

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

RE-READING GENDER ROLES AND IDENTITIES: TOWARDS A
NEW THEORIZATION OF A NEW AFRICAN FEMINISM

DORCAS EWURADWOA OCRAN

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University of Cape Coast

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THEORIZATION OF A NEW AFRICAN FEMINISM

BY

DORCAS EWURADWOA OCRAN

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and Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the Master of Philosophy Degree in Literature

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DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I, Dorcas Ewuradwoa Ocran, declare that this research is my original work and that it has not been presented in any institution for an academic award. I also declare that with the exception of other academic works referenced, which has been duly acknowledged, this project work, either in whole or in part has not been submitted to this or any other school for any other award.

Candidate's Signature: Date:

Candidate's Name: Dorcas Ewuradwoa Ocran

Supervisor's Declaration

I hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of the thesis were supervised in accordance with the guidelines on supervision of thesis laid down by the University of Cape Coast.

Supervisor's Signature: Date:

Supervisor's Name: Professor Jane Naana Opoku Agyemang

ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study is to formulate a practical and realistic theoretical framework on how contemporary African women are redefining gender roles and identities within the family and society. It also discusses how qualitative methodology and formalistic approach are adopted for the study. Data was collected from three novels: Evelyne Accad's *Wounding Words* (1996), Nawal El Sadaawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1992) and Flora Nwapa's *Women are Different* (1975). The findings of the study revealed that Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa employed characterization in their novels to underscore negative stereotypical norms against women including domestic and social violence. While such attitude is not new, unlike some women, several female characters rose above intimidation and worked tirelessly at redefining their gender roles and identities via Western education and other practical ways. They redefined their gender roles to become breadwinners, family heads, and occupied several leadership roles, which society often stereotypically attributes to masculine gender and identity. Though the three novels underpinned radical feminism and reformative feminism, the study formulated Proactive Feminism as a bulwark against domestic and social violence as well as gender inequality in post-colonial Africa (Sikweyiya et al., 2020). It is recommended that women should be sensitized towards reporting abuse or cases of gender inequality. Female child education should be prioritized because educating a woman is much the same as educating a nation.

KEY WORDS

Gender roles

Characterization

Stereotypical

Identity

Feminism

Violence

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May God bless you all!

DEDICATION

To my husband, mother, children and my entire family.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

Scholars have described feminism as a worldwide movement solely concerned with raising women's economic and social status alongside activism or the total rejection of gender inequality in all aspects of human society (Tong, 2009; van Niekerk, 2018; Bayu, 2019). The hallmark of feminist literature has been equity and equality, an egalitarian society rid of gender inequality and social injustice. However, a critical study of feminist discourses worldwide reveals a dichotomy of opinion on theoretical perspectives (Nehere, 2016; van Niekerk, 2018; Bayu, 2019).

Being a socio-political movement, feminism was expected to be based on theoretical underpinnings that embrace diversity and multiculturalism. However, in practice, feminists are finding it difficult to clearly and satisfactorily articulate these differences, multiculturalism and commonality, associated with every form of feminism (Arndt, 2002). While some scholars, including Robinson (2008) and Nehere (2016) broadened the scope of feminism by raising new questions and objecting previously held views, others (Arndt, 2002; Kamal, 2016) are espousing new demands, and several others (Mendes, 2009; Hambur and Nurhayati, 2019) are undecided, constantly changing position or stance on theoretical issues. The debate is confounding, and it has affected feminist discourse or engagement worldwide, including African feminism (Nehere, 2016; Hambur and Nurhayati, 2019).

For instance, Arndt (2002) stated: “there is hardly a debate that is more controversial than the African discourse on feminism” (p. 2). The controversy and dichotomy of opinion on theoretical frameworks can be seen in the characterization of African women writers. Characterization by these writers is often influenced by individual conception of feminism arising from varying perspectives, shifting patterns, location bias, paradox, status or hierarchy in the society, movement and territorial claims.

While several writers, such as Arndt (2002), Barriteau and Connelly (2000) and Parpart (2000) have the conception that feminist ideal, in general, is conceived within European cultural settings without any consideration for African cultural settings, others totally reject feminism. Yet, others (Coetzee & du Toit, 2017; Lewis, 2009) embrace feminist ideals but experience difficulty in applying theories on feminism to the unique context of African women.

Literature revealed that the cultural settings and geographical location of women serve as the theoretical lens through which some African women writers view feminist spirit and ideals. Others, on the other hand, felt the ability to resist imperialism, patriarchy, and unequal gender treatment in the African society should be used as theoretical framework for feminist engagement or discourse.

For instance, some writers such as Ngurukie (1992) and Beyala (1996), viewing feminism from the theoretical lens of social structure, patriarchy, and unequal treatment of women, characterize protagonists as rebels or women with lust for power, unscrupulous, untamed and brazen (Arndt, 2002; Ogunyemi, 2010; Nehere, 2016; van Niekerk, 2018). However, Adimora-

Ezeigbo (2002) objected such view by stating that “it conjures up visions of aggressive women who try to be like men, dress carelessly and abandon essential feminine attributes” (p.1). Ogunyemi (2010) further indicated that feminism is viewed as fostering lesbianism, hatred of men, and rejection of marriage and non-acceptance of African traditions.

Some African women writers have contended that some of the feminist literature presume to address issues affecting African women, while basing their theoretical framework on personal experiences and views which are totally different from the unique context of African women.

Based on the above views, a growing body of feminist literature in Africa subscribes to the conceptualization of an alternative to feminism and labels such conceptualization as *African womanism*. This group of writers, including McLane-Davison (2015) and Blackmone (2008), is seeking a united front against feminism in Africa so as to replace it with *African womanism*, since it offers better contextualization of gender inequality in the African society (Nehere, 2016; van Niekerk, 2018). By means of characterization and well-orchestrated plots in their novels, African women writers have vividly portrayed and criticized gender inequality, discrimination and negative stereotypical norms rampant in the African society.

Others have employed characterization in such a way as to reflect or portray the ills in the African society, as well as the subjugated position of women in the society. For example, the female characters in several literary works depicted the prevalent situation of women in Africa; and how some of these female characters are redefining their roles within several spheres of the society and the family.

Redefinition of gender roles is consistent with the theoretical framework by Biddle, Wang, Chatzisarantis and Spray (2003) that gender is performative and not immutable. Biddle et al. (2003) defined social roles as dependent on specific circumstances and actions not dictated by gender. In this sense, a woman can be a caregiver at home and be a breadwinner when she occupies the post of a manager at the workplace. This means that, in consonance with Biddle et al. (2003), female characters in the novel are depicting how women could transcend certain gender roles often attributed to women in the African society in order to fulfill roles stereotypically reserved for men in the family or at the workplace.

Oftentimes, characterization is a reflection of the conception held by the writer. As a result, characterization has projected the dichotomy of opinion and theorization on African feminism. One school of thought (Ngurukie, 1992; Beyala, 1996), by virtue of their characterization, felt African feminism should be theorized as aggressiveness towards men, fierce struggle against patriarchy and male domination. The second school of thought (Ogot, 1990; Okoye, 1982), refraining from aggressiveness against men, theorized African feminism based on reformative theory which postulates that women are complementary and can help men to reform the society culminating in gender equality. The third school of thought (Blackmone, 2008; McLane-Davidson, 2015) claimed that there should be nothing like African feminism, since feminist movement caters for Western women ideal. Rather, African Womanism would reflect the African woman's situation.

The focus of this study is to critically examine the works of three notable African women writers: Flora Nwapa's *Women Are Different*, published in 1992; Evelyne Accad's *Wounding Words*, published in 1996, and Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*, published in 1975. I do this with the view of formulating a practical and result-oriented theoretical framework on how women are redefining gender roles and identities. I have selected the three works because the authors were among the pioneers of African feminism, with deep insight into the hotly debated issues surrounding African feminism.

In her extensive work on African feminism, Arndt (2002) discovered that the female characters in Flora Nwapa's work are representative of reformist theory, while Firdaus, in Saadawi's work, exhibited the ideals of radical feminism. Accad's work is the essence of the crippling controversy surrounding African feminism and the urge to replace it with African Womanism (Blackmone, 2008). The literary works are representative of the varied theorizations of the three schools of thought. Hence, it will be prudent to conduct a close reading of these African women's literary works, with a view to understand how female characters exhibited varied theoretical conceptions on African feminism and feminism in general.

Statement of the Problem

The hallmark of feminist literature has been equity and equality, an egalitarian society rid of gender inequality and social injustice. However, in-depth analysis of feminist discourses worldwide and in Africa reveals dichotomy of opinion on theoretical perspectives (Nehere, 2016; van Niekerk, 2018; Bayu, 2019).

In her work, Arndt (2002) stated: “there is hardly a debate that is more controversial than the African discourse on feminism” (p. 2). Nehere (2016) posited that theoretical perspectives on feminism are perplexing with Marxism feminism, socialist feminism, reformist feminism, radical feminism, eco-feminism, lesbian feminism, and the list goes on. Hence, she said: “the feministic analyses are active, challenging” (p. 2). In her study, van Niekerk (2018) lamented on the problems associated with effectively prosecuting human traffickers and men involved in women exploitation, due to conflicting feminist discourses on what constitutes gender rights abuses and criminal acts.

A close reading of van Niekerk’s (2018) statement shows that it is not the varied theoretical perspectives that are worrying; rather, it is the ineffectiveness of feminist discourses in the resolution of societal issues. The controversy and dichotomy of opinion on theoretical frameworks can be seen in the characterization of African women writers.

Characterization by African women writers is often influenced by individual conception of feminism arising from varying perspectives, shifting patterns, location bias, paradox, status or hierarchy in the society, movement and territorial claims (Bergman, 2016; Diop, 2017; van Niekerk, 2018). For example, Ngurukie (1992) and Blackmone (2008) project anti-feminist ideals by characterizing protagonists in terms of African cultural settings (they strongly feel feminism espouses White women ideals), while Diop, Stewart and Herr (2017) embrace global feminist ideals but experience difficulty applying theories on feminism to the unique context of African women, especially in connection with Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).

An in-depth examination of various theoretical underpinnings reveals deficiency and contention. For example, those in the second school of thought feel that aggressiveness against men is inappropriate since some men are very good, and ready to support women; and that, labeling all men as bad only makes women imbalanced and unreasonable. On the other hand, proponents of the first school of thought claimed that going on the offensive is the only solution to achieving feminist ideal, because, for centuries, men have been perpetuating inequality and oppression against women. The third school of thought felt that feminism is the embodiment of the Western woman's ideal of the world order without any recognition of African women's unique context.

It is paramount therefore, to resolve the identified contradictory evidence gaps to know the way forward regarding theorization of African feminism. It is also important to investigate whether women can employ certain means to attain feminist ideal; or whether feminism should be thrown away, altogether and African womanism embraced. The resolution of these gaps forms the crux of this study.

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to formulate a practical and realistic theoretical framework on African feminism. The specific objectives of the study are to:

Ascertain how Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa's works underscore gender norms in their characterization of women in post-colonial Africa, investigate how the feminist discourses of Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa's novels underscore the existing dichotomy of theorization of feminist ideals in Africa, examine how Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa's novels highlight ways that women are

redefining gender roles and identities and to formulate a theoretical framework that balances conceptualization of African women's experiences in post-colonial Africa.

Research Questions

In order to achieve the focus of the present study, the following research questions will guide the study:

How do Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa's works underscore gender norms in their characterization of women in post-colonial Africa?

In what ways do Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa's novels highlight pertinent ways that women are negotiating gender roles and identities?

How do the feminist discourses of Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa's novels underscore the existing dichotomy of theorization of feminist ideals in Africa?

What theoretical framework balances conceptualization of African women experiences in post-colonial Africa?

Significance of the Study

In recent times, several studies in literature have placed much emphasis on feminism (Kottig, Bitzan & Peto, 2017), education of the girl child (Kantola, 2019) and stereotypical norms regarding women in several countries (Taylor et al., 2019). I, therefore, envisaged that the study will provide holistic and culturally sensitive framework for African feminism. Findings of the study will provide ample insight into the dimensions of the raging debate among scholars on African feminism, in relation to societal, educational and stereotypical norms on African feminism.

The study serves as a forum to highlight the works of African women writers on how African women are using Western education to redefine their

roles within the family, society, and at the workplace. The study will be relevant to theoreticians and researchers in sexualities and reproduction studies, alongside fostering a convergence in theoretical perspectives among proponents of African feminism (Arndt, 2002; Diop, 2017; van Niekerk, 2018).

I envisaged that by virtue of the selection of the three literary works, whose authors are pioneers of African feminism, deep insight into the hotly debated issues surrounding African feminism will be garnered. Characterization in the three novels underscores theoretical orientation of feminism in post-colonial Africa. Hence, the selection of the three novels will augment and entrench understanding of the varied theorizations of the three schools of thoughts comprising reformism, radicalism and African Womanism. The variation in characterization and prose will foster a well-rounded study with the potential of yielding rich and well-validated findings.

Methodology

In his study, Mohajan (2018) defined methodology as “logic of development of the process used to generate theory that is procedural framework within which the research is conducted” (p. 27). Creswell and Poth (2018) provided a clearer understanding by stating that methodology entails the logical steps and procedures through which the research problems are resolved. As a result, this section on methodology covers the important aspect of how I will approach the study in terms of research paradigm and sources of data, alongside in-depth analysis of the selected texts in relation to feminist agendas, within the context of African women, in the three novels. This

section also provides ample insight into how female characters are redefining their gender roles and identities.

For the purpose of this study, I have adopted the qualitative research paradigm. Sauro (2015) and Creswell and Poth (2018) posited that qualitative research methods entail exploration and in-depth comprehension of the meanings that individual or groups associate with a human or social problem. This means that qualitative researchers often take note of “emerging questions and procedures of which data is typically collected in the participants’ settings, whether primary or secondary, followed by data analysis (inductive) based on emerging themes and patterns”.

Considering the aforementioned attributes of qualitative studies, the study collected primary data from the three novels for analysis. This was followed by literary criticism via formalistic approach to data analysis. The means for close reading of the expressions and actions of the characters in the novels constitute the basis for data analysis. Qualitative research methodology entails critical evaluation of the three novels with a view to understand the activities of individual characters within the context of this study. By this means, I will extrapolate meanings based on the novels in view of their individual meaning as reflected in the various aspects of the texts.

Exploration of the characterization of each of the African women writers was relevant to the resolution of the research problems identified at the beginning of the study. As earlier stated, characterization by a writer is reflective of her conception of African feminism and highly representative of her stance on the dichotomy of theorization regarding African feminism (Arndt, 2002; Reams, 2015; van Niekerk, 2018).

Sources of Data

The study employed secondary sources of data. The three novels by Evelyne Accad (*Wounding Words*), Nawal El Sadaawi (*Woman at Point Zero*) and Flora Nwapa (*Women are Different*) served as the primary sources of data.

Rationale for Selection of Texts

I have selected the three literary works of Evelyne Accad, Flora Nwapa and Nawal El Sadaawi in view of their relatedness to issues involving African feminism. The female characters depict and exemplify the dichotomy of opinion concerning African feminism as portrayed in the texts of the three novels. Critical evaluation of feminist literature shows that it is evolving and constantly changing. A careful study of the changing phases of feminist ideal reveals that the choice, depiction and activities of characters in the three novels, flow freely with the oscillating tides and currents of opinion in feminist discourses.

I adopted purposive sampling technique for the selection of the three novels in harmony with the findings of Patton (2015). He indicated that since qualitative research method is often associated with limited sample, it is best to select sources of data that will yield rich and reliable results. I agree to Patton's recommendation, because such approach will allow in-depth interrogation of the texts in the three novels.

The study employs formalistic approach, which entails rigorous examination of the expressions and actions of the respective characters in the selected texts. Critical evaluation of the literariness of the texts in the three literary works is relevant, because the authors' bias or misgivings regarding global feminism and African feminism could have limited the result of the

study. Moreover, since the literary works of the authors were written within space and time and their adoption of characterization helped in underscoring the fluidity of African feminism and feminism in general, it will suffice for the four-pronged objectives of the study.

Data Analysis

I will adopt formalistic approach to analysis, which entails rigorous textual analysis of the three novels. I will highlight emergent trends and patterns, and appropriate inferences made, based on the texts and in relation to the objectives of the study. More importantly, the process will help in the resolution of the research problems identified at the introductory section of this study. The adopted methodology is relevant because it will fast track formulation of practical and result-oriented theoretical underpinning that provides ample insight into African feminism.

However, the formulated theoretical framework does not in any way render other theoretical perspectives on how feminism practiced in Africa is obsolete. Rather, it offers a more realistic, broad and unique framework. This framework offers a platform upon which African women's daily struggle against stereotypical norms, patriarchy and unequal gender treatment in African society can be hinged. Hence, the formulated theory is complementary and provides a clearer picture of how female characters are redefining their gender roles and identities.

In harmony with the focus of formalism, I analyzed the three literary works via a thorough consideration of the literariness of the three novels by the notable African female writers (Saadawi, Nwapa and Accad). This means that analysis will be limited to the texts, which speak to the purpose of the

study. Relevant aspects of the expressions of individual characters will be critically analyzed in order to resolve the research problem. I will not consider the economic, social or cultural background of the three writers.

Summary of the Three Novels

***Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Sadaawi**

Firdaus, being the main character in *Woman at Point Zero*, goes through terrible ordeals at each stage of her life in Egypt. Though she longs for a beautiful, serene and fulfilling life, she is highly disappointed with how her life turns out due to the abuse and ill-treatment by men. Firdaus has a humble background, which reinforces her painful experiences. For example, because of economic gains, her close relatives maltreat her, and her father compels her to marry Sheikh Mahmoud, a rich man with deformity and over sixty years of age. Firdaus is deprived of several opportunities that could have made her life more fulfilling, such as university education. She suffers in the hands of several men including Bayoumi, whom she wanted to marry, but he treats her like a prostitute. Later, Sharifa, an elegant prostitute, introduces her to prostitution¹. Sharifa deepens Firdaus' hatred for men and opens her eyes to the endemic gender inequality and male chauvinism pervading the post-colonial Egypt.

Firdaus is embittered and disillusioned due to her grueling experiences with men. She concludes, therefore, that women are mistreated and deprived of true love, self-determination, happiness and security. Her bitterness and

¹ This, regardless, Firdaus asserted that she was “not a prostitute in the full sense of the word” because her creed is against the norms of prostitution; and that a prostitute never says no or else, she ceases to be a prostitute. However, she posited that instead of leaving her alone, men insist because they feared rejection and were ready to pay whatever she requested.

sorrow become so strong that she kills a pimp and ends up in Qanatir prison cell in Cairo, Egypt. Although she suffers from the male dominated post-colonial Egypt, she feels that all men are wicked or criminals and all women are better than men are. By killing a man, she declares herself free from man's domination. Firdaus' statement is poignant and vivid. She cannot take the brutal treatment any longer and does all she can to rid herself of patriarchy and gender inequality.

The protagonist's courage, as graphically portrayed in the novel, has inspired and spurred many women into active feminism and has highlighted the need for close attention to male chauvinism, irrespective of where it is detected. Over the years, it has inspired several women to avidly fight for their rights and deprivation arising from patriarchy and gender inequality, which is rampant in post-colonial Africa.

***Women are Different* by Flora Nwapa**

Agnes, Dora and Rose are the protagonists of the novel. The travails of the triad epitomize the pervading gender inequality and entrenched patriarchy during and after colonization in Nigeria. Their immediate family members as far as patriarchy do not spare Agnes, Dora and Rose and gender inequality is concerned. By her narratives and choice of characters, Nwapa exemplifies the daily experiences of women in pre- and post-colonial periods in Nigeria. It is noteworthy that despite the disabling environment and the pervading story of women's incapacitation to rise above gender inequality, the three characters use Western education, astuteness and dynamism to effectively address and rise above male domination and gender inequality.

The novel captures the flickering embers of the colonial period. It also provides adequate insight into relevant issues involving women's struggle against patriarchy, gender inequality, and solidarity for financial freedom and negative stereotypical norms associated with the Nigerian Society. Nwapa indicates that Agnes is compelled to marry someone as old as her father. Though it initially derails her desire for higher education, she later attains it, becomes financially independent, and adequately provides for her children's material needs. She feels she has transcended man's domination and transmuted her terrible ordeal into becoming the breadwinner of her family.

On her part, the negative stereotypical norms in post-colonial Nigeria seriously affects Dora. She loves all the men in her life but they are all traitors and they disappoint her. She does not give up but rather overcomes her travails through astuteness, forethought and business acumen. She is opportune to occupy the role of the family head, which could have been done by Chris. Dora succeeds in rising above men's domination and redefines her gender role.

The third protagonist is Rose. In a bid to save face and respond to the negative stereotypical norms rampant in post-colonial Nigeria, Rose's efforts at marrying is futile. She is thoroughly deceived by three men and the last man, Tunde, "cherished a dear dead wife" (p. 138) than Rose. The betrayal she experiences underpins the entrenched gender inequality in post-colonial Nigeria. However, she never relents on her efforts, especially at exploiting Western education. She is the most educated of the three protagonists, and has a business corporation of her own. Rose gains financial freedom and redefines her gender role by becoming the head of a business organization.

While there are other characters in the novel, the travails of the three protagonists exemplify how women have succeeded in attaining financial freedom as well as taking on masculine gender roles irrespective of the negative stereotypical norms and the prevalent gender inequality in post-colonial Nigeria.

***Wounding Words* by Evelyne Accad**

The novel revolves around the touching story of the protagonist, Hayate, who relates her ordeal with negative stereotypical norms prevalent in post-colonial Tunisia. In an effort to promote feminist ideals in Tunisia, Hayate, an expatriate and a scholar, finds herself trapped in the controversial and highly divisive debate on what should constitute feminist ideal in Tunisia. Her efforts at uniting the disparate schools of thought on feminism is met with stiff opposition. She employs historical review of feminism with a view to underscoring the relatedness of Tunisian's conception of feminism to the overall objective of feminism in the US and other European countries. It falls on deaf ears, and the issue becomes more divisive than she met it. Even though most of the groups agree that Tunisian men are domineering, insecure and tyrannical, they still find it difficult to live alone without their husbands, due to stigmatization and loneliness. Women are at the mercy of the traditional Islamic culture and customs, which pervades the Tunisian Community and overrides civic laws.

Accad indicates that Tunisia is known for the respect for democratic rule in comparison to its neighbours, yet the country is divided along religious and political lines. The protagonist comes to the realization that every aspect of life in Tunisia comes secondary to traditional Islamic culture and custom,

including even civic laws. Hayate is perturbed because Tunisia reviewed its civic laws to address gender inequality in 1956 so that women could have equal rights with men.

However, women have no say in the family. In spite of the provision for gender equality in Tunisia's civic law, Islamic law, as reflected in the culture and customs, mandates women to always obey their husbands even when such obedience will prevent them from working to gain economic independence. As a result, Hayate subscribes to feminist orientation that fosters inclusive discourse and transcends historical and cultural differences. Her argument is for feminist ideal that is instrumental and fosters the common good instead of espousing religious, political or personal agenda. This is feminist orientation that caters for the good of both the male and female without fear or favour.

Delimitation

The study is restricted to three novels or literary works by African women writers, namely: *Wounding Words* by Evelyne Accad, *Women are Different* by Flora Nwapa and *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Saadawi. The focus is on comparative analysis of how these authors (Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa) employed characterization along with plots, themes, and dialogue to produce a string of interconnected, reliable and well-validated results concretizing the rationale of the work on African feminism. It will also enhance understanding into formulation of a realistic and balanced conceptualization of African feminism. This is relevant to filling the contradictory and knowledge gaps existing in African feminism.

Limitations

The study is not devoid of some mitigating factors. One major limiting factor is that the characterization in the three novels does not represent women struggle against the ills of patriarchy or stereotypical norms regarding women in the African society in its entirety. Another limitation is the context within which the novels were written, which could affect the feminist ideals or theoretical orientation of the authors. For example, Saadawi's novel espouses radical feminism, because it was written in post-colonial Tunisia where religious laws supersede constitutional laws. Hence, in order to gain freedom, women took to radicalism. However, in Nigeria, where Nwapa wrote her novel, constitutional rights supersede religious laws. As a result, Nwapa subscribed to reformist theorization of feminism with a view to make marriage work. By underscoring areas where each of the orientations coincides, and formulating a realistic and balanced conceptualization of African feminism, I will address these differences.

In harmony with the focus of formalistic approach to analysis, the study will be restricted to the activities of the characters as contained in the texts. This means that, I will conduct analysis not on the motive or background of the authors, but rather on how female characters are redefining gender roles and identities within the context of the texts. Even though findings of previous studies indicated that the manner or approach to characterization by an African woman writer is influenced by her conception of African feminism (Ngurukie, 1992; Blackmone, 2008), the main focus of analysis in this study is not what the authors conceived about African feminism; rather what the female characters in the novels expressed, as represented in texts.

This study will therefore conduct a rigorous and robust analysis based on the texts of the three novels, and not the authors' viewpoints. In effect, the study is concerned about what the characters say, do and conceive about African feminism without consideration for divergence of opinion regarding African feminism among authors. I envisage that the outcome of the study will serve as a touchstone for other studies on the same topic.

Organization of the Study

The study is organized into five chapters. The first chapter covers the introductory section of the study, which lays the groundwork for the entire dissertation. This entails a brief discussion on the background of the study. The chapter also includes statement of the problem, objective of the study, the research questions, delimitation of the study and the significance or relevance of the study.

Chapter Two covers in-depth review of previous literature on African feminism. It comprises two sections: theoretical and empirical literatures. This provides ample insight into differing theoretical underpinning, conceptual frameworks and host of previous studies related to the focus of the study. Chapter Three is directed towards the critical analysis of the expressions and actions of the characters in the literary works of the three notable African women writers (Saadawi, Nwapa & Accad). It also covers an in-depth view of two of the research questions.

Chapter Four entails presentation of the results of data analysis alongside in-depth discussion of the results in reference to the three literary works of the authors. Chapter Five concludes the entire thesis and serves as the cap or the major section highlighting the overall results and implications of

the study. Hence, chapter five entails the summary, presentation of major findings, and conclusion reached based on the findings of the study. I have made relevant recommendations in relation to the results of the study and suggestions for further studies are proffered.

Summary

This chapter sought to highlight relevant issues involving theorization of African feminism and feminism in general. With the adoption of formalistic approach to analysis, I showed that the texts in selected novels form the unit of analysis. The chapter underscored the relevance of the study through identification of gaps in knowledge and why they should be resolved. It delineates the significance of the study in terms of its contribution to literature on theorization of African feminism.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter reviews and discusses relevant literature that serve as linchpin for the present study. The focus of the review is threefold— theoretical, conceptual and empirical. The theoretical review focuses on two theories of African feminism – Theory of Reformative Feminism and Theory of Radical Feminism.

The conceptual framework discusses formalism as one of the concepts of literary criticism. The empirical review critically examines previous studies in relation to the influence of the existing differences of opinion on what form of theory should underpin African feminism (Jones, Palmer, and Jones, 1988, 1997). It provides insight into prevailing factors such as differences; and also touches on why African women should collaborate to achieve a united front in feminist engagements or discourses, amidst crippling diversity and multiculturalism.

The crux of the review is to conduct in-depth investigation into the previous works of several African women writers related to the primary objective of the present study. African women are vastly different from their White counterparts in view of integral differences in political, cultural and socio-economic structures (Anyidoho, 2015, Blackmone, 2008). Moreover, the preconditions of White females are vastly different from African females. For example, Anyidoho (2015) indicated that some African women daily experience the devastating effects of poverty, illiteracy, war, and illness of which some White women may not fully comprehend. When viewed as a

whole, I will agree with Anyidoho's submission because the standard of living in Europe and the United States is higher as compared to Africa. However, individually, some White women suffer from poverty, illnesses, illiteracy and war. For example, the Covid-19 pandemic has affected more White women than Black women in Africa (Forkuo, 2020; WHO, 2020). Additionally, countries such as Russia, Ukraine, and Kazhakstan are witnessing war, and their women suffer gender inequality, diseases and live in abject poverty (Kuzio, 2020; Human Right Watch, 2020). That notwithstanding, the population of African women who are deprived of basic human rights, lurching in poverty and suffer gender inequality are greater than that of the White women. In a recent Global Gender summit focusing on gender inequality in Africa, Egbetayo (2019) observes: "In Africa, 70% of women are excluded financially and the continent has a US\$ 42 billion financial gap between men and women" (p. 19).

Hence, African women writers strongly believe that theorization of African feminism must be vastly different from global feminism which generalizes feminist spirit or ideals. Rather, it must be conceptualized and contextualized to address the debilitating plight of African women in the face of patriarchy, oppression, subjugation and gender inequality seen in several quarters of the social milieu.

However, African women writers are divided on how each of these problems should be tackled. While some feel that global feminism should be totally rejected and a new brand of African feminism formed, others strongly advocate global feminism with radical approach to gender inequality in African societies. Yet, several others are still unstable and are constantly

changing their conception of what African feminism should be. The review will ascertain these gaps and highlight how to articulate feminist ideal amidst the crippling diversity and multiculturalism.

The conceptual framework provided ample insight into formalism as an important approach to analyzing literary work through close reading of the selected texts. What does formalism entail in the context of African feminism? How does the principle of literary criticism influence the identification of valuable, reliable and practical findings? Can the historical, personal experience and level of education be considered using a formalistic approach? I adequately catered for these questions in the course of the review.

Theoretical Framework

The Theory of Reformative Feminism

It is pertinent to discuss two of the theoretical facets of feminism that underpin this study. This will be relevant in highlighting the conceptual contribution of each of the novels towards the raging debate on what constitutes feminism within the African context; the conceptions among women writers and how women are redefining their gendered roles and discourse in the family and society, to the end of bridging the prevailing gender gap.

The central theme of feminist discourse falls within the need to negotiate gender equality, since feminists see inequality as the mainstay of human societies around the world (Lorber, 2009). Lorber indicated that inequality can be seen in every inch of the society: in marriage and families, politics, religion, the economy and cultural production. In fact, even our daily use of language engenders gender inequality. Hence, feminists strongly

believe that the entire society, and not just individuals, need to change their view on gendered roles and discourse. Lorber (2009) and Nehere (2016) indicated that feminist perspective is evolving; however, for the purpose of this study, three forms of feminism will be considered, namely: Gender Reform Feminism (Liberal), Gender Resistant Feminism (Transformative) and Gender Revolution Feminism (Radical) (Lorber, 2009; Nehere, 2016; Dimitrakaki, 2018).

Reformative feminists, according to Arndt (2002), Nehere (2016) and Dimitrakaki (2018), are concerned with the ills in the modern society, which discriminate against women in several spheres of life. They clamor for a world where women are not marginalized in the job market, including the art industry (Lorber, 2009; Dimitrakaki, 2018). This means that women should not be deprived of the opportunity to enter into any type of field, even those such as Science, Art, Engineering, Construction or Police and Military workforce.

Reformists are reconciliatory in their approach to feminism and are quite optimistic that it is possible to achieve reconciliation with disputing parties. Proponents of reformative feminism also claim that women should not be discriminated against in relation to wages. Wages should be based on qualification, requisite skills, extent of dangerousness and responsibility, all of which cut across gender lines. Salaries should be equalized so that women can be less dependent on their husbands and be liberated economically (Lorber, 2009; Nehere, 2016).

Reformative feminism also entails the desire for gender equality in issues pertaining to work and development. Proponents place much emphasis

on how economic exploitation of women in the developing world, especially in post-colonial Africa, can be eradicated. Comprehensive studies (Lay, 2007; Ackerly & True, 2018; Kantola and Lombardo, 2020) employing empirical gender analysis of global economy, reveal that due to stereotypes in post-colonial Africa, women are paid less than men in the job market. Additionally, due to patriarchy in post-colonial Africa, the mode of production and kinship rules, there is much emphasis on the men as bread winners with much power and prestige invested in them, whereas women are of little value.

Another aspect of liberal feminism lends credence to the ratified resolution of United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women Forum in Beijing (1995) that “human rights are women’s rights and women’s rights are human rights.” As a result, sociocultural practices, such as marginalization at work and other oppressive activities against women, such as child marriage, infanticide, female genital mutilation and dowry were frowned upon. In essence, development feminism promotes economic independence for women and a world rid of gender inequality.

Implication for the Study

The Reformative theory underpins Nwapa’s *Women Are Different* and a section of Accad’s *Wounding Words*. Both writers employ characterization that emphasizes reconciliation and strong optimism that men could change and become better husbands.

Characterization in *Women Are Different* focuses on the transition between colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. Similarly, in *Wounding Words*, it revolves around the intense debate on feminist discourse in post-colonial Africa, while characters in *Woman at Point Zero* dwelt on feminist discourse

in post-colonial Egypt. Reformative feminism is reconciliatory in nature and always hopes for readjustment or amelioration of social ills culminating in a happy ending. Transformative feminism, on the other hand, detests discrimination of women at workplace while radical feminism resists women subjugation.

I below consider a brief analysis of the statements and actions of some of the female characters in the novels. This is not an exhaustive analysis; I have done it to highlight how the activities of the female characters in Nwapa and Accad's novels underscore reformative feminism. Exhibiting reconciliatory stance, Nwapa's female character, Dora, stated: *"It is a difficult situation. I know...I am sad because my marriage failed. And I must be frank with you, if Chris comes back today and shows penitence, I'll go back to him"*. Even though her husband, Chris, deserted her, Dora strongly believes he will come back to her one day despite the serious problems that separated them, hence, *"Dora has come to terms with Chris and has her children"* (p. 138). Dora further stated:

"I believe in Nigeria today if a woman marries a difficult husband, and if she wants the marriage to last, she has to be prepared to take a lot. She has to be prepared to receive insults from all and sundry. She has to give and give and continue to give...ignore all her husband's shortcomings" (p. 102).

Likewise, *"Agnes lost her lover but she has her husband and children"* (p. 138). Rose, another female character stated:

"Right now, I have nobody. When I spent that short time with Olu in London, the greatest pleasure I had was waking up in the mornings"

and seeing Olu by my side. It was short-lived, but I would do anything in my power to re-live that experience all over again” (p. 105).

The quoted texts of Agnes, Dora and Rose, female characters in Nwapa’s novel, revealed their keen desire to get back to their husbands, thereby exhibiting reconciliatory disposition. For example, Dora indicated that if a woman marries a difficult husband, she must be ready to do everything to see to it that the marriage never fails: *“She has to give and give and continue to give...ignore all her husband’s shortcomings”* (p. 102). Likewise, Rose indicated that though Olu deceived and disappointed her, she *“would do anything in my power”* (p. 105) to achieve the type of cordial relationship she once had with Olu.

In all the texts cited above, the disposition of female characters is underpinned by reformist theorization, laden with the notion that women can reform men and improve men’s willingness to rethink, correct their paths and rejoin their wives or correct unequal treatment of women.

The female characters envisioned a situation which Rose described as *“we talked, we listened to the news, and we listened to music. He ordered breakfast; we sat facing each other eating breakfast”* (p. 106). These characters want a world with gender parity in which they see non-discriminatory attitude from men. Unlike radical feminism, they do not entertain aggressiveness; rather, they entertain the gender equality and a balanced approach to issues on gender bias or gap, so that socio-cultural and stereotypical norms fueling patriarchy, as reflected in the lives of the protagonists, are addressed. For example, one of the protagonists, Agnes, is compelled to marry a man who is as old as her father is, due to stereotypical

norms that women are only useful in the kitchen, and that a girl should not be sent to school or be educated.

A closer reading of *Wounding Words*, revealed that several of the female characters exhibited reformist theoretical perspective, as shown below:

I don't remember my childhood well, ... I think that I've always been a feminist.... After God, it was the Club! Feminism, for me, is a societal project. It is another vision of things. I'd like to work for the liberation of the entire society, for if we free women, men will also." (p. 44).

Dalale, one of the female characters in *Wounding Words*, does not have aversion for men, nor does she describe all of them as bad; rather, she pleads that the entire society should be liberated from negative stereotypical norms and oppressive patriarchal norms via societal projects which are all-embracing. She strongly believes that the Tunisian society can be rid of unwholesome norms in order to prepare the entire country for growth and peaceful coexistence between males and females, where men and women would not be suppressed or deprived of basic human rights.

It must, however, be noted that Nwapa took another position on feminist discourse when she indicated that Agnes, Dora and Comfort had failed marriages because their husbands were exploitative, less pragmatic and adulterous. Rose, on her part, is unable to marry and raise any child of her own due to the exploitative behaviour of her would-be husbands. She stated that all these women fought against their dependence on men and sought economic independence, via education. For example, Agnes, Rose and Dora became economically liberated via education, and they could readily perform male dominated jobs as executives.

In this instance, Nwapa's characterization depicts the narrative of transformative feminist literature because the characters were transformed by Western education, and they redefined their gender roles and identities. They rose above the stereotypical norm that women are meant for the kitchen, and went ahead to occupy positions often occupied by men in the society. They sought economic independence so that they could remove themselves from male domination and exploitation.

There is a tint of radical feminism in Nwapa's characterization because she indicated that Rose was severely dealt with by Ernest and Mark, and implied that the two (Ernest and Mark) were beyond redemption. They were both beyond the reach of Rose. She stated that Ernest would be either in jail or in protective custody. In this sense, she portrays men as exploitative, dubious and ungrateful, supporting radical feminist literature.

This brief analysis of Nwapa's *Women are Different* underscores the fluidity of her stance regarding African feminism. At one time, she characterizes her protagonists as exhibiting reformative feminism, and at another time, they display transformative feminism. However, feminist discourse or engagement does not allow for such vacillation. It is either this or that. It is pertinent, therefore, to critically examine the rest of the text (*Women are Different*) to ascertain possible factors influencing such vacillation and define a better way to classify Nwapa's stance on African feminism through a practical and balanced theoretical framework.

Radical Feminism

Unlike reformative and transformative feminism, the concept of radical feminism is a total aversion to patriarchy, male dominance, oppression, and

exploitation of women. Providing additional insight on radical feminists, Jeffreys (2013) stated: “Radical feminist theorists do not seek to make gender a bit more flexible, but to eliminate it. They are gender abolitionists, and understand gender to provide the framework and rationale for male dominance” (p.13).

In harmony with Jeffreys’ (2013) statement above, radical feminists want to deconstruct the rigid gender roles in the society, and free men and women. They attributed the oppression, inequality and other ills in the society to the restrictive gender roles and identities imposed on men and women in the society.

Proponents of radical feminism often emphasize what women can do, relegating men to the background. They actively promote women-oriented activities and readily assist battered women and rape victims, through counseling and legal services. Women in radical feminist movements feel strongly that men are wicked and have the potential to use physical violence against women (Arndt, 2002; Vukoicici, 2017).

Radical feminists claim that in patriarchal societies, several men exhibited severe loss of respect for women, women’s bodies, and their aspirations (Vukoicici, 2017). They strongly feel that men control women by setting up patriarchal societies where men own everything including their wives, and women are subjected to all forms of maltreatments and inequality. This means that women must be under the shadow of their husbands and must be regimented to low-level status in the society. These groups of feminists are concerned about everything woman, with disdain for men.

Implication for the Study

Radical feminism underpins the present study since this is the third faction in the hotly debated theorization and perspectives of African feminist literature. Radical feminism underpins the characterization in *Woman at Point Zero* by Saadawi. However, for *Wounding Words*, female characters were divided between radical and reformative feminism.

Several female characters in *Woman at Point Zero* and *Wounding Words* expressed theoretical perspective underpinned by radical feminism because they favour militant or radical approach to gender inequality with the notion that reformative feminist or those interested in reconciliatory discourse lack the potency of facilitating gender equality and an equitable approach to women issues. The main protagonist in *Woman at Point Zero*, Firdaus, enjoyed fame and walked shoulder to shoulder with men on the corridors of power.

For example, Firdaus, the protagonist in *Woman at Point Zero*, states, after killing a man: “*I have triumphed over both life and death because I no longer desire to live, nor do I any longer fear to die. I want nothing. I hope nothing. I fear nothing. Therefore, I am free*” (p. 110).

Hala, one of the female characters in *Wounding Words* asserts that:

She is convinced that the women of Tunisia must...take militant action: a feminist struggle allowing them to acquire full democratic citizenship. The dominant patriarchal ideology slows up the contribution of Tunisian women. They misogynist attitudes and especially the Islamic movements are a real danger to the rights, liberty and equality of women...feminist movement must...fight against

exploitation, imperialism, and against specific oppression on women
(p. 151).

However, earlier, Firdaus' life was so bitter that she concluded that "all criminals are men and all men are criminals" (p. 48). All the men in her life, including her father, were very mean, oppressive and exploitative. She attained economic independence and could amass wealth in a short while due to her keen desire to be rid of men's domination, oppression, exploitation and discrimination.

Notwithstanding, scholars have criticized female writers espousing radical feminism and have pointed to the weakness inherent in radical feminist theorization. For example, in a bid to resist patriarchy, Firdaus killed a man in her effort to fight inequality and she ended up becoming a criminal.

Punching a hole in radical feminist theorization, Eichler (1988) indicates: "gender partisanship may end up becoming what it purports to fight against" (p. 33). Similarly, Daniel (2012) posited: "this gynocentric structure may replace an androcentric one, which will be a sexist sexism" (p. 41). In effect, objectivity and candor would have made radical feminists know that not all men are criminals, and one cannot use criminal activity to resolve serious societal issues.

Both *Woman at Point Zero* and *Wounding Words* (section of the novels) are underpinned by radical feminist discourse. Accad and Saadawi employed characterization to show radical feminism through the protagonists and female characters that are ready to overthrow the gender system, wage war with men and relieve themselves of patriarchy, subjugation and oppression at all cost, and end up becoming what they hate or disillusioned.

Concept of Literary Criticism: Formalism

Following the groundbreaking works captioned “*Principles of Criticism*” and “*Practical Criticism*” in 1924 and 1929 respectively, Richards challenged the subjective and impressionist criticism of his day. He conducted an empirical study in which he tested the evaluative ability of undergraduate students by providing them with poems of which they had no preliminary knowledge of the poet and were unfamiliar with the text. These students were required to pass judgment based on the text. Thus, he initiated a shift in paradigm as far as literary criticism is concerned. His approach was both empirical and pragmatic, which entails “close reading of the text” (p. 89).

Richards’ (1924, 1929) perspective on literary criticism underpins the works of African women writers because the activities or depiction of female characters is carefully crafted towards highlighting certain ills within the African society. In line with Richards, an in-depth analysis (close reading) of their characterization in terms of plot, point of view, settings, and other pertinent aspects of the text, will reveal their theoretical viewpoint regarding African feminism. Anyidoho (2015) indicated that passage of time influences the literary work of African women writers because the nature of societal issues are changing, becoming more complex, requiring a change in writing style and characterization. Blackmone (2008) and McLane-Davidson (2015) indicated that the current phase of inequality in African society is vastly different from pre-colonial times when oral traditions and folklore influenced societal norms.

Lending credence to the fluid nature of African literary works, Okunoye (2004) and Olowookere (2013) described African literary works as

comprising both old and new concepts, because, according to these scholars, African literatures “tend to change in response to the socio-political realities of the time. This can be detected in the subject matter, writing style and form, setting a generally acceptable way of writing for the various generations of writers in Africa. Hence, ascertaining the meaning of a literary work within the African context requires close reading of the work, in order to uncover the meaning trapped within the text.

A critical examination of the characters in the three novels tallies with formalistic approach to literary criticism. This means that in analyzing literary texts, the main concern of a formalist is to underscore ambiguities, tensions, and paradoxes in the text (Busse & McIntyre, 2010). It focuses on the literariness of the text, and considers literature as an important aspect of human experience and has to be understood on its own merits. Formalistic approach is devoid of superfluity such as historical contexts, biographical information, or intellectual ability of the writer (DiYanni, 2008). Morell (2010) indicated that formalists treat literary works as a body constitutive of several parts.

I view texts as self-contained, comprising individual chapters or scenes, settings, the point of view, the tone and other relevant aspects of a text. I analyze each of the constituent parts of the work, and determine the overall picture or meaning of the literary work. This means that the mood, socio-cultural condition or status of the writer is irrelevant to the overriding meaning of the work. In effect, statements and actions of female characters in each of the novels are paramount to the attainment of a balanced theoretical framework. From the perspective of formalists, close reading of literary work

requires an objective consideration of the written text. They are of the view that the meaning and focus of a literary work is within the text; critical analysis, without external influences, will reveal it (Morell, 2006, 2010; Pilshchikov, 2016).

Scholars and critics often employ several approaches to analyze pieces of literature such as fiction, poetry or drama with the sole aim of deepening knowledge, improving the understanding of literary works, and affirming or rejecting concepts espoused in previous studies as well as formulating a practical and flexible theoretical framework (Hale, 2001; Sijercic, 2018). Richards sees the text as a living organism, functioning or operative through its various parts. In effect, he strongly objected subjective and impressionist appraisal of texts. Rather, he favoured pragmatic approach, which treats the text as autonomous.

However, critics are of the opinion that the level of education, geographical location and economic accomplishment of a writer or poet could influence the writing style and conceptual contribution of the literary work. For example, Tekiner (2006) contended that biographical information and socio-cultural contexts of writers, alongside the intellectual ability of a writer should be included in the analysis. However, empirical studies show that preliminary knowledge of a poet could create bias or sympathy affecting the quality of critical examination (Richards, 1929; DiYanni, 2008).

Scott-Baumann and Burton (2014) further indicate that though formalism is a good approach to analysis, it is insufficient because the context or social world of the writer and reader influences the text. By focusing on only the scientific aspect of texts while neglecting moral implications and feeling or emotions influencing such writing, I consider formalism weak. Formalism is also very time consuming because it ignores psychological aspects and focuses on forms or texts through close reading (Burton, 2004).

Since the focus of the study is to formulate a realistic and balanced theorization of African feminism, I am of the opinion that formalistic approach is highly relevant to understanding the inherent qualities of a literary work since it considers literary devices and textual features of the text. The hallmark of formalism, as literary criticism, is unbiased, objective and scientific evaluation of the text culminating in a reliable, well-validated findings rid of bias (Di Yanni, 2008; Scott-Baumann and Burton, 2014).

Implication for the Study

Consistent with the framework of formalism, as postulated by Richards (1924, 1929), the crux of gaining insight into the literary works of the three African women writers is to critically examine the text via close reading. In essence, in analyzing literary works, the overarching objective of a formalist is to underscore ambiguities, tensions, and paradoxes in the text and the text alone (Busse & McIntyre, 2010).

Formalism in literary criticism focuses on literariness of the text and considers literature as an important aspect of human experience, which has to be understood on its own merits. It is devoid of preliminary knowledge of the writer such as his or her writing ability, social or economic background.

The approach rids itself of any superfluity such as historical contexts and biographical information of the writer (Hale, 2006; DiYanni, 2008; Habib, 2013). Unequivocally, the conceptual framework of formalism underpins the present study since it considers literary devices and textual features of the text.

As a result, this study critically examines the literary works of selected African women with the main objective of underscoring how they employ characterization to theorize African feminism and delineate various ways women redefine their gender roles and identities. A cursory examination of the three novels reveals gaps in characterization authenticating the need for resolution of such gaps to arrive at a practical and balanced theoretical framework for African feminism.

Empirical Review

This section entails an in-depth review of extant feminist literature by African women writers. I made an effort to itemize works of some writers with the aim of highlighting the deep divide in the theorization and perspectives among African women writers. The review also touched on how African women writers employ characterization to underscore the focus of African feminism.

In her study on gender and identity issues, Ngulube (2018) defined identity as the sense of self that one possesses and that is developed within the context of societal constructs related to ethnicity, gender, culture, social class, sexual orientation, and differing abilities. As people develop these multiple identities, they grapple with societal expectations related to gendered roles.

Grappling with societal expectations regarding gender has resulted in feminist movement around the world. Theoretical views on what constitutes

inequality or women oppression are vastly different among the several members of the movement. For example, van Niekerk (2018) indicated that theoretical underpinning among feminists can be confusing at times, with some clamoring for a different form of feminist discourse for African women while others want feminism thrown out entirely. Blackmone (2008), on her part, wants theoretical perspective on feminism replaced with African womanism with much emphasis on African women context. Blackmone's submission is relevant to the focus of the present study. Blackmone feels the present theorization on feminism is irrelevant, impractical and out of touch with social reality in Africa. It is therefore paramount, to develop a flexible and balanced theory enshrined on peaceful and respectful co-existence of men and women, with much emphasis on gender equality and equitability. It will serve as a framework embracing the performativity and evolving nature of gender (McEwen, 2003; Mears, 2009; Ngulube, 2018).

This underlies the burning desire of African women to develop a theory that harmonizes or espouses the peculiar situation African women face every day. This will help readers to know how African women are redefining their gender roles to cope, survive, and entrench support for gender equality. Bayu (2019), on the other hand, favours the radical approach to feminism. She desires women's economic and social status uplifted via activism or total rejection of gender inequality in all aspects of human society. Similar to Egbetayo's (2019) analysis, there is a huge gap between men and women from sociocultural and economic perspectives. Hence, Bayu is of the opinion that radical action that defies the current political, social and economic structures must be taken before women can be emancipated. Her conviction is that

something more drastic, transcending dialogue, and subservient approach to gender inequality are the panacea to the recurrent cases of gender inequality in post-colonial Africa.

While Bayu's conviction could be helpful on one hand, it could result in escalation of gender inequality on the other hand. In my opinion, addressing societal issues with disregard for political, social and economic structures will be consequential. Lending credence to my opinion is the statement of one of the female characters – Nayla, in *Wounding Words*. She stated: "*I don't want to hurt my parents, my family – my father in particular. That's not the way to move forward...I don't agree, Hay. It's not my approach.*" Radical action without consideration for societal structures such as the family will be counterproductive and entrench division among feminists, since several, like Nayla, will disagree with such approach.

Arndt (2002) indicated that in recent times, feminist perspectives have broadened with extended application. On several fronts, feminists do not physically assert their status but rather, they do so through Western education, which fosters economic independence. It also helps women to redefine the gendered roles (imposed on them by the African society) and renegotiate their identities due to economic empowerment.

In their studies, Nehere (2016), van Niekerk (2018), and Bayu (2019) indicated that, while some feminists held to radical or revolutionary approach to addressing ills in the society, others felt not all men are bad. Hence, they are reconciliatory and want a happy ending when men balance their treatment of women and correct gender inequality at work and within the family.

However, others are vacillating between reformative and radical feminism with a tint of transformative feminism.

In her work, *Overcoming Ignorance: The Graduate*, Grace Ogot, an African woman feminist, characterizes her protagonists to exhibit reformist conception of African feminism. In Ogot's perspective, reformist conception contextualizes African women's experiences. She is among the writers who viewed radical feminism as White feminism, which espouses hatred of men and total rejection of the family arrangement in Africa. A closer look at her work shows that she neither subscribes to transformative or radical feminism nor vacillates between the three theoretical frameworks.

In Ogot's book, *The Protagonists*, she characterizes Karungaru, the protagonist, as very bitter due to being maltreated by men. For example, Karungaru reminisces how she and other women supported men at the risk of their lives to gain independence from oppressors. Shortly after that, she recounted that men folk quickly forgot their contributions and never rewarded them. However, Ogot did not finish the prose on that bitter note. She indicated that men folk later cooperated and welcomed women to participate in governance so much so that Karungaru became the Minister of Public Affairs. In this stance, Ogot's characterization depicted a reformist feminist literature in Africa, which hopes for the best. In most of her novels, Ogot always emphasizes return to the homeland, which tallies with the reformist outlook.

Several studies have been carried out in connection with the experiences of women's gender identity development (Mears, 2009; Ngulube, 2018). The findings of these studies, according to McEwen (2003), demonstrate that women's gender identity develops within the context of a

society in which they are oppressed, maligned and treated unfairly. A careful study of the inhumane conditions women were subjected to in the society reveals that women are identified as second-tier citizens with inferior identity. It also demonstrated that women's identities are socially constructed instead of being personally negotiated and constructed (Hallyburton & Evans, 2014; Kayanan, 2017; Ngulube, 2018).

Ngulube (2018) investigated women's plight in relation to gender inequalities, power relations, girls' education, patriarchal leanings, and gender roles in Northern Ghana. Findings of the study revealed that women are sidelined because of the deeply rooted stereotypes against them, and power relations between men and women. Ngulube (2018) attributed this situation to male-dominated social and cultural structures. He concluded that an educated woman can make a difference. By her actions, she can exert positive influence on the society by improving the lot of women.

Ngulube's (2018) study underpins the present study because it presented empirical evidence that women are oppressed or sidelined due to patriarchal leanings and stereotypical norms in Africa. Since gender is performative and evolving, Ngulube's study shows that women can address the negative stereotypes against them and improve their place in the family and society in general through Western education. Women are also redefining gendered roles by exploiting several other avenues, thus proving that women are not weak intellectually, not incapable of taking effective lead within and outside the family. Women can change their lot and resist undue domination or subjugation.

African women writers are educated, and, as Ngulube indicated above, they can become a formidable force in addressing gender inequality, girl child education and other ills within the African society. At the outset of the study, I showed that that African feminism is all about improving women's sociocultural situation and reinforcing gender equality in the African society. However, due to the dichotomy of theorization, addressing certain issues becomes difficult. For example, Platt (2002) contended that among African feminists, some see female circumcision as a religious rite while others vehemently reject it, claiming it is female genital mutilation. Feminists who see African feminism from the perspective of religion and cultural belief would frown upon restriction of the practice. However, feminists' viewing the issue from human rights perspective will see the issue as mutilation and stark human right violation.

In another scenario, van Niekerk (2018) contended that perpetrators of girls trafficking often go scot free because feminist discourses on what constitute girls trafficking is confusing and unclear. She indicated that some claim that an individual or organization is culpable of human trafficking only when a child or adolescent (less than 18 years of age) is transported to another country and another area for forced labour or sexual exploitation. This means that to these groups of feminists, transporting 18 years and above to another country or area for sexual exploitation or forced labour does not necessarily constitute human trafficking since the individual is an adult and can make rational decision. However, other feminists have argued that, an adult can be deceived or transported under duress for exploitative purposes; these perpetrators are also culpable of human trafficking.

The situation involving human trafficking and female genital mutilation is just two of the several issues underscoring the dichotomy of theorization on African feminist discourse. Continuation of these dichotomies will only make gender inequality, women subjugation and ill-treatment worse. The several schools of thought will not win since they are opposing each other. As a result, it is paramount to formulate a practical and balanced theory that cuts through the excesses of competing feminist theory. For example, even though female circumcision is viewed as religious and cultural rights of women in certain areas in Africa (including Ghana), human rights demand that such practices should be discontinued, with the motive of improving the living condition of African women.

Empirical evidence shows that there are higher incidences of negative impact on women's health due to the method adopted. FGM should be done under strict hygienic condition, and, considering several examples of negative impact² on women's sex life and existence after such practice, those sticking to religious group for such practice should consider other alternative so as to preserve the healthy condition of women and sex life.

Blackmone (2008), McLane-Davidson (2015) and van Niekerk (2018) indicated that lack of collaborative efforts among feminists cripple African feminism and make it difficult to address several issues involving inequality and women oppression within the African society. There is the need for consensus and collaborative efforts to fight the ills within the society and also to promote a balanced treatment of women. This underscores the focus of the

²Sakeah, Debpuur, Oduro, Welaga, Aborigo, Sakeah and Moyer (2018) indicated that there are short- and long-term consequences of FGM. These include, but not limited to heightened risk of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), severe pain, chronic genital reproductive tract, painful urination, urinary tract infections.

study. Arndt's (2002) directed her work towards defining and classifying African feminism. She critically examined feminist literature in Africa and highlighted the raging debate on theorization or what African feminism should be. She discussed the heterogeneity of African feminism, and classified the differing opinions and conception among African women writers.

Arndt's work identifies certain factors contributive to the dichotomy among African women writers, especially in their efforts to characterize protagonists in their novels or literary works. One of the several factors is the perception of writers on societal issues, personal experiences and levels of education. Arndt (2002) indicated that the recurring oppression perpetrated by colonialists influenced pre-colonial African women writers by paving way for the spread of other forms of evil against women. Critical examination of the text of writing prior to independence by many nations is reflective of the militant approach to the resolution of gender inequality and extreme perspective on men's behaviour. However, these factors cannot be used to analyze African women writers' works in view of the tenet of formalistic approach to literary criticism. As a result, I have provided some textual evidence to authenticate such conclusion.

In her work, *"Mother of Daughters"*, Ngurukie (1992) portrayed men as brutal, wicked and inconsiderate, when she introduced the protagonist, Nduta: *"He had beaten her, denied her financial help, insulted her in front of her children and visitors, tortured her psychologically"* (p. 86). Nduta's husband did all of these to her because she *"has no son, only six daughters"* (p. 84). However, Nduta was depicted as benevolent when Ngurukie indicated

that Nduta procured a loan on behalf of her husband when he lost his job. They used the loan as initial capital to start a thriving bar business.

Arndt (2002) indicated that despite the diversity of the writers, it should be possible to enjoy unity of purpose amidst diversity. Her work did not explain how such unity could be achieved, and that is why the present study is very important, since it focuses on the differences, factors contributive to them and more importantly, on how a converging point can be achieved in theorization of African feminism.

A scholarly attention given to gender issues in recent times creates awareness of the inequalities women face globally. The level of inequality and its debilitating effects are dependent on the society in which women are placed or grow up in. For example, Opare (2015) and Ngulube (2018) posited that women in the West suffer inequalities in the area of equal pay, whereas in Africa and Ghana in particular, women are marginalized and suffer inequalities in the area of accessibility to quality education and sustainable livelihoods alongside other forms of ill-treatment common to male-dominated societies.

Even though white women may face some of the above-mentioned issues, Anyidoho (2015) indicated that it has become the daily experience of millions of women in Africa and in Ghana. In his work, *“Corruption, Good Governance and the African States”*, Ganahl (2013) indicated that the level of corruption, gender inequalities and women subjugation in the West is vastly different from Africa. In this part of the world, women enjoy the fruit of developed economy, strong institutions, and legal framework. This has facilitated ample support for gender equality and fewer cases of women

subjugation. On the other hand, in African states, weak institutions mar women's livelihood, and it is frail to non-functional legal framework. Moreover, public institutions are endemic of corruption as well as abuse of human rights.

A perusal of several studies (Evans, 2014; Ngulube, 2018; Hyland, 2018) demonstrated that women develop and gain a sense of identity in a context of connections with others, and that women's sense of self is organized around building and sustaining relationships. This means that women's lives could be enhanced or marred by the prevailing circumstances they live in. Women thrive where there is love and rights are respected, with serious consequences or penalty for violation of women's right. Women's sense of self revolves around the understanding of responsibility and relationships, and women are more likely to preserve relationships than to pursue personal objectives.

In effect, women's identity of self and assessment of achievement in life are interconnected. Women often do better, according to Evans (2014), when they discern that their families, and especially their husbands, respect them. The need for belonging as well as confirmation of what they are from close friends or spouses is crucial to how women assess themselves. The yearning for belonging and self-awareness shows that women value good relationships and peaceful co-existence to personal achievement. This is an important quality for leadership.

Kouzes and Posner's (2002) book, *Making Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, demonstrated that women can be transformative in their approach to leadership. Northouse (2007) also indicated that irrespective

of the societal conception of women, they can function effectively as leaders, energizing people and organizations into achieving spectacular results due to their natural attributes for building relationships. Results of the studies by Kouzes and Posner and Northouse lend credence to the submission of Evans, Ngulube and Hyland mentioned above, that women are often concerned about how to preserve cordial relationships than personal achievements. This is an important component of a successful leader.

Findings of these studies unerringly situate women within the transformational paradigm of leadership. The ability to relate to others; to be tolerant; to develop relationships with and amongst people; to integrate diverse individuals with differing experiences and backgrounds, and to form consensus by bringing together varied perspectives, are vital to effective, culturally sensitive, and socially responsible leadership.

However, a critical evaluation of African feminist literature reveals that they are not only transformational in their texts; they have also exhibited reformative and radical traits in their writing. Arndt (2002), Diop (2017) and van Niekerk (2018) indicated that the first generation of African women writers, that is, those born in the 1930s, often write reformist-oriented literatures. The recurring problems associated with the Second World War and the activities of the liberation movement influence them, when most African countries are struggling for independence in the early 1950s and late 1960s. However, after the upheaval and several African countries gained independence, some of the writers became transformative in their conception of African feminism.

For instance, Flora Nwapa wrote *Efuru* and *Idu* in the post-colonial period in Nigeria. Her characterization followed reformist orientation at the outset but later changed to transformative orientation at the latter part of the novel. In these works (*Efuru* and *Idu*), Nwapa did not severely criticize polygamy in the African society. For instance, she underscored the attributes of a loving husband in Adiewere and stated concerning his union with Idu, the protagonist of the novel: “*God created the two of them together and said that they must be husband and wife. Do you know if one of them is sick, the other one becomes sick too?*” (p.150) Nwapa depicted Adiewere as an ideal husband yet she indicated that “*he upholds other privileges of men and basic principles of the unequal gender hierarchy*” (p. 103). Textual evidence shows that Idu and the writer (Nwapa) were less concerned that Adiewere deprived his wife certain rights; they still view him as an ideal picture of a caring husband. As indicated earlier, *Efuru* was written after Nigeria had independence from colonial rule in 1966, and in that period, the urge for reformation or reconciliatory approach to gender inequality was rampant.

Notwithstanding, there are exceptions to the above submission because Saadawi, for example, was among the first generation of writers and yet her characterization in *Woman at Point Zero* was entirely orientated towards radical African feminist literature. Also, Pat Ngurukie’s characterization in *Mother of Daughters* was also tilted towards radical feminism. She used her lead character, Nduta, to depict the most gruesome things men are doing to women. She depicted men as brutal, selfish, inconsiderate and wicked. For example, Ngurukie depicted Nduta’s husband as Mr. Right, who inflicted a lot of pain on his wife, yet she was optimistic. The novel reads: “*poor Nduta,*

innocent of any crime and acting the good obedient wife that she was, followed her husband inside to an inner room, without arguing or asking any question” (p. 87).

Despite Nduta being a good wife, her husband maltreated her, and the story climaxed into the most barbaric and brutal act by the husband. After the husband had asked two men to beat the wife mercilessly, struggling to survive, she saw “*her husband drawing a sharp knife from his pocket. Then pain, real agony as he, her one-time Mr. Right, pierced her eyes with the sharp knife several times. And then everything was total darkness*” (pp. 87-88). Here she depicted men (the husband and his two friends) as barbaric, wicked and inconsiderate. They could even go as far as piercing the eyes of an innocent woman who was docile and willing to cooperate with her husband. Ngurukie employed this characterization to demonstrate that men generally are unreservedly wicked and can inflict wounds on their wives irrespective of the extent to which the wives are supportive and ready to obey them.

However, a closer study of the literary works of the generation of African women writers born after the 1970s are transformative in orientation. They want an alternative to feminism and are strongly interested in redefining women gender roles and identities. This is not always the case because in recent works by African women writers born after 1970, radical feminist literature was the orientation. Nzioki, Akinyi and Kabira’s (1992) work comprised short stories and thought-provoking poems orchestrated to break the lingering conspiracy of silence involving everyday violence against women. The book was designed to curtail the impunity associated with crimes against women. The editors wrote in graphic terms how many people in the

African society were obtuse about women suffering, struggle, and loss of dignity as a result of social structures within the African society. They condemned patriarchy and gender inequality that is rampant in the society, and attributed most of these ills to social structures, men and economic factors.

For example, in one of the poems in “They Have Destroyed the Temple”, women’s body was theorized as “*a temple that men have desecrated/destroyed*” (p. 70). Referring to women’s inability to utter words against oppression by men, Nzioki et al. (1992) indicated that women’s tongues are seen as “*swollen tongues that stick to the palate*” (p. 70). By this depiction, Nzioki et al. (1992) painted men as evildoers, destroyers and inconsiderate. However, they presented women as benevolent, accommodating and enduring.

In effect, the empirical review shows that women can redefine their gender roles and identities when they occupy the position of transformational leaders. This underpins the present study because at one point or another, most of the characters in the three novels occupy the position of a leader, both in the family and in an organization. For example, Firdaus said: “*A prostitute always says yes, and then names her price. If she says no, she ceases to be a prostitute. I was not a prostitute.... So, from time to time I say no...I became very successful*” Yes, Firdaus redefined her gender role by becoming a breadwinner and gained economic independence from men via her profession.

Likewise, Dora in *Women Are Different* by Nwapa, was “*left at IkotEkpene with five small children, the eldest was only eleven*”. How would she survive when the husband, Chris, left her and travelled to London? She fought her way through, because she had foresight and worked assiduously to

take on the role of a breadwinner in the family because “*Dora had the money...her family did not suffer too much during the civil war...people envied her*” (p. 74 – 75). Undoubtedly, Dora was a transformative leader because she was able to take care of five children, regained her house and adequately provided for her family despite the absence of her husband. She redefined her gender role both in the family (breadwinner and protector of her children) and in the society (C.E.O of a company). Hence, as shown above, some of the characters redefined their gender roles in the society and family through Western education. Several others have done so through economic empowerment, improved status in the society and wealth.

The three novels contain different ways by which women attained freedom and redefined gender roles and identities. Characterization in the three novels differs in connection with power relations between men and women, women’s view of men, inequality in the society and response to impunity within the society.

Summary

The review and discussions in this segment of the study, as buttressed by brief analysis of primary texts and relevant sources, reveals that there is a huge gap in conception regarding African feminism among African women writers. One group of writers are unstable in their conception of African feminism because they vacillate between one conception and another. This is not necessarily because they are afraid or unsure of what the movement should espouse; rather, it is a way of adjusting to what they feel was the best conception at a given time. From such writers’ perspective, conception of

African feminism is not static; it is dependent on prevailing circumstances and what is being criticized within the social milieu.

Others felt this form of feminism is not realistic because things are not changing. Men continue to dominate over women to their (women's) injury, and as a result, there is the need for transformation when women transcend subjugation and domination by men and gain freedom. These group of writers felt that feminism should be replaced with "*womanism*" or "*motherism*" to demonstrate the unique nature and position of African women.

The third group comprised women who claimed that religious and cultural obligations within the African context should not be relegated at the expense of Western ideology. For example, they theorize female circumcision as religious rite and cultural norm that every woman should undergo.

This study contends that multiculturalism and diversity in orientation do not rule out a core and practical theory reflective of the unique context of the African women. In this sense, flexibility and variation of orientation is allowed but the core theory must be constitutive of fractions of undeniable fact agreed upon by every African woman writer. In effect, while the theoretical framework will not be perfect, it will thus be representative of the unique and varying circumstances: social, cultural and economic, that African women found themselves requiring decisive move culminating in the redefinition of gender roles. As a result, the theory will be representative of African feminism, which is constitutive of African women experience. A close reading of the three works by the first generation of African women writers (Flora Nwapa, Nawal El Sadaawi & Evelyne Accad) will suffice in the formulation of such theory.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PERTINENT WAYS THROUGH WHICH WOMEN IN WOUNDING WORDS, WOMAN AT POINT ZERO AND WOMEN ARE DIFFERENT ARE NEGOTIATING GENDER ROLES AND IDENTITIES

Introduction

This chapter provides ample insight into how each of the writers made unique and vivid portrayal of female characters with a view to underscore their theoretical perspective and unveil an in-depth grasp of the intricate stereotypical philosophies involving gender issues in the African society. I also adopt a formalistic approach for the analysis. This entails an objective examination of the three novels with a view to resolve two of the research problems adequately.

Analysis is structured into two main compartments. Unlike the summary presented at the introductory section, the first segment of this chapter provides plot summary of the novels within the perspective of how it relates to the focus of the study and resolution of two of the research problems. Hence, it considers relevant issues within the three novels that provide a credible platform for the analysis of the research questions. Situating the works of each of the three African female writers within feminist discourse forms the second segment of the analysis. As a result, I will carry out analysis with a view to answer two of the four-pronged research questions guiding the focus of the study.

Plot Summary of the Novels

In consonance with Selasi (2015), it is important to outline the plot summaries because it provides ample insight into the sequential arrangement of events in each of the novels, by each of the three African female writers. It is also useful in understanding character development and other aspects of a novel such as energy, suspense, and catharsis (this is the same as emotional release). Valuable information regarding the themes in a fiction, conflict or depressive issue that enhances emotional engagement with the story as well as raising the desire of the audience in seeing how the story relates to ways or manners within which the identified conflicts are resolved and discussed.

What comes to the fore upon a careful study of the three novels is the compelling concern of the authors at seeing a world where women are understood in relation to their situation, position and stereotypes in a male-dominated society (Eustace, 2000; Flanagan, 2015; Kalpakli, 2017). The cry for equal gender relations and autonomy occurred briefly in the context of colonial Africa and dominantly in post-colonial Africa, with patriarchal ideology taking sway in the society (Eustace, 2000; Fleming and Lempert, 2014; Benchop and Verloo, 2016). In harmony with Ritzer and Goodman (2004), the authors highlighted the pressing need for effective strategies towards a sociocultural world where things are just for women and for people of all pedigree (Bruno, 2006). By virtue of their approach to characterization, each of the women underscored their side of the debate on what the theoretical framework underpinning African feminism should be. A critical evaluation of their works reveals much regarding the ordered while one portrays her characters as representative of age.

Plot Summary of *Woman at Point Zero*

Woman at Point Zero (hereinafter referred to as *WPZ*) is a novel that revolves around the main protagonist and the first-person narrator, Firdaus. She is an unusual woman, unlike other prisoners in Qanatir Prison, Egypt. She has been sentenced to death because she killed a man. Although she will not speak or welcome visitors and also refused to plead for clemency, she allowed a psychiatrist into her prison cell. Though surprised to have been invited, the psychiatrist knows she was in the presence of a real woman, and the voice echoing into her ears was the voice of Firdaus.

As a young energetic girl, Firdaus went through all forms of social strata in her society. On several occasions, men dashed her aspirations, hope and dream for a better life. With a humble background, Firdaus went through painful experiences of being deprived a university education, maltreated and forced by her family to marry Sheikh Mahmoud, a man over sixty years of age. She later suffered in the hands of Bayoumi and his friend who treated her like a prostitute. A prostitute, Sharifa, led her into prostitution with a poignant statement suggesting the pervasiveness of gender inequality and patriarchy in post-colonial Egypt.

Life was so unbearable for her that at a point; she lost all sense of hope or aspiration due to the grueling experiences she went through from childhood. She strongly believes it is a waste of time to hope and dream for a brighter future because women are often deprived of true love, self-determination, happiness and security. It is a male dominated world she lives in and women have no say. Her frustration led to strong aversion and hatred for men, so much so that she killed a man and, was incarcerated in Qanatir prison cell in

Cairo, Egypt. She said “*No woman can be a criminal. To be a criminal one must be a man...I want nothing, I hope for nothing. I fear nothing. Therefore, I am free*”.

Yes, she has sent the message. She rebelled against the brutal treatments perpetrated by men of all ages, backgrounds and professions, and rid herself of them all in death. Her statement has been a source of inspiration to women and underscored the urgent need for ridding the African society of gender inequality.

Plot Summary of *Women are Different*

Written from a third person limited point of view, *Women are Different* centers around three protagonists, namely: Agnes, Dora and Rose. The novel, *Women Are Different* (hereinafter referred to as *WAD*), demonstrates that, though women are vastly different in their experiences in life, they are all confronted with gender inequalities with little or no power to exert authority over their own bodies. Though capturing the last embers of the colonial days, the novel provides an in-depth insight into post-colonial Nigerian sociocultural framework, women’s struggle for financial freedom, male domination, and negative stereotypical norms rampant in the Nigerian Society.

For example, the author indicated that one of the protagonists, Agnes, “*was under pressure to get married to someone she did not like. He was much older than her – no he was as old as her father*” (p. 53). This derailed her plans to further her education. However, she was later able to attain her dream of higher education, married another man, became rich and lived a financially buoyant life. Her financial independence necessitated that she takes on several

responsibilities belonging to men, especially taking care of her four children. From her standpoint, she was free of man's domination.

Another female character, Dora, married Chris, who had limited education. Dora worked as a nurse and lost her work due to the negative stereotypical norms that pervaded post-colonial Nigeria. Without giving up, Dora built a bakery where she worked with her husband who felt that due to his gender, he is the boss and should control the affairs of the bakery. At this point, there was a twist in the life of Dora because she was to take on the responsibility of Chris as the breadwinner. Her situation demonstrated that women could attain financial liberation and perform men's role in a male-dominated society.

Another protagonist, Rose, married four men in succession. While three betrayed her, the last one, Tunde, was bewildered due to the loss of his ex-wife, which makes him feel both guilty and unable to love Rose truly. Considering her losses and inability to get Mr. Right, Rose threw herself into her work and attained economic independence so that she was in charge of her own life.

Comfort is an important and unique figure, though not often mentioned like the three protagonists. She worked tirelessly with the goal of enjoying her life and becoming self-dependent. From her standpoint, if a man cannot satisfy her monetary needs, she moves on. As a result, she also experienced failed marriages.

WAD clearly demonstrates the compelling argument that women can be financially independent and in recent times, there is an ongoing change in gender roles where women are taking on men's responsibilities in the society,

although it is now without consequences due to patriarchal sentiments and negative stereotypical norms in post-colonial Africa.

Plot Summary of *Wounding Words*

Wounding Words: A Woman's Journal in Tunisia (hereinafter referred to as *WW*) entails the touching story of the protagonist, Hayate, who was marginalized due to stereotypical norms in post-colonial Tunisia. She was an expatriate, and a scholar promoting feminist ideals. However, she was trapped in the divisive feminist movement. She tried to employ historical detail regarding the development of feminism in the United States, to impress her point of view on the need for a unified front within the feminist movement. However, her words fell on deaf ears because in a bid to acknowledge patriarchy within post-colonial Tunisia, members of the feminist movement in Tunisia find it difficult to combine sexual life with professional life. They see men as domineering, unsecure and tyrannical yet they find it difficult to live alone without their husbands due to stigmatization and loneliness. Women are at the mercy of the traditional Islamic culture and customs, which pervade the Tunisian community and overrides civic laws.

Viewed as “the most democratic” country in the Middle East (Brym & Andersen, 2016; Benstead, 2019), Tunisia is divided along religious and political lines. The protagonist came to the realization that every aspect of life in Tunisia comes secondary to the traditional Islamic culture and custom than the Civic Laws. Hayate was perturbed because Tunisia reviewed its civic laws to address gender inequality in 1956 so that women can have equal rights with men. Debates during the conference reveal that women are still seriously considered as underage.

The protagonist described her personal experiences while in Tunisia, to authenticate the divisive nature of civic and religious laws. She was compelled to forgo her deposit and give up her rented apartment in a serene environment at the landscape of El-Menzeh, when her landlord accost her because she lodged complaint about how he has been mistreating his wife and children. She became confused and troubled when the wife of the landlord came to her, imploring that she withdraws her complaint and return to the house in spite of the abusive behaviour of her husband. Hayate later discovered that it was a ploy and she could have entered into a big trouble since the man and his wife have been under surveillance by the government due to their depravity and bad reputation. Considering the cooperative attitude of this woman with her morally depraved husband, the protagonist was taken aback regarding her desire to champion women's cause and serve as a voice for the voiceless.

Women have no say in the family. In spite of the provision for gender equality in Tunisia's civic laws, Islamic law, as reflected in the culture and customs, mandated women to always obey their husbands even when such obedience will prevent them from working to gain economic independence. Hence, Hayate, for the first time, saw the need for inclusive discourse or theoretical orientation in the feminist movement that transcends cultural and historical differences. She clamored for a discourse that puts the common good ahead of personal and political interest or agenda.

Situating Contents of the Three Novels within the Context of Feminist Discourse

The three African female writers employed their works to vividly portray pressing societal issues concerning women. The point of view and

settings of each of the three novels place them right at the heart of the raging debate within the context of feminist discourse as highlighted below.

Point of View

In her book “*Woman at Point Zero*”, Saadawi maintained a first person point of view. However, there were two narrators: Nawal El Saadawi, the author, and Firdaus, the protagonist (Zamorano, 2014; Wolf, 2018). The first and third chapters were narrated by Nawal El Saadawi (the author and psychiatrist) while the remaining sections, which form the bulk of the novel, were narrated by Firdaus. The antagonist was Marzouk, a pimp whom the protagonist killed with her own knife.

By using this point of view, Nawal El Saadawi, an experienced psychiatrist, was able to provide vivid imageries, paradoxes and symbols to complement Firdaus’ life story and enjoin readers on the twist and turns of the novel. The point of view also allowed the protagonist to freely express the height of her emotions, feelings and visions such as when she said:

I am saying that you are criminals, all of you: the fathers, the uncles, the husbands, the pimps, the lawyers, the doctors, the journalists and all men of all profession...I am speaking the truth. And truth is savage and dangerous (p. 110)

Firdaus’ statement above is quite explicit since it clearly demonstrated her conception of men. The excerpt above is inspiring and nailing to the point that Firdaus was conveying regarding the pervading gender inequality and unsavory treatment of women in post-colonial Egypt and its male-dominated culture. It clearly demonstrates the extent to which patriarchal sentiments and negative stereotypes exist in Egypt and Africa at large. Firdaus indicated that

every man is a criminal, perpetuating gender inequality and mistreatment of women. She believes she's speaking the truth and will be punished for the truth because the "truth is savage and dangerous".

Women are Different was written in the third person limited point of view. Nwapa vividly portrays the feelings, thoughts, emotions and perspectives of each of the four protagonists: Agnes, Dora, Comfort and Rose from their high school days in Archdeacon Crowther Memorial Girl's School (ACMGS), Elelenwa to their late motherhood days. Using the third person omniscient point of view facilitated Nwapa's ability to relate the focus of the novel to the social context of the Igbo people in Nigeria and post-colonial Africa. The point of view also allowed her to make her own descriptions and subjective comments. The Omniscient point of view was quite relevant to *Women are Different* because the writer was able to acquaint the audience with the inner and outer experiences of the protagonists. For example:

I have not come to Aba to hunt for husbands, protested Rose.... Tomorrow you will meet Tunde...her interest was aroused.... Rose was restless. Today was the tomorrow they talked about last night. She was like a child who was so excited about going to a party tomorrow (p. 134).

Nwapa's style of narrating the story was very simple and original. Each of the characters spoke in the local parlance, which reflected the Nigerian cultural practices and the transition between colonial and post-colonial Nigeria.

In her novel, *Wounding Words*, Evelyne Accad employed varied or alternated points of view. The narrative style alternated between first, second

and third person points of view. By alternating her point of view, Accad demonstrated her focus, which is a vivid description of Hayate's journal. The journal comprises her experiences in relation to the heated debate on African feminism, her disappointments and several characters that have influenced her understanding of the raging debate on African feminism. Her audience was able to see and feel the confounding situation feminist movements are thrown into as they grapple with the Tunisian Sociocultural practices and the deeply entrenched Islamic customs and traditions. For example, she writes:

Concerning politics, declares Rima.... We must take up the issue of sexuality. Its essential to our progress. If we are afraid to approach this subject, our discussion will remain superficial.... We have to speak about feminism with regard to rise of fundamentalism, says Hala.... Feminism with regard to the western world and Tunisian feminism compared to other countries of the Maghreb, where does our identity lie? (pp. 103, 104)

The excerpt above shows the conflicting views of feminists in Tunisia. As one feminist raised one point, the other felt it should be the other way. Accad was able to capture the dilemma the proponents of feminism faced in Tunisia especially in relation to contextualizing feminism within the Tunisian discourse and worldwide feminist movements.

Settings

The main setting for *Woman at Point Zero* is Egypt. The novel commenced from Qanatir Prison in the Egyptian countryside, and then Firdaus' father's house where the protagonist stayed until the parents died. Another location is El Azhar School in Cairo, where Firdaus' uncle attends a

school, which was built for only men. After the death of her parents, Firdaus' uncle takes her to Cairo, where she attends boarding school and eventually marries Sheikh Mahmoud, and stays in his house. Later, she meets Bayoumi and his friends and then Sharifa who introduces her into prostitution and luxurious lifestyle. She rubs shoulders with dignitaries and eventually kills Marzouk, a pimp. She gets jailed in the same location (Qatanir Prison) where the story commences.

The settings enhance the plot of events. They establish the atmosphere, the mood, and the cascading streams of emotions. These emotions are related to the bewilderment of a woman shaken by the savagery of patriarchal society. The setting also reveals the rays of hope shown on her eyes upon freeing herself from such savagery by killing an overweening fellow (Marzouk). She says: *"I have triumphed over both life and death because I no longer desire to live, nor do I any longer fear to die. I want nothing. I hope nothing. I fear nothing. Therefore, I am free"* (p. 110).

Nwapa chooses a fitting setting for her novel by selecting the traditional setting of the Igbo community in the Nigerian patriarchal society. This occurs within the period of transitioning from colonialism (1945) to post-colonialism (1970s). The plot follows the characters (Agnes, Dora, Comfort and Rose) from their high school days to their late motherhood days. The novel commences with the four characters writing exams in Port Harcourt (p. 1), gained admission to ACMGS, Elelenwa in Igboland. They continue there until they finish school. Each of them moves to a different location with Agnes going to Lagos, Dora to Ikot Ekpene, Comfort to Aba, and Rose going to London and later ending up at Ikoyi, Lagos.

The setting is very fitting in underscoring the troubles of the three Nigerian women as they struggle against patriarchy and strive to gain consciousness about their rights to education and economic independence. The author shows that the missionary school in Elenwa influenced these protagonists to embrace feminist ideals and shun corruption, immorality and extreme materialism. However, being in a patriarchal society, they are affected by stereotypical norms with resulting cases of failed marriages. They end up remaining economically buoyant and independent but divorced (Agnes, Dora and Comfort) and single (Rose).

I acknowledge that *Woman at Point Zero* concretizes its point using several figures of speech and colourful expressions. For example, Saadawi employed parallelism as follows: “*An infernal circle whirling round and round, dragging me up and down with it*” (p. 99).

This means that the state is steeped in corruption because it is similar to whirling wind that affects everyone along its path with concomitant havoc on the entire society. The protagonist also makes a paradoxical statement as follows: “*Now I have learnt that honor required large sums of money to protect it, but that large sums of money couldn't be obtained without losing one's honor*” (p. 99). Essentially, Firdaus is underscoring the extent to which corruption has taken over the entire country. She indicates that even if she does not want her name tarnished, she would have to break a law by giving either bribe or accepting it, which, if found, she would eventually lose her good reputation and name. In effect, she is saying, no matter what she does, she has to lose her honor to save it.

Nwapa's literary work is quite impressive. She employed fitting settings for her work, which was grounded in reformative feminism and stressed on Western education as a means of financial emancipation for women. The three protagonists in her novel received substantive education and never stopped learning until they became liberated financially and had full control over their lives, enjoyed what they wanted, and when they wanted it. However, they suffered from failed marriages due to the limitation of reformative feminism which cannot reconcile with cultural practices in the patriarchal society in Nigeria (Kalpakli, 2017), as portrayed in the following excerpt:

So Agnes left her husband in a most callous manner. He went to work as usual, and by the time he returned, Agnes had left with their four children. Agnes' father was heart-broken, and shortly afterwards, he died (p. 59).

So Dora took the next plane to Hamburg armed with the address she was given. She arrived at the flat and rang the bell. A sleepy German lady opened the door saw Dora and shut the door again.... Chris, I have waited these years, the children, the war, everything.... A month after return from London and Hamburg, she went to Chris home, got hold of his old relatives and divorced him by native law and custom. A few days afterwards, Tunde came into her life (pp. 77, 78)

Upon a careful consideration of Nwapa's novel (*WPZ*), Umeh (1995) was compelled to state: "It is in her fiction that the enterprising African woman takes a stand and demands her rightful place in the halls of global

literary history” (p. 24). Unequivocally, Nwapa’s setting clearly situates her novel within the context of feminist discourse.

In Evelyne Accad’s novel, the setting was Tunisia; a country deeply entrenched in Islamic cultural norms and practices. Commencing from the Tunisian coast where Hayate, the protagonist, has a house, the novel indicated that she attended a conference on feminism, which sparked negative reactions from members of the Tunisian feminist movement. The setting was appropriate because it helped Accad’s audience to see, feel and smell the conflicting scenario between feminism and Tunisian environment steeped in patriarchy, Islamic religious norms, customs and beliefs. Though the civic law dictates that women have equal rights as men, Islamic religious norms require women to obey their husbands under every circumstance. This has perpetuated abuse and impunity by some men. The following excerpt epitomizes such mistreatment:

I was...born in a small village,’ Samia continues.... Early on, I learned of my mother’s trials and I swore that I would not live like her. I learned to demystify the world of men at a very young age. I told my mother I didn’t want to marry: I want to study. Some of my illiterate cousins had died under the blows of husbands and I said that I would never accept that fate. But, in one sense, I did the opposite of what I wanted. I was living an ambiguous lifestyle – I married at the age of twenty-two. I wanted a divorce immediately.... I divorced, and took up my studies and research again (pp. 43, 44).

Hayate indicated that she “*would never accept that fate*” where women will not do anything to address the mistreatment, abuse and domination of their

husbands. This was true in the case of “Fatima, the landlord’s wife” (p. 137). She requested that Hayate should retrieve her complaint against the criminal activities of her husband, the landlord. Hayate wrote:

I told her that I did not understand her, that if I had gone to the police, it was also for her sake. How could she stand to be treated this way? Had she thought about the horror of her husband’s actions, about justice, about other women to whom he had perhaps done the same thing or even worse...Hayate learned that...his wife supported him in all of this! I avoided her wisely, writes Hayate (pp. 137-139).

Like Fatima, Hayate discovered that several women were willing to submit to the Islamic religious custom as a matter of faith in God. Lending credence to Hayate’s discovery, Hala stated: “*The misogynist attitudes and especially the Islamic movements are a real danger to the rights, liberty and equality of women...feminist movement must...fight against exploitation, imperialism, and against specific oppression on women*” (p.151). Buttressing Hayate and Hala’s conceptions, Rima asserted: “*A delegation of women lawyers.... were silenced with the reminder that the Koran had proclaimed that nothing good could come from a woman leader, that women are too emotional, do not have intellectual capacity of men, or something like that!*” (p. 14).

A close reading of Hala and Rima’s expressions revealed that “*Islamic movements are a real danger to the rights of women*” and “*Koran had proclaimed that nothing good could come from a woman leader*”. These phrases underscore why several women could not fight against abuse and domination by their husbands. It is not a matter of fate; it is rather a matter

faith and religious belief, which was why Hayate told Fatima: “*I did not understand her... How could she stand to be treated this way?*” This is the reason why Hala felt that “*Islamic movements are a real danger*” that could disrupt their efforts at fighting “*against exploitation, imperialism, and against specific oppression on women*”.

However, some opposed male dominance, hence there was a division among members of the Tunisian Feminist Movement in their struggle against intolerance, indignity and inequality perpetrated by their husbands and men in general. The setting also ensures that the audience felt what Hayate felt, as she stated in her journal:

And I remain there, overwhelmed,

Outraged for these women

Sickened by the injustice

Not knowing how to give shape

To all this pain

Wanting to find the bond of a plural unity

The place of meeting and communication (p. 70).

She ended up leaving Tunisia a distraught due to the strong aversion for American version or theoretical orientation of feminism by some of the Tunisian women. Hayate was helpless in view of her earnest efforts at reconciling the irreconcilable differences between the patriarchal and religiously influenced cultural practices in Tunisia and feminists’ ideals.

Analysis of Research Questions

I have structured this segment to resolve two of the research questions. I envisage that it will facilitate attainment of the primary objectives or focus of

the study. Hence, in this section, therefore, I have critically examined relevant texts in the three novels in relation to two of the research questions and the overarching objective of the study.

Research Question One:

How do Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa's works underscore gender norms in their characterization of women in post-colonial Africa?

The essence of this question is to elicit relevant information on how each of the female characters in the three novels depicted or portrayed the prevailing stereotypes regarding women in post-colonial Africa. The section also provides ample insight into how female characters have been used to promote each of the three female writers' theoretical perspective on feminism. In order to resolve the question adequately, I have analysed relevant excerpts on societal, religious and civic perspectives on womenfolk. I also considered how the characters depict the power structure within the family and how women perceive their status in comparison to men, as a means of underscoring the recurring gender norms within post-colonial Africa. Retrieval of portions of the novels was not chronological or sequential. Rather, it was dictated by relevance to the overall objective of the study and its usefulness in resolution of specific research problem. Adopting this approach is prudent since it coincides with the tenets of formalistic approach, which focuses on the text without consideration for sociocultural contexts or backgrounds of authors. It is also very helpful in using the most relevant texts in buttressing the focus of the study.

In the three novels, the writers portrayed female characters in different ways. For this study, portrayal is representative of a word or picture regarding

an individual's behaviour, appearance or feelings. In effect, portrayal denotes detailed account of an individual in writing.

As earlier discussed, characterization refers to how a writer portrays a character in the novel especially in relation to feelings, behaviour, and general attributes. Writers often employ characterization to familiarize their audience with the thoughts, emotions and ideas of a given person in the plot. This is often identifiable through what the individual says about herself, about others and what others say about her. In his study, Methuselah (2010) underscores varied approaches to characterization as a result of theoretical perspectives on feminism. For example, he said some writers portray women's image as "flat, docile, ordinary housewives, to the trope of nags and other such representations that overlay them with such fractiousness and or complacency" (p. 151). However, other African female writers see the issue from another perspective and present women in "strong, progressive and assertive heroic roles...projected other issues that impact on the ordinary lives of women like domestic violence, insecurity, food, security, poverty and disease and the effects...on women and children" (p. 151).

By his expressions above, Methuselah demonstrates that characters are similar to clay in the hands of a female writer and can be moulded to a given specification and dimension. Hence, for the purpose of creating public awareness and advocacy, writers have used female characters to underscore gender norms. The three African female writers employed several characters, and I have made efforts to select the most compelling of these characters in underscoring gender norms within post-colonial Africa, starting with Accad's *Wounding Words*.

Wounding Words (WW)

Hayate

This is the protagonist, an expatriate Lebanese scholar, who had renewed her research and teaching grant in an American university. She was to travel to Lebanon for her research but was sent to Tunisia because the American Embassy in Tunisia was bombed. Even though she was introduced by Nayla as visiting Tunisia “*to inspire us, to bring us new ideas, that we might support the oppressed*” (p. 11), Hayate soon found out that “a Lebanese man or woman living in the US is always under suspicion”; and, since she taught and received her research grant from the United States (US), she was seen as an affiliate to the US which was a representative of “*imperialism and domination/oppression*”(p. 121). She struggled to clear the misconception, but the situation became so dire, and the misconception deepened with Hayate becoming disillusioned and confused in view of the dichotomy of opinion and viewpoint among Tunisian women regarding feminist ideals.

Her experience, as captured in the following excerpts below, reveals the gender norm in Tunisia.

LANDLORD: *Do you need anything else*

HAYATE: *You were to bring in a larger bed. The one inside is much too narrow*

LANDLORD: *[He looks her over from head to toe, as if her request were indecent. His gaze is obscene, charged with unspoken meaning] “You live alone, don’t you? Why do you need a bigger bed?” [He slowly asks].*

HAYATE: [His remark angers her] The bed is very uncomfortable, [she throws back]. 'And my private life is none of your business! [She should not have made this type of remark. She must keep calm, at all costs! In a country where women are considered permanently under age, at the mercy of male authority, she should not have shown her irritation].

LANDLORD: [He reddens and retorts]: "I'm sorry, but I have no other bed. You can leave if you don't like it here" (p. 30)

Hayate was surprised at the uncomplimentary behaviour of the landlord in spite of paying her rent two months in advance. In these exchanges, Hayate realized that the landlord has no qualms failing to provide her with a larger bed or make her stay enjoyable. He categorically told her that she can leave if she does not like it. Eventually, she left in view of the harrowing experience she later had with the landlord that almost resulted in her being raped by the landlord, as summarized below:

HAYATE: Oh well! I'll make you the coffee

LANDLORD: [He grabs her wrists] It doesn't matter. You don't have time. But get undressed, just for a moment. I want to see your body. [Now he is using the familiar form of French address 'tu', with her. She tries to get away but the more she struggles, the more he presses his large fingers into her arm].

HAYATE: So is this how Tunisian men behave? Aren't you ashamed? Would you treat your sister this way? [She hopes to appeal to his sense of humour, his reputation as an Arab male, but his grip on her remains tight].

LANDLORD: *You've got a beautiful body. You are making me crazy. I want to suck you. I want to see it. [He begs her].*

HAYATE: *[She was seized with rage...she fears the worse...he is certainly stronger than she is. He could easily rape her, kill her even, and wash his hands of it. She should keep a cool-head, try to trick him with a ruse instead]. It is very warm, [she declares] I will show you my body, but let me breathe. And anyway, close the curtains. The neighbour might see us.*

LANDLORD: *[He runs to the window to close the curtains.... She throws herself to the door, opens it and runs...into the garden] Don't get so worked up I am leaving (pp. 119, 120).*

The account above clearly demonstrates that women are viewed as objects of sexual satisfaction. Although some may claim it is an African thing, in my opinion, it is very clear that Hayate's personal experience, as highlighted above, is unique to her. She feels and knows what happened to her. Her experiences cannot be rationalized as daily occurrence in Africa; it should rather be understood as one of the vices men, such as the landlord, are perpetrating and must be addressed.

Apart from failing to make life easier for the protagonist, the landlord went as far as wanting to have sexual relations with her in view of his expression: "*you are making me crazy; I want to suck you. I want to see it*". If she had not played tricks on him, the issue would have taken a disastrous turn. Undoubtedly, the main character in *WW* demonstrated that Tunisia is a male dominated environment endemic in domestic violence against women and rife with gender inequality.

Accad's portrayal of Hayate also reveals the deep division among Tunisian women as far as gender inequality, violence against women and lack of respect for women are concerned in the country. While some felt such mistreatment should be reported and promptly addressed with all eagerness, others felt reporting such issues is a betrayal of their family members or of the men folk. Hayate's experience with four characters, Aida, Nayla, Samia and Rima underscores these conceptions:

AIDA

AIDA: We should assert ourselves and not be afraid any more. If we don't, who will? I never tire of our conversations. They nourish me and help me to move forward without fear, to assert myself.... (pp. 2, 3)

NAYLA

I don't want to hurt my parents, my family – my father in particular. That's not the way to move forward...I don't agree, Hay. It's not my approach. [Later, she throws the folder in Hayate direction...picks up her novel and her guitar and leaves. She has just enough time to add] And don't forget to return the pages I gave you, torn up (pp. 48–50).

SAMIA

Accad writes: *For the past two days, Samia has been sheltering a cousin who has left her village and an abusive husband. Samia has contacted her journalist women friends; they will write her story to sway public opinion.*

SAMIA: [...who has also suffered greatly, has sworn to help her to the bitter end, despite all obstacles; her own family accuses her of inciting

her cousin to rebel]. I'm used to fighting! I'll do it for her too! We will not give up the struggle because certain men have decided to take away the few rights we have won! (pp. 13, 14)

RIMA

RIMA: A delegation of women lawyers – with a man at their head! - objected [returning to Islamic law regarding women's needs]. They were silenced with a reminder that the Koran had proclaimed that nothing good could come from a woman leader, that women are too emotional, do not have the intellectual capacity of men, or something like that! (pp. 14).

Accad writes: She [Rima] outlines a current problem facing Arab women. The Arab League is seeking an extension of the code of civil rights common to all Arab countries in order to make conditions of women the same across the League. Most women believe that such an accord will mean a step backwards for Tunisian women.... Some women don't even want to talk about the problem or see the issue raised, saying they don't consider themselves to be Arab. Aren't they tearing each other apart precisely because they feel completely powerless and paralyzed? (p. 97).

A closer study of the protagonist and the four female characters reveals the prevailing gender norms within Tunisia. For example, Aida stated that women should “assert themselves” because they are “not afraid anymore”.

By her expressions, she should have underscored the resoluteness of some women to take the bull by the horn and face patriarchy and gender inequality headlong. Assertion and being not afraid of something demonstrate

that the individual is no longer intimidated and will meet any action with definite and decisive reaction. Aida is among the group of women ready to take radical action to restore gender equality. Samia is also in the same school of thought with Aida, because she provides shelter for her cousin and indicates that she can go at any length to send out the message that women will not be subjugated.

Samia uses the expressions: “*bitter end*” “*despite all obstacles*” “*used to fighting*”, and will not allow some men to snatch the “*rights they have won*”. By her expression, Samia demonstrates that she will not only go to any length that may incur bitterness or misconception on the part of her family and the society in general, she will also promote radicalism and assert her hard earned rights, irrespective of where opposition may come from (even if from her close relatives); and she is not new to sacrificing whatever it will take.

However, Nayla takes another course; she opposes such drastic action against societal norms. She states that even though the father is mistreating her, she will never go against him. This is in line with the Islamic law requiring a child to obey the parents irrespective of what they may be doing to her. Hayate tells her that Nayla reporting the abusive father is the way forward. Nayla immediately challenge that “*that is not the way forward for her*”. From Nayla’s perspective, working collaboratively with one’s family and the society at large is more important than any other ideal. For her, feminist ideals should be kept within the realm of religious laws and that radicalism is forbidden.

On her part, Rima is concerned about the dichotomy of opinion regarding constitutional rights and Islamic laws. She is torn between

cooperating with Islamic laws which relegated women to a lower rating in comparison to men. Women are seen as intellectually weak, with no capacity to take effective lead. From Rima's submission, while I do not condone abuse or oppression of women, I am of the opinion that the issue of men or a woman taking the lead does not necessarily prevent women from expressing their opinion about issues of inequality and abuse.

In my perspective, it is all about how women approach the issue. Those interested in fighting or using violence could further disrupt the peace of the nation, since "violence begets violence" (Arndt, 2002; Woyongo, 2015). On the other hand, those women remaining silent and apathetic also encourage perpetuation of the oppression, just as Fatima, the landlord's wife, was pleading with Hayate "*take back my complaint*" at the police station, instead of "*supporting Hayate*" (p. 138) and taking a stance against her husband. This means that Rima should not feel helpless. She should seek other practical approach to addressing her dilemma.

Notwithstanding, I strongly feel that women's rights should not be trampled upon under the cloak of Islamic laws. Some of the women are too afraid to report abuse or mistreatment because their families and the society will label them as rebellious. Several others claimed that women are low intellectually in comparison to men and should always be followers. This has so much affected some women that, according to Rima, they see themselves as powerless and at the mercy of the men in the society. Likewise, some women think that for the sake of their families and husbands, it is better to keep quiet when abused by their fathers, husbands or male relatives.

Experiences of these women lend credence to the findings of several studies. For example, Zaki (2018) indicated that women suffer systematic sexual violence in the hands of men and women's rights are trampled upon because the authorities fail to uphold the stipulations in the 1956 Code on gender equality. Elghossain, Bott, Akik and Obermeyer (2019) posited that Tunisia is rife with negative stereotypical norms regarding women, which have aggravated the level of sexual, physical and psychological/emotional abuse or violence against women.

Unlike other Arab countries, there is visible evidence of large spaces for civil societies and organizations championing women's rights, yet the society treats women as second-tier citizens, and their husbands and other males abuse them with impunity. Moghadam (2020) also discovered that even though certain provisions were clearly stipulated in Labour Law to fast track women empowerment, these laws are not adequately enforced and women are deprived of their basic human rights.

Society is structured so as to lessen women's economic freedom. A report by Nabil (2016) indicates that in Tunisia, domestic violence is still a common form of abuse and 70% of Tunisian women are victims of this abuse by men. Women are "reluctant to talk about their sufferings because they feel ashamed" (p. 2). They are usually afraid of their families, neighbours, workmates, and others as is the case with Nayla.

Woman at Point Zero (WPZ)

Firdaus

As a young woman, Firdaus was severely abused by her father, husband, Bayoumi, Ibrahim and other men. She worked briefly in the office

and later became a prostitute. Saadawi vividly portrays Firdaus to underscore what was prevalent in Egypt as far as women are concerned. She related her overall feelings about men in the excerpt below:

However, every single man I did get to know filled me with but one desire: to lift my hand and bring it smashing down on his face. But because I am a woman I have never had the courage to lift my hand (p. 10).

Firdaus' statement revealed that her experiences with men was unsavory and bitter, yet she could not do anything about it. She had no courage to do so and lived with "suppressed desires" despite the rampant abuse men had perpetrated against her as she substantiated below:

Starting with her father, she stated:

My father...knew very few things in life. How to grow crops..., how to exchange his virgin daughter for a dowry when there was still time, how to be quicker than his neighbour in stealing from the fields once the crop was ripe..., how to beat his wife and make her bite the dust each night (p. 10).

Her uncle also abused her sexually at a tender age when she said:

My galabeya often slipped up my thighs, but I paid no attention until the moment when I would glimpse my uncle's hand moving slowly from behind the book he was reading to touch my leg...his hand would continue to press against my thigh with a grasping, almost brutal

insistence. He was doing to me what Mohammadain had done to me before³(p. 13).

When her husband beat her, and she went to the uncle for succor, the uncle also told her:

All husbands beat their wives, and my uncle's wife added that her husband often beat her. I said my uncle was a respected Sheikh, well versed in the teachings of religion, and he, therefore, could not possibly be in the habit of beating his wife. She replied that it was precisely men well versed in their religion who beat their wives. The precepts of religion permitted such punishment. A virtuous woman was not supposed to complain about her husband. Her duty was perfect obedience (pp. 46, 47)

Later, Firdaus captured the most telling part of her experience with men, as dictated by societal norms. She stated:

Now I was aware of the reality of the truth. Now I knew what I wanted. Now there was no room for illusions.... All women are victims of deception. Men impose deception on women and punish them for being deceived, force them down to the lowest level and punish them for falling so low, bind them in marriage and then chastise them with menial service for life, or insults, or blows. Now I realized.... That marriage was the system built on the most cruel suffering for women” (p. 94).

³Mohammadain, according to Firdaus, “used to pinch me under water and follow me into the small shelter made of maize stalks. He would make me lie down beneath a pile of straw, and lift up my galabeya. We played at ‘bride and bridegroom’. From some part in my body, where exactly I did not know, would come a sensation of sharp pleasure” (p. 12).

As the protagonist, Firdaus demonstrates that gender norm or negative stereotypes regarding women is also exhibited among government officials. High government officials who are required by law to protect women's rights and promote gender equality were found foul of the same act as indicated in the following excerpts:

On still a third, he explained to me that refusing a Head of State could be looked upon as an insult to a great man.... He added that if I really loved my country, if I was patriot, I would go to him at once. So I told the man from the police that I knew nothing about patriotism, that my country had not only given me nothing, but had also taken away anything I might have had, including my honour and my dignity (p. 98). When Marzouk (the pimp), threatened Firdaus, she relates:

I went to the police, only to discover that he had better connections than I. Then I had recourse to legal proceedings. I found out that the law punishes women like me, but turns a blind eye to what men do (p. 101).

Critical evaluation of Firdaus' experiences with men and other female characters, such as her uncle's wife, reveals that gender inequality is a norm in the post-colonial Egypt. Even women were aware of it, as Firdaus indicated "*I am a woman I have never had the courage to lift my hand*" (p. 10). She lived with suppressed desire. Women are required to keep mute even when their husbands batter them, handed off as brides in their teens and relatives sexually abused them.

Men can commit all forms of atrocities but a woman cannot; otherwise, she will be punished. The portrayal of Firdaus revealed that all the segments of post-colonial Egypt is rife of violence against women and gender inequality. The family is bankrupt because fathers abuse their wives and daughters. The Sheikhs and religious leaders beat their wives, in fact, Firdaus was shocked when her uncle's wife asserted: "*It was precisely men well versed in their religion who beat their wives*" and indicated that their religion requires a woman to keep quiet without complaining about the issue.

The last segment of post-colonial Egypt that should be rid of gender inequality and mistreatment of women should have been the government; however, as shown in the selected excerpts, government officials, including the police who are charged with the onerous task of protecting women's rights and upholding laws, policies and ordinances on physical and sexual violence against women, were culprits. Firdaus stated abruptly that she could not be patriotic to a nation or country that removes her dignity and honour and "punishes women... but turns a blind eye to what men do" (p. 101).

Saadawi employed characterization to vividly convey the gender norms in post-colonial Africa and the gloomy picture she painted is consistent with the findings of several studies. Despite the proclamation in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (Articles 5, 9, 18, 19, and 20), violence against women is still rife, and negative stereotypical norms, limiting women's freedom of conscience, expression and association and the right to fair trial still exists in Egypt.

Yount and Li (2009) reported that majority of the participants in a national demographic survey justified wife beating or hitting for several

reasons include religious beliefs. Most of these women, according to Yount and Li, felt powerless and, as a result, felt that domestic and social violence against women was justified since, from their perspective, they saw their mothers, siblings and other women suffer terribly in the hands of their husbands, fathers, uncles and other men. Lending credence to this issue, Wasef (2018) indicated that politicians and other high officials have orchestrated domestic and social violence against women in Egypt in recent times. Wasef continued that the regime of such officials or politicians often carry out their plots against women, claiming they are maintaining security or defending the regime against uprising. The study showed that women are often targeted whenever there is political turmoil.

Women are Different (WAD)

Agnes

She is one of the several female characters in the novel. Agnes' father abused her by marrying her off to Mr. Egemba, who was old enough to be her grandfather. Nwapa relates:

He had wanted to marry Agnes when she was a little girl of ten years old, when Agnes mother was alive.... Agnes... did not like the man of course. But you know what our husbands are like. Once they are given money, they sell their daughters. The man was and is an impostor (p. 53).

Agnes' father felt no qualms in selling his daughter of ten years of age to a friend because of money. He did this against Agnes and her mother's wishes. However, Agnes' mother "*insisted that Agnes went to school in the first place...and her husband, that long suffering man had to wait all those years – a mere piece of paper, can you imagine*" (p. 52).

Perusal of the excerpt above reveals that some women were empathetic and do not see anything wrong with marrying Agnes off at a tender age to an older man. One of the relative stated: "*marry her off as soon as possible so she will be busy with her own family and won't bother you with yours*" (p. 52). This underscores negative stereotypical norms in the Igbo community in Nigeria, which states that women are meant for raising children and taking care of their husbands. School is of less importance as one of the female characters stated:

Study? That means going back to school, to do what? Get another piece of paper? What happens after that? Marriage of course. So why bother with book if you are eventually going to be married (p. 53).

It is noteworthy that Agnes' insistence to go to the university in Lagos infuriated the husband, Mr. Egemba, and he disagreed with her. Nevertheless, Agnes took to her decision and left him to pursue her university education. Eventually, when she was called to bury her father, people said the following: *"She did not escape the criticisms of the people. She heard someone saying behind her back that she, Agnes killed her father by deserting her husband"* (p. 59).

By her behaviour, Agnes refuted the negative stereotypical norms that women were only meant for taking care of their husbands and children, and nothing else. She completed her university education and secured a job in Lagos, and demonstrated that women are highly relevant in other spheres of life.

Agnes also witnessed how her father maltreated and abused her mother. She relates:

Our children will have to get that important piece of paper before they get married. I have told my daughter, she must have it. I don't have it and that is why Papa Emeka behaves in such an atrocious manner to me. He seems to tell me during some of our quarrels: "If you can't take it, go." Then I think – where will I go to with seven children? So, I stay. But if I had that piece of paper which Agnes now has, I could have left him and gone to study (p. 53).

This reveals that, similar to Egypt, women were often deprived of their rights due to the endemic nature of negative stereotypical norms. Women are at the mercy of the men. He told her: *“if you can't take it, go”*. However, the twist in Nwapa's characterization was that both Agnes and her mother and other female characters were willing to correct the anomalies in their families, despite their husbands' mistreatment. They believed their husbands would change. Agnes demonstrated this when she returned to the husband after completing her education, but she was disappointed when her husband lashed back at her: *“Sit down, my wayward wife”*. Similarly, other characters in the novel treaded the same path.

Dora

She loved Chris and after marriage, she discovered terrible things about Chris including the collection of bribes. He sold their house, deserted her and travelled to London. When Dora travelled to London to look for Chris, *“a sleepy German lady opened the door, saw Dora and shut the door again”* (p. 77). Dora waited for several years, raising five children single-handedly. She was highly disappointed, however, she later told her friend: *“Rose if Chris comes back today and shows penitence, I'll go back to him”*. True to her words, *“Chris finally returned from Germany, and Dora threw a big party for him, to welcome him home, she asked her friends and business associates to rejoice with her”* (p. 130). Hence, similar to Agnes, Dora strongly believed that her husband could be helped and perhaps he could change for the better, she said:

I have built these businesses with my sweat and all the resources I could command. Should I have a brand new man to preside over them

or my husband who is the father of my children, no matter how badly he has treated me in the past, to preside over it? (p. 134).

Rose

She was the most brilliant and highly accomplished character as far as education is concerned. She studied in the University of London and had bad experiences with men. Mark tricked and jilted her, “*depriving her of her good name and her life savings*” (p. 83). She loved Earnest but had lost contact with him. “She was miserable. She felt sorry for herself. She wept, but she shared her sorrow with no one”. Later, Olu, a married man came into her life, the wife threatened her and “Rose never saw Olu again”. *Tunde became friends with Rose and they were on the verge of getting married, when Rose discovered it is possible to “share with him his type of music, his books and even his solitude, but the memory of his wife and his guilt over her death, she could not share....Tunde cherished a dear dead wife” over Rose* (p. 138). Upon reminiscing on her ordeal with men, “*She threw herself into her work. She went for another course overseas. She was having the most wonderful time of her life. She decided to relax and make the best out of it while it lasted*” (p. 87, 89).

Perusal of Rose’s life pattern is similar to the other two protagonists, Agnes and Dora. They knew men are unfaithful, deceptive and domineering, yet they entertained the hope that their husbands would change and would be faithful and understanding.

In sum, Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa employed characterization to vividly portray negative stereotypical norms against women. It was shown that women were abused verbally, sexually and physically. They were also

deprived of education, belittled and suppressed. While Accad and Saadawi underscore gender inequality, domestic and social violence against women, Nwapa portrayed unfaithfulness, deception and domineering attitude on the part of men in gender relations. The three writers clearly demonstrated that men commit so many atrocities, and women are divided in their opinion on the best approach to address it. While some felt it should not be reported so as to save face or protect the reputation of the abuser and the family, others felt it is best to hold the bull by the horn and lay bare what has transpired so that others will not suffer similar fate. Some women believed that with the passage of time, their husbands or the abuser could change and be reformed.

Research Question Two

In what ways do Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa's novels highlight pertinent ways that women are negotiating gender roles and identities?

The primary objective of this question is to critically examine the texts in the three novels on how female characters handled issues involving gender inequality, mistreatment and negative stereotypical norms in post-colonial Africa. This segment deepens the understanding on how female characters developed requisite skills; adapted their approach to economic issues; swapped or took on new gender roles as a means of improving their lot and that of their children (in the case of those having children), and took on new identities. I have selected relevant portions of the three novels with the aim of outlining how the female characters redefined their gender roles and identities within different segments of the society.

Women are Different (WAD)

In *WAD*, the three protagonists – Agnes, Dora and Rose made concerted efforts at overriding negative stereotypical norms in their community. They defied all odds and went through the rigors of obtaining sound education. Nwapa captured the tenacity and resilience of each of the protagonists under different settings, types of problems and opportunities.

These are clearly defined below:

Agnes

She was married off immediately after finishing secondary school and was later burdened with the responsibility of taking care of four children. Despite her predicament and her husband's opposition, she was bent on furthering her education. With the help of Mr. Dele, she got admission into the Faculty of Arts at the University College, Ibadan in 1957. Studying at the University College was onerous. Nwapa wrote:

Ibadan was tough for Agnes, but she read and read. She did not make much contact with the lecturers.... This was because she was too busy not only with academic work, but with her young children as well. For nearly every weekend, she went to Lagos to be with her children.... Maths gave her quite a problem, but she tackled it with vigour and single-minded (p. 61).

With unflagging determination, she passed her final exams and graduated in 1961. However, her lover, Mr. Dele, suddenly died. What would she do? She was in quandary, mourned his death privately but never gave up. She strategized, and:

With the help of Nanny, Agnes rented a two bedroom flat in Yaba, and applied for a job as a teacher in a private school there. She taught mathematics and English in the school, but a year after, she decided to join the civil service at Enugu, and there she was appointed a Woman Education Officer in the Ministry of Education (p. 62).

She never gave up. Previously, her role in the family was that of a housewife. However, by obtaining Western education and a university degree,

she redefined her role into that of a family head and breadwinner and took charge of raising her children.

Dora

She was very determined to rise above all negative stereotypical norms. After she completed her secondary school education, Dora was “trained as a nurse, qualified, worked for a short time and married Chris” (p. 67). She faced serious problems as described below:

Dora worked as a nurse until she had her fifth baby in 1959.... When Dora got to the house, a family was occupying it. But why, maybe Chris got tenants before he left for England, but why he did not tell her?...It was later on that she learnt that the house was not only rented out, but sold outright (p. 67).

Dora faced the uphill task of raising five children all alone. She must also look for an accommodation since the deceptive husband (Chris) had sold their house. She never gave up but she continued with her bakery business and later became very rich and eventually:

...due to Dora's foresight, she and her family did not suffer too much.... So when the war ended in January 1970, Dora came out of it, with her five children, and lost not even a pin and regained her house and two property deeds into the bargain. She went back to Aba to resume her business.... (p. 75).

While it is true that Dora had tertiary education, she also had practical wisdom and foresight. She did not rely on only tertiary education. In fact, she stopped working as a nurse and became a businesswoman and an investor. As a result, by virtue of her prowess in business matters, unflinching

determination to raise her children and raise them well, she strategized and redefined her gender role. She became the family head, breadwinner and a business owner. She also got many assets for their future use.

Rose

She was the most talented and brilliant among the three female characters. She received sound education but was quite unfortunate to have had love affairs with a trail of deceptive, unfaithful and indecisive men. Despite her ordeal:

Rose worked hard and in eighteen months, she had become a high executive. She was sent abroad for training...and returned with new ideas.... She moved to Ikoyi, had a large office and a secretary” (pp. 82, 83).

Unequivocally, Rose overcame all forms of obstacles regarding stereotypical norms within post-colonial Nigeria, obtained high-level education and became financially independent. Though not married, she is a boss and self-sufficient, financially independent woman who goes contrary to negative stereotypical norms that a woman is financially dependent on a man and she is meant for only house chores.

Woman at Point Zero (WPZ)

Firdaus resisted the impunity resulting from maltreatment, injustices and unequal treatment of women by setting up her own business which had the features of prostitution, but not prostitution in the exact sense of the profession.

A prostitute always says yes, and then names her price. If she says no She ceases to be a prostitute. I was not a prostitute in the full sense of

the word, so from time to time I say no.... I became a very successful prostitute. I was paid the highest price, and even men of great importance competed for my favours (p. 97).

...she rose above poverty, shame and was deeply respected and cherished by men. (p. 94).

Firdaus became financially independent and was able to cater for herself without the help of a man. For those interested in helping her financially, she remarked:

They wanted to feel noble and elevated by reminding me of the fact that I was low. They were saying to themselves: ‘See how wonderful I am. I’m trying to lift her out of the mud before it’s too late.... I refused to give them a chance to play this role. None of them was there to rescue me when I was married to a man who beat me up and kicked me every day. And not one of them came to my help when my heart was broken because I had dared to fall in love....I was able to convince myself that I had chosen this life of my own free will...this was my choice and that I some freedom, at least the freedom to live in a situation better than that of other women (p. 97).

Perusal of Firdaus’ statement above showed that she relished her desire of becoming financially independent because the negative stereotypical norm regarding women is that they are low and always dependent on men. She refuted such stereotypical norms and demonstrated this by her livelihood. She enjoyed financial freedom with the capability of doing whatever she liked, unlike other women in her society.

She negotiated the identity of a courageous fighter for justice against all forms of impunity against women aggravated by negative stereotypical norms. She stated:

When I killed I did it with truth not with a knife.... I have triumphed over both life and death because I no longer desire to live, nor do I any longer fear to die. I want nothing. I hope nothing. I fear nothing. Therefore I am free (pp. 110 and 112).

In the excerpt above, although Firdaus described her personae as someone lacking the courage to “*lift my hand and bring it smashing down on his face*”, she negotiated a new identity of being a courageous fighter for what is just and fair. She “*want nothing...hope nothing...fear nothing*”. She could raised her hand to kill a pimp because he harassed and threatened her. The pimp said “*Then I may be obliged to threaten*” (p. 100), yet the police could not come to Firdaus’ rescue as she indicated: “*I went to the police, only to discover that he had better connections than I*” (p. 101). She sought legal protection and was surprised that “*the law punishes women like me, but turns a blind eye to what men [such as the pimp] do*” (p. 101). Firdaus took the law into her own hands by killing the pimp because she would not tolerate his impudence.

Firdaus was assertive and negotiated masculine role of becoming the voice for the voiceless and fighting to lay down a legacy for future generations. Lending credence to the above conclusion is the findings of a study by Ngula (2019) that: “*Gender is dominantly used to mean social differences...in many societies, men are believed to be assertive...women are believed to be unassertive, passive, calm or collaborative*” (p. 2). Schiffrin

(1996) provided additional insight by stating: “*the form of our speech, the content of our stories, and our manner of speaking, are all sensitive indices not just of our personal selves, but also of our gender*” (p. 57). Her assertiveness was misguided, but it does demonstrate that women should not be treated with impudence, taken for granted or oppressed. This serves as a deterrent for any such man as the pimp in the future.

Sharifa

She rescued Firdaus from depression due to the inhumane treatment she suffered in Bayoumi’s hand. She was elegant and a boss of herself. She was also financially independent. Firdaus described her apartment as follows:

After a little while I halted in front of a large apartment building...she took a key out of her bag, and the next moment, I stepped into a spotless apartment with carpeted floors, and a spacious terrace overlooking the Nile. She took me to the bathroom, showed me how to turn the hot and cold water taps on and off (p. 56).

Firdaus questioned Sharifa on how she made it to get such a beautiful apartment all on her own, and she responded:

You must be harder than life, Firdaus. Life is very hard.... I am hard, terribly hard....I never got further than a primary school certificate....But I cannot ask for anything from a man (p. 58).

Sharifa had her own business even though she never went to the second cycle institution. She was astute, bold and daring; she was “hard terribly hard”. She took no chances, was her own boss, and, later became Firdaus’ manager. She was financially independent, and never “ask anything from a man”. She is self-sufficient financially. Her portrayal in this sense

brings to mind masculine role of unreserved determination to survive despite all odds. She become financially buoyant.

Wounding Words (WW)

As soon as Hayate discovered that the landlord could rape her, she negotiated both feminine and masculine gender roles. While her two fingers were in his hands, she was very angry and wanted to even kill him, but she quickly concluded that he is more powerful and could harm her. She reasoned:

She should keep a cool head, try to trick him with a ruse instead....it is very warm, she declares, surprised by the firmness of her tone despite her terror. I'll show you my body, but let me breathe. And anyway, close the curtains. The neighbours might see us (p. 120).

Her action mirrors feminine gender in view of the findings of a study by Meehan (2017) remarks that women are often portrayed as deceitful and manipulative in response to the oppression and mistreatment by men. In effect, Hayate devices a means of releasing herself from the potential rapist by playing tricks on him and deceiving him into believing she is in tune with his sexual fantasy. As soon as Hayate informed the landlord to close the curtains, he believed and moved towards the window, allowing Hayate to escape. Wisman and Shrira (2020) indicate that men can read sexual chemo-signal from a woman indicating her readiness. Once it is perceived, men follow through.

As soon as she succeeded in getting out, Hayate took on masculine gender role by asserting as shown in the excerpt below:

Leave this house immediately or I'll call the police...leave the premises, Go, leave, or I'll get the neighbours out (p.120).

Don't get so worked up. I'm leaving.... He is no longer sure of himself. He goes off, muttering... (p. 120).

The landlord had no choice than to leave because he had been threatened by Hayate who categorically told him that she will report him to both the police and the neighbours, especially the security guard that passes from time to time. By virtue of her assertion and commanding tone, she negotiated a masculine identity and gender role. This is in consonance with the findings of the studies by Eagly and Karau (2002) and Hecht (2017) that stereotypically, while women are perceived as being gentle, sensitive and sympathetic, men are considered to be more assertive, controlling and dominant.

Samia

Samia negotiated masculine identity and gender role when she sheltered her cousin who:

...has left her village and an abusive husband. Samia has contacted her journalist women friends. They will write her story to sway public opinion...Samia who has also suffered greatly, has sworn to help her...despite all obstacles, her own family accuses her of inciting her cousin to rebel....Samia...tell this story with fire and passion....I'm used to fighting!...We will not give up the struggle (p. 14).

Samia was bold and determined. She spoke with fire and passion and was ready to go into all-out battle to achieve freedom and fight for her rights. Here, she exhibited masculine identity and gender role because she will go any length to change the negative stereotype that women are low, dependent, timid and unable to defend themselves against chauvinism. This finding is consistent

with Hecht's (2017) that leaders, often associated with the masculine identity, are bold and struggle to make changes to the status quo. This is true of Samia. Hence, she redefined her gender role by negotiating leadership role.

Other female characters exhibiting masculine gender roles in the novel include but not limited to Rima who stated: "*We'll fight... We won't allow repression to be established*". Likewise, Aida who told Hayate:

We should assert ourselves and not be afraid any more. If we don't, who will?...I never tire of our conversations. They nourish me and help me to move forward without fear, to assert myself (pp. 2, 3).

In brief, Nwapa, Saadawi and Accad have demonstrated pertinent ways the female characters were negotiating gender roles and identities. For example, Agnes, Dora, Rose, Firdaus and Sharifa all demonstrated masculine identities when they became financially independent and occupied the position of administrators in their respective works. Agnes and Dora became breadwinners and family heads, which are stereotypically masculine gender roles. While Agnes and Rose accomplished such tasks via Western education, Dora, Firdaus and Sharifa became financially independent through setting up private businesses and sustained them with astuteness and foresight.

Female characters also displayed feminine identity and gender roles. For example, Agnes and Dora were very caring, loving and ready to fight till the last breath to protect their children. In handling her ordeal with the landlord, Hayate also negotiated both feminine and masculine roles. Agnes, Dora, Rose, Firdaus, Sharifa, Hayate, Samia, Rima and Aida demonstrated leadership roles, which is stereotypically masculine identity, and gender role. Hayate negotiated leadership role because she initiated change in connection

with negative stereotypical norms against women attested to by Aida: *“We should assert ourselves...if we don’t who will? Your presence here in Tunisia has taught me a lot (p. 2).* Rima also said: *“This is Hayate, from Lebanon, in exile among us this year, to inspire us, to bring new ideas, that we might support the oppressed” (p. 11).*

In connection with women’s capacity for leadership, Kouzes and Posner (2002) book *“Making Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations”* demonstrated that women can be transformative in their approach to leadership. Northouse (2007) indicated that irrespective of societal conception of women, they can function effectively as leaders, energizing people and organization into achieving spectacular results due to their natural attributes for building relationships. The results of studies by Kouzes and Posner (2002) and Northouse (2007) lend credence to the findings of this study that women are intellectually capable of being successful leaders.

In a nutshell, the results of this section of the analysis revealed that Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa employed characterization to vividly portray negative stereotypical norms against women. Female characters depicted how women were abused verbally, sexually and physically, deprived of education, belittled and suppressed. While Accad and Saadawi underscore gender inequality, domestic and social violence against women, Nwapa portrayed unfaithfulness, deception and domineering attitude on the part of men in gender relations.

The three writers clearly demonstrated, through the female characters, that men commit so many atrocities, and women are divided in their opinion on the best approach to address it. While some felt it should not be reported so

as to save face or protect the reputation of the abuser and the family, others felt it is best to hold the bull by the horn and lay bare what has transpired, so that others will not suffer similar fate. Some women believed that with the passage of time, their husbands or the abusers could change and be reformed.

Findings of the study revealed that Nwapa, Saadawi and Accad have demonstrated the pertinent ways the female characters were negotiating gender roles and identities. For example, Agnes, Dora, Rose, Firdaus, and Sharifa had all negotiated masculine gender and identities when they became financially independent and occupied the position of administrators in their respective works.

Agnes and Dora became breadwinners and family heads, which are stereotypically masculine gender roles. While Agnes and Rose accomplished such tasks via Western education, Dora, Firdaus and Sharifa became financially independent through setting up private businesses and sustained the businesses with astuteness and foresight. Female characters also displayed feminine identity and gender roles. For example, Agnes and Dora were very caring, loving and ready to fight to the last to protect their children. In handling her ordeal with the landlord, Hayate also negotiated both feminine and masculine roles. Agnes, Dora, Rose, Firdaus, Sharifa, Hayate, Samia, Rima and Aida demonstrated leadership roles which are stereotypically masculine in identity and gender role.

Summary

The chapter has critically examined the choice of settings and point of view of Accad, Nwapa and Saadawi in their characterization, depicting the state of African feminism. The adopted point of view and settings were very

useful in highlighting complex gender issues in post-colonial Africa. The chosen point of view and settings made it possible to gain in-depth understanding of the expressions and actions of respective characters in connection with their stance on African feminism.

Selected texts revealed that activities of female characters were instrumental to understanding the nature of treatments that women are experiencing in post-colonial Africa. I was able to show that, though most of the male characters in the three novels mistreat or abuse women, there are some who dignified women and were against oppression of women. Female characters displayed great courage in the face of many discouraging situations, especially within the context of those espousing reformist agenda.

The chapter provided ample information on the different ways in which women are rising above mistreatment and other issues that could have incapacitated them or derailed their goal of caring for their children or enjoying economic independence from oppressive husbands. Resolution of the two research questions thus bridge the knowledge gap on the influence of the post-colonial African society on gender roles and identities. It also underscores how African female writers depict various ways women are negotiating gender roles and identities through the protagonists and other minor female characters.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK THAT BALANCES

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF FEMINIST IDEALS IN *WOUNDING*

WORDS, WOMAN AT POINT ZERO AND WOMEN ARE DIFFERENT

Introduction

The previous section comprised the introductory segment to data analysis. It highlighted the plot summary of each of the three novels. It also examined the writer's point of view and the settings for individual novels. It is noteworthy that the previous section conducted rigorous analysis of characters based on their expressions and actions, as shown in the texts. The section further examines relevant texts to ascertain how female characters depicted pertinent ways women are negotiating gender roles and identities.

This chapter provides explicit map on formulated theoretical framework based on relevant information extrapolated from the texts in each of the three novels selected for this study. The texts in Accad, Nwapa and Saadawi's novels are very instrumental to the formulation of balanced conceptualization of the African woman's daily ordeals undergirded by the earnest desire to redefine gender roles and identities.

The present chapter forms the bulwark against patriarchy and unequal gender treatment. It is also a supporting beam for balanced theoretical perspective on feminism, void of aggressive response to unequal gender treatment as well as a lax or ill-conceived theoretical framework towards resolution of issues related to patriarchy and how women are redefining gender roles within the family and society in general.

This segment provides ample insight into the nature of theoretical conception on African feminism depicted by each of the female characters, based on their expressions and actions. I do this with a view to formulate a theoretical framework on how female characters in these novels are redefining gender roles and identities within the family and society. In this chapter, I made concerted effort at critically examining how the texts in the three novels resolve research questions three and four.

Research Question Three

How do the feminist discourses of Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa's novels underscore the existing dichotomy of theorization of feminist ideals in Africa?

The raison d'être of this question is to highlight the nature of feminist theorization in Africa. Under question three, I highlighted relevant information concerning the feminist ideals exhibited by the female characters in each of the novels. Additionally, based on the text, I have highlighted ample insights on how feminist ideals should be theorized in Africa.

Understanding the nature of feminist ideals exhibited by the female characters facilitated in-depth knowledge on the existing differences in perspectives and opinion on feminist ideals. I cited relevant texts from the three novels, and critically examined and analyzed them in a bid to provide accurate response to question three.

Woman at Point Zero (WPZ)

I selected several portions of Saadawi's novel for the purpose of critical evaluation. These are highlighted below:

This journey to a place unknown to everybody on this earth fills me with pride. All my life I have been searching for something that would fill me with pride, make me feel superior to everyone else, including kings, princes and rulers. Each time I picked up a newspaper and found the picture of a man who was one of them, I would spit on it.... Anyone who saw me spitting on the picture might think I knew that particular man personally. But I did not. I am just one woman. And there is no single woman who could possibly know all the men.... However, every single man I did get to know filled me with but one desire: to lift my hand and bring it smashing down on his face (p. 10). Any one of them, it doesn't make any difference. They're all the same, all sons of dogs, running around under various names. Mahmoud, Hassanien, Fawzy, Sabri, Ibrahim, Awadain, Bayoumi (p. 55).

A closer study of the excerpts above reveals that men or masculine identity irrespective of colour, profession, prowess and status were depicted as wicked, abusers, domineering and unforgiving. The description went as far as labeling all men "sons of dogs running around under various names" (p. 55). The image of men painted above is consistent with radical African feminist literature. They often depict men as gruesome in their behaviour towards women, inconsiderate, wicked, selfish, and brutal. For example, a notable African female writer, whose stance on feminism was radical feminism, in her book titled "Nduta", described men as capable of doing all sorts of atrocities

without qualms. Her characterization demonstrated that men are generally unreservedly wicked.

Another aspect of radical African feminism is depicted in the excerpt below:

One day [the husband] he discovered some leftover scraps of food, and started yelling at me so loudly that all the neighbours could hear. After this incident, he got into the habit of beating me whether he had a reason for it or not. On one occasion he hit me all over with his shoe. My face and body became swollen and bruised. So I left the house and went to my uncle.... My uncle told me that all husbands beat their wives, and my uncle's wife added that her husband often beat her...she replied that it was precisely men well versed in their religion who beat their wives. The precepts of religion permitted such punishment. A virtuous woman not supposed to complain about her husband. Her duty was perfect obedience (p. 46, 47).

Perusal of the excerpt above shows that men who are held in high esteem, such as religious leaders, are allowed by Islamic laws to beat their wives. The character was disturbed that these are the people that should uphold gender equality and see to it that their wives and other women are not mistreated. In disbelief, the protagonist discovered that even her uncle's wife acquiesces with such conclusion, that it is even those who are well versed in Islamic laws that often beat their wives. That is why, in Egypt, women knew that all men, including Sheikh Mahmoud, beat their wives.

By implication, religious laws incapacitate women to do anything about being mistreated by their husbands. They are to remain silent, subservient and obediently follow their husbands despite the abuse. From my

perspective, this is incongruous, and I am of the opinion that it is a misconception of the Islamic law. Saadawi stated on page 11, that “*his holiness the Imam*” stated that “*stealing was a sin, and killing was a sin, and defaming the honour of a woman was a sin, and injustice was a sin, and beating another human being was a sin*”.

Imam’s sayings were drawn from Quran, the foundation of Islamic law. Beating another human being such as a woman, or defaming the honour of a woman is synonymous with mistreating a woman, which is considered a sin. This means that Firdaus’ uncle and his wife’s statement that a woman is to maintain perfect obedience under gender inequality and abuse is untenable, incongruous and an erroneous interpretation of Islamic law. As a result, Firdaus strongly believes that a radical step is required to address such misconception, erroneous interpretation of Islamic law with a view to entrench gender equality. This led to her in taking the bold step to kill a man. Thus, Firdaus upholds radical approach or theorization to feminist ideal.

The excerpts from pages 46 and 47 also situate *WPZ* within radical African feminist perspective or theorization. Radical African feminists claim that men cannot change to be good because even the closest one’s ⁴father or husband is unreservedly wicked. Women in radical feminist movements feel strongly that men are wicked and have the potential to use physical violence against women. They claim that patriarchal societies and Islamic laws and customs are rooted in severe loss of respect for women, women’s body and their aspirations.

⁴Firdaus indicated her father that is very wicked with no pity for his wife or daughter, she said: “my father...knew very few things in life...how to exchange his virgin daughter for a dowry when there was still time ...how to beat his wife and make her bite the dust each night.

Regarding proponents of radical African feminists' ideals, Jeffreys (2013) stated: "*Radical feminist theorists do not seek to make gender a bit more flexible, but to eliminate it. They are gender abolitionists, and understand gender to provide the framework and rationale for male dominance*" (p.13). Theorization of feminism by radical feminists sees feminist ideal as a means of dealing with the stereotypical norms that women must be under the shadow of their husbands and regimented to ⁵low-level status in the society. Radical feminists are concerned about everything woman with disdain for men as depicted below:

You are a criminal, they said, and your mother is a criminal

My mother was not a criminal. No woman can be a criminal. To be a criminal one must be a man.

Now look here, what is this that you are saying?

I am saying that you are criminals, all of you: the fathers, the uncles, the husbands, the pimps, the lawyers, the doctors, the journalists, and all men of all professions.

They said, you are a savage and dangerous woman

I am speaking the truth. And truth is savage and dangerous (pp. 109, 110).

Saadawi, by virtue of her portrayal of Firdaus and other female characters, made known her perspective or theorization of feminist ideals. She embraced Radical African Feminism.

⁵ This matter was highlighted by Rima when she stated:

Wounding Words (WW)

Accad's female characters were divided on what should constitute a proper theory on African feminism. This brought to bear the confusion and the bewilderment Accad expressed through her characterization in the novel. She was not specific on her stance since most of the discussions were centered around debates where everyone expressed their conception or theoretical perspective on what should underpin African feminism. Some felt that radical feminism should underpin African feminism and expressed their feelings in the excerpts below:

HALA:

She is convinced that the women of Tunisia must...take militant action: a feminist struggle allowing them to acquire full democratic citizenship. The dominant patriarchal ideology slows up the contribution of Tunisian women. The misogynist attitudes and especially the Islamic movements are a real danger to the rights, liberty and equality of women...feminist movement must...fight against exploitation, imperialism, and against specific oppression on women (p. 151).

AIDA:

Men are destroying the Earth with their weapons of war. I wish I could tell them to dive into the sea, without fear and not in a spirit of vengeance and conquest, so they could see the marvels the sea creates. They would come out transformed and decide to end pollution and destruction. If they learned to love Nature, they would also love women better. They would encourage them to blossom. We should

assert ourselves and not be afraid any more. If we don't, who will?

Your presence [Hayate] here in Tunisia has taught me a lot (p. 3).

HAYATE:

I'm becoming more and more aware of just how much the patriarchal system is built on the exploitation of Nature...Men reinforce their strength by subjugating Nature just as they do women (p. 3).

However, after the bitter experiences including divorce, her abortions, and imprisonment, Aida vacillated towards reformatory theorization and made a “kind plea for more tolerance and more love” (p. 151). She further stated that she is against any form of aggressiveness or militant approach to resolution of negative stereotypical norms against women. Rather, she cautioned:

AIDA:

...troubled by the aggressive atmosphere of the meetings...she has come to feminism through an emotion. For her, feminism is essentially a new relationship among women, based on trust, solidarity and love. This is why she becomes depressed when she senses aggression, intolerance and egotism in the creation of their journal, in their meetings and in her relationship with other women (p. 151).

Hayate also expressed reformist perspective when she stated:

But he has hurt you a lot! I, too, expressed painful moments with my father in my first novel. I didn't know if he would accept it. My sister had prepared him. He read my novel and apologized for having been so strict with a daughter as sensitive as I was. Since then, we've become the best of friends (p. 49).

Due to the centering of the novel around the hot debate on what form of theoretical framework should underpin feminism in Tunisia or Africa in general, Accad employed characterization to pinpoint the controversy surrounding how African feminism should be approached. As a result, part of the novel espouses radical feminism while the remaining section espouses reformists' orientation. In spite of these arguments and debates, the bottom line is that the central theme of feminist discourse falls within the need to negotiate gender equality, since feminists see inequality as the mainstay of human societies around the world (Lorber, 2009).

Women are Different (WAD)

Critical examination of Nwapa's characterization reveals fluidity as far as theoretical perspective on feminism is concerned. There are occasions where she took a reformist stance with the hope that men or perpetrators of negative stereotypical norms can be reformed or changed to become better individuals. On the other hand, there are certain occasions when she took a radical feminist approach to feminism in her writing. The two instances are given below: Consider the following excerpts underpinning reformist perspective:

AGNES

In spite of her husband's affair with his stepmother and his abusive words, Agnes went back to him believing they can reconcile, and so it was. She said:

As Agnes emerged, he recognized her...Agnes came near and greeted him. Agnes never called him anything, she never referred to him by name when she lived with him. Now she called him Papa Emena, Emena being the name of her first daughter (p. 65).

She told me to straighten up my ways first before bothering about her.... It was after that incident that I brought her father to my flat in Ikoyi (p. 121).

DORA

Dora's husband deserted her yet she still hoped he would come. Hence, she advised her child, Chinwe:

I know it hurt her. It is not so much as adultery as the deceit that is hurting Chinwe, I know, but still, I don't want her to leave her

husband, because of the effect it will have on her younger sister who is not yet married. Soon people will say that my daughters are incapable of marriage, that they are following my footsteps, even when they know that it is neither your fault nor Chinwe's fault (p. 112).

ROSE:

I was angry with Ernest on account of the Irish girl. I did not think of him in his predicament. I thought only of myself. He needed support at the time. He needed understanding and love. I did not give him any of those. I reveled in my hurt and I refused to forgive him, and now here I am, close to forty three, no child, no Ernest, no husband and no lover (p. 112).

Perusal of the three instances reveal that Agnes and Dora, aware of their husbands' infidelity and abuses, still want their husbands back. They still hope that they will come together once again. For Agnes, she did succeed in living with her husband, as shown above in the excerpt from page 121. On the other hand, after several years of deceiving and deserting his wife, Chris returned from Germany, and the children could meet their father. Rose, on the other hand, was quite unfortunate and was saddened by several instances of distrust and deception from men. Yet, as shown in page 112, she regretted not forgiving one of these miscreants so that she could have somebody as her husband as Dora and Agnes.

The excerpt below revealed occasions in the novel when Nwapa took the stance of radical feminist in her characterization. She writes:

But Chinwe was not consoled. Her husband had already brought in a seventeen year old girl to her matrimonial home and she move out.

Rose told her it was wrong for her to have moved out. But she said she would rather die than have a seventeen year old girl share her home with her (p. 111)

Her mother was so good...see how shabilly her mother was treated. What Chinwe is trying to say is this: “Mother I cannot take what you have taken from father. No man is going to hold me to ransom, and...”. In short, what she is doing is an act of revenge? asked Rose. Not exactly, I should say defiance, that’s the appropriate word (p. 117).

Chinwe, a minor female character, exhibited radical feminist ideal. She totally disagreed with the reformist ideal recommended by Rose and exhibited by her mother. She said she “*would rather die*” than allow her husband to oppress her by bringing “*in a seventeen year old girl to her matrimonial home*”. Chinwe meant her words. Unlike her mother, she carried out her desire and never returned to the husband.

Rose described Chinwe’s action as “*an act of revenge*” or an act of harming or hurting the husband in return for what he did to her. Comfort provided an appropriate description of Chinwe’s action. She called it: “*defiance*” or bold resistance to authority. Revenge and defiance are key attributes of radical feminist agenda. In this sense, it is clear that the author employed Chinwe, a minor female character, to underscore radical feminist ideal. Chinwe’s husband was portrayed as exploitative, dubious and wicked, supporting reformist feminist literature.

Findings of the study coincide with the results of several studies (Arndt, 2002; Nehere, 2016; Dimitrakaki, 2018), that African female writers

that are concerned with the ills in the modern society which discriminate against women or promote negative stereotypical norms in several spheres of life are reformist feminist in their theorization of feminism. They often clamor for a world where women are not marginalized in the job market and in industries, as well as hoped for the best in any relationship with men (Lorber, 2009; Dimitrakaki, 2018). Proponents of reformist agenda (Lay, 2007; Ackerly & True, 2018; Kantola & Lombardo, 2020) place much emphasis on how economic exploitation of women, oppression and unequal treatment of women in the developing world, especially in post-colonial Africa, can be eradicated.

On the other hand, in line with Jeffreys (2013), the study discovered that Saadawi's novel employed radical feminism which entails strong aversion for anything unbecoming in men. In this instance, radical feminists often resort to defiance, aggressive and vengeful behaviour, and sometimes with militant approach, to resolving gender inequality and other ills in the society. This coincides with Firdaus, the protagonist in *Woman at Point Zero* by Saadawi, and Chinwe, a minor female character in *Women are Different* by Nwapa.

In a nutshell, two African feminist ideals underpin the three novels. While Saadawi depicted Firdaus as a radical feminist, both Accad and Nwapa employed their characterization to portray both reformist and radical ideals. This demonstrates fluidity in their theorization of African feminism due to constant changes in views, issues concerning women and the world in general. The views and conceptions of feminism of individual female characters are

not autonomous; it is evolving, requiring a broader view of issues concerning feminist ideals.

Research Question Four

What is the nature of a theoretical framework that balances conceptualization of African women experiences and how they are redefining gender roles and identities?

The crux of this question was to critically evaluate the several stances of African women writers on theorization of African feminism. I did this with a view to elicit a more practical conceptualization or theoretical framework that binds the disparate conception together.

Under this section, I critically probed the raging debate among scholars on what should constitute African feminism, with a view to understand arguments of the various schools of thought and the ring that runs through all of them. Perusal of the excerpts below, extracted from various portions of the three novels, provides a clue to a realistic and more practical theorization of African feminism.

Wounding Words (WW)

Providing her conceptualization on what is practical for African feminist ideal, conflicting views were presented in the following excerpts:

HALA

She distinguishes three kinds of feminist movements: the reformist – trying to make conditions better for women; the radical – not satisfied by simple reforms, challenging the foundations of the patriarchal society; and the ideological – mixing the class struggle with the gender

struggle. She is convinced that the women of Tunisia must combine the three approaches and take militant action (pp. 150, 151).

From her perspective, a practical and realistic theory on African feminism should encapsulate the three forms of feminist perspectives: reformist, radical and ideological. Holding on to only one of these frameworks will not lead to success. However, Aida and Ahlame felt that combining the three forms of feminism in Africa will not necessarily bring about realistic results in view of some mitigating factors. They substantiated their arguments in the excerpts below:

AIDA

For her, feminism is essentially a new relationship among women, based on trust, solidarity and love. That is why she becomes depressed when she senses aggression, intolerance and egotism in the creation of their journal, in their meetings and in her relationship with the other women...she has a marvelous memory of intense relationships of love and solidarity among...women and men – facing repression.... in a country where there is no freedom of expression, no community life, and where the individual is isolated, the club [feminist movement] has brought her hope. Democratic freedom is inseparable from solidarity with the oppressed (pp. 151, 152).

AHLAME

Ahlame introduces the problem of women's jealousy of each other, mainly spread through gossip. Feminism and gossip, there is a contradiction in terms.... According to Ahlame, rumour and hostility

demoralize the women for whom solidarity among women is sacred...However, the contradiction is flagrant, for society favours homosexuality by cultivating hatred between the sexes, social inequality, ignorance, and therefore fear of the other, by banishing mixed groups (p. 153, 154).

A closer reading of both Aida and Ahlame's arguments revealed that solidarity and love among feminists is very important to the attainment of any success. In other words, from their perspective, the theoretical framework or conceptualization that will get to the bottom of feminist ideal and practically achieve any breakthrough should be built on solidarity and love. According to Aida and Ahlame, sociocultural and economic framework in the third world is structured towards "where the individual is isolated", encourages "hatred between sexes, social inequality, ignorance, and therefore fear of the other". When one group is jealous of the other, there can be no unifying push regarding feminist ideal.

Buttressing what Aida and Ahlame expressed, Rima went back the memory lane and highlighted what transpired in Monastir. She relates:

There was a meeting with some Tunisian lawyers. They declared that Bourguiba had gone too far in his emancipation of women and that Tunisia must return to Islamic law, where answers to all the needs of women can be found. A delegation of women lawyers.... objected that we could not and must not leave it to the past any longer to solve future problems. They were silenced with a reminder that the Koran had proclaimed that nothing good could come from a woman leader,

that women are too emotional, do not have intellectual capacity of men, or something like that! (p. 14).

By inference, Rima was indicating that apart from the social, cultural and economic structures that are isolating women in feminist movement, religion is also a force to reckon with. Even women are divided along this line, with some strongly holding to the tenets of Islamic cultural norms while several others refute such and claim that mistreating women is unethical, and they will fight against it. For example, when Hayate was encouraging Nayla to expose her father for maltreating and beating her, she responded: *“that is not my approach...I don’t want to hurt my parents, my family – my father in particular. That is not the way to move forward”* (p. 49). However, Samia feels differently about abuse whether from the husband or any other man, and she does not see how Koran should encourage that. Her resolve is summarized below based on her personal experience and that of her cousin regarding domestic violence against women:

Samia...has sworn to help her [cousin] to the bitter end, despite all obstacles, her own family accuses her of inciting her cousin to rebel...Samia...tells the story with fire and passion...I am used to fighting...we will not give up the struggle because certain men have decided to take away the few rights we have won.... Like in Monastir three weeks ago... (p. 14).

Considering the raging arguments, Sihame poses a number of questions:

...does establishment of feminism that demands a distinct social status for women mean the negation of cultural identity? Does the recovery

of women's dignity necessarily have to place itself within the national culture? (p. 165).

Sihame indicates that if feminism is to be theorized based on cultural identity, where each culture is to have a version of feminism, there will be difficulty because:

The existence of a group presupposes ethnocentrism, necessary for the affirmation of a group with regard to others. Every group affirms its superiority. To put oneself apart from others is to put oneself above them. This claim to an identity is manifested with even more vigour if the group is attacked by another trying to imitate it (p. 165).

However, she contends that if cultural identity is to be removed and feminism is defined broadly as a forum where women from any part of the world can reclaim their fundamental human rights, then gender equality is assured. In that sense, there will be a universal code of conduct for every woman with diverse content for the purpose of applicability, so that it can be “*expressed in the same terms at any moment in time, or across all societies*” (p. 165). While several women may agree with universalism, Sihame points out a mitigating factor that could limit the reach of universality in feminist theorization or perspectives. She relates:

It acts as a uniform agenda necessary for all societies, and not only as a trend towards reclamation of dignity. It is therefore the continuation of neo-imperialism, since it affirms itself as a superior western model, tending to destroy and negate different agenda. It is burdened with a certain number of western models, having for its role a negation of the

differences of other societies, the accomplishment of progress, modernity, superior values, in contrast to the backward condition of women in the societies it seeks to dominate (p. 166).

In the excerpt (p. 166), Sihame indicates that society often understands universality to be representative of “the continuation of neo-imperialism where Western society dictates the framework of feminism. Sihame quoted the sayings of a popular figure in Tunisia as reiterating that they do not need Western ideas to correct the ills and gender inequality in Tunisia. They are opposed to westernization of women issue, yet Sihame argued:

Feminism was born at the same time as trade unionism, and has the same origin – the introduction of capitalism. For Sihame, the fact that feminism came from the west along with capitalism does not devalue feminism. It is the meanings that one attaches to it that can be negative.... The condition of women is the weak point of our societies and thanks to this the West attacks them (p. 166).

At this point, Ahlame contended: “*she considers identity a false problem, and sees any discussion of identity as anti-feminist. Identity is a duty while she demands desire*” (p. 166). Providing additional insight on identity, Zainabe posited: “*Identity should not be presented as a return to the source, but rather as an affirmation of one’s place in the twentieth century, in the world*”. She went further admitting that: “*It is true that she was born into the framework of an Arab-Muslim culture, but she has established her own path and the perception of her own identity through her reading*” (p. 166).

Critical evaluation of Sihame, Ahlame and Zainabe’s arguments above reveal important indices of a practical theory on African feminism. Sihame

indicated that gender inequality, domestic and social violence against women is the weak point of the Arab world, and by extension, Africa at large. However, her recommendation of going back to one's root or language in expressing feminist ideals will be counter-productive because, as Ahlame indicated, discussion on identity is anti-feminism because we are in the 21st century where, as Zainabe stated, every woman may desire or carve out her own identity and not necessarily the identity of the place she was born. In essence, any language can be used to express feminist ideals as far as those issues that form the weak point of the African society such as negative stereotypical norms against women are squarely dealt with.

Sihame cited that trade unionism has a universal body with diverse content to suit the context of varied societies around the world. Code of conduct by the umbrella body is flexible, allowing modification to suit current time and cultures across the world. By inference, the universal body formulates a general code of conduct that is malleable and open to adaptation by the disparate or diverse groups. Going by Ahlame and Zainabe's expression, every woman from any country around the world can identify with the universal code without feelings of superiority or inferiority.

Sihame indicated that coming from the West does not devalue feminism just as trade unionism does not devalue the focus of trade unionism. This means, anti-western or ethnocentric sentiment should be relegated to the background since it is negative and discourages unity, solidarity and love between sexes and cooperations.

A closer study of the debates by female characters in *Wounding Words* (WW) reveals that practical theorization should be void of aggression and

jealousy; rather, it should be of love and solidarity. While the concept of universality of feminist ideal that is expressed “in the same terms, at any moment in time, across all societies” (p. 165) was pushed forward, some women indicated that it should not be regimented to the language or culture of one’s origin, since time and identities are evolving. Likewise, women identities and gender roles are evolving, and these should be captured in any realistic or practical theorization of feminism.

Woman at Point Zero (WPZ)

Saadawi’s characterization revolves around radical feminists’ theoretical framework. Most of the female characters in the novel such as Sharifa and Firdaus are often concerned about radical approach to women issues. In essence, from the standpoint of Saadawi, radical perspective on feminist ideal is the panacea to domestic and social violence against women and all other issues involving gender inequality. This means that men are seen as evil and beyond reformation or improvement. A closer examination of such conception is impractical in view of the following excerpts from the novel. These are discussed below:

Sharifa stated: “*Any one of them, it doesn’t make any difference. They are all the same, all sons of dogs running around under various names, Mahmoud...Bayoumi*” (p. 55). Firdaus asserted: “*I am saying that you are criminals, all of you, the fathers, the uncles, the husbands, the pimps, the lawyers, the doctors...all men of all professions*”. Going by the Sharif and Firdaus’ statements, men, irrespective of background, orientation, colour, creed or religion, are criminal or wicked. However, a closer look at the following excerpts proves otherwise:

I asked the prison doctor, “Will she see me?”

I shall try to persuade her to speak to you for a while, he said.

She even refused to sign an appeal to the President so that her sentence might be commuted to imprisonment for life

Who made the appeal for her? I asked.

I did, he said. To be quite honest, I do not really feel she is a murderer. If you look into her face, her eyes, you see... (p. 2).

A closer reading of the excerpt above shows that the protagonist was quite convinced that she was doing the right thing by taking the man’s life. Expressions such as “*she refused to sign an appeal for her sentence to be commuted to imprisonment*”, reveal that she was not shy for doing what she did. It was intentional, she really wanted to pass a message that subjugation and mistreatment of women will never be tolerated. Underscoring her radicalism is seen in the expression “*I do not really feel she is a murderer...If you look into her face, her eyes, you see*”. Firdaus’ demeanor was calm thus indicating her resignation to doing anything, going any length to fight for her right. She was not perturbed, because she said: “*I have triumphed over both life and death, because I no longer desire to live, nor do I any longer fear to die....I fear nothing. Therefore, I am free*” (p. 110).

She strongly believed she has succeeded in achieving her long held desire to free herself of man’s undue domination, abuse, and mistreatment. This means she feared nothing. Her choice of words demonstrated someone very resolute and quite convinced that her course of action is justified and relevant. Her radicalism is borne from the notion that all men are criminal,

while women are at the receiving end, dangling up and down due to mistreatment and gender inequality rampant in the Egyptian society.

Firdaus' conception that all men are criminal is a misconception. For instance, the prison doctor is good because he was the one who drafted the appeal to lessen Firdaus' penalty. Moreover, Firdaus talked highly of the Imam who spoke against injustice and considered defaming the honour of a woman as a sin. She even said: "*nodding their heads in admiration, and in approval of everything his Holiness, the Imam had said*" (p. 11). In effect, referring to all men as wicked is inconceivable. Commenting on impracticality of aggressive or radical perspective or framework on feminist ideal, Eichler (1988) indicated that "gender partisanship may end up becoming what it purports to fight against" (p. 33).

Similarly, Daniel (2012) posited: "this gynocentric structure may replace an androcentric one, which will be a sexist sexism" (p. 41). In effect, objectivity and candor would have made radical feminists know that not all men are criminals and one cannot use criminal activity to resolve serious societal issues. This disqualifies radical theorization of feminist ideals as the practical and realistic theory for African feminist literature, since it fosters aggression, inordinate and criminal activities that would eventually worsen feminist claims against patriarchy.

Women are Different (WAD)

Though Nwapa espoused a dint of radical feminism, several portions of the novel revealed that reformist approach to feminism is dominant. For example, all the female characters had serious problems with marital issues, yet, they never gave up. Agnes later joined her husband and took good care of

her children. Dora, though very rich and successful, looked forward to the time her husband, Chris, would return and be reformed. Rose, on the other hand, regretted never forgiving Ernest, and would have loved to be with him even if he has mistreated her. Several sections of the novel show that Nwapa is conscious of respecting family arrangement and religious norms even if women are deprived of their rights or mistreated. Consider the following excerpts:

Dora: It is difficult situation. I know...I am sad because my marriage failed. And I must be frank with you, Rose, if Chris comes back today and shows penitence, I'll go back to him. You will, knowing you as I do. If we say we are Christians, we must practice Christianity, that is, we must forgive those who have wronged us (p. 101).

Agnes: She did not stop there. She wanted to know my explanation for abandoning her father, while I prostituted in Lagos. It was after that incident that I brought her father to my flat in Ikoyi (p. 121).

Rose: [After Ernest has jilted Rose and married Agnes daughter – Elizabeth, popularly called Zizi] Rose did an extraordinary thing. She went to Ernest's home and brought his mother to Lagos for fear that local people would hear and make life miserable for her (pp. 123, 124).

The three protagonists, despite their economic buoyancy and the terrible things their husbands and families did, they still respect the institution of marriage, cultural and religious norms. This means that Nwapa's theorization or perspective on feminism does not exclude respect for authorities, both civil and religious. She also believed that a woman should do

her best to reconcile with her husband because of their children, as exemplified in the case of Agnes and Dora. By her theorization, Nwapa strongly believes in solidarity between men and women to rid the African society of gender inequality. For the purpose of exemplification, at one point when Agnes' husband was preventing the wife from going to evening classes, the father reproved the husband, set matters straight and asserted: *...she has had four children for you. She wanted to read and improve herself and you say no. What kind of man are you? How much money do you give her as food money or pocket money? Has she ever complained to you? Has she ever quarreled with you? Has she not been a good wife to you? If she wanted to have men, how would you know since you are away all day? Has she asked you to pay for the evening lessons? You should count yourself lucky and blessed to have a wife like my daughter.*

By inference, Nwapa's theorization of feminism revolves around love and solidarity between men and women, in fighting for gender equality and restitution of women's fundamental rights and righting domestic and social violence against women. However, a critical examination of such conception or theorization could fast track abuse, deception and mistreatment of women. It could encourage men to perpetrate heinous crimes against women under the conviction that the women will come back to them. For example, when Agnes strove so that she could rejoin the husband, he lashed out at her, and browbeat her referring to her as "my wayward wife" (p. 65). He is not qualified to call her a wayward wife because previously, this had ensued: *One night, Agnes returned home to see her step-mother in a most compromising position with her*

husband. She had suspected this relationship, but she had not proof...Agnes heard about three years later that her step-mother was living with her husband in Ebute-Metta.... What impudence (p. 59, 60).

In spite of this adulterous relationship, Agnes went back to the husband and he could inform her:

Whether you answer my name or not, you are my wife and the children are mine. One day, you will bring them back to me. You cannot say they are not mine. They are mine. You had them in my home, under holy wedlock. So whether you committed adultery or not, having them was my responsibility, they are mine (p. 65).

This account corroborates what previously happened to Agnes' mother, when her father abused her. He told her: "*if you can't take, go...where will I go with seven children, so I stay*" (p. 53). Without any doubt, reformist theorization of feminist ideal is not broad enough to effectively resolve gender inequality and other forms of mistreatment against women. In certain instance, as highlighted above, it may promote and enhance negative stereotypical norms against women in any given society. A critical evaluation and analysis of the various forms of theorization by each of the writers in their novels, practical and realistic theoretical framework should be expansive covering several aspects of issues affecting women in Africa. As shown above, radical feminism and reformist feminism has certain weaknesses that can perpetuate the same evil that it sets out to correct.

However, as suggested by Hala, a blend of the two forms of feminism could help. Nevertheless, the approach will not be militant, as she suggested; rather, it will follow what Sihame termed as universality. She described it as

“expressed in the same terms at any moment in time, or across all societies”. The trap of universality should be avoided. Such trap includes uniform agenda without consideration for diverse culture and orientations, jealousy, aggression, and labeling of feminist ideal as westernization.

Then, formulating the theoretical framework similar to trade unionism as Sihame intimated, there will be an umbrella body with universal creed enshrined on flexibility for cultural, social and economic backgrounds. In this sense, the umbrella body will structure the creed on general issues that affect women, encourage love and solidarity and discourage factions. Where necessary, a peaceful demonstration should be allowed instead of aggression either to the government or to men.

The formulated theoretical framework is Proactive Feminism. Proactive feminism is devoid of aggression, jealousy, condemnation of all men, racism or ethnocentrism. The tenets of Proactive Feminism coincide with McAfee’s (2018) assertion that “It can be both intellectually and politically valuable to have a schematic framework that enables us to map at least some of our points of agreement and disagreement” (p. 2). Hence, Proactive Feminism is not an endeavor to attain homogeneity in approach or conclusions of the varied theorization in feminist movement; rather, as McAfee asserted above, it is to provide a schematic framework that espouses inclusivity and peaceful cohabitation with men.

Proactive Feminism is in consonance with the recommendation of Sikweyiya et al. (2020), based on the finding of their study on Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) in Ghana, that, success in addressing issues involving violence against women requires “engaging...men and women throughout the

community” (p. 10). By inference, Sikweyiya et al.’s recommendation supports the tenets of Proactive Feminism, which places premium on the need for active collaboration between men and women to adequately address negative stereotypical norms in the society. Instead of resorting to aggressive approach or neglecting important issues, women peacefully dialogue with men with the goal of clarifying doubts and understanding each other.

Results of Waling’s (2018) study is consistent with the framework of Proactive Feminism because it shows that “feminist accounts of agency...continue to paint masculinity as a static and fixed entity despite their attempts to theorize its fluid multiplicity” (p. 89). His conclusion was built around Kimmel’s (2010) argument that “men and masculinity are misframed, built in the masculinist backlash against women and gender equality and misunderstanding about feminism’s ultimate goals...we still don’t know how to talk about masculinities” (cited in Waling, 2018, p. 90). The ultimate objective of Proactive Feminism is to engender deeper understanding of masculinity in relation to its fluid multiplicity. A platform is created, as suggested by Kimmel and Waling, to understand the men and masculinity so as not to misframe all men as unkind.

It is expected that this will mitigate misframing and misunderstanding by womenfolk since McAfee (2018), Waling (2018), Sikweyiya et al. (2020) indicated that there are several interacting factors in sociocultural and political settings that are contributing to gender inequality (Nabil, 2016; Moghadam, 2020). Hence, the tenet of Proactive Feminism that men and women engage in peaceful dialog is incontrovertible. They need to find the underlying cause of issues instead of resorting to misframing or attributing the entire blame to a

particular gender (Kimmel, 2010; McAfee, 2018; Moghadam, 2020). Proactive feminism is therefore very fitting in the attainment of active collaboration and peaceful cohabitation between men and women, culminating in better resolution of issues involving gender equality.

Adoption of Proactive Feminism will ensure respect for religious beliefs, constituted authorities (Zaki, 2018; Sikweyiya et al., 2018; Elghossain et al., 2019), and engender love and solidarity between men and women. In a bid to achieve gender equality, it adopts peaceful resolution of differences via peaceful demonstrations, court proceedings and other appropriate means without fear, favour or violence. In line with McAfee (2018), Proactive Feminism is expansive and can be practised in any part of the world, especially Africa because it is balanced in approach to issues affecting women. Since it encourages collaboration and solidarity with men and discourages confrontation, it will go beyond radical or aggressive feminism. It encourages decisive action such as peaceful demonstration or judicial means. To ensure that domestic and social violence against women are addressed, it will work where reformist feminist ideals will not succeed. The female characters exhibiting reformist feminist agenda are prone to allowing evil to pervade the society. The group of characters in the three novels tends to endure what is bad, remain collaborative, refrain from taking any legal action against the wrongdoer or abuser, hoping that he will change for the better. Such act often emboldens the evil doer to continue in the same course. Consider the case of Fatima who was pleading that the complaint against her oppressive husband should be withdrawn from the police station. Hayate was perturbed and infuriated, so she informed her: *“Had she thought about the horror of her*

husband's actions, about justice, about other women to whom he had perhaps done the same thing, or even worse?" (p. 137). Eventually, Fatima's husband sexually assaulted Hayate, the protagonist, in the novel *Wounding Words*.

Similarly, in the novel *Women are Different*, the female character, Rose, espoused reformist feminist ideal, and never took any legal action against Ernest. Agnes once told her: "*Comfort told me...you were crazy to give Ernest a thought at all...since the war ended, Ernest has been involved in trafficking in hemp and dangerous drugs*" (p. 123). Instead of doing something about the issue, Rose went to Ernest's home and brought his mother to Lagos for fear that local people would hear and make life miserable for her. Rose later referred to her action as "*stupid thing to do*" (p. 124).

Apart from deceiving Rose and marrying Agnes' child - Zizi, Ernest got entangled in vices, all because Rose failed to take decisive action in bringing him to book, get him disciplined or face the brunt of the law. Instead, she was hoping for the best, enduring Ernest's deception and abuse, unwittingly escalating his abusive and criminal behaviour.

In sum, findings of the study revealed that Proactive Feminism is the practical and realistic theoretical framework that underpins feminism in any part of the world, including Africa. It is void of aggression, jealousy, condemnation of all men, racism or ethnocentrism that is in consonance. This means, it respects religious tenets, constituted authorities, and engenders love and solidarity between men and women.

Proactive Feminism is broad, expansive and balanced in approach to issues affecting women. It will go beyond radical or aggressive feminism since it encourages collaboration and solidarity with men, and discourages

confrontation. It will work where reformative feminist ideals will not succeed because of its negligently allowing evil to pervade the society with appropriate punishment for offenders. Rather, proactive feminism will see to it that offenders are brought to justice through decisive action such as peaceful demonstration or judicial adjudication. These will fast-track restitution of women's fundamental rights and mitigate domestic and social violence against women.

Summary

This chapter assessed the type of theoretical conception of individual female characters, with a view to underscore the dichotomy of feminist agenda in African feminism. Results of the assessment revealed that there is a huge gap in theoretical orientation among the protagonists as well as the minor female characters. It is expected that feminist ideals will be evolving and not static, since human society is also evolving and gender issues are constantly changing. Hence, in this chapter, I conducted an in-depth examination of the various theoretical conceptions exhibited by female characters. This facilitated the formulation of a practical, flexible and realistic theoretical framework. Proactive Feminism is not a one-size-fit-all agenda to feminist issue; it is rather a framework that blends various theoretical orientations with a view to address the contemporary situations or conditions of African women that could confront in the short or long run.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The primary focus of this chapter is to provide a summary of the study, outline the conclusion drawn, and proffer appropriate recommendations based on the findings of the study. The summary, conclusion and recommendations I have provided in this chapter are relevant to the formulation of a practical and realistic theoretical framework on African feminism. The chapter also entails how contemporary African women are redefining gender roles and identities within the family and society.

Summary

The specific objectives of the study were as follows: To ascertain how Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa's works underscore gender norms in their characterization of women in post-colonial Africa; to investigate how the feminist discourses of Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa's novels underscore the existing dichotomy of theorization of feminist ideals in Africa; to examine how Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa's novels highlight pertinent ways that women are redefining gender roles and identities, and to formulate a theoretical framework that balances conceptualization of African women experiences and reflects ways in which women are redefining gender roles and identities.

The study was guided by four-pronged research questions: How do Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa's works underscore gender norms in their characterization of women in post-colonial Africa? In what ways do Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa's novels highlight pertinent ways that women are

negotiating gender roles and identities? How do the feminist discourses of Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa's novels underscore the existing dichotomy of theorization of feminist ideals in Africa? What is the nature of a theoretical framework that balances the conceptualization of African women experiences and reflects ways women are redefining gender roles and identities?

I adopted qualitative research methodology for the study (Sarantakos, 2005). This is the most appropriate because it involves in-depth and close reading of texts in the three novels for addressing the study's research problems. The study collected primary data from the following novels for analysis: *Wounding Words* by Evelyne Accad, *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Sadaawi and *Women are Different* by Flora Nwapa. This was followed by literary criticism via formalistic approach to data analysis. Formalistic approach to data analysis entails textual analysis of the expressions and actions of respective characters in the three novels. In order to achieve the focus of the study, I conducted critical evaluation of the three novels with a view to understand how each of the female characters depicts the dichotomy of opinion on feminism among African women and women in general. The meaning of the selected texts is derived based on close reading of the protagonists, antagonists, and other minor characters in the three novels.

The use of formalism for data analysis of the three novels facilitated objective results since it is rid of personal opinion or sociocultural influences of individual authors. Emergent trends and patterns were highlighted, and appropriate inferences made in relation to the objectives of the study. More importantly, it helped in the resolution of the research problems identified at the introductory section of the study.

Analysis of the three novels fast tracked the formulation of practical and result-oriented theoretical underpinning of the study. This provides ample insight into African feminism. The formulated theoretical framework does not in any way render other theoretical underpinnings on how feminism is practiced in Africa. Obsolete rather, it offers a realistic and unique framework upon which to view African women's daily struggle against stereotypical norms, patriarchy and unequal gender treatment endemic in the African society. Hence, the formulated theory is complementary and provides a clearer picture of the African women.

In harmony with the focus on formalism, the three literary works were analyzed via a thorough consideration of the literariness of the texts in the three novels by the notable African female writers (Saadawi, Nwapa and Accad). This means, analysis was limited to what the writers wrote, their point of view, and style of writing. In effect, other issues such as the writers' place of birth, sociocultural or economic status, do not affect the findings of this study. Valuable information retrieved from individual characters, as represented in the texts, were instrumental to the outcome of the study, and thus underscore meaning of African feminism by respective female characters including minor ones.

Major Findings

Results of the study revealed that Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa employed characterization to vividly portray negative stereotypical norms against women. It was shown that women were abused verbally, sexually and physically, deprived of education, belittled and suppressed. While Accad and Saadawi underscore gender inequality, domestic and social violence against

women, Nwapa portrayed unfaithfulness, deception and domineering attitude on the part of men in gender relations. The three writers clearly demonstrated that men commit so many atrocities and women are divided in their opinion on the best approach to address it.

While some (Accad, 1996) felt it should not be reported so as to save face or protect the reputation of the abuser and the family, others felt it is best to hold the bull by the horn and lay bare what has transpired so that others will not suffer similar fate. Some women believed that, with the passage of time, their husbands or abusers could change or be reformed (Nwapa, 1992).

Findings of the study revealed that Nwapa, Saadawi and Accad have demonstrated pertinent ways the female characters were negotiating gender roles and identities. For example, Agnes, Dora, Rose, Firdaus and Sharifa negotiated masculine gender roles and identities when they became financially independent and occupied the position of administrators in their respective works. Agnes and Dora became breadwinners and family heads, which are stereotypically masculine gender roles. While Agnes and Rose accomplished such tasks via Western education, Dora, Firdaus and Sharifa became financially independent through setting up private businesses and sustained them with astuteness and foresight. Female characters also displayed feminine identity and gender roles. For example, Agnes and Dora were very caring, loving and ready to fight to the last to protect their children. In handling her ordeal with the landlord, Hayate also negotiated both feminine and masculine roles. Agnes, Dora, Rose, Firdaus, Sharifa, Hayate, Samia, Rima and Aida demonstrated leadership roles, which are stereotypically masculine in identity and gender role.

Results of the study showed that two African feminist ideals underpin the three novels. Saadawi clearly revealed her stance as a radical feminist, while both Accad and Nwapa employed their characterization to portray both reformist and radical ideals. This demonstrated fluidity in their theorization of African feminism. It also demonstrated that due to constant changes in views, issues concerning women and the world in general, stance on feminism could change requiring a broader view of issues.

Findings of the study revealed that Proactive Feminism is the practical and realistic theoretical framework that underpins feminism in any part of the world including Africa (McAfee, 2018). It is devoid of aggression, jealousy, condemnation of all men, racism or ethnocentrism (Zaki, 2018; Sikweyiya et al., 2018; Elghossain et al., 2019). This means that it respects religious tenets and constituted authorities, and engenders love and solidarity between men and women. It is broad, expansive, and balanced in approach to issues affecting women. It will go beyond radical or aggressive feminism since it encourages collaboration and solidarity with men and discourages confrontation. It will work where reformative feminist ideals will not succeed because of its negligently allowing evil to pervade the society with appropriate punishment for offenders. Proactive feminism will rather see to it that offenders are brought to justice through decisive action such as peaceful demonstration or judicial adjudication. These will fast track restitution of women's fundamental rights and mitigate domestic and social violence against women and most importantly ensure gender equality within post-colonial Africa.

Minor Findings

Other minor findings that are emergent upon in-depth analysis of the three novels are presented below. Minor findings regarding African feminism and how women are redefining their gender roles and identities relevant to the objectives of the study are also presented below:

Reformist theorization of feminist ideals is not broad enough to effectively resolve gender inequality and other forms of mistreatment against women. In certain instance, as highlighted above, it may promote and enhance negative stereotypical norms against women in any given society (Lorber, 2009).

Radical feminism lacks objectivity and candor because all men cannot be criminals and killing someone is a criminal activity and cannot be used to resolve serious societal issues. Hence, radical theorization of feminist ideal is impractical and unrealistic since it fosters aggression, inordinate and criminal activities that would eventually worsen feminist claims against patriarchy (Daniel, 2012). Punching a hole on radical feminist theorization, Eichler (1988) indicates that gender partisanship may end up becoming what it purports to fight against.

Conclusion

Accad, Saadawi and Nwapa employed characterization in their novels to vividly portray negative stereotypical norms against women ranging from domestic and social violence to deception and domineering attitude on the part of men. Due to difficulties and increasing violence against them, women are redefining their gender roles and identities via Western education, foresight, astuteness and setting up of private businesses. Several female characters

became breadwinners and family heads, which are stereotypically masculine gender roles, while some have embraced leadership roles, which are often attributed to masculine gender roles and identities. The three novels were underpinned by two African feminist ideals namely; radical feminism and reformative feminism. Proactive feminism was formulated as a practical and realistic theoretical framework as a bulwark against domestic and social violence as well as gender inequality in post-colonial Africa.

Recommendations

The study discovered that female characters portrayed the endemic nature of gender inequality and violence against women. I therefore recommend that writers should sensitize women towards fulfilling their responsibility of reporting abusers irrespective of their status. Efforts should also be made to disabuse women's minds on supporting the view that religious creed supports wife battering or sexual violence against women.

The study discovered that several women are seizing every opportunity to become educated and participate in every form of activity that men are involved. In view of this, I recommended that female child education should be improved especially in Africa, and women should not be regarded as intellectually unfit to hold leadership positions. Hence, admission into fields such as engineering, science and politics should be based on merit.

While two (Accad and Nwapa) of the African female writers espouse reformist and radical feminism, one (Saadawi) espouses radical feminism. The study revealed that both theories are deficient. Considering this, I recommend that a balanced approach should be adopted in feminist movement. While women should not engage in aggression to secure their

desire, neither should they retreat nor accept defeat so as to encourage perpetrators of patriarchy to continue. Ample advocacy should be made on educating women regarding their constitutional rights in order to allay indifference to gender inequality.

The study formulated proactive feminism as a practical and realistic approach to African feminism. I recommended, bearing this in mind, that factors such as jealousy, racism and ethnocentrism which often marginalize feminism movements should be discouraged and solidarity alongside love be embraced. Women should know that a woman in Africa is the same as a woman in America. The same hormone runs through their bodies, hence castigating one another will only draw the movement back. A collaboration and cooperation via result-oriented discussion is highly relevant to forming a strong front against patriarchy, domestic and social violence and gender inequality.

In view of the scope and limitation of this study, I am recommending the following areas for further research:

The present study conducted in-depth investigation into the how female characters are re-defining gender roles and identities using formalism. Further research can be conducted within the same context with the use of deconstructionism, as postulated by its leading proponent, Jacques Derrida. This is relevant because, unlike formalism, deconstructionism will highlight contradictions, paradoxes, ambiguities and, in a nutshell, defects in the novels. Findings of the study will also be relevant in the composition of effective literary texts rid of the identified defects and useful in augmenting knowledge on African feminism.

The present study was conducted through in-depth analysis of three novels: *Wounding Words* by Evelyne Accad, *Woman at Point Zero* by Nawal El Sadaawi and *Women are Different* by Flora Nwapa. In the future, similar studies could be conducted using *Distant View of a Minaret* by Alifa Rifaat, which has been acclaimed as a must-read on issues related to African feminism (Jerome, 2014). Likewise, the novel, *The Dynamics of African Feminism*, by Susan Arndt, contains apt description of the several issues involving African feminist literatures. It is envisaged that deconstructing the two novels will be highly instrumental to broadening knowledge on African feminism.

The present study adopted qualitative research paradigm with primary attention to secondary data. In the future, issues involving women redefining their gender roles and identities can be adequately investigated with the use of primary and secondary data. In this sense, semi-structured interview guides can be administered and conducted through virtual platforms on social media such as WhatsApp or Zoom Meetings. This will enrich and concretize findings of the study, since results of the secondary data can be compared, triangulated or vetted using retrieved data from selected experts on African feminism.

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