

The Emergence of Women in African Literature

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ABSTRACT

The present paper aims to depict The Emergence of Women in African Literature that is laden with inconsistencies and resistances, most emerging out of the colonial domination of Africa, other fundamental to the authoritative structure of specific social orders. The privileging of man in African social orders has engaged an eradication of personalities and subjectivities of numerous women, holding them to a supposition of female mediocrity. This paper also analyses with a perspective on investigating how the contemporary African women meet individual issues as the African culture wrestles with gender, class, ethic and other social disparities. In this context, African women writers, to contend against the injustice, have occupied in metaphorical and performative stratagems intended to reconstitute the social eradication as they attempt to assert status as individuals. Their works stand elevated for women empowerment and the other debased sections of the social order. The works of female writers are passionate and replicate the occurrences in the general public. They depict characters which are near the real world. In addition to this, their novels are profound established in compassion, anticipating issues identified with gender, marriage, motherhood, social inequality and sexual misuse.

Keywords: Women, African literature, Francophone, Africa, French

INTRODUCTION

African literature has come a long way from the pre-colonial times to the post-colonial era. In all of this time however, there seems to have been a disconnect between the male African writers and their female counterparts. The African literary space has been mostly dominated by male writers who have made their mark in addressing several societal issues. With their writings, male African writers engaged the society, colonialists and the ruling political elites on germane issues that affected the society. It however took a while for the African literary sphere to start enjoying the input of female writers.

If Achebe's (1958, 1975) *Things Fall Apart* and *Morning Yet on Creation Day* can be seen as blueprints that laid the foundation for literary works to suggest the need to break away from neocolonial yokes of oppression, *Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Ba's* semi-autobiographical and epistolary *Shalini Nadaswaran* works *Second Class Citizen* (1974) published later as *Adah's Story* (1983) and *So Long A Letter* (1979) respectively, were integral to the legacy of African women's writing.

Women authors in Africa have enjoyed a more extensive audience particularly in higher institutions where the core curriculum incorporates African Women Writers, Gender Studies and other relevant programs. In this regard, some prominent women writers like *Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Adichie, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Mariama Ba and Nawal El Saadawi* are taken into consideration as their literary works are much celebrated in the contemporary literary field of Africa. In their writings, the position and role of women as *mothers* and *daughters* within the institution of marriage especially polygamy, the encumbrance attendant on traditional role prescriptions for women, female circumstances, and gender inequalities are the themes explored. These women writers through their novels share their care and concern for women in the society. While trying to cope with the existing challenges in the society like male chauvinism and oppressive patriarchal system, they keep reminding the society that woman empowerment is highly crucial for a country to develop. Education for women is the life line of any nation. Economic independence and self-assertiveness are integral parts of women liberation. Probing deep into the feministic aspects, the current study aims at focusing on various problems faced by women during bildungsroman, motherhood, and gender ideology.

African women writers have engaged in rhetorical and performative tactics to reconstitute cultural erasure in order to fight inequality as they attempt to assert status as individuals. But in the process, different cultural expectations such as their maternal roles serve as persistent bottlenecks to return them back as subordinate beings to their prescribed roles. The Subversion of identity in the novels of African Women's Writing examines the cultural resistance methodologies and the difficult ways in which African women have expressed their subjectivity, challenged social roles, negotiated tradition and established a literary and feminist aesthetic.

Their works or novels show the accounts of how women in African social order change the dynamics of power through sustained efforts in crafting possibilities of liberation in spaces formed in and spread by social practice. But irrespective of the kind of resistance the writers

embrace, their overriding undertaking is to articulate the collective erasure of women fostered by their restrictive social-cultural customs. Through the different rebellious techniques, the authors urge their followers and readers to reconsider both the patriarchal and postcolonial gendered belief systems. Their books attest an incessant challenge and confrontation from the authoritative power talk in postcolonial Africa, especially when they show freeing devices like "safe spaces" making women powerful to talk and pay attention to each other.

Main Thrust:

Many African female writers like *Nwapa* (1966), *Emecheta* (1981), *Dangaremba* (1988), *Mugo* (1988) and *Aidoo* (1977) among others have written stories seeking to expunge women's marginal position and thus their texts are "spaces of strength within and between which they fluctuate". Early women writers like *Mariama Ba* and *Miriam Tlali* debunk the myths surrounding the nostalgic praise of motherhood by uncovering how women are muted and oppressed within this trope. Central to this idea is also Omolara *Ogundipe-Leslie's* "Six Mountains on A Woman's Back" which pinpoints the six categories in which women are oppressed. The mountain's discussed is influenced by both external and internal forces like colonialism and postcolonialism, traditional structures, the woman's backwardness, man, race and the woman herself. By identifying the mountains that force women to conform to a prescribed state of being, *Ogundipe-Leslie* offers an insight into women commodified and objectified circumstances. These similar 'Inscription' as Speaking for Women categories are challenged in *Emecheta* and *Ba's* texts, revealing how systematic oppression must be fought by exposing its fallacies through writing. Womanist theory is also vital to understanding the African woman's story. Both Alice Walker and *Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi* in the 1980s coined the term womanism independently to theorize the Black and African woman's experiences respectively. Womanism's exegesis was necessary to discuss the African woman's condition. Early women-centered theories like feminism and even postcolonial feminism did not provide enough space for the African female dialogue, which is why Ogunyemi coined African womanism as a theory. Ogunyemi theorised that the African woman became a womanist after an emotional or tragic experience that pushed her towards agency and self- definition. This womanist experience will be seen in the texts discussed in the article. Collectively, these three

major ideas used in this article help foreground my argument on the importance of early African women's writing on contemporary (third-generation) African women's literature.

Emecheta dispelled the myths and ideologies surrounding motherhood and mothering by exposing the 'realities' of motherhood. While *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) was exceptional for an early African woman writer's works, it was her first two semi-autobiographical novels *In the Ditch* (*Emecheta*, 1972) and *Second Class Citizen* (1974) which were compiled later in one volume *Adah's Story* (1983) that began *Emecheta's* vocation as a writer. These texts were seminal works for African and Nigerian women's literature in which *Buchi Emecheta* continued *Flora Nwapa's* dialogue for female personhood by challenging anachronistic practices in her marriage through the fictional character of Adah. In "African Women, Culture and Another Development", Omolara Ogundipe- 'Inscription' as Speaking for Women Leslie theorizes that there are six mountains on an African woman's back which serve as oppressive tools that ensure her subjugation and prevent her development.

Nigerian women's writing seen in *Adichie's Purple Hibiscus*, *Atta's* (2005) "*Everything Good will Come*" and *Unoma Azuah's* (2005) "*Sky-High Flames*", Lola's change began at an early age as she challenged different aspects of her family relationships to achieve self-definition, beginning with writing in her diary, attending university and finally leaving the country to begin a new life for herself

Conclusion:

African literature has been enriched by the voices of women expressing their concerns. From 1966 to the present, various inhibitions and encumbrances of women exercising their human rights have found expression in the literature especially in fiction written by women. Generally, their output has been feministic in portraying the female characters various reactions to a subsuming life. It is seen from their various discourses that feminism is not found only among the city-dwellers and educated women but among the rural and unlettered women. It does appear that male chauvinism makes no such distinctions, both categories of women come under the same masculine yoke. The only difference is that the educated women are able to free themselves from this masculine yoke more quickly because of the economic empowerment education bestows on them. So, women's education and economic viability are emphasized as a means of women's reification. There is need also to remove the immoral and murderous options in women

strives for rights because the presence of only two genders leaves no room for mediation so it becomes rationally expedient that both have to come together in mutuality and work out their differences.

In this context, modern female authors are working to free women from such extreme enslavement, effectively reshaping society by rewriting gender conventions and, consequently, demolishing gender identities. The women writers are *Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Adichie, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Mariama Ba and Nawal El Saadawi*, whose works have been considered significantly and extensively in the modern literary field of Africa.

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