CHAPTER II

WEST AFRICAN WOMEN WRITERS

The representation of African women in male-authored works reveals the ideological standpoint of the writers that quite explicitly identifies women with tradition and self-denied role of mother. It reveals women and predators who take to the flesh trade for high life and quick money. African women writers of first generation like Grace Ogot, Flora Nwapa have focused on the marginalized position of women and need to revolt against exploitation and oppression of women in African society. But contemporary African women writers deal with a post-colonial reality where both customary and common laws of marriage apply.

African woman writing as a ‘multi-voiced discourse’ has challenged a number of orthodoxies: ‘the voicelessness of the black woman’, ‘the derogatory portrayals of their gender’ and ‘their economic marginalization’. West African women writers are concerned with the protest against sex discrimination and woman oppression in patriarchal society. Their writings by presenting the realistic picture of suffering of women appear to
have sympathized with the plight of women and denounced their meek submission in male dominated society.

The chief concerns of most of women writers are polygamy that degraded the status of woman, wife inheritance and her property disinheritance causing a lot of humiliation and ill treatment in her family and society. They have often challenged some of the fundamental assumptions relating to Igbo woman’s passively accepting retrogressive cultural norms. By presenting woman as a victim of circumstances created by the society, they seem to have established that woman is not just a commodity to inherit or enjoy but an individual with emotions and desires and ambition and drive in her to advance in life.

In pre-colonial and colonial situation in West Africa women are pictured as weaker sex, passive, and docile in their traditional role. African patriarchal society has suppressed woman’s freedom of expression and economic capabilities. Dr. Rose Ure Mezu, a prominent contemporary writer in Nigeria advocates African female activism. She led the life of a cloistered and protected woman quite ignorant of the problems of women expected every marriage to resemble like her parent’s and every woman to be as loving, strong reliable and resourceful as her mother.
But she was greatly influenced by Flora Nwapa's, Efuru who was placed at the centre of the plot with an ambition to assert her existence as free individual. In a male oriented society motherhood and wifehood branded a woman like Nwapa's Efuru 'unfeminine'. And a barren woman as well as a woman with unsuccessful marital life is considered to be useless in her society.

Dr. Rose as the Commissioner in charge of Social Welfare was aware of daily oppressions and marginalisation of Nigerian woman. And her pursuit for Ph.D. brought her into contact with feminist theorists and their perception of the plight of women. She realized that black women are no more considered intellectually inferior to men but their lives largely distorted, deemed to be insignificant.

Florence Nwanzuruahu Nkiru Nwapa is the first West African woman novelist to champion the cause of women in particular in West Africa. She is a prolific Nigerian writer, a feminist depicting the suffering of female in the new political dispensation in Nigeria. Born on January 18, 1931 in Oguta, East Central State, Nigeria, she is the first African woman to publish in English. She obtained a degree from University College, Ibadan in 1957. Later, she did a diploma in education.
from the University of Edinburgh and also worked for one year as Educational Officer in the Ministry of Education in Clabar.

Her love for teaching took her to Queen’s School in Enugu where she taught English and geography for three years. She also held various administrative positions such as Assistant Registrar, University of Lagos, Minister of Health and Social welfare, East Central State and Minister of Lands, Survey and Urban Development. But she continued her life mostly as an educator teaching at colleges and universities including New York University, Trinity College, University of Minnesota, University of Michigan and University of Ilorin.

Flora Nwapa became popular a writer for depicting Igbo life and customs from a woman’s point of view. She is acknowledged as the first internationally acclaimed woman novelist of black Africa written in the English language. She is called the mother of Modern African literature. She is awarded by her own town Oguta, the highest chieftaincy title ‘Ogbuefi’ which is an achievement award given to men. She has written many stories compiled into volumes meant for children with Nigerian setting and with profound message. Besides her being a writer and teacher she has also become an entrepreneur setting her own example to others contrary to the traditional
roles of women. Though she never likes to be called a feminist, her writings deal with feminism, the cause of woman.

She has openly confessed in an interview with Marie Umeh that women are more independent and industrious.

When I do write about women in Nigeria, in Africa, I try to paint a positive picture about women because there are many women who are very, very positive, in their thinking, who are very, very independent, and very, very industrious. 1

Flora Nwapa's first novel Efuru published in 1966 and her second novel Idu published in 1971, carried name for her as a writer to reckon with. Distressed with the attitude of her publisher Heinemann Education, she determined to establish Tana Press Limited in 1977 to publish her other works and the works of her other contemporary writers. The women in her novels are impressive in their roles of promoters of African cultural traditions and protectors of cultural heritage. They often use prayers, lullabies, proverbs, riddles, folk songs and tales mainly to protect African character and shape African personality.
Her novels have also drawn from oral literature material for her characterization and dramatization of situation. Sometimes for her lengthy dialogues she appears to be rhetorical. She has always asserted and highlighted the feminine principle, the prime cultural factor in African life to make women become conscious of herself and her individual creativity. She has stressed that the institution of marriage should never act as a barrier to female-actualization. Her feminine perspective shows that female characters not only accelerate the actions of men around but also shape their destiny.

The world of Flora Nwapa's first two novels—Efuru and Idu—reflects patriarchy. It is a world bounded on a value system that is conducive to man's pleasure and self-realization. Women have no option to assert themselves but to obey and follow the dictates of their husbands. And a woman's life is significant as long as the prestige of the man and the integrity of the family are intact.

In Efuru woman is portrayed merely as a sex object to satisfy man's desire and taste. Efuru is subjected to clitoridectomy 'by having a bath' in contrast to circumcision in man, only to denigrate woman, to make her potentially weak.
The 'bath' is used as a metaphor to show that woman is inferior to man biologically speaking.

As a pious lady upholding the divine principles of Ugwuta Community, Nwapa notes that women priestesses are the privileged class and are revered in their society. The sacrificing nature of women in Nwapa's novels reflect the importance of priesthood to be treated on par with men in the patriarchal society in Nigeria. She confers dignity and identity on African woman in an attempt to establish female literary tradition with realistic approach. She has never troubled her heroines especially when they are central to the main plot by dint of their hard work and honesty.

Nwapa unleashed a new tradition in African letters making one-dimensional, monotonous depiction of women triumph as female fatals and never do wells. Female bonding to Flora Nwapa is female solidarity. Her views on the institution of marriage and familial relationship that she proclaimed at the Second International Feminist Book Fair in Oslo, Norway are noteworthy.

*If we as women pay less attention to men and marriage...I am married and I have children. But I*
don't live for my husband alone. I live for him, for my children and for my profession.  

Her creative works abound in the use of colloquial Igbo proverbs that are didactic and have identified women as carriers of Ugwuta verbal art. She never remained contented with her publication of adult novels but she also went on to scribble children’s books, and wrote plays and essays. She exhibited her books at International Conferences and Book Fairs to expose her women centred perspective to academics and masses all over the globe. Her Tana Press remained instrumental in the circulation of her books throughout Africa, Europe, Asia and the United States of America. Her books enabled the scholars and students of African literature Studies to become inquisitive to probe further into even her unpublished works.

Toni Morrison, the first African-American woman to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1993, in an interview on her essay, “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation” implores the people to ruminate the great ancestor.

If you kill the ancestor you will kill yourself. Let us continue to keep Flora Nwapa, our ancestor, alive by disseminating for ideas and her philosophy with the same energy that her own artistic life radiated.
Nwapa’s lucid, thought provoking and spiritually charged writing is an endeavour to differentiate herself intellectually from other literary writers. She carved a feminine niche for herself in her works by merging gender based relationship controversy with that of national discourse. Nwapa, a skillful manipulator of language employs lucid language mainly to stimulate a serious situation involving social and moral issues that are faced by the Igbo woman in her daily activities.

Flora Nwapa’s plots appear to be simple, woven with complex symbolism, comic interventions and skillful dialogues with sprinkled anecdotes and moral judgements. She reinforces the notion that a woman can change her mind based on situation and thus she does not necessarily bring peace and respect to her people. She focuses on the unsympathetic husbands harassing their barren wives. On the other hand, she proves how fast a tenderhearted man succumbs to female seduction and changes his habits when he loses control over his life. In One is Enough Amaka’s husband Obiora who often beats her suddenly becomes submissive when Amaka, a passive recipient turns ferocious and knocks him down assuming the opposite role.
Like Efuru, Nwapa too is an illustrious successful woman shaping her own destiny. She, as the mysteries of Uhamiri exemplifying female authority, has influenced her society in her own way, in particular women. She prepares her audience to accept and approve the sufferings of her protagonists in her two novels *Efuru* and *Idu*, and also *Never Again* to become successful in life. In each of her novels Nwapa tries to diagnose the maladies of her characters, and community and suggests certain precautionary measures to overcome her difficulties and suffering.

The most distressing of all kinds of maladies is childlessness, lamenting the lack of fertility among Nigerian women. Nwapa considers woman not just a vessel empty or filled but also a decision-making personality. She revolts against such humiliation women are subjected to as week and meek persons unable to raise their voice. Nwapa as mother and teacher recites a tale in the African oral tradition to the African women consoling and cautioning them and also expects them to respond to her call.

Her last two novels *One is Enough* and *Women Are Different* reached Nigerians as clarion calls to redefine their lives. She makes a fictive exploration of child figures by
projecting them onto the canvass of childhood thereby creating a conscious symbolism to revise the patriarchal norms in the society. Nwapa quite often with skillful craftsmanship returns to the religious fantasy with Uhamiri as source emphasizing the idea that there exists no hierarchy in terms of gender between the gods and goddesses for the acquisition of more power.

Nwapa is greatly influenced by the works of Chinua Achebe, Ernest Hemingway and Charles Dickens. The symbol of cross roads dominates literary production. She herself faced many challenges in the world. She stabilizes her position through economic independence and self-reliance. She identifies herself with African Women who are shrewd market women, energetic female cultivators and rebellious wives and also the sacrificial mothers.

Nwapa never likes to be addressed as feminist though her works question African tradition and for reformation of women. She has skillfully synthesized the traditional Igbo mores and myths with imported views of women for the creation of complex characters yearning for independence. Nwapa is convinced that in African tradition a woman enjoys the privilege of breaking and sharing a kola if only her industry and accomplishments are estimated. She concludes that sexism
stands as the second problem emerging out of race, class and the exploitation of people of colour.

Flora Nwapa’s Efuru is a living model of a woman craving to become mother. She approaches Uhamiri, the goddess of Ogbuide for fertility. She silently suffers the humiliation in the society, and when she gives birth to a child she feels as if she has conquered the whole woman world. She loves her child more than herself and when her husband Adizua fails to attend the funeral, as an affectionate mother she divorces Adizua and blames him for lack of concern for her child and goes for a second marriage against the tradition.

 Efuru came back after a month and vowed that it was over with her and Adizua. She told herself that even if Adizua came back and begged her on his knees with a bag of money, she would not listen to him.

Efuru openly declares to her mother-in-law that she can’t live with her husband anymore.

I cannot wait indefinitely for Adizua, you can bear witness that I have tried my best. I am still young and wish to marry again. It will be unfair both to
Idu in Flora Nwapa’s *Idu* is the most affectionate and selfless wife of Adiewere. She is disappointed as she could not conceive and consoles herself by encouraging her husband to marry a second wife. But after sometime, when she conceives she dreams of her happy life with her husband in a newly constructed house. When Adiewere thinks of divorcing his second wife, Idu prevents him from taking such a drastic step. Adiewere suddenly vomits and dies in the bathroom and Idu after delivering a child too dies after few days. She proves that she not only craved to become a mother but also remained loyal to her husband and concerned about his happiness.

African woman is also viewed as an object of sex merely meant for physical gratification. For most of the women writers in Africa this attitude towards women has formed the basis for feminism. Flora Nwapa’s Amaka in her *One is Enough* is portrayed as an object of sex. She is deeply hurt when she comes to know that her husband has illicit relations with another woman. She is helpless and forced to tolerate her suffering. Moreover her mother-in-law also approves her son’s marrying a second wife who has children. Amaka could not
restrain herself long and picks a quarrel with her husband Obiora.

You have changed a good deal, my husband, I too could change you know. Meaning what? Meaning that I could do a lot behind your back without ever finding out, she said. Like prostitution? No, God forbid our land forbids that. What would you do behind my back? Nothing, Nothing? Yes, Nothing, I won't be a prostitute, that's all I know. What then? Sleep around with other men? Out with it. What would you do behind my back? I am not a man. I am a woman.  

She becomes conscious of her self-identity in her definition of herself as a wife, a slave to tradition.

As a wife I am never free. I am a shadow of myself.  

Nwapa's son Uzoma Nwakuche considers her only as a mother rather than a woman with various roles including that of writer but his assessment proved wrong. Nwapa first suffered from arthritis and then pneumonia and breathed her last in October 1993 at the age of 62. She was buried at Amede's

Buchi Emecheta, another successful writer with astounding academic record began her university career at the age of twenty-two. Born on July 21, 1944 in Yaba near Lagos, Nigeria, but was orphaned in her early childhood and had early education at a missionary school. After the death of her parents she remained neglected by her own relatives. Her traumatic experiences, suffering at an early age turned her into a feminist.

In 1960 at the age of 16 she got married to Sylvester Onwordi, a student with whom she had been in love since she was eleven. They moved to London thereby fulfilling the desire of her dead father that at least a member from their family should go to London. And after six years of her marriage, she was blessed with five children. She struggled hard to sustain her family and faced many hardships in life. She assumed several roles such as mother, student, worker and writer. She translated her works into fourteen languages. When she was asked about her literary works, she replied:
If I was not to perish here, I realized that I find something I was good at. My books are about survival, just like my own life.\textsuperscript{8}

She mostly wrote for her children and she modestly remarked that her writings lacked creativity.

Well, I admit that I am not really very creative. I have to experience something or know someone who has seen something in order to write convincingly.

People keep on going back to them because when they read them they see a mirror of their own lives.\textsuperscript{9}

Buchi Emecheta after obtaining her degree in Sociology took to writing to become a writer. Her Nigerian compatriot Flora Nwapa immensely influences her and she calls herself Nwapa's sister. She is lively, energetic and a strong woman unaffected even by her own success. The problems and prejudices of black people and especially degradation and humiliation of Black Women are subjects of her writings.

She has drawn material from her own life to focus the problems of black immigrant women. She has a dual role to perform as writer and social worker. She has produced thirteen
novels, three autobiographical works and four children's books and also has written plays for the BBC. She is conscious of her roots in Africa.

And she has presented women in different roles in both the traditional and immigrant societies. Like Achebe she too is greatly concerned about the Igbo culture. To her Igbo is an emotional tongue full of proverbs and sayings reflecting ancestral wisdom. She is conscious of black woman's awareness of racial and gender discrimination. Some of African male writers consider her to be a hostile immigrant with prejudiced European views.

She has analyzed African women only from her point of view. Her works deal with the social norms of African culture such as polygamy, son-preference and wife inheritance. She depicts the life of woman with a sense of commitment to focus gender and class relations cutting across racial and geographical boundaries.

Buchi Emecheta writes in her works how women when displaced from the rural setting move to urban areas where gender system is flexible and almost non-existent; enjoy certain amount of freedom and autonomy. Women often find themselves in disadvantageous position compared to men.
Emecheta and Mariamaba illustrate how a woman who is a senior wife has at least three things that stand in her favour, which she can use with impunity that is her position of senior wife; her status as mother; and her status as the mother of her sons since her sons are the direct heirs to the property of family.

Buchi Emecheta uses the strong oral traditions of Africa to represent aspects and values of native culture. She believes in the writer's being an oral communicator.

> I believe it is important to speak to the readers in person...to enable people to have a whole picture of me; I have to both write and speak. I view my role as a writer and also as oral communicator.¹⁰

One of Buchi Emecheta's finest novels, *The Joys of Motherhood* could not so impress the reader in Nigeria when the country was undergoing a great political and economic change. The main character Nnuego defines the validity of her womanhood solely by the success of her children. Her fulfillment is centered around her desire to uphold motherhood, and to see her children happy and prosperous. But she faces many disappointments and finds her grownup children unhappy. For her own misfortune and other disasters she considers herself as slave woman responsible.
Emecheta in the agony and physical suffering of Nnuego symbolizes gender suppression in African society. But Nnuego's happy and carefree life ends in her marriage and after that she starts living a docile life in the company of her children. She supports her husband in his business but the earnings are insufficient to sustain the family. And even the happiness of her motherhood remains a myth. For her the joy of being a mother is a joy of giving all to her children.

Nnuego realizes that money and family progress do not go together.

*She had reminded herself of the old saying that money and children don't go together: if you spent all your time making money and getting rich, the gods wouldn't give you any children; if you wanted children, you had to forget money, and be content to be poor... Nnuego realized that part of the pride of was to look a little unfashionable and be able to draw with joy: 'I can't afford another outfit because I'm nursing him, so you see I can't go anywhere to sell anything.'*
Buchi Emecheta has been criticized for presenting "stereotypic portrayals of African women" with emphasis only on gender and not any other serious activity involving her woman protagonist. Her main concerns centre on the "biological and marital aspects of women’s lives central to which are motherhood, bride wealth and polygamy." She uses the theme of motherhood with a view to reconstructing women’s gender identity, to move beyond gender as sexual difference. The exchange of women, marriage, child bearing, child rearing are the various social issues, she tries to highlight to show the male-female relationship grounded in the male-oriented society. Though she has championed the cause of woman, she refuses to be called a feminist. But she has admitted that her works advocate liberation of women, and has claimed that she is just a womanist. And she has succeeded in realizing her dreams.

Akosua Busia, born in Ghana, belongs to a new generation of African women writers from outside Africa. Like Buchi Emecheta, she too left her homeland never to return but for brief spells. She was educated at Oxford University and settled in Los Angeles. She contributed to the screenplay of Jonathan Demme’s film, adoption of Toni Morrison’s Beloved, and acted in films such as Low Blow (1986), Native Son (1987)

Ama Ata Aidoo, a rebellious writer of Africa held various positions such as Consulting Professor to the Phelps-strokes Funds in Washington during 1974 and 1975. She compiled eleven short stories in a volume entitled *No Sweetness Here* revealing the impact of the conquest on Africa in the economic and cultural spheres. She published her poems while studying at the University of Ghana in 1964. She was privileged to work with Efua Sutherland, founder of the Ghana Drama Studio. She wrote stories only to bring about change among women. She believed that the man of Africa alone wasn't able to advance without establishing relationship with the West and the rest of the world.

*The Dilemma of a Ghost,* a play published in 1965 brought her name and fame as a dramatist. The play is concerned with the problem of conflict between traditional culture and western education and values. In 1977 she succeeded in publishing her full-length novel *Our Sister Killjoy,* a work of art. This novel depicts the impact of African encounter with Europe on African people in general and women
In particular. Her craftsmanship lies in her linking concerns of women with social issues.

In 1982, she was appointed Minister for Education in the military regime in Ghana for 18 months. Later on Aidoo shifted to Zimbabwe where she concentrated on both curriculum development unit of the Ministry of Education and Zimbabwe women writers. Besides being a novelist and short story writer, she has also published her first collection of Poetry, *Some One Talking Some Time.* Like Buchi Emecheta, She also wrote for children. *Changes: A Love Story,* her second novel also became popular novel in Ghana.

*Changes,* which has won Commonwealth Writers Prize for best book for the African region has brought her recognition as a writer to reckon with. Aidoo has reasserted her theme of woman's position as economic, social, political being in the contemporary African society. Her financial independence encouraged her to examine and question the values of her own culture. She rhetorically poses many questions as to why women are not treated on par with men. Her protest is explicit in the following heart-felt cry.

*Why had they sent her to school?*

*What had they hoped to gain from it?*
What had they hoped she would gain from it?

Who had designed the educational system that had produced her sort?

What had that person or persons hoped to gain from it?  

Aidoo has defined the word nationalism used by the new rulers as an instrument meant to suppress the aspirations of people. She mocked at the educated Africans who called themselves real patriots but who are lured by the material advancement. She projects Africa with its distinct identity from a female perspective.

"My dear young man", said the visiting professor, "to give you the decent answer your anxiety demands, I would have to tell you a detailed history of the African continent and I to do that, I shall have to speak every day, twenty-four hours a day, for at least three thousand years. And I don't mean to be rude to you or anything, but who has that kind of time?"  

Ama ata Aidoo hailing from Ghana and Emecheta from Nigeria have much in common. Emecheta as a divorcee lived with her four children, so is Aidoo a few years older than Emecheta was a widow and lived with her only daughter. Both
are African women writers known also outside Africa and lived in exile—Emecheta in London and Aidoo in Zimbabwe. Emecheta’s exile is personal and professional while Aidoo’s is overtly political. Emecheta because of male domination could publish only a dozen works including her own autobiography and stories for children.

Aidoo, a playwright, poet, novelist, radical, socialist, Ghanaian leader and an outspoken woman faced bitter criticism from her own people. Both the writers enthusiastically delivered lectures at the universities in the United States and Britain. Both experienced denigration in their society partly because of their traditional customs and practices. Aidoo’s *Changes* and Emecheta’s *Kehinde* are similar in their recording of woman’s experience.

Esi divorces Oko and marries Ali Kondey only to find that in the polygamous society second marriage would never end in happiness. Similarly Kehinde divorces Albert and marries her Caribbean lover but she too repents. Ama Ata Aidoo mixes European realism with choral communalism, to record her universal experience of woman. Emecheta’s domestic realism clashes with self-consciousness in dealing with similar theme. *Kehinde* and Esi are middle class women and educated
entrepreneurs earning more than their husbands. Both are independent owning their houses but losing their children to their husbands. Both find solace in female friendship. Both had bitter experience in life with lecherous male-Esi with her friend’s husband and Kehinde with the hotel housekeeper.

Between the two authors, Emecheta is a less explicit feminist. In her essay "Feminism with a small 'f'" from Criticism and Ideology, a volume of papers of the 1986 Second African Writers Conference in Stockholm (Scandinavian institute of African studies, 1988) she discusses woman’s problems from African woman’s point of view.

Being a woman and African born, I see things through an African woman’s eyes...I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if I am now a feminist that I am an African feminist with a small 'f' ...I write about women who try very hard to hold their family together until it becomes absolutely impossible...14

Aidoo feels that feminism is something that has been imported into Africa to strain the cordial relationship between African women and African men.
The Black Women Writers of 1970's and 1980's have emphasized the black feminist thought exploring the aspects black feminism. Alice Walker’s novel *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens* (1983), Barbara Smith’s *Anthology of Black women’s Writings* (1983) have dealt with the issues relating to black lesbianism. Filomena Chioma Steady’s Essay on *African feminism: A Worldwide Perspective* (1987) has traced the development of black feminist thought inside and outside Africa especially among the intellectual class. Contemporary black feminism has spread itself in multiple organizational setting.

Black women earlier represented their grievances to the traditional organizations such as churches, clubs and local organizations. Later new black women’s organizations like professional associations were formed to champion their cause. Black feminist intellectual’s writings as pieces of propaganda also helped in spreading black feminism, meant to bring awareness among especially the black women. The black feminist popular agenda has been to make African woman acquire leadership qualities to advance in life. Thus feminism emerged also as a political movement, promoting black feminist thought, and to forge black women with their distinct vision into future as an intellectual force.
Though African-American women disagreed on the agenda and the concept of black feminism, it attracted many blacks all over the world in general and the black in Africa in particular. The early black feminists are responsible for the emergence of black feminism as a rigorous and progressive movement, in America.

Toni Morrison, the first black woman to be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature, believes in the dynamic spirit of community reflected in folklore, mythology and native culture. After graduation she entered Howard University to make her academic career, secured a degree in English and Classics and enrolled herself in a graduate school at Cornell University where she worked on the works of Virginia Woolf and William Faulkner for her Master's thesis. She served as English Instructor at Texas Southern University, Howard University, and State University of New York at Albany and at Princeton. She married Harold Morrison, a Jamaican architect but got separated in 1964 and moved to Syracuse, New York to become editor for Random House.

Her first novel The Bluest Eye was published in 1970. Her literary career is marked by many honours such as National Book Critics Award, Pulitzer Prize, Robert F Kennedy
Award etc. In her novels she has focused the experiences of Black Americans in particular the Black Women, the deprived section of the so-called civilized society. She has also discussed in her works racial, class and gender problems of women.

Her magazine Salone, revealed her vision into future of black women as individuals and responsible citizens of their nation. Her novels are an enquiry to better the condition of woman and for projecting a promising image of black woman in her native country. She has declared in her lecture at Princeton that she wants to write for people like her, which is to say black people, curious people, demanding people—people who can’t be faked, people who don’t need to be patronized, people who have very, very high criteria.

In an interview with Jean Strouse, Morrison has revealed how her childhood experiences influenced her works. She has said that those were not written for a little black girl in Lorain, Ohio, but they were so magnificently done that she got them anyway and they spoke directly to her out of their own specificity.

The potentiality of black South African is revealed in a short lyric.
You have touched the women,
You have struck a rock,
You have dislodged a boulder,
You will be crushed."^{15}

African women writers as spokeswomen of African women going into the history of feminist politics, woman's rights and her suppression and deprivation have focused on the predicament of women in America and Africa. In feminist issues in the Fiction of Kenya's women writers, O'Barr classifies feminist concerns into three main categories: "How female children become women...what marriage means for women...where women's work fits into their lives."

She has also admitted that,

\textit{All I write from the women's point of sharply underscoring the idea that the female perspective may be different from the male perspective on the same topic.}^{16}

About the significant roles of Kenyan women she said:
They see themselves performing traditional roles... without traditional resources...while at the same time they are undertaking modern activities... while being denied access to modern support systems.¹⁷

Katherine Frank in her controversial article, *Women Without Men, the Feminist Novel in Africa* tries to influence African women with her radically feminist thought. Kofi Owusu emphasizes on Aidoo’s linguistic, textual manipulations and the complex image of women in African literature. Elleke Boehmer highlights the portrayal of women as mothers, whores, symbols of national pride, spiritual advisers, and builders of nation but not as individuals actively involved in political activity.

In Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*, Boehmer criticizes Achebe’s attempts to include women in his renovation of the past and present women merely as a vehicle of transformation rather than as individuals with active role in the nation building activities.

For her:

*Woman is a ground of change or discursive displacement but not the subject of transformation.*¹⁸
Mariama Ba, a native of Senegal, was brought up by her grand parents in a traditional environment. Her father was active in politics and became a Minister for Health. She secured a diploma in teaching in 1947 and remained in the teaching profession for twelve long years. Owing to her ill health, she gave up teaching and got married to a Member of Parliament, Obeye Diop. In 1980, she was awarded Noma prize for her first novel So Long A Letter. But she died the following year before the publication of her second novel, Scarlet Song.

In her novel So Long A Letter, she followed the norm of epistolary art. She dealt with the problems like polygamy, caste system and exploitation confronting woman even in the civilized society. Ramatoulaya who later becomes a widow records her poignant endurance when her husband decides to marry Binetou. The novel Scarlet Song portrays the failure of the marriage of a young Senegalese man with a young French woman. The desecration of the institution of marriage and the pertinent factors like family opposition, husband’s weakness of character and the cultural shock of expatriate spouse that disrupt inter-racial marriages are vividly portrayed in the novel.
Mariama Ba upholds women's struggle for liberation and independent existence and their rightful place in literature.

*As women we must work for our own future, we must overthrow the statuesque which harms us and we must no longer to submit to it like men we must use literature as non-violent but as an effective weapon. We no longer accept the nostalgic praise to the African mother who, in his anxiety man confuses with mother Africa. Women have a place within African literature, the place due to them on the basis of their participation side by side – with men – in all places of the liberation struggle and their contribution to economic development but women will have to fight for the place with all their might.*

Like Flora Nwapa, Toni Morrison, the Nobel Laurcate of Literature in 1993, highlights black woman's oppression in male dominated society and her craving for cultural identity. She uses fantasy and native myths and folklore for authenticity and presenting racial, gender and class discrimination in her works.
Nadine Gordimer a South African woman novelist born in 1923 in a well-to-do family in the small mining town of Springs outside Johannesburg, South Africa, is concerned about the moral and psychological tensions in her racially divided home country besides the depiction of master-servant relations, spiritual and sexual paranoia of colonialism and the shallow liberalism of her privileged white compatriots. She has personally experienced the impact of the treatment given to the black majority by the minority whites. She was a founding member of Congress of South African Writers and was awarded Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991.

She did not choose to write an autobiography, as she is too jealous of her privacy and did not want to reveal herself in her works. She vehemently opposed the apartheid a policy of racial segregation for nearly half a century. As a keen observer she has recorded even minute details of human relationship in her works. The novel *Living Days* is about Helen, a white girl and her growing dissatisfaction and dislike towards the parochial attitude of people in a small town.

Her new novel, *The House Gun* set in contemporary post-apartheid South Africa speaks of immorality. The book is about a privileged couple whose life becomes topsy-turvy when
their son is accused of murder. When they rush to a talented black lawyer for help, they become too sentimental and become conscious of their genuine problem.

Ben Okri's fiction is one of the most significant exploitations of literary form in the canon of post-colonial African literature. Ben Okri’s works include five novels and two collections of short stories and a volume of poetry dealing with the themes pertaining to post-colonialism. Rampant corruption and violence in Nigeria are dealt with besides voicing the concerns for the poor and deprived class of the African society.

Bessie Head, born in South Africa in 1937 to a Scottish mother and Black South African father, was brought up in a foster home. She attended a missionary school and later graduated herself to become a teacher. After moving to Botswana, she started living in constant fear that the government might deport her back to South Africa. Her mother's psychic problems too distressed her much. This has a direct bearing on her works but one can see a note of hope and optimism underlying it.

Charlotte Bruner, a professor of Literature at the University of Iowa, and African editor of the Feminist
Companion to English Literature produced a weekly radio series **First Person Femine** for over six years in the United States. Her popular anthology **Unwinding Threads** contains stories and extracts from novels by women all over Africa. National pride for West African independence, South African voices against political and economic repression and racism, North African women lifting their veils to emerge from enforced domesticity and female servitude are some of her concerns. Though the experience, goals, language, expression, audience differ from one writer to another yet all their works affirm as Doris Lessing Puts forth: "that filter which is a woman's way of looking at life has the same validity as that filter which is a man's way."

Calixthe Beyala, a Cameroonian now living in Paris published four novels in France is considered one of the most promising young writers today. The themes of her novels are Africa and struggle for women's liberation.

African Women Writers are endowed with a special sensitivity and empathy necessary to creativity. Dr. James in the course of an interview quotes the concerns of the African women writers. It is discovered that women writers have been no less concerned than men to articulate and denounce the poverty, corruption and destructive practices that have impeded
development in Africa. At the same time women writers appear to treat more intimately the themes of love and death, transcendence and the struggle to rise above the traditional limitations responsible for women's underdevelopment and oppression.
REFERENCES:


5. Ibid.


7. Ibid. P.127


9. Ibid.


17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.


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