
African Women Writing and Gender Identities: A Review

Ms. Laxmi Tulasi (laxmitulasirao@gmail.com)

Research Scholar and Faculty of English (Freelancer), Hyderabad, India

Abstract

African Women writing and their works stand elevated for women empowerment and the other debased sections of the social order. The works of female writers are passionate and replicate the occurrences in the general public. They depict characters which are near the real world. Women authors in Africa have enjoyed a more extensive audience particularly in higher institutions where the core curriculum incorporates African Women Writers, Gender Studies and other relevant programs. African women writers have engaged in rhetorical and performative tactics to reconstitute cultural erasure in order to fight inequality as they attempt to assert status as individuals. The patriarchy in African social orders has included an erasure of identities and subjectivities of numerous ladies, holding them to a supposition of female subordination.

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Introduction

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

African Women's Writing

Women authors in Africa have enjoyed a more extensive audience particularly in higher institutions where the core curriculum incorporates African Women Writers, Gender Studies and other relevant programs. In this regard, some prominent women writers like Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Adichie, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Mariama Ba and Nawal El Saadawi are taken into consideration as their literary works are much celebrated in the contemporary literary field of Africa.

In their writings, the position and role of women as mothers and daughters within the institution of marriage especially polygamy, the encumbrance attendant on traditional role prescriptions for women, female circumstances, and gender inequalities are the themes explored.

These women writers through their novels share their care and concern for women in the society. While trying to cope with the existing challenges in the society like male chauvinism and oppressive patriarchal system, they keep reminding the society that woman empowerment is highly crucial for a country to develop. Education for women is the life line of any nation. Economic independence and self-assertiveness are integral parts of women liberation. Probing deep into the feministic aspects, the current study aims at focusing on various problems faced by women during bildungsroman, motherhood, and gender ideology. The first wave feminism was initially enthused by Women's

Suffrage movements across America and Britain in the 19th and early 20th centuries as a means of supporting social, political and economic changes. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) is recognized as the groundbreaking treatise on feminist thought within European and American circles. African novel does not concentrate only on 'private life', solely. It is mostly about the individual in connection with his society. It is not just about the fate of the individual in the given time and context within the framework of the narrative though limited freedom is conceded to him to assert himself. The intensity is more on the damage caused to the African innermost self. African literature today is more real and is a more serious writing examining the human condition in Africa. Dealing with colonialism and the effects of colonialism, African literature endeavors to rebuild the society and its character which is not affected by the West.

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

Their works or novels show the accounts of how women in African social order change the dynamics of power through sustained efforts in crafting possibilities of liberation in spaces formed in and spread by social practice. But irrespective of the kind of resistance the writers embrace, their overriding undertaking is to articulate the collective erasure of women fostered by their restrictive social-cultural customs. Through the different rebellious techniques, the authors urge their followers and readers to reconsider both the patriarchal and postcolonial gendered belief systems. Their books attest an incessant challenge and confrontation from the authoritative power talk in postcolonial Africa, especially when they show freeing devices like "safe spaces" making women powerful to talk and pay attention to each other.

The Identity of Women in African Society

Majority of the contribution in African literature have been produced by male writers among them some of the writers have portrayed women as 'Mother' or 'Earth', while others presented a distorted and stereotyped image of women. They portrayed women as complacent individuals, cheerfully accepting their inferior status given to them by men in a male dominated society. Women in African comprising almost half of the population in the continent are inconsistently not considered as equivalent to men in all walks of human life. Despite the fact that they are slaves for the development of their husbands and children they are oppressed, suppressed, and marginalized in matters of sharing the available opportunities for the fulfillment of their lives. Women in African social orders are exposed to sexual orientation partiality. Lacking educational chances, despondent conjugal lives, infertility, polygamy are the significant issues that burden them socially, monetarily, mentally, and physically. This has been identified as the major issue to be discussed. As women continue to suffer in the male-dominated society they tend to lose their identity as strong individuals and opt for merely existing than living in the society.

In African social regimes, patriarchy has resulted in the erasing of many women's identities and perspectives, confining them to an assumption of female servitude. Subsequently African ladies were seen from a bio-basic focal point in the accounts of both the racial colonialists and the early male created African writing. The women writers of Africa have extensively challenged this essentialist development that subordinates and underestimates black women, depicting empowered black women denouncing and disobeying the bullhead associated with sex focused general conclusions and social engagements imposed by the colonizing society's male dominant culture. So, there is a need to explore the portrayal of female characters maintaining the feminist beliefs looking for accomplishment throughout the life; and then it endeavors to analyze the ultra-fine manners, in which they assume demonstrations of subversion and battle to deconstruct the gender characteristics in the works of the female authors.

The aim of this paper is to portray quintessential women problems from emotional and social perspectives of African women in their specific cultural contexts; to illuminate the common issues of African women through a comparative analysis of women from Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Senegal and Egypt; to delineate their existence in the family as mothers and daughters within the institution of marriage especially polygamy, the encumbrance attendant on traditional roles prescribed for women; and to highlight the subversion of Identity and the women characters compared to the contemporary society portrayed in their works.

African women are suffering and dealing with a variety of issues, which are reflected and related to the protagonists featured in practically all writings produced by African women authors. Regardless of the fact that they become slaves in their husbands' and children's development, they are subjugated, smothered, and underestimated in issues of sharing the accessible opportunities for the accomplishment of their lives. Women in African societies are exposed to sex inclination. Lacking educational chances, troubled conjugal lives, infertility, polygamy are the significant issues that burden them socially, financially, mentally and physically. Although they make so many sacrifices for their family and children, they are determined not to lose their identity.

There are a number of woman writers in African Literature; they are able to assert themselves as writers, both on a national and international scale. But, the account of these writers' literary background and works are negligible.

The women writers of Africa are the other voices, the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and the predictably male-oriented studies in the field. Relatively few literary magazines and scholarly journals, in the West and in Africa itself, have found significant space or time for African women writers. The ignoring of women writers on the continent has become a tradition, implicit rather than formally stated, but a tradition nonetheless--and a rather unfortunate one at that (Brown, 1981).

In his book, *Women Writers in Black Africa* (1981), Lloyd Brown mentions that women have been excluded from most studies of African literature. Brown emphasizes in his introduction how women writers are frequently overlooked for a variety of reasons, including male-oriented discrimination, Eurocentricism, colonialism, and traditional norms of a society reflecting male supremacy throughout many African countries.

As indicted by Brown, they are male-situated selectivity, Eurocentricism, imperialism, and conventional mores that reflect male matchless quality in most African societies.

As a consequence of the male-dominated literary tradition, many of the depictions of African women are reductive – perpetuating popular myths of female subordination. Female characters in male-authored works are rarely granted primary status – their roles often trivialized to varying degrees – and they are depicted as silent and submissive in nature (Kumah, 2000:6).

As Male heroism is more dominant in the writings of African male authors, the portrayal of characters in the works of African writers of prose reveals a preference for male characters as heroes while female characters are frequently portrayed as supporting characters. In this way, the African female authors have shaken things up in the social, political, and religious domains of their networks by utilizing their specialty or skill to introduce women who resist established roles and oppose the restrictions imposed.

Conclusion

The female protagonists delineated in women's writing emerge as liberated and empowered women by undoing their feminine and racial roles. In this context, modern female authors are working to free women from such extreme enslavement, effectively reshaping society by rewriting gender conventions and, consequently, demolishing gender identities. The women writers are Flora Nwapa,

Buchi Emecheta, Adichie, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Mariama Ba and Nawal El Saadawi, whose works have been considered significantly and extensively in the modern literary field of Africa.

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