

ENG816

LITERATURE AND GENDER

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Introduction

ENG816 - Literature and Gender - is designed to acquaint the students with the conceptualisation of gender issues particularly as it is portrayed in literature. This course is a one-semester three credit course, and is suitable for beginners and people with intermediate knowledge of gender.

This course consists of 17 units, comprising gender conceptualisations, feminism, womanism, masculinities and queer theory. The material has been especially developed for students in Africa with particular focus on Nigeria.

This course guide tells you briefly what the course is all about, what you are expected to know in each unit; what course materials you will be using and how you can work your way through the material. It also emphasizes the need for tutor-marked assignments. Detailed information on tutor-marked assignment is contained in a file to be sent to you in due course. There are periodic tutorial classes that are linked to the course.

What You will Learn in this Course

The overall aim of ENG816: Literature and Gender is to familiarise the students with the various concepts and theories of gender literary analysis. Your understanding of this course will equip you with both the theoretical and practical approaches to gender issues.

Course Aims

The course is to equip the students with the knowledge of the carrying out literary analysis using gender theories such as feminism, womanism masculinity and queer theory. This aim will be achieved by:

- Introducing students to conceptualization of gender;
- Explaining to you to the basis of feminism and other gender concepts in literature;

- Teaching you how to carry out literary text analysis using feminism, womanism, masculinity and queer theories;
- Explaining to you the process of mounting a play;
- Exposing you to practical literary text analyses using various gender theories, etc.

Course Objectives

To achieve the aims set out above, there are overall objectives. In addition, each unit has specific objectives. The unit objectives are always included at the beginning of the unit. You should read them before going through the units. You should always look at the unit objectives on completing the unit to assure yourself that you have done what the unit required and acquired the competencies it aimed to inculcate.

Stated below are the wider objectives of this course. By meeting these objectives, you should have achieved the entire aim of this course. On successful completion of this course, you should be able to:

- Discuss the concept of gender,
- Explain the difference between gender and sex
- Discuss the history and forms of feminism,
- Explain the evolution and distinguishing features of womanism,
- Discuss the African women writers and critics reactions to feminism,
- Explain masculinity, emasculation and queer theory,
- Analyse literary texts using feminism, womanism, masculinity and queer theory.

Working through this Course

To complete this course, you are required to read the study units, read recommended books and other related materials you can lay your hands on. Each unit contains self-assessment

exercises, which you are expected to use in assessing your understanding of the course. At the end of this course is a final examination.

Course Materials

Major components of this course are:

1. Course Guide
2. Study Units
3. Textbooks
4. Assignment File
5. Presentation Schedule

Study Units

There are seventeen units in this course as follows:

MODULE 1: CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS ON GENDER

Unit 1: The Construction of Gender

Unit 2 Gender Concepts

MODULE 2: FEMINISM

Unit 1 Definition of Feminism

Unit 2 History of Feminism

Unit 3 Types and Diversities of Feminism

Unit 4 Feminist Literary Critical Methodology

Unit 5 Major Statements

MODULE 3: WOMANISM AND RACIAL FEMINIST VARIANTS

Unit 1 Evolution and Concept of Womanism

Unit 2 Distinguishing Characteristics of Womanism

Unit 3 African Women and the Rejection of Feminism

Unit 4 Ideological Position of African Female Writers/Critics in Gender Discourse

MODULE 4: GENDER DISCOURSE IN AFRICAN FEMALE FICTION

Unit 1 Gender Politics in African Literature

Unit 2 Common Themes in African Women's Writings

Unit 3 African Women Writers and Gender Issues

MODULE 5: MASCULINITY AND QUEER THEORY

Unit 1 The Notion of Masculinity

Unit 2 The Concept of Emasculation

Unit 3 Queer Theory

The first two units in Module 1 provide conceptual clarifications on gender. Units 1 to 3 of Module 2 give the definitions of feminism, the history of feminism, types and diversities of feminism. Units 4 and 5 of Module 2 explain feminist critical methodology and provide summary of major statements of canonical feminist critics. Units 1 to 5 of Module 3 explain womanism as a racial variant of feminism and discuss African women's reactions to feminism. Units 1 to 3 of Module 4 provide practical engagement with the works of African women writers. Literary analysis of writers is carried out. Units 1 to 3 of Module 5 explain the notions of masculinity, emasculation and queer theory.

Textbooks and References

De Beauvoir, S. (1972). *The Second Sex*. Harmondsworth, UK.: Penguin.

Dobie, B. A. (2009). *Theory into Practice: An Introduction to Literary Criticism*. Boston, Wadsworth Centage Learning

Freeman, J. O (1989). (ed.) *Women: A Feminist Perspective*. 4th edition. California: Mayfield Publishing Co.

Friedman, Betty (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*. London: Penguun Books.

Gayle, Green and Coppella Klian (1985). *Making a Difference: Feminist Literary Criticism*. London: Methuen Co Ltd.

Humm, Maggie. (1992). *Feminisms: A Reader*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Millet, Kate (1970). *Sexual Politics*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press

Mills, John Stuart (1963). *The Subjection of Women*. London: Virago Press Ltd.

Roget's II The New Thesaurus (1995). 3rd Edition. Boston & New York, Houghton Mifflin Company, 1995.

Sheila, Ruth (1980). *Issues in Feminism: A First Course in Women's Studies*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Showalter Elaine (1999). *A Literature of Their Own*. U.K: Virago Press

Sotunsa, Mobolanle Ebunoluwa (2018) *Gender Matters and the Cultural Dilemma in African Literature* 22nd Inaugural Lecture Thursday May 3, 2018. Babcock University Press. Ilisan Remo

Sotunsa, Mobolanle. (2008). *Feminism and Gender Discourse: The African Experience*. Lagos: Asaba Publications.

Wollstonecraft, Mary (1978). *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Assignment File

This file contains the details of all the assignments you must do and submit to your tutor for marking. The mark you obtain from these assignments will form part of the final mark you will obtain in this course.

Presentation Schedule

The presentation schedule included in your course materials gives you the important dates for the completion of your tutor-marked assignments and when you will attend tutorials. Remember that you are required to submit your assignments according to the schedule.

Assessment

There are two aspects of assignment in this course. The first aspect includes all the tutor-marked assignments, while the second is the written examination.

In tackling the assignments, you are expected to apply the information and knowledge you acquired during the course.

The assignments must be submitted to your tutor for formal assessment in accordance with the deadlines stated in the Assignment file. The work you submit to your tutor for assessment account for 30% of the total mark accruing to the course.

At the end of the course, you will sit for a final three-hour examination that will carry 70% of the total course mark.

Tutor-Marked Assignment

Each unit has a tutor-marked assignment. You are expected to submit all the assignments. You should be able to do the assignments from the knowledge you derived from the course, and information you acquired from the textbooks.

When you have completed the assignment for each unit, send it along with your TMA (tutor-marked assignment) form to your tutor. Make sure that the completed assignment reaches your tutor on or before the deadline in the assignment file. If you cannot complete your assignment on time due to a cogent reason, consult your tutor for possible extension of time.

Final Examination and Grading

The final examination for ENG816 will be for the duration of three hours. The examination will carry 70%. It will consist of questions that will reflect the type of self-testing practice exercises and tutor-marked assignments you have come across. All areas of the course will be examined.

You are advised to revise the entire course after studying the last unit before you sit for examination. You will find the revision of your tutor-marked assignments equally useful.

Course Marking Scheme

The table below shows how actual course marking is broken down.

Assessment	Marks
Assignment 1 - 3	Three assignments will be given which will count as 30% of course mark
Final Examination	70% of overall course marks
Total	100% of course marks

Course Overview

The table below brings together, the units, the number of weeks you should take to complete them, and the assignments that follow them.

Unit	Title of Work	Week's Activity	Assessment(End of Unit)
	Course Guide	1	
Module1 CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS ON GENDER			
1	The Construction of Gender	1	Assignment1
2	Gender Concepts	1	Assignment2
Module2 FEMINISM			
1	Definition of Feminism	2	Assignment3
2	History of Feminism	2	Assignment4
3	Types and Diversities of Feminism	3	Assignment5
4	Feminist Literary Critical Methodology	4	Assignment6
5	Major Statements	5	Assignment7
Module3 WOMANISM AND RACIAL FEMINIST VARIANTS			
1	Evolution and Concept of Womanism	6	Assignment8
2	Distinguishing Characteristics of Womanism	6	Assignment9
3	African Women and the Rejection of Feminism	7	Assignment 10
4	Ideological Position of African Female	8	Assignment 11
MODULE 4 GENDER DISCOURSE IN AFRICAN FEMALE FICTION			
1	Gender Politics in African literature	9	Assignment12
2	Common Themes in African Women's Writings.	10	Assignment13
3	African Women Writers and Gender Issues	11	Assignment14
MODULE 5 MASCULINITY AND QUEER THEORY			
1	The Notion of Masculinity	12	15
2	The Concept of Emasculation	13	16
3	Queer Theory	14	17
	Revision		
	Examination		

How to Get the Most from this Course

In distance learning, the study units replace the university lecture. This is one of the advantages of distance learning: you can read and work through specially designed study materials at your own pace, and at a time and place that suit you best. Think of it as reading the lecture instead of listening to a lecturer. In the same way that a lecturer might set for you some reading to do, the study units tell you when to read your set books or other materials. Just as a lecturer might give you an in-class exercise, your study units provide exercises for you to do at appropriate time.

Each of the study units are written according to common format. The first item is an introduction to the subject matter of the unit and how a particular unit is integrated with the other units and the course as a whole. Next is a set of learning objectives. These objectives guide you on what you should be able to do by the time you have completed the unit. You should use these objectives to guide your study. When you have completed the units, you must go back and check whether you have achieved the objectives. This habit will improve your chance of passing the course.

READING SECTION

Remember that your tutor's job is to help you. So, when you need help of any sort, call on him or her. Do not fail to do so.

1. Read this Course Guide thoroughly
2. Organise a study schedule or time table. Refer to the course overview for more detail. Note the time you are expected to spend on each unit, and how the assignments relate to the units.

3. Once you have created your own study schedule, do everything you can to stick to it. The major reason students fail is that they lag behind in their course work. If you get into any difficulty with your schedule, do let your tutor know it before it is too late for help.
4. Turn to unit one and read the introduction and the objectives for the unit.
5. Assemble the study materials. Information about what you need for a unit is given in the overview at the beginning of each unit. You will always almost need both the study unit you are working on and one of your books on your table at the same time.
6. Work through the unit. The content of the unit itself has been arranged to provide a sequence for you to follow. As you work through the unit you will be instructed to read sections from your set books or articles. Use the unit to guide your reading.
7. Review the objectives for each study unit to confirm that you have achieved them. If you feel unsure about any of the objectives, review the study material or consult your tutor.
8. When you are confident that you have achieved a unit's objectives, you can then start on the next unit. Proceed unit by unit through the course and try to pace your study so that you keep yourself on schedule.
9. When you have submitted an assignment to your tutor for marking, do not wait for its return before starting on the next unit. Keep to your schedule. When the assignment is returned, pay particular attention to your tutor's comments, both on the tutor- marked assignment form and also on what is written on the assignment. Consult your tutor as soon as possible if you have any questions or problems.
10. After completing the last unit, review the course and prepare yourself for the final examination. Ensure that you have achieved the unit objectives (listed at the beginning of each unit) and the course objectives (listed in this Course Guide).

Facilitators/Tutors and Tutorials

There are eight hours of tutorials provided in support of this course. You will be notified of the dates, time and location of these tutorials, together with the name and phone number of your tutor, as soon as you are allocated a tutorial group. Your tutor will mark and comment on your assignments, keep close watch on your progress and on any difficulties you might encounter and provide assistance to you during the course. You must mail your tutor-marked assignments to your tutor well before the due date (at least two working days are required). They will be marked by your tutor and returned to you as soon as possible do not hesitate to contact your tutor by telephone, email, or discussion board if you need help. The following might be circumstances in which you will find help necessary.

Contact Your Tutor If:

- You do not understand any part of the study units or the assigned readings
- You have difficulty with these If-tests or exercises
- You have a question or problem with an assignment, your tutor's comments on an assignment, or with the grading of an assignment

You should try your best to attend tutorials. This is the only chance to have face to face contact with your tutor and ask questions which are answered instantly. You can raise any problem encountered in the course of your study. To gain the maximum benefit from course tutorials, prepare a question list before attending them. You will learn a lot from participating in discussions actively.

Summary

ENG816: Literature and Gender explains to you the meaning of gender, the history of feminism, the concept of womanism and other racial variants of feminism, as well as Masculinity and queer theories.

Gender is a very sensitive issue. Literature and Gender is, in the main, designed to equip the students understand gender conceptualisations and carry out gender analysis of literary texts.

Happy reading.

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MODULE 1: CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS ON GENDER

CONTENTS

1.0 Introduction

This course is generally aimed to help you understand gender, gender concepts and conceptualisation in literature. This module exposes you to the definition of gender, the differences between gender and sex, various gender terms and concepts. The module lays the general foundation of the understanding of gender before we go on to apply it to literature. The understanding of the notion of gender equips you to assess how a literary text invites its readers, as members of a specific culture, to understand what it means to be a woman or a man, and so encourages them to reaffirm or to challenge existing cultural norms.

2.0 Objectives

- a. To familiarise you as a student with the notion of gender and its operation in society.
- b. To enable you to understand the difference between sex and gender.
- c. To help you comprehend and appreciate the various gender terminologies, concepts and terms
- d. To prepare you to recognise the stereotypical representations of women and men in literature and equip you to critique them.

3.0 Main Contents

- 3.1 The Construction of Gender
- 3.2 Differences between Sex and Gender
- 3.3 Gender Equality, Equity and Gender Gap
- 3.4 Gender Analysis, Gender Awareness, Blindness and Mainstreaming
- 3.5 Gender Roles and Gender Stereotypes

Unit 1

3.1. The Construction of Gender

Gender, in common usage, refers to the differences between men and women. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* notes that gender identity is "an individual's self-conception as being male or female, as distinguished from actual biological sex." Historically, feminism has posited gender roles to be socially constructed, independent of any biological basis. Many languages have a system of grammatical gender. The word *gender* in English means kind or type. Gender is perceived as masculinity or femininity. Sex is what you are biologically, while gender is what you become socially.

Gender refers to the social construction of sex differences. While "sex" is construed to relate to biological differences, i.e. anatomical, physiological or biological characteristics of an individual e.g. male and female, gender denotes the social and cultural roles of each sex within a given society. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines gender as:

...the socially constructed characteristics of women and men, such as norms, roles, and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society to society and can be changed.

Gender is the socially constructed roles, activities, responsibilities that are attributed to a particular sex. It also refers to the individual's and society's perceptions of sexuality and the concepts of masculinity and femininity. While most people are born either male or female, they are taught appropriate norms and behaviours – including how they should interact with others of the same or opposite sex within households, communities and work places (WHO). It implies that the sets of roles and responsibilities which are associated with being girl and boy or women and men are different. The sets of behaviour, roles and responsibilities attributed to women and

men respectively by society are reinforced at the various levels of the society through its political and educational institutions and systems, employment patterns, norms and values, and through the family. At the practical level, for instance, it is common to hear a boy being chided for crying whereas a girl is rebuked for performing feats expected of males because it is unbecoming for a female to display heroism and courage. Gender roles in some societies are more rigid than those in others. Gender roles vary greatly in different societies, cultures and historical periods and depend on socio-economic factors, age, education, ethnicity and religion, among other factors. Although deeply rooted in tradition, gender roles can be changed over time, since social values and norms are not static. (WHO)

Gender regulates the relations between women and men through social norms, practices and institutions. Therefore, gender relations involve a system of power relations between women and men in the context of socio-cultural definitions of masculinity and femininity. In many societies, the system of gender relations gives power and privilege to men and discriminates against women. The gender order determines what is accepted, encouraged and allowed for women and men. When the gender order privileges men, the social acceptance of male domination and female subordination may be sustained by many formal and informal institutions and practices. (www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/.../W2000%20Men%20and%20Boys%20E%20web.pdf)

Gender is a concept and process with multifarious complexities in content and structure. It is used as an analytical tool across disciplines in and outside the academia. It is a concept imbued with notions of difference in the forms of hierarchy, opposition and power relations. The use of gender as an analytical tool in many academic engagements resulted from feminists' agitations concerning the status and role of women, especially in Western countries. Gender is informed by assumed capabilities, social power, and it varies from culture to culture as a people's historical

experiences contribute to formulate expectations for individuals in different contexts in the society. In addition, gender is dynamic and constantly negotiated through the agency of human activities. Gender is neither timeless nor universal; it is not a fixed concept which is applicable to all societies at all times in the same way. Rather, it is a process that is constantly negotiated in content and structure at various levels. This process, however, differs from culture to culture.

In terms of structure, gender is characterized by notions of the differences and oppositions.

This opposition sometimes enlarges the differences between males and females; and at other times, it translates into the oppression and domination of one gender over the other, but this is not always the case. It is worthy of note that where these observed differences and opposition between the two genders do not translate to oppression and domination, some other sociological structure accounts for the attenuation. Examples of such sociological structures, especially in African societies, include seniority and economic attainment (Oluwole and Sofoluwe, 2014).

Hierarchy and notions of powers are important to the conceptualization of gender. This implies that one gender may be considered to be above and superior to the other. In other words, roles assigned to one gender may be regarded as more important than roles assigned to the other gender. For instance, the male is always regarded as the head of the home in traditional societies. In some African societies, this does not mean that he has absolute power in the home but in terms of hierarchy, he is at the apex of the family structure. Next to him are his wife/ves (sexual partners) and then the children. Hierarchy and power are closely linked as the person in charge would demonstrate some form of authority and control.

Gender relations refer to a complex system of personal and social relations of domination and power through which women and men are socially created and maintained and through which they gain access to power and material resources or are allocated status within society. (IFAD,

2000, p. 4). Daily experiences reflect notions of gender relationships in the society. There are various ideas about appropriate and desirable masculine and feminine identities. From birth different expectations are assumed and assigned to males and females. For instance, pink coloured gifts are given to baby girls while blue are given to baby boys. One is tempted to ask whether the babies already have preferred colours. More so, children learn that boys grow up to be Dads and girls grow up to be Moms. This is the standard pattern that children incorporate, even when they know these rules have exceptions. The basic stereotypes seem somehow branded on their psyche in the daily course of growing up.

3.2 Differences between Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological aspects of being male and female. Gender typically refers to behavioral, social, and psychological characteristics of men and women. Sex is considered a natural phenomenon, which is determined by biology, anatomy and reproductive functioning. On the other hand, gender is determined socially; it is the societal meaning assigned to male and female.

Sex refers to the biological characteristics (including genetics, anatomy and physiology) that generally define humans as female or male. People are born with their sex, that is, they are either male or female (Although there are very few people born with the physical characteristics of both male and female. Such people are referred to as hermaphrodites). Unlike notions of gender which varies in different cultures and can differ in different historical periods, sex is natural and universal. It does not vary from culture to culture. This means that the physical characteristics of a boy born in India are the same with a boy born in America or Nigeria. At birth, the difference between boys and girls is their sex. Sex cannot be changed, except by a high technological medical procedure.

Gender is oftentimes context and culture bound. Whereas sex is biologically determined because an individual is born (in most cases) either a male or a female, gender is ascribed through the process of socialisation. Gender classification prescribes expected roles for biological female and male but individuals do not always obey these prescriptions. Also, gender classifications are premised on the maintenance of order and/or ideologies in a particular society.

Unit 2 – Gender Concepts

3.3.1 Gender Equality

Gender equality is the state or condition that affords women and men equal enjoyment of human rights, opportunities and resources. It allows both sexes the same opportunities and potential to contribute to, and benefit from, all spheres of society (economic, political, social, and cultural). At the practical level, an example of gender equality is demonstrated if in a family with limited funds, both daughter and son need to attend school in a particular year, but only one can go to school for that year. If the family decides which child will go to school for that year based on the child's NEED, and not on the child's sex, gender equality is demonstrated.

3.3.2 Gender Equity

Gender equity refers to justice and fairness in the treatment of women and men in order to eventually achieve gender equality. Equity may request differential treatment of women and men or specific measures in order to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from sharing a level playing field. An example of differential treatment may be the provision of leadership training for women or establishing quotas for women in decision - making positions in order to achieve the state of gender equality. It is important to note that equity is meant to lead to equality. In other words, there may be a need to continue taking differential actions to address historical inequality among men and women and achieve gender equality. (www.ekvilib.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/01_Gender_Concepts.pdf)

3.3.3 Gender Gap

The gender gap is the difference in any area between women and men in terms of their levels of participation, access to resources, rights, power and influence, remuneration and benefits. Women are often underrepresented in formal decision-making structures, including

governments, community councils, and policy-making and even academic institutions. Moreover, women tend to be more often victims in domestic violence, they experience sexual exploitation through trafficking and sex trade, in wars by an enemy army as a weapon of attempted 'ethnic cleansing' etc. In addition, there are differences in legal status and entitlements between men and women. (www.oecd.org/social/gender-development/1896320.pdf). There are many instances in which equal rights to personal status, security, land, inheritance and employment opportunities are denied women by law or practice. Gender, and particularly the roles of women are widely recognized as important to international development issues. This implies a focus on gender equality to ensure participation and an understanding of the different roles and expectations of the genders within the community.

Directly addressing inequality and paying attention to gender issues are fundamental to the success of development programmes. Some organizations working in developing countries and in the development field have incorporated into their work the advocacy and empowerment for women.

3.4. Gender Analysis, Gender Awareness, Blindness and Mainstreaming

3.4.1 Gender Analysis

Gender analysis is the study of differences in the conditions, needs, participation rates, access to resources and development, control of assets, decision-making powers, etc., between women and men in their assigned gender roles. In literature it is achieved through the portrayal of male and female characterisation, including foregrounding or backgrounding of female and male characters. This is achieved through the application of gender theories such as feminism(s) and its variants and masculinities.

Gender Awareness is the recognition of the fact that life experience, expectations, and needs of women and men are different; that they often involve inequality and are subject to change while Gender Blindness is ignoring or failing to address the gender dimension. Gender Mainstreaming refers to the systematic integration of the respective needs, interests and priorities of men and women in all the organisation's policies and activities.

Gender mainstreaming rejects the idea that gender is a separate issue and something to be tackled as an afterthought. Achieving greater equality between women and men will require changes at many levels, including changes in attitudes and relationships, changes in institutions and legal frameworks, changes in economic institutions, and changes in political decision-making structures. (www.ekvilib.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/01_Gender_Concepts.pdf)

Self-Assessment Exercise 1

Does gender inequality exist in your community? Give reasons for your answer.

3.5 Gender Roles and Gender Stereotypes

3.5.1 Gender Roles

Gender role is the cultural stereotype of what are masculine and feminine. Gender roles vary greatly in different societies, cultures and historical periods, and they depend also on socio-economic factors, age, education, ethnicity and religion. Although deeply rooted in cultural norms, gender roles can be changed over time, since social values and norms are not static. Example of sex roles is that only women can give birth and breastfeed. Examples of gender roles are the expectation of men to be economic providers of the family, and for women to be caregivers in many cultural contexts. However, women prove able to do traditionally male jobs

as well as men (e.g. men and women can do housework; men and women can be leaders and managers).

Elements of gender role include clothing, speech patterns, movement, occupations and other factors not limited to biological sex. *Gender role* is often abbreviated to *gender* in literature, without leading to any ambiguity in that context. Most societies have only two distinct gender roles - male and female - and these correspond with biological sexes. Contemporary sociological reference to male and female gender roles typically uses *masculinities* and *femininities* in the plural rather than singular, suggesting diversity both within cultures as well as across them.

The essential point you need to note is that at birth, the difference between boys and girls is their sex; as they grow up, society gives them different roles, attributes, opportunities, privileges and rights that in the end create the social differences between men and women.

3.5.2 Gender Stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are sets of cultural expectations popularly adopted by the mass majority.

Common gender stereotypes and norms include the following examples:

1. A man is socially superior to the woman.
2. A man has a right to assert power over a woman,
3. A man has a right to “correct” or discipline female behaviour.
4. A woman’s freedom should be restricted.
5. Physical violence is an acceptable way to resolve conflicts within an inter-gender relationship.
6. A woman is responsible for making a marriage work.
7. Intimate partner violence is a taboo subject and reporting abuse is forbidden.

Stereotyping of women has been a huge disadvantage for the advancement of women socially. Common gender-stereotypical qualities of women are: submissive, quiet, weak, passive, dependent and incompetent. Since social pressures to fulfil these expectations are strong and typically enforced by parents, friends, teachers and the media, many women conform to these qualities. They refrain from speaking their minds, become passive in strength-related activities and do not progress and thrive at work because of insecurity and the pressure of wifehood and motherhood. It is noteworthy that women who do not conform to gender roles are often considered harsh, controlling or manly even in the place of work.

Men also have strict gender stereotypes that typically enforce the idea that men do not have any feminine qualities. Essentially, this means that it is culturally unacceptable for men to display qualities of being emotional, weak, caring or nurturing. This leaves the male stereotypical qualities of athleticism, loudness, strength, dominance and being in complete control of emotions. While this can negatively affect men's mental and emotional growth, it also encourages men to excel in active sports and in the place of work for fear of being considered feminine or weak. Financially, gender stereotyping seems to affect men positively, but gender stereotyping tends to restrict men's creativity and emotional growth.

Male stereotyping promotes masculine norms and principles. These include statements such as: "Take it like a man." "Be a man about it."- These imply do not display emotions. Be strong willed. In other words, men should be tough in both body and spirit. Physical toughness means never shirking from the threat of physical harm; while displaying emotional toughness requires that men conceal such emotions as fear, sadness, nervousness, and uncertainty. Outward displays of anger, confidence, or stoicism are considered to be far more socially acceptable for men. Even in professional settings, showing emotional toughness is often seen as a key leadership attribute.

“Avoid all things feminine.” is another masculine principle. This implores men never to be identified with any feminine norms or traits. It appears to be a core rule of masculinity. Furthermore, “Be a winner” is another masculine norm that concerns the attainment of status, wealth, social prestige, and power over others. Men gain the approval of others when they make their careers a priority and pursue occupational fields such as corporate management and politics, which offer opportunities to increase their social and economic status. Finally, “Be a man’s man,” which also implies being “one of the boys,” as a rule of masculinity calls on men to win the respect and admiration of other men and to appear to enjoy a special sense of camaraderie with male peers. Being a “man’s man” means visibly complying with all masculine norms.

Men who are creative and emotional, who don't meet the stereotype, tend to be seen in a negative light. Male gender stereotype results in dilemma and crises for the male. If a man is judged as having acted in ways that are consistent with any or all norms prescribed for women - that is, feminine norms - he will often experience criticism, ridicule, and rejection, and his status as a man may be called into question. This “policing” often occurs within male peer groups beginning at an early age and continuing into adulthood.

While many people tend to fit into their gender stereotypes to a certain degree because of socialization and the need to belong to one's culture, there are still many men and women who deviate from their stereotypes. Many people have misguided ideas about the submissiveness of women, the dominance of men and the relative intelligence and aptitude of different genders and even races. These stereotypes affect relationships both in the domestic realm and at work.

Many people have internalised stereotypical views of men and women, and they often bring those views into their relationships. For instance, wives might expect their husbands to be unsentimental and rational, while husbands expect wives to let their emotions rule. In reality,

men and women, to an extent, are not born with these characteristics, but societal expectations lead to confusion and resentment within relationships.

Being stereotyped results in dilemma, stress and spill over violence. Men also miss out on a whole range of emotions and experiences that are immensely rewarding and socially valued due to gender stereotyping. For example, in most cultures men are not expected to play a significant role in caring for children and sick parents, or to show affection and express their vulnerabilities in distress. Societal pressure to uphold stereotyped notions of masculinity means that men must often suppress this aspect of their human persona

Self-Assessment Exercise 2

1. What are the gender roles that men are expected to perform in your community?
2. What are the gender roles that women are expected to perform in your society?
3. To what extent do you as an individual abide by these norms and expectations?

4.0. Conclusion

Gender has become a widely used theory which is applied to the understanding of male and female roles in society. It is a cross cutting theory which is used across various academic disciplines including literature. In this unit, we have discussed the meaning and conceptualization of gender. We have also differentiated between sex and gender. Moreover, we have defined various gender concepts such as gender equality, gender equity, gender analysis,

awareness, blindness and mainstreaming. We have explained gender roles and the fact that they may vary from society to society and in different historical periods.

Finally, we have discussed gender stereotypes and how they affect males and females. Understanding gender helps you to examine literary texts from feminist, masculinist and queer theory perspectives. With your knowledge and understanding of gender, as a student of literature, you will be able to determine how a text represents men and women, what it says about gender relations and how it defines sexual difference.

Gender studies question the qualities of femininity and masculinity and in feminist literary criticism; gender scholars ask questions about the nature of the female imagination and female literary history. In literature, gender scholars probe whether there is really a female aesthetic? Do women use language in ways that are different from that of men? Do women have a different pattern of reasoning from men? Do they see the world in a different way from the man?

Several significant studies have tried to answer such questions. They do not all agree, but in general, they have challenged assumptions about how males and females use language, view reality, solve problems and make judgments. They all suggest that women and men have different conception of self and different modes of interaction with others. Some of the findings call for recognition of the differences, because ignoring them inevitably leads to a suppression of women's ways of understanding and acting.

Summary

In this unit, we have learnt:

- The definition of gender
- The differences between sex and gender
- The definitions of various gender concepts

- The phenomenon of gender roles
- Meanings and effects of gender stereotypes

In the next unit, we shall learn about feminisms and how they relate to gender

5.0 Tutor Marked Assignment

1. Gender is a social construction. Discuss
2. Define the following: (a) Gender Awareness, (b) Gender Mainstreaming, (c) Gender Blindness; (d); Gender equality; (e) Gender equity.
3. Explain gender roles as they operate in your society.
4. Discuss how some of these institutions (family, universities, media, religion, government, law, or educational system) create and maintain gender stereotypes? Give examples of stereotypical behaviours, practices, and policies in these institutions.

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MODULE 2: FEMINISM

1.0 Introduction

In the last module, you were introduced to the concept of gender. In this module, you will become familiar with the basis of feminism as a theory. You will learn about the history of feminism as well as types or varieties of feminism. You will also be introduced to canonical feminist thinkers and their works. This module will further equip you to carry out feminist literary criticism as you will be exposed to feminist literary techniques and methods of analysis.

2.0 Objectives

- a. To understand feminism, the history of feminism and the various forms of feminism
- b. To introduce canonical feminist critics and writers.
- c. To introduce feminist methodology for further research.
- d. To impart the skills of carrying out feminist analysis of literary texts, by both male and female writers.

3.0 Main Contents

- 3.1 Definition of Feminism
- 3.2 History of Feminism.
- 3.3 Types and Diversities of Feminism
- 3.4 Feminist Literary Critical Methodology
- 3.5 Major Statements

Unit 1

3.1 Definition of Feminism

Feminism is a cross cutting *theory* in contemporary scholarship. It is intertwined with the question of woman. Feminism began in Europe and America in the nineteenth century when women became conscious of their oppression and marginalization, and took steps to redress these forms of treatment. At present, feminism has spread all over the world although in many countries it has become tagged with different labels. Feminist ideas constitute aspects of current global thinking. As Maggie Humm (1992:1) asserts, while most writers agree that feminism as a group of political and social movements probably dates from the seventeenth century, feminism as a body of answers to the 'question' of woman' has a more diffuse and considerably long-standing existence.

Feminism is a historically diverse and culturally varied international movement that probes the "question of woman". It has been variously defined and described by many critics. Since feminism means various things to different people, it becomes difficult to have a concise universal definition of the term. While recognising the implications of a sweeping definition, the following definitions throw light on the concept of feminism.

According to Barrow and Milburn (1990:128), "*Feminism is a label for a commitment or movement to achieve equality for women.*" J. A. Cuddon (1991:338) also defines feminism as "*an attempt to describe and interpret (or reinterpret) women's experiences as depicted in various kinds of literature*/" Maggie Humm (1992:1) asserts that "*the word feminism can stand for a commitment to transform society.*"

Essentially, feminism is a theory which seeks that men and women be equal politically, economically and socially. This is the core of all feminism theories. Sometimes this definition is also referred to as "*core feminism*" or "*core feminist theory*."

Notice that this theory does not subscribe to differences between men and women or similarities between men and women, nor does it refer to excluding men or only furthering women's causes.

(<https://www.mheducation.co.uk/openup/chapters/0335204155.pdf>)

Ruth Sheila (1980:4) observes that feminists do not agree among themselves on one all-inclusive and universally acceptable definition of the term. According to her, what feminism means to various people depends on one's political leanings or observations and goals, one's understanding or interpretation of the word 'woman' and several other factors. Feminism, she emphasizes, may be a perspective, a world-view, a political theory, or a kind of activism.

Feminism originates from the Latin word '*femina*'. Femina is a term which describes women's issues. It is clear from the above definitions that whatever feminism means to different people, it revolves primarily around the female experience! Feminism is concerned with females not just as a biological category, but the female gender as a social category.

Feminists share the view that women's oppression is tied to their sexuality. This is so because the biological differences between women and men are reflected in the organization of the society. Based on these differences, women are treated as inferior to men. Whether as a theory, a social movement or a political movement, feminism focuses on women's experiences and highlights various forms of oppression which the female gender is subjected to in the society.

In what appears to be a manifesto for feminism, Ruth Sheila (1980:4-5) expresses some beliefs, values and attitudes which constitute some of the aims and aspirations of feminism as a theory and socio - political movement. According to her:

- i. Feminists value woman in and of themselves and for themselves not in the hypocritical fashion of male dominated cultures.
- ii. Feminists value and prize the act of being women as much as being human. They see themselves as strong, capable, intelligent and successful ethical human beings.
- iii. Feminists value autonomy for themselves as individuals and for women as a group who are developing their own political, social, economic and personal destinies.
- iv. Feminists reject separation of human qualities into two categories - one for men and one for women and the valuing of one of those categories better than the other. For instance male characteristics of aggression, power and competition is celebrated while female characteristics of compassion, tenderness and compromise is termed weak and ridiculed.
- v. Feminist recognise that attitudes regarding women in many cultures are false and wrong-headed based on myth, ignorance and fear. Thus, they believe in the necessity of replacing these myths with reality and ignorance with knowledge created by women, first for women and finally for all people.
- vi. Feminists point out the denial of their rights as humans for centuries. Rights such as voting, earning a substantive living commensurate with their work, freedom to determine whether to bear children etc.
- vii. Finally, feminists recognise women's strength in the true face of oppression and are optimistic about the possibilities of a change.

Since feminists are of the view that male domination is found in virtually all important aspects of life, this male domination is seen as the source of social inequalities and injustice which affect

the lives of women. Feminists, therefore, seek to eliminate all the barriers to equal social, political and economic opportunities for women. They object to the notion that a woman's worth is determined principally by her gender and that women are inherently inferior, subservient or less intelligent than men. Feminist scholarship is aimed at 'deconstructing' the predominant male paradigms and constructing a female perspective which foregrounds the female experience.

Unit 2

3.2 HISTORY OF FEMINISM

For many centuries, Western culture assumed that women were inferior to men. Leading thinkers, including Aristotle reiterated that women were lesser beings. There are several quotes traced to eminent writers, theologians, and other public figures that ridicule and degrade women. The Greek ecclesiast John Chrysostom (ca. AD 347-407) called women “a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil.”

The Roman theologian Tertullian (ca. AD 160-230) stated about women that “the judgment of God upon your sex endures even today; and with it inevitably endures your position of criminal at the bar justice. You are the gate way to the devil.” Alexander Pope (1688-1744) declared, “most women have no character at all,” and John Keats (1795-1821) explained, “the opinion I have of the generality of women - who appear to me as children to whom I would rather give a sugar plum than my time – forms a barrier against matrimony which I rejoice in.”

In the face of the widespread acknowledgement of the inferiority of the female, some women accepted their lesser status. For example, the French Writer Madame de Steal (1766-1817) is said to have commented, “I am glad that I am not a man, as in should be obliged to marry a woman.”

When women did recognize their talents, they sometimes worked to conceal them. Jane Austen (1775-1817), for example, advised, “A woman, especially, if she has the misfortune of knowing anything, should conceal it as well as she can.’ According to Mae West (1893-1980), “Brains are an asset, if you hide them.” (Dobie 2009: 105)

However, Mary Wollstonecraft took exception to the popular opinion about women. In 1792 she published *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, a book in which she depicted women as an oppressed class regardless of social hierarchy. Her views were radical in a place and time that did not recognize women’s political or legal rights, offered them few opportunities for

employment, and, if they married, gave their property to their husbands. From personal experience, Wollstonecraft recognized that women are born into powerless roles. As a result, she declared that women are forced to use manipulative methods to get what they want. Wollstonecraft argued for women to be “duly prepared by education to be the companions of men”. She recommended that women should take charge of their lives by recognizing that their abilities were equal to those of men, define their identities for themselves, and carve out their own roles in society. According to Wollstonecraft:

I earnestly wish to point out in what true dignity and human happiness consist - I wish to persuade women to endeavour to acquire strength, both of mind and body, and to convince them that the soft phrases, susceptibility of heart, delicacy of sentiment, and refinement of taste, are almost synonymous with epithets of weakness, and that those beings who are only the objects of pity and that kind of love which has been termed its sister, will soon become objects of contempt.... I wish to shew that elegance is inferior to virtue that the first object of laudable ambition is to obtain a character as a human being, regardless of the distinction of sex.

Her stand earned her severe criticism, for example, Horace Walpole, called her a "hyena in petticoats". Nevertheless, Wollstonecraft's works were already published and they contributed significantly to the stirrings of feminist thinking.

In 1929, Virginia Woolf published *A Room of One's Own*. The book questioned why women appear so seldom in history and as writers. Woolf pointed out that literary works are full of women's depictions, but in real life they hardly seem to have existed. In other words, in reality, women are invisible. In the chapter entitled "*Shakespeare's Sister*," Virginia Woolf gave an example of what may have happened to a female in Shakespeare's age.

If she had the ability, creativity and talent to write, she would have been discouraged, always laden with household and domestic chores, not given her own privacy to develop intellectually

such that her potentials are stifled by the family and society. Woolf emphasised that a gifted female writer of Shakespeare's era did not have 'a room of her own'. Without an adequate education or a room of her own, "whatever she had written," Woolf concluded, "would have been twisted and deformed, issuing from a strained and morbid imagination."

Woolf went on to argue that if we [women] have the habit of freedom and the courage to write exactly what we think; if we escape a little from the common sitting room and see human beings not always in their relation to each other but in relation to reality; and the sky too.... when she [Shakespeare's sister] is born again she shall find it possible to live and write her poetry. (Dobie, 2009:106)

As a group of political and social movements, feminism probably dates from the seventeenth century, but as a body of answers to the 'question of woman' feminism has a more diffuse and considerably long-standing existence. Feminism has its origin in the struggle for women's rights. It began in Europe in the late eighteenth century. According to the *World Book Encyclopedia*, Mary Wollstonecraft (1792), and John Stuart Mills (1809) publications were the early major contributions to feminist literature.

The suffrage movement at the beginning of the twentieth century carried out the campaign for achieving women's rights. After achieving voting rights in 1920, it seems feminism in Europe and America suffered a lull until it was revived in the 1960's through Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963). As a result of the lull in the feminist movement and a shift in emphasis, feminism has been divided into first wave feminism and second wave feminism." Second wave feminism started with the politics of reproduction, while sharing first wave feminism's political of legal, educational and economic equal rights for women. (Humm ed., 1992: 53).

According to Ruth Sheila (1980:444), the first stirrings of women's movement were felt in the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* in 1792. The Women's Right Movement in the United States was born during the agitation for the abolition; particularly in the activities and writings of the Grimke sisters in the 1830's. It culminated in the winning of the vote in 1920 and then because women had exhausted themselves in the fight for suffrage, it died until Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* brought it back to life in 1963. From late 1980's, third wave feminism came into existence.

According to Kate O'Connor at <http://writersinspire.org/content/feminist-approaches-literature>, Elaine Showalter divided the history of feminism into three phases, the feminine phase (1840-1880), the feminist phase (1880-1920), and the female phase (1920-present). The major focus of first wave feminism is men's treatment of women; as such feminist critics in this era reassess male novelists' condescending treatment or marginalization of female characters. Another attribute of the first phase of feminism is that female writers imitated the literary tradition established by men, taking additional care to avoid offensive language or subject matter.

Ann Dobie (2009:107) explains that in second wave feminism, which is the feminist phase, the central theme of works by female writers was the criticism of the role of women in society and the oppression of women. In the second phase, according to Showalter, women protested their lack of rights and worked to secure them. In the political realm, Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and others pushed to secure equality under the law, and some of the more radical feminists envisioned separate female utopias. In the literary world, they decried the unjust depictions of women by male writers.

Similarly, Dobie (2009:107) further explains that the third wave feminism is what Showalter terms 'The Female Phase'. During the 'female' phase, women writers were no longer trying to

prove the legitimacy of a woman's perspective. Rather, it was assumed that the works of women writers were authentic and valid. The female phase lacked the anger and combative consciousness of the feminist phase. It involved gynocriticism.

Elaine Showalter pioneered gynocriticism with her book *A Literature of Their Own* (1977). Gynocriticism involves three major aspects. The first is the examination of female writers and their place in literary history. The second is the consideration of the treatment of female characters in books by both male and female writers. The third and most important aspect of gynocriticism is the discovery and exploration of a canon of literature written by women.

With gynocriticism, feminist critics concentrated on exploring the female experience in art and literature. For female writers, this implied turning to their own lives to become subjects. Feminist critics interrogated the depiction of women in male authored texts in an effort to reveal the misogyny (negative attitudes toward women) lurking there.

The British feminists, according to Showalter, largely take a Marxist position. British feminist critics work to change the economic and social status of women. They analyse relationships between gender and class and show how power structures, which are male dominated, influence society and oppress women. Like Marxists in general, they see literature as a tool by which society itself can be reformed (Dobie, 2009:107).

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) attacked the image of the happy, mid-twentieth century, American, suburban housewife and mother. Kate Millett, in *Sexual Politics* (1970), objected to the repressive stereotyping of women by probing the differences between biological (sexual) and cultural (gender) identities. Millett also pointed out that power in both public and domestic lives is held by males, and literature is a record of the collective consciousness of patriarchy. That is, much literature is the record of a man speaking to other men, not directly to

women. At about the same time, Germaine Greer documented images of women in popular culture and literature in *The Female Eunuch* (1970) in an attempt to free women from their mental dependence on the images presented by males.

Aside Britain, feminism also grew in America. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, authors of *The Madwoman in the Attic* (1979), have been influential in American feminist criticism. They called for a recognition that male writers have too long stereotyped women as either "*the angel in the house*" (the woman who lives to care for her husband) or "*the madwoman in the attic*" (the woman who chooses not to be the angel). They call for writing by women that will more accurately capture the complexity of women's lives and nature. (Dobie, 2009).

In the French society, feminism also had some unique tones. Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* (1949) argued that French culture and Western societies in general, are patriarchal. In those societies, the males define what it means to be human. Lacking her own history, the female is always secondary or nonexistent. Beauvoir believed that women are not born inferior but rather are made to be so. She called for women to break out of being the "*other*" and to realise their possibilities.

According to Showalter, French feminist are primarily psychoanalytic. They rely heavily on Jacques Lacan for their theoretical basis. They are, consequently, concerned with language, particularly with how women in the **Symbolic Order** (a phase of development) are socialized into accepting the language (and law) of the father and are thereby made inferior. Helene Cixous asserts that there is a particular kind of writing by women, which she calls *I'écriture feminine* that has as its source, the wholeness of Lacan's **Imaginary Order**, the prelinguistic domain of the infant characterized by freedom from laws and a sense of "*other*".

Other French feminist including Julia Kristeva, Hélène Cixous, and Luce Irigaray, rely heavily on Freudian psychology and the theory of penis envy. French feminists postulate the existence of a separate language belonging to women that consists of loose, digressive sentences. (Feminist Approaches to Literature by Kate O'Connor at <http://writersinspire.org/content/feminist-approaches-literature>)

Unit 3

3.3. TYPES AND DIVERSITIES OF FEMINISM

Feminism has been referred to in the plural form. This is as a result of differences in the methodologies, concepts and practices of feminism. Many forms of feminism have been identified. They include Marxist/ Socialist feminism, Humanist feminism, Liberal feminism, Radical feminism and Analytic feminism, among others. In this section, we shall briefly discuss some of the major forms or schools of thought of feminism.

Marxist Feminism

This brand of feminism believes in the interlocking relationship between class gender oppression. Marxist feminists extend the critique of class developed by Marx and Engels into a feminist history of material and economic subordination of women. They highlight the sexual division of labour and the implications of this division for the differences in power between men and women. Marxist feminism seeks to determine the way in which the institution of the family and women's domestic labour are structured and how this structure contributes to the subjugation of women. Marxism offers an explanation of capitalism's subordination of women but Marxist feminism goes a little further. It highlights the fact that women's work count as productive labour. Reproduction constrains many women workers. Very often, they take part-time or less skilled employment in order to care for children. The economic and cultural significance of women's domestic work is a major concern of Marxist feminists. Marxist feminists believe that economic power is the only way proletarian culture can effectively mitigate subjugation.

Humanist Feminism: Humanist feminists believe in the universality of women's oppression regardless of class and race. They argue for a concept of self which is unified despite the

fragmentation resulting from the cultural violence of oppression. In the humanist feminist's view, all women are oppressed because they are women despite class and racial distinctions. To them, the exploitation of women is neither a racial or class phenomenon but a gender phenomenon. In other words, women's subjugation is gender based. Marxist feminists have pointed out that humanist feminist assumed that the specific concerns of white middle class heterosexual woman virtually represented those of all other women.

Liberal Feminism: Liberal feminism aims at achieving equal legal, political and social rights for women. It strives to bring all women equally into public institutions and extend the creation of knowledge about women so that issues concerning women would no longer be ignored. The most important goal of liberal feminism is equality of opportunity for women.

Radical Feminism: Radical feminism argues that women's oppression stems from being categorized as inferior to men on the basis of gender. Therefore, radical feminism aims to destroy this sex classed system. It focuses on the roots of male domination and claims that all forms of oppression are extensions of male supremacy. Radical feminism claims that patriarchy is the defining characteristics of our society. Therefore, it aims at overthrowing patriarchy. Very often, radical feminism argues for radical ways of ending female subjugation. It is usually man-hating in orientation and sometimes encourages androgyny. Androgyny is the mixture of traditional masculine and feminine virtues in an individual. It is this type of feminism that C.O. Ogunyemi (1988:64) discourages African women from. According to Ogunyemi, radical feminism smacks of rebelliousness, fearlessness, political awareness of sexism, and an unpardonable (from the male viewpoint) drive for equality and equity between the sexes ... The radical feminist can go as far as doing without the macho male to enjoy her liberty. Radical

feminists are those who have made people imagine that feminists are bearers of female anger, as female incendiaries. They challenge male control and encourage homosexuality.

Analytic Feminism: This is a feminism which is rooted in analytic philosophy. Analytic feminists are considered by some people to be non-feminists because their interest is not limited to feminist issues alone. Analytic feminists are in pursuit of notions of truth, logical consistency, objectivity, rationality, justice and the good despite the fact that the pursuit of these notions has often been dominated and perverted by androcentric. Analytic feminists insist on seeing how sexism, androcentrism, and the domination of the profession of philosophy by men distort the philosopher's pursuit of truth and objectivity.

Analytic feminists are of the opinion that the social constructions of gender create a fundamentally unjust imbalance in contemporary social and political arrangements. They hold that there is a sex/gender distinction and explore the moral and political implications of this. Analytic feminism attempts to reclaim notions dominated and perverted by androcentrism. Its argument is that when properly analysed, these concepts can be used to undermine unjust gendered social institutions.

Lesbian Feminism: Lesbian feminists comprise mainly women who have sexual relationship with other women. They hold that heterosexism that is male/female sexual relationship, is basic to women's oppression and tends to support male supremacy. Therefore, lesbian feminism challenges heterosexuality as being compulsory for all women. Adrienne Rich (1983:177), a lesbian feminist, challenges the assumption that most women are innately heterosexual. She believes that the assumption that most women are innately heterosexual stands as a theoretical and political stumbling block for many women. She also suggests that for many women,

heterosexuality may not be a preference, but something that has had to be imposed, managed and organised. In her opinion, it is a propaganda maintained by force. Lesbian feminism involves a belief that women identified women, committed together for political, sexual and economic support, as an approach to life for women which is a better alternative than the male-female relations.

Unit 4

3.4 FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICAL METHODOLOGY

The section will equip you to read literary texts, by both male and female writers, from a feminist perspective. In other words, it furnishes you with the necessary skills to become a 'feminist reader'. The feminist reader assumes that there is no innocent or neutral approach to literature and that all interpretation is political. The feminist reader might ask, among other questions, how the text represents men and women, what it says about gender relations, how it defines sexual difference. A feminist does not necessarily read in order to praise or to blame, to judge or to censor. More commonly s/he sets out to assess how the text invites its readers, as members of a specific culture, to understand what it means to be a woman or a man, and so encourages them to reaffirm or to challenge existing cultural norms.

It is not easy to designate a literature as feminist literature even if it is written by a female. This is because not all works written by females are women-centred and some works written by males may treat feminist issues. For this reason, critics are divided in their opinion about what really constitutes feminist literature. Despite the obvious lack of agreement on what constitutes feminist writing among critics, the general consensus is that feminist literature is a work written in a prejudiced way to favour the status of women.

According to Green Gayle and Kahn Coppel (1985:1-2), feminist literary criticism is one branch of interdisciplinary enquiry which takes gender as a fundamental organising category based on two premises: inequality of the sexes is neither a biological nor a divine mandate but a cultural construct. Male perspectives assumed to be universal have dominated fields of knowledge. Hence feminists' scholarship serves to correct these and restore a female perspective by extending knowledge about women's experience and contributions to culture. Feminist

literary criticism confronts patriarchal values and aims to combat female oppression and repression as depicted in literature. Feminist literary criticism is based on the belief that the social structure that privileges the male is reflected in religion, philosophy, economics, education and all aspects of the culture, including literature. Feminist critics work to expose such ideology and deconstruct it.

Although feminist criticism has many strands, most critics hold some general notions in common. Some feminist critics re-examine literary history to discover 'forgotten texts' written by females. Feminist critics attempt to assert the quality of texts produced by female writers who have been generally undervalued by an androcentric, which is male centred culture by questioning the values that underlie the literary canon. Similarly a feminist critic attempts to make alternative readings of traditional works by males.

Other feminist critics analyse the male/female power structure that makes women the other (the inferior), in male or female authored works and they reject it. Feminist critics attempt to expose limiting stereotypes of women; they seek to expose patriarchal premises and the prejudices that the writers have created. Such critics challenge traditional, static ways of seeing gender and identity. From the foregoing, it is possible to group some of the different feminist perspectives into several overlapping approaches. Dobie (2009:114) identifies three major groups of feminist critics as those who study difference, those who study power relationships, and those who study the female experience.

According to Dobie (2009: 114), feminist critics who are interested in determining the differences in male and female writings work from the assumption that gender determines everything, including value systems and language. More often, feminist critics are interested in studies of power between men and women as depicted in texts. Such critics are more interested

in the sociological aspects of texts and have a political intent. Many of the English feminist critics who work from a Marxist perspective belong to this group.

In carrying out a feminist criticism, you may find it helpful to focus on the characters in the text because through character analysis, you will identify the author's attitude and ideology. Answering the following questions outlined by Dobie (2009:121-124) will help you to carry out a feminist criticism of a work authored by either a male or female:

- What stereotypes of women do you find? Are they over-simplified, demeaning, untrue?
- Examine the roles women play in a work. Are they minor, supportive, powerless, obsequious? Or are they independent and influential?
- How do the male characters talk about the female characters? How do the male characters treat the female characters? How do the female characters act toward the male characters?
- Who are the socially and politically powerful characters?
- Who is primarily responsible for making decisions in the society depicted: men or women?
- Do the female characters play an overt part in decision making? Or do they work behind the scenes?
- Who holds positions of authority and influence?
- Who controls the finances? Do the female characters play traditional female roles? Or do they assume some unusual ones? Are there any instances in which women are unfairly treated or ill-treated?
- What kind of accomplishments do the female characters achieve?
- Are the female characters honoured for their accomplishments?

- Do the male characters consult the female characters before taking action, or do they merely inform them of it?
- Does the story approve or disapprove, condemn or glorify the power structure as revealed by your answers to these questions?
- How is the female reader invited to reject the images of women presented in the work?
- Are images of the female body important in the text?
- Does motherhood, or do those attitudes and behaviours characteristic of motherhood, feature significantly in the text?
- Can you find instances in which the traditional binaries of male/female, intellectual/emotional, objective/subjective, and active/passive are reversed? What new circumstances do the reversals suggest?
- What generalizations about the uniqueness of the female experience can you make based on the answers to these questions?

In order to write any essay, you need to have an introduction, the body of the essay as well as the conclusion. When writing a feminist criticism of a text, it is not different. You should begin your discussion with an interesting introduction before going into the body of your work and finally concluding your work. Dobie (2009:122) counsels that one interesting way to open your discussion is to point out why a feminist critique is particularly appropriate for the text you are analysing. For example, many established works have acquired traditional readings that can be challenged from a new point of view. You can easily explain that you intend to show why the accepted understanding is not the only possibility. Other rationales for a feminist analysis may lie in the characters, the situation, the cultural context in which a text was produced, or the

author. Whatever your reason for making a reading based on feminist theory, explaining why it is a fitting one will help your reader follow the analysis more easily. Another style of introducing your work is to connect the characters or events in the text to a similar situation that has actually occurred in life. This is based on the premise that literature is a reflection, or 'mirror of life'.

The body of your work will be an attempt to answer the questions outlined above in a coherent order. You do not necessarily have to answer all the questions, neither do you have to arrange the body of your work in the order which the questions appear. Depending on the thrust of your text and the emphasis of your approach, you should examine issues about female characterization, power, stereotyping of males and females, among others, in a coherent manner.

It is very useful for you to understand and apply some of the feminist concepts and terminologies in the body of your essay. You should attempt to situate these concepts in the context of the text(s) you are analyzing. The following are few of feminist terminologies you should be familiar with:

Androcentric: A term used to describe attitudes, practices, or social organisations that are based on the assumption that men are the model of being. In other words, androcentric means male centred.

Gynocriticism: This implies female centredness. It is a movement that examines the distinctive characteristics of the female experience, 'in contrast to earlier methods that explained the female by using male models. As applied to literature, gynocriticism is concerned with developing new ways to study the writing of women'. Elaine Showalter designated four such perspectives. These are biological, linguistic, psychoanalytic, and cultural.

Misogyny Misogyny means the hatred of women.

Oedipal attachment Sigmund Freud's theory that around the age of five a boy perceives his father to be a rival for the love of his mother.

Patriarchal A term describing one who approves of a social system that is headed and directed by a male. Patriarchy favours male domination and female subordination

In the concluding part of your paper, you need to state the generalizations and conclusions drawn from your answers to the questions and analysis. You should be able to make deductions from the text about what is particularly female (or male) about the way the work was written, about the power relationships depicted in it, or about its presentation of the nature of the female experience.

Unit 5

3.5. MAJOR STATEMENTS

In order to afford you as a student and upcoming scholar the opportunity of being introduced to notable feminist writers and their canonical works, this section attempts to quote at length what is considered major statements of some of these writers. We also endeavour to summarize the contents of the selected quotes and provide relevant information about the writer and / or works quoted. We hope that these will wet your appetite for reading, broaden your knowledge about gender issues and motivate you as a learner to search for and read the works of these writers, among others. We have provided the link or other information you need to have access to these canonical feminist writings

A Vindication of the Rights of Women by Mary Wollstonecraft

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS

A Vindication of Right of Women is one of the oldest feminist books that exist. Written in 1792, it remains one of the most forceful arguments for the rights of the woman. Wollstonecraft attempts in her work to decry the low educational status of majority of women in her society. She affirms that if women are not encouraged to embrace reason which is viewed as the prerogative of man, then they cannot be equitable with the men and marriage which is considered the primary role of women will also be threatened because of the wide intellectual gap which will result from the ignorance of women. Mary Wollstonecraft also criticises the shallowness and vanity which women are encouraged to indulge in rather than true virtue which reflects the true worth of the individual.

A VINDICATION OF RIGHTS OF WOMEN

To render women truly useful members of society, I'll argue that they should be led, by having their understanding cultivated on a large scale, to acquire a rational affection for their country, founded on knowledge, because it is obvious that we are little interested about what we do not understand. And to render this general knowledge of due importance, I have endeavored to show that private duties are never properly fulfilled unless the understanding enlarges the heart; and that public virtue is only an aggregate of private. But the distinctions established in society undermine both...

To prove this, I need only observe that men who have wasted great part of their lives with women, and with whom they have sought by pleasure with eager thirst, entertain the meanest opinion of the sex. Virtue, true refiner of joy! If foolish men were to fight thee from earth in order to give loose to all their appetite without a check- some sensual wight of taste would scale the heavens to invite thee back, to give a zest to pleasure!

That women at present are by ignorance rendered foolish to vicious, is, I think, not be disputed; and the most salutary effects tending to improve mankind might be from a REVOLUTION in female manners, appear, at least with a face of probability, to rise out of the observation. For as marriage has been termed that parent of those endearing charities which draw man from the brutal herd. The corruption intercourse that wealth, idleness, and folly produce between the sexes, is more universally injurious to morality than all the other vices of mankind collectively. . . But that noble simplicity of affection which dares to appear unadorned, has few attractions for the libertine, though it be the charm, by cementing the matrimonial tie, secures to the pledges of a warmer passion the necessary parental attention; for children will never be properly educated till friendship subsists between parents. Virtue flies from a house divided against itself- and a whole legion of devils take up their residence there.

Let women share the rights that she will emulate the virtue of man; for she must grow more perfect when emancipated, or justify the authority that chains such a weak being to her duty. If the latter, it will be expedient to open a fresh trade with Russia for whips: a present which a father should always make to his son-in-law on his wedding day, that a husband should always keep his whole family in order by the same means; and without any violation of justice reign, wielding this sceptre, sole master of his house, because he is the only being in it who has reason: - the divine, indefeasible earthly sovereignty breathed into man by the master of the universe. Allowing this position, women have not any inherent rights to claim; and by the same rule their duties vanish for rights and duties are inseparable. . .

ON LIBERTY AND THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN: JOHN STUART MILL

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS

It is interesting to note that John Stuart Mill is a man, yet this phenomenal essay *On Liberty and the Subjection of Women* remains one of the best statements for the cause of feminism ever written. In his work, Mill establishes the basis for which everyone deserves liberty. He particularly highlights the basis for which society subjugates women. The reasons highlighted are then de-constructed to expose the contradictions and illogicality of the continual subjugation of women in the society. According to Mill, one of the greatest hindrances in achieving progress in the society is the subjugation of women.

THE SUBJECTION OF WOMEN

It will be well to commence the detailed discussion of the subject by the particular branch of it to which course of our observations has led to the condition which the laws of this and all other countries annex to the marriage contract. Marriage being the destination appointed by society for women, the prospect they are brought up to, and the object which is intended should be sought by all of them, except those who are too little attractive to be chosen by any man as his companion; one might have supposed that everything would have been done to make this condition eligible to them as possible, that they might have no cause to regret being denied the option of any other. Society, however, both in this, and, at first, in all other cases in which it has substantially persisted in them even to the present day. Originally women were taken by force, or regularly sold by their father to the husband.

Until a late period in European history, the father had the power to dispose of his daughter to marriage at his own will and pleasure, without any regard to hers. The church, indeed, was so far faithful to a better morality as to require a formal 'yes' from the woman at the marriage ceremony; but there was nothing to shew that the consent was other than compulsory; and it was partially impossible for the girl to refuse compliance if the father persevered, except perhaps when she might obtain the protection of religion by determined resolution to take monastic vows. After the marriage, the man had anciently (but this was anterior to Christianity) the power of life and death over his wife. She could invoke no law against him; he was her soul tribunal and law. For a long time he could repudiate her, but she had no corresponding power in regard to him. By old laws of England, the husband was called the lord of the wife; he was literally regarded as sovereign, inasmuch that the murder of a man by his wife was called treason (petty as distinguished from high treason), and was more cruelly avenged than was usually the case with high treason, for the penalty was burning to death. Because these various enormities have fallen into disuse (for most of them were formally abolished, or until they

had long ceased to be practiced) men supposed that all is now as it should be in regard to the marriage contract; and we are continually told that civilization and Christianity have resorted to the woman her just rights. Meanwhile the wife is actual bond-servant of her husband; no less so, as far as legal obligation goes, than slave commonly called. She vows a lifelong obedience to him at the altar, and is held to it all through her life by law. Casuist may say that the obligation of obedience stops short of participation in crime, but it certainly extends to everything else. She can do no act whatever but by his permission, at least tacit. She can acquire no property but for him; the instant it becomes hers, even by inheritance, it becomes ipso facto his.

***A Literature of Their Own* By Elaine Showalter**

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS

The original title of the work was “The Female Literary Tradition and the English Novel” This was changed to the current title by publishers. According to Showalter in the introduction, the new title emanated from John Stuart Mill’s statement, “If women lived in a different country from men, and had never read any of their writings, they would have a literature of their own”. However many critics believe that the title echoes Virginia Woolf’s prized book *A Room of One’s Own*. A literature of their own was first published in 1977. The book attempts to access the contributions of famous and obscure women writers of the English Victorian Age. It provides a record of how the women writers such as George Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Doris Lessing, The Bronte sisters, among many others, reflected the social changes of their societies in their works. It also reviews the critical standards by which the women’s works were judged. Below we quote chapter three titled ‘The Double Critical Standard and The Feminine Novel’

THE DOUBLE CRITICAL STANDARD AND FEMININE NOVEL

To their contemporaries, nineteenth-century women writers were women first, artists second. A woman novelist, unless she disguised herself with a male pseudonym, had to expect critics to focus on her femininity and rank her with the other women writers of her day. No matter how diverse their subject or styles, the knowledge that their individual achievement would be subsumed under a relatively unfavorable group stereotype acted as a constant irritant to feminine novelists.

. . . One form of male resistance ... was to see women novelists as being engaged in a kind of aggressive conspiracy to rob men of their markets, steal their subject matters, and snatch away their young lady readers, to see them as "dominating" because of superior abilities. As late as 1851, there were hardy souls who continued to deny that "there certainly have been some cases women possessed of the properly masculine power of writing books, but these cases are also truly and obviously exceptional, and must without the least prejudiced to the soundness of our doctrine."

Some reviewers found the situation so embarrassing that they had to treat it as an unfortunate accident. In 1853 J. M. Ludlow glumly advised his reader, "we have to notice the fact that at this particular moment of the world's history the very best novels in several great countries happen to have been written by women." By 1855, even before appearance of George Eliot, the emergence of the woman's novel was so striking that readers and reviewers would have agreed with Margaret Oliphant in "this, which is the age of so many things- is quite as distinctly the age of female novelists."

Even those critics who disapproved of changes in the doctrine of two sexual spheres were far from advocating women's retirement from the literary field. The new question of women's place in literature proved endlessly fascinating ... Although most periodical criticism, especially between 1847 and 1875, employed a double standard for men's and women's writing and seemed shocked or chagrined by individual women's failure to conform to stereotypes, a few critics, notably G. H. Lewes, George Eliot, and R. H. Hutton, were beginning to contribute to the art of the novel.

Most of the negative criticism tried to justify the assumption that novels by women would be recognizably inferior to those by men. When the Victorians thought of woman's body and its presumed afflictions and liabilities, they did so, first, because the biological creativity of child birth seemed to them directly to rival the aesthetic creativity of writing. The metaphors of childbirth familiarly invoked to describe the act of writing directed attention towards the possibility of real conflict between these analogous experiences. . . .

American Feminism: A Contemporary History by Ginette Castro

INTRODUCTORY STATEMENTS

This work was originally published in France as *Radioscopie du feminism American* in 1984. It was translated into English by Elizabeth Loverde-Bagwell. In the work, the author attempts to trace the history of the contemporary women's movement in America. It discusses the variety and diversities in the American feminist movements and ideologies. It also attempts to capture

the underlying similarities in the movements. Below is a quote from the chapter titled “Feminist Literary Criticism.”

FEMINIST LITERARY CRITICISM

Feminist literary criticism is one of the latest manifestations of feminism to arrive on the scene. A frankly political approach, it arises because of the emergence of feminist school of literature, and it gives rise in turn to a literature of commitment, for which it defines criteria. . . .

Feminist literary criticism is a daughter of women’s movement. It is engaged in political action, since it is inseparable from feminist philosophy, like any other demonstration for “Women’s Lib.”

Having perceived the underlying foundation of the patriarchal society, that is , the power relationship between the sexes by which the male group officially enthroned as “superior” exercises its domination over the female group classified as “inferior,” feminists became aware that existing literature and literary criticism, up to that point, were based on substratum of sexual politics.

Consequently, according to the editors of female studies, the feminist approach to literature and to literary criticism needs to serve two essential functions. The first is to awaken women to the fact that literature is a masculine institution, which throughout history has never ceased transmitting a patriarchal image to women. This image, which is ever more sophisticated, is the ultimate objectification of the mystery of the menstrual cycle and manna of fecundity, and therefore, as being strange and disturbing- in a word, other. Therefore, literature as a masculine institution must be denounced as an institution of socialization, responsible for offering to both sexes, behavioral models and roles that match the sexual hierarchization and polarization of our patriarchal societies.

This primary function of feminist literary criticism is therefore founded on a double refusal typical of feminist philosophy. It is first a refusal of the alienating conformity that for centuries has condemned women to a sexually defined identity and to an essential impoverishment as a consequence of the arbitrary polarization of human traits into sexual stereotypes and role. The second refusal is even more radical: it is a rebellion against women’s status of “otherness,” in the sense that this “otherness” has been spread throughout every aspect of life, and is synonymous with inferiority in patriarchal terms, since to be other than man is to be less than human. Particularly interesting here, as Bonnie Zimmerman suggests, would be the views of lesbian feminist critics, as both a woman and homosexual, has been as doubly ‘other “other” in the patriarchal stereotyping and mythology.

A second function of feminist literary criticism will be, at some future time, to raise the fundamental issue of generic human consciousness. It is true, feminist critics admit, that at present there exist specifically masculine and feminine perceptions; but, they ask aren’t these precisely the result of social biased socialization?

Feminist criticism raises implicitly that fundamental question to which we are just beginning to address ourselves - need women and men have distinctly different

consciousness? The answer is obviously yes insofar as we are socialized human beings - two genders separated experientially from birth, given different attitudes and several images. But whether the differences in our reproductive organs are accompanied by natural differences in temperament and consciousness is a question to ask, if not yet to answer.

Self-assessment

Read the full text of the essays and write a 250 words summary of each of the canonical works mentioned above.

4.0. CONCLUSION

In the world today women's issues dominate discussions in many areas of life like economics, politics and labour. Women's roles in many aspects of life are being re-examined. Feminism has succeeded to a large extent in creating awareness of the oppression of women. It has also helped to check to a great degree these oppressions. As a literary theory, feminism is contributing its quota in shaping knowledge about women and gender roles cross culturally.

5.0. SUMMARY

1. Feminism has its origin in the struggle for women's rights which began in Europe in the late eighteenth century.
2. Feminism means different things to various people; but it revolves primarily around female experiences.
3. Feminism has been referred to in plural form because of differences in its methodologies, concepts and practices.
4. Feminism's major aim is to combat female oppression and repression in all forms.

6.0 TUTOR MARKED ASSESSMENT

1. In the light of the failure to have a concise universal definition of feminism, discuss the aims and objectives, origin and forms of feminism.
2. In not more than 250 words maximum made up of two paragraphs, summarise the major statements of the following critics:
 - A. Mary Wollstonecraft – *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*
 - B. John Stuart Mill – *On Liberty and the Subjection of Women*
 - C. Elaine Showalter – *A Literature of Their Own*
3. Carry out a feminist literary criticism of ANY ONE of the following texts: Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, Loisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, George Elliot's *Middlemarch*

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MODULE 3: WOMANISM AND RACIAL FEMINIST VARIANTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This module presents other variants of feminism particularly among blacks, African Americans and indigenous Africans. Feminism is mainly a socio-political movement which focuses on women's issues. It concentrates on eradicating the oppression of women in male dominated societies. However, because feminism as a movement originated in Europe and America and was first organized by middle class white women, it tended to focus on the concerns of this group of women to the exclusion of other groups. This has led to the domestication of feminism by different cultures and classes. You will learn about the concept and evolution of womanism, an African American variant of feminism. You will also study about the reception of and response to feminism and womanism in Africa.

2.0. OBJECTIVES

1. To highlight the weaknesses of feminism.
2. To understand the evolution of womanism as a racial variant.
3. To assess the response to feminism and womanism in Africa.

3.0 MAIN CONTENTS

- 3.1 Evolution and Concept of Womanism
- 3.2 Distinguishing Characteristics of Womanism
- 3.3 African Women and Feminism
- 3.4 Ideological Positions of African Female Writers/Critics in Gender Discourse

Unit 1

3.1 EVOLUTION AND CONCEPT OF WOMANISM

Prior to the 1980's, the voices of black females were muted both as writers and activists. Although feminism claimed as its goal the emancipation of all women from sexist oppression, it failed to take into consideration the peculiarities of black females and other women of colour. In practice, feminism concentrated on the needs of middle class white women in Britain and America while posing as the movement for the emancipation of women globally. Patricia Collins (1990:7) contends that even though black women intellectuals have long expressed a unique feminist consciousness about the intersection of race and class in structuring gender, historically, black women have not been full participants in white feminist organizations.

Bell Hooks (1998:1844), the African American literary critic, accuses feminism of excluding blacks from participating in the movement. According to her, feminism in the United States has never emerged from women who are most victimized by sexist oppression; women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically and spiritually; women who are powerless to change their own condition in life. They are the silent majority. Hooks further criticises Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) because though it is heralded as paving the way for contemporary feminist movement, it was written as if the black/ lower class women did not exist. In Hook's opinion racism exists in the writings of white feminists. As a result, female bonding is difficult in the face of ethnic and racial differences. The deficiencies of feminism as practised by middle class white women and the need to evolve a theory or an ideology that caters specifically for the needs of black women folk later led to the development of another variant of feminism called womanism.

The term womanism was coined by Alice Walker in her collection of essays titled *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983). Womanism sums up the aesthetics of black female literary experience. According to Julia Hare quoted by Hudson Weems (1998:1812), “women who are calling themselves black feminists need another word to describe what their concerns areWomen of African descent who embrace feminism do so because of the absence of a suitable existing framework for their individual needs as African women.”

According to Alice Walker (1983: xi - xii), a womanist is:

A black feminist or feminist of color... A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non sexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as a natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength. Sometimes loves individual men sexually and/or non- sexually, committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not a separatist, except periodically for health. Traditionally universalist. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. Loves the spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless: Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender.

A similar term “Africana-womanism was used by Hudson Weems (1991:24), she claims:

Africana-womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture, and therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desires of African women. It critically addresses the dynamics of the conflict between mainstream feminist, the black feminist, the African feminist and the Africana womanist.

The ideology of womanism is now extending beyond the frontiers of Black America. It is being embraced by many women from several African countries and other third world countries as the ideology that defines the experiences of black women in gender discourse.

The term womanism was also used by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi in 1985 to describe the African female experience. Ogunyemi, as quoted by Mary Kolawole (1997:24), defines womanism as “a philosophy that celebrates Black roots, the ideal of Black life, while giving a balanced presentation of Black womanism. It concerns itself as much with the Black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates Blacks.” African Americans in advocating womanism as a black outgrowth of feminism, present womanism as a global ideology that defines the experiences of blacks in the Diasporas, as well as, those residing in the continent. The use of the term black is somehow elastic. Some critics have applied the term black to mean all those people who are nonwhite by descent. Such people may be black Africans or not.

Unit 2

3.2 DISTINGUISHING CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMANISM

Womanism as an alternative theory is distinguished by its focus on the black female experience.

Benard Bell (1987: 242) observes that the preoccupations of African American female writers include:

Motifs of interlocking racist, sexist and classist oppression, black female protagonists, spiritual journeys from victimization to the realization of personal autonomy or creativity, a centrality of female bonding or networking, a sharp focus on personal relationships in the family and community, deeper, more detailed explorations and validation of their epistemological powers of emotions, iconography of women's clothing and black female language.

Three things are central to womanist writings. They include racial issues, classist issues and sexist issues. These are not central to feminist writings. Bell Hooks (1998: 1845) insists that “racism abounds in the writings of white feminists reinforcing white supremacy and negating the possibility that women will bond politically across ethnic and racial boundaries.”

To womanist writers, racial and classist oppression are inseparable from sexist oppression. Many womanist writers even portray racial and classist oppression as having precedence over sexist oppression. This is because the womanists believe that the emancipation of black women folk cannot be achieved apart from the emancipation of the whole race. Womanists therefore believe in partnership with their menfolk. This characteristic distinguishes womanism from feminism which is mainly a separatist ideology.

The Combahee River Collective (1982), a black feminist group states:

We believe that sexual politics under patriarchy is as pervasive in black women's lives as are the politics of class and race. We also often find it difficult to separate race from class or sex oppression because in our lives they are most often

experienced simultaneously. We know that there is such a thing as a racial-sexual oppression which is neither solely racial nor solely sexual, e.g. the history of rape of black women by white men as a weapon of political repression ...We struggle together with Black men against racism, we also struggle with Black men about sexism.

The core themes of black feminist and womanist writings revolve around the history of struggle of black womenfolk in the United States. In attempting to analyze the position of the black woman, Zora Neale Hurston depicts the black woman as "de mule of the world" Nanny, a character in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937:16) states:

de white man is the ruler of everything as far as Ah been able tur find out. May be its someplace way off in de ocean where de black man is in power, but we don't know nothing but what we see. So de white man throw down de load and tell the nigger man tur pick it up. He pick it up because he have to but he don't tote it. He hand it to his women folks. De nigger women is de mule uh the world so fur as ah can see.

Also central to womanist writings is the focus on family relationship and the importance of motherhood. Feminism, on the other hand, tends to derogate the women's role as mothers. Radical feminism views motherhood as a limiting imposition on women. Womanists celebrate motherhood while insisting that women be treated with more respect and that motherhood be valued rather than derogated. Alice Walker's *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1987:237) is an attempt to "look at and identify with our lives the living creativity some of our great-grandmothers were not allowed to know".

Family relationship in African American womanist writings is seen not only in the light of the nuclear family, but the entire community is considered as a family unit. The slave trade in the Americas affected the stability of family relationships. Very often, black children were sold off as slaves to far places at a very tender age. Many of them were too young to know their

biological parents or form any relationship with their parents before being sold off. As a result of this and the carryover of the traditions from Africa where the whole community is usually regarded as a family unit, African Americans developed a sense of communal living where every member of the society is considered a family member.

In addition, womanism is aimed primarily at achieving self-definition and self-actualization for black women. As a result of centuries of racial and sexist oppression black women have been abused. Williams Fannie (1984: 150) opines that “the colored girl... is not known and hence not believed in. She belongs to a race that is best signated by the term 'problem' and she lives beneath the shadow of that problem which enveloped and obscures her.”

Hudson Weems' (1998:1815) agenda for Africana womanism is an apt description of the aims of womanism as an ideology. Weems contends that “the Africana womanist names and defines herself and her movement... She is family centered. The Africana womanist is more concerned with her entire ‘family’ than with just herself and her sisters even though genuine sisterhood is also very important to her reality.” Since womanism is accommodationist in nature she continues: that “the Africana womanist also welcomes male presence and participation in her struggle as her destiny is often intertwined with his in their broader struggle for humanity and liberation for Africans people. She has demonstrated and continues to demonstrate enormous strength both in a physical and psychological sense. Moreover the Africana womanist desires positive male companionship.”

Hudson Weems further affirms the centrality of motherhood in her ideology. She writes about the Africana womanist that “her role as homemaker, as it has always been is much relaxed. She demands respect and recognition in her incessant search for wholeness and authenticity The

Africana womanist is committed to the art of mothering and nurturing her own in particular and humankind in general.”

The search for a black female ideology brought about womanism. Womanism is still essentially aimed at alleviating women's multiple oppression. This feature it shared with feminism. However, the issues addressed in womanism concerns mainly black womenfolk. Womanism differs from feminism because as we have mentioned earlier on, it recognizes the triple oppression of black women. Racial, classist and sexist oppression are identified and fought against by womanists as opposed to feminism which is concerned mainly with sexist oppression. Womanism makes it clear that the needs of the black women differ from those of their white counterparts.

By recognising and accepting male participation in the struggle for emancipation, womanism again differs from feminism in its methodology of ending female oppression. Womanism is rooted in black culture. This fact accounts for the centrality of family, community and motherhood as key issues in womanist discourse. These features of black culture differentiate womanism from feminism.

Unit 3

3.3 AFRICAN WOMEN AND THE REJECTION OF FEMINISM

In 3.2 we examined African American women's response to feminism, the evolution of womanism and its distinctive features. In this segment, we shall consider the African women's reaction to feminism and by extension, their position on womanism.

Gender discourse evolved with the theory of feminism. However, many African women feel uneasy about using the term feminism to denote the African female experience in gender discourse. This is so because there are glaring differences in the perception, world-view and experiences of African women and their Euro-American sisters who evolved the concept of feminism. The awareness that the west (Euro-America) cannot speak authoritatively for Africa, forms the basis of the search for alternative terminologies which adequately address the specificity of African female experiences.

The search for a different theory or concept which is peculiarly African is criticized by some African women while others feel that the quest for a different terminology that more adequately addresses the specificity of African women's yearning as opposed to an imposed or dogmatic position is a wholesome one (Kolawole, 1997:22).

The reasons why some African women tend to reject feminism as the concept which denote the African female experience in gender discourse are many and varied. One of the reasons is the fear of the appropriation of the voices of African women by the existing feminist discourse. A number of African women recognize the fact that self-assertion by African women did not begin with their knowledge of feminism. Mary Kolawole (1997:10) speaks of her maternal grandmother whom she says "was not a feminist but simply a strong African woman. This is because the history of female self-assertion in Africa goes beyond feminism."

Similarly, some African women are opposed to the use of the term feminism because of the tendency of regarding them as merely imitating their Euro-American counterparts. This rejection of feminism is based on what some scholars describe as 'parroting' (Kolawole: 1997). Parroting will negate attempts by African women to inscribe themselves in gender discourse

The issue of cultural relevance is an added major reason for the rejection of feminism by several African women. Many issues that are of primary importance to western feminists have no cultural significance to the African woman. In fact, some proposals of western feminists actually negate cultural values which many African women consider positive. Kolawole (1997:12-13) observes that the role of patriarchy as it undermines women's sexuality is dominant in radical feminist discourse. Many such scholars have proposed very overt demonstrations of sexuality and sexual freedom. They often probe conventional concepts of biological and reproductive roles. Shalsasmith Firestone suggests a neutralization of reproductive role in line with lesbian calls for in vacuo reproduction. Others like Marge Pierson envision a Utopia, in which male and female have the option of "agendered" childbearing. It is obvious that 'agendered' child bearing, lesbianism and vacuo reproduction are not issues that are of immediate concern to African women in addition to the fact that such issues are considered culturally negative and irrelevant in the African world.

Besides these reasons, many African women prefer a different terminology from feminism because of the need to gain the support and acceptance of the African for their ideology and social movement for the emancipation of the African women. Either correctly or erroneously, many African men regard feminism as an imperialistic imposition, or as a rebellious posture which teaches African women to revolt against cultural norms at the same time that it sets them against their men folk. Since many African women realise the need for the support of their men

folk in realising any true emancipation from all forms of oppression, they seek to adopt a conciliatory position that does not whip up negative sentiments in the men.

Unit 4

3.4 IDEOLOGICAL POSITIONS OF AFRICAN FEMALE WRITERS/CRITICS IN GENDER DISCOURSE

African women were portrayed as a 'voiceless' lot who as a result of patriarchal subjugation remained silent victims of oppression. However, this portrayal is no longer the case as the imagery of 'voicelessness' of African women no longer holds true. In recent years the number of African women engaged in gender discourse has increased noticeably. African females are engaged in creative writing, literary criticism and theory. All the genres of literature are being explored as avenues for the African female writers to add their voices to gender discourse. Buchi Emecheta, Bessie Head, Nawal El Saadawi, Zaynab Alkali, Marima Ba, Ifeoma Okoye, Chimamanda Adichie, Akachi Ezeigbo are among the numerous African women engaged in fiction writing. Tess Onwueme, Micere Mugo, Zulu Sofola, Efua Sutherland and Ama Ata Aidoo are the foremost African female dramatists while 'Molara Ogundipe Leslie, Abenia Busia, C. O. Acholonu, Maagoye M. Oluche are engaged in delineating African women's experiences in poetry, among others. African women are also actively involved in the field of literary criticism and theory. The leading African female critics and theorists include 'Molara Ogundipe Leslie, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Katherine Frank and Mary E. Kolawole.

Although many African women evolve a concept that is relevant to the needs of African womanhood, there is a big problem with generating an all-embracing concept which takes care of the vast field of the African women's experiences. Any attempt to generalise all women on a continent as vast and diverse as Africa really poses a big challenge because of many reasons. The reasons which shall be examined presently are responsible for the difficulty which African women are facing in having to lend their voices to gender discourse. African women are still speaking in different voices although their sole aim is the emancipation of the African women

from all kinds of oppression. The multiple voices of African women in gender discourse can be attributed to various reasons

African culture is not homogeneous. It is as varied and diverse as the number of ethnic groups which makes up the continent. Each ethnic group has a culture that is peculiar to it, although it shares similarities with other cultures in the continent. The difference in the cultural backgrounds of African women necessitates a difference in their outlook and world-view. This difference in turn affects the ideological positions and attitudes toward the problems that confront women in Africa.

Aside the differences in cultural background, African females are again influenced by the variation in religious beliefs and background. The three major religions practised on the continent are Christianity, Islam and traditional African religions. The last is in the plural form because the deities worshipped, the beliefs and modes of worship differ. Although the three major religions entrench patriarchal values and contribute to the oppression of women in Africa, they do so through different means.

Another important factor which contributes to the split in the ideological position of African women is the difference in the colonialism which the various regions of African were subject to. Mary Kolawole (1997:4) observes that colonialism brought different kinds of affiliation to the continent. National, ethnic and regional idiosyncrasies, predominant religious influences, modern and post-colonial traditional values intercept the writers' perception and consciousness.

In addition to communal factors which militate against evolving an all-embracing concept in gender discourse by African women, personal factors also play a crucial role in entrenching differences in the ideological positions of African women. It is well known that no two people think exactly alike. Individual differences occur as a result of differences in the experiences.

Even when experiences of people are similar, reactions to similar situations differ. The role which individual differences play in influencing how African women respond to their challenges and oppression is well exemplified in Mariama Ba's *So Long A Letter* (1980) where Ramatoulaye and her friend Aissatou respond to similar situations differently.

In the light of these differences African female writers, scholars and critics speak with multiple voices in gender discourse.

These multiple voices can be classified into three broad groups. The first group consists of African female writers, scholars and critics who identify themselves with feminism. The group deems that the term feminism is adequate to express issues pertaining to women everywhere. As such they see no reason for evolving an alternative concept to substitute feminism. Nonetheless African women in this group often assert their indigenous African world view.

The second group comprises those who are cautious of the implications of the feminist tag. It is noteworthy that some members of this group eventually subscribe to the use of the term in the absence of an appropriate alternative concept to articulate their ideological position. Members of this group are quick to point out the differences between their African brand of feminism and the mainstream feminism of the west. Usually, members of this group append African to feminism to delineate what they consider peculiar to African women from women of other global regions. This gives rise to the term African feminism.

The third group consists of African women who choose to proffer alternative concepts to the theory of feminism. These new concepts are an attempt to indigenize the theory of women in gender discourse. Such concepts are rooted in the peculiar experiences of the African women. Indigenous concepts that have been suggested include Womanism by C. O. Ogunyemi;

Motherism by C. O. Acholonlu, and Stiwanism by Omolara Ogundipe Leslie. These concepts shall be examined in detail later on.

Ama Ata Aidoo is one of the foremost versatile African female writers. Her writings include fiction, poetry, drama, as well as essays and reviews. Ama Ata Aidoo identifies boldly with feminism. She sees nothing wrong in being regarded as a feminist because feminism is basically concerned with the emancipation of womenfolk from all forms of oppression. In her view, the betterment of African women is a prerequisite to the complete independence of the African continent from imperialist domination. Ama Ata Aidoo declares:

When people ask me rather bluntly every now and then whether I am a feminist, I would not only answer yes but I go on to insist that every woman and every man should be a feminist especially, if they believe that Africans should take charge of our land, its wealth, our lives and the burden of our own development because it is not possible to advocate independence for our continent without also believing that African women must have the best the environment can offer. For some of us, this is the crucial element of our feminism (*Criticism and Ideology*, 1988:183).

She believes also that "the position of a woman in Ghana is no less ridiculous than anywhere else. The few details that differ are interesting only in terms of local color and family needs (Morgan (ed.) 1984:259). Although Aidoo identifies boldly with feminism, she feels that the legacy of African women's struggle for emancipation is rooted in the African heritage and is not an imposition from the Western world. According to her, "African women's struggling both on behalf of themselves and the wider community is very much a part of our own heritage. It is not something new and I really refuse to be told I am learning feminism from abroad" (*Criticism and Ideology* 1988: 183).

Abena Busia is another African female scholar who does not shy away from feminism. In the interview with Mary Kolawole (1997: 8) she is quoted as saying “I am comfortable with the term 'feminism'. If we concede the term feminism, we've lost a power struggle. As a strategy, we might be conceding grounds that we shouldn't ... Feminism is an ideological praxis that gives us a series of multiple strategies (of reading, of analysis) and what those strategies have in common is that the woman matters.”

Abena Busia nevertheless admits that "her way of conceptualizing her world as an African is different from that of North American women." (Kolawole 1997: 8-9) Another African female scholar, Aduke Adebayo (1996:3) is of the opinion that feminism is an adequate term for describing women's experiences both in Africa and elsewhere. She contends that the term "feminism" when shorn of its variegated cultural attachments and excesses- still possesses a core programme that adequately synthesises women's experiences worldwide...Feminism is superbly able to describe issues pertaining to Women.

Nawal El Saadawi, the Egyptian medical doctor and writer is among African females who are able to clarify the points of similarities and differences between African feminism and western feminism. She credits western feminist movements for devoting great efforts to the cause of women everywhere. However she maintains that although there are certain characteristics common to these movements all over the world, fundamental differences are inevitable when we are dealing with different stages of economic, social and political development. (*The Hidden Face of Eve* 1980 : ix). For Saadawi, these differences are rooted mainly in the gap between the developed and underdeveloped worlds; in underdeveloped countries liberation from foreign domination often still remains the crucial issue and influences the content and forms of struggle in other areas including women's status and role in society (ix).

Saadawi does not endorse the depiction of the African women's oppression by western feminists as being worse off than that of Euro-American women. Western feminists portray women in African and Arab countries as suffering from a continual submission to medieval systems. They point vehemently to rituals and traditional practices such as female circumcision as evidence of the barbaric oppression to which only women in Arab and African countries are subjected. This attitude leads to a kind of superiority complex in Euro-American women who feel they are better than their sisters in Africa or Arab nations.

Although she condemns female circumcision, Saadawi quarrels with such feelings of superiority on the part of western feminists. She argues, "Women in Europe and America may not be exposed to surgical removal of the clitoris. Nevertheless they are victims of cultural and psychological clitoridectomy." (xiv).

The only viable manner which African and Arab women can achieve their emancipation in Saadawi's opinion is through the formation of a formidable political force. She affirms that freedom for women will never be achieved unless they unite into an organized political force powerful enough and conscious enough and dynamic enough to truly represent half of society. (xv)

Buchi Emecheta, the prolific African female writer, appears wary of being called a feminist. However, by reason of the tendencies in her works and critics' insistence that she is a feminist, she reluctantly accepts the tag of feminism. In the interview with Umeh, as quoted by Kolawole (1997:11) Emecheta avers:

I am a feminist with a small 'f. I love men and good men are the salt of the earth. But to tell me that we should abolish marriage like the capital 'F (feminist) women who say women should live together and all that, I say no. Personally I'd like to see the ideal, happy marriage. But if it doesn't work, for God's sake, call it off.

Obviously Emecheta is horrified at the idea" of lesbianism which some western feminists propose as a viable weapon of female bonding. Although Buchi Emecheta believes in marriage, she thinks that a bad marriage should be terminated. This position is opposed to some writers like Zaynab Alkali and Mariama Ba who through the topicality of their works would rather have women remain in the bond of their marriage till death separates a couple.

Chinkwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi, a literary critic and theorist has proposed the use of the term womanism to replace feminism in African gender discourse. In Ogunyemi's view, womanism is a more authentic term expressing the African woman's experiences. According to Ogunyemi as quoted by Mary Kolawole (1997:36), Black womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideal of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom. It concerns itself as much with the black sexual power tussle as the world power structure that subjugates blacks.

Like the African-American women and other none-whites, Ogunyemi's rejection of feminism is based on certain tendencies in white feminism which she considers unacceptable to the black/African women. Ogunyemi in 'Women and Nigerian Literature' asserts that as an ideology, feminism smacks of rebelliousness, fearlessness', political awareness of sexism and an unpardonable (from the male viewpoint) drive for equality and equity between the two sexes (Ogunbiyi (ed) 1988:64). She further explains that womanism is black-centered. It is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism. Unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between the black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand. It is also interested in communal wellbeing thus extending its ideology, towards a Marxist praxis.

There have been other efforts to posit a theory that is indigenously African in gender discourse. Catherine Acholonu's concept of motherism arose from African women's attempt to indigenize the gender theory. In her book *Motherism* (1995) Acholonu posits the concept of motherism as an African alternative to feminism. Implicit in the concept is the centrality of motherhood in the African female experience.

Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie (1994:1) proposes another term as the African variant of feminism. She names this ideology Stiwanism. In her words:

Stiwa means "Social Transformation Including Women of Africa." I wanted to stress the fact that what we want in Africa is social transformation. It is not about warring with men, the reversal of role, or doing to men whatever women think that men have been doing for centuries, but it is trying to build a harmonious society. The transformation of African society is the responsibility of both men and women and it is also in their interest.

Ogundipe realises that the radical or militant posture of Western feminism has no place in the African context. To effectively rid the African society of all forms of oppression especially sexist oppression, diplomacy is essential for African women. It is this diplomacy she attempts to display in evolving her concept. Ogundipe states:

I have since advocated the word "Stiwanism" instead of feminism, to bypass ... the combative discourses that ensue whenever one raises the issue of feminism in Africa. The new word describes what similarly minded women and myself would like to see in Africa. The word "feminism" itself seems to be a kind of red rag to the bull of African men. Some say the word by its very nature is hegemonic or implicitly so. Others find focus on women in themselves somehow threatening ... Some who are genuinely concerned with ameliorating women's lives sometimes feel embarrassed to be described as 'feminist' unless they are particularly strong in character... (22-23)

The new term describes my agenda for women in Africa without having to answer charges of imitateness or having to constantly define our agenda on the African continent in relation to other feminisms, in particular white Euro-American feminisms which are, unfortunately, under siege by everyone. This new term allows me to discuss the needs of African women today in the tradition of the spaces and strategies provided in our indigenous cultures for the social being of women (23).

African women are presently speaking with multiple voices in feminine discourse. In spite of them the ideological positions of African females there are basic features linking all of them together. They recognise the uniqueness of the African female experience. Furthermore they seek to establish a theory that is culturally and socially relevant to African women. According to Kolawole (1997:6), "they are dealing with African women's questions in different ways but there is room for each in the collective 'compound.'

African females who identify cautiously with feminism, as well as, those who prefer other terminologies recognize the uniqueness of the African woman's experience. Even those who identify boldly with feminism do not deny the fact that there are some differences in the experiences, conception and world view of Africans and other races.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The intersection between theoretical gender analysis and practice continues to generate inquiries and animate scholarship. The challenge of practical application of the gender discourse has resulted in attempts to domesticate feminism as evidenced in the evolution of womanism among black women, as well as other gender concepts in Africa. While it is undesirable to build gender

boundaries indiscriminately, it is important to recognise diversities in the applications of gender theories.

5.0 SUMMARY

In this unit, we have learnt that:

1. Although feminism claimed as its goal, the emancipation of all women from sexist oppression, it failed to take into consideration the peculiarities of black women and other women of colour.
2. The search for a black female ideology brought about womanism. Womanism is distinguished by its focus on the black female experience.
3. Racial, classist and sexist issues are central to womanist writings.
4. Family, community and motherhood are key issues in womanist discourse.
5. Many African women feel uneasy about using the term feminism to denote the African female experience.
6. The awareness that the West (Euro-America) cannot speak authoritatively for Africa, forms the basis for the search for alternative terminologies which adequately address the specificity of African female experiences.
7. There are three broad groups representing the ideological positions of African female writers and critics in gender discourse. These are:
 - i. African women who identify boldly with feminism.
 - ii. African women who are cautious of the feminist tag.
 - iii. African women who proffer alternative concepts to the theory of feminism.

8. The fear of being viewed as 'parroting' white feminists is a major reason for the rejection of feminism by some African women.

In order to make feminism as a theory and practice to fit into the African world it is essential that the concept be made to undergo cultural transformation and indigenization. In the next unit, we shall explore African female fiction in order to elicit the feminist/womanist stance of the writers as evidenced in their works.

4.1 **TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT**

1. Account for the evolution of womanism as an alternative theory to feminism.
2. Highlight the distinguishing characteristics of womanism as it differs from feminism.
3. Discuss the three major ideological positions of African females in gender discourse.
Substantiate your discussion with examples of famous African female writers and critics.
4. Examine the factors that contribute to the split in the ideological position of African women.
5. Evaluate the reasons for the rejection of feminism by some African females.

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MODULE 4 - GENDER DISCOURSE IN AFRICAN FEMALE FICTION

UNIT 1 GENDER POLITICS IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

CONTENTS

1.0 . Introduction

This module is designed to provide you with both a specific and a general view of the status, achievements and experiences of African women in fiction. In this module, we will explore various African women writers and examine the central thrusts and themes of their writings. We will also determine their positions and feminist/ womanist stance from their writings. We will consider the issues of gender politics, the characterization of female and male characters in their work. Using African female fiction, we will endeavour to understand how women's literary expression has been shaped by history, culture, and their experiences, as well as see how they address issues of gender in their respective societies. Our discussions will focus on issues of gender politics, oppression, resistance, domestic violence, marital challenges and male and female characterisations in the novels.

2.0 Objectives:

1. Introduce you to the different female writers of African fiction from various regions.
2. Help you to carry out literary analyses of gender issues in African women fiction.
3. Understand the major thematic thrusts of African female writers

3.0 Main Contents

3.1 Gender Politics in African literature

3.2. Common Themes in African Women's Writings.

3.3. African Women Writers and Gender Issues

3.1. GENDER POLITICS IN AFRICAN LITERATURE

Contemporary society is gender sensitive; hence gender portrayal is a critical and sensitive issue in the writing and interpretations, construction, and deconstructions, of works of literature. Several female critics have condemned what they consider as the image of the weak woman presented by many male African writers. The woman's role in male works is often seen within the bonds of relationships only. Female characters are made marginal to the plot of stories while only a few emerge as powerful and credible protagonists. According to Gloria Chukukere (1995:7), the ideal female created by male writers in fiction often acts within the frame work of her traditional roles as wife and mother. So strong are social values that the respect and love which a woman earns are relative to the degree of her adaptation to these roles.

The pioneer African male writers mirrored patriarchy in their works. The man is often the protagonist and antagonist who dominate other people, while the women are made peripheral and their characters hardly developed. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* provide the classic example of his trend where the man is active but the women are docile and helpless, playing no part in shaping their fate.

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo beats up his wife for failing to provide his meal. In *The Concubine* by Elechi Amadi, Ekwueme attempts to discipline his wife Ahurole to curtail her independent spirit. Cyprian Ekwensi in *People of the City* and the *Jagua Nana* series presents

women as prostitutes that are used by men as distraction from the stress of life. Ekwueme often presents the woman as dependent on the man for her survival.

According to Chukukere (1995), the few outstanding exceptions where women are protagonist in African male writings are the socialist novels of Ngugi wa Thiongo comprising *Petals of Blood* (1974), *Devil on the Cross* (1982) and Ousmane Senebène's historical novel *God's Bits of Wood* (1975). In *Petals of Blood* Ngugi portrays women of strong character like Wanja, Penda, Ndege Touti, among others, who contribute to the success of the revolution. Senebène Ousmane similarly presents women like Penda and Ramatoulaye who defy all odds to liberate their families and societies from the poverty, suppression and subjugation they experience.

In spite of the exceptional portrayal of some politically active and morally strong women, the dominant characters in African male writings are men.

Little wonder Chikwenye Ogunyemi (1988:60) describes Nigerian literature as "Phallic, dominated as it is by male writers and male critics who deal almost exclusively with male characters and male concerns, naturally aimed at a predominantly male audience". Similarly Femi Ojo-Ade (1983:158-159) posits that African literature is a male created, male oriented chauvinistic art. An honor roll of our literary giants clearly proves that point.... Men constitute the majority and women the minority."

The unfavorable portrayal of women by African male writers ignited a literary outburst which culminated in female writers' attempt to counter the impaired picture of African womanhood by reversing the roles of women in African fiction written by men. African female writers began to present female protagonists who are pitted against all odds, yet emerge liberated and determined to exist without the man.

In a typical African female writing, the woman is the protagonist. She is often industrious, dynamic and resourceful rather than weak, docile and dependent. Female characters are imbued with qualities of independence, dynamism and industry which the society and writers hitherto associated with the male. This is the case in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*, Nawal EL Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter*, Zaynab Alkali's *The Still Born*, among many others. It is noteworthy that in recent works, female writers reveal some of their heroines' weaknesses, thus making their works credible and realistic.

One reason for the foregrounding of female experiences is that female-authored work is usually concerned about the women's experiences in the society. Although, many female writers focus on the domestic experiences of their female characters, others depict women in politics, commerce, economy and administration. Women writers in Africa generally criticize the negative atmosphere created by the uneven socio-cultural setting of the society which hinders the woman's complete happiness and self-fulfillment.

In all, African female writers have succeeded in reversing the patriarchal image of women as docile helpless beings with no control over their own fate.

The tendency of the over-glorification of the African woman is often accompanied with a corresponding demonisation of man in African female writings. Male characters in many early African female writings were mostly villains, often strong physically but morally weak. They appear as tyrants, chauvinists who have no regard or respect for the feelings of the women. Sometimes they are even physically weak, yet possess a domineering disposition and myopic chauvinist attitude. Nevertheless, the trend in recent writings appears to be more tolerant of men, allowing for general human weaknesses.

Many African women have come to the realization that an over glorification of the woman, compounded by a demonization of the male, rather than advance their aims of liberating African womanhood might jeopardize the goal since it re-echoes the radical feminist stand, which many African female writers and critics condemn.

In addition, this inclination reduces the value of their writings and readers tend to dismiss their works as unrealistic, lacking authenticity and mere biased writings of women with personal domestic problems and literature of women who have a grouse to pick with men. In recent African female writings, particularly Nigerian literature, there appears to be an attempt to correct the lopsidedness in previous female writings by a conscious refrain from demonizing the male.

Nevertheless, in African female writings, female characters and experiences are fore-grounded while the male characters and experiences are back-grounded.

To facilitate your deeper understanding of gender politics in African literature, we shall carry out an analysis of Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds* with the aim of exploring gender politics in the text.

Gender Politics in Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds*

In *Behind the Clouds*, Ifeoma Okoye presents Ije, the heroine as a loving, hardworking, devoted, dynamic and mortally strong woman. Prior to her marriage to Dozie, she worked tirelessly to pay his school fees while in England. Despite her childlessness, 'she loved Dozie dearly...' (*Behind the Clouds*: 22). Although desperate for a solution to her apparent childlessness, Ije rejects Apostle Joseph's outrageous suggestion that she sleeps with him and have a child as did her friend. Ije resolves never to visit Apostle Joseph again. This action suggests that she would rather remain childless. For Ije, immorality was not an option.

Furthermore, Ije is resolute, brave and strong in decision making. According to the narrator:

Ije had been the brains behind his successes. When he vacillated between resigning his job in the ministry and striking out on his own, it was Ije who came to his aid and urged him to take the plunge... Ije had kept her job and of her own free will had given him all her salary... through dint of hard work she had helped Dozie into becoming a rich successful architect (*Behind the Clouds*: 63)

In contrast to his brave and adventurous wife, Dozie, although, loving, hard working and successful had a weakness:

He was a hardworking and intelligent man who knows his job well. His only flaw was his inability to take decisions easily and stick to them. Every change was a risk and he hated taking risks (*Behind the Clouds*: 70)

Dozie's flaws extend beyond his professional life. His weakness becomes apparent in his failure to check his mother's excesses in his running down, embarrassing and insulting his wife Ije. Moreover, after his one night affair with Virginia, he claimed to be handling the matter such that Virginia bagged into his house and affirmed "I've made up your mind for you" (*Behind the Clouds*: 77).

To worsen the situation Dozie also fails to handle Virginia's excesses and stop her from harassing Ije, his rightful wife. This, in fact, is the last straw that broke the proverbial camel's back for Ije, coping with Dozie's infidelity was hardly tolerable since she thought herself barren but, her fragile world shattered completely when Dozie fails to resolutely defend her in the face of Virginia's false accusation that she intended to poison Dozie.

By portraying Ije's emotional weakness at this point, Ifeoma Okoye paints for us an unbelievable picture of a superwoman, but an authentic portrayal of a feminine character although strong, adventurous and dynamic, nevertheless prone to tears and emotional disturbance when sorely tried. Ije fails to fight for her right as Ugo advises but allows the crisis to overwhelm her until she breaks down completely and becomes an emotional wreck. Thanks to the survived.

Besides the portrait of the heroine Ije and her husband Dozie, the portrayal of the other characters in the novel is important for the total understanding of the intrigues of gender politics in *Behind the Clouds*. In the novel, other female characters comprise the good, the bad and the ugly. Ugo Ushie epitomizes all the qualities of a healthy friendship between women. Ije and Ugo are childhood friends who are separated after their graduation from secondary school. While Ugo attends the Teachers Training College in Umahia, Ije travels to England to further her education. They kept up their friendship and become reunited when Ije returns and both of them settle down in Enugu. Unlike Ije, Ugo birthed three children and enjoys a happy marriage. She however sympathizes with her friend who has challenges in her marriage because of her perceived barrenness.

Ugo Ushie as a sensitive and understanding friend is skilled in stabilizing Ije's erratic moods. She subtly maneuvers discussions such that when Ije is moody "Ugo Ushie could detect the glitter of tears in her friend's eyes. She tactfully changed the topic of their discussion" (*Behind the Clouds: 31*)

Faced with the shocking betrayal of her husband, Ije runs to Ugo who advises her against leaving her home. A touching scene which exposes the bond between the two women is unraveled below. Referring to Ugo, the narrator reveals:

She led her friend into the bathroom and made her wash her tear-stained face with cold water. Then she took her into the bedroom and made her powder her face (*Behind the Clouds: 76*)

Furthermore when Ije breaks down emotionally and takes ill, the house maid summons Ugo. Then Ugo and her husband take Ije to the hospital and care for her. She also helps to reunite Ije and Dozie as she tactfully prods her friend to forgive and accept Dozie back. The relationship between Ugo and Ije exemplifies Alice Walker's definition of a womanist:

...A woman who loves other women; sexually / or non sexually, appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counter-balance of laughter) and woman's strength... (Alice Walker 1982:2)

Another female character, Beatrice also happens to be Ije's secondary school mate. However it is their search for children that really brings the two barren (?) women together when they meet at the Blest Clinic. Beatrice confides in Ije that if Dr. Melie fails to solve her problem she would visit the faith healers. Dr. Melie fails and later Beatrice visits Ije with a four month pregnancy-the apparent fruit of faith.

Beatrice persuades Ije to try the option of Apostle Joseph who solves her problem, when fasting and prayers again fail in Ije's case. Apostle Joseph suggests she sleeps with him like Beatrice, her friend. Ije is disgusted and confirms from Beatrice that she is really carrying Apostle Joseph's baby. Despite the revelation, Ije refuses to condemn Beatrice since that was the only apparent way to save her marriage.

Here the play of gender politics also becomes apparent as the author does not vilify Beatrice for her unfaithfulness. Although Ije's dignity is held up against Beatrice's ignominy Beatrice's position is explained and deemphasized.

Dozie's mother (mama) is another character who represents the ugly among the female characters. Her persona is described thus:

She was a domineering woman. When her husband was alive, it was she who ruled the house. Her husband was a man of few words who hated scenes, allowed her to have her way if only to have some peace in the house (*Behind the Clouds*: 42).

It was mama who harassed Ije the most for failing to give her a grandchild. She consistently abused, embarrassed and insulted Ije, and called her a prostitute among other ugly names. Mama

did not only harass Ije she constantly pushed her son Dozie to marry a second wife and wholly supported Virginia's plot to hijack Dozie's matrimonial home.

Virginia epitomises all that is ugly in women. She is a schemer, manipulator and a gold digger. She takes advantage of Dozie's predicament to impose on him a pregnancy not sired by him in order to extort money from him. Ifeoma Okoye does not make any attempt to excuse mama or Virginia; this authenticates her work as realistic because men or women, there are the good and the bad among both men and women.

Okoye also makes realistic portrayal of male characters in *Behind the Clouds*. Apostle Joseph is portrayed as a hypocrite who justifies adultery in the name of helping women to bear children. Ayo, Ugo Ushie's husband appears to be a complete gentle man. Dozie too despite his weakness is represented as a "night's mistake" resulting from drunkenness. Unlike most men he consults Ije's opinion before taking any decision on family and business. It is a note-worthy that Dozie admits his sterility. It takes a real man to admit such a short coming. Many African men in his shoes would discountenance the result of the medical test and keep blaming the wife for the infertility. Such men would likely keep Virginia for the simple reason of making their masculine failure a secret.

Ifeoma Okoye attempts a realistic portrayal of male and female characters in *Behind the Clouds*. She depicts both positive and negative characters, strengths and weaknesses of both male and female characters and achieves authenticity. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the writer is not totally immune from the feminine bias of her gender. In the fashion of womanist writers, she focuses on the female experience. In addition, although she tried to portray male characters with their strengths and weaknesses, the weaknesses are more obvious than the strengths. Similarly, she foregrounded the strength of her female characters and makes some attempt to excuse some

of their actions. An instance is her excusing Beatrice, arguing that “My infidelity saved my marriage for my husband was on the verge of sending me out and taking a new wife” (*Behind the Clouds*: 61). On the other hand Apostle Joseph is not given any credit for salvaging Beatrice’s marriage but castigated for his hypocrisy and adultery.

Unit 2

3.2 COMMON THEMES IN AFRICAN WOMEN'S WRITINGS

This section gives a general overview of common or recurrent themes found in African female fiction. It provides you with illustrations from several literary texts authored by African women from the various regions.

One of the common themes treated in female authored-African fiction is the lack of choice of husbands for women. In most cases, the challenges of the African woman in marriage begin even before the marriage is contracted. It is customary in most indigenous African communities for parents/ guardians to decide or at least approve the proposed spouse of their children or ward. Where the parents make the choice, often times, the feelings of the woman are completely ignored. She is pushed into a loveless marriage with consequent problems. In contemporary times the practice of choosing a husband for a girl appears to have reduced considerably, nevertheless it is imperative for the parents to sanction their children's choice. Where the families withhold their blessings, the marriage usually becomes moot. This is the case with Buchi Emecheta's *The Bride Price* (1976).

Loneliness is another serious challenge facing many married women in Africa. It would appear a contradiction since one of the major reasons for marriage is to avoid loneliness. However in most loveless marriages, the woman is subject to acute loneliness. Li in *The Still Born* (1984) and Ramatoulaye in *So Long a Letter* (1981), are fictional examples of the lonely married syndrome.

The agony of women in polygynous marriages is also a familiar theme of African women's writings. Polygyny is a phenomenon sanctioned by most African communities. The traditional African religion promotes its practice, the Islamic faith supports polygyny, and the Christian faith which supposedly forbids it, turns blind eyes to the common situation in Africa where a

man legally marries a wife but keeps concubines who bear children for him outside the matrimonial home. Faku's experiences in *The Still Born* (1984) reveal the misery of the predicament of many women entrapped in polygynous marriages. The feelings of rejection, betrayal and abandonment suffered by many women are adequately captured by Miriama Ba in *So Long a Letter* (1981).

In addition, child-rearing burdens often fall solely or heavily on the women if the husband is irresponsible. In many instances of polygynous marriages, each woman caters solely for her children. Child rearing responsibilities are heavy burdens for women when not shared by the man. Li and Awa in *The Still born* (1984), Adah in *Second Class Citizen* (1974) provide fictional illustrations of the frustrating experiences of women bearing almost single-handedly child rearing responsibilities

The woes of barren women are also commonly catalogued by African female writers. Flora Nwapa, one of the earliest African female writers, explores this theme in *Efuru* (1984). In addition, this is the main theme of Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Cloud* (1982). Akachi Ezeibgo also captures this in *The Last of The Strong Ones* (1991).

Though forbidden by law, wife-battering, a global problem, is still a common practice among many Africans today. Most women tolerate these inhuman violations of their persons in order to avoid a divorce or separation. Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus* is a case in point. Usually, where women take legal actions (where they are aware of their rights) the marriage ends in divorce.

What then are the solutions to the various challenges facing women in marriage? It is obvious that there is no single solution. Various solutions have been proffered as evidence by the positions of different writers and critics. Some of the solutions include divorce, separation, remaining single, rebellion and revenge in the form of prostitution and other forms of anti-social

behaviours. In extreme cases some women physically harm or kill their husbands and other people regarded as responsible for their oppression.

Many of the above solutions have proved unsatisfactory. Rebellion and revenge often lead to lack of self-fulfillment and ultimately self-destruction. This is the case with Firduas in *Woman at Point Zero* (1975). Similarly Adaku in *Joys of Motherhood* (1980) takes to prostitution and becomes a threat to many happy homes.

Divorce and separation which may sometimes provide an escape for many women also have their set-backs. Very often the woman still suffers (perhaps less) and the children suffer more. Where the woman remarries, she may be faced with similar problems. Esi in *Changes* (1993) divorces her husband on the excuse that she does not love him; she marries Ali, an already married man and again divorces him. She ends up as Ali's mistress- a miserable solution since she finds no.

In order to illustrate some of the common themes in African female writings, we shall explore the theme of domestic violence in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*.

Domestic Violence in *Purple Hibiscus*

"Things started to fall apart at home" These words open the story of Kambali's domestic setting as the heroine (Kambali) unfolds the mood of her prison-like home where violence, lack of freedom, religious fanaticism and solid silence define the atmosphere in the home. The reader is introduced to Kambali's family where her father, Eugene dominates every aspect of the home. Eugene is a wealthy businessman and a fighter for democracy through his newspaper, *The Standard*. He is also a human rights award winner, a devout catholic and church financier, a famous philanthropist and a community leader. Fifteen year old Kambali and her elder brother

Jaja are restricted by their father's fanaticism. They know and do very little beyond the schedules that their father evolves for sleeping, eating, reading, studying and attending services, which they must adhere to absolutely, even when they are away from home. Any deviation from strict adherence to the schedule draws a heavy punishment. Jaja's refusal to attend mass and go for the confession of his supposed sins causes Eugene to fling his heavy missile at him. Kambili's transgression of keeping her grandfather's portrait incurs her a near- mortal beating which lands her in the hospital for months. Kambili and Jaja have hot water poured on their feet for not confessing to their father that his father (their grandfather, Papa Nnukwu) slept under the same roof with them at aunty Ifeoma's house. Papa Nnukwu's offence is that he refuses to abandon his inherited indigenous religion in favour of the Catholic religion which his son embraced and promotes.

This singular offence makes Eugene refuse to visit or take care of his father. It is at the community's intervention that he seldom sends money and allows the children to visit Papa Nnukwu once a year for not more than fifteen minutes with strict orders never to eat or drink at their grandfather's house. Kambili's lapse of disobeying this order earns her a slap. Papa Nnukwu's punishment does not end at this. Eugene threatens to deny his father a befitting burial if he remains a traditionalist. He carries out his threat by refusing to attend the burial and forbidding his family members to do so. He however sends money, only when aunty Ifeoma spited him and decided to give their father a befitting burial despite Eugene's refusal. Eugene's rigidity makes no room for human compassion as Kambili, Jaja and their mother receive heavy battering for breaking the Eucharistic fast because Kambili was experiencing menstrual pain and needed to eat and take some medications to enable her attend to the service.

Beatrice, Eugene's wife, watched helplessly as her husband inflicts injuries on their children in the name of discipline or love after which she nurses them. She fares even worse than her children as she receives battering that cause several miscarriages. Her offences include her reluctance to visit the reverend father after church service because she was feeling weak and nauseated from early pregnancy symptoms. For an unnamed wrongdoing, Eugene breaks a heavy mahogany table on her stomach, which causes another miscarriage of her six week pregnancy.

Eugene's violence in the home transcends physical violence to physiological violence. He publicly embarrasses Kambili by asking her if the girl who came first had two heads. In the current term Kambili came second in class. Jaja also has his fingers mutilated for not coming first in his class.

In the home Eugene not only has the final say but also all the say. Every one depended on his decision so much that when the family needed new curtains, Beatrice commented "Papa would decide the colors" (*Purple Hibiscus*: 94). When invited to spend their holidays with aunty Ifeoma, Jaja immediately replies "if papa said it is alright" Beatrice's roles are simply to supervise the house girl, prepare meals, serve the food and nurse the children back to health after battering from their father. Her relationship with her husband is more of a slave-master relationship.

The paradoxical twist is the sharp contrast between Eugene's public personality and his behaviour at home. The irony in the situation is Eugene's reasons for being the domestic despot that he turns out to be. He claims that love and the desire to discipline his children account for the torture he subjects his family to. In order to demonstrate his love for his family, he makes them to take what he describes as 'love sips'. They each take a sip from his tea but Kambili

comments ‘the tea was always too hot, burned my tongue but it didn’t matter because I knew when the tea burned my tongue, it burned papa’s love into me’ (*Purple Hibiscus*: 8).

In other words his supposed love is forceful and harmful, yet cannot be rejected despite the suffering it causes. In the church Eugene is completely engrossed in the sermons, cutting the image of a living saint, seeming more pious than the Pope himself. According to Kambili “papa always sat in the front pew for mass... most people did not kneel to receive communion but papa did (*Purple Hibiscus*: 4). Furthermore, Father Benedict usually used Eugene to illustrate the gospels. He always referred to Pope, papa and Jesus in that order. Papa always wore a blank face while accolades are poured on him, and then he goes home to batter his wife and throw missiles at his children.

On the international scene Eugene wins a human rights award by amnesty world yet the faintest principles of human freedom are not observed in his home. His wife and children are never free to express their opinion or make choices. The slightest resemblance of independent thinking is severely punished as rebellion. His family members are forced to live according to his rules and rigid schedules. When Jaja refuses to go for mass, Eugene throws the missiles at him. Beatrice is forced to visit the priest though she was very sick and afterwards she received severe beatings for her initial reluctance. Jaja and Kambili are forced to confess whatever their father perceives as sin in spite of their convictions otherwise. The priest is given early information about such ‘offences’ and he connives with Eugene to ensure his children confess staying under the same roof in aunty Ifeoma’s house with their grandfather, a pagan.

More so, for his generosity Eugene won the title *omelora* “the one who does good for the community”. He gives out money to the villagers like a money god. At charismas, he feeds the whole village, except his father to whom he sends paltry sums through the driver merely at

charismas only after his relatives pleaded with him to allow his children greet their grandfather. Similarly, his widowed sister, aunty Ifeoma struggles alone with her children and receives no help from her affluent brother. In the face of Eugene's seeming deep, religious experience, the reader is constrained to conclude that Eugene is a great hypocrite.

After examining the depiction of violence, it is important to evaluate the reactions to violence in the novel. Beatrice's passive posture in the face of oppression, violence and tyranny is perhaps not surprising as it speaks of the larger situation of severe women in the nation. According to Ezeigbo (1990:16), women have a tendency to keep quiet and suffer in silence. This is because society has always prescribed silence, reticence, complaisance, patience and gentleness as the greatest virtues of the feminine gender.

Beatrice displayed tolerance and stock resignation to her family's oppression. She hardly speaks. According to Kambili, Beatrice spoke the way birds eat, in small amounts (*Purple Hibiscus*: 20) and there was so much that she did not mind" (*Purple Hibiscus*: 19) when challenged by aunty Ifeoma to emancipate herself even if it meant leaving Eugene and she replies "where would I go if I leave Eugene's house? Tell me, where would I go. Do you know how many mothers pushed their daughters at him? Do you know how many asked him to impregnate them even and not bother paying the bride price?"

Beatrice's stoic acceptance of Eugene's irrational behaviour is rooted in her perception and myopic world view. She feels indebted to her husband because he did not take another wife despite the fact that she has only two children and several miscarriages caused by his battering. Similarly, Kambili and Jaja experience stunted maturation in their emotional and psychological development. It was not until their visit to Nsukka with their aunt's family that they discovered their voices and asserted themselves. Kambali and Jaja were affected so much by the violence

and restrictions in their home that they could not speak at home and also found themselves reticent among their peers outside the home. The children were so maladjusted that their cousins in Nsukka initially found them ‘strange’, very strange indeed.

There are glaring differences in the attitudes of Jaja and Kambili when compared to their cousins – Amaka and her siblings. Auntie Ifeoma’s children are assertive. They are able to speak their minds without fear because they have been raised in a truly democratic and free family atmosphere. While not condoning indiscipline, auntie Ifeoma allows her children to mature and hold opinions of their own. In addition, the children know their duties and perform them from a sense of responsibility and not fear. The children are allowed to contribute to decision making in the family.

While Beatrice and her children are reticent, auntie Ifeoma is assertive. She speaks up and never allows Eugene to intimidate her. Surprisingly, despite the fact that she challenges Eugene she is often able to have her way with him. Auntie Ifeoma succeeds in making Eugene release Kambili and Jaja to spend their holidays with her, she is able to persuade him allow them to watch the traditional festivities against his fanatical religious convictions and even release money for Papa Nnukwu’s burial. It is in Nsukka, with auntie Ifeoma’s family that Kambili and Jaja are able to experience freedom of speech and action coupled with responsible behaviour. At last they mature and are able to assert themselves and get rid of their father’s domination.

For many readers, the disclosure at the end of the story that Beatrice poisoned Eugene is a bolt from the blue. All the years of forbearance and silence in the face of heavy battering, mauling, mutilations, oppression and subjugation had built up in Beatrice the deadly poison of revenge. Possibly, her action results from mere desperation to be free. However, it is a pity that she

eventually succumbs to a state of mild insanity after her supposed liberation. This may be due to the fact that Jaja, her son chooses to suffer imprisonment for his mother's crime.

Following the practice of many African women writers, domestic issues are fore-grounded in *Purple Hibiscus*. It is obvious that there is an intertwining of the domestic with the larger socio-political issues in Africa, particularly Nigeria. The novel is a testimony that the home is merely a microcosm of the society as Eugene's tyrannical actions parallel those of African political despots. Eugene like many male characters in African female fiction is the bigot, chauvinist oppressor per excellence. Beatrice, on the other hand, is an icon of the tacit, voiceless subjugated African woman who accepts her oppression in a stoic spirit. Aunty Ifeoma models the contemporary liberated African who knows exactly what she wants and how to get it without being unnecessarily domineering and aggressive. Papa Nnukwu mirrors the traditional African values devoid of abuse, bastardizations and misrepresentations. Kambili emerges at last as a budding young woman who like the purple hibiscus, opens up and matures despite her hostile environment. It appears she is the one who would not let all things fall completely apart.

Unit 3

3.3. AFRICAN WOMEN WRITERS AND GENDER ISSUES

In this section, we shall examine the works of Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo, Nawal El Saadawi, Mariama Ba and Zaynab Alkali to determine the various positions taken by these writers on gender issues as they affect the African woman. This will help you to have practical engagements with gender issues in African literature.

BUCHI EMECHETA

In her works, Buchi Emecheta presents the African woman as a helpless victim of tradition. Since African tradition is largely based on the patriarchal structure, it is often considered a veritable means of oppression against the African woman. In Emecheta's fiction, African women who attempt to break free from the noose of the rigid, oppressive culture and tradition eventually end up in self-destruction or get estranged in the process.

The Bride Price (1976) is the telling tale of the victimisation of the African woman through the man centered African tradition. Aku-nna, the heroine is a young orphaned girl who attempts to live a life free from the shackles of tradition by marrying the man of her choice despite her family's objection. Aku-nna's family opposes her marriage to Chike because he is an 'osu' descendant (slave). This has serious cultural implications. For example, the free-born is forbidden to marry or interact with the 'osu' because the latter, a slave, is dedicated as sacrificial beings to some divinity. But this was long ago. At the time Emecheta's story is set, it is no longer a popular practice even though the dust of the taboo is yet to completely clear. This is because the idea of slavery is no longer topical. It is largely a custom stigma for a free-born to marry an 'osu'. This explains why the huge bride price by Chike's father to Aku-nna's family is rejected

regardless of the deep love Aku-nna has for Chike. As far as her family is concerned, Chike is an 'osu' and as such the proposed union is not sanctioned by tradition.

While the young lovers are awaiting the consent of Aku-nna's family, she is kidnapped in marriage to Okoboshi a hated classmate of hers. Aku-nna escapes sexual interaction with Okoboshi on the wedding night through guile and deception. She elopes with Chike to whom she finally gets married, legally, in court.

According to the custom of the land, a young girl whose bride price is not paid but gets married against the tradition suffers death during her first delivery. Aku-nna gets married to Chike legally but the bride price was rejected by her family. She nevertheless lived happily with Chike. The marital bliss is short-lived. Aku-nna falls ill during her first pregnancy and finally dies during the delivery even though Joy, the baby girl, survives. The authorial remark is opposite here:

So it was that Chike and Aku-nna substantiated the traditional superstition they had unknowingly set out to eradicate... If a girl wished to live long and see her children's children, she must accept the husband chosen for her by her people, and the bride price must be paid. If the bride price was not paid, she would never survive the birth of her first child. It was a psychological hold over every young girl that continues to exist... why this is so is as the saying goes is anybody's (*The Bride Price*: 168).

In *The Bride Price*, Emecheta seems to warn against defying tradition. Buchi Emecheta further portrays how the patriarchal structure deprives women of self-actualization. A father is regarded as the head and master of the home. Everyone, including the wife, looks up to the father of the home for sustenance. This explains why at the death of Ezekiel Ochia, his family had to return to the village in order to be re-absorbed into his extended family. This is because "a fatherless

family is a family without head, a family without shelter, a family without parents, in fact a non-existing family” (28).

Nnado’s education up to secondary school is insured even after Ezekiel’s death, but no such provision is made for Aku-nna because she is a girl. Fortunately, Aku-nna is allowed to stay on in school until she completes standard six after her father’s death because the longer she stays in school, the higher the bride price that is expected on her. Women submit to this kind of deprivation because according to auntie Uzo, “This is the fate of us women. There is nothing we can do about it. We just have to accept it” (38).

In *The Slave Girl* (1977), Emecheta again depicts the tyrannical hold of tradition on African woman. Ogbanje Ojebetta is sold into slavery by her brother. After her mistress’s death, Ojebetta finds the courage to break the yoke of slavery which her mistress’s children desire to continue to impose upon her. She returns to her village, Ibuza, only to be entrapped by the cultural norms and tradition. In *Head Above Water* (1986:3), Buchi Emecheta writes to Ojebetta:

My mother, Alice Ogbanje Ojebetta-Emecheta...
that slave girl who had the courage to free herself
and return to her people in Ibuza and still stooped
and allowed the culture of her people to reenslave
her, and then permitted Christianity to tighten the
knot.

Ojebetta marries Jacob because the tradition dictates that she gets married at the time she does. Ojebetta’s marriage to Jacob is presented as another kind of slavery. The story ends with “Ojebetta, now a woman of thirty-five, is changing masters” (*The Slave Girl*: 190).

In *Second Class Citizen* (1974), Buchi Emecheta presents a different picture of women. As a result of education, women can confront unjust patriarchal customs and break free even if it costs them their marriage. Adah, the protagonist of the novel is believed by some critics to be a fictional representation of Buchi Emecheta herself. Adah refuses to submit herself to continuous exploitation and abuse at the hands of an indolent husband and his selfish family members. Although Adah is reluctant to end the marriage, she is forced to leave her husband and she later finds fulfillment in a writing career. Adah's marriage to Francis limits her creativity and potential for developing herself. Francis refuses to allow her fulfill herself in writing. He does not want a writer for a wife because his family would object to such a thing. Apart from debarring Adah from writing, Francis sexually abuses her, beats her, maltreats her and spends her income selfishly while he fails in his responsibility to provide for his home.

In Emecheta's fiction, marriage is presented as a kind of slavery for women. This is why Ojebetta in *The Slave Girl* (1977) is said to be changing masters when her husband returns the money initially paid on her as a slave to Clifford.

In *The Joys of Motherhood* (1980), Nnaife, who is a servant, attempts to dominate and enslave his wivies. Emecheta's fictional characters often opt out of oppressive marriages. Adah divorces Francis in *Second Class Citizen* (1974) while Adaku moves out of Nnaife's house and later becomes a prostitute in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1980). According to Jennifer Breen (1990:11):

Although the world of a novel is not an embodiment of the author's beliefs about her actual world, a fictional world often implies a world view that can be deduced from the way the behavior of the characters is constructed in the fictional world.

Emecheta through her fictional works, as well as in real life clearly believes that if marriage becomes unbearable for the woman, she should opt out of it.

AMA ATA AIDOO

Ama Ata Aidoo like Buchi Emecheta explores the influence of the tradition on the African woman in her works. However, in her fictional works considered in this study, Aidoo does not present women as victims of tradition in the same way that Buchi Emecheta does. Even though the women in Aidoo's works are prone to male domination, they are able to chart the course of their own lives.

In *Changes* (1991), Esi, the protagonist, decides to divorce Oko, her husband on the ground that she feels gratitude for him, not love. She also complains that her husband makes enormous demand on her time, and that interferes with her activities as a career woman. Finally, she accuses him of committing "marital rape." Despite the disapproval of her family members and warnings from her friend Opokuya, Esi goes ahead to divorce Oko. She gives up her only daughter to the care of her mother-in-law although the decision is against her will.

Esi falls in love with Ali Kondey and becomes his second wife. In contrast to her first husband, Ali does not give Esi adequate time and attention. He buys her expensive gifts to compensate for the lack of attention. Esi is dissatisfied with the arrangement since she is lonely most of the time. She ends up separating from Ali and "they became, just good friends who found it convenient once in a while to fall into bed and make love" (164). Esi refrains from criticism from her family and the society.

Through Esi, Aidoo presents the plight of both single and career women in the African society. A career woman chooses between putting her best into her career and losing her family. When Esi claims that she competes effectively with her male colleagues by attending all meetings and conferences, and that she gives extra time to her job, Opokuya points out that her male colleagues still have their families while she has lost hers. According to Opokuya "we can't have

it all. Not if you are a woman” (49). Esi chooses to be single but she realizes that “our societies do not admit that single women exist ... yet single women have always existed here too” (47).

Aidoo juxtaposes the perceptions and world view of the older generation against the modern generation. The values of modern women are different from those of the more conservative older generation. In response to Esi’s confession that she is not divorcing her husband because of his infidelity or his abuse of her person, but because she only feels gratitude to him instead of love, Esi’s grandmother admonishes her;

And who told you that feeling grateful to a man is not enough reason to marry him? My lady, the world would die of surprise if every woman openly confessed the true reason why she married a certain man (4).

Esi’s grandmother further declares:

Love? ... Love? ... Love is not safe... love is dangerous. It is deceitfully sweet like the wine from a fresh palm tree at dawn. Love is fine for singing about and love songs are good to listen to and sometimes even to dance to. But when we need to count on human pennies for food for our stomachs, and clothes for our back, love is nothing ... The last man any woman should think of marrying is the man she loves (42).

In contrast to Esi, Fusena, Ali’s first wife decides to abide by the traditional dictates. She remains married to Ali despite his decision to take Esi as a second wife. Though the decision for Fusena is an unhappy one, but she thinks it wise to make the best of a bad situation. Fusena attempts to dissuade Ali from marrying Esi by asking the elders to intervene on her behalf. But the elders eventually support Ali’s decision. They send elderly women to persuade Fusena to consent to her husband’s second marriage. The elderly women realize with Fusena that “It was a man’s world. You only survived if you knew how to live in it as woman” (107).

Like Esi, Fusena is educated although she is not a University woman. She is also economically self-sufficient yet she chooses to remain in her marriage to Ali despite his second marriage. At the end of the story, she is not a complete loser since Ali still regards the place where Fusena stays with her children as 'home'.

In *Changes* (1991), the female characters know the importance of motherhood and esteem its institution. Nevertheless, they are not prepared to subjugate their lives to those of their children. While Opokuya enjoys her role as a mother, Esi sometimes seeks escape from mothering and agrees to leave her daughter in the care of her mother-in-law because it is much more convenient for her and the child. Again, Esi uses family planning devices despite Oko's objection to them. She does not want to give birth to children that she will have no time to bring up.

Tuzyline later in the novel comments:

Indeed as *Changes* vividly demonstrates, the cult of motherhood has no fanatical following among Aidoo's female characters – another of the author's distinctive characteristics. Far from lacking maternal instinct, the women in the novel nonetheless show no signs of yielding to its culturally enforced power (186).

Esi realises "she could never be as close to her mother as her mother was to her grandmother (174). One might add that Esi's daughter could never be as close to her as she was to her own mother.

Again, Tuzyline Allan notes:

Aidoo's creative imagination has no room for the drama of victimization believed to preoccupy African women writers. Missing from the work is the painstaking delineation of oppression by such writers as Buchi Emecheta and Flora Nwapa...(185).

In the critic's opinion:

Emecheta's fiction is ubiquitous and deterministic. The process of women's subjugation is often overwhelming, and escape from the prison house of gender is virtually impossible (185).

No Sweetness Here and Other Stories (1970) similarly expresses Ama Ata Aidoo's artistic vision. In the series of stories, Aidoo depicts the conflicts between traditional societies and modern postcolonial societies in contemporary Ghana. She demonstrates how gender problems are intersected with national issues.

The lead story "Everything Counts" tells the story of Sissie, a young University graduate who recently returns from abroad to take up a teaching appointment in the University of Ghana. Sissie experiences a great shock at the current mentality of the post-colonial Ghanaians. The women take to wearing wigs and bleaching their skins in imitation of the Europeans. This is a sign of the rejection of the traditional values in favour of foreign ones. The trend is seen by Aidoo as a major psychological effect of post-colonialism on the psyche of Ghanaian women.

In the story titled "In the Cutting of a Drink", the negative impact of urbanization on Ghanaian womenfolk is presented. As a result of mass migration from villages to cities, prostitution becomes prevalent since most of the women who migrate to the cities are not gainfully employed. Mansa, the girl who runs away to the city tells her brother who comes in search of her after several years "any kind of work as a prostitute". Similarly, in "Two Sisters" Mercy gets into a sexual relationship with "Big men" who are able to give her money, fame and power. Aidoo censures both the "Big Men" and girls like Mercy who prostitute themselves for money. In contrast to Mercy, Connie her elder sister remains married to her husband despite his infidelity.

Although Aidoo censures prostitution, it is depicted as a byproduct of urbanization. The women, who engage in prostitution, Aidoo seems to argue, cannot really be blamed.

The title story of the collection “No sweetness Here” recounts the trials of a woman as a wife and mother. Mami Ama is a woman with an only child, Kwesi, whom she deeply treasures. She struggles to bring up her child in spite of the suffering which she experiences in the hands of her husband, his other wives and his family. Mami Ama is victimized and abused by her husband. She tells “Chicha” that she was told by her mother that “in marriage a woman must sometimes be a fool” (61). However, Mami Ama is no longer prepared to be a fool. She decides “I have been a fool for too long” (61).

Mami Ama agrees to a formal divorce by her husband and even allows him to have the custody of her treasured son since that was the only way to escape from her oppressive marriage. Unfortunately, her son dies of a snake bite on the day of divorce. Mami Ama is heartbroken but at the end of the story one gets the feeling that she still possesses the will to survive. In the afterword of *No Sweetness Here*, Ketu H. Katrak writes about the women in the stories:

They are not victims, they resist oppression where they can and they discuss their deeply personal dilemmas which have national import (151).

From Aidoo’s fictional works, one can deduce that she advocates resistance to oppression on the part of women. She is ambivalent on such issues as prostitution and sacrificial motherhood.

NAWAL EL SAADAWI

Nawal El Saadawi presents the trials of females as girls, wives and mothers in the Egyptian world. In *The Hidden Face of Eve* (1980), Saadawi recounts the various forms of oppression which women are subjected to by male members of their families. Men who take sexual

advantage of young girls often include grandfathers, fathers, uncles, brothers and male teachers. If a girl is disvirgined before her marriage, she loses her honour and that of her family. The hymen of a girl is equated to her honour and that of her family by the society. Yet girls are often exposed to sexual exploitation even in their homes. The men who commit the crime of abusing the girls get away with the misdeed, while the helpless victims are left to face disgrace, punishment and in some cases, death.

Saadawi advocates revolutionary actions on the part of female victims to break the yoke of oppression. She is a sort of revolutionary woman who demands to know why, as a child, she is being treated differently from her brother. According to her, in *The Hidden Face of Eve* (1980) she never received a satisfactory answer to this question. Often the reply was “He is a boy and you are a girl” (10). Whenever she persisted in knowing the difference between a boy and a girl which justified the preferential treatment given to her brother the answer was often “because it is so” (10).

Again, in *Woman at Point Zero* (1975), Nawal El Saadawi exposes the tyranny of a patriarchal society which drives women to the point of insanity. Saadawi claims that the story is the life story of the heroine, Firduas, as told by Firduas to Saadawi shortly before Firduas’ execution for murder.

Firduas is a victim of the society’s debasement of women. Her lifestyle is a direct result of her victimisation as a female in a society which exploits and subjugates women. Firduas is born into a loveless family. She remembers her father as a man who could neither read nor write but who knew very few things in life:

How to grow crops, how to sell a buffalo poisoned by his enemy before it died, how to exchange his virgin daughter for a dowry when there was still time, how to be quicker

than his neighbor in stealing from the fields once the crop was ripe ... how to beat his wife and make her bite the dust each night (12).

As a young girl, Firduas is sexually exploited by her uncle. He pretends to read while he explores her body as she bakes. Later on, Firduas's parents die and she goes to live with her uncle. He continues his sexual exploitation of her until he gets married. After her uncle's marriage, Firduas is sent off to a boarding school where she receives no care from her uncle. After her secondary school, she is sold into a loveless marriage with a deformed old man who beats and maltreats her and treats her as a mere sexual object. When the suffering becomes unbearable for her, she runs back to her uncle's house. She is returned to her husband's house immediately with the injunction "A virtuous woman is not supposed to complain about her husband. Her duty is perfect obedience" (14). Firduas takes to the streets as a result of mistreatment. She unavoidably becomes a prostitute.

Life as a prostitute entails much suffering, abuse and humiliation. After being told bluntly by one of her customers that she is not a respectable woman, Firduas leaves prostitution and takes up a job in a company. She does this in the hope of becoming a respectable woman. She however finds out that as a woman, it is almost impossible to be honourable in the type of society in which she lives. Working women are vulnerable to sexual exploitation by their male bosses. Firduas manages to uphold her honour by not succumbing to the advances of the male executive members of her company. However, her triumphs are short lived. She falls in love with Ibrahim, the revolutionary leader in the company. Imagining that Ibrahim loves her, she gives herself to him, but he betrays her and gets married to the daughter of the company's chairman. Firduas realizes:

Revolutionary men with principles were not really different from the rest. They use their cleverness to get in return for principle what other men buy with money. Revolution for them was something to be abused. Something to be sold (88).

Firduas returned to prostitution. She realises that in the society she lives, honour has been perverted. Even though a prostitute, Firduas contends:

Yet not for a single moment did I have any doubts about my own integrity and honour as a woman. I knew my profession has been invented by men... That men force women to sell their bodies at a price and that the lowest paid body is that of a wife.

All women are prostitutes of one kind or another. Because I was intelligent, I preferred to be a free prostitute rather than an enslaved wife (91).

Firduas is finally sentenced to death for the murder of a 'pimp' who sought to control her and take her earnings from her. Despite Firduas's life style and sad end, Nawal El Saadawi presents her as a woman of strong character who is superior to many others in the society. Saadawi confesses: Compared to her, I was nothing but a small insect crawling upon the land amidst millions of other insects (3).

At the conclusion of the story Saadawi reveals: "I realized that Firduas had more courage than I" (106).

Saadawi implies through her works that prostitution is not necessarily a mark of debasement on the part of the woman. It may be used as a weapon of survival and revenge by women who are seeking emancipation from the oppression they are subjected to.

MARIAMA BA

In her works, Mariama Ba presents a different view from that of Nawal El Saadawi. Although she presents two views of women in response to oppression, she advocates understanding, fortitude and love between men and women as the principles that should guide the African woman in the bid to cope with her oppression. Ramatoulaye, the protagonist in *So Long a Letter* (1980) is deserted by her husband – Modou Fall. He marries Binetou, his daughter's friend thereby betraying Ramatoulaye's love and loyalty. Despite this betrayal, Ramatoulaye remains within the bonds of marriage. She takes solace in writing letters in a diary form to her friend Aissatou who was also going through a similar experience. Unlike Ramatoulaye, Aissatou divorces her husband, travels abroad with her sons and gets herself a lucrative job. After Modou Fall's death, Ramatoulaye rejects other offers of marriage. She refuses to be inherited by Tamsir, Modou's brother. In her anger at his effrontery in asking her to be his wife, she lashes out at him:

You forget that I have a heart, a mind that I am not an object to be passed from hand to hand. You don't know what marriage means to me. It is an act of faith and love, the total surrender of oneself to the person one has chosen and who has chosen you (58).

Ramatoulaye also refuses Daouda Deing's proposal because she does not love him even though she is fond of him. In addition, she could not bring herself between him and his family after her own bitter experience. Although she believes in women liberation Ramatoulaye still affirms:

I remain persuaded of the inevitable and necessary complementarity of man and woman. Love, imperfect as it may be in content and expression, remains the natural link between these two being. To love one another! If only each partner could move sincerely toward the other! If each could only melt into the other! If each would only accept the other's successes and failures! If each would only praise the others' qualities instead of listing his

faults! If each could only correct bad habits without harping about them! If each could penetrate the other's most secret thought to forestall failure and be a support while tending to the evils that are repressed (88-9).

The essence of Ramatoulaye's fortitude stems from her belief in the unity of the family. According to her:

The success of the family is born of a couple's harmony as the harmony of multiple instruments creates a pleasant symphony. The nation is made up of all the families, rich or poor, united or separated, aware or unaware. The success of a nation therefore depends inevitably on the family (89).

In the typical African woman's fashion, Mariama Ba also reveals the essence of motherhood for an African woman. Ramatoulaye decides to stand by her pregnant teenage daughter. According to her:

One is a mother in order to understand the inexplicable. One is a mother to lighten the darkness. One is a mother to shield when lightning streaks the night, when the thunder shakes the earth, when mud bogs one down. One is a mother in order to love without beginning or end.... One is a mother so as to face the flood (82-83).

The fortitude displayed by Ramatoulaye and her view of motherhood differs from that portrayed by Buchi Emecheta and Ama Ata Aidoo in their novels.

ZAYNAB ALKALI

Zaynab Alkali like Mariama Ba expounds love, endurance, forgiveness and tolerance as the principles of true marital happiness for the oppressed African woman. In *The Still Born* (1984), Li's marriage to Habu Adams does not yield her expectations. Habu left her in the village in

search of greener pastures in the city. He does not send for her until four long years later, rather reluctantly because of pressures from his family. After Li joins her husband, she is subjected to humiliation and silence as Habu refuses to communicate with her. Li laments:

Where is my man? ... That boyish man with an incredible smile and a mischievous twinkle in the eye? Where is that proud, self-confident, half naked lover that defied the laughter of the villagers and walked the length and breadth of the village just to see me?
(70)

The narrator reveals “Li knew she had lost her man to the city” (70).

After putting up with Habu’s insufferable behaviour, Li is obliged to return to the village when her father dies. Custom demands that Habu pays her family a condolence visit. For the second time she waits in vain. She is forced to flee the village because of the hostility of other women whose husbands are making advances to the ‘single’ Li. Li sets out from the village for the second time with a goal. She achieves the goal by becoming a trained teacher who returns to her village to assume the responsibilities of “the man of the home” since Sule her brother chooses to remain in Niger.

Although Li fulfills her dreams and becomes a self-reliant woman she does not find absolute fulfillment. The narrator reveals:

Li ought to have felt fulfilled, but instead she felt empty. It wasn’t just the emptiness of bereavement, but an emptiness that went beyond that. For ten years she had struggled towards certain goals. Now having accomplished these goals, she wished there was something else to struggle for. For that was the only way life could be meaningful. (102)

After the vision which projected Li into her life fifty years into the future, she realises that the emptiness stems from her refusal to return to her now lame but, repentant husband. The emptiness is a result of loneliness.

Li decides to return with Shuwa her daughter to Habu Adams who is at this time a cripple through an accident. In response Shuwa's queries as to whether Li intended to hold Habu's crutches and lead the way or walk behind him to arrest his fall, Li replies: No, I will just hand him the crutches and side by side we will learn to walk (105).

Again, when Awa objects to Li's return to Habu because he is lame, Li declares: We are all lame, daughter-of-my mother. But this is no time to crawl. It is time to learn to walk again (105). Zaynab Alkali apparently judges that the road to true happiness and self-fulfillment for the African woman lies in human understanding and forgiveness. She reveals her position on the appropriate ideological posture of the African women as follows:

All I am advocating in *The Stillborn* is understanding between men and women, togetherness between husband and wife, but some people don't understand this. My intention is to uphold God's law of mutuality, coexistence. Equality between men and women doesn't arise at all. Men are like the brain and the woman, the heart. (Otonio Nduka, 1996: 148)

4.0 CONCLUSION

From the creative output of various African female writers that we have examined above, it is evident that the various positions taken by these writers on gender issues as it affects the African woman can be determined. The deduction from the African female writers helps to facilitate our understanding of the appropriate principles informing gender theory for the African woman.

5.0 SUMMARY

1. Gender portrayal is a critical issue in the writing, interpretations, construction and deconstruction of works of literature.
2. The pioneer African male writers mirrored patriarchy in their works.
3. In many African male writings, female characters are made marginal to plots of stories and the woman is portrayed as weak.
4. In African writings, female experiences are fore-grounded while male characters and experiences are back-grounded.
5. African female writers present female protagonists who are pitted against all odds, yet emerge liberated and determined to exist with or without the man.
6. Male characters in many African female writings are mostly villains, often strong physically, but morally weak.
7. Buchi Emecheta presents the African woman as a helpless victim of tradition in many of her works.
8. The female characters in Ama Ata Aidoo's fiction are able to chart the course of their lives even though they are prone to male domination.
9. Nawal El Saadawi advocates revolutionary action on the part of women to break the yoke of oppression.
10. *So Long a Letter* explicates Mariama Ba's position that understanding, fortitude and love are the principles that should guide the African woman in coping with her oppression.

11. Zaynab Alkali in *The Still Born* expounds love, endurance forgiveness and tolerance as the principles of true marital happiness for the oppressed African woman.

TUTOR MARKED ASSESSMENT

1. What is gender politics? Fully illustrate the issue of gender politics in an African female authored text.
2. Compare and contrast the depiction of female and male characters in African male authored works and African female authored works.
3. Outline common challenges of the African women in marriage with reference to various African female authored works.

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MODULE 5: MASCULINITY AND QUEER THEORY

1.0 Introduction

In previous modules, we have introduced the concept of gender and treated issues of feminism and its variants among African Americans and Africans. You must note that gender is not restricted to women alone. The male is another category of gender. In this module, we shall explore the male gender and masculinity which is a gender theory that focuses on the male. In addition, we shall also consider other sexual orientations grouped under queer theory such as homosexuality, transgender and bisexuality. Masculinities and queer theory are valid aspects of gender theories even though feminism seems to be more foregrounded.

2.0. Objectives

- a. To define masculinity
- b. To identify various forms of masculinities
- c. To explore the notion of emasculation and identify its types
- d. To examine the notion of the queer

3.0.Main Contents

- 3.1.The Notion of Masculinity
- 3.2.Forms of Masculinities
- 3.3.The Concept of Emasculation
- 3.4.Types of Emasculation
- 3.5.Queer Theory

Unit 1

3.1. The Notions of Masculinity

Several questions may run through your mind as you consider the notion of masculinity: Such questions may include: What does it mean to be a man? What does it mean to be manly? How has peoples' notion of masculinity changed over the years? These and many more questions are likely to run through the mind when considering masculinity in gender studies.

Masculinity can be defined as the characteristics of being masculine. It can also be loosely defined as covering the qualities that are usually attributed to men such as boldness and strength. Traits associated with the male include physical prowess (strength, fitness, hard work), dominance, independence, rationality, sexual aggressiveness, ambitiousness, assertiveness, honourable or righteous behaviour, courage, intelligence, competence, analytic abilities, competitiveness, insensitivity and attractiveness (usually viewed from point of view of achievements) (Tobalase, 2014). Abrams (2009) asserts that the masculine has come to be widely identified as active, dominating, adventurous, rational and creative.

Webster Dictionary states that the word “masculinity” refers to the characteristics of being masculine, manly, male stereotypes. According to Miescher and Lindsay (2003:4), as quoted by Jegede (2013), the term masculinity refers to a cluster of norms, values and behavioural patterns expressing implicit expectations of how men should act and represent themselves to others. Behavioural patterns associated with the male are, therefore, socially constructed and can be said to be in opposition to characteristics such as weakness, submissiveness, dependence, expression of emotions (especially weak emotions such as fear or tears), passivity, dishonourable behaviour, ineffectiveness, being subdued, anxiety and irrationality

The word masculinity originates from the Latin word *masculus* which means “virility”. Masculinity examines the enactment of men’s manhood and centres on the understanding of men’s lives and experiences as gendered beings. It is associated with “manliness” suggesting essential differences that make a man different from a woman, especially from the biological configuration of the sexes (Kaufman 1994: 14).

Masculinity attempts to understand men’s lives. Masculinity as a gender theory captures the lives and experiences of men as gendered beings in particular social settings; therefore it is society specific and has become pluralized. Masculinity is what any given society accepts as features associated with the male gender and expressions of maleness. Notions of masculinities all over the world are shaped by culture, religion and belief systems, environmental realities and historical experiences and races.

In gender studies, the important issue is that men become socialized into becoming men, masculinised behaviour is not simply a biological issue, Since masculine behaviour are determined by the society’s expectation, it implies that like feminism(s) there is no single homogenous masculinities for all men, because males learn to become men within a culture. Again historical, political and social experiences make culture dynamic and can affect a society’s notion of masculinities. Various forms of masculinities have been identified including hyper masculinity, hypo masculinity, hegemonic masculinities, normative masculinities and subordinated masculinities. We shall consider the types of masculinities very shortly.

In literature, feminist writers and critics aver that women’s subordination is due to patriarchy which privileges men, therefore in discourses of gender oppression, men are majorly portrayed as aggressors, oppressors, privileged and the empowered. Again in life and literature, men are

constructed as breadwinner, provider, father, strong, self-reliant, independent, rational, powerful, emotionless and aggressive.

Masculinity as a theory seeks to study the enactment of men's manhood. This includes the role performance of a man in the society as well as the man's traits exhibition. Masculinity provides the basis for the understanding of men's lives and experiences as gendered beings. Masculinity is associated with "manliness" suggesting essential differences that make a man different from a woman, especially from the biological perspective (Kaufman 1994:14). Masculinity as a gender theory captures the lives and experiences of men as gendered beings in particular social settings. Masculinities, therefore, refer to those practices that help to establish or confirm the masculine character's sense of being male, man or boy.

Masculinity helps to categorise men and their identities on masculinity hierarchy. The implication is that there cannot be homogenous masculinities for all men, because men are not born but made over time within a culture. The identity of the male gender is constantly undergoing changes according to cultural and socio-economic dictates of his environment. For example there are different expectations of each society about an 18 year-old boy in Nigeria and the United States of America. Again, what is expected of a man in the pre-colonial era has changed considerably in the post-independence Africa.

The major objective of a literary analysis using masculinity as a theory is to examine the literary representation of the male in works of literature and analyze how authors create characters using the actions and speeches and other indicators of the male psychic and sensibilities.

3.2. Forms of Masculinities

Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity is defined by physical strength and boldness, heterosexuality, economic independence, authority over women and other men, and an interest in sexual relationships. Hegemonic masculinity is the highest of the masculine enactment and on the social hierarchy. Hegemony presupposes the dominant value. The notion of domination emphasised in hegemony, makes hegemonic masculinity to be regarded as the highest form of masculinity enactment.

Hegemonic masculinity is characterised by patriarchy in gender discourse. It is a situation where the man commands power over women, children and other lesser men in the society. Haywood and Ghail (2003: 153) consider hegemonic masculinity as “an ascendant masculinity in a particular time and space.” The word ‘ascendant’ implies superior, control and dominance in the masculinity hierarchy. To dominate requires power of influence, thus hegemonic men are those who possess power, wealth and influence in a society. You need to note that apart from exercising power over women as evident in patriarchal systems, hegemonic masculinity confers power on some men to control other men who fall into different forms of masculinity which are lower on the masculinity hierarchy.

In hierarchical ranking, hegemonic masculinity occupies the highest in masculinity performance. In carrying out a literary analysis using masculinity as a theory, one may use the theory to identify and analyse male characters who belong to this category or fall short of this hierarchy in creative works.

Normative Masculinity

The idea of normative masculinity is coined from the word “norm.” It is suggestive of what is regarded as normal or typical by members of a society. This is the generally acceptable style of

life or behavioural pattern prescribed in the society to which other contrary way(s) is a deviant. Normative masculinity is the cultural norm of a particular society that set standard for masculine performance within their cultural setting.

Normative masculinity refers to men who are successful, intelligent, rational, heterosexual, emotionally stable, college educated, with good jobs, own homes, proud, bread winners, who help maintain families among other traits and roles referred to as standard behaviour and status in a given society. Even other men within the social setting use these criteria, being the norm, to judge fellow men. By implication, normative masculinity refers to the 'normal man' who may not be very powerful like the hegemonic men, but who can perform the expected roles of providing for their families, among other prescribed duties of men in a given society.

Subordinated Masculinity

Subordinated masculinity refers to a form of masculinity that fails to measure up to expectations for hegemonic and normative masculinities. It is defined by other masculinities that exclude men from the general and homogenous definition of what it takes to be a complete man. (Kimmel & Messner, 1995) Subordinated masculinity is the lowest in masculinity hierarchy. Men use different criteria to rank themselves according to the cultural dictate of each society such that anyone who is unable to measure up to acceptable ranking is seen to be emasculated or subordinated.

Subordinated men are viewed and represented as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior. Characters that comprise subordinated masculinities are depicted in literature as emasculated, humiliated, helpless and dependent. Sometimes they are represented as possessing feminine behavioural orientation considered inconsistent with the traits and behaviours of real men.

Hyper-Masculinity

Hyper-masculinity is the extreme manifestation or performance of ascribed masculine norms and values/ideals. The hyper male is that man who can impregnate a woman, fend and protect his family, is aggressive, intelligent, fearless, and unemotional. Hyper-masculinity is the tendency for male gender to over emphasis maleness in terms of traits and sex role. Hyper-masculinity has the trappings of chauvinism in the male's attempt to derogate femininity and excessively project manliness and masculine status. This form of masculinity has been demonized because in its extreme enactment, it usually leads to self-destruction or the destruction of others. As a result of the exhibition of over bloated male ego, this form is categorized as a subsidiary of subordinated masculinity. Rather than strength, it is a form of weakness characterized by raw display of macho power and lack of self-control (Tobalase, 2014).

The male character that enacts hyper-masculinity does not allow emotions, sentiments or fear as a mark of manliness devoid of any feeling or emotion. Hyper-masculinity gives expression to excessive emphasis on patriarchal dividends and male privileges based on gender construction. For its effects to be felt, usually the male character re-invents stereotypes that put women down or in disadvantaged positions. Hyper-masculinity traits manifest in male dominance and stereotypical outlook of women in the society. Hyper-masculinity enactment has its roots in patriarchy, masculinity mystique and gender role schemas which combine to project the man as superior to the woman (Jegede, 2018).

Hypo-Masculinity

The hypo male is that man that is incapable of meeting the needs of his family, weak, dependent on others, lazy and sterile. It is the lowest form of male norms which is usually exhibited by

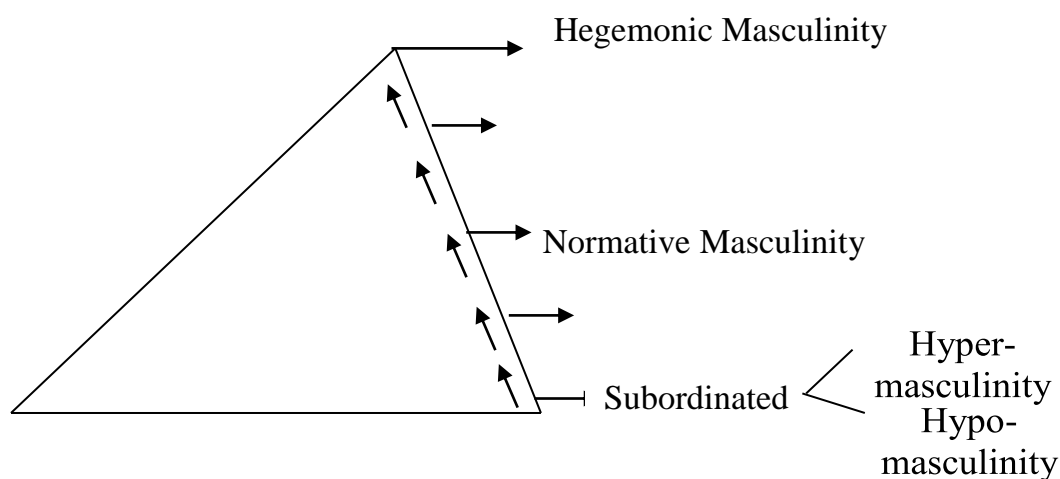
subordinated males. Such men feel a sense of inadequacy, frailty, weakness and emotional wreckage which are all indices of hypo-masculinity enactment.

Complicit Masculinity

According to Jegede (2018), complicit masculinity is a form of masculinity that makes no sacrifice to the masculine social group but benefits from the privileges it confers on men. They are aware of the enormous power and influence of the hegemonic social class but will not attempt to challenge it, rather take full advantage of the benefits it accrues men. The word complacent is more apt to describe this form of masculinity.

Jegede also developed a diagram tagged Fig 5.1 as shown below which sums up the masculinity hierarchies into which men are categorized according to their socio-cultural, economic and political statuses in the social environment where they learnt their masculinity. It begins with the subordinated having two variants, hyper and hypo-masculinities, at the base of the ladder, followed by normative form and hegemonic at the top of the ladder. A male character can oscillate between one form and the other depending on the prevailing circumstance of the time.

Fig. 5:1 Masculinity Hierarchy



**Model designed by Jegede 2018*

Unit 2

3.3. Concept of Emasculation

Emasculation is a condition in which a man is deprived of virility and vigor. It is a form of castration and unmanly weakness in which a man's exercise of power is devoid of requisite energy and control. Emasculation also results from oppression either by female or male that makes a man to suffer psychological castration in the performance of roles and exhibition of traits that validate him as a man/boy/male. Male emasculation implies a social condition that is created to make a man less masculine psychologically, materially, culturally and in terms of social responsibilities (Kimmel, 2005).

James and Nadeau (1999:98) define emasculation as the “fear of losing masculine status and power in the eyes of others”. According to them, emasculation is one of the fears associated with gender-role schemas which can be experienced consciously and unconsciously and the capacity to ‘play a significant role in males’ interpersonal relationships with both men and women’ (p. 96). James and Nadeau (1999) posit that:

One of men's greatest fears is to be emasculated. To be emasculated means to be deprived of virility or procreative powers; to be castrated; to be deprived of masculine energy, vigor, or spirit; to be weakened; to be unnerved by others in terms of your masculine gender-role identity. In short, emasculation means losing one's masculine identity and energy. Being emasculated is part of almost every boy's and man's gender-role identity development. He may feel emasculated by devaluing comments, failures, sexual

dysfunctions, and perceived losses of control and power
(pp. 98-99).

Such men are seen in their society as failures, useless and lazy. For instance, Emecheta's male characters are said to be "irresponsible heads of families who are mostly insensitive to the needs of their wives and children" (Taiwo 1984:19). This statement, true as it sounds, fails to consider social condition(s) that create these characters in those contexts. The question is, what is the social construction of these male characters in terms of role performance and trait exhibition that make them insensitive and irresponsible? No doubt, certain social conditions have created these men who are products of unrealized ambition and failed aspirations, as social lepers, failures and unlucky beings, the Igbo refer to as *agbala*.

Emasculation occurs in a variety of ways. For instance, it occurs as a result of the imbalance in human interactions, and exclusion from privileges enjoyed by the others in a social setting. In terms of exercise of power, exhibition of traits and performance of roles, standard has been set in all of those areas against which all men are measured and assessed. This standard actually defines individual's hierarchy in masculinity. The emasculated individual is made so because of certain inabilities or deprivation in the social system. By the set standard, the individual or group of individuals cannot measure up. Emasculation crosses gender boundaries to include racial segregation and ethnic subordination.

Any relationship among men in a given society that tends to create for others a complex, and a sense of inadequacy, surely will emasculate. Such tendencies arise often from intimidation and harassment by "men with the properly sanctioned educational credentials in our society" (Brod, 1985:6). Other men who do not have access to education either because of their economic inadequacy or low social status succumb to the whims of the privileged men who impose their

opinion on them “with an air of supreme self-confidence and aggressive self-assurance” (Brod 1985: 6). This kind of relationship creates for others a sense of denial and alienation that lead to low self-esteem.

While some will blame themselves for such ill-defined self-identity among fellow men, others simply respond by assuming more deviant to the acceptable social norms. In a society where education or love for learning is a norm, literacy may be considered a “mark of dignity”. Those who are denied that opportunity are, therefore, rendered helpless especially in socio-cultural climes where the certificate is a means to economic independence and higher social status.

Emasculation by race seems to be prevalent at local and global levels. At global level, the masculinity of the developed economy enacts the hegemonic type. According to Kimmel (1995) hegemonic masculinity presents the image of a compradorial bourgeois...

Sitting in first-class waiting rooms in airport or in elegant business hotels the world over, wearing a designer business suit, speaking English, eating ‘continental’ cuisine, talking on his cell phone, his laptop computer plugged into any electrical outlet, while he watches CNN international or television (p. 415).

He represents the image of his Asian, African and European counterparts globally. This image contrasts sharply with the image of male peasants or artisans in remote villages battling diseases and abject poverty across the globe. The global economy has emasculated and rendered them “weak, helpless, effete and incapable of supporting a family” (p. 420). Kimmel did not, however, explain here whether all men enacting the hegemonic form fit the description above.

One might be tempted to ask whether it includes the very rich, powerful farmer with the image of the African big man in the village not exposed to sophisticated technology and lifestyle.

Again, among men across races of the world are those emasculated by other men not of their own race. For instance, the colonized men are emasculated socially and economically by their colonizers. The colonized is less masculine by the colonizers' estimation. According to Kimmel (1995) "in many colonial situations, the colonized men were called 'Boys' by the colonizers" (p. 412). This is a form of de-masculinization of the male gender in a situation where 'men ceased to be men.'

Racism remains a veritable tool for male emasculation in a multicultural, multi-racial environment. A multi-racial country like South Africa will probably have minority white men in control of the means of production, rendering majority black men incapacitated.

The black man has not been able to regain his self-esteem and manhood wounded through the dehumanizing slavery that spanned almost 300 years.

The Jews have been accused of feminizing the American environment by recruiting black women and gay in order to further emasculate American white men. What Kimmel terms "Anti-Semitic slander," is the radical criticism of "American manhood as soft, feminized, weakened – indeed, emasculated" (p. 413).

Kimmel describes the downward slope of the emasculation of North American men as alarming citing Ferber (1998) thus:

The number of effeminate males has increased greatly....

Legions of sissies and weaklings, of flabby, limp-wristed, non-aggressive, non-physical, indecisive, slack-jawed, fearful males who, while still heterosexual, in theory and

practice, have not even vestige of the old macho spirit
(p. 136).

The economic and socio-cultural dictates of the society consistently reduce capacity for men to live up to societal billings and expectations as “men.” He is simply inadequate. This, according to hooks (1984), cannot be divulged from the fact that the emasculated man...

does not have the privilege or power society has taught him
‘real men’ should possess. Alienated, frustrated, pissed off,
he may attack, abuse, and oppress an individual woman or
women, but he is not reaping positive benefits from his
support and perpetuation of sexist ideology (and therefore)
not exercising privilege (p. 73).

Emasculation is a painful social and psychological condition. Gaylin (1992) refers to it as “social humiliation” which occurs when “men become depressed because of loss of status and power in the world of men” (p. 22). This study argues that many of the male characters created as the ‘wretched of the earth’ in both male and female authored works are actually emasculated characters. A man becomes emasculated having been deprived, rejected, humiliated, scoffed and disdained by his female partner or fellow men arising possibly from the social system and cultural standard he daily contends with.

3.4. Types of Emasculation

Biological Emasculation

Biological emasculation results from physical disabilities or the inability of a man to procreate or reproduce. A man who cannot impregnate his wife is said to be biologically emasculated.

Biological emasculation eventually results in psychological pains especially when it involves cultural necessities such as inheritance, chieftaincy titles that will require the man to nominate a child to carry on the family legacy. Oftentimes, the impotent man is regarded as a social outcast in the cultural setting where he is located. In literary creativity, such infirm men are depicted as deprived, effete and object of ridicule.

Since anything that will make a man less manly is considered emasculation, men who are unable to reproduce are often emasculated.

Psychological Emasculation

Psychological emasculation results from negative comments that produce low self-esteem. The failure of a man to enact expected masculine traits or behaviour results in stigmatization and produces psychological emasculation. Physical disability can be a major cause of emasculation as people with disabilities are perceived as weak, dependent and pitiable as against strength, vigour and independence expected of men.

Socio-cultural Emasculation

Socio-cultural emasculation presupposes forms of deprivations, constraints, and underprivileged situations imposed on men as a result of the social and cultural norms that define their manhood. Socio-cultural emasculation also results from economic deprivation, poverty, joblessness/unemployment and the inability to perform the masculine roles. Culture defines the masculinity of an individual male. For instance, what it takes to be a 'real' man among black men is different from what it requires among the whites. According to Kaufman (1995), "masculine norm has its own particular nuances and traits dependent on class, nation, race, religion, and ethnicity" (p. 16). So, society defines what it means to be a 'real man' and what it means to be a 'real man' defines who is socio-culturally emasculated. This is largely because

such notion as being a real man or emasculated man is socially constructed. As earlier stated, Kimmel and Messner (1995) contend that “to be a man is to participate in social life as a man, as a gendered being. Men are not born; they are made” (p. xx). Men grow through childhood to adolescent and adulthood to become men, internalizing certain behaviours that define their manhood as they grow up.

Among these learned behaviours is what it takes by societal specification to be a ‘real man.’ Examples are breadwinner role, good provider, good father which lead to an elevated status in the family and the society generally. Ability to meet these specifications gives him satisfaction while failure to measure up makes him feel less manly. He feels emasculated “because in his own estimation, he is failing to fulfill what is the central duty of his life, the very touchstone of his manhood---the role of family provider” (Komarovsky, 1940: 20).

Any social situation that makes a man incapable of acting like a man or unable to accomplish things he has been taught as measures of success tends to emasculate him. Homelessness, for instance, strips a man of his self-esteem. The man divorced by his wife as a result of his inability to perform the provider role has his spirit broken and sees himself as an outcast. Like the homeless, the jobless and the wretched man constitute social liabilities, and are seen in the society as failures. They lose respect and are despised. They can be discussed as cowed men who cannot raise their heads among men. Socio-cultural emasculation strips off their pride and dignity, and makes them feel insignificant and powerless.

Typical examples are the characters who suffer one form of oppression or the other in *The Beggars’ Strike* by Aminata Sow Fall and *Xala* by Sembene Ousmane.

Unit 3

3.5 QUEER THEORY

The splits in the feminist movement grew wider by the 1980s. There were accusations from minority groups claiming that the feminist movement had become just as exclusive as the patriarchal system it had initially opposed. As noted earlier, African American women charged the leading feminists with concentrating on the experiences of white, middle-class women while ignoring and marginalising black women, thereby recreating the social inequalities that feminism had objected to. Lesbian critics raised similar objections, protesting that feminism continued to privilege heterosexual orientation to the exclusion of gay women.

The objections and protests led to the development of gay and lesbian studies, which is a movement that seeks to make sexual orientation central to critical analysis and understanding. Lesbian and gay studies appear to have political and social goals, especially to eradicate the discrimination against gays or lesbians in the society. Gay and lesbian studies is what comprises homosexuality.

Homosexuality denotes same-sex sexual relationship or same-sex marriage. It comprises both gayism and lesbianism. Gayism is the sexual relationship between two or more men, while lesbianism is the sexual relationship between two or more women. Homosexuality was considered an abnormality and sexual deviant attitude. It was not an acceptable practice in most societies and although it is becoming more prominent, it is still largely considered an aberration in many societies, particularly in Africa. In the western societies, in contemporary times, it is labelled alternative lifestyle.

Being homosexual, or gay, therefore, implies that a boy or girl will primarily feel attracted, in a romantic sense, to other men or women. For instance, rather than falling in love with women and longing for a woman as a spouse, gay men fall in love with other men and hope to find a man with whom to share their adult lives. There have been debates as to whether homosexuals are biologically 'wired' to be gays or lesbians. Opposing sides of the debates argue for and against this view as some hold that homosexuality is a choice while others argue that it is a biological conditioning which cannot be helped.

Homosexuality challenges what societies presume to be "normal" (straight) and abnormal sexual behaviour. When compared to heterosexuality, that is the sexual relationship between a male and a female, homosexuality has a short history. Homosexuality as a phenomenon met with resistance from various societies. It results in homophobia which is regarded as fear of resistance to and sometimes hatred for homosexuality.

Queer theory is not simply limited to homosexuality; it is concerned with a wide range of sexual practices and entities, particularly those considered abnormal until recently. The "odd" (queer) is considered to be an opportunity to examine social organizations and practices with the purpose of redefining how we see and understand ourselves. It includes homosexuality including gayism and lesbianism, bisexuality, transgender, transsexual, among other 'odd' sexual orientations.

Transgender refers to those people who live permanently in their preferred gender, without necessarily needing to undergo any medical intervention/s to belong to the female gender and live as such. For example a biological male may play the feminine role in a homosexual relationship. The transgendered male chooses to live as a woman. Transsexuals are people who identify entirely with the gender role opposite to the sex assigned to them at birth. They attempt to live permanently in the preferred gender role. Transsexual people usually undergo gender

reassignment treatment (which may or may not involve hormone therapy and/ or surgery). Bisexual people can transit from one gender to the other at any time they want. They may be heterosexual and at the same time homosexuals as they wish. The choice of the term 'queer' initially appears counterproductive, however, the queer movement have attempted to reclaim the term to connote legitimate difference in an effort to reverse the meaning of the term and thereby change the attitudes of society to what it considers queer

Queer theorists interrogate how sexuality is contrived: Is it socially created or natural? Can it be changed, or is it unavoidable? Since feminists drew distinctions between sex, as biological determination and gender, as socially constructed and argue that while sex is fixed and stable, gender is not, lesbians take the argument further and contend that accepting the premise that a woman is born with essence that cannot be varied is erroneous.. Queer theorists oppose the idea that a person's true identity is composed of fixed and unchanging properties. They instead support the idea that human identity is formed by the culture into which he/she is born and claim that gender, what it means to be a man or a woman is constantly changing.

Judith Butler in the book *Gender Trouble* argues that feminism was wrong in asserting that women are a group with inherent characteristics and interests that they hold in common. Instead of accepting that gender shifts and changes with times and contexts across a wide range of behaviours and attitudes, the feminist stance limited the choice of gender to two possibilities: male and female. Butler asserts that the traditional binary of masculine/feminine makes it difficult for individuals to choose their authentic identities. Queer theorists argue for fluidity of identity since identity, for them, is a complex mixture of choices, life experiences and professional roles.

According to Dobie (2009), queer theorists adapt the strategies of deconstruction to demonstrate the fluidity of gender identity. They reverse sexual binary oppositions, such as heterosexual/homosexual, they show that these are not fixed essences. Queer theory claims that such terms are not absolute because they cannot be understood without one another, and they are not stable because they can be reversed to a binary that privileges homosexual over heterosexual, showing by their reversal different possibilities of identities and power, and thereby opposing the notion of an essential, unchangeable relationship. Queer theorists emphasise the importance of questioning notions of homosexuality and heterosexuality.

Queer theorists query sexual identity; they view individuals not simply as male or female but as a collection of many possible sexualities that may include various degrees of heterosexuality, homosexuality, or bisexuality. In other words, for the queer theorists, sexuality is neither stable nor static. It is dynamic and changing, affected by the experiences of race and class and subject to shifting desires. They argue that sexuality is not biologically conferred because it can change in an individual depending on many factors.

In literary criticism, the queer theory critic examines gender, sexual practices, identity, defining choices, assumed norms, types of masculinity and femininity, and other such issues in a text. The queer theory critic is highly interested in narratives that feature the surprising and the unusual and interrupts the realistic outlook.

According to Dobie (2009: 113-114), to carry out a queer literary analysis you can provide answers to the following questions:

Does the work challenge traditional ways of viewing sexuality and identity?

Does it depict human sexuality as more complex than the essentialist terms *male* and *female* suggest?

- What ranges of male and female identities do you find?
- Does the work assume an essentialist view of gender, that is, does it accept that there is a fixed, unchanging self?
- What sexual topics do you find in the work that are odd or peculiar – that is, queer?
- Where is gender destabilized? What destabilizes it?
- Does the work show how sexual identities are indeterminate, overlapping, changing? If so, where?
- Does the work complicate what it means to be homosexual or heterosexual?
- Are there characters who can be viewed not simply as male or female but as a collection of many possible sexualities that is, do they exhibit various degrees of heterosexuality, homosexuality, or bisexuality?
- Is sexuality assumed to be stable and static or dynamic and changing?
- Is the sexuality of the characters affected by experience of race and class?
- Is heterosexuality viewed as the norm against which other sexual identities are measured?

4.0. CONCLUSION

We have discussed the notion of masculinities and its forms as well as queer theory. We have discovered that there are various forms of masculinities including the hegemonic and normative against which other forms like the subordinated masculinities are measured. This contrast produces tensions and results in emasculation of some men. Moreover, gender as a fixed category has been challenged, as a result, the queer is gaining attention. Since gender comprises

the female, male and others, gender studies in literature is richer with the understanding of masculinity and queer theory.

5.0.SUMMARY

- a. Masculinity deals with the male gender
- b. Masculinity comprises various types such as the hegemonic masculinity, normative masculinity, complicit masculinity, subordinated masculinity, hyper masculinity and hypo masculinity
- c. Emasculation is the demeaning of a man who is made to feel less than a man
- d. Types of emasculation include biological emasculation, psychological emasculation, social emasculation, cultural emasculation and...
- e. The queer and understood its application to text analysis

TUTOR MARKED ASSIGNMENT

1. Discuss the forms of masculinities.
2. With reference to characters from literary texts that you are familiar with, examine various types of emasculation
3. The Queer comprises different sexual orientations. Discuss homosexuality, transgender and bisexuality as “queer” sexualities.

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