**MANIFESTATION OF THE PROTEST AGAINST GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF SOME NOTABLE FEMALE AUTHORS**

**CHAPTER ONE**

**INTRODUCTION**

**BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

Gender inequality damages the physical and mental health of millions of girls and women across the globe, and also of boys and men despite the many tangible benefits it gives men through resources, power, authority and control. Because of the numbers of people involved and the magnitude of the problems, taking action to improve gender equity in health and to address women’s rights to health is one of the most direct and potent ways to reduce health inequities and ensure effective use of health resources. Deepening and consistently implementing human rights instruments can be a powerful mechanism to motivate and mobilize governments, people and especially women themselves. Gender relations of power constitute the root causes of gender inequality and are among the most influential of the social determinants of health. They determine whether people’s health needs are acknowledged, whether they have voice or a modicum of control over their lives and health, whether they can realize their rights. This report shows that addressing the problem of gender inequality requires actions both outside and within the health sector because gender power relations operate across such a wide spectrum of human life and in such inter-related ways. Taking such actions is good for the health of all people - girls and boys, women and men. In particular, inter-sectoral action to address gender inequality is critical to the realization of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Like other social relations, gender relations as experienced in daily life, and in the everyday business of feeling well or ill, are based on core structures that govern how power is embedded in social hierarchy. The structures that govern gender systems have basic commonalities and similarities across different societies, although how they manifest through beliefs, norms, organisations, behaviours and practices can vary. The report shows that gender inequality and equity in health are socially governed and therefore actionable. Sex and society interact to determine who is well or ill, who is treated or not, who is exposed or vulnerable to ill-health and how, whose behaviour is risk-prone or risk-averse, and whose health needs are acknowledged or dismissed.

However gender intersects with economic inequality, racial or ethnic hierarchy, caste domination, differences based on sexual orientation, and a number of other social markers. Only focusing on economic inequalities across households can seriously distort our understanding of how inequality works and who actually bears much of its burdens. Health gradients can be significantly different for men and women; medical poverty may not trap women and men to the same extent or in the same way. The standard work on gradients and gaps tells us easily enough that the poor are worse off in terms of both health access and health outcomes than those who are economically better off. But it does not tell us whether the burden of this inequity is borne equally by different caste or racial groups among the poor. Nor does it tell us how the burden of health inequity is shared among different members of poor households. Are women and men, widows and income-earning youths equally trapped by medical poverty? Are they treated alike in the event of catastrophic illness or injury? When health costs go up significantly, as they have in many countries in recent years, do households tighten the belt equally for women and men? And are these patterns similar across different income quintiles? This poses a challenge for policy to ensure not only equity across but also and simultaneously within households. The right to health is affirmed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and is part of the WHO’s core principles. This report is grounded in the affirmation of equal and universal rights to health for all people, irrespective of economic class, gender, race, ethnicity, caste, sexual orientation, disability, age or location.

**1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Gender politics is as old as humanity. It started with our ancestors Adam and Eve, Satan and the Serpent. Gender politics will survive as long as humankind exists, for it is the salt that spices our union, and the subtle cord that binds a man and a woman together. To discuss gender inequality and the imaging of man in the perspective of female writers is to go the whole hog in discussing the genders as they relate to each other, for a man‘s image is firmly anchored on his treatment of the woman in his life.

The problem statement of this research work therefore is finding out how the female gender has fared culturally and how feminism has helped to reposition the image of womanhood in Africa through a selection of some notable literary works.

**1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The main purpose of this study is to show how the selected literary works portray the role of feminism in the fight against gender inequality. Also the study intends to take an overview of the African woman in relation to the concept and movement of feminism.

**1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

Feminism is history in the making, and feminist literature, like other literatures before it, is a protest literature. This study when completed will serve as a document that portrays how literature:

* Challenges, debunks and confronts the negative conception of the female gender.
* Represent the image of the woman correctly.
* Show why people must respect the opinions of women.
* Reveal how the image of womanhood was depicted in African culture before and after the advent of feminism in African literature.

**1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The following research questions will guide the direction of this study:

* What makes females suffer gender inequality?
* What is the role of African culture in gender inequality?
* What contributions have the selected writers made in the manifestation of protest against gender inequality?

**1.6 SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

This study will cover some notable literary texts that are focused on the protest against gender inequality in relation to the manifestations of this agitations.

**1.7 DEFINITION OF BASIC TERMINOLOGIES**

**Gender:** Either of the two sexes (male and female)

**Inequality:** Unequal treatment or perceptions of individuals due totheir gender

**Feminism:** A claim by women for the right to be equal with men

F**eminis**t: Someone that is in support of feminism

**Protest**: to resist a particular authority

**Cultura**l: connected with culture, which means the customs and beliefs, arts, way of life and social organization of a particular group of people.

**1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts the library research method. The information analysed is gotten from published literature texts that are available for research at various libraries both public that are available for research at various libraries both public and privately owned.

**CHAPTER TWO**

**REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

**2.1 INTRODUCTION**

A female critic, Chukukere, believes that ―the unsatisfactory appreciation of the significance of women in life has spilled into imaginative literature and not only ―African male creative literature, but African literary criticisms have largely become a male-oriented and male-controlled cult (Chukukere, p.9). This chapter presents a review of related and relevant literature on the subject matter.

**2.2 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW**

Flora Nwapa of Nigeria admitted that the imaging of male characters in her works was a deliberate attempt to reverse the roles credited to women by men. She claimed to have explored the theme of moral laxity as a direct response to earlier novels written by men on the theme of prostitution. The Jagua‘s of Ekwensi‘s Jagua Nana, the Simi‘s of Soyinka‘s The Interpreters and the Wanja‘s of Ngugi wa Thiongo‘s Petals of Blood are promptly replaced by male pimps and prostitutes, Chris, Ernest, Mark and Olu, in Women are Different (Nwapa, p.531). Nawal El Saadawi of Egypt confesses to the initial purpose for her writing as inspired by anger, she claims to write in order to release her anger. ―What angered me most she writes,―were oppression; oppression of women and oppression of the poor‖ (El Saadawi, as quoted by N. Eke, p. 49). In her fiction, the Arab world is masculine, women are just appendages. El Saadawi ―unabashedly exposes the lowest part of African womanhood‖ (ibid, p.133). The woman in El Saadawi‘s novels does all the work, satisfies her husband‘s urges, sleeps without food, washes her husband‘s feet and gets beaten when a son or a domestic animal dies (Ibid, p133). Not only are Saadawi‘s male characters heartless, selfish and cruel, they are also morally depraved. A female character describes her father in these words:

*“My father, a poor farmer who could neither read nor write,*

*knew very few things in life. How to grow crops, how*

*to sell a buffalo poisoned by his enemy before it died, how*

*to exchange his virgin daughter for a dowry… how to be*

*quicker than his neighbour in stealing the crops from the*

*fields once the crop was ripe …How to beat his wife and*

*make her bite the dust each night”*

*(Woman at Point Zero, p. 12)*

To crown this, most of El Saadawi‘s male characters are physically despicable. Here is a typical description of a father by a daughter in Woman at Point Zero:

His mouth was like that of a camel, with a big opening and wide jaws.

His upper jaw kept clamping down on his lower jaw with a loud grinding noise, and chewed through each morsel so thoroughly that we could hear his teeth striking against each other. His tongue kept rolling round and round in his mouth as though it also was chewing, darting out every now and then to lick off some particle of food that had stuck to his lips or dropped on his chin (pp18-19) George Tarabishi, one of El Saadawi‘s ardent critics, observes that in Saadawi‘s novels, men in general are almost always portrayed as having ―a hairy chest like that of a monkey and ―prominent belly like that of a pregnant woman‖ and their bodies are almost always ―huge and ―smell of tobacco‖ (Tarabishi, p.172).

The famous critic, Ernest Emenyonu in his article titled ―Iconoclasm or Radical Realism? Socio-political Portraits in the Fiction of Nawal El Saadawi and Zaynab Alkali observes that:

By accident or by design, both Nawal El Saadawi and Zaynab Alkali, depict in their fiction, male characters who even when striding as macho men, are indeed moral weaklings. In Saadawi‘s characters, the debility is psychological and physiological, approaching neurosis. The result is a portrait of men who are both ridiculous and ludicrous… With Alkali, the men are portrayed as inadequate in masculine‘ tasks.

They are wimpy, degenerate, retarded and emasculated. They live a zombie like type of existence, systematically becoming irrelevant in family leaderships until their roles are taken over by the womenfolk! (Emenyonu, pp.220-221)

As for Flora Nwapa, Charles Nnolim thinks:

Flora merely renders the men of no consequence to allow her superior women occupy centre stage, Buchi Emecheta proceeds to paint grotesque, repulsive pictures of men (Nnolim, Issues, p.140).

Even Mariama Ba‘s world acclaimed winning novel, So Long a Letter, that has seen her through being a liberal or moderate feminist, is accused of imaging man as ―a monstrous beast, essentially and thoroughly egocentric, heartless, atrocious, promiscuous and licentious (Asoo, p.116).

Ba is accused of making her major character-Ramatoulaye, to reject all suitors after her husband‘s death for no other reason than that men are all the same; ―Moudau is not the only man, but all men… all men are traitors. All are polygamous by nature. All are sexual animals.

All are victimizers (Ba, as quoted by Asoo, p.118).

African women writers are definitely on the war path to redeem their image and to reclaim the identity and integrity of their ancestors. The earlier works by male writers like the colonial masters, down-played the African woman‘s intelligence, her hard work and independence of spirit. The men failed to ―recognize women‘s power base (Nwapa, p.528).

The women writers therefore, have to recreate credible African women‘s image by creating characters that are preferably in male dominated professions; the sciences and the social sciences, women who are not only economically independent, but psychologically strong and as ambitious as the men. Not only did female writers ―re-order the trends that perpetuate

female inferiority, subjugation and silence, they try to re-assess the positions and roles (Ini Uko, p.85). If some of the earlier women writers are labelled radical feminists simply because they cried foul, to ill-treatments and set out to reconstruct the true African female image, what would male critics label the younger generation of African female authors; Fauziya Suleiman, Halima Abdullahi, Hadiza Shariff, Asmau Badamasi, Fatima Alkali Mundi, to mention a few? What legacy has been left for this generation?

Interestingly enough, the male literary wizards unwittingly recognize that woman is supreme. Some of the most powerful deities and priests of such deities presented in African literature are women. Such community goddesses are often, as quoted by a critic, the ―ultimate judge of morality and conduct, and wield absolute power over the people. The priestesses, who mediate between them and mankind and carry their power, are greatly feared and revered in their communities.

The same trend is seen among the Arab-Africans, where again history reveals the immense power wielded by women who are said to be once ―goddesses of knowledge, the makers of civilisation, [the] creative minds in the evolution of scientific knowledge, agriculture, philosophy and medicine‖ (El Saadawi, ed. Toubia, p.20).

Any society which arrogates such immense powers to her female deities cannot be said to view female members of its community as inferior beings, yet such recognition of female dignity and superiority falls short of covering the ordinary woman, wife, mother, sister and daughter. It would seem that only in the realm of the supernatural can the woman be accorded such immense respect and honour.

Indeed, not many had the grace that before colonialism ―ruined our collective integrity‖, there were some notable and formidable normal women of substance and integrity, (not goddesses of some rivers or hills), women worthy of emulation by the younger generation of women. To

mention a few, Queen Amina of Zazzau, Nana Asmau Dan Fodio, Ya Gumsu of Borno, Daurama of Daura, Inkipi of Igala, Moremi of Ile-Iffe, Egbe Iyalode of Oyo, Iyalode of Ibadan; women that were not only successful wives, mothers, and princesses but military generals, diplomats, teachers, merchants, warriors, political and religious leaders whose roles

in nation building were said not to be ―passive‖ and supportive to men only, but also ―dynamic and constructive‖ (Nana Mba in Awe, pp75-88).

History is indeed replete with the contributions of Nigerian women to national development.

Great and powerful women who made sacrifices, mobilized groups and formed societies and organisations in order to make meaningful changes in society through women‘s wars, protests, riots and uprisings in the South-East, South-West, South-South of Nigeria between 1950 – 1986.

Most importantly, what about the silent policy movements by the Arewa Women‘s Association led by Laila Dogonyaro, the Miller Sisters, Gambo Sawaba, Comfort Dikko, Mrs. Ayo Bello and a host of others, and the contributions to national development by pioneers of the National Council of Women Societies with their Grand Patrons, the 1st Ladies of the Federal Republic of Nigeria? (Ojewusi pp.171-202).

These movements, whether militant or intellectual, were and still are, led by women and have contributed hugely to the development of our societies. The question begging for answer is why did these women leaders not make the list as powerful female characters in the fiction of Nigerian male writers?

However in all fairness to the male writers, the trend is beginning to change. In latter novels, the men, to borrow Flora Nwapa‘s words, have had a sudden awakening to the importance of women-being and are beginning to create liberated and powerful women characters, characters to be reckoned with, for example, the character of Beatrice, Nwanyibuife in

Achebe‘s Anthills of the Savannah (Nwapa, p.528).

The ―awakening can also be interpreted as a positive response to African women‘s protest writing against poor female imaging. We could safely assume that the older feminist writers have succeeded to a large extent in hauling the image of the woman to the centre stage by creating strong and credible female characters worthy of discourse, not as prostitutes, mistresses, naggers or over-dependent, subservient wives and battered mothers, but as co-travellers, worthy companions to men, respected mothers and wives who are stakeholders in their moulding of nations.

If the founding fathers of African literature over-glorify Africa and Africans to counter the negative presentations of Africa by adventurous strangers- a necessary measure in the excising of a malignant growth, the same could apply to feminist writings. The image-bashing may have been necessary for a while. The image bashing and misrepresentation may probably not stop on either side for a long time or not ever. Gender politics is an on-going phenomenon, the salt in our sauce, the delicious aroma of a hot spice wafting in the air, even as the subtle bond that ties together the man and the woman gets firmer and firmer. Man and woman are ―two side of a single coin. There ought not to be an alternative to man/woman relationship, no matter how harsh the battle rages. Why else would Mariama Ba, a renowned feminist writer through her character say that:

I am one of those who can realise themselves fully and bloom only when they for part of a couple. Even though I understand your stand, even though I respect the choice of liberated women, I have never conceived of happiness outside marriage (Ba, pp.55-56).

**2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

**Feminism**

The feminist theory extends feminism into theoretical discourse. It is a sociological theory that analyzes the status of women and men in order to empower the female gender; the theory seeks to emancipate the female gender. The feminists believe in the political, social and economic equality of both sexes as they often criticize male supremacy; they fight for equality of women and insist that the female gender should share equally and enjoy the same rights as men.

Foremost and leading feminists include Virginia Woolf, Simone de Beauvoir,

Germaine Greer, Kate Millet and Shulamith Firestone among others. Feminism typifies the ‘Women’s Wovement which drew attention to the glaring inequalities in the way society treated men and women’ (Ugbabe: Mark on the Wall: 12). Feminists writers question the stereotypical roles assigned women by custom and tradition. They do this by allowing the female gender assumes certain roles hitherto ‘reserved’ for their male counterparts. Women struggle against all odds to be released from the shackles of patriarchal oppression. What the writers present is a New Woman, a feminist ideal that emerged in the nineteenth centuary. Consciousness raising (empowerment) by feminist writers has changed the notion and behaviour of women who now feel they can be more relevant politically.

Thus, the female gender is more confident, assertive and able to take control of situations that affect their lives. The feminists demonstrate the importance of women in a patriachal society and they reveal that historically women have been subordinate to men. The theory gives a voice to women and highlights the various ways the female gender has contributed to the society.

**CHAPTER THREE**

**THEORIES OF GENDER INEQUALITY**

The theories discussed here may be classified in several ways. The seemingly simplest approach would be classification of theories as biological, psychological, anthropological, sociological, and economic. This is cumbersome, as hardly any theory stays within one discipline. Another seemingly simple method would be classification of theories as socialist, liberal, and radical feminist. For my part, this classification is quite inadequate: some theories are advocated by some but not all members of one or more of these camps and others are not feminist at all. A better classification, which will be used here, is to group the theories according to their main themes: production and property relations; family structure and household; social roles, especially occupational work roles; and sexuality. Theories belonging to the first group are mainly economic; the theories in the second and third groups are economic, sociological, anthropological, psycho-logical, and even biological. In the fourth and last group, the most conspicuous theories are psychoanalytic.

**Production and Property Relations**

Many theories concerning the status of women have originated within socialist thought, which blames the existing material in-equality in society for most or all of its ills. Socialists assume the feasibility of the elimination or great reduction of this material inequality and with it, the elimination of almost all social inequalities as well as status hierarchies. In line with this assumption, socialists generally expect that the smaller the differentials in standards of living or property in a society, the smaller also the status differentials between men and women. Marxism locates the origins of all inequality more specifically in the private ownership of the means of production by one class and contends that the elimination of all inequalities will be effected by the expropriation of the privately owned means of production by the revolutionary proletariat and by their subsequent administration by society for the benefit of all. According to Engels ([1884] 1972), the cause of women's inferior status is class society and the forms of family organization it produces; once class society is abolished, and the state withers away, the patriarchal family will also disappear. Engels blamed capitalism for the current separation of the place of reproductive work, that is, the family home, from that of productive work, that is, the factory, which has made women's participation in social production more difficult and limited. According to Engels, capitalists want to keep women reproducing the labor force without pay, while serving as a cheap reserve army of labor. His program for full equality for women was their full participation in social production. Engels did not assume that the socialist revolution and the elimination of the capitalists as a class would automatically overcome all the obstacles to women's equality. He added two assumptions concerning household and marriage; they belong to the second group of theories as classified here. Several modern materialist theories that stress the central impor-tance of women's place in production for their status in society have been developed by Brown (1970, 1975), Sanday (1973), and Lesser Blumberg (1984). Brown's earlier version (1970), based on an analysis of the anthropological literature, explains the greatly varying degree of women's contribution to subsistence production as depending on the degree of compatibility of child minding with the kind and conditions of subsistence production in each society. Her later explicit theory of gender equality is based on the analysis of the exceptionally high status of women in Iroquois society. She found that this status cannot be "attributed to the size of the women's contribution to Iroquois subsistence. The powerful position of Iroquois women was the result of their control of the economic organization of their tribe" (1975, p. 251). Sanday (1973) uses samples from Murdock's Ethnographic Atlas (1967) to test the theory that women's high participation in subsistence production results in high social status. She refutes it by pointing to the existence of societies whose women, though they contribute over half of their society's subsistence, nevertheless have extremely low status. Conse-quently, she reformulates her theory to say that participation in subsistence production is a necessary but not sufficient condition for women's high status. Lesser Blumberg's theory is sociological and is relevant to industrial as well as simple societies. She claims that it is only the production of surplus resources, and access to and control over these resources, that translates into power or valued status-for men and women alike.

**Family Structure and Household**

Engels's first additional assumption was that the private family household condemns women to household work and child care and thus to inequality. Women can become equal, then, only through the dissolution of the private family household by the socialization of domestic services and child raising. Engels's second assumption deals with women's unequal status and financial dependence within marriage: according to Engels, only property-less proletarian marriage can be based on "individual sex-love," that is, on genuine free choice, and only in such a marriage can women be equal. Modern sociological feminist theory has continued the severe criticism of the conventional family household for burdening women with all or most of the unpaid domestic and child-care work and of conventional marriage for causing women's economic dependence and limiting their autonomy. As a precondition for gender equality, they call for extensive changes in both the marriage contract and the household division of labor. Several theories are based on the assumption of the feasibility of gender-egalitarian family households and egalitarian, long-term, heterosexual partnerships in the future. These, it is predicted, will come about as a result of one or more of the following factors: the decline of women's economic dependence on men, the increase in women's control over reproduction, the improve-ment and greater availability of nondomestic child-care services, the reduction and greater flexibility of occupational working time, and men's gradual realization that a gender-egalitarian dual role of occupational and of family work is in their own long-term interest (see, for example, Agassi 1989; Bernard 1975; Lewis and Sussman 1986; Mason and Lu 1988; Pleck and Sawyer 1974; Rapoport and Rapoport 1971; Whicker and Kronenfeld 1986). In examining the nuclear family household as a capitalist and patriarchal institution that prevents all but a minority of women, who employ other women to perform services at relatively low pay, from having a career, Hunt and Hunt (1982) argue that to expect men in nuclear family households to undertake half of the household and child-care work is unrealistic. They reject as stultifying to children's development their supervision for much of the day in child-care centers or in schools. The best alternative, according to Hunt and Hunt, is a household with more than two adults, in which children systematically participate in domestic work. Additional theoretical questions that have to be considered are the significance of women's status in marriage or in the household for their status in the community and the society at large, and vice versa. Lesser Blumberg argued in 1984 that the economic independence of women may be sufficient for their acquisition of equal power (i.e., equal status) in marriage and in the household without, however, being sufficient for women's equal status in the community or larger society.

**Social Roles, Especially Occupational Roles**

Modern liberal feminist theories of gender equality are based on the assumption that in order for women to achieve equal status, all stereotyped social roles for men and women have to be abolished. Conventional women's work roles assign to them the major respon-sibility for unpaid domestic and especially child-care work, and thus handicap them in their occupational roles. Despite legal rights of women to equality in employment, men use women's actual or presumed domestic handicaps in order to perpetuate de facto discrimination by forcing women into a small number of occupa-tional roles that are segregated according to labor-market types and working-time schedules and that have lower pay and prestige than comparable men's occupations. Employed women's inferior income is used as a justification for the perpetuation of their unequal burden of domestic and child-care work and their inferior power within the family. Their segregated and inferior occupational roles also hinder their acquisition of economic and political power. It is in the short-term interest of men of all strata to use the unpaid domestic services of women and to prevent women from competing with them for the better jobs (see, for example, Agassi 1977; Bergmann 1974, 1986; Epstein 1981; Kanter 1977a, 1977b, 1982; Lorber 1984; Mednick et al. 1975; Reskin 1988; Reskin and Hartman 1986). This theory of gender inequality is usually applied to indus-trialized societies alone; a generalized version of it has been applied by some anthropologists to preliterate societies. These anthropol-ogists assert that the more work activities are carried out by both genders indiscriminately, the higher the status of women; the more rigid the segregation of women and men during work activities, the lower the status of women. The idea behind this theory is quite general; there are no separate but equal functions or roles (Bacdayan 1977; Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974; Sacks 1974). Thus, even if women perform central roles in food production, as long as they are excluded from roles that provide access to means of exchange, they are devoid of prestige and political power. Similarly, as long as women are barred from significant political or ritual roles, there is no genuine gender equality. The liberal feminists' theory includes the claim that the abolition of gender segregation of occupational roles is necessary for the achievement of women's equality. It follows that for the acquisition of gender equality, all domestic consumption work and all child-care work-as well as the responsibility for their performance-must also be freed of gender stereotyping and must be divided equally between partners and between parents. These theories are thus linked to the theories of family structure and household. A different modem anthropological nonmaterialist theory of gender roles is that of Schlegel (1977), who claims it is of no importance whether work activities are gender segregated as long as the creation myths and ritual system of the society evaluate and celebrate women's activities as highly as men's. According to Schlegel, neither segregation of work roles nor participation in production determines the status of women and men, but only the spiritual evaluation of their activities. Sanday's later work (1981) downplays her earlier emphasis on production and presents a theory of women's status rather similar to Schlegel's: she claims that for gender equality, what is needed is a high mythical and cultural evaluation of birth, as well as women's participation in sacred roles. Yet unlike Schlegel, Sanday does not dismiss the significance of gendered role segregation for women's status; she claims that "[symbolic] sex role plans determine the sexual division labor" (p. 6) and "whether or not men and women mingle or are largely separated in everyday affairs plays a crucial role in the rise of male dominance" (p. 7). All gender stratification theories mentioned until now agree that gender equality is both desirable and feasible. We come now to two gender-role theories that claim that gender equality is unfeasible and that attempts to achieve it are therefore unwise. The first of these argues that gender roles are biologically given and thus unchangeable. According to this theory, during the mil-lennia of the infancy of the human species, males and females had radically different experiences; these have implanted in each indi-vidual a "biogrammar" that makes male humans better disposed to pursue action and adventure within male groups, much like their presumed activities during the hunting stage of humanity, while it makes female humans better disposed to pursue the domestic and maternal activities. Hence, all attempts to equalize gender roles will be in vain, since they will be opposed by biogrammar differences (Tiger 1969; Tiger and Shepher 1975). Variants of the biogrammar theory can be found in Trivers (1972) and Wilson (1975); they claim that most higher vertebrates, humans included, exhibit an asymmetry of parental investment between male and female. This unequal investment, they say, is the foundation of the sexual division of labor, since the female, by investing generously in offspring, has to forgo investment in alternative tasks (see also Shepher and Tiger 1983). The second theory that shares the thesis of the inevitability of gender inequality is that of precultural motivational disposition (Spiro 1979). According to this theory, there is a gender difference in the degree of the need for initial parenting. The alleged cause is possibly the human biogrammar, possibly human anatomy (women's "inner space" predisposes them to domestic maternal interests), or possibly the difference in the psychological development of male and female infants. The Freudian version is that penis envy drives girls inevitably toward mothering; castration fear drives boys inevitably away from primary child care. A variant of this theory, less traditionally psychoanalytical yet still somewhat Freudian, is Chodorow's (1978). According to Chodorow, gender equality is both desirable and feasible, but its attainment depends on fundamental changes in human behavior: As long as only mothers-or substitute mothers-care for babies during the first stages of infancy, women will develop a personality different from that of men, and that personality will shape their attitudes and behavior in work and family roles. In Chodorow's view, gender equality could be achieved, but only if babies of both sexes would be nurtured, from birth onward, equally by women and men. This theory can therefore also be classified as a theory of family structure.

**Sexuality**

One radical feminist theory of gender inequality condemns marriage and any other form of long-term heterosexual liaison as detrimental to women's equality, not because of economic dependence or double work burden, but because of the inevitability of the resulting emotional dependence of women on men (Atkinson 1970a, 1970b; Firestone 1971). Another radical feminist theory of gender inequality is that of obligatory heterosexuality (Rich 1980; Rubin 1975), which derives from Levi-Strauss and from Freud as interpreted by Lacan. The basic form of male dominance, according to Levi-Strauss, is men's use of women as objects of exchange. Women are raised, according to Lacan's reading of Freud, to internalize their inferior status by being pushed from birth to see heterosexuality as obligatory. Denied the choice of any form of sexuality except passive heterosexuality, Lacan claims that women accept marriage and the responsibility for mothering as the only option open to them. This theory allows for the feasibility of gender equality; as a necessary-yet perhaps not sufficient-condition, it postulates, as does Chodorow's theory, equal nurturing for infants from birth by men and women. MacKinnon (1987) presented the radical feminist view that the basis of all gender inequality is the sexual violation of women, namely, violence against women in the forms of rape, wife battering, sexual abuse of children, sexual harassment, non-voluntary prostitution, and pornography. According to MacKinnon, the concentration on legal and occupational equality cannot touch this core oppression and so will necessarily fail to achieve gender equality. According to a socialist variant of this theory, the root cause of men's violence against women lies in the frustrations and injuries generated in men by class society (Schwendinger and Schwendinger 1983).

**CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED TEXTS**

Flora Nwapa’s Efuru (1966) was the first published novel written by an African woman. However, by the time it appeared, a distinctively male literary tradition was already established in Africa.

For example, Grace Ogot, a Kenyan writer whose first novel The Promised Land (1966) was published in the same year as Flora Nwapa’s Efuru, claims that she was influenced by her grandmother: ‘My interest in writing fiction may have started at a very early age, stimulated by my childhood keenness to listen to my grandmother’s folk tales. She was a renowned storyteller.’

In the same vein, Buchi Emecheta pays tribute to her ‘Big Mother’: ‘But the Ibo story teller was different. She was always one’s mother. My Big Mother was my aunt. […] It was a result of those visits to Ibuza, coupled with the enjoyment and information those stories used to give us, that I determined when I grew older that I was going to be a story teller, like my Big Mother.

Ama Ata Aidoo also canvassed the ongoing problems faced by African woman writers at the Second African Writers’ Conference, held in Stockholm in 1986. In her paper, entitled ‘To be an African Woman Writer —An Overview and a Detail’, she deplores exclusionary practices and the lack of serious attention from both African and non-African male critics:

“In March of 1985, Professor Dieter Riemenschneider came to Harare to give a lecture on some regional approach to African literature. The lecture lasted at least two hours. In all that time, Professor Riemenschneider did not find it possible to mention a single African woman writer. When this was pointed out to him later, he said he was sorry, but it had been ‘so natural.’ I could have died. It had been natural to forget that quite a bit of modern African literature was produced by women?

Why should it be ‘natural’ to forget that some African women had been writing and publishing for as long as some African men writers?”

Aidoo noted that the critical material on women writers has appeared rarely, either in special topic books or in so-called ‘special issues’ of a few critical journals, for example, the fifteenth volume of African Literature Today on women in African literature, published in 1987. However this academic scholarship, according to Aidoo, is ‘often absent-minded at the best, and at the worst, full of veiled ridicule and resentment.

When commentary on African women in literature is none of the above, it is certain to be disorganised (or rather unorganised) and choked full of condescension.’ African women writers have struggled to gain literary attention and also admission to the literary canon. Stratton observed that Bernth Lindfors’ ‘The Famous Authors’ Reputation Test: An Update to 1986 (the statistics in order to establish a writer’s canonical status), and ‘The Teaching of African Literatures in Anglophone African Universities: An Instructive Canon’ (the frequency with which Anglophone African universities include an author in their curricula in 1986) reveals an all-male canon. Achebe, Ngũgĩ, and Soyinka occupy the top three positions, while the next seven are occupied by Ayi Kwei Armah, John Pepper Clark, Okot p’Bitek, Christopher Okigbo, Pete Abrahams, Alex La Guma, and Dennis Brutus. Stratton noted that, Ama Ata Aidoo and Bessie Head occupy the fifteenth and eighteenth position respectively, and thus come close to obtaining a canonical status.

According to Chikwenye Ogunyemi, the 1986 and 1988 awards of the Nobel Prize in Literature to Wole Soyinka of Nigeria and Naguib Mahfouz of Egypt have brought international acclaim to African literature, which has increased pressure for meaningful dialogue along gender lines.

Juliana Makuchi Nfah-Abbenyi argued that the increase in scholarly inquiries on, by, and about women in the mid-1980s was another important factor in changing the status of African women writers.

In university curricula, the writings of African women are still dominated by well-established and important African male authors, such as Achebe (Nigeria), Ngũgĩ (Kenya), and Ousmane Sembène (Senegal). However, as Nfah-Abbenyi has commented, this situation is gradually changing, as many scholars of African literature in the west are now including African women writers in their courses.

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Nfah-Abbenyi has commented, this situation is gradually changing, as many scholars of African literature in the west are now including African women writers in their courses. This change, according to Nfah-Abbenyi, has also affected many African universities, where curricula have traditionally been ‘Eurocentric and/or African male-oriented.’

Aidoo argues that as writers, African women have the right to be treated as equals, to expect that ‘critics try harder to give [their] work some of their best in time and attention, as well as the full weight of their intelligence, just like they do for the work of their male counterparts.’

**The Politics of Feminism in Bâ’s Fiction**

Mariama Bâ explores women’s marginalised status and struggles against the patriarchal structures of contemporary Senegalese society. In the words of African critic Abiola Irele, Bâ’s work is ‘a testimony of the female condition in Africa, while giving that testimony a true imaginative depth.’

Bâ’s fiction has provoked both keen appreciation and stinging criticism. An important though largely unremarked facet of both positive and negative appraisals is the assumption that the women who contest polygamy or demand greater autonomy and respect are doing so under the influence of western ideals of feminism.

What these reductive assessments overlook is Bâ’s subtle and searching negotiation between tradition and modernity. Her incisive responses to the cultural phenomena and institutions of ‘marriage’, ‘mother-in-law’ and ‘negritude’ are by no means anti-African or anti-Islam. Rather her fictional explorations can be measured against Femi Ojo-Ade’s observation on So Long a Letter: ‘Bâ’s feminism, especially as expressed by Aissatou the interpreter, smacks of Beauvoirism; the traditional marriage is a deterrent to woman’s promise. No marriage. No attachment. No master. The home becomes a transitory institution. Love is a passing sentiment secondary to other elements of existence.’

Bâ’s feminism does not criticise marriage and family, but rather condemns the exploitation of these institutions for male privilege. Bâ’s particular brand of feminism supports divorce as a legitimate choice and civil/Islamic right for Senegalese women. However, Ojo-Ade maintains that Ramatoulaye and Aissatou live their lives on borrowed training and thoughts; as a result ‘Aissatou remains what she has been: a sad slave, a loveless loser.’

It is revealing to set this article against Florence Stratton’s appreciation of Aissatou’s decision to divorce her husband and calls it an assertion of herself in the world. However, at the same time she deplores Ramatoulaye’s decision to stay in her marriage, calling her ‘emotionally and sexually paralyzed.’

Stratton concludes that ‘by having her heroine tell her story while literally confined in the house of death, Bâ tells the tale of the living death of every woman who is unable to break out of that conditioning. In effect, Ramatoulaye mourns her own demise.’

It appears that Femi Oje-Ade understands So Long a Letter in the context of tradition and nationalism and therefore Aissatou who seeks divorce is a ‘loser.’ Florence Stratton and others read the novel in the context of western feminism and therefore Ramatoulaye’s decision to stay in the marriage makes her a ‘loser.’ Before making any judgments about ‘winner’ and ‘loser’ in this feminist battle it is necessary to determine first what kind of feminism we are talking about. Bâ identifies the damaging role skewed traditions and unjust laws play in the development and the maintenance of chauvinistic attitudes. Bâ’s protagonists are caught within and chafe against the specific cultural and material realities of their society. The injurious and destructive effects of sexism seem to be more or less the same all over the world, and thus sexism must be challenged globally.

However, the means by which they are produced varies across cultures, and these operational differences determine and inflect how feminist struggles ought to be conducted.

Therefore the application of western feminist ideas and ideals on African women and their realities will not only lead to a western-African clash, but will also produce misrepresentations.

**Margaret Atwood**

Born on 18 November,1939 in Ottawa, Canada to Margaret Dorothy, a former dietician and nutritionist and Carl Edmund Atwood, an entomologist. Margaret Atwood is a Canadian writer, best known for her novels, short stories and poems. She decided to pursue writing as a career in the early years of her life. She is a feminist by nature and her fiction revolves around a woman character in most of her novels. Her writing has an impact on the reader’s mind and one is forced to think about the connection between reality and fiction after reading her stories and poems. Her fictional work consists of historical as well as scientific backdrops with a strong and independent woman as its central character. Her stories have realistic yet imaginative textures which converge thoughtfully with open endings that tend to make a greater impact on the society. Many of her stories have been adapted into stage plays and movies in addition to the translation of her works to almost 30 languages. She is considered as a literary genius with the ability to connect her fictional character with the deepest emotions of the reader and society. She is an international award winning prolific author and also a well-known humanist.

The Canadian novelist, who eschews the feminist label for own books, said feminism has dissolved into a catch-all term used to denote myriad definitions. Margaret Atwood argued that feminism is not defined as the assumption women are always right regardless of the context. Atwood did not say which wave or offshoot of the feminist movement she was referring to but argued one brand of feminism was defined as thinking women are “better” than men. “So, if we mean, should women as citizens have equal rights, I’m all for it and a number of advances have been made in my lifetime regarding property rights and divorce and custody of children and all of those things,” Atwood said. “But do we mean, are women always right? Give me a break! I’m sorry, but no! Theresa May is a woman, for heaven’s sakes!” she asked? Do we mean all men should be pushed off a cliff? In June 2017, women staged a protest against a proposed ban on Ohio's most common abortion procedure while dressed in character from the dystopian novel. They wore red capes and white bonnets to resemble the costumes worn in a new TV series based on Atwood's novel in which women are forced to give birth.

## Edna Adan Ismail, founder of the Edna Adan Hospital, anti-FGM activist

Ms. Ismail has long been a trailblazer: She was one of the first women in Somalia to become a nurse and midwife, to obtain a driver’s license and to gain a leadership position in the health system. In 1965, she was recruited by the World Health Organization to educate other nurses and midwives, and in 1976 she started to speak out against female genital mutilation. These achievements were against all odds: Gender inequality is deeply rooted in the Horn of Africa. There were not even schools for girls in the area where she grew up, she told UNFPA. But she took inspiration from her father, a doctor. “He allowed me to learn to read and write with boys,” she said. “He treated me in the same way that he treated my brother and my male cousins, encouraged me to seek the same rights for other girls too.” In the 1960s, despite Ms. Adan’s extraordinary accomplishments, she was denied civil service appointments “because I was a female and no female had ever been appointment to such a senior position in the past.” Still, she dug in her heels. “I refused to leave,” she said. After nearly two years of hard work, she received the appointment. As a health professional, she saw how gender inequality can kill. Somalia has one of the highest maternal death rates in the world, a sign that the health needs of women are going unmet.

To fight these trends, Ms. Adan opened a maternity and teaching hospital in "Somaliland" in 2002. There, health workers were trained to safeguard not only women’s health but their rights as well. It has since grown into a large general hospital and major referral institution for the region. And in 2010, Ms. Adan established a university, which today has nearly 1,000 students enrolled in a variety of health-related courses. Ms. Adan has been widely recognized for her work: In 2010, she was awarded the French Legion of Honour. Still, she says, women have a long way to go. “We have not yet reached our goals for gender equality,” she told UNFPA, which has supported programmes at her hospital. She has advice for other women’s rights advocates: “If you believe that what you are doing is right, do not give it up to please others.”

# Sonia E. Alvarez

Sonia Alvarez is a feminist, anti-racist and social justice intellectual-activist who has participated in Latina/women of color feminist movements in the US, as well as solidarity movements, alter-globablization organizing, and other transnational activist efforts. Since the 1980s, she has  been connected with feminist and women’s movements in Brazil, Latin America, and globally, while conducting research on and with them. Her current work focuses on the “sidestreaming” of feminist ideas and practices into parallel social movements, the dynamics of feminist discursive fields of action and activist assemblages, and the (mis)encounters of feminism and anti-racism in Brazil. That work forms part of a larger book project entitled Feminisms in Movement, under contract with Duke University Press. In her book “Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women’s Movements in Transition Politics” This is one of the earlier books that really shaped the public thinking about the importance of having a dual-pronged strategy to promote women’s empowerment and reduce gender inequalities. It underscores the importance of both working through women’s movements which are outside the state and also encouraging and supporting women to work within the state and within political parties in order to achieve real change for women and men. What is so fascinating about this book by Sonia Alvarez is that it is an analysis of what happened during one of the most repressive political regimes in Latin America in the 60s, 70s and 80s but a period where you have the paradox of the emergence of a very progressive women’s movement that mobilised tens of thousands of women and really transformed the agenda of all the major political parties.

# The Persistence of Gender Inequality

# Mary Evans (2016)

As the book jacket states, The Persistence of Gender Inequality is a ‘wide-ranging and elegantly written book’. It centres around two main areas of concern. The first is the focus of the initial section of the book, and relates to the inequalities of the old and new neo-liberal market economies, within which both persistent and emerging forms of gender inequality are located, though often ignored or concealed. The second is feminism; something which the author boldly suggests has had a part in sustaining the very social imbalances that lie behind gender inequality.

In her consideration of the interrelationship between gender inequality and the economy, the author contends that, contrary to what most accounts of the recent history of the Western world maintain, the position of women has not been dramatically transformed for the better. To counter the positive view that gender equality has been achieved in the ‘modern’ Western world, Mary Evans offers three arguments: women’s continued reliance on state support as evidence of the persistence of the structural disadvantages they endure; the emergence of new, and extreme, misogynistic use of social media; and the fact that undeniable improvements in the lives of women in the global North are often, and in different ways, gained at the expense of women in the global South. The role of care work is woven in various and sometimes surprising ways through this discussion and beyond, making clear that the main connection between the social inequality inherent in neo-liberal systems and gender inequalities is the persistence of the idea of the household as the foundation of society, and with that, the association between women and care. Chapter 3 is particularly rich in unexpected intersections, from sexuality and sexualisation, to love and women’s presence in politics, with the discussion encompassing the social order and how neo-liberal politics shape human relations and continue to control them through women and their bodies; love, desire, agency, and the current xenophobic and racist trends in politics; finally arriving at the question of what type of feminism may or may not offer hope for real gender transformation.

The chapters covering the second theme are more challenging to read, as they implicate feminists and feminisms in the very problems they seek to eradicate. Mary Evans begins with the clear reflection that feminism has been characterised by the ‘tendency of reassurance’ (p. 80), in other words, the way in which some feminists argue that feminism is about bringing about changes which are beneficial not only to women but also to men, and thus make feminism less threatening and more palatable to a broader range of people. To prove this point she gives, among others, the example of recent campaigns in the UK focusing on child and maternal health, which reinforce the idea that state support to women must be of benefit to others, in this case children.

Later, however, the author’s connections appear more fragmented, and it is unclear how certain conclusions are reached. For example, Chapter 4 is a history of feminism in the global North, aiming to highlight consistencies as well as dissent and disagreements. While the author states that she has identified two themes that have most united women in their campaign for equality, only one is discussed at length, while the second is lost (at least in the eyes of this reviewer) in the complexities of the discussion that follows. Even the reasoning relating to the first of the two themes – women’s desire to have the same level of civic status and autonomy as men (p. 93) – is not always easy to follow, though it arrives at the unambiguous conclusion that the history of women in both education and employment should be understood as the economy changing as gender expectations changed and not, as many feminists would have it, as being about overcoming resistance to women’s presence in either.

There are also too many numbered lists and sub-lists, often difficult to track, in this second section of the book. Closer to the end, however, the argument settles back into a pace and structure more amenable to being understood, if not always agreed with. This applies, for example, to the discussion of the current challenges encountered by feminism, especially in finding the right focus for its actions, given the shifts in the location of power away from national institutions, towards sites that are more elusive and invisible. This analysis includes reflections on the more problematic ways in which feminism has engaged with gender inequalities: the insufficient attention given to the intersections of gender with race and class; the criticisms of academic feminism; the complex implications of and reasons for the violent threats which social media subjects women to; the new challenge feminism faces in dealing with growing social inequality in the global North (to be addressed either by simply ‘adding women’, or by presenting gender inequality as something separate and unrelated); and the temptation of following the tendency that presents all social change as dramatic, and which prevents feminism from adopting a more sensitive understanding of trends.

The last chapter offers ideas on how enduring gender inequality can be fought: the main suggestion is that only through engaging with all forms of social inequality can we hope to redress gender imbalances. Mary Evans proposes that as part of this we need a much better understanding of how pervasive fantasies about women’s bodies contribute to shaping both current ‘material relations’ (p. 134) and gender inequality, and of the violent punishments meted out to women for even minor forms of subversion. She advises that we also need to be alert to the need to combat the exceptionalism and individualism typical of the current century.

In The Persistence of Gender Inequality, references are drawn from many disciplines and traditions, and arguments are presented through analyses of historical accounts, of ideas and theories, and of fictional characters and their lives. These contentions progress by logical links, but more often through unusual associations, and even paradoxes. At times, as the author recognises, propositions are not new, but they are presented from a different angle, or with an unexpected emphasis, and through juxtapositions that help the reader to re-think and deepen their understanding and position. For example, Mary Evans agrees that depicting women (especially women in the global South) as ‘victims’ is wrong and dangerous, but warns that highlighting their agency plays into the hands of an ‘empowerment’ narrative in which individuals can, on the one hand, possess useful new skills and capacities, but on the other, can be denied state support to which they have need and a right.

These are evident virtues of the book, which make it both an engaging and challenging volume. But this is not a book for relaxed or sporadic reading. Its arguments are not always easy to follow or summarise, because of the long chains of connections, and require considerable patience and concentration. All the same, these arguments, always insightful and exciting, make clear that gender inequality has not disappeared, and that indeed, we need to ‘start with the abandonment of fantasies about emancipation and progress’ (p. 138) in order to begin to truly redress gender inequalities.

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**CONCLUSION, SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS**

**5.1 INTRODUCTION**

This section concludes the research work, summarizes and tries to highlight the impact of some selected female writers who have made a strong case in the fight against inequality through their literary works.

**5.2 CONCLUSION**

Since the idea of nationhood or nationalism often assumes ‘a masculine identity’, it is a difficult domain for women to find an assertive voice and original vision. African woman has been given the sole identity of motherhood, ‘a feminine face’ and subsequently she is forced to stay within the private domestic realm as she cannot legitimately have any other identity. In the work of most male African writers, female figures are delineated in limited roles. As discussed above, women are identified either as mothers – as with Mumbai in A Grain of Wheat (1967) – or harlots, as with Wanja in Petals of Blood (1977). Achebe also portrays women in symbolic forms in his fiction, for example, Beatrice Okoh as a goddess in Anthills of the Savannah (1987).

African women writers’ response to the essentialised identity of mother is their entry into the forbidden territory of war and national politics. This transgression of gender boundaries is their effort to reclaim history in order to incorporate their versions of events.

These writers’ versions do not glamorise conflict, but rather expose the harsh realities, in which patriotism is sold as a commodity, and the vulnerable in society (children, women and the elderly) pay the price. Nigerian women writers in particular condemn the detrimental and criminal role of both Nigerian and Biafran armies against the civilian population.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

The writers we have discussed in this study such as; Bâ, Emecheta, Adichie, Dangarembga, and Aboulela are communicating stories which need to be analysed and criticised within their unique cultural and material contexts. There is a powerful new presence of African women writers in the literary marketplace; their work is now reaching new audiences both at home and abroad but more work still needs to be done.

There also has to be an improvement in the role publishing houses play in the literary world, they should pay more attention to stories that seek to even the inequality in both genders.

There also needs to be a review in the curriculum of tertiary institutions to make room for gender studies. This will adequately equip the feminists with the needed knowledge to advance the fight against gender inequality and also create awareness on the subject matter among members of the public.

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