

The decision by the Committee to sideline Cassandra proves to be the firm's undoing; for it is after that that Cassandra and Marie decide to quit and start their own Publishing Company. But the lesson that it delivers is significant. There are several other reference points in the power debate, which reference points make a collective statement about the nature of the inter-gender power struggle, and also highlight the odds that confront Cassandra and others with similar determination to change the rules of the gender power game. First, we have the seductive macho males like Raymond Agutamba who look at women in terms of how regularly they can make "easy conquests" (*Cassandra* 201). Speaking about Raymond Agutamba in particular, Melinda, Cassandra's sister observes that every woman in town below the age of seventy knows about him. His brother, Bevis, is the very opposite of him. He is an introvert. Bevis loves Cassandra deeply and has done so for a long time; and this adds to the complications in Cassandra's situation. At the beginning of the novel, she wanted to keep all men at arms distance, but she ends up being pursued by two brothers and is powerless to ward them off. In the end she gets pregnant and is uncertain about which brother is responsible. The fact is that there are too many forces at play in Cassandra's life and sometimes they threaten to overwhelm her. That is why it takes her far too long to realise that she was always up in arms against Bevis because there was a strong force pulling them together, which force is later responsible for the child they produce (*Cassandra* 225). And even after they have had a child, she continues to fight, and in one of her fighting moods, she tells him: "In my scheme of things, there is no place for a husband, let alone one encumbered with the name Agutamba" (*Cassandra* 186).

Ironically, it is at a time when she almost loses him to Byensi's bullet that she realises how much he meant to her. As Marie observed, Cassandra needed lessons in natural law, and Barungi carefully guides her through them. While Okurut and Kyomuhendo deal with the situation of women in broader contexts such as those of national and even global conflict, Barungi concentrates on interpersonal power struggles between males and females. The closest that she comes to involvement with the wider political issues in society is in the incidental complaints of characters like Esta in The Shadow and the Substance about the poor Doctors pay, and the mismanagement of the country by men (*Cassandra* 92-93) She concentrates on personalities and personal relationships, out of which the wider societal power evolves. She is however quite effective in demonstrating that the macro conflicts that she deals with lie at the heart of the debate on the evil of gender discrimination.

The odds against the female writers are many, not least among them being the age-old system of patriarchy that defines both men and women differently. In the face of these odds, it would seem like the women writers are attempting an impossible task. But their writings offer the reading public new and refreshing experiences that were hitherto unfamiliar in readings of Ugandan literature. In the first instance, they help to straighten the record in the face of some of the previous writing (by men), which had painted the picture of an all male society. This they do by introducing to the literary scene several female characters, playing leading roles. Secondly, they attack established stereotypes and injustices in the society in a manner that has not been attempted in Ugandan literature before.

GENDER DISCOURSE SHIFT IN TSITSI DANGAREMBGA'S *THE BOOK OF NOT* AND BINYAVANGA WAINAINA'S *ONE DAY I WILL WRITE ABOUT THIS PLACE*

Plot of *The Book of Not* and *One Day I Will Write about this Place*

The Book of Not, a sequel to Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, was published in 2006 as an attempt by the novelist to interrogate the contemporary land issues and agitation for self identity in the land. The novel extends the narration in *Nervous Conditions* through the characterisation of Tambu revealing her experiences and trials in Sacred Heart College, the school she was admitted into towards the end of *Nervous Conditions*. Besides, the setting of the novel is in 1970s at the height of agitation for independence. At the opening of the novel, it is revealed that a lot of things have changed with the armed confrontations between the people of Zhona and the imperialist government. The novel reveals the multiple experiences of Tambu in a multi-racial environment riddled by racism, segregation and social injustice based on the pigmentation of the skin. The experiences at school change Tambu's orientation about her cultural identity. By the end of the novel, Tambu has undergone a re-orientation with some misinformation about the gender and racial identities in a patriarchal society of Zhona.

One Day I Will Write about this Place

One Day I Will Write about this Place is a novel which is written in the style of memoir with the protagonist narrating his childhood experience. The novel, like *The Book of Not* is in the form of bildungsroman revealing the stages of development of the novel's protagonist. Wainaina treats his fear of the future and the unknown since his association with his brother and sister while in school. He is not comfortable with studies but always has consolation in the performance of his sister Ciru. At a point, he drops out of school and begins to experiment with his writing with the mindset of writing about Kenya and hence *One Day I Will Write about this Place*. The narrative of the novel

focuses on government and administration of Kenya under the administrations of Kenyatta and Moi.

Gender Discourse Shift in *The Book of Not* and *One Day I Will Write about this Place*

The Book of Not

Dangarembga's *The Book of Not*, interrogates the patriarchal highhandedness in gender relations and extends the frontiers of *Nervous Conditions* as a bildungsroman (the novel of development). Tambu, the protagonist of the novel has advanced in age and experience more than how she is presented in *Nervous Conditions.* Her advancement in experience is informed by the exposure and she has acquired at the Young Ladies' College of Sacred Heart. Tambu's enrolment at the College offers her an opportunity to occupy a space which affords her the opportunity to interrogate patriarchal ideology particularly the one which is connected with the rationality behind the war. Dangarembga, through the characterisation of Tambu validates the fact that one of the liberating factors for women in patriarchal confinement of socio-economic limitations for women. Marginal position is maintained for women in patriarchal socio-cultural configuration to the extent that a girl-child (a woman) is seen as an option or an alternative. The validation of this view is linked with the choice for schooling of Tambu in the first part of *The Book of Not* with the title *Nervous Conditions*.

Tambu gets the opportunity of schooling after the death of her younger brother. As an alternative to the attainment of Babamukuru's resolution of educating one the children of his brother, Babamukuru enrols Tambu in a school. Babamukuru's decision and resolution are indications that Zhona community is patriarchal with much preference for the rights and privileges of men. Dagarembga also hints at the point that patriarchal society is characterised by injustice, inequity and lack of fair play in the distribution of opportunities. Owing to his social, economic and religious status, Babamukuru is able to enrol Tambu in a school which is not affected by the war. This situation, perhaps, is one of the major causes of the public humiliation of Babamukuru in time of war. Tambo, on the other hand, is not comfortable with the humiliation as revealed below:

I was proof of my uncle's dubious spirit. For why would a man select a school for his child where the education was superior to the education given to the children of other people? A school that would not, unlike other schools in areas where guerillas battled for independence, be closed? A school peopled not by those who look like us, but by Europeans? I was to watch the decimation of my uncle in order to instill loyalty in me. (*The Book* 6)

Tambu's reaction to her uncle's humiliation is a mark of her maturity and learning. Despite that, Tambu benefits from the good will of her uncle, she sees her uncle insincere in relating with the people of the community. Her argument is premised on the fact that only her school is not closed during the war. She is not comfortable with this development. Her discomfort may be because of the large number of foreigners (white people) in Young Ladies' College of Sacred Heart. In Tambu's view, Babamukuru's action is an attempt of classicism, one of the variables of social stratification and hegemonic masculinity in a patriarchal society. The humiliation of Babamuluru, in Tambu's view is a source of loyalty for her.

It is necessary to investigate the remote reasons for Tambu's reaction to Babamukuru's humiliation by the guerrilla. The first of the reasons is that Tambu holds Babamukuru responsible for the death of her brother, as presented in *Nervous Conditions* with Nhamo's early start of education as a result of the choice made by Babamukuru. She has great resentment for Babamukuru who does not consider the chronological age difference between her and her younger brother Nhamo. The second reason is connected to the horror she witnesses when her sister, Netsai, steps on a landmine and eventually loses her leg. The impression of Tambu is that Babamukuru has been unable to undo what he did. Though Babamukuru also sustains injury in the process of beating and humiliation in the hands of the guerrilla, Tambu's perception about him does not change.

The third of the factor, perhaps, is because Tambu is not satisfied with the extent of discrimination and humiliation she suffers at the college. The problem of Tambu is compounded by her skin pigmentation and race. Most of the girls at the college who are whites including white teachers discriminate against Tambu. Put together, all these factors may prompt reactions of Tambu towards Babamukuru's humiliation in the hands

of the guerrilla. Despite the discrimination against her at the college, Tambu is determined to forge ahead in order to change her marginal status and position in the society. This view is consistent with Ogaga Okuyade's (2014:64):

> Tambu is determined to overcome her marginal status, regardless of the fact that there are concerted efforts to make her accept her lot. These efforts are not only orchestrated by the patriarchal order in their calculated attempt not to only tame, but to completely subdue her wild, unnatural, unbridled spirit.

Dangarembga underlines the fact that the much expected women empowerment can only come with functional education and in some cases vocational training. In the instance of Tambu's experience within the context of the novel, education has been the major source of her empowerment. The novel validates the significance of education in women empowerment with the invitation extended to Tambu to attend the meeting of the Elders in the forest. At the meeting, the fate of Zhona people in the guerrilla warfare with the whites is discussed. Despite her age and gender, the Elders consider Tambu's education, particularly among the whites enough for the invitation to attend the meeting. What Tambu sees and hears at the meeting are beyond her age despite her education and this informs her decision that she will pretend as if she had not seen or heard anything frightful in the forest with the guerrilla. Tambu's education only improves his social identity among the blacks but the whites (students and teachers) in her school do not see any special value in her. She suffers discrimination and humiliation with no form of apology.

Tambu's experiences at the College are consistent with Anne Anlin Cheng's (2001:18) conceptualisation of racial melancholy (dissatisfaction with the relationship which exists between the whites and the blacks where skin pigmentation determines the extent of the social justice and integrity). Despite the fact that Young Ladies' College of Sacred Heart is founded with the Christian creeds of fairness, equity and justice, the racial identity of the College cannot be overlooked. The College, from critical study of his policy and practice, is an afterthought for Africans to attend because of the small quota given to Africans. Five percentage of the quota is only available for the blacks to attend and luckily for Tambu, she is among the five percent. The black students at the

College do not find things easy and comfortable for them as six black students are always crammed in a room in African dormitory. Dangarembga, through the portrayal of the pattern of life Young Ladies' College of Sacred Heart, particularly for African girls like Tambu, is making a point that women always have limited space in patriarchal society with reference to her gender, race and social identity. Tambu suffers racial melancholy at school and by extension, she suffers gender melancholy in the patriarchal society.

This study conceptualises gender melancholy as a situation of denial and frustration that an individual suffers as a result of his or her gender (maleness or femaleness). With her experiences at school, Tambu becomes confused and suffers from double consciousness (she sees herself as the racial other in the school and reclaims her self -worth through education in the society). She has lost her socio-cultural identity in an attempt to belong the racial order of the whites. This study, therefore, shares the Door Hannah Deroo's (2015:65-66) view:

> Tambu loses her sense of coherent self, for in the eyes of her white classmates and teachers, she is a racial Other, and although she tries to distinguish herself from her roommates, she is unable to assimilate into the white, colonial community. In the African dormitory, Tambu frequently brawls with her roommates, which is the reason why she is an outsider to their group as well.

With her cultural confusion and confused social identity, Tambu finds herself in cultural limbo. She is neither here nor there. Patriarchy has imposed an identity on her and this has predetermined her occupancy of space of operation and relationship. The education that patriarchy, represented by Babamukuru, offers to Tambu further limits her space in the order of things in her immediate society. This argument is further sustained with change in the orientation and ideology of the adult Tambu as against what we have in young Tambu in *Nervous Conditions*. The adult Tambu in *The Book of Not* has lost her focus and sense of direction because of the inability to internalise, interiorise and adapt the racial and gender melancholies to sustainable human relations. This view is consistent with Deroo's (2015:67):

> *The Book of Not* particularly deals with Tambu's question of being heard, and being remembered. While the young Tambu loses track of her own sense of direction and values, the mature Tambu is able to determine how her perspective at the time was influenced by the

colonial, white context, and consequently question the institutions that damaged her. For example, when Tambu engages herself as a volunteer to knit for the Rhodesian Security Forces while at Sacred Heart, Ntombi accuses her of putting all of them in danger. If the Elders would find out, Ntombi says, they would all be severely punished, or put to death. Tambu comes to the shocking realisation that she has indeed forgotten about Babamukuru's trial, and is jeopardising the safety of her roommates and herself.

The deduction from the above is that patriarchy has imposed some forms of identity and limitations on the realisation of women potentials. Tambu and her black colleagues in the College cannot follow their heart because of the fear of patriarchal punishment. Tambu's fear, perhaps, is as a result of patriarchal socialisation that female children are exposed to in their formative years.

Through the characterisation of Tambu and some other female characters such as Nyasha in the novel, Dangaremgba reveals how patriarchal ideology places some inhibition on the ambition and bond of women. Tambu's narratives of her experiences in the dormitory and with freedom fighters reveal the complicity of patriarchy and colonial authorities in the exploitation of women in the postcolonial Rhodesia. No matter how highly educated, women do not occupy the same socio-political and economic space as their male counterparts.

As a feminist bildungsroman (a narrative which chronologically presents the experiences of women in the order of awareness, exposure and experience), the novel intones on the bond of sisterhood which is an intrinsic element in womanism that exists among the black students in Sacred Heart. With the bond of sisterhood that Tambu and other ladies demonstrate in the novel, she (Tambu) makes effort to revert the racial and gender melancholies which she has suffered as a result of her colonial education and Christian religion. This study, therefore, shares Rosanne Kennedy's (2014:92) that the problem of Tambu is "how to recover from the damage of a colonial education and be liberated from the systemic racism she has internalised". With the internalisation of colonial racial ideology, Tambu finds it difficult to decolonise her mind and to assert her personhood and feminine integrity in a patriarchal society.

Dangarembga is of the view in *The Book of Not* that the alternative for self-reclamation is to shun all forms of self-objectification which have been imposed by racism and patriarchy. Tambu's self-objectification spurs the spirit of sisterhood with other black girls in Sacred Heart. The bond of sisterhood connects all the black girls in the College because they have and share similar experiences of racism and racial discrimination. In the College, Tambu becomes a "detached observer" of activities of the white girls in the College. She uses their behaviour as standard to measure her own action. She holds on to the racism and racial discrimination in Sacred Heart because of the assumption that her education will bring a better tomorrow for her and others. This tenacity of hope in a better future is captured in the following words:

> I believed in the college with a practically ferocious tenacity. I may have thought differently, but I didn't believe it. Belief prevailed. This school that formed us was an early and important post on the road to better living. You believed the signs to this superior destination were placed along the way by those who knew and wished you a safe journey, so that all you had to do was follow.   (*The Book* 164)

The colonial education of the school assists the patriarchy to further have a stronghold on the identity and integrity of women in the novel. The indoctrination of the minds of Tambu and other girls in Sacred Heart subverts Tambu's radical view and interpretation of realities around her. The indoctrination of Tambu's mind with colonial education and mentality makes it difficult for her to liberate herself from the firm grip of patriarchy. Every attempt she makes to ensure that she occupies a central space in the social matrix is abortive because she does not have a clear vision of her status in the patriarchal social arrangements. The implication of this argument for the gender integrity of Tambu is that her education does not add any value to her.

The novel in the final analysis suggests utopian future for Tambu as she is unable to attain the dream she has set for herself in her first year in Sacred Heart. She is unable to attain personhood an *unhu* which she has promised herself. This study, therefore, is of the view that Tambu suffers from self-defeat because of the aborted hope:

> I had forgotten all the promises made to myself and providence while I was young concerning carrying forward with me the good and human, the unhu of my life. As it was, I had not considered unhu at all, only my own calamities, since the contested days at the convent. So this evening I walked emptily to the room I would

100

soon vacate, wondering what future there was for me, a new Zimbabwean. (*The Book* 246)

She leaves the College with empty hand and no courage to return to Babamukuru and her native people. This study, therefore, argues that Dangarembga unconsciously upholds patriarchal ideology of subversion and denial. The conclusion of the novel on the note of despair and frustration for Tambu, the protagonist of the novel, suggests that Dangarembga opposes to girl-child education. This view is maintained because Tambu's education does not add value to her social identity and personhood. This argument is consistent with Kennedy's (2008:89):

> This is a novel of 'unbecoming' — of the loss of identity, feeling, and attachments. Despite her concentrated efforts to exercise agency over her life, Tambu is repeatedly thwarted: by the psychic damage she sustains as a result of internalising a Eurocentric view of her African 'inferiority.

Tambu is unable to find her bearing and direction in a patriarchal society because of the mixed identities she has acquired during her education. She has suffered both physical and psychological disillusionment in patriarchal social arrangements.

The understanding of the political situation of her country may contribute to Dangarembga's contextualisation of the guerrilla warfare in Rhodesia within the narrative of *The Book of Not*. Despite the masterfully integration of the activities of freedom fighters in the context of the novel, Dangarembga still holds patriarchal ideology in her representation of women freedom fighters in the novel. Netsai's loss of her leg to the explosion at the land mine is attributed to carelessness. The argument is that a male soldier will be more careful while walking around land mines. This argument is buttressed with the facts that male freedom fighters are the ones who come to Netsai's rescue. Netsai, like other female freedom fighters are marginally represented in the narrative. The study, therefore, argues that Dangarembga unconsciously "reinforces the image of the female soldiers as weak and incapable of enduring the rigors of war" (Christiansen, 1997:243).

The female freedom fighters are presented as peace loving and compassionate as against the patriarchal standard for a warrior. Dangarembga gets it out of the way here

because human history has recorded some women amazons who were brave and valiant at wars of territorial expansion and protection. The violence and fierceness of the war for the female freedom fighters does not change the patriarchal perception of their worth as soldiers. Rather, the patriarchal society also conscripts them to the gender stereotypes of sex objects. This argument is consistent with the view of Juliet Sylvia Pasi (2017:90):

> The violent nature of the liberation struggle and the construction of the District Council houses not only destroys the natural environment, but also affects women more. The female freedom fighters are objectified as sex objects as they are sexually abused by the male freedom fighters. Maiguru's garden is the only space that gives authority and power to women. By the end of the novel, the protagonist Tambu, remains oppressed by the patriarchal, racial and colonial systems.

The objectification of the female body which female freedom fighters object to is a pointer to the fact that women cannot be totally free from patriarchal domination in socio-political space. As the women join forces with their male counterparts to fight the agents of racial and colonial oppression in guerrilla warfare, they are oppressed in another form based on the weakness of their body and gender. The rape the female freedom fighters face in the bush is a patriarchal attempt to demean their potential as nationalists with strong fervour as men. The female freedom fighters are, therefore, subjected perpetually to patriarchal oppression because of their anatomical sex and gender stereotypes. In the traditional African societies, women were conscripted to engage in domestic chores and farming in farm lands which are close to the homestead. They are not expected to be warriors or freedom fighters as presented in the novel, *The Book of Not*. The only gender role and expectation of women in time of war is to take care of the home fronts in the absence of their husbands and at the same time, to care for the food of the warriors. This gender role and expectation of women in time of war is consistent with Elshtain's (1987:164):

> In the matter of women and war we [women] are invited to turn away. War is men's: men are the historic authors of organised violence. Yes, women have been drawn in – and they have been required to observe, suffer, cope, mourn, honour, adore, witness, work. But men have done the describing and defining of war, and the women are "affected" by it: they mostly react.

The female freedom fighters are victims of hegemonic masculinity like their other female counterparts who are not freedom fighters. This argument is offered because women are always victims of rape and other forms of sexual assault during war.

Dangarembga's argument in the novel, *The Book of Not* is that no matter how hard a woman tries to survive in a patriarchal society, she will also be affected by patriarchal codes of living. What comes of Tambu and Netsai in the novel confirms this idea. They both end up as being helpless and hapless in their patriarchal society because of the harrowing experiences they suffered respectively in the colonial jungle represented by Sacred Heart and African jungle represented by the bush where the freedom fighters hide and fight the colonial government.

Dangarembga has, therefore, presented her female characters within the marginal space of patriarchal norms of restrictions. Tambu and other ambitious female characters in the novel do not attain the maturity of their vision as can be seen in the failed hope and dream of Tambu and Netsai when they come out of colonial and African jungles respectively. This study, thus, corroborates Florence Stratton's (1988:147) view about female writers:

> Their female characters are enclosed in the restricted spheres of behaviour of the stereotypes of male tradition, their human potential buried in shallow definitions of their sex. Silence, like the slave woman, by blows, - either bodies or psyches – they are forced to submit to the necessity of conforming to the externally imposed requirements of their masculine societies. Living in bondage to men, but desiring to live freely and fully, they are bewildered by, or seethe with inner rage at their servitude to a structure of values matched to the needs of others… They are schizophrenic, their personalities fragmented by their desire both to accept and reject their condition.

Through the characterisation of Tambu, Netsai and other female characeters in the novel, Dangarembga has presented women as object and subject in gender conflicts.

One Day I Will Write about this Place

The novelty of Binyanvanga Wainaina's *One Day I Will Write about this Place* is in the author's adoption of memoir as a narrative technique to represent patriarchy and

space in the novel. This observation is premised on the fact that the whole of the narrative does not capture the entire life span of the author/narrator. The plot of the novel, however, covers a segment of the life of the author/narrator. The view of this study on the difference between memoir and autobiography is consistent with Sidonies Smith and Julia Watson's (2010:3-4) view that memoir's "recollections often bracketed one moment or period of experience rather than an entire life span and offered reflections on its significance for the writer's "status or self understanding". The uniqueness of the novel is established with the fact that it offers a fresh insight into contemporary prose narrative in Kenya. Majority of memoirs and meimorists in colonial Kenya were whites who gave the accounts of the adventures in Kenya and other parts of East Africa. Earliest memoirs in Kenya were by nationalists recounting aspects of their experiences in the struggle for self governance. Leading examples of African memoir are Tom Mboya's *Freedom and After*, Odinga Odinga's *Not Yet Uhuru* and Harry Thuku's *An Autobiography*. Since the time of these earliest memoirs/autobiographies, contemporary writers, except Wainaina, have not engaged memoir as narrative technique in Kenya novels.

Owing to the fact that the novel is a memoir, the author adopts self-narrative to present trajectory of development and experience transcending boundaries and geographical locations. This view informs the idea of engendering self. This is because the narrator/author presents self with the gender perception and reception of others. The narrator/author sees himself as a gendered person whose individualism and personality is influenced by others based on the norms and values of the society. The author's parentage has great influence on his childhood and upbringing particularly the ethnicity of his father who is a Kenyan. The memoirist traverses the homecountry of his mother (Uganda) and that of his father (Kenya) throughout the narratives and how these home towns have shaped his bearing and understanding of life.

Wainaina's *One Day I Will Write about this Place* is not a personal memoir but rather the memoirist assumes the position of the chronicler of the political activities in post-colonial Kenya and how this has affected his horizon about life. The peculiarity of this narrative to this study is that it has many male actors whose actions and inactions have influenced the destiny of their country after political independence. The narrative of

the memoir which begins in 1978 focuses on the leadership of Kenya since the time of political independence. The regimes of four of the presidents are captured and these are Jomo Kenyatta, Daniel arap Moi, Mwai Kibaki and Uhuru Kenyatta. These four leaders have influenced the fate of Kenya considerably and greatly. Kenyatta's regime is presented through the eye of a seven year narrator who one will assume has not attained maturity to interpret political situations around him. The narrative reaches its maturity when the narrator attains adulthood with the ability to interpret and analyse the political happenings around him. The narrative reaches its crescendo with the ability of the narrator to crytallise personal and collective experiences together in a gendered society.

The deduction is that there is no way that the political and sociological situations of a society will not influence the identity and personality of individuals within a social matrix. The naivety of the seven year narrator is seen in the beginning of the novel when he is trying to appraise the justification for the name of Kenyatta as the president of the country. Wainaina, in a confused state of mind states "Kenyatta is the father of our nation. I wonder whether Kenya was named after Kenyatta or Kenyatta was named after Kenya" (*One Day* 25). The implication of this situation is that readers cannot really rely on the information that the memoirist provides at this stage of his development. This argument is based on the naivety and confusion which have characterised some of the narratives at this stage. The similarity in the name of the president and the country, perhaps, influence the idea that Kenyatta is the father of Kenya. Read from another perspective, it can be because Kenyatta was a frontline nationalist in the struggle for Kenya's political independence as we have Nelson Mandela in South Africa and Kenneth Kaunda in Zambia. Similarly, at the age of seven, the memoirist has no ability to be critical of the events and happenings of his society. His assumption is that the reign of Kenyatta is peaceful with the singing and chanting of the slogan *Harambee*:

> We are all pulling together, and in school we sing, *harambee*, which means we are pulling together, like a choir, or tug-of-war. Standing on the podium of the choir, waving a fly whisk, is a conductor, President Kenyatta, who has red scary eyes and a beard. (*Place*. 24)

The spirit of *harambee* is unity, cooperation and self help. On the other hand, some decade after political independence, the spirit of *haranbee* died off because of classicism and social stratification occasioned by gender and social class.

The memoirist skill in narrating self and collective consciousness of the nation is seen in his description of Jomo Kenyatta and Arap Moi who became President after Kenyatta. In the narrative, Kenyatta's regime came to an end with his death in 1978 while Arap Moi who was his Vice President became the President of the country. While describing Kenyatta, the meimorist is personal and subjective because of the fondness he has for Kenyatta while he is detached in his description of Arap Moi. This observation is made through the use of collective we to describe the personality and reception of Moi as the new President of Kenya:

> Sometimes we like Moi because he fumbles, like most of us. He isn"t booming like Kenyatta, or polished and slick like Charles Njonjo. His English stumbles, his Kiswahili is broken and sincere. We have no idea what man and mind he is in his home language, Tugen. That is a closed world to the rest of the country outside his people. We are not curious about that world. We make a lot of jokes about him.   (*Place.*43)

The use of collective we in the excerpt reveals some sociological and cultural perceptions about individualism and collectivism. It is genderless as it does not reveal specific gender of the people who do not like the President. The implication of this is that the President suffers total rejection by the country people. Moi's government is unpopular, unlike Kenyatta's regime in Kenya. With the use of "we" to describe the perception of Kenyans about Moi's regime, the meimorist attempts to construct a social frame for individuals regardless of their gender and socio-economic class. Aleida Asmann (52) is of the view that social frame is a shared feelings and concern:

> the family, the neighborhood, the peer group, the generation, the nation, the culture are such large groups that individuals incorporate into their identity by referring to them as "we". Each "we" is constructed through shared practices and discourses that marks certain boundaries and defines principles of inclusion and exclusion.

With the use of "we" individuals in the country collectively assume responsibility for their reactions and attitudes towards their President. The use of "we" therefore connotes collective voice and responsibility in the affairs of the country.

The resentment of Kenyan people for Daniel Arap Moi may be connected to his gender relations in society. The memoirist presents him as a weak family man whose wife slaps him in public even before President Jomo Kenyatta:

> Lena Moi Primary school used to be Lugard School, a Whites-only school until the 1960s. Now it is named after Lena Moi, the abandoned wife of our president, Daniel Toroitich Arap Moi. When Moi was Vice President, she slapped him during a Madaraka Day dance, in front of President Kenyatta, who laughed at him, and that made him angry and now we hear she cannot leave her farm. She comes from an important Kalenjin family, the Bomets, a big farming family, one first in the Rift Valley to become Christians and go to the mission school. (*Place.* 48)

Lena's action is an instance of gender violence. The patriarchal society of Kenya overlooks this shortcoming because of the position of authority (Vice President) which Moi occupies at the moment. The public disgrace that Moi suffered from his wife (Lena Moi) is uncalled for and punishable but patriarchy will not subscribe to a deflation of masculine ego because of a woman. The relationship between Daniel Moi and his wife, Lena Moi may be connected with the difference in their socio-economic backgrounds. Before he becomes a Vice President, Daniel Moi was a teacher with no economic strength while Lena is from a well-to-do family. With the separation between Daniel and Lena Moi in 1974 and their eventual divorce in 1979, Daniel Moi takes a radical step of severing all the links and affiliations with his enstranged wife, Lena. One of these steps is the change of name of Lena Moi Primary School to Moi Primary school:

> One day President Moi drives past our school in his motorcade. He stops. He donates a whole truck of orbit chewing gum… Starting today, our school is no longer Lena Moi Primary School; it is newly painted Moi Primary School. All the old rubber stamps and exercise books are collected, all stationary, anything with the word *Lena* disappears. (*Place.*58)

With the severance of every link with Lena, Moi changes the societal perception of his masculine weakness. He shows that wife battering and beating are not signs of masculine ego and strength. His actions show that when men relate maturely to situations involving their wife, praise shall accompany their actions. Lena Moi is seriously hit by Daniel Moi's actions.

While engendering self, the narrator is silent on the role and contributons of his father towards his achievement. On the other hand, he emphasises the influence of his mother (Rosemary Kandiki) and sister (Ciru) on his life achievement. While narrating self in the memoir, the narrator's life can be put in three phases and these are childhood phase, adolescent phase and the phase of adulthood. The narrator presents his sister (Ciru) as brilliant in school always come on top of the class. Since the age of five, Ciru has demonstrated brilliance in class and this has always captured the interest of the narrator whose determination is to come first in his class. In this line of thought, this study aligns its view with Jepkorir Grace Serem's (2014:58):

> The narrator progresses well academically at the primary school level. The desire to be like his sister eventually makes him an achiever. Ciru, his younger sister, whom the narrator paints as a genius since she was five is still leading in her class. When the narrator is in class four he leads in his class for the first time and this surprise everyone including the narrator. This achievement becomes a defining moment in the narrators" life. It is at this point that he realises that being among the best students in class is not a very special occurrence.

The influence of his sister propels him to strive harder to make to the top in his studies. No wonder that the memoirist says that his sister has great influence on his life. The determination for sucesss strengthens him throughout his educational pursuit.

The contribution of the narrator's mother to her life achievement is found in her being proactive to the needs and sensibilities of the children. As an owner of personal business (a salon), she gets enough chance to cater for all the needs of her children. The narrator states that his mother is supportive despite the patriarchal perception of her potential for the socio-economic upkeep of the family.

Another important feature of engendering self in *One Day I Will Write about this Place* is the author's declaration of his sexuality. In the novel, the narrator/author declares that he is a gay and that he is aware of this since the age of five. His earlier exposure to sexual experience with neighbours doing it nearby makes him prone to masturbation which eventually degenerates to homosexuality. He authenticates his sexual orientation as homosexual in his other publication, *The Lost Chapter.*

CHAPTER FIVE

GENDER DISCOURSE SHIFT IN NAGUIB MAHFOUZ'S *PALACE WALK AND DANIEL MENGARA'S MEMA*

Plot Summary of *Palace Walk*[1] and *Mema*

Palace Walk

The plot of the novel focuses on Jawad's family with all the stress and strains. The family comprises Jawad as the head of the family, a wife cum mother (Amina), three sons (Yasin, Fahmy and Kamal) and two daughters (Khadija and Aisha). Jawad, as the head of the family is presented as a disciplinarian that rules with double standard. He does what he forbids for all his family members: he drinks alcohol despite his strict Islamic religious background, he engages in extramarital affair as against the teaching of Islam, he engages in night crawling with nobody to question him. With the way he rules his house, Jawad does not see his wife (Amina) as a companion whose views and opinions count in the affairs of things at home.

With his style of leading his family, Jawad subjects his family, particularly, into the culture of silence. He expects the wife to take orders without questioning. She (Amina) has no freedom and independent opinions of her own. Amina is absolutely subservient to her husband owing to the factors of patriarchal structures and Islamic religion, which is most prevalent in Northern African sub-region. One of the tenets of Islam on marriage and marital relationship is that a woman should be totally submissive to the will of her husband. This is what Amina follows to the extreme to the extent that she does not have independent opinions of her own.

The absolute submissiveness of Amina to the will of her husband may inform the narrative pattern of the author who centralises attention on her status and role in the matrix of relationship in a patriarchal setting. As a way to demonstrate her submission to patriarchal standard, Amina dutifully carries out her duties as a wife and a mother. She plays these roles at the expense of her own comfort and convenience. She has inculcated the habit of ensuring that her husband must be satisfied, before she thinks of other things.

Even when her husband comes back home late, Amina will not have a sound sleep or she stays awake. This is a way of conditioning herself to the socialisation process of a girl-child in her matrimony.

Mema

First published in 2003, *Mema* shares the quality of a biographical novel with the narrator sharing with the audience the life and time of his mother, who is explicitly referred to as Mema throughout the novel. Mema is presented as a woman with strong will and perseverance to achieve her set goals. The narrator opens with a feeling of nostalgia and longing for his mother. This narrative style prepares the audience for the flashback into the life and trials of Mema, the mother of the narrator. Mema is versatile in nearly all areas of human endeavours – she is a competent public speaker, a brave and uncompromising woman. The villagers, particularly, fear her fury which she has used on many occasions to save her face and integrity.

The novel examines the culture in transition through the perseverance of a woman who has a resolute power to live beyond patriarchal limitations. Mema does not present herself as a woman who can be tossed around by phallic proscriptions as evidences of this are abound in the novel. When her husband dies, her in-laws accuse her of killing their son and for this reason, they conspire to assume the paternity of her children without her consent. As a woman with strong will and untiring spirit, Mema resists all attempts to take away her children from her. With her resolute will and strong determination, villagers take her for a witch. To this end, they always keep distance from her.

Mema does not spare the church of her sharp criticism (as it is used in the novel *bad mouth*). The Presiding Pastor is always full of joy in a day that Mema does offer a criticism of what is delivered as a sermon by the Pastor. Mema is presented as a loving wife and doting mother in the novel. This is shown with her strong will to do the forbidden to ensure that her husband survives the sickness which has incapacitated him. Unfortunately, the husband dies in the process. As a demonstration of her love for the deceased husband, she refuses to re-marry or leave the household of her late husband. As a doting mother, Mema is seriously interested in the welfare of her children and hopes

that they become outstanding achievers in life. As an indication of her hope in the success of her children, Mema allows the narrator to go to the city to learn the language and culture of the Fulassi to become the Osuga Zame of the family.

This action of Mema presents her in the novel as a woman who is proactive and practical in her thought and action. The novel is set in a society which is experiencing a gradual transformation from agrarian culture to modern culture. This transformation is expected to be through education introduced by the Fulassi people who are the whites. The novel concludes with the narrator's protagonist feeling and promise of always remembering Mema for all that she represents.

Gender Discourse Shift in *Palace Walk* and *Mema*

Palace Walk

The idea of gender shift reveals the empathy that male writers demonstrate in the representation of their female characters. Mahfouz demonstrates gender shift with the presentation of his male characters alongside the female characters. These male characters are presented in a manner which leaves the readers baffled about the gender status of the female character in the novel. Mahfouz representation of women in the novel reveals his liberal disposition towards feminist movement in Egypt and the empathy he has shown towards the status and integrity of women in Cairo, the primary setting of the novel.

Through characterisation and proper plot arrangement, Mahfouz critiques the representation of women in Egypt with the influence of religion, culture and tradition which confine women to a level of domesticity and invisibility. This confinement of women's roles to the domestic spheres is revealed through the characterisation of Amina, the female protagonist of the novel.

By the tradition and the dictate of religion, Amina is only expected to care for the well being and ego of the male characters in the family set-up of the novel along-side other female characters that are present. Through socialisation process which confines women to the status of wifehood and motherhood, Amina is already groomed into the

habit of caring for the physical well-being of the family to the extent that this has become a habit she has learnt to live with. She wakes up early every morning to cook and care for the children in contrast to her husband who is reckless in the care and up keep of the family. The novel excerpt reveals the commitment and seriousness of Amina to be responsible to her roles as a wife and mother:

> Habit woke her at this hour. It was an old habit she had developed when young and it had stayed with her as she matured. She had learned it along with other rules of married life. She woke up at midnight to await her husband's return from his evening's entertainment. That she would serve him until he went to sleep. She sat up in bed resolutely to overcome the temptation posed by sleep. After invoking the name of God, she slipped out from under the covers and onto the floor. (*Palace.* 1)

The above quoted instance shows the life of lack of freedom and independence that Amina lives in her marriage. She gives it all to her husband. She stays awake to satisfy the sexual org of her husband. She sleeps on the floor while the husband sleeps in the comfort of a bed.

The representation and characterisation of Amina is an attempt by Mahfouz to expose the gender inequality in the Cairo society, which is the primary setting of the novel. With this attempt, Mahfouz aims, perhaps, to recreate modern Cairo women who will live beyond the traditional roles of wifehood and motherhood. Amina has no prospect of improving her status because she lacks education and exposure that will liberate her unlike the female protagonists in Nawal El Saadawi's *Women at Point Zero* and *Two Women in One*. With Amina's lack of education in the novel, Mahfouz subtly advocates that the only way Cairo women can be liberated is through education and access to economic space as in the case of Jawal's mistress in the novel. It is, therefore, argued in this study that Mahfouz's treatment of gender status of women in the novel reveals a clear distinction between Western feminism and African feminism. The Western feminism only aims at interrogating the male dominance in the West with the aim of enhancing the status of women in the society. In Africa, like other underdeveloped/developing countries, the struggles are always foreign and male dominations. This argument is consistent with Nawal El Saadawi's (1989:vii):

> In underdeveloped countries, liberation from foreign domination often still remains the crucial issue and influences the content and forms of struggle in other areas including that of women's status and role in society.

Mahfouz stylistic approach in the representation of male and female characters in his novel reveals a gender shift with a man writing to subvert the repressiveness of women in the African patriarchal society. The novel, in its subject matter and thematic pre-occupation, reveals feminine agitation for social and economic space in a developing country which is immersed in too much religiosity that has limited the rights and privileges of women. The novel is a sort of questioning of the parochialism of hegemonic masculinity which is one of the major qualities of patriarchal society. Jawad typifies every man in patriarchal Cairo society where women are seen as nobody and nothing until recently.

With his style of leading his family, Jawad subjects his family, particularly Amina (his wife), into the culture of silence. He expects the wife to take orders without questioning. She (Amina) has no freedom and independent opinions of her own. Amina is absolutely subservient to her husband owing to the factors of patriarchal structures and Islamic religion, which is most prevalent in Northern African sub-region. One of the tenets of Islam on marriage and marital relationship is that a woman should be totally submissive to the will of her husband. This is what Amina follows to the extreme to the extent that she does not have independent opinions of her own.

The absolute submissiveness of Amina to the will of her husband may inform the narrative pattern of the author who centralises attention on her status and role in the matrix of things in a patriarchal setting. As a way to demonstrate her submission to patriarchal standard, Amina dutifully carries out her duties as a wife and a mother. She plays these roles to her own discomfort and inconvenience. She has formed a habit of married life that her husband must be satisfied before she thinks of other things. Even when her husband comes back home late, Amina will not have a sound sleep or she stays awake. This is a way of conditioning herself to the socialisation process of a girl-child towards a marital life.

Mahfouz presents the above situation in the family structure of Jawad household, perhaps to interrogate the logicality of masculinity which has been the major indices of the home. Despite the fact that Jawad is a successful business man, he is reckless in the supervision of the home. He comes home late at night when all the children might have slept. The nurturing of the children is placed on Amina. The argument of Mahfouz is that most men are always irresponsible in the management of the affairs of their homes – they always think that they are only responsible for the economic well being of their homes by providing the basic necessities (food, clothing and housing) for their families. Jawad is one of those men who do not care for the emotional and psychological development of their children. He does not show much care to know how his sons are faring in schools and their chosen careers. This shortcoming in the fatherly responsibility of Jawad negatively affects the emotional and psychological development of Yasin – his son and eventually culminated into the failure of Yasin's first marriage. The novel presents Yasin as the replica of his father in terms of addiction to alcoholism, adultery and marital infidelity. Yasin's carefree nature may inform his attitude towards women. He sees all women as the same with so many faults in their characters. This mindset may inform his opinion about women and Amina that they are irresponsible and irrational in their behaviour:

> A woman. Yes, she's nothing but a woman. Every woman is a filthy curse. A woman doesn't know what virtue is, unless she's denied all opportunity for adultery. Even my stepmother, who's a fine woman- God only knows what she would be like if it weren't for my father.   [*Palace.* 88]

Yasin's view about women, as shown in the above excerpt, is a general perception of women in a patriarchal society with specific reference to Cairo, the primary setting of the novel. Patriarchal societies always hold a parochial view that women can only behave well with the supervision and control of men. Yasin praises his father with his ability to subdue the will of Amina which eventually turns her to a virtuous woman. Yasin fails to evaluate the failure of his father to 'tame' his own mother which eventually leads to the collapse of the marriage. Besides, Yasin fails to critique the infidelity of his father, Jawad, with the mistress. The critical issue here, therefore, is that both men and women are often guilty of marital infidelity.

115

In *Palace Walk* and other two novels which make up the trilogy, Mahfouz writes in favour of his female protagonists who always strive for visibility and relevance in the complex and dynamic patriarchal society. With his treatment of female protagonists in his novel, Mahfouz presents himself as an individual who negates the patriarchal ego of female oppression and domination. The pattern of narrative and his literary imagination queries the prevailing gender inequality in a non-secular society like Egypt. The thematic presentation of the novel, therefore, qualifies Mahfouz as a feminist writer – this point is made because of his pro-feminist treatment of the male characters side by side the female characters in the novels. The plot of the novel reveals a binary opposition of the male and female ethos. This is bore, perhaps, out of the passion of Mahfouz for the defence of human rights, irrespective of gender and social status.

Passionately, Mahfouz interrogates the trends of gender stratification and inequality in terms of social and economic space through the characterisation of the male and female protagonists in the novel. These protagonists represent the sexual identity of their respective gender and social expectations in relation to the dynamics of family and society. Despite this passionate interest in the defence of the integrity and status of women in the novel, some female writers and critics do not trust the pro-feminist inclination of Mahfouz. One of the leading voices in the criticism of Mahfouz's pro-feminist inclination is Nawal El Saadawi (1989:160):

> Among the male authors I have read, both in the West and in the Arab world, irrespective of the language in which they have written, or of the region from which they have come, not one has been able to free himself from this age-old image of women handed down to us from an ancient past, no matter how famous many of them have been for their passionate defence of human rights, human values and justice, and their vigorous resistance to oppression and tyranny in any form.

Saadawi's reaction to female representation in male-authored novels is a representation of the age-long gender warfare in life and literature. There is always a mutual suspicion between men and women in relation to sexual identity and gender role in the society. The failure of Saadawi's criticism of the gender narrative in Mahfouz's *Palace Walk* is that she (Saadawi) fails to view the text as independent of its author

following Roland Barthes's postulation of the death of the author. The novel, *Palace Walk*, is best enjoyed when read with reference to how language is used and its structural pattern without reference to the biographical information of the author. When this approach is adopted in the critical reading and analysis of the novel, the reader will be able to uncover the feminist ideology of the novel. It is to this end that this study is not comfortable with Saadawi's reaction to the pro-feminist ideology that Mahfouz has presented throughout the entire plot of the novel.

Menahem Milson's (1989:124) description of Mahfouz Cairo trilogy as novels with indexes of social realism is apt. Mahfouz wrote *Palace Walk* with other two novels which make up the trilogy based on the understanding of the socio-economic structure of Egypt. The masculinity and submissiveness of women and docility of children which constitute basic feature of Cairo society are presented in the novel. The manner of the narratives in the novel presents an instance of gender shift because Mahfouz expresses sympathy and empathy for the female characters in the novel. In a similar direction, Milson argues:

> Mahfouz endeavors to grasp social reality as observed directly by him. These stories need not be explained by, nor can they be reduced to, a set of theoretical ideas and moral precepts; they have an artistic existence of their own. [However], many of the characters in these novels represent something beyond their fictional role. Stern patriarch, submissive wife, obedient and dutiful son, rich merchant and other similar characters are social types as well as individual people. Mahfouz has certainly retained the impulse of a social critic and the pathos of a moralist…
>
> (124)

Like every other feminist novels, Mahfouz's *Palace Walk* exposes deprivation, victimisation and oppression that women suffer in patriarchal societies. One of the mechanisms instituted by patriarchy is the deprivation of girl-children access to education of any form. This practice is an index of male egotism to protect their place and hegemony in the complex and dynamic social matrix which involves women. In his narrative and literary imaginary, Mahfouz also intones on the deprivation of girl-children access to education as presented in the characterisation of Jawad's female children (Khadija and Aisha). These poor girls are not given the opportunity to attend educational

institution unlike their brothers who have the opportunity. The belief of Jawad is that his female children can only do better in the kitchen and other areas within which women can function effectively as index of their gender expectation. To this end, Khadija and Aisha are withdrawn from primary school and kept within the home. Jawad is only concerned about training his daughters in ways of becoming good wives and mothers in marriage. He is of the erroneous view that schools have corrupting influence on women. Besides, he is of the view that if women are given the opportunity to be moving around in public, they will become corrupt. His traditional view about the place of women in a patriarchal society is the confine of a home. In relation to this, Jawad oppresses his wife and deprives her all forms of pleasure and some degrees of liberty to the extent of prohibiting her from visiting her parents after marriage. The situation gets worsened that she forbids her from worshipping in a mosque for Jummat service. This might be for the fear of what he does to other person's wives and daughters. Jawad is a flirt. He probably restricts his wife from moving around for two reasons: (i) his experience with his first wife (Haniya); (ii) fear of vengeance on his wife and daughters. The novel, therefore, shares the vision of Marxist feminists that view women as members of the oppressed class in a predominantly patriarchal society.

This study reviews the circumstances which lead to the separation of Jawad and Haniya. This separation is as a result of the masculine ego of the former. Jawad restricts his wife from going outside and from socialising with people outside the matrimony. This restriction makes life unbearable and uncomfortable for Haniya who defies this instruction. To sustain his masculine ego, Jawad send Haniya away from home with the mind that she will come back to beg for forgiveness. She, however, refuses to succumb to the masculine ego of Jawad. This strained relationship eventually leads to separation of both of them. In line with the tenets of Marxist Feminism, Haniya's decision to separate with Jawad is for her social and economic liberation. With this liberation, she hopes to compete meaningfully and profitably with male characters in the novel.

With the characterisation of Haniya, Mahfouz attempts to build a strong woman who will be assertive and critical of her social and economic denigration in the matrix of events in the society. After her separation with Jawad, Haniya begins to live an

independent life selecting the man she desires to live with. With this, she exercises greater level of liberty on matters that affects her life and interpersonal relationship with men. This new life of his mother always torments Yasin psychologically and emotionally. Haniya's new life is profitable for her as she is able to acquire and sustain much wealth. Her freedom from the control of men is a catalyst for her economic achievement. Mahfouz also indicts men of greed and covetousness as some men are eager and willing to foster relationship with Haniya because of her wealth. This situation precipitates altercation when Yasin discovers that another young man proposes to marry his mother, Haniya. While Yasin is discussing with his father about the proposed marriage of his mother, he is worried about the reasons which might have prompted the young man to marry Haniya as revealed in his statement that "what makes him marry a woman ten years older is greed for her money and property" (*Palace.* 117). This is a revelation that men are also guilty of marrying for money and wealth.

Yasin's reaction about the proposed marriage of his mother, Haniya, is not from a genuine concern for the integrity of the latter. He has a secret desire to get all Haniya's property as inheritance. Yasin's fear, however, is that if his mother gets married, he (Yasin) may not have access to her money and property. Yasin is trying to be calculative so that he will not come out of the whole saga empty-handed and with shameful regrets: Yasin's intention and fear are predicated on the fact that her mother may be swayed by love and eventually will the whole property to her husband, instead of him – the son. The excerpt of the novel reveals the extent of the wealth of Haniya and the fear of Yasin in losing the wealth:

> Yes, Haniya, Yasin's mother was well-to-do. Her fortune in real estate had remained intact in spite of her experiments with marriage and love. Although in the past she had been a beautiful young woman with both magic and majesty, to be feared and not feared for, now it was unlikely that she had as much control over others. Her fortune might well be squandered on the battlefield of love, where he was no longer so competitive. It would be courageous in the extreme if Yasin emerged from the inferno of this tragedy with both wounded honor and empty hands.
>
> (*Palace.*118)

The deduction from the above is that Yasin craves for the wealth of his mother. He does not have a genuine interest in protecting her social integrity. Haniya, with her wealth and beauty, is able to decide for herself and control her own life. This is an attempt by Mahfouz to state that economic/financial wherewithal and capability is the sustaining force behind the authority and control of men over women. If women like Haniya have access to economic power, they will be able to control and handle the affairs of their own lives and the lives of others.

The representation of Amina's character (Jawad's second wife) is a contrast to Haniya's characterisation. Amina is conservative and submissive totally to the masculine ego of her husband. She does not have an independent will of herself. Amina's characterisation is Mahfouz's strategy to interrogate the positions of Egyptian Islamic clerics that women should always be under the influence and control of men in their lives, particularly, the husbands. It is this injunction that Jawad wants to uphold strictly by restricting his wife (Amina) and his daughters from going to the public. Maryam Hassan El-Shall (2006:47) evaluates the gender situation in Egypt and how this has been affecting the socialisation and social visibility of women:

> Ibn al-Hajj, an Islamic scholar who helped establish the foundations of Islamic jurisprudence in fourteenth century Cairo, suggests that in order for a woman not to cause havoc in society, she should leave the house three times in her lifetime: when she marries; when her parents die; and at her own funeral. Any contact between men and women was deemed as potentially dangerous, as seen in another of his examples, where he warns the water-carrier to lower his gaze upon entering a house, due to the possibility of seeing an unveiled woman. A spontaneous glance, in this case totally without forethought, was quite naturally assumed to lead towards seduction.

The novel is, therefore, a sort of criticism of the gender and social relationship between men and women in the modern Cairo setting. The women are presented as the endangered species which are to be perpetually under the guidance and control of patriarchal ego. Mahfouz empathises with women in his presentation of their status. The female character which attracts much of the empathy of Mahfouz is Amina who has no

alternative interpretation and meaning about life except the gender roles which have been stipulated by her husband. The gender roles stipulated for her by her husband is cooking, caring for home and the children. In these gender roles, she is dutiful and meticulous:

> …here she was the queen, with no rival to her sovereignty. The oven lived and died at her command. The fate of the coal and wood…rested on a word from her. The stove that occupied the opposite corner…slept or hissed with flame at a gesture from her. Here she was the mother, wife, teacher, and artist everyone respected. They had full confidence in everything she produced. The only praise she ever succeeded in eliciting from her husband, if he did favour her with praise, was for a type of food she prepared and cooked to perfection. [*Palace.*19]

In his presentation of the status of the male and female characters in *Palace Walk*, Mahfouz critiques religion and religious hypocrisy in the creation of gender stratification in Arabian countries where Islam is the dominant religion. The clear example of this presentation is found in the characterisation of Jawad who lives dual lives, with the guise of religious tenets. He does rule his household with strict religious tenets to the extent that he places so many restrictions on the women in the household. Beyond his home environment, Jawad derives so much pleasure in women and wine to the extent of going back home late. Despite his respectable social and economic status with religious understanding, Jawad has no respect for his wife, Amina and the rest of the family. He expects that his order and ways should not be questioned. This is a way to ensure that he maintains his hegemonic masculinity. One of the occasions of his late outing when Amina questions him about his night crawling, he threatens the latter to beat her. In the encounter, Jawad retorts:

> "I'm a man. I'm the one who commands and forbids. I will not accept any criticism of my behaviour. All I ask of you is to obey me. Don't force me to discipline you." [*Palace.* 8]

The above is a reflection of masculine ego which does not allow any woman to critique or criticise actions of men. It is a way of protecting and sustaining the higher social status of men. Jawad's high handedness in ruling his home is a representation of masculine mindsets that their higher social and economic statuses are products of

divinely arranged ethos and not products of social circumstances. This view corroborates that of Barbara Lusk Forisha's (1978:68-69):

> It is no wonder that men refuse to acknowledge that their position is neither natural nor divinely ordained. If they were to concede that their position is just the result of social circumstances, their superior position would become open to question and vulnerable.

Jawad relates his strictness with the tenets of Islamic injunction that women should always be submissive to the will and orders of their husbands. When Yasin's mother comes to the knowledge that male hegemony is not divinely proclaimed, she liberates herself from the shackles of Jawad's tyrannical control of their home/matrimony.

The entire plot of the novel shows that Mahfouz has a very strong aversion for male dominance in Cairo society. He reveals his gender ideology through the characterisation of the male and female protagonists. All the male protagonists of the novel, particularly Jawad and his first son, Yasin, are presented as characters with questionable characters. What Mahfouz intends to achieve with this form of characterisation of these male characters, perhaps, is to establish the fact that men do not have perfect characters and behaviours like their women counterparts. In fact, the statement of Yasin that women cannot do things correctly, except, with the guidance of men is inaccurate. This assertion is a reflection of masculine ego that men are always superior to women in thoughts and actions.

Mahfouz presents Yasin and his father as wayward and incorrigible. In his illogical thought, Yasin refers to women as filthy curse. This statement is ironical of the situation because Yasin cannot do without women and wine. The novel upholds the fact that Yasin cannot survive without the influence of women and wine. Yasin is not selective in his sexual escapade and infidelity. He, at one point in time, sexually abuses Umm Hanafi, the house maid of the family. Instead of his father to reprimand him for the action, he does not. His father only reprimands him for making a wrong choice because Umm Hanafi is old and unattractive. The degree of infidelity of father and son is worrisome because they are both unrepentant of their actions. They see their actions as

consistent with their aristocratic status in their immediate environment. The infidelity of father and son without any sense of remorse is consistent with the view of Nawal El Saadawi (1989:29-30):

> Shame is only the result of poverty, where men are concerned. The male ego grows in proportion to the number of his female conquests, and his sexual relations are a source of pride and occasion for boasting.

The implication of the above for the fate of women in the act of infidelity of their husbands is that they (the women) are always at the receiving end of the whole situation. In the novel, Jawad blames Zaynab, Yasin's wife for exposing the act of infidelity of her husband. What this suggests is that the male characters in the novel do not see anything wrong with their actions. Despite the shortcoming in the characters of Jawad and Yasin, they still believe that they have moral authority to regulate the affairs of the female characters in their control. This study, therefore, observes a sort of double standard in the way Jawad operates. What he forbids his male and female children from doing, he does himself. The situation is worse because he does not want anybody to even mention the name of all his female children outside. The critical issue here is to ascertain the sincerity of intention of Jawad in handling his female children – he is just like a killer that does not want another killer to move a sword across his head. He is afraid that men will [mal-] treat his female children in the like manner he has been treating other women.

If the novel is read from another perspective, one can argue that Jawad is protecting his daughters for safe and sustainable marital life. This is because patriarchal society does not encourage women/wives to be assertive and bold. The society expects the women to always be submissive to the will of their husbands. This view brings to the fore the fate of Zaynab after the open condemnation of the actions of his husband, Yasin. Because she is unable to tolerate the infidelity and waywardness of her husband, Zaynab opts for a divorce. Jawad and Yasin misinterpret Zaynab's actions as being aggressive. On the other hand, Zaynab is only assertive of what she does not like about the actions of her husband. The assertiveness of Zaynab becomes a problem because patriarchal society always takes women assertiveness as aggressiveness as in the case of Zaynab in the novel. This argument is consistent with Dorothy Etuk's (2013: 295) view:

> Assertiveness is especially difficult for women, because many of us are conditioned to be agreeable, polite and generally would strive to make people around us comfortable. Another reason is that many people see assertiveness as a negative behaviour which they confuse with aggressiveness.

This misinterpretation of women assertiveness is one of the strategies that men have put in place to ensure that women are always submissive to their will. Amina who is not assertive is always under the control of all the men in her life. Her characterisation in the novel shows that she has no independent opinion of her own. She always depends on the opinion of her children on some matters. One of the clear instances of this situation is seen when he needs confirmation about the rotation of the earth:

> …she slipped off to Fahmy's room to ask him about the truth of the ox supporting the earth, and whether it still did. The young man thought that he should be gentle with her and answer in language she would like. He told her that the earth is held up by the power and wisdom of God. His mother left content with this answer, which pleased her, and the large ox was not erased from her imagination.   [*Palace.* 70-71]

The deduction from the above excerpt is that Amina's interpretation and understanding of truth and reality depend on all the males in her life. The woman of Amina's character is all that patriarchal society always want in their midst – a woman who will take orders and instructions without any form of interrogation. Amina also desires and expects all her daughters to emulate her conditions in marriage. She wants her daughters to be submissive and docile in marriage, this is because, in her view, that is the only way that they can enjoy their respective marriages. The only time she disobeys her husband by visiting Al-Husayn's mosque is at the instance of Yasin. On this visit, Amina is knocked down by an automobile and in the course she loses her collarbone. Jawad further inflicted masculine tyranny by banishing Amina from his home for a period of time. She is only able to return after the serious intervention from the children. The action of Jawad is justified in the novel that it is for the mere reason of not losing his control and authority over his family:

> If he forgave her and yielded to the appeal of affection,
> which he longed to do, then his prestige, honour, personal
> standard and set of values would be compromised. He
> would lose control of his family, and the bonds holding it
> together would dissolve. He could not lead them unless he
> did so with firmness and rigor. In short, if he forgave her,
> he would no longer be Ahmad Abd al-Jawad but some
> other person he could never agree to become.
>
> (*Palace.* 195)

The above reveals Jawad as an individual who is not in the habit of not showing or betraying his emotion. This is a common attribute of men in a patriarchal society. The action of Jawad is related to the character of Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Okonkwo is in the habit of hiding his emotion. The excerpt shows that Jawad has substantial level of love and affection for Amina. The patriarchal standard he has set for himself within the context of society, however, does not allow him to pardon Amina for her misdemeanour. For not forgiving Amina, he does not want to be seen as a weakling who has no firm control over his family.

Jawad hides under the precinct of religion to execute his illicit plans. He refuses to marry a second wife yet he flirts around with different women. This is not being religious but yet he believes that he is doing everything in line with the ideology of Islamic religion. Sheik Mutawali reminds Jawad that what he does is not consistent with the teachings of Islam and thereby advises that he needs to change. Instead of having a rethink, Jawad retorts:

> Don't forget, Shaykh Mutawalli, that the professional
> women entertainers of today are the slave girls of
> yesterday, whose purchase and sale God made legal. More
> than anything, God is forgiving and merciful.
>
> [*Palace.* 46]

What Jawad refers to is that women are the same in status. It shows his lack of respect for women of all professions and social status. This disregard for women, perhaps, may influence his attitude towards them. Besides, he is of the belief that God is all forgiving and merciful. For this reason, he believes that after repentance, God will forgive him.

His lack of respect for all women in his life, perhaps, informs the reason Jawad is grooming his daughters for marriage. What is disheartening is that marriage, in the view of Mahfouz, is one of the apparatuses adopted by patriarchy to subjugate the will of women. In the context of the novel, marriage is equated with abandonment because any woman that is married is forbidden to visit her parents. There is a reference to this in the reaction of Kamal to the arrangement to marry out Khadija, as it has been done to Aisha:

> What's happened to your mind, Mother?…Are you going to give up Khadija the way you abandoned Aisha? 'She explained to him that she was not abandoning either of the girls but was pleased by what would make them happy…She explained to him that happiness has a price. He protested, 'Who told you that marriage brings happiness? I can tell you that there's absolutely no happiness in marriage. How can anyone be happy when separated from his mother?' He added fervently, 'And she doesn't want to get married any more than Aisha did before her. She told me that one night in her bed.' His mother argued that a girl needs to get married. Then he could not keep himself from saying, 'Who says a girl's got to go to the home of strangers?…'   [*Palace*.326-327]

The argument is that women do have unpleasant experiences in marriage because they do not have the privilege to visit their families. This situation is exactly the fate of Amina in the novel. Kamal critiques this patriarchal arrangement and questions the logic in marriage. It can, therefore, be argued that Kamal is the voice of reason and logic in the novel. He is a sort of authorial voice in the novel. This argument is consistent with Sheridene Barbara Oersen's (2005: 22-323) that the gender representation in Mahfouz's trilogy is a reflection of his exposure to gender relations while he is growing up. He situates his argument in the home environment and different ideological orientations that individuals in the novel have demonstrated. While commenting on the influence of personal experience in the whole narratives of *Palace* Walk, as it is evident in the view of Oersen (22-23):

> The young Mahfouz, who studied philosophy at university, became increasingly disillusioned with religion and he has cited Taha Husayn's On Pre-Islamic Poetry (1926) as the text which has had the greatest influence on his intellectual development. He began to subscribe to the school of thought that reason takes precedence over tradition. It

appears that bridging the gap between reason and tradition was one of the chief obstacles facing those eager to modernise Egypt, as everything "modern" was equated with moral decadence. Despite this sense of the absolutism of patriarchal tradition, however, an investigation of the emergence in Egypt of women's rights movements does indicate an awareness of both the religious and the secular sanction of women's independence.

From the above, it can thus be argued that learning and experience influence the narratives and representation of gender in the novels of Naguib Mahfouz. Through his approach in the writing, Mahfouz attempts to interrogate the status quo and offers some ways out of the problems of gender representation in Egyptian literature. His writings suggest to the readers that men are not divinely ordained as superior to women.

Considering the narratives and the representation of gender in the novel, Maureen Uche Udewenze (2009:66) explains:

> Mahfouz's *Palace Walk* as a typical representation of African males' definition of women in Literature focuses mainly on Islamic patriarchy that control women's lives. Islamic culture continues to teach that women's existence are (sic) only important as much as it is valuable to the men in their lives: their fathers, brothers, husbands and their sons, there is no meaning or value for a female existence outside this cycle. The narrator employs this cultural perspective to approach the issue of how the traditional religious aspect of married life based on patriarchy governs the family. The man alone presents challenges of sexism, classism, racism, and patriarchy while the woman is only valuable in the kitchen and reproductive responsibilities.

Mema

The plot of *Mema*, on the other hand, focuses on the struggle of the female protagonist to liberate herself from the shackles of oppression and victimisation of men. The novel has the quality of gender shift in its narration because the author demonstrates a sort of nostalgia for his mother. Through this narrative approach, the novelist attempts to present the novel to the audience as a biography of his mother who has done something remarkable to be remembered for. A critical analysis and discussion of the novel, therefore, reveals some dimensions to gender studies and these are female masculinity and male feminity. This study upholds this idea because the female characters in the

novel with particular reference to Mema wield much power and influence over their male counterparts with particular reference to Pepa. The influence of Mema is revealed in her physical, psychological and oratory strength. Everybody in the village fears her anger and for this reason, they do not want any interaction with her. The oratory power of Mema is sustained with her ability to use appropriate proverbs within context of her discourse. This argument is sustained with reference to the description of Mema by the narrator:

> My mother was a good speaker. Like all the village people who mastered the art of speech, she always began her talks with a tale or a proverb that was appropriate for the particular situation. And since my mother had a tale or a proverb for all the situations in which she was involved, I believe she herself was a treasure trove of tales and proverbs.   (*Mema* 7)

The above gives Mema confidence to talk even when and where women are forbidden to talk. The ability to talk in the face of strict intimidation is also one of the striking features of Mema. In the church, she questions the sermons of the Presiding Pastor to the extent that the latter is not always comfortable any time Mema is in church for the service. In public gathering, whoever does not have something reasonable to say always keeps silent anytime Mema is around.

The gender representation in *Mema* can be done by considering the nature and basic qualities of male and female characters with reference to their significance to advance the plot and thematic concern of the novel. This approach will afford the present writer the opportunity to evaluate the gender shift in the novel.

Character Name	Sex/Gender (M/F)	Description
Ntsame Minlame (Mema)	F Protagonist,	the narrator's mother
Sima Okang (Pepa)	M Mema's husband	the narrator's father
Elang Sima (The narrator)	M	Mema's and Pepa's son
Akoure Okang	F Mema's sister-in-law	Pepa's older sister

In *Mema*, Daniel Mengara through the homodiegetic narrator, Elang Sima Okang, depicts both men and women in subverted gender roles, attributes or traits. The gender roles depicting female masculinity and male feminity are itemised below:

Female Masculinity

Ntsame Minlame: strong, spiritual, powerful, manly, independent and aggressive. She is intelligent, strongwilled, enduring, assertive, undiplomatic and indiscreet. She is also imposing, convincing and open-minded

Akoure Okang: strong, powerful, manly, independent and aggressive. She is strongheaded, arrogant and undiplomatic.

Women: masters of their households, decision-makers. They control men, their husbands. Women have the power of the inside world. They are discreet and diplomatic.

Male Feminities

Sima Okang: weak/impotent, carnal, powerless, womanly, dependent and calm. He is also a pacifist.

The village catechist: boring in his preaching. He is afraid of preaching the Word of God the way it is to his parishioners. He is often humiliated by Mema.

Men: carriers of empty titles of leadership. Men have the power to control the society but they are docile and are controlled by women, especially their wives.

The above presentation of female masculinity and male feminity reveals the contrast in the character traits of the male and female characters in the novel. The manner of gender representation by Daniel Mengara locates him within the context of gender shift. The focus of this study, however, will focus more on the gender role and expectation of Mema (Ntsame Minlame) and Pepa (Sima Okang) with occasional reference to other characters in the novel as they have contributed to the advancement of the novel's plot.

In the above character analysis, Mema, the female protagonist in the fiction is described as strong, spiritual, powerful, manly, independent and aggressive. She is intelligent, stubborn, enduring, arrogant, undiplomatic and indiscreet. She is also imposing, convincing and open-minded. The firstlines in the opening of the novel read

thus: "I remember. I remember Mema. Mother. My mother. My mother was **a strong woman**" (1) (emphasis, ours).

Mema's strength is increasingly enforced through time: "It is the nature of things that years should take their toll. But the years did not vanquish Mema, because Mema was strong, a strong woman indeed" (4) (emphasis, ours). This depiction denotes an absolutely unfailing strength, the kind of strength that transcends idealised time. Mema's strength actually instills a fear that pervades her hut and even the whole village (Otongwaku). She is feared by everybody, including her husband. When Mema is angry, her strong voice echoes and this frightens both males and females: "She [Mema] had the kind of strong voice that could be heard from one village corner to the other. When that voice started to talk, it sounded very frightful to both males and females" (6) (emphasis, ours). Besides, Mema's strength is buttressed by her deep roots in spirituality:

> "my mother. That mother of mine was herself a strong believer in things that should not be profaned, in things that should go unquestioned because they were truths that were self-evident and manifest in our surroundings. She was very deeply rooted in the belief that things always happened for a reason, and that there would always be truths beyond the perception and grasp of humans" (*Mema*.32).

It is obvious in the quote above that Mema believes in God, a supernatural power and spiritual things that transcend the grasp of human beings. Her role of a strong believer denotes that she is not a carnal person. In fact, she is represented as an embodiment of moral and spiritual values. This role confers a certain power and intelligence on her. Because of this, she obviously becomes fearless, bold and intelligent. The villagers fear Mema for the violence of her tongue coupled with her physical violence:

> Mema had a big mouth too. And when I say a big mouth, I mean she really had a big mouth. Not in the physical sense. But in the sense of the things she said, and how she said them. Somewhere in her heart, Mema always believed she was the most intelligent person in the universe. It was not easy to win a debate against her. She would always try to convince others that she was right. But she was never easily convinced.   (*Mema*. 4)

Unlike Mema, Pepa, Mema's husband, in the novel, is depicted as weak/impotent, carnal, powerless, womanly, dependent and calm. He is also a pacifist, as identified above. Pepa dies of an unspecified disease when the narrator is still very young. As a result, his presence is faint in the narrator's memory. All the narrator knows about his father is what he is told by his mother and other people:

> The story went that Pepa was a very calm and placid man with no real manly power in our household. My mother, her critics said, ran every single thing in the hut with a heavy hand, and a big mouth. Pepa, I was told, had been turned into *a* mere woman in his own hut. He had become an empty shell. A soundless tom-tom. Alion with broken legs who could no longer bounce and pounce. He was thought of as someone so subdued and bewildered by the power wielded by his wife inside and outside the hut that his voice was never heard rising above that of the panther of a woman that people called his wife.   (*Mema* 32)

Considering the role Pepa takes on in the passage above, it is obvious that Pepa is a tamed man; a sort of man deprived of the notion of masculinity. Pepa's attitude here is not natural at all. He is subdued by Mema, his wife as stated by the narrator that "My mother had turned my father into a mere empty calabash using witchcraft" (*Mema* 33). The use of a supernatural power called witchcraft by Mema makes her undo her husband's maleness and as a result she controls his will and manhood. In fact, Mema does not conceal this social practice to the public. Whenever she has the opportunity to exude that she is the one in control, she does so without wasting time. For instance, only men are said to attend *medzo* (meeting or gathering) in the village where they discuss serious issues related to the village life, but Mema often accompanies her husband to such meetings where she misses no opportunity to open her big mouth.She also attends the mud-walled church in the village. There she will impose her presence on everyone, the village catechist inclusive.

When the preaching of the catechist is boring and not accurate enough, Mema will step on the pulpit to take over the sermon and preach convincingly using live examples from the daily experience of her people (34). Mema is presented as a perfect embodiment of her people's culture, history, lores, traditions, mores and customs. She is a kind of person who often records everything that goes around her and she does not find it

difficult to bequeath her knowledge and experience to her children. For example, Mema, in the novel, recounts her experience of the Second World War (1939-1945) to Elang Sima, her son: "white people are really strange people, my mother used to tell me. She thought they were crazy. They could wake up one day and decide that it was time for them to go to war […]. This is how the Fulassi who ruled our land and the Dzaman started to fight a big war against each other (p. 2)."Furthermore, Mema is not formally educated as indicated by her use of expressions like "Fulassi" for "French", "Dzaman" for "German" in the passage above. But she is very unquestionably intelligent. This is consistent with the tenets of Marxist Feminism.

The text above also shows that Mema is mono-parental; who single-handedly raises and educates her children, playing the mother-father's roles. By so doing, Mema negotiates a transgendered identity for herself. In addition, she is a dedicated and caring housewife. When her husband is afflicted with a strange disease, Mema does not abandon him. She actually stands by his side to take care of him and equally shares in his lot: *my father had spent most of his last years going from one nguegan to another.* Mema's in-laws do not understand her character and the logic behind her actions. The in-laws' actions are informed by cultural belief that Pepa, their son and brother belongs to them and not the wife, Mema who they perceive as an intruder. This cultural belief, perhaps, inform their decision that Pepa should not be taken to *mimbiri D*octors. Pepa's sickness, therefore, is the genesis of Mema's trials and tribulation in the novel:

> The sufferings of my mother began when she started to spend most of her time taking her husband to various medicine men and women of our area. She had elected to try all sorts of medicines. But neither the witch-doctors nor their medicines cured my father. (*Mema* 37)

It can be deduced from the above instance that all the medicines in the land of Otongwaku have failed to cure Pepa's strange disease. This informs Mema's courageous decision to take him to the village of Okom where lives a fearful witch called *mimbiri*. Her in-laws, out of sheer fear of the *mimbiri* witchcraft and doctors, quickly oppose this idea and send Mema a delegation to dissuade her from taking their son to Okom. They try to explain the risky nature of *mimbiri* ceremonies to Mema and even draw her attention to

the white priest's warning that "the *mimbiri* is an evil medicine, and that because it is evil medicine, he will exclude from his church all the people who go and seek a cure from *mimbiri* doctors" (38). The narrator notes, "My mother did not yield" (37).

Obviously, Mema turns down people's pieces of advice and takes her husband to the *mimbiri* camp. It must be noted here that Mema's act exudes love. Though Mema terrifies her man (or husband), she, in fact, loves him: "*She [Mema] loved him [Pepa] enormously…* Her fights with him had just been her own capricious way of making sure the relationship was one of love, not of formality" (62) (our italics). When Akoure Okang, Mema's sister-in-law, hears that her younger brother, Sima Okang, has been taken to Okom, she walks with an army of thirty women to wage war against Mema. Mema with the help of her machete scatters all the women (47-48). After this incident, no one dares to stop Mema from seeking a cure from the *mimbiri* doctor. The role of the *mimbiri* doctor is to prepare and send Sima Okang, Pepa, "to the world of the dead to ask for a cure" (49). Sima Okang is warned by the Doctor never to accept the food given to him by the dead. But he does not heed the warning. He accepts and eats the food his dead mother brings to him. This act terminates his life.

This portrayal clearly points out that Pepa is carnal, superficial and greedy. While Mema is still mourning her man's death and is getting ready to take the body back to the village for burial, her two daughters fall sick and subsequently die a mysterious death the following day, thus been a victim of double tragedies of losing three loved ones. What a terrible doom for her! Mema blames her husband's family for her doom. She is in turn blamed by her husband's people for the deaths of their son and granddaughters. In this multitude of blames, Mema becomes shattered, expressionless and weak.

Vanquished by the circumstances of her life, my mother did not have much more word to say. She felt in *a mute silence* and never opened her mouth again. The pain had reached the boiling point in her heart and it felt as though her head was going to be *shattered* into thousands of small pieces. Life itself had become meaningless. She was *ready to die*. She wanted to rejoin her husband and daughters in the invisible world of the dead. She was sure she would feel no pain in the world of the ancestors. She no longer had the strength to fight (64) (Our italics).The italicized linguistic terms in the passage

above show that Mema does possess feminine traits. This observation draws attention to the pendulous nature of gender: gender swings along with context.

Mema's shift from the masculine to feminine can be accounted for by her psychological state at that moment. Mema remains in this context for a limited time (a period of one year or so after the deaths of her husband and daughters). She is woken up from her stupor when her husband's people come to claim the two remaining children (boys: Owono Sima & Elang Sima). She quickly puts on her masculinity and shows them her machete. They all flee in panic. That's how she is able to keep her children with her for some time. On the request of Zula Mebiang, the first child (or son) of Akoure Okang, the one who by tradition has the right and responsibility to look after Mema and her children, a *medzo* (meeting) is held to decide on the burning issue on ground, the issue is to take the two boys away from Mema. During the meeting, Mema exudes all-female attributes: she is very calm, not frightening at all. She agrees to let Elang Sima (the younger of her two sons) go to Beyok (the big city) with Zula Mebiang. *For the first time* in a long time, my mother did not speak during a palaver. *For the first time*, she did not argue with her in-laws. *For the first time in a long time*, others decide her destiny and the destiny of her children. *For the first time in a long time*, she did not show anyone her machete. *She had simply agreed to let me go to the big city* (92) (Our italics). The reason why the *medzo* decides that one of Mema's sons should go to the big city is to keep him far away from the reach of the *beyem* (witches or wizards) who want to exterminate Mema's seeds. But, Mema has a hidden agenda; she wants her son to go to the big city and get education.

As the homodiegetic narrator emphasises, she knows that: "With schooling would come power, and with power total protection for her and my elder brother (121)". It follows from this to assert that Mema is resourceful and open-minded; she is open to modernism, and she wants her son to be her emissary in the city. She recalls this a countless number of times to him: "I want you to be my Osuga Zame" (84), Osuga Zame meaning "the protecting force, the shelter" (121). The old English adage that says that we meet to part and part to meet (Omotoso, 1978, 62) actually holds sway here. Both the

parting and meeting of the mother and her son are charged with mixed emotions: joy and sorrow.

Five years of parting brought much change to the lives of both personae. While Elang Sima goes through Beyok to get the white man's knowledge in school, his mother remarries with a man from another village called Allen. They finally relocate to Allen due to the animosity of Mema's deceased husband's family members towards the man, who is also a clansman. When Mema first visits her returning son in Eboman (the village where Akoure Okang gets married), she actually expects Zula Mebiang to see that she is missing her son, but he fails to do so. So, two weeks later, Mema calls for a *medzo* in Eboman. The *medzo* is meant to put things right. She has come to claim back her son. When she meets Zula's resistance with much insult and disrespect, this is her reaction that ends the meeting: *my mother sprang from her bamboo seat like a famished she-lion. She slapped Zula in the face, causing him to step backward and tumble against his seat.* He landed squarely on his buttocks, causing panic among the people who were sitting behind him. "I have had enough!" my mother shouted fiercely. I tell you this right now. I have had enough. I will not take the disrespect of this man anymore. Ah Zula. Are you forgetting who you are talking to? Are you forgetting that I once cleaned shit from your buttocks? Who gave you the right to talk to me with such disrespect? Did anyone say to you that working in Beyok in the white man's world gave you the right to come here and insult me? Today, I will show you all that I am Ntsame Minlame. Upon this, my mother turned towards me and called: "Elang!" "Mema", I responded, trembling. "Get up and let's go!" she commanded. I hesitated, not knowing what to do. I was afraid. I looked at her, then looked at my aunt Akoure. Then I remembered that I had to start crying and roll on the floor. My mother was not deceived. She briskly seized my arm, pulling me from the floor towards her. Zula had finally been helped up. He and his mother advanced, intending to pull me away from my mother. "*Song*!" ["*Cemetery*!"] shouted my mother in a chilling voice that froze Zula and his mother on the spot. "In her hand had miraculously appeared a machete". The crowd that had gathered inside and outside the kitchen house dispersed in panic (118-119).

Mengara empowers his female characters by focusing on female power as mother and wife inorder to discourage and subdue patriarchal violence against women in his

novel, *Mema*. Daniel Mengara, in his novel – *Mema,* uses to some extent, lies in what Chinweizu pointed out as mother power: the power a mother has upon her infants whether male or female, to subvert the hegemony of patriarchy. Biologically, women are the ones who bear in their womb and give birth to infants. By so doing, this wonderful birth-power gives them authority over humanity.

Mengara, as a womanist writer, has shown the aspect of the supreme power of mother which is a true African cultural reality through old Meleng (Mother of Biloghe"s mother. She is a grandmother to Biloghe) and Bilogh e"s mother. Mengara uses the supreme power of mother to correct distorted image of the African women. He uses it to re-establish women into their right to decision-making in the patriarchal setting of the Gabonese society. For instance, old Meleng"s speech is considered as final and uncontestable when she counter-attacks Nkulanveng during a dispute-settling sitting for the return of Biloghe, her grand-daughter. Though Nkulanveng, the speechmaster, tries to dominate old Meleng with his charisma of male power but Meleng actually uses her female force as a mother to undo the riddle of Nkulanveng. As the homodiegetic character narrates: "His pride [Nkulanveng] had to be put aside, above all because he had been vanquished, not by a peer, but by an old mother who still had a lot to teach people of his generation"(25). Through this portrayal, Mengara confirms what Chinweizu further says concerning female power: "…female power is like the sun–steady, quiet and uncontestable" (1990:22). In fact, not only can Nkulanveng contest what old Meleng has said but the entire people, who are present at the meeting, also attest to what she has said:

> A roar of voices saluted her last words. Ah! These old
> women …No one can be cleverer than they are. Where did
> they learn all these tricks of knowledge? Well, you know,
> never play with those old people. After all, didn"t they give
> birth to us? Yes? So why expect younger people to surpass
> them in wit?   (*Mema,* 25)

In the same way, Biloghe's mother exercises mother power on her son in-law, Ntutume, by warning him never to illtreat her daughter anymore. During her reproach of her son in-law, she threatens to return the dowry he has paid for her daughter, the mother invites his attention to the reality of the fact that he can never provide a substitute to

replace her daughter if he kills her with his brutality. As a reality, the mother power is uncontestable power over men because the particularity of this female power branch is to make men reason about the consequences of their brutality over women. As observed in the novel, when mothers speak in the gathering, their words are incontrovertible and profound. Remi Akujobi (2011:6) argues that "with motherhood, a woman is considered blessed, she acquires a higher status in society, she is respected and mythologised". Accordingly, this is shown through Biloghe's mother when she warns her son in-law in the gathering of Biloghe's people and Ntutume's people who come from different two communities: "As the two communities parted that day, everyone went away pondering over the words of Biloghe's mother, words that symbolises the respect that men and women used to show to one another [...]" (29).

The foregoing exudes a balanced portrayal of both male and female powers. Through Mengara's ardent desire to correct "the social structure in a male dominated environment" (Koussouhon and Dossoumou, 2015:132), he has shown the reality about another aspect of female power which lies in a wife's roles. Indeed, wives are female human beings who are married to men. They are legally married to men and may choose to have children or not. Besides, Mengara also portrays some of his female characters as those who are traditionally married. That is, their parents are informed and have collected the bride-price from their husbands. Since this is an African cultural reality which gives values to married women, they do not allow themselves to be carried away or to be enslaved with this esteem. An instance of this is shown in the novel when married women in the village decide to put an end to men/husbands' ill-treatment of their wives. The women agree to go on a protracted strike in their different matrimonies. In the novel, as a mode of strike, a wife called Akoma cooks and serves her husband's food without water. Though she normally serves food and water to her husband on his dining table, the strike has made her not to serve food with the water. When the husband wants to claim his lordship role over her, she clearly lets him know that the fact that a man has paid the dowry of a woman does not make the woman a slave or an object: "Ah! You think I am your slave? I do not remember my father telling you when you paid the marriage *nsua* to my people fifteen mimbuh ago, that he had sold me to you as a slave. If you want to

drink, go and get your water yourself" (16).The foregoing portrayal really counters first generation male writer's depiction of wives. In early male writings, women are painted as dancing to every clap of their husbands; they are depicted as voiceless and treated as objects and as senseless and incapable of making decision(s).

In this regard, Mengara portrays the female power of his female characters, as wives, in order to debunk the viewpoint of some feminist thinkers who think marriage is a way of enslaving women. For instance, "Emecheta sees the motif of marriage as a form of slavery for woman" (Fonchingong, 2006:140). Although the fact of marrying a woman to man is not everything, it gives the married woman a kind of power over the man/husband especially when it is well contracted. Chinweizu (1990:22) corroborates the wife power when he says that: […] every man has as boss his wife, or his mother, or some other woman in his life, men may rule the world, but women rule the men who rule the world. Thus, contrary to appearances, a woman is a boss, the overall boss of the world.

Mengara, as a womanist writer, has confirmed the powers of wives in ruling the world of men who rule the world through their wives.Women, without taking up arms, are able to persuade their men/husbands, who sometimes are authoritarians, to summon an urgent meeting for the return of Biloghe. In other words, the outcome of the wives' victory over their men/husbands is what has led Ntutume"s family to appoint Nkulanveng, the speech master, to be the speaker of Ntutume's people before Biloghe's people in the negotiation for Biloghe's return. Also, the wives whittle down the egoism of men/husbands. This can be noticed in the speech of Nkulanveng, the speaker of Ntutume's people before Biloghe's parents: "[…] today, we have braved our fears to appear before you at last. Isn't that the most important thing? We have come to beg back our daughter and wife. And we are doing so openly. Is there any shame in begging for what you have lost in foolishness?" (26).

In a nutshell, using motherhood and wifehood as the female power, Mengara confirms Ogunyemi's conclusion when comparing the power of the black woman and that of the white woman in a patriarchal society: *The black woman is not as powerless in the black world as the white woman in the white world […]"* (Ogunyemi in Phillips,

2006:29). Therefore, the female power as mother/wife is not used with violence but with calmness and steadiness to suppress male violence against women who are their mothers, sisters and wives. Indeed, the female power is reinforced as a way of reducing patriarchal oppression against women in the contemporary African society. As pointed out earlier on in the case of Biloghe, women's unity is a strong weaponry that contemporary African women can draw on to make men comply with whatever requests they have. They then need to act and stop being acted upon. The foregoing is consistent with the postulation of womanism, within the context of this study.

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Reference here is to the 2011 edition of the novel.

CHAPTER SIX

GENDER DISCOURSE SHIFT IN NJABULO NDEBELE'S *THE CRY OF WINNIE MANDELA* AND AHLEM MOSTEGHANEMI'S *THE BRIDGES OF CONSTATINE*

Plot Summary of *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* and *The Bridges of Constatine*

The Cry of Winnie Mandela

Published by Bandbury in United Kingdom in 2003, Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* adopts mythico-historical approach to present the fate and destiny of four women in waiting for the return of their respective husbands. The central narratives of the novel are on the fate of Penelope while waiting for her husband, Odysseus who is on national assignment for many years. Ndebele links his narratives with the fate and trials of Winnie Mandela while waiting for the release of her husband who is incarcerated for his active role in the agitation against apartheid regime in South Africa. The novel also gives account of the private lives of four women who are also waiting for the return of their husbands. The novel ends with the divorce of Nelson Mandela and Winnie Mandela on account of high-handedness of the latter while Nelson Mandela is away in prison. The other four women have learnt their lessons that they need to continue with their lives in the absence of their respective husbands.

The Bridges of Constatine

The Bridges of Constatine is a love story which describes the uncommon passionate love between Khaled and Hayat (the daughter of a revolutionary leader who is now late). Hayat becomes the essence of the narrative as her re-appearance offers Khaled the opportunity to recollect his past which is receding into oblivion.

Gender Discourse Shift in *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* and *The Bridges of Constatine*

Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* is an autobiographical, historical and sociological chronicle of the experiences of women in South Africa in the Post-Apartheid regime. The plot of the novel focuses on four women whose husbands are

away for economic, political and social reasons. Each of these women suffers different degrees of loneliness and nostalgia waiting endlessly for their husbands. The novel makes historical allusion to the Ancient Greek story of Penelope who waits endlessly for her husband who is away for national assignment. The striking character of Winnie Mandela occupies the central space of the novel and this qualifies it as a national literature.

Ndebele's treatment of women experience in the novel qualifies him as an individual with the ideology of gender shift. He does not write to deride the contributions of Winnie Mandela in the struggle against apartheid regime in South Africa. The motive of writing the novel, perhaps, is to uphold the fact that Nelson Mandela is not alone in his fight against apartheid government in South Africa. To Ndebele, many years of waiting for the release of Nelson Mandela is tormenting and frustrating for Winnie Mandela. The novel, therefore, is a covert celebration of heroism of Winnie Mandela. This is because Winnie Mandela is presented as a political widow in the narratives of the novel. She has no opportunity to relate freely with her husband who is in detention for championing the movement against racial stratification in South Africa. Ndebele is sensitive to the social positioning of women as waiting widows, as those who maintain the home while their mobile men traverse the world. Yet, at the same time, he locates his hope for the future in the restoration of home. He mediates through Winnie his own nostalgic longing on his return to a liberated South Africa.

Winnie Mandela is presented as the archetypal "political widow," the "ultimate public symbol of women-in-waiting" (61): "You stood in for him.[...] You held onto your husband by absorbing his political image into yourself' (60). Ndebele places her story at the heart of a narrative that includes four "ordinary" women who encircle Winnie's spectacular experience of widowhood with their quotidian experiences. The novel moves between the "ordinary" lives of *"four unknown women"* and *"that of South Africa's most famous woman"* (1) as it responds to the challenge it sets itself: "to build abridge between the public clamour in [Winnie's] life and the intimate secrets deep inside [her]" (52). In search of Winnie's "intimate secrets," the novel hones in on the point at which the homely becomes unhomely. Winnie, therefore, becomes a victim of circumstances following the incarceration of her husband, Nelson Mandela.

141

Ndebele's handling of the gender issues in the novel is to contest the societal and sociological representation of women as individuals with no significant contributions to the growth and development of the society. The characterisation and representation of Winnie Mandela in the novel transcends the private life. The public identity of Winnie Mandela enhances gender self-consciousness of women drawing inferences from the waiting of Penelope for her husband.

Set in an ibandla, in which women debate Winnie Mandela's controversial will to power and willingness to use violence to enforce power and participation in campaigns and boycotts, Njabulo Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* covertly presents how common such actions were among women militants. The participants invite an imaginary Winnie as a foil to narrate their own lives and cross-examine how she could have made such brutal decisions, so unlike those of her husband, made saintly by his long detention and maleness. In an important scene, Ndebele's Manette explains both the dire situation she faced when she realised that her husband was not going to be able to contribute anything monetary and her sense of achievement at figuring out ways to generate income and feed her children. As Manette described,

> I said to myself, "You have to be your own pillar." My children and I! We became a little army of survival. God blessed all five of them with intelligence. I only needed to put a patch of clothing on their backs and a bit of food in their hands, and they took themselves through school and university.   (*Winnie.* 100)

Because Manette appreciates the material value and social worth that the white capitalists extract from black people, her self-satisfied testimony reinserts her actions and those of her children in the racial capitalism which structures society. She refuses to be forgotten:

> Look at me now, my children … They, and children of other mothers, come to you now not as miners, but as bankers, civil servants, chief executive officers, lawyers, doctors, and professors.   (*Winnie.*100)

Mannete's characterisation is consistent with the tenets of womanism which state that women should strive to ensure the success of their community and children for posterity. Mannete does not allow her limitation to prevent her from discharging her duties as a mother and a wife. Ndebele's focus on Mannete is an attempt to reveal the fact that women have different areas where apartheid has affected them. Winnie only combines the private and public lives in the struggle against apartheid regime in South Africa. Ndebele's setting and pronouncements about Mandela's supposed moral failings echo the stakes of cyclical intergenerational dislocation, a legacy of apartheid.

The ambiguously presented figure of Winnie Mandela unifies the text, in that all four of the other women write putative letters to her, which both praise and question her stance, gaining strength from who she was while sympathising with what she had to endure in the long absence of her husband. Nelson Mandela's role in what Winnie became is also implicitly questioned, though the text does quote from the letter he wrote her from prison in which he shows a deep awareness of the burden imposed on her:

> Your love and support, the raw warmth of your body, the charming children you have given the family … the hope of enjoying that love again, is what life and happiness mean to me. I have somebody I love who is worthy to be loved and trusted, one whose own love and patient support have given me so much strength and hope … Yet there have been moments when … I have wondered whether any kind of commitment can ever be sufficient excuse for abandoning a young and inexperienced woman in a pitiless desert, literally throwing her into the hands of highway-men … (*Winnie.*108-109).

The depth of affection and empathy displayed here contrasts with Nelson Mandela's eventual divorce of his wife and Ndebele highlights some of the faultlines which led to this in Winnie Mandela's lament for their loss of intimacy. The words she uses trace the process of alienation, beginning with "Waiting" and "the systematic invasion of whatever dreams we had of family life" (*Winnie.* 88). In what follows Winnie's repetitious use of words such as "home" and "order" develops this idea until it is overwhelmed by other frequently occurring words such as "disorder" and "disruption". Her litany culminates in phrases such as "shattered intimacy" and the conclusion that

"You had to go away to smash something to restore the order of love between us" (*Winnie.* 90). This final sentence, with its precarious positioning of violence and love in the same frame, highlights the disjunction between the political demands of a South Africa undersiege by apartheid on the one hand, and the conditions necessary for a stable family life on the other.

Yet, paradoxically, when Winnie was forcibly removed from her home and sent into exile in Brandfort, the process (as shown in the novel) involved empowerment as much as loss:

> Brandfort was my first real taste of power; something close to absolute power. It came from my sense of having the ability to change things in a place that had no notion of change.   (*Winnie.* 102)

Winnie's ability to transmute disempowerment into engagement, even at times triumph, is one of the reasons she has become such an inspiring figure, and her achievements in restoring some dignity to the black population of Brandfort are well known. Yet the novel also raises the issue of Winnie's abuses of power, with one of the putative letters written to her challenging her:

> So much ugliness was ascribed to you: kidnapping children; gruesome beatings and torture of children; disappearances and deaths, assassinations; defamations and denunciations; intimidation and terror.   (*Winnie.* 62)

By the way he sets out Winnie's story, which repeatedly undermines any easy conclusions about her, Ndebele encourages us to wrestle with these conflicting depictions of Winnie, a provisional stance which may be the closest we can come to solving the riddle of her life. Through the contributions of his characters to this debate, Ndebele manages to represent Winnie as someone both empowered (ironically, by her struggles) and disempowered, by the structures of apartheid – empowered in that she is shown as finding new strengths in response to official harassment, but disempowered in that the limitations imposed on her life, especially her experience in prison, eventually created unbearable tensions which destroyed her moral stability. Winnie Mandela was held for 13

months in solitary confinement in a tiny concrete cell in Pretoria Central prison, during which she was brutally tortured for "Forty days and forty nights" (*Winnie.* 100).

The title of Ndebele's text speaks not of Winnie's story but of her cry, perhaps because a cry can be a very intense form of narrative employed by those wrestling with the inarticulacy induced by trauma. The plight of black women in general is highlighted by Ndebele from the start, with each of the four abandoned wives having to reinvent a coherent narrative of their lives as they struggle to live without their husbands. The tale of Winnie herself is presented by Ndebele as a paradigmatic struggle to find herself, as a woman of power, within the restrictive framework imposed on women by a male-dominated apartheid society. Deprived of both personal relationship and a legitimate sphere in which to exercise her powers of political and social leadership, Winnie is shown as destroying herself in her frantic bid for freedom.

Yet, Ndebele's narrative is not just about Winnie Mandela, it points to the tensions between societal norms during apartheid and the flesh-and blood feelings that are evoked by situations of abandonment and loss of relationship. How is it possible to reconcile the enforcement of traditional values regarding the behaviour of women with the deep suffering felt by so many women as their basic sources of support, love and companionship are removed? This is the nub of the problem: the women are expected by their communities to conform to the Penelope paradigm, but this expectation is clearly an idealised one – the archetype of the abandoned woman who remains faithful to her absent (and often erring) husband is a narrative imposed by patriarchal societies, for the benefit of men only. And, in this text, Penelope herself – in a radical rewriting of the original myth – leaves her husband after he has returned:

> She relates how, when Odysseus returns, he leaves her
> after their first night together "to perform cleansing rituals
> to forestall possible civil strife following his brutal slaying
> of my shameless suitors.   (*Winnie.* 119-120)

But, she says,

> … it has never been told that when he returned, I was gone. I went
> on my own cleansing pilgrimage. Odysseus should not have left

145

me like that on that special morning while I was still learning to savour his return. He should have shown more sensitivity.

(*Winnie.* 120)

The text ends on an optimistic note, with the five women travelling through South Africa in a minibus together, celebrating their self awareness and strength and asserting their right to equality by exercising the social, emotional and geographical mobility traditionally denied women. On their way, they give a lift to a whitehitch-hiker, who turns out to be Penelope. She says that Odysseus was unaware that he had to reconcile with her, as well, and she is now on "a pilgrimage of reconciliation" related to what she calls the unfolding of consciousness in the world, but related specifically to herself, as the world learns to become more aware of me not as Odysseus's moral ornament, but as an essential ingredient in the definition of human freedom. I travel around the world …attempting to free [women] from the burden of unconditionality I placed on their shoulders (*Winnie.* 120).

The Bridges of Constatine

Ahlem Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constatine* transcends gender fixation with the autobiographical narrative style that the novelist adopts. Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constatine* was first published in Arabic in the 70s. The success of the novel is in its lucidity of narration and captivating characterisation with the quality of transgender and gender shift. The protagonist of the novel is a man who suffers disillusionment in post independent Algerian society. Khaled, a revolutionary who fought in the war of liberation against France becomes disillusioned with greed and corruption that pervades his country after the departure of the French imperialist.

Having served years before as a revolutionary in the Algerian war of liberation, where he became responsible for the child of his mentor, the wounded artist Kahled is self-exiled in Paris. Here fate draws together the tangled strands of his previous life in Algeria through the re-introduction into his life of the child he knew, now a grown woman with whom he falls passionately in love. Fate is determined to have the last laugh, drawing Kahled into an emotional turmoil from which he cannot escape, even years later, even after he believes he has lost his love to another.

146

The seductive nature of the female protagonist, and the city of Constantine to which Kahled is ultimately pulled, is matched by the interesting prose style of the author. The entire novel is written in the second person, which can be difficult to sustain without irritating the reader. However, the author comes up with a book in which the narrator talks to his love while never isolating the reader and the 'I' becomes the reader's ally. The female author presents the man's story adeptly and with believability. It is a beautiful, sad, powerful narrative and is highly recommended to those who like their reading to have a literary, rather than a mainstream bent.

Ahlem Mosteghanemi's novel is the anguished statement of a generation but nonetheless stands the test of time. It is experimental with a kind of second person narrative. It focuses on Khaled, a veteran of the Algerian independence campaign, a one-armed painter in Paris who meets the daughter of an old comrade. He knew her when she was an infant. The relationship is deftly drawn with a background of disillusion with the corruption and consumerism of the new leaders of the country.

Khaled's life turns 360 degrees when Hayat, daughter of his long dead commander Si Taher comes into his life in Paris. Hayat makes Khaled remember all his long forgotten /buried memories of Constantine and once again makes his wounds raw!! He is completely besotted by her and starts visualising their future together....His obsession with Hayat reaches such a state that he starts thinking of her and Constantine in the same breath as in they both begin symbolising the same meaning to him...his one true love who is difficult to attain but impossible to leave/ forget.

Khaled and Hayat part ways and all he is left alone with, is his broken heart and shattered dreams: a beautiful heart rending story of unrequited love. The story is from a man's perspective. A man above fifty years old… his dreams, his love, his lust, his frustration, his helplessness, his anger- are all written so convincingly that one can almost imagine the author to be a male. And this affected Ahlem, when she first published this book in Arabic in the mid 70's. It took her three years and five lawyers to prove that this was her creation, written from a male's point of view.

CHAPTER SEVEN
FINDINGS, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Findings

The novel tradition in Africa has experienced some dynamism in plot, subject matter and thematic pre-occupation. In recent times, the thematic concern of African novel has shifted from the issues of coloniality, to some contemporary sociological issues. Among the contemporary sociological issues in the African novel is gender discourse. African writers from different social and gender backgrounds have been engaging gender issues in their creative texts using different stylistic approaches to project their biases and positions.

Contemporary African novelists have been trying to balance the representation of gender issues in their novels without heating up the raging gender debates. They achieve this through a subtle representation of gender issues and characterisation without maligning any sex or gender. Unigwe's representation of gender issues in her novel present a balanced view about marriage and parenting. She does not place the bulk of the blames on men as we used to have in the novels of the pioneer female novelists such as Buchi Emecheta.

The recent issue in gender discourse in contemporary African novels is gender shift in which male authors write in advocacy for better opportunities for women, as found in Naguib Mahfouz'a *Palace Walk*. In the contemporary African novel, there are instances of male/female writers writing in favour of the opposite sex. In this situation, these writers show empathy for the suffering, marginalisation and subjugation of the opposite sex. This overt show of empathy for the opposite sex in the African novel is common among some male writers. In *Palace Walk*, for instance, the writer, through the characterisation of the protagonist, Jawad, shows empathy for the plight of women in a patriarchal society. The problem of the protagonist is compounded with the factors of religion and tradition. What this implies is that the status of women in a patriarchal society is not divine.

Apart from the issue of gender shift in the African novel, there is also an issue of intra-gender conflicts, particularly between mother and daughter, wife and mother-in-law, housemaid and wife. In the case of Adanma and Ezi in *Night Dancer*, there is daughter-

mother intra-gender conflict (Chika Unigwe's unique intervention in contemporary gender discourse in African novel). The daughter has a strained/sour relationship with her mother owing to the issue of single motherhood of the latter. The daughter's attitude to her mother changes after the latter's death that brings about some revelations about her identity. Besides, the novel, *Night Dancer*, is written in the tradition of *bildungsroman* (the novel of development). Adanma embarks on a quest for identity of herself and her mother. The outcome of this quest reveals to her some unknown facts about her late mother.

There is also a new form of inter-gender conflict in the African novel. This new form of inter-gender conflict takes place between step-mother and step-son as presented in *Cassandra*. There is an inter-gender conflict between Steve (Raymond's son from his first marriage) and Cassandra. In African context, there are always instances of inter-gender conflicts between wives and their brother-in –laws and not in the way it is presented in the novel. In African context, there are also instances of intra-gender conflicts particularly among wives, sisters-in-law, daughters-in-law and mothers-in-law.

The representation of gender issues and ideologies in the selected novels have demonstrated a transformation which is consistent with the dynamism of human relationship in contemporary African society. Since literature is not written in a vacuum, the novelists' gender orientations have been influenced by the change in their gendered experiences. The thematic focus and subject matter of the novels are products of the novelists' cumulative experiences in life. One of the instances to buttress this finding is *Palace Walk*, a novel written from the experience of Mahfouz with how women are treated in Egypt. This cumulative experience, perhaps, informs the gender discourse shift which is pervasive in the novel.

Summary

The study has critically engaged the emerging perspectives of gender shift and intra-gender conflicts in gender discourse in contemporary African novels. The gender agenda in African novels has revealed significant changes in how African literary writers have been treating issues of gender in their literary creativity. African novels are selected across gender and regions of Africa covering West Africa, North Africa, East Africa and

Southern Africa. The novels are content-analysed revealing different layers of gender shift and intra-gender conflicts as handled by male and female writers.

The theoretical framework of the study revealed that different gender ideologies inform how literary writers of African extraction have been handling gender issues in their novels. Marxist Feminist ideology encourages subversion of social and gender stratification as a social order and arrangement. With this understanding, some male writers have been engaging gender discourse in African novels in favour of women.

The structure of this study is in seven chapters with the first chapter indicating the background to the study and the statement of the research problem, among others. The study, in its approach and analysis, considers the refractive and reflective capacities of literature to represent or question gender stereotypes in the African world of fiction and the real African world of existence. Gender discourse has its root in feminist movement that began in Europe. The focus of chapter two of this study is on feminism and feminist movement across the globe. The chapter proceeds to examine the intersection between literature and gender. The sociology of literature reveals the fact that literature is a reflection and refraction of society and for this reason, whatever gender relations is presented to us in literature is an interpretation of life.

The third chapter of the study is on intra and inter-gender conflicts in Chika Unigwe's *Night Dancer* and Violet Barungi's *Cassandra*. These novels adopted different approaches for their narratives on gender relations and conflicts.

The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters of the study are captioned: Gender Discourse Shift in Dangarembga's *The Book of Not* and Wainaina's *One Day I Will Write About This Place*; Gender Discourse Shift in Mahfouz's *Palace Walk* and Mengara's *Mema*; and Gender Discourse Shift in Ndebele's *The Cry of Winnie Mandela* and Mosteghanemi's *The Bridges of Constatine,* respectively. The male writers show compassion in the representations of female characters in their respective novels and vice-versa, on the part of their female counterparts, thus foregrounding the advent of a paradigm shift in gender discourse in contemporary African novels. The last chapter contains the findings, summary and conclusion of the study.

Conclusion

The regenerative feature of literature has informed different thematic approaches to similar subject matter such as gender. The traditional mode of gender representation in African literature is accusation and counter-accusation from authors of both sexes. This mode of representation has generated series of heated debates among critics on suitability of gender issues in creative literature.

Series of activism and advocacy redressing the cases of women subjugation began to change the gender orientation in society and literature. From the 90's, African writers have been critical in their presentation of gender issues in their texts. This development has generated the phenomenon of gender shift, trans-sexualism, and balanced gender representation. The index of this is the compassion some male writers now show for their female protagonists as found in *Mema* and *Palace Walk*. The compassionate representation of women in a society which favours the rights and opportunities of men is an instance of gender discourse shift in the contemporary African novel.

In recent times, some African novelists have been approaching gender issues from different thematic and epistemological perspectives to demonstrate their biases and theoretical positions on the nature and status of individuals along the parameters of their anatomical sex and the cultural gender construction. Even female writers have been writing to question some cultural conceptions that men are the major problems of women in society. Chika Unigwe's *Night Dancer* presents intra-gender conflicts blaming the whole gender issues on the female protagonist of the novel.

The selected novels are discussed with the parameters of subject matter, thematic preoccupations, plot and characterisation. These parameters contribute to the textual understanding and interpretation of the texts. The selected African novelists have introduced new perspectives in the construction of gender conflicts in African societies as revealed in their respective texts. The study, consequently lends credence to the fact that more African novelists are focusing now more on intra-gender conflicts which is suggestive of an apparent shift in gender discourse in contemporary African novels.

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