

Some Features of African Male Writings in the Female African Novel

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Abstract—The pervasive suffering of married women, male authority and submissive female characters are among the commonalities of African men writers' discourse of the first generation which African female writers set about counterbalancing in their literary production. Thus, in the novels by women writers of the first and second generations, one often sees female characters who are remarkably outspoken in their criticism. They rebel against societal norms which ostracize women. This article focuses on women writers' texts, especially on female characterization which is based on their own experiences. One may wonder whether the features of African male writings which are antagonistic to African women writers are removed from the female African novel. Based on feminism, the paper will deal with *The Features of African Male Writings in the Female African Novel*. Using culture, sociology, feminism and psychology, the study will first spin around women's endurance in marriage and male authority and then will analyze the female protagonists' pseudo-independence of mind.

Keywords— Features; male; female; writings; endurance; feminism.

I. INTRODUCTION

The pervasive suffering of married women, male authority and submissive female characters are among the commonalities of African men writers' discourse of the first generation which African female writers set about counterbalancing in their literary production. In the literary works of these men writers, wives are often persevering in their marital home according to society's expectations of the married woman. She is bonded to her husband and is expected to endure the worst in her matrimony. Male authority is conveyed through husbands' authority and power over their wives and the privileges granted to male characters, especially in marriage. Also, in African male writings, female characters usually mind the societal norms, public opinion and they care about motherhood. Thus, in the novels by the first and second generations of African female writers, one often sees female characters who are remarkable for their independence of mind, who rebel against societal norms which relegate women to the background and which are detrimental to them.

Some of these feminist-oriented novels are Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966), *One is Enough* (1981), Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen* (1974), Bessie Head's *The Collector of Treasures* (1977), Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1979), Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988), Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* (1991), Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* (1991), to mention but a few.

The article focuses on these literary texts where the novelists have tried to restore justice to women through the

chronicling of women's own life experiences. One may wonder whether the features of African male writings which are antagonistic to African women writers are removed from the female African novel. For example, are features such as the pervasive suffering of married women, male authority submissive female characters still plain in the literary production of these female writers?

Through a feminist viewpoint, this paper will deal with *The Features of African Male Writings in the Female African Novel*. According to Filomina Steady (1981; 35-36), "True feminism is an abnegation of male protection and a determination to be resourceful and self-reliant. The majority of black women in Africa and in the Diaspora have developed these characteristics, though not always by choice." As for Ifi Amadiume (1987; 10), feminism is "a political consciousness by women, which leads to a strong sense of self-awareness, self-esteem, female solidarity and, consequently, the questioning and the challenging of gender inequalities in social systems and institutions."

Using culture, sociology, feminism and psychology, the study will first turn around women's endurance in marriage and male authority and then will analyze the female protagonists' independence of mind.

II. WOMEN'S ENDURANCE IN MARRIAGE AND MALE AUTHORITY

One of the images which bothered African women writers in the literary production of African men writers is that of the enduring woman in the face of her husband's abuse. Flora Nwapa denounces this fact in her first novel, *Efuru* through the heroine who does not approve of her mother-in-law's attitude. As a matter of fact, *Efuru's* mother-in-law, Ossai, is not different from the female characters who are silenced in African male writings. *Efuru* blames her for being responsible for her own suffering: "Perhaps self-imposed suffering appeals to her. It does not appeal to me." (61). Her husband kept deserting her for other women but Ossai would not leave her marital home. She even sometimes went to look for him. When he came back home from his adventures and died shortly after, Ossai chose to stay in his house so as to show her faithfulness. And yet, she sinks increasingly into extreme poverty. This explains why *Efuru* and *Ajanupu* (Ossai's elder sister) think that the woman is stupid. So they told her to free herself by going back to her father's home; a conviction which *Efuru*, contrary to Ossai, makes come true by leaving

first Adizua and then Gilbert, two men who do not really value her.

However, one may ask whether Efurū's leaving these two men is enough to say that she has not been long-suffering facing her ill-treatment in her matrimonial home. Before leaving Adizua, the heroine had adopted an attitude similar to that of her mother-in-law. In fact, when her husband started being unfaithful, she lost her appetite, became sad, could not sleep soundly anymore. Crying, which is seen as a sign of weakness and helplessness, is all that is left to her when she remembers the good times spent with Adizua. At the market where she traded, she was so depressed that one of her customers asked if her daughter was ill. But Efurū preferred to keep her suffering secret. Like Ossai, she is not willing to divorce, which is illustrated through her father's question regarding her husband's behaviour: "*Nothing. Perhaps I shall continue to wait. I don't know. I have not made up my mind. Once it is made up, there is no coming back.*" (78). This can make one think that the protagonist would probably wait longer if Adizua, like his father, used to come and fool his wife before leaving again.

Adah, in Buchi Emecheta's *Second-Class Citizen*, tries to cope with the ill-treatment her husband, Francis, inflicts on her. On the one hand, Francis keeps on subjecting her to sexual harassment "... like the demands of a wicked child who enjoys torturing a live animal given to him as a pet." (162). The consequences of this sexual harassment are pregnancies in quick succession, her physical weakening, dizzinesses and eye complications. On the other hand, Francis exploits the heroine financially. In effect, he expects his wife to provide the housekeeping money, to pay for his studies and puts the pressure on her so that she does not enjoy her financial power the way she wishes. The fact that Francis would not let her buy a nightgown following the birth of their third baby, let alone a new shawl for the baby, is illustrative in this respect. Francis even went so far as to forbid his wife to watch television in their landlords' flat whereas he frequently does so.

In spite of all the abuse she undergoes from her husband, Adah does not take action to change her situation: "... she did not make any protest. She simply accepted her role as defined for her by her husband." (98). The truth is Buchi Emecheta's heroine, like the traditional Igbo woman in particular and the traditional African woman in general, wants to keep her marriage. Like Ramatoulaye in Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, Adah is one of the women who do not conceive of happiness outside marriage. Besides, if Adah ended up resorting to the police, it was because she could no longer bear her husband's behaviour. As a matter of fact, Francis moved up a gear. From sexual, financial and psychological exploitation, he moved on to physical violence. This was the straw that broke the camel's back. So Adah left him.

In *So Long a Letter*, if Aissatou put an end to her marital union with Mawdo Ba, Ramatoulaye preferred to keep her marriage to Modou Fall. As a matter of fact, refusing to accept the "*absurd divisions*" (31) of Senegalese society, Aissatou left Mawdo Ba when his mother pushed him to take a second wife. Thus, Aissatou embodies, in the same way as most of the

heroines of African women writers, a modern African woman. As for Ramatoulaye, Modou eventually deserts her after marrying Binetou, a friend and age-mate of his eldest daughter. However, Ramatoulaye chooses to stay in her marital home. And several factors contribute to this choice. In fact, she does not want to abandon her matrimonial home where she has spent twenty-five years. She feels she cannot maintain and educate alone twelve children. In addition, Ramatoulaye is not sure if a second marriage will be better or worse than the one she is experiencing; having seen the happiness and the unhappiness of remarried women. Her stoicism is noticeable through the following words, sometimes used by Senegalese women when their husband takes a second wife: "*if Modou was milk, it was I who had had all the cream.*" (39).

Another female character, in *So Long a Letter*, who endures abuse from her husband is Jacqueline. This Ivorian woman, married to a Senegalese, Samba Diack, and living in Senegal, is confined in misery because of the unfaithfulness of her husband. Contrary to Mawdo Ba and Modou Fall, Samba Diack has not married a second wife but he devotes his time running after "*slender Senegalese women*" (42). He does not even hide his attitude from his wife, which ends up making Jacqueline very unhappy. Her inner suffering caused her a nervous breakdown. Furthermore, like Adah, the quick succession of Jacqueline's pregnancies contributed to her physical depression. Even if Samba Diack does not change in his misconduct, Jacqueline remains in her husband's house, hoping for a better future. Fortunately, her condition improved after the illness she was suffering from was identified and the means to cure it known. It is noteworthy that Jacqueline is, by her education, an embodiment of the independent African woman.

In Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon*, Mara's mother has taught her daughter to be submissive to her husband: "... mother had taught me that a wife was there for a man for one thing, and that was to ensure his well-being, which included his pleasure." (13). This is what Mara was also told several times when she was about to join her marital home: "*'obey and worship your husband', as my parents and family elders stringently repeated to me at the end of the marriage rites.*" (13). Thus, while living in the city with Akobi, she wakes up first at dawn and takes a bucket of water to the bathhouse for her husband. The man has not afforded her any clothes so far but she copes with those she has come with from the village. Akobi does not give her enough money for food either, but she throws people's rubbish and later on sells eggs to supplement the money he gives her in order to make ends meet. Mara is all the more persevering in her marriage as her husband is unkind to her, a situation which her substitute mother, Mama Kiosk, condemns: "*Tradition demands that the wife respect, obey and worship her husband but it demands, in return, care, good care of the wife. Your husband neglects you and yet demands respect and complete worship from you. That is not normal.*" (13). Actually, Akobi beats his wife, sometimes asks her to spend the night on a mat while he sleeps alone on the grass mattress. Nevertheless, Mara has borne all that.

Additionally, African female writers have denounced in the texts of their male counterparts the power and authority given to males over females. Yet, this power and this authority can be noticed in the female African novel as well. In African society in general, a man is supposed to have authority over his wife, to rule over her. If not, he is underestimated and even denied his complete manhood. For instance, because Akobi lords it over Mara, the heroine recognizes him as the man of the house, as her husband:

... I had grown wholly attached to Akobi, to... the strength he possessed over me. I didn't like what he meted out to me with that strength and yet, at the same time, that same strength made me acknowledge him as the man of the house ; as my husband. (44)

In Bessie Head's *The Collector of Treasures* too, Kegoletile's maternal aunts want Neo to submit herself to her husband's authority. On the afternoon of Kegoletile and Neo's marriage, Kegoletile's aunts went to their in-laws' to take the bride and bring her in her marital home. While in their in-laws', Kegoletile's aunts advised Neo : *'Daughter, you must carry water for your husband. Beware, that at all times, he is the owner of the house and must be obeyed. Do not mind if he stops now and then and talks to the other ladies. Let him feel free to come and go as he likes...'* (79). In any case, black women among these people do not have the power to prevent their husbands from coming and going as they like, as Dikeledi informs. For example, Garesego has abandoned his wife, Dikeledi Mokopi, for years and will not assume any responsibility towards the woman and her children. Even when Dikeledi enlists his help to pay their eldest son's secondary school fees, he refuses by telling her to go to her house neighbour, Paul, whom Garesego says is Dikeledi's lover. Unexpectedly, Garesego, through their eldest son, sends his wife a letter in which he informs Dikeledi that he is coming home again so that they may settle their differences. Dikeledi, who knows that her husband is *"coming home for some sex,"* (101) thinks for a while of warning him against coming, but she gives up this idea because: *"If she wrote back, don't you dare put foot in the yard I don't want to see you, he would ignore it. Black women didn't have that kind of power."* (101).

Dikeledi has been unable to prevent her husband from coming back home and Fusena to stop hers from taking a second wife. To prevent Ali from carrying out his intention, Fusena even went to his elders in Nima to complain and to weep. But after his first wife, Ali too went to see the same elders and had them on his side. One or two days after the man's visit, the elders instructed *"those among their wives and sisters who they trusted had the patience and wisdom to do the job properly, to talk to Fusena."* (129). So, the women sent a message to Fusena and asked her to come and see them. In the course of their meeting, she did not delay in realizing that her husband had won the battle:

As she sat in front of the group of older women trying so diligently to listen to them, she knew that all was lost. Besides, what could she say to the good women, when some of them were

themselves second, third and fourth wives? And those who had been first wives looked dignified, but clearly also so battle-weary? She decided to make their job easier for them. 'Yes, Mma. Yes, Auntie. Yes ... yes ... yes,' was all she said to every suggestion that was made. (129-130)

In Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, Babamukuru's wife, Maiguru, has a Master's degree and is a teacher but this does not prevent her husband from lording it over her. For example, when Babamukuru is about to beat their daughter, Nyasha, who angers him by showing profligacy and challenging him, Maiguru intervenes and tries to reason with her husband. But the man beckons to her immediately not to speak : *'Babawa Chido,' began Maiguru, but was silenced immediately.* (116). The rebel and promiscuous Lucia, for her part, challenged Babamukuru's authority in the past. However, wanting Babamukuru to help her to find a job so that she can pull herself out of her precariousness, Lucia pitifully exposes her need to her brother-in-law :

'I did not come to your home to bring grief, Babamukuru, [...] But I see that I have brought problems instead. If going back to my father's house were possible, I would go, but what would I eat if I got there? [...]. But I can see that my living at your home has not helped her as I hoped.' She paused and applied herself to her food for a while. 'Do you know what I was thinking, Babamukuru?' she continued, concentrating on her plate in an effort to remain calm. 'I was thinking that if I could find work, any little job in this area, if I could find a little job here in Mutasa's kraal, there would be no more of these problems. (159)

Through Lucia, her elder sister and Maiguru who kneel in front of Babamukuru, thanking him for having found a job for Lucia and through this woman's following words towards her benefactor, one can see the man's power and authority over the women:

'Purururu!' she shrilled, her hand to her mouth. 'Did you hear that, Sisi, did you hear that, Sisi?'... 'Babamukuru has found me a job.' [...]. She knelt in front of Babamukuru, energetically clapping her hands. 'Thank you, Samusha, thank you, Chihwa. [...]. Truly, we could not survive without you. [...] My mother came hurrying with her own shrill ululations. 'That is why they say education is life,' she cried. 'Aren't we all benefiting from Babamukuru's education?' and she knelt worshipping beside Lucia. Then it was Maiguru's turn to take her place on the floor. (160-161)

Also, on the occasion of Babamukuru's return from England, his relatives come to Tambudzai's parents' to welcome him. By carrying the water-dish first for her male relatives and then for her female ones so that they can wash their hands before having lunch, Tambudzai has shown that

she is aware of the superior position granted to males among her people :

Making a considered and perhaps biased decision, I knelt first in front of Babamukuru, which was a mistake because he wanted me to let his uncle Isaiah, our eldest surviving grandfather, wash first. I knelt and rose and knelt and rose in front of my male relatives in descending order of seniority, and lastly in front of my grandmothers and aunts, offering them the water-dish and towel. (40)

In addition to female characters' endurance in marriage and male power and authority, the protagonists of African women writers do not sometimes show psychological independence.

III. THE HEROINES' PSEUDO-INDEPENDENCE OF MIND

African women writers usually portray heroines who are psychologically independent. This is why these female characters do not often care about the cultural pressures weighing down on women. However, because of cultural influence, the heroines do not always demonstrate independence of mind. In *Second-Class Citizen*, Adah surprised everyone when she did not cry in the presence of her husband who was leaving for England. Contrary to the women in her husband's family, Adah cried after Francis took off. Actually, among the Igbo people, a woman is supposed to cry out of love for her husband when he leaves for the West. Thus, when he comes back home to join the elite, he will remember that his wife had wept for him when he was still an ordinary citizen. Yet, on the eve of this leave-taking day, Adah was worried. She wished to cry when Francis would be taking leave of his family in order to be considered a good wife: "Adah prayed to God the night before to send enough tears to impress her parents-in-law." (27). So, Adah reminds of Ossai who wanted to be regarded as good wife. She is different from Kehinde who, by the end of the novel which bears the same name, did not mind being a concubine.

What is more, even if Adah is unwilling to yield to the pressure from her husband who wants her to accept a job in a shirt factory, she is anxious that her refusal may ruin her marriage. Francis demands that she find work at all costs whereas she wants a librarian post, which matches her qualification. Thus, during a medical consultation for this post, she had to deceive the doctor, which she regrets. In truth, because of the heroine's flirtatious attitude, the doctor did not notice that she was pregnant. Had Francis not put the pressure on her, Adah would not have adopted such a witty attitude. The heroine may join her husband in Britain without the latter's consent, she may dare call him a liar, may tell Francis her disagreement with the narrowness of the room he has rented. She may also threaten to kill him, but her psychological independence often deserts her. As a matter of fact, Adah wishes to use a contraceptive method to curb her frequent pregnancies. However, she fears the reaction of Francis in case he knew about her act: "The fear of what Francis would say and what he would write to his mother and her relations loomed, full of doom, in her subconscious."

(152). One can see, through this quotation, that Adah is not indifferent to her community's mindset. The fact is that her act is likely to be viewed as deceitful towards her husband and could eventually tarnish her name and her children's.

Adah's independence of mind is equally questioned when she pleads with Francis to have a look at her book manuscript. It seems that if her husband does not approve of the manuscript, it will not be approved of by editors either. Nevertheless, Adah is persuaded that the document is interesting enough to be published. Moreover, her fellow librarians, namely Bill and Peggy, suggest that she should send the piece to a publishing house. But the protagonist does not take delight in the result of her work because her husband will not appreciate it. She is morally affected when Francis calls her manuscript rubbish: "That Francis would not read her book was bad enough but that he had called it rubbish without doing so was a deeper hurt, and that he had said that she would never be a writer because she was black and because she was a woman was like killing her spirit." (168).

Efuru too wavers between independence of mind and psychological pressure. The first act of psychological independence she did was marrying Adizua without the payment of the dowry, which constitutes a violation of a cultural norm. She is however obliged to submit to another cultural norm which demands that a woman be excised before giving birth her first baby. Efuru's agony, as described in the novel, is indicative of how much this practice is heavy on a woman's shoulders, so much so that she would have liked to do away without this norm. Also, even if the protagonist will not follow her husband to the village for farm labour (second act of independence), she is worried by the delay of her first pregnancy. Efuru is afraid of being barren in a society where children are a necessity for woman and an asset in the eye of the people. This betokens why an infertile woman is relegated to the background. That is why Efuru is all the more under pressure as she cries for fear of being barren: "[...]. But what if that is denied me? What if that also is denied me? What will I do? Oh, what will I do?" she wept. (24).

In addition to the delay of her first pregnancy, the unfaithfulness of Adizua and the imprisonment of Gilbert evidence the psychological pressures which Efuru is subjected to. In effect, the protagonist was in total disarray after Adizua deserted her for another woman, a woman who had abandoned her husband. In reality, the protagonist is made miserable by the rumors which are spread about the woman: "So I don't mind if he marries another wife. But rumor has it that this woman is a bad woman. So, father, that is why I am unhappy." (63). In Efuru's community, a woman who leaves her husband is considered a bad woman. As for the imprisonment of Efuru's second husband, it disturbs her peace of mind because she thinks that it results from robbery. In this case, the reputations of Gilbert, his wife and children would be damaged in their neighbourhood, as nobody in their community wants to have a serious relationship with a family in which a member is convicted of theft.

Like Efuru, Ramatoulaye, in *So Long a Letter*, married Modou Fall without the payment of the dowry and without pomp. She thus brought about the disapproval and indignation

of her parents who wanted her to get married with the medical doctor, Daouda Dieng, and not with the student, Modou Fall. Later, she disregarded a cultural norm by turning down all marriage proposals after the death of Modou, preferring to remain single. However, she has in mind the day her family-in-law are supposed to bear testimony of her conduct, for example, the marriage of her children or the day her husband will be no more. So her independence cannot be complete. Thus, all along the years she lived with Modou Fall, Ramatoulaye had tried, as a wife, to be faithful, spendthrift and hospitable towards her family-in-law. This explains why, on the day of Modou's death, her sisters-in-law accepted to unbraided her. The heroine would not have been unbraided if she had mishaved herself.

In *Nervous Conditions*, Tambudzai states that she was not sorry when her brother, Nhamo, died. It is because the latter symbolizes patriarchal oppression. Tambudzai expresses clearly her opposition to the sexism, precisely male superiority and female inferiority, which prevails in her people's mentality. Thus, she deliberately flouts the societal norms regarding sexual differences by swimming where she pleases in the Nyamarira river. However, she does so in secret. Besides, when her uncle, Babamukuru (another figure of patriarchy), called the long union of her parents illegitimate, Tambudzai curiously kept silent. Her silence is all the more understandable as Babamukuru's attitude is questionable to her. Tambudzai ponders over her independence of mind in these terms: "*There was definitely something wrong with me, otherwise I would have had something to say for myself.*" (166). Tambudzai's silence can be explained by the fact that, according to Charles Sugnet, her mother has passed "*on to her daughter her history of compromise and her tendency toward passivity and paralysis.*"¹

The moral qualities, which make Ihuoma in Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966) an ideal woman are incarnated by Mara in *Beyond the Horizon* and Esi Sekyi in *Changes*. As a result, Ihuoma is valued in her community on account of her beauty and her scrupulous observance of her people's customs. She is so concerned about preserving her good reputation that sometimes she sacrifices her happiness. Thus, Ihuoma will not marry Ekwueme whom she is in love with because, in accordance with tradition, a young man should marry "*a young maiden who would obey him and give him the first fruits of her womb.*"² As for Mara, although she ends up making her husband be imprisoned after he forced her into prostitution, she is by her people's standards a good wife. As mentioned above, during her marital life, she went by the values her mother taught her and the advice her parents and family elders gave her while she was about to leave her parents' home for her husband's. One can therefore

understand that she is ashamed of her job as a prostitute because prostitution is not viewed positively in her society.

Concerning Esi Sekyi, the social pressures which unmarried women go through account for the fact that she does not officially put an end to her second marriage; her separation from her first husband has taught her a lesson. Her grandmother and her mother could not understand why she wanted to divorce Oko. They were scandalized by the reason Esi invoked and which was that Oko wanted too much of her and her time. They vehemently blamed her: "*Finally, as Esi got into her car to drive back to Accra, and almost for a farewell, her mother had called her a fool. She had driven to Accra feeling like one.*" (47). Furthermore, her friend, Opokuya, influenced by her society, reminded her that being single "*... is just not healthy.*" (55). Thus, in spite of her dissatisfaction with her second matrimony, Esi

... never bothered to look for an annulment of the marriage. [...] Her people would not have accepted any explanation from her as to why she wanted to destroy that marriage too. [...] It would probably have ended in her grandmother asking her to go back to the village for a longer stay. So that they could take her to the priestess and ask her to have Esi's soul called up for an interview. For instance, about what it was that she really desired from this life. Since as far as they were concerned she always seemed to get and throw away what other souls desired. Besides, her behaviour was becoming unnatural altogether. (197-198)

Whereas a girl's future often merges with marriage in African male writings, what matters to Amaka, in *One is Enough*, is to be important to the world. She knows that a woman can be so without a husband: "*Was she useless to the world if she were unmarried? Surely not.*" (20). Instead of staying in her marital home and coping with the disrespect of her husband and her mother-in-law simply because she is childless, Amaka divorced and went to Lagos. The independence which she experiences there has made her realize how liberating her decision to abandon her husband's house has been: "*She did not realize how hurt she was until her eyes were opened in Lagos and she began to see what she could do as a woman, using her bottom power, as they say in Nigeria.*" (120-121). This explains the reason why she does not want to depend on any man, anymore. So she definitively gives up marriage: "*She did not know which the lesser evil was. She neither wanted to be a wife any more, nor be a mistress, or even a kept woman. She wanted a man, just a man and she wanted to be independent of this man, pure and simple.*" (100). This option of Amaka is all the more justified as she feels that the source of her present happiness (that is her business) is incompatible with marriage.

However, if Amaka no longer cares about marriage, this is not the case with motherhood; she kept yearning to give birth. The reactions of Amaka, her mother and her sister to the birth of Amaka's twins, the huge joy which the delivery has aroused in them and what is done consecutively to the birth, enable to know how deep motherhood is rooted in their society. The

¹ Charles Sugnet. "*Nervous Conditions: Dangarembga's Feminist Reinvention of Fanon.*" In *The Politics of (M)Othering* edited by Obioma Nnaemeka. London & New York, Routledge, 1997, p. 40

² Banyiwá-Horne, Naana. "African Womanhood: The Contrasting Perspectives of Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* and Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*." In *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*, edited by Carole Boyce Davies and Anne Adams Graves. Trenton, New Jersey, Africa World Press, 1986, p. 124

three women cannot believe it. The delivery has relieved them in the sense that it proves that the heroine is not barren in a society where barrenness deprives women of their complete womanhood. Therefore, Amaka, her mother and Ayo are overwhelmed with joy and they set their hearts on showing their happiness :

They all went by plane to Benin and by road to Onitsha. The purpose of the trip was of course to announce the twins, to show off to home people and to make a big feast, inviting everybody in the village. A cow was slaughtered and those invited and those not invited came and ate and made merry. Food was abundant... Greedy ones had a feast day. They had as many helpings as they cared to have. Amaka's mother saw to that. (113)

Amaka's mother sees in Amaka's delivery her fulfilment as a woman : "Amaka is a woman, she is a mother, and that's all that matters right now." (117). The heroine has the same feeling since, after making use of Father Mclaid until she gets what she had been yearning for, i.e. to be pregnant, she simply jilts him.

IV. CONCLUSION

In their literary production, African female writers set about correcting the commonalities of African male writings which they considered unfair towards women. Some of these features are female characters' endurance in marriage, male authority, particularly husbands' authority and power over their wives, conformist female characters who mind the societal norms, public opinion and who care about motherhood. So women writers came up with heroines who often leave their husbands when they can no longer cope with their marital lives. The female characters claim their rights and are not willing to be ostracized anymore. Hence, their challenging frequently the cultural standards and public opinion. These women writers have even questioned the paramount importance given to motherhood in the literary texts of their male counterparts through the concept of barrenness.

However, many of the traits of African men writings are noticeable in the novels by female writers. Some heroines put

an end to their marriages after doing all they can to make things work. Others remain in their matrimonial homes although they are not satisfied with their living conditions there. Even if women writers have come up with outspoken female characters, male authority and power over their wives is a reality in the female African novel. On the one hand, the female characters often show psychological independence but on the other hand, they have to conform to the society's expectations from a woman or a wife. The novels under study extol women's endurance in marriage with a glare of hope for a better life.

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