CHAPTER TWO

BLUE EYES AND THE BLACK MIRROR:
IS THERE A SCOPE FOR AFRICAN FEMINISM?

WHO SAID IT WAS SIMPLE

There are so many roots to the tree of anger that sometimes the branches shatter before they fall.

Sitting in Nedicks
the women rally before they march
discussing the problematic girls
they hire to make them free.

An almost white counterman passes
a waiting brother to serve them first
and the ladies neither notice nor reject
the slighter pleasures of their slavery.

But I who am bound by my mirror
as well as my bed
see causes in color
as well as sex.

and sit here wondering
which me will survive
all these liberations.

- Audre Lorde

"We learned there is no one key to liberation."

- A Black feminist
The proposed thesis centres around a hypothesis of image-study that seeks to differentiate between presentation of images of women in the works of male and female novelists. Generally this kind of analysis involves feminist reading of the texts under consideration. The feminist literary theory, essentially an outcome of feminist movement in the west, evolved as a discourse based on the western literary tradition. To begin with, it analysed texts to locate and identify elements of domination and oppression of women by men, both of whom belonged to white societies.

The two 'classics' that articulated feminist critical approach to literature in concrete and effective language - namely, Kate Millett's Sexual Politics and Mary Ellmann's Thinking About Women - were based on analyses of man-woman relationship in Anglo-American society that were reflected in the works of authors like D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer, Jean Genet, Dorothy Richardson, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Nathalie Sarrante, and so on. This was during the late '60s. Even before that, pioneering works which appeared in the 18th and the 19th century, such as Mary Wollstonecraft's 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' (1792) and John Stuart Mill's 'The Subjection of Women' (1869), sought to uphold women's rights and demands for equality.
within the contemporary British society.³

Among non-literary prose that concerned itself with the female point of view, _Married Women's Work⁴_ was based on the survey by Clementina Black of the 'true conditions' of thousands of married working women's lives in Britain during the first decade of this century, that was characterized by overwork, ill-health and poverty. Another brilliant account of the life of a British working woman at the end of the last century is _Ada Neild Chew: The Life and Writings of a Working Woman._⁵ Ada Neild Chew wrote a number of letters at the age of 24 which appeared in a local newspaper in Crewe, Cheshire, and exposed the exploitation and inhuman condition prevailing in a local clothing factory where she herself was a worker. With almost no formal education Chew continued with her writing of letters, articles, sketches, stories which reflected her ideas on the relationship of women to work, politics, marriage and independence. William Thompson's _Appeal of One-half the Human Race, Women, against the Pretentions of the Other Half, Men_ (1825)⁶ was also a pioneering work on the question of women's liberation and equality of the sexes. Thompson (1775-1833) was considered the principal socialist theoretician of his time in England.
He became friend of Jeremy Bentham and Robert Owen, whose ideas had major influence on him. Known as one of the two most outstanding leaders of the co-operative movement, he was also a front line activist in the women's movement of his time. The book, as he said, was a joint work with Anna Wheeler, another leading figure of those days who was also a believer in Owenite Socialism. Wheeler, married at the early age of 15, was self-taught in British, French and German philosophy. She fled from her drunkard husband and worked for the co-operative movement, and also for the women's movement for equality. The book was a response to James Mill's famous 'Article on Government' of 1820 where he had denied political representation to women.

The diaries of Hannah Cullwick (1833-1909) also provide deep insight into the lives of ordinary women in Victorian England. Born in 1833 in Shropshire as the daughter of a housemaid and a saddler, she started working as a housemaid at the age of eight. A lower servant for most of her life, she was maid-of-all-work, and also worked as a pot-girl, cook and housekeeper. In 1854, she met Arthur Munby (1828-1910) who was a 'man of two worlds', an upper-class author and poet, with a life-long obsession for lower-class women. Till 1872, both had secret courtship during
which Hannah wrote her diaries. "She did so at her 'Mas-sa's' behest, in order to keep him in touch with her daily drudgery, every detail of which he sought from her."

"At the time of their marriage (which was to last for next thirty-six years) in 1873, the diaries ceased. Hannah, by force of will and stubbornness, was now able not only to resist Munby's attempts to turn her into a respectable and inactive lady, but she also refused his demand that she continued her diary writing. Their relationship, still conducted largely in secret, appeared to be that of master and servant, Hannah living in the basement kitchen of Munby's chambers in the Temple. After four years they separat-ed and Hannah returned to Shropshire."

In the diary, Hannah records the dramatic moment when she finally exercised her independence of will by refusing Munby's offer:

Then M kissed me and said, 'Oh dear, you are not fit to be seen by ladies as a servant, and however shall us two be seen together then?' I said, 'Ah, indeed, but there is one thing, Massa, I don't want anyone to see us.' I like the life I lead - working here and just going to M when I can of a Sunday, and a chance time to clean of a weekday when I can get leave now and then, oftener of course if I could - better even I think than a married life. For I never feel as if I could make
my mind up to that - it's too much like being a woman.4

All the above mentioned works are representative of white women from British societies. Even during the recent years, white Anglo-American women have occupied the centre-stage in major works of feminist literary criticism. In the Lady of Shalott in the Victorian Novel,10 Jennifer Gribble has included works of Jane Austin, Dickens, Charlotte Bronte, George Eliot, Henry James, Leo Tolstoy, Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence. In The Prison of Womanhood: Four Provincial Heroines in Nineteenth Century Fiction,11 Elizabeth Jean Sabiston analyses the characters of Jane Austen’s Emma Woodhouse, Flaubert’s Emma Bovary, George Eliot’s Dorothea Brooke and Henry James’ Isabel Archer. Martin Seymour Smith’s Fallen Women12 is a brilliant analysis of the treatment of prostitution, pimps and their clients in works like Walter’s My Secret Life or Zola’s novels. Declan Kiberd’s Man and Feminism in Modern Literature13 is based on analyses of authors like Ibsen, Hardy, Strindberg, Lawrence and Joyce. Margaret Kirkham makes a study of Jane Austen’s female protagonists in Jane Austen, Feminism and Fiction.14 A similar study of E.M. Forster’s heroines is available in Forster’s Women: Eternal Difference,15 written by Bonnie
Blumenthal Finkelstein. Henry James's treatment of women in his novels is what Elizabeth Allen discusses in *Women's Place in the Novels of Henry James*.\(^{16}\) A chapter in *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative and Twentieth Century Psychology*\(^ {17}\) deals with women in the work of Collins' detective novels in relation to a complex interconnection between contemporary discourse on identity and popular fictional forms. Images of women in the works of several American, French and British authors are compared in *Women in Search of Literary Space*,\(^ {18}\) edited by Gudrun Grabher and Maureen Devine. In a similar vein, works like Philip W. Martin's *Mad Women in Romantic Writing*,\(^ {19}\) George Watt's *The Fallen Woman in the 19th Century English Novel*,\(^ {20}\) Billie Melman's *Women and the Popular Imagination* in the Twenties,\(^ {21}\) *Women and Literature 1779-1982: The Collected Papers of Muriel Bradbrook*,\(^ {22}\) Anne K. Mellor's *Romanticism and Gender*,\(^ {23}\) and *The Feminine Critique of Language: A Reader*,\(^ {24}\) edited by Deborah Cameron, all are feminist studies on the conditions, status, roles and situations of white women. There was, however, hardly any representation of the plights of Third World women, not to speak of women from Black Africa, in these analyses. It was quite natural as feminism originated, and later acquired its various labels...
in the west, though ironically, numerous black women participated in these struggles for equality that heralded the present forms of feminism.

The introductory chapter had included a discussion on the propriety of judging African literature by standards that represented western experience and technique, considering the functional nature of African literary traditions and the disparity of historical experience of African peoples. Realising that a term like "Black feminism" as opposed to the Anglo-American, the French or the Scandinavian brands of the discourse is not yet a widely accepted and very welcome phenomenon, this chapter seeks to establish some of the key aspects that warrant such a branding. The effort, in fact, is to highlight the points of departure from the mainstream (?) white feminist understanding of life and literature in order to problematise the reflections of womanhood in the context of modern Africa.

Primarily, feminist reading of any literary text would point towards areas in it that have been influenced by sex difference, a term meaning difference between the sexes in attitude, abilities, and also relating to a body of research that tries to find out origins of these difference in terms
of sex-role socialisation.

As the existence of such difference is still hotly debated, social scientists have agreed upon two main theories that explain the phenomenon.

According to the Social Learning Theory which has its followers named as "the environmentalists", western societies in particular have somehow arrived at a pattern of expectations concerning desired behaviour of men and women. These "stereotypes of masculinity and femininity" are inculcated from the cradle by a programme of rewards and punishments. These stereotypes are arbitrarily chosen by some abstract decision-making body called the "society". Otherwise they are arrived at by some historical accidents. But these causal factors could always be easily dismantled by appropriate childhood training and media control.

The environmentalists attach importance to certain major features in human biology to explain sex difference: i) the size difference between men and women; ii) the burden of childrearing naturally falling more on women than on men; iii) more prominence and accessibility of the male genital; etc.
Social learning theorists, like A. Bandura\textsuperscript{25} and H. Weinreich\textsuperscript{26} opine that but for these disparities which result from physical circumstances, women would have exhibited the same kind of "independent and exploratory personality" as men.

On the other hand, the Evolutionary Theory holds that those selective factors responsible for producing difference in the reproductive systems and physical stature of men and women are also responsible for the difference in male and female brain. This in turn manifests in the distinctions between male and female emotions, preferences, motives, instincts, fantasies and desires. As G. Wilson observes:

> Our bodies and brains are merely transient machines geared to the preservation and proliferation of our genes... the units to be considered in the struggle for survival...\textsuperscript{27}

Therefore, a varying genetic configuration materializes physical, psychological and emotional difference in men and women through a parallel evolutionary development.

Many argue against the use of such a masculine/feminine scale as that would scientifically reinforce the sex-role stereotypes already existing in the society. They believe, as does M. Eichler in her book \textit{The Double Standard: A Femi-}
that due to social conditioning and dissimilar social experience men and women show varying psychology. Eichler's theory finds support in the work of feminist psychologist Martina Horner, and American psychologist and philosopher, Carol Gilligan. In her article, 'Toward an Understanding of Achievement-related Conflicts in Women' (1972), Horner observed that women are motivated to achieve but fear the negative consequences of their success.

Horner based her explanation on the perceived inconsistency for women between achievement and femininity. It was not that women wished, or needed, to fail but they thought achievement and femininity were mutually exclusive.

In her path-breaking book, *In a Different Voice* (1982), Carol Gilligan argued that moral reasoning takes quite different forms in men and in women. Because women are concerned with the activity of care and children's moral development, they define morality as the understanding of responsibility and relationships. Men claim that morality is defined by fairness which leads men to think of rights and rule.

Kate Millett also deals with various
psychological aspects of this male/female parameter under patriarchy:

The female is continually obliged to seek survival or advancement through the approval of males as those who hold power. She may do this either through appeasement or through the exchange of her sexuality for support and status. As the history of patriarchal culture and the representation of herself within all levels of its cultural media, past and present, have a devastating effect upon her self-image, she is customarily deprived of any but the most trivial sources of dignity or self-respect. (...)

When in any group of persons, the ego is subjected to such invidious versions of itself through social beliefs, ideology, and tradition, the effect is bound to be pernicious. This coupled with the persistent though frequently subtle denigration women encounter daily through personal contacts, the impressions gathered from the images and media about them, and the discrimination in matters of behaviour, employment, and education which that endure, should make it no very special cause for surprise that women develop group characteristics common to those who suffer minority status and a marginal existence. (...)

(... What little literature the social sciences afford us in this context confirms the presence in women of the expected traits of minority status: group self-hatred and self-rejection, a contempt both for herself and for her fellows - the result of that continual, however subtle, reiteration of her inferiority which she eventually accepts as a fact. 31

This supports Martina Horner's hypothesis of women's fear of success.
But there are others who would look forward to sex-difference existing in the literary tradition. Elaine Showalter in her essay 'Towards a Feminist Politics' goes on to argue that the presence of such a difference would warrant 'gynocentric' research and consequently help construct a female literary tradition. Similar views have also been expressed by Annie Leclerc, a well-known French feminist. These feminist critics would trace sex-difference in factors like syntax and vocabulary. Julia Kristeva also favours this view by saying that sex-difference remains in the relationship of subjects to power, language and meaning.

She argues that subjects operate at once in two levels of articulation: the conscious, socialised or symbolic level, and the pre-linguistic, pre-oedipal instinctual or semiotic level. There is an inextricable link between a subject's linguistic and her psychic processes. The double process underlies all signification. 32

Commenting on 'Kristevan perspective' in 'Marginality and subversion: Julia Kristeva', Toril Moi writes:

(...) masculinity and femininity are posited as stable, unchanging essences, as meaningful presences between which the elusive difference is supposed to be located. This is not to say that the researchers believe in biological essences; on the contrary, they often work with the anthropological theory of women as a 'muted
group', which suggests that in a social power relationship it is the subordinate group's different social experience that constitutes their different relationship to language (...) if any sex difference were ever to be found, it could always (and always would) be used against us, largely to prove that some particularly unpleasant activity is 'natural' for women and alien to men. 33

Whether it is due to environmental influence or a biological determination, existence of sex-difference not only creates sex-roles but also generates disparity in perception of social reality by man and woman. This socio-biological truth in a way explains the entire gamut of experience that points towards a world-order defined by hegemony of male domination. The main thrust of radical feminism has been to destroy this order and replace it with an alternative that is free from the evil of genderisation.

In a world where the word 'male' carries an institutional force, feminists perceive the ideology of male dominance as the sole custodian of reality within which a woman is forced to live despite her ability to interprete 'life' in her own way. This enables man to perpetuate his own vision of 'truth'. But in contemporary feminist theory, analysis of the 'basis' of this 'institutionalised' force or dominance varies. While liberal feminism believes that male
dominance stems from irrational prejudices already existing in society. Marxist feminism defines it as an ideology inherent in capitalist social structure. On the other hand, radical feminism argues that the dominance is grounded in men's universal control over 'female' body, which, in turn, is aided in the process by women's procreative activities. Socialist feminism traces male dominance in the existing economic foundation of the society.

However, this male dominance manifests in all social, political and economic institutions to give rise to a 'male system of authority', or patriarchy, which oppresses women. Under patriarchy, the dominant consciousness in the society is a 'male' consciousness. The accepted 'point of view' of a patriarchal society to judge reality is essentially a 'male' point of view. Catherine MacKinnon observes that "another strategy of male hegemony is 'aperspectivity' or the power to create the world from one's point of view."34

The legacy of male hegemony came under severe attack during the 'Second Wave', a term coined by Marsha Weinman Lear to refer to the formation of women's liberation groups in America, Britain and Germany during the late 1960s. These groups emerged mainly because many women activists...
estranged themselves from the largely male dominated civil rights groups. In the United States repression and violence faced by thousands of men and women activists of civil rights movements, Black liberation movements, anti-war movements and the White students movements made them conscious about their status in the society. The experience gained during these movements also made the activists politically conscious. In the 1960s, women actively involved in these struggles came to face growing difficulties with the men they worked together. Jill Lewis observes, recounting an incident that symbolised the attitude of male participants towards their female counterparts in the movement:

They were involved in struggles for equality, human rights, justice and freedom, but in different organisations; and in personal relationships the women found themselves slighted, harassed, patronized, and treated as inferior helpers or sex objects. There was a legendary anti-war rally at which one of the women activists got up to speak and was met with cries of "Take her off and fuck her."...

The attitudes and perspectives of the White male Left were objectionable because as Robin Morgan, White political activist, speaker, and author, pointed out, they resulted in organisations with hierarchical power distribution - with men at the top. These men refused to recognise the problems of women's lives, saw women's issues as secondary to their own priorities, and used women sexually.
Toril Moi also records this inner turbulence in Sexual/Textual Politics:

In other politically progressive movements (the anti-war movements, Marxist groups), women were experiencing the same discrepancy between male activists' egalitarian commitment and their crudely sexist behaviour towards female comrades.36

Identical reasons led to formation of the first woman only French feminist group, Psychanalyse et Politique in the summer of 1968. Formation of similar women only groups took place, as Moi writes, because women joining their male comrades on the barricades were expected to provide "sexual, secretarial and culinary services" to the latter (Sexual/Textual Politics, p.95).

But it was not till 1970 that the new women's movement could consolidate upon a clear theoretical perspective. However, with the publication of Kate Millett's Sexual Politics in 1969, and Robin Morgan's Sisterhood Is Powerful: An Anthology of Writings from the Women's Liberation Movement in 1970, the pathbreaking task of providing the movement with a 'feminist theory' had begun.

This was of course preceded by Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex, published in 1949. Beauvoir's book highlighted
how women were reduced to 'objects' by men, as the latter 'constructed woman as the man's other'. However, during this period, Beauvoir's ideological interpretation of women's problem had nothing to do with feminism, for she believed at that time that the spread of socialism would do away with women's oppression. She later changed her position and accepted that there could be a 'feminist' struggle outside of 'class' struggle. Mary Evans writes in her essay, 'Simon de Beauvoir: Dilemmas of a Feminist Radical':

(...) it is perhaps possible to argue that in The Second Sex de Beauvoir came very close to suggesting, implicitly, what later feminists, and most significantly radical feminists, have explicitly stated: namely, that in fact heterosexuality does inevitably oppress women. However favourable a woman's material situation, however pro-feminist the man, the very nature of heterosexuality carries with it inescapable consequences of male domination and female submission (...).37

Evans goes on to state:

Yet The Second Sex does not suggest that its author is necessarily a socialist, so much as a radical liberal. Passionately concerned with the question of social justice, especially in so far as they affect women, de Beauvoir nevertheless ignores many of the questions about the social world which materialists, and Marxists would ask.38
In fact, one of the two major trends in the Women's Liberation Movement that was spearheaded by the radical feminist groups recognised men as the agents of oppression and argued that every other form of exploitation, like imperialism, racism and capitalism, sprang from the ideology of male supremacy. Radical feminism was pioneered by feminists like Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Emma Goldman and Margaret Sanger who argued that women must come to take radical control of their bodies to put an end to male supremacy. In America, the radical beginning was probably made by a feminist activist, Lucy Stone (1818-1893) who refused to take her husband's name.39 Charlotte Perkins Gilman, in a rebellious observation against institutions of oppression, had said:

'Women's economic profit comes through the power of sex-attraction', said Charlotte repeatedly, but when we confront this frankly 'in the open market of vice, we are sick with horror.' But when we see the same economic relationship made permanent, 'established by law, sanctioned and sanctified by religion, covered with flowers and incense and all accumulated sentiment, we think it innocent, lovely and right'. More pointedly: 'The transient trade we think evil. The bargain for life we think good.' But in both cases 'the female gets her food from the male by virtue of her sex-relationship to him.'40
The main theories of contemporary radical feminism were developed by various feminist groups in New York during the late 1960s and the 1970s. Adrienne Rich, Mary Daly, Shulamith Firestone, and Ti-Grace Atkinson are among those who have given leadership to this branch of feminist movement through their contributions towards development of a radical feminist theory. As opposed to this the socialist-feminists, representing the other major stream, did not accept sexual oppression as the source of all other forms of female subjugation. They were trying to address to individual socio-economic and historical factors that helped in the creation of patriarchal institutions. Their commitment was to introduce basic changes in human society whereby all oppressed groups, and not just women, would be free from exploitation.

Unlike radical feminism, socialist feminists refuse to treat economic oppression as secondary; unlike Marxist feminists they refuse to treat sexist oppression as secondary.

Socialist feminism argues that men have a specific material interest in the domination of women and, that men construct a variety of institutional arrangements to perpetuate this domination. Socialist feminism goes beyond the conventional definition of 'economy' to consider activity that does not involve the exchange of money, for example, by including the procreative and sexual work done by women in the home. In analysing all forms of productive activity, socialist feminism joins
the analytic tool of gender to that of class. For example, Sheila Rowbotham and Juliet Mitchell argue that women who are confined primarily to the lowest paying and least secure jobs can gain real economic independence only in a fully transformed economy. (...) A socialist feminist theory of historical materialism, together with psychoanalysis, helps us evaluate concepts like 'internalised oppression'. Juliet Mitchell links the two in her theory of character formation to explain why women seem to collude with their own subordination and neglect apparent opportunities for individual or collective resistance.41

Dale Spender observes:

Within the most of the economic frameworks men have designed, women's reproductive capacity has been controlled by men and used against them, for at best, most economic theories and forms of analyses have concentrated on production while reproduction has been made invisible and has been almost completely ignored. Trying to insert the value of reproduction into economic descriptions of wealth and its distribution, so that they reflect the realities of human beings and not just of males, has been another feminist goal which has taken a variety of forms. (...)

Other feminists, such as Juliet Mitchell and Sheila Rowbotham have been more concerned with tackling the problem at its roots and in overthrowing capitalism which is a fundamental basis of inequality.42

The *Second Sex*, however, contained the germs of what distinguished the new feminist upsurge in the 1960s from the suffrage movement in America and England between 1890 and 1920. It sought to relate politically to the question of
fighting patriarchy and sexual discrimination in the society, something that was entirely different from the theory of individual freedom and the public/private dichotomy in sexuality propagated by liberal feminism.

Gradually by late seventies a distinct genre of feminist criticism of life and literature that attacked essentialist view of the female sex was seen to be firmly rooted in the intellectual west. Pioneering works like Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women*, writings of Judith Fetterley, Ellen Moer's *Literary Women* and many other works analysed literature in the political context of patriarchy. These writings also exposed a strong misogyny of a predominantly male literary establishment.

Since 1975 feminists have focused their interest exclusively on the writings of women. Apart from above mentioned works, Elaine Showalter's *Literature of Their Own* and, *The Made Woman In The Attic* by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar among others have helped establish women's writing as a specific field in modern literature. This was aided by similar developments in the field of philosophy and anthropology. French feminist Helen Cixous introduced the concept of "patriarchal binary thought" in the realm of
western philosophy and literature. She argued that existence of this binary pattern always showed the feminine side as "negative and powerless". Her theory of feminine sexuality combined Freudian psychoanalysis and anthropology. Another French psychoanalyst, Jacques Lacan, argued that it was language that structured the social subject, while his country cousin, Luce Irigaray, criticised the phallocentric premises of Sigmund Freud. Again another French semiotician (who rejected the 'feminist' label) Julia Kristeva observed that modern linguistics ignored the female sex in favour of male symbols.

All these developments further strengthened the feminist perspective and produced space for complex debates, a result of which was the creation of various schools of thought within feminism. During the last two decades, some major groups has emerged within the movement, with their respective theoretical perspectives. Feminists like Ti-Grace Atkinson, Adrienne Rich and Charlotte Bunch talked of various women-identified experience that were characterised by all forms of intensity between women. This is posed against a "compulsory heterosexuality" that helped perpetuate a male controlled worldview. Thus, Rich's concept of a "lesbian continuum" takes the meaning of lesbian experience beyond
genital contact and makes it an essentially political terminology. This seeks to deconstruct the institutions of male domination (heterosexuality), and strives to establish a woman-centered alternative (separatism). This school of radical feminists argue that women's liberation is possible through a "womanculture" constructed by exclusive political, economic and sexual associations among women.

But socialist-feminists, like Sheila Rowbotham, point out that such alternative "female" institutions will not be able to address to the need of women in the long run. Instead, they propose to work out new forms of association between men and women to achieve a perfect harmony and freedom. Writing about feminists' disillusionment with the received ideas of sexuality, Barrett Michele writes:

Sexuality is a notoriously elusive object of study: it slides under our eyes from biology to poetry and back again. (...)

Co-existing with a persuasive popular ideology of romantic love are the brutal facts of rape, domestic violence, pornography, prostitution, a denial of female sexual autonomy and horrifying practices such as clitoridectomy. It is, perhaps, not surprising that feminism has, at least in the movement's recent history, given a central place to the sexual abuse of women. It has insisted on the political character of sexuality, on the unequal power of those involved in sexual relationship. In this respect the contemporary wom-
en's movement, insisting at every turn that 'the personal is political' can truly be said to have established 'sexual politics' as a significant area of struggle. This achievement is predicated upon a knowledge that sexual relationships are political because they are socially constructed and therefore could be different. A central element in this argument is the recognition of the distinction between the physical characteristics of males and females and the personality and behavioural characteristics deemed 'masculine' and 'feminine' in specific cultural and historical situations.43

Michele also argues that:

An analysis of sexuality in terms of male supremacy, with no real understanding of the construction and meaning of heterosexual femininity as it is experienced by a majority of women today, can lead to a political position of radical lesbian separatism. While this is a possible strategy, it remains a solution which exists within a fundamentally gender divided society, and advances little hope, or even claim, for changes which affect, let alone liberate, all women.44

The Marxist-feminists, on the other hand, seek to analyse the "material basis" of women's oppression vis-a-vis modes of production. As Nancy Hartsock observes in her writings, the material basis of women's unequal status in the society is a part of woman's consciousness. So there is a relation between the construction of woman's inner experience and her social experience, the conscious being and social causality.45 Kuhn and Wolpe also observe that the
power relations between the two sexes are also related to the 'material basis' of patriarchy:

The materialist problematic is based on a conceptualization of human society as defined specifically by its productivity: primarily of the means of subsistence and of value by the transformation of nature through work. United with this is a conceptualisation of history as the site of the transformation of the social relations of production and reproduction. As far as an analysis of the position of women is concerned, materialism would locate that position in terms of the relations of production and reproduction at various moments in history. In doing this, one of its central concerns would be with the determinate character of the sexual division of labour, and the implications of this for power relations between men and women at different conjunctures. 46

Roisin McDonough and Rachel Harrison emphasize the need to understand the issue of women's oppression, which they feel many Marxist feminists would not agree, in order to have a complete understanding of contemporary capitalist society.

Patriarchy has often been used as a central concept of analysis with which to understand the nature of women's oppression, both theoretically and politically. However, recent debates within the women's movement show that there is no consensus about the meaning and status of such a term. While its usefulness as a concept is rarely contested, it is nevertheless the focus of much debate amongst radical feminists, separatists and socialist feminists alike, and the debate is often one which the very term patriarchy occludes as much as it illuminates. Yet there is agreement on
one issue - there can be no understanding of the nature of contemporary capitalist society without placing the oppression of women at the centre of such an analysis. It is precisely this lack of centrality within Marxism to date on the whole question of women's oppression - that is, the virtual dearth of any analysis concerned with the relationship between the social relations of production and the social relations of human reproduction - to which many feminists are addressing themselves. The questions posed by the attempts to understand the forms of women's oppression both in the present and historically, to uncover the material basis for such oppression and to explain why it takes the particular forms it does are the key theoretical and political tasks which the movement faces today.47

When the radicals highlighted the politics of gender, sexuality and woman culture, and the Marxists talked of class and material basis of exploitation, Black feminism took off on the dual issue of racial and sexual discrimination. The root of this movement may be traced back to the nineteenth century abolitionist movement in the U.S.A. The abolitionist movement, primarily launched against slavery, also provided the impetus and strategies to Black women for their fight against sexual discrimination. Sarah Grimke's Letters on the Equality of the Sexes and the Condition of Women (Boston, Mass.: Isaac Knapp, 1838) attacked the social order that subjugated women, and put forward demands for women's rights. Based on the abolitionist politics, Grimke's ideas of feminism were much more
radical than those of Mary Wollstonecraft and other liberal feminists.

The ideas behind Black feminist movement were often influenced by a mixed tradition of left activism and socialist feminism with a view to forging a coalition between women of colour and progressive movements. Black feminists emphasised the idea that all forms of White feminism must reckon the evils of imperialism and challenge them. Leading Black feminists like Audre Lorde, Gloria Joseph, Alice Walker and Gloria Hull have criticised the idea that feminist ideology derived from White experience is capable of addressing to the problems of women in all parts of the globe. They also proved the inadequacy of White feminist perceptions to understand the role of gender in the realm of Black male thinking.

As Gloria Joseph and Jill Lewis observe:

The juxtaposition of Black women's consciousness and White feminism sets the stage for the need to construct different political sites for challenging the unsatisfactory realities of the male-female polarities. The differences recognized in the sexual relationships between Black women and Black men in contrast to White women and White men relate to the question of power. Male dominance as a salient problematic factor in male-female sexual relationships cannot be considered as a
universal trait applicable to all men. To categorically lump all men together and attribute the same sense of power to both Black and White men is racist in the sense that the crucial role of White-skin privilege in our society is being disregarded. It is incumbent upon White feminists to recognize the very real differences that exist between White men and Black men when their degree of power is considered. The White-skin privilege cuts across any categories of class in a racist society as does male privilege in the White dominant culture. Yet the forces shaping and sustaining male privilege are not equally participated in by all White men - though all White men benefit from these privileges and define their sense of gender in relation to them.\textsuperscript{48}

In America, Black women have a 'specific' relationship to Black men, because Black men have helped the former to fight against and survive the inhuman and cruel social treatment meted out to them. Similarly Black women also fought along side Black men against racial discrimination.

For White feminists, the recognition of racism and the will to fight it do not exempt them from the blindness, the harshness, and the passivities of racism, which their culture, their daily realities, and their political vision contain.\textsuperscript{49}

Describing the context of Black feminism as an essentially Black-defined struggle for sexual as well as racial 'equality' the authors explain:

Black feminism is the context for the development of Black-defined sexual-political struggles, examining the sexual tensions and conflict in the
In contemporary American society, where the current century witnessed fierce battle for women's rights and equality, and promotion of anti-orthodox institutions to put radical feminist claims into their proper perspectives, there has been a growing number of 'virgin clubs' coming up even among school-going girls, pointing towards a possible role reversal. In a way, 16 million or so American women who were born between 1968 and 1974, and had had a glimpse of explosive history when women's movement took hold, are 'disheartened' by their mothers' guilt during the 1970s [over choosing to pursue careers] and their older sisters' exhaustion hauling baby and briefcase through the career traffic of the 1980s and are set to redefine the feminine mystique. Nancy Gibbs provides a picture of how the reactions of the majority white, and minority women mostly of third-world origin differ in this respect:

Given this combination of goals and fears, young women would appear to be disciples of feminism, embracing the movement as a means of sorting out social change. But while the goals are applauded by three quarters of young people, the feminist label is viewed with disdain and alarm.... Some young people reject the movement in principle (...).
Others feel that the battle belonged to a different generation, without realizing that the very existence of a debate about family leave, abortion, [flexible work hours], and affirmative action is the fruit of an ongoing revolution. Minority women seem to be the group least likely to abandon the feminist label, perhaps because they are most aware of how many critical battles remain to be fought. "In fact", argues Stephanie Ratiste, 18, black freshman at Princeton University in New Jersey, "minority women are almost a separate women's movement.... You're very alone. You get a lot less support."}

Amidst all this brou-ha-ha about mistakes of the feminist movements to have overlooked the negative effect of women's assertion of self on women themselves, the lot of the Third World -- and especially Black women -- seems to have undergone very little change under the patriarchy of a capitalist empire. Writing very forcefully about it in her essay, "Age, Race, Class and Sex: Women Redefining Difference", Black feminist Audre Lorde wrote as recently as in 1992:

Much of Western European history conditions us to see human differences in simplistic opposition to each other: dominant/subordinate, good/bad, up/down, superior/inferior. In a society where good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need, there must always be some group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel as surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior. Within this society, that group is made up of Black and Third World people, working-class people, older people and women.
As a forty-nine year old Black lesbian feminist socialist mother of two, including one boy, and a member of an inter-racial couple, I usually find myself a part of some group defined as other, deviant, inferior, or just plain wrong. Traditionally, in American society, it is the member of oppressed, objectified groups who are expected to stretch out and bridge the gap between the actualities of our lives and the consciousness of our oppressor. (...) Black and Third World people are expected to educate White people as to our humanity. Women are expected to educate men. Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world. The oppressors maintain their position and evade responsibility for their own action.52

The perceptions of Black feminists were based on concrete experience they all went through while fighting alongside their White sisters for civil rights and equality of sexes. The lack in White feminist perspectives to challenge the problem of racial discrimination, and a wide gap between cultural histories of the Black and the White people made Black women aware of the need to launch a struggle that would tackle the twin problems of racial and sexual oppression. In the United States of America, where Black women constitute the most oppressed group as compared to White women and Black men, their involvement in the women's movement was propelled by a genuine desire to improve their daily lives. So they joined in large numbers to highlight the issues of job opportunities, sterilisation abuse, abortion rights, sexual harassment and abuse, etc. But none of
these traditional feminist struggles put racial discrimination on their agenda as a priority issue.

Soon the realisation dawned that

Black women should not allow a movement to be defined by others, and condemned on the basis of a definition that never considered their reality. Black women should define their role in social movements in terms that are constant with their own motives and goals.53

The role of Black women in the Women's Liberation struggle was underplayed by the White-controlled media. Gloria Joseph recounts:

While traditional historians and the media have historically denied Black women their role in history - a denial that continues today - numerous female freedom fighters were involved as central figures in the struggle, and Black women as a whole have always played an active role. In the fight to end slavery, Harriet Tubman was a key part of the Abolition movement. Sojourner Truth was another warrior in the antislavery struggle as well as an early fighter in the women's suffrage movement. Mary McLeod Bethune was a pioneer in the struggle for education for Blacks. Ida B. Wells was a tireless fighter for antilynching laws and an organiser for women's clubs. Frances Ellen Watkins Harper, the first Black female novelist, was an early reformer and speaker for temperance and women's rights. Assate Shakur was a fearless activist; Rosa Park's refusal to move to the back of the bus ignited the early 1960s drive for civil rights. This is to name but a few of the thousands of Black women who sustained the struggle against racism from slavery to the present day.54
Commenting on Black women's relationship to Black Power and Women's Liberation Movements during the 1960s, apart from their relationship to Civil Rights movement, Asha Kanwar writes:

However, Black women's relationship to these movements was highly problematic, caught as it was between the sexism of the Black Power movement and the rampant racism of the predominantly White Women's Liberation Struggle. That the feminist movement is divided along the colour line is clear from the fact that the issues of racism identified in the 1981 National Women's Studies Association Conference were still alive and unresolved eleven years later at the 1992 NWSA Conference. Similarly, Black Women's subordination and marginalization by Black men in Civil Rights, Black Power and Black Panther movements made them reassess their political position.55

Racism was one of the dynamics that brought together Black women in the United States and, it is still a prominent issue there even today. Here Black men and women fought shoulder to shoulder against the imperialist forces in a capitalist society. But racial discrimination at the hands of White men and women was not the last thing in Black women's plight. They also suffered sexual discrimination and abuse perpetrated by Black men. So their problem was much more complex than those of their White sisters. This was best summed up in the manifesto of Combahee River Col-

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lective. An all lesbian Black feminist group, the Collective was founded in 1974, taking the name from Harriet Tubman’s military action – the only military campaign planned and led by a woman in the history of America – that set free more than 750 slaves. The manifesto is a brilliant treatise on the need for and, the perspective of Black feminism, as reflected in the following portions:

...Although we are feminists and lesbians, we feel solidarity with progressive Black men and do not advocate the fractionalization that White women who are separatists demand. Our situation as Black people necessitates that we have solidarity around the fact of race which White women of course do not need to have with White men, unless it is their negative solidarity as racial oppressors. We struggle together with Black men against racism, while we also struggle with Black men about sexism.56

The manifesto further speaks of the realisation that for the liberation of all oppressed peoples it is necessary to destroy the political-economic systems of capitalism, imperialism and patriarchy. The collective is in essential agreement with Marx’s theory as it applies to economic relationships, but argues that this analysis must be extended to understand "our specific situation as Black women".

During the 1970s, there was a stock-taking done by many feminist groups in the United States to discover, to their
utter dismay, that there were very little participation by the Third World women in their struggle. A case in point is the largest and the best-known National Organization for Women (NOW). Formed in 1966, the body was organised with conventional formal structures with hierarchies, in contrast with radical sectors of Women's Liberation Movement. By 1974, there were over 40,000 members from all over the country, mainly comprising educated, white-collar White women. Only a mere 5% of this membership were Black. The radical groups also did not have much encouraging formal participation by Black women, though they would be present in large numbers in public demonstrations called by these groups.

One of the major reasons for this ironical situation was what Jill Jewis observes about White traditional feminists:

This tradition of feminism was — and still is — concerned that certain changes be won and implemented within the framework of the U.S. "democratic", capitalist state. Women in this tradition fought for the rights and privileges for women without questioning the rights and privileges they already enjoyed from the class and race oppression endemic to the capitalist system. 57
While White women from White ethnic groups in the United States suffered exploitation by White men, they did not have to experience extreme and brutal forms of racism that was related to conditions of slavery and survived the Abolition movement to become even a present-day phenomenon in America. Even though the White women were subjected to economic and other forms of exploitation, they lived through a cultural reality that a dominant White society legitimized. Black women could not identify their struggle with a movement that broadly agreed with this dominant historical-cultural construct.

The most decisive factor that distinguishes Black feminist perspective from the ideological basis of White feminists is the specific historical experience of the Black woman. While the White woman is oppressed as a woman, a Black woman is oppressed by the same White patriarchy as a non-female as well. Data collected during the last twenty years shows that racial discrimination in the United States not only manifests in the identifiable level, but also hides behind attitudes, prejudices and other psychological mechanism that abounds the society. Citing examples from the Prison reports, Gloria Joseph traces obvious racial bias even in the judicial system, supposed to be the noblest of
all social machineries. In trials of rape cases the number of White rapists being higher than Black ones, the percentage of convicts given death sentence is always higher among Blacks. But most surprisingly, when more than 50% of Blacks convicted of raping White women are sentenced to death, hardly any White rapist of Black women receives the same punishment.

There is also a gaping dissimilarity between the media image of White and Black women as well as men. The reinterpretation of a very popular phrase of the 1960s, "Black is beautiful", by the western media is a case in point. The original meaning of the popular phrase was to signify pride, confidence and belongingness to Black history, race, civilisation and ancestry. It meant to develop a worldview that was free from personal greed and desire for exploitation, and propagate a humanity defined by equality. But the western White-controlled media made a mockery of the whole meaning by making a cosmetics-defined interpretation of the phrase, aided by tips to make "black skin look more beautiful". Gloria Joseph thus reacts:

The beauty of things Black clearly does not apply to "Miss America" with Black skin. The beauty of Blackness is historical and should be defined by
Blacks along lines that are germane to their African heritage and genealogy and their Afro-Americans culture — not on the basis of the distribution of genes, tissue, and pigment.... To be beautiful isn't simply a physical state. It has to be active in the sense that it arouses more than a sexual response — that it is inspirational and enhances the mental well-being of others — and it cannot be defined with finality.58

Not only in the print and electronic media and films but also in the allotment of jobs the racial bias of White patriarchy surfaces with an ugly face. Certain menial, laborious jobs, considered unfit for women are allotted to Black women without a second thought. In factories, laundries and other heavy duty workplace, both Black and White women sweat it out, but even in such places the dirtiest jobs are reserved for Black women. This conforms the prevalent idea that Black women are tough and meant for such jobs.

On the other hand, if a Black woman consciously cultivates the qualities defined as feminine by White patriarchy, she faces a double-edged problem of misinterpretation. In her own community she will be appreciated and accepted by only those men who have come under the influence of White culture. There is a historical reason behind this. At the same time, her acquired behaviour (White-defined
femininity) will hold a different interpretation among White males, which a White woman would not have to experience.

The above brief overview of 'White' and 'Black' feminist perspectives point towards a 'situational' nature of feminist politics and interpretations. This in a way explains the departure of feminist criticism from the tenets of American New Criticism. Kate Millett's Sexual Politics was a pathbreaking work in this direction, as one observes in Toril Moi's comment:

Her criticism represented a striking break with the ideology of American New Criticism, which at that time retained a dominant position within the 'literary academy. In courageous opposition to the New Critics, Millett argued that social and cultural context must be studied if literature was to be properly understood, a view she shares with all later feminist critics regardless of their otherwise differing interests.59

This theoretical basis of feminism is reason enough to look for contradictions in a feminist theory that never considered specific historical and cultural realities of women of African origin, before applying it to assess life and literature in Africa. The realities from which modern African literature emerged was, and still is, essentially different from that of the West. Ngugi wa Thiong'o makes a brilliant illustration of this aspect of modern African literature in
his collection of essays named *Homecoming*:

Literature does not grow in a vacuum; it is given impetus, shape, direction and even area of concern by social, political and economic forces in a particular society. The relationship between creative literature and these other forces cannot be ignored, especially in Africa, where modern literature has grown against the gory background of European imperialism and its changing manifestations: slavery, colonialism and neo-colonialism. 60

A brief survey on African women from antiquity, through their Arabo-Barber and European colonial history to the modern times would show following major factors that changed their status in the society: i) The dominantly matriarchal indigenous societies shifted more and more towards patriarchal modes as they came under Islamic and later Christian influence; ii) spread of these new religions also induced changes in the world-view of indigenous people and thus affected attitudes of both the male and the female; iii) introduction of new kinds of legal systems especially by the White colonists changed the concept of crime and punishment in the native societies, advantage of which was often taken by influential and powerful Black men setting precedences; iv) the new economy with cash nexus introduced by the European colonists soon caused the simple, peasant-subsist-
ence economy of the indigenous people to perish. The new economic order created distinct social classes by encouraging accumulation at various levels. This further influenced change in women's status as means of production was completely removed from her control; v) a new European education system influenced the Africans to despise their own social customs and traditions and embrace western manners and emulate their European colonists, thereby also assuming the role of dominating white male and coy, sexy female; vi) and finally, even after gaining independence many African states are today ruled by neo-colonial governments, perpetuating similar kinds of oppression and exploitations as did the colonial rulers. Under such a condition, it cannot be said that the fight against imperialist forces is over, and so are all forms of patriarchal domination and subjugation that come along with such political systems.

The feminists, White women to be particular, in the west never had to face these socio-historical interventions in their history, and as such cannot claim to equate their historical and cultural experience with Black women. Rather, as discussed earlier in this chapter, they indirectly enjoyed the advantages of belonging to the race of the oppressor, the "superior" human beings. It was not until
the Black feminists came into the scene that they realised this aspect in their struggle for equality which they thought would change the lives of women all over the world. The Black feminists' assertion on their racial exploitation relating it to the politico-economic crisis under capitalism, and their unequivocal challenge to imperialist forces in the world helped their White sisters to see reason. A leading Black feminist activist, Pauli Murray, echoes this view in her essay, "The Liberation of Black Women". She also notes that under white culture a stereotype of female dominance is often attached to Black women because of their former's matriarchal background. This is a blatant show of double standard by White patriarchy, she argues, where the dominant standard of beauty is "blond, blue-eyed, white-skinned girl with regular features". As a result, the Black woman is faced with, unlike her White sisters, a "dilemma of competing identities and priorities".

Almost all the major African writers and activists have tried to review feminist ideologies in the African context. Buchi Emecheta writes in her article, "Feminism with a small "f" that African feminism is without the "shackles of Western romantic illusions" and thus, is much more "pragmat-
ic". In a discussion on the same article, famous critic Lauretta Ngcobo observes that looking for a solution to women's problem in Africa through "male exclusion" is no solution at all. Ghanaian writer Ama Ata Aidoo also comments that as an African woman writer, she "did not have to learn feminism from Lapland" that sought to ruin the "nice relationship between African women and men". Taban lo Liyong is more matter of fact:

I have been writing as a contribution towards understanding our position in the world, not as male chauvinist pig. I have also been reading the writings of African women and other women as a contribution towards understanding the position and the problems of human beings...Let us have all of those women writers, African, Asian expressing their point of view. That is a good thing. But to say - I am going to be a feminist writer, I am going to take a position vis-a-vis that man, I am going to shoot him. That upsets me. I think I should appeal to us to keep the African household intact at the end of the day, otherwise we may have our younger sisters going off and joining in dances in Lapland which concern the people of Lapland only.63

To many, this may sound a little patronizing, a view bordering on a liberal male attitude that sympathises with women's predicament. But juxtaposing this with what radical feminist V. Solanis had to say about men in SCUM (Society for Cutting Up Men) manifesto, one gets a glimpse of what Eme-cheta calls "romanticism" of the White feminists:
It is now technically possible to reproduce without the aid of males and to produce only females. We must begin immediately to do so. The male is a biological accident. The 'Y' (male) gene is an incomplete set of chromosomes. In other words, the male is an incomplete female, a walking abortion, aborted at the gene state... Many women will for a while continue to think they dig men, but as they become accustomed to female society and as they become absorbed in their projects, they will eventually come to see the utter uselessness and banality of the male.64

The cultural history of the African societies and their order of man-woman relationship will never be able to endorse such a lunatic height of feminist enthusiasm. Noted South African writer and activist, Christine Qunta comments on feminism in the west:

It is a reformist rather than revolutionary movement in the west, initiated and sustained by middle-class women of European origin. It has raised the consciousness of these women and played an important role in changing their position for the better. Nevertheless, true emancipation of women goes beyond legislating for equality. If someone examines the situation in some West European societies, particularly Sweden and other Scandinavian countries with social democratic welfare state arrangements, where women have gone a substantial way toward gaining legal equality, one immediately notices that women continue to be degraded through the portrayal of their bodies as vulgar toys in the pornography that abounds in those same societies.65
Today these inherent contradictions are taken note of not only by Black feminists but their White comrades as well. For example, the effectiveness of right to abortion as an instrument to ensure freedom from sexual repression and to generate parity of respect in a personal man-woman relationship has been questioned. Free abortion is welcome and may help to do away with the problem of an unwanted child. But not speaking — from a moral point of view — of eliminating a life, still how much does free abortion help to change the basic male attitude towards his female sexual partner?

Similarly, the radical solution of separatism to eliminate the male agent of oppression has also come under question. As an answer to male-defined and male-dominated sexual patterns in the society legitimatized by patriarchy (hetero-sexuality), lesbian groups have been formed. These groups operate to create a sub-culture, to insulate women from the mainstream culture. But in the process they also insulate themselves from their comrades who do not believe in this philosophy of sexual exclusion. There are many who have not chosen but still respect a lesbian lifestyle. The resultant isolation of the lesbians, despite full "security" from male onslaught as claimed by these groups, affect the whole movement for women's liberation as resources and
talents of such groups cannot be shared by others for general benefit. Especially for Black women, their specific historical background that stood for greater equality in man-woman relationship poses a lot of problem in accepting such an alternative sexuality as lesbian association. At the same time, the same set of specific cultural-historical elements to which Black man is rooted, will also create fear and wrong judgment in his mind about the logic behind such an association.

In the United States, the relationship of Black women and men have come to develop in a context of survival struggle. This fight for survival and basic human rights have brought about a collaborative mode in the realm of their relationship instead of an overwhelming urge to separate themselves. More importantly, their struggle that grew up in opposition to a White "culture" makes it more difficult for both Black women and men to readily accept an alternative sexuality that does not essentially belong to their indigenous cultural parameters.

In the African context, considering the socio-historical background of man-woman relationship, as reflected in the specific political, economic and cultural histories of
the indigenous people, there was hardly anything as "helpless female". So a different set of dynamics emerge and operate in the Black women's struggle for equality. The Black woman has to carry forward her political struggle in keeping with her personal consciousness and at the same time maintain her ties with the Black community as a whole. Her role in the Black community is as central to her survival as is her personal political development vis-a-vis sexuality.

Therefore Black women cannot be part of a process that implies their removal from personal and political collaboration with men. The phenomenon of male abuse is drawn from clear-cut and real social contexts. But White feminism often has failed to explain this abuse against an appropriate assessment of cultural, politico-economical and historical mechanisms that work behind the scene to create such contexts. In Black community, it is thus difficult to deny the nexus of desires, pleasures, affirmations and positive intent which also mediate individual woman's relation with man. Jill Lewis, summing up the inherent inadequacies of radical feminism of the west in explaining Black women's problem, observes:
The implications of radical feminist method do present acute dilemmas for Black women. The encounter of Black women with its discourses may indeed be highly instrumental in transforming the landscape it delineates, for radical feminism either urges an escalation of a kind of feminist consciousness which condemns men, or on the other hand does not enable means of understanding and transforming the sexual dilemmas and dynamics between men and women in specific cultural, material and historical contexts. The imperative to indict men as simple agents of oppression does not develop analytical methods and critical tools for understanding the diverse social and political factors which produce and necessitate this power division and its eventual violent consequences. There is therefore no way of transforming existing power relationships only on an oppositional rhetoric which one can either adhere to passionately, or respond to with stunned helplessness or disagreement. 67

In her introduction to the anthology of Black women's writing, Asha Kanwar tries to identify the central theme in the domain of Black women's literature:

Writing in itself was and is, for them, a political act, an act of transgression, a "talking back" in their own voice, of their own experiences, informed by a special consciousness forged out of four hundred years of oppression. As such, there are certain features common in the writing of Black women. For one thing, and most critics agree, if there is a single distinguishing feature of the literature of Black women...it is this, their literature is about Black women. 67

Barbara Christian observes in her book Black Feminist Criticism that works of women authors about women's experience as
mothers or daughters have always been given a secondary place under a male dominated literary tradition:

Since a woman, never a man, can be a mother or a daughter, that experience should be hers to tell and since we all come from mothers it is striking that these stories have remained secondary in a world literature.\textsuperscript{68}

Apart from philosophical issues like that of motherhood, African writers - women writers to be particular - have been able to picturize the sweeping social and demographic changes taking place in the African countries since they have gained their independence. And along with the extrinsic transformations, changes have occurred within the social relationships contained in these societies. Aidan Southall comments on the 'precise changes in the social relationships and roles of individuals which accompany' major socio-political and demographic changes:

There are too many catchwords: detribalization, the breakdown of traditional authority, the emergence of elites and of new political and economic forces, the emancipation of women and the rise of nationalism. The variety and contrasts of Africa are greater than ever before. There are both air-routes and foot-safaris, talking drums, newspapers and radios, doctors, lawyers and gangsters as well as lion men and witch doctors. It is difficult to find the less spectacular truth between the extremes.\textsuperscript{69}
Then there has been what Adrian Roscoe terms as a 'painful collision' of cultures in Africa against a 'background history of humiliating colonialism and slavery'. Quoting Chinua Achebe on the issue Roscoe writes on the results of such collisions:

There is a good deal of agony in the African situation and the best writers reveal it. 'No thinking African can escape the pain of the wound in our soul', observes Chinua Achebe, a writer determined to help his society 'regain its belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-denigration.

But the very turbulence of the African position, the very storms it has blown up in African minds and souls has created a situation fraught with the challenge and material that provide inspiration for the literary artist.\(^7\)0

Women writers from Africa have been able to capture in their writings the changing environment around modern African women that often generate 'stereotypes' of prostitutes, high-lifers, political wheeler-dealers, rich and westernized elite, and the ever-present urban woman wasting money on expensive clothes and beauty products. What writers like Bessie Head, Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo and Buchi Emechata have been able to achieve is to reconstruct these stereotypes by critically analysing the socio-political and economic situations affecting women in Africa today. Problems
like morality among 'professional' women, difficulties of middle-class working women, and the intricate relationship between modern woman and the question of 'African authenticity' are what these authors have highlighted in their work alongside their portrayal of the socio-economic situation of African nations which are still controlled by imperialist forces. The whole situation puts African women of today in a dilemma, as Christine Obbo points out:

It is said that women, as bearers of African culture should be protected, with or without their consent from the corrupting influences of Western culture such as cosmetics, wigs or short dresses. The real issue of course is that, if the primary colonial and neo-colonial forces that keep Africa in subjection cannot be adequately dealt with, at least women should be kept pure for the sake of African authenticity. In many ways this is an attempt to reconcile the dilemmas posed by conflicting ideals of individual advancement based on self-interest and choice, on the one hand, and the development of the community at large, on the other.71

The proposed thesis therefore will analyse novels by Cyprian Ekwensi and Buchi Emecheta to assess their presentations of African women of today, taking into consideration not only the contradictions within feminist theory, but also those within the modern African society. The analysis will be made against three different situational backdrops: war, urban life, and rural/traditional surrounding. Causal fac-
tors in the change of status of women will be discussed while trying to compare specific elements from the traditional past with those of the modern times. Finally, the study will make an effort to compare emerging male and female perspectives in these novels by analysing their female characters which often appear as stereotypes.
Notes and References


3. Mary Warnock (intro.), Mary Wollstonecraft, A Vindica-


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30. Ibid., p.87.


32. Ibid., Maggie Humm, op. cit., p.111.


34. Maggie Hum, op. cit., p.125.


36. Toril Moi, op. cit., p.22.


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