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The African Woman, “the prey to the Male Predator”: A Deconstruction of Feminism in Nawal El Saadawi’s *God Dies by the Nile*, Tsitsi Ndagarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* and Margaret Ogola’s *The River and the Source*

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ABSTRACT

It will be more accurate to argue not in the context of a monolith (African feminism) but rather in context of a pluralism that captures the fluidity and dynamism of different cultural imperatives, historical forces and localized realities conditioning women’s activism in Africa. (Nnaemeka, 1998, p. 5)

African feminist narratives present the African woman on the continent as the innocent victim of the cruel, oppressive patriarchal system. African culture as a whole in most of these narratives presumably gives men authority to violate ethical standards in their treatment of women: men are gods, above the law thereby given to their primordial instincts. They commit diverse acts of sexual perversion without retribution from society

because the culture permits them to do so. As much as feminist writing attempts to subvert dominant male hegemonies, it is essential to interrogate the claims, which these narratives depict and the extent of representation by the authors. Do the views of African feminist writers represent the plight of all African women? Is every African man a male beast or this is just a skewed belief “Under Western Eyes?” This paper examines representation of men, women and African culture in African feminist writing. Using ideas of Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanty the study interrogates the representation in Nawal El Saadawi’s *God Dies by the Nile*, Tsitsi Ndagarembga *Nervous Conditions* and Margaret Ogola’s *The River and the Source*.

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Statement of the Problem

Most African feminist writers present African men as callous, brutal and sexual perverts whose license to misbehave stems from African culture. These narratives paint a grim picture of African culture and readers wonder how primordial traditions of Africa can get. Men characters defile house helps, rape girls in their neighbourhoods, have sex with animals and worst of all exhume corpses to have sex. The audience wonders if this is true of evils of patriarchy in African cultures. Feminist scholars argue that male writers conceal the true picture of the woman's position in literature. Mills S. (1995) contends that there is a male hegemony in both the treatment of women in society and characterization in literary works. With Jacques Lacan and Burton Deirdre, they formulate feminist stylistics to counter the image of women in literature. Garvey B. (2012) observes that the female sentence lacks in rationality and authority, one which is essentially emotive, as the writer simply pours out her feelings... in a painless and structureless way (p. 2463). The male sentence is however authoritative, assertive with element of control and choice. Could this be one reason why feminist narratives from Africa paint a grim picture of African men? This paper examines representation of men and African culture in African feminist writing. Using ideas of Gayatry Spivak and Chandra Mohanty the study interrogates the representation in Nawal El Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile*, Tsitsi Ndagarembga *Nervous Conditions* and Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source*.

Background of the Study

The last half of the twentieth century saw the proliferation of women's movements and feminism the world over. Women began agitating for their rights by civil society, which spilled over to literature. They complained of misrepresentation by male writers and started writing to restore the position and image of women. In both fiction and nonfiction works, feminist writers depict male bashing and gender stereotyping which confounds their masculine counterparts. They depict men as brutes, sexual perverts and lazy. Deckard B. (1975) writes:

In Africa for example, women used to conduct almost all Agricultural production while the men limited themselves mostly to hunting and warfare. The advent of European colonialism ended the intertribal war activities of the men. Since African men appeared idle to the Europeans, they used every means to force them into farming. (p. 239)

African men are therefore creatures of no economic use to the society after the banning of perilous interethnic clashes and raiding of neighbouring communities. The women and children do all the weeding and harvesting on the farm as the men possibly search for beer to return in the evening and demand for sex. Crehan K. (1983) reiterates Decard's argument that men were only of use in the case of hunting and fishing; however in crop farming, women and children constituted the basic unit. Men only gained access to products of cultivation through their relationships to women (59). Quoting Booserup, Leavitt (1971) observes that the occupations of African men in Africa were warfare, hunting and felling trees. When the colonizers banned intertribal warfare, the men seemed to be idle... "Men could be come far better farmers than women if they could abandon their customary laziness" (287). It is important to note that most of these feminist scholars hail from the west and tend to ignore the heterogeneity of Africa. Some African writers took cue from

western feminists and started writing to defend the position of women and give a grim picture of African men. In her interview with Ayinne R. (2004), the feminist writer Amma Darko says:

We have started writing from our point of view because for a while you were writing for us...if we are writing, there are some pain that will have to come out... and I think rather than take it as male bashing, you must take it as a means to better understand the womenfolk of Africa. You were always portraying us as all enduring, all giving mothers. But I don't want to be all enduring... all giving.

Mawuli Adjei suggests that Darko like other African female writers uses an "irrational sentence" to depict the gender question. Citing Mariama Ba, Zeynab Alkali, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo and Celix Beyala, Adjei observes that feminist writers present a situation in which women are victims of physical and psychological violence and men the perpetrators of the same (48). Darko for instance exhibits strong anti-patriarchal tendencies and reduces men both to worthless, irresponsible physically grotesque images, wicked husbands, drunkards, rapists, exploiters, predators, monsters, sexually depraved, perverse and evil (49). Frank K (1987) summarises the African feminist's theme: man is the enemy, the exploiter and oppressor (14).

As the reality of feminism sinks in the African collective psyche, scholars have emerged with divergent perspectives. Using Chandra Mohanty's ideas, African scholars have questioned the western feminists' treatment of Africa as a homogeneous entity. Oyeronke O. (2003) contends that western feminists' reference to Africa as one place with same cultural beliefs is "intellectual indolence and imperialist arrogance" (59). He asserts:

Readers get the impression that Africa is homogeneous as the inhabitants of a beehive. No sociologist would regard Paris or Toronto as a homogeneous entity and Toronto has only two million people. But Africa is "Africa" and it is said all Africans look the same [...] Reference to Africa as if the continent were a homogeneous village are clearly nonsense. (p. 51)

Oyeronke's main argument is that if men in a Zambian village were lazy then it would be absurd to generalize the attribute to all African men in the continent. So is the case with other vices like brutality, sex perversion and drunkenness. Western feminists strive as much as possible to eradicate context in representation of African culture. Nawal El Saadawi complains that when submitting *The Hidden Face of Eve* to Beacon Press for publication, the publisher deletes the long preface to do away with her ideas on context (Nnaemeka 2005, p. 54).

Oyewumi (2005) contends that looking at gender via the assumption that women are oppressed universally does account for differences in history and culture in different communities in the world, and particularly Africa. She adds that feminist theory originated in the West where men and women are conceived and brought up in a binary opposition and cannot be exported to other cultures (P. 11). These African scholars go on to invent a balanced form of feminism: nego feminism. Nnaemeka O. (2004) defines it as a "No Ego"

feminism; the kind that fights for the rights of women with respect for the strategies that the people of that community have (57). Nnaemeka writes:

In their enthusiasm, our sisters usurp our wars and fight them very badly. The arrogance that declares African women “problems” objectifies us and undercuts the agency necessary for forging true global sisterhood. African women are not problems to be solved. Like women everywhere, African women have problems. More important, they have provided solutions to these problems. We are the only ones to set the agenda and anyone who wishes to participate in our struggle must do so in the context of our agenda. (57)

Nnamaeka suggests that western skewed feminists fight the gender war badly by stereotyping African men as sex perverts, lazy, predatory and other vices mentioned in aforesaid female writers. They depict African women as weak, helpless, miserable and hopeless creatures, which is not the case. Nnaemeka concludes that it is a Western yearning to demonise African men in the pretext of saving African women. In this study, the researcher applies the ideas of Chandra Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak and other postcolonial scholars to interrogate the ideas of feminist writers who have possibly misrepresented African culture and men to the world

Theoretical Frame work

The interpretive grid for this study is postcolonial theory. Post-colonialism in its most recent definition is concerned with persons from groups outside the dominant groups and therefore places subaltern groups in a position to subvert the authority of those with hegemonic power (686). Ashcroft notes that post-colonial theory entails migration, slavery, suppression, resistance, representation and influences to discourses to imperial Europe (2). In this study, the researcher employs the ideas of Chandra Mohanty and Gayatri Spivak to resist domination of African culture by western feminism. The following concepts will be essential to the study:

Representation

Spivak G. C (1988) questions the notion of representation in postcolonial studies. Poststructuralists crown the intellectual as a transparent medium through which the voices of the oppressed can be represented (67-72). Spivak contends that the colonized subaltern subject is irretrievably heterogeneous. She asks, “[c]an this difference be articulated? And if so by whom?” (79-80). In other words, to what extent do African Feminist writers represent the heterogeneous African women in Africa? There are those who do not see African traditions as oppressive at all. Furthermore, African culture is diverse; not all African cultures are oppressive to women. For Spivak, a feminist writer may either misrepresent some African women or in the attempt to give them voice start silencing some women. An attempt to give the oppressed women a voice will silence those who like the culture. Spivak gives the British example who in attempt to speak for oppressed widows by banning *Sati* rite ended up silencing the Hindu culture. Can African feminists avoid this? Is their representation plausible? Apparently, the subaltern cannot speak; therefore the intellectual remains a medium. The study will apply Spivak’s notion of representation to interrogate feminists writers’ concerns to determine their effectiveness.

Skewed Generalisations

In her seminal paper, "Under Western Eyes," Mohanty () critiques hegemonic western feminisms. She rejects the universality of the theories of western feminists and categorisation of the third world woman as a monolithic subject. Mohanty feels that the assumption that third world women are a coherent group (ignoring social factors) is problematic. She adds that the model of men as oppressors is not a universal model. Mohanty is against the oversimplification of the complexities across culture and gender to a binary division. She comes up with the concept of discursive colonialism where first world women (subjects) try to explain third world women (objects) to create power hierarchies and cultural domination. Mohanty gives a less pessimistic approach than radical feminists by criticising texts which claim that women worldwide are oppressed by male dominance. Mohanty suggests that women gain experience to get cultural insight to understand their situations rather than rely on a false sense of sisterhood. She interrogates universalizations like women are sexual objects, commodities and others, which collapse without due consideration to the context and situation. Whereas a veil symbolises oppression in one area, it signifies allegiance to other women in Iran.

The Female Sentence and Retaliation

In their attempt to deconstruct male stereotypes in literature, African feminist writers paint a negative picture of men. Ogola (1994) deliberately presents male characters in the negative light. In the character of Otieno, Ogola represents men as lustful. He marries four wives and treats them like sluts; shockingly, he admires his brother's wife, Akoko. He is arrogant because he wants to beat Akoko while the brother is absent. He inherits the chieftom and grabs Owour's wealth after the death of Owang' Sino. In the character of Mark Sigu, Awiti's husband, men are stereotyped. When Awiti leaves him at Nakuru, he falls in love with another girl. Ogola presents men as unfaithful. At school, the principal suspends Aoro for being careless but when the girls, Vera and Becky are in school they behave well. The writer stigmatizes boys as careless and undisciplined. When Aoro marries a Kikuyu girl, Awiti accepts her happily but Mark says that he should marry a Luo girl because Kikuyus love money. Ogola portrays men as ethnocentric. Whereas Wandia furthers her studies to PhD level, Aoro is contented with a Bachelors; men are complacent.

All the prime movers that represent the four generations in Ogola's (1994) are women: Akoko, Nyabera, Awiti and Wandia are women. Although the story begins at Chief Gogni's house where Akoko is born, the male character, Gogni is made to unconventionally appreciate the girl child contrary to his contemporaries and then dies as soon as he sells her at thirty head of cattle. Owour Kembo though humble and exemplary character dies very early. The writer deliberately eliminates Obura, Akoko's noble firstborn. He dies in the First World War and when Owang' Sino, the younger sibling, becomes chief; the writer eliminates him under unconvincing circumstances. He chokes while eating fish and dies. Okumu, Nyabera's husband, is very poor and relies on his wife, Nyabera, for sustenance. Like Gogni and Owour, Okumu dies early and leaves a helpless family. Towards the end of the story, the baton of generation is handed to Wandia. The death motif in male characters is a deliberate ploy by the writer to imply that women, not men, can perpetuate family line. The widow motif from Akoko, Nyabera to Wandia's mother is an unreasonable attempt to erase the role of men in the society. Ogola kills exemplary male characters such as Owour

Kembo, Obura and Owang' Sino for women to take their place and do the good and lets funny men like Otieno to live longer to besmirch men's repute.

In her novel *So Long A Letter*, Mariam Ba paints a grim picture of African culture and men. The burial rites, which are presided over by men, are very absurd. After the death of Moudou, Ramatoulouye is supposed to sacrifice her possessions to the family in law. She gives up her personality and dignity and becomes a thing in the service of the man who had married her (40). The man's family takes all financial contributions made at the funeral and the widow is left empty handed. Men remain the sole owners of the family property; Ramatoulouye's husband Moudou Fall acquired his house after joint savings with her but the title deed bears only his name (p.10). Men are cowardly people who manifest their insecurity through denying women education. Moudou is determined to pay fifty thousand Francs to Binetou to "to establish his rule" (p. 10) because going to school will make her critical. Men call educated girls "scatter brained and devils" (14).

Furthermore, the men are lustful because they are obsessed with marrying even at a very old age. The story of Moudou Fall's second marriage is queer. Binetou tells Daba, his firstborn that she has a sugar daddy who buys her expensive dresses. She tells Daba that the sugar daddy wants to marry her. Besides, the man offers her a villa, mecca for parents, a car, monthly allowance and jewels. Binetou's mother persuades her to get married. Later, the sugar daddy happens to be Daba's own father, Moudou (p. 37). Worse still, men use divorce to abuse women. Ramatoulouye writes, "I counted the abandoned and divorced women of my generation whom I knew...I knew a few whose remaining beauty had been able to capture a worthy man," (40). The men divorce the women when they age. The men have extramarital affairs and their lewdness is confounding. Samba Diack, Jacqueline's husband spends time chasing slender Senegalese women after marriage (p. 42). Jacqueline discovers notes, cheque stubs, bills from restaurants and hotel rooms. Jacqueline suffers constant fits of depression as a consequence of her husband's infidelity. Some men are so keen on inheriting widows even before the widow heals from the bereavement. Tamsir appears to propose to Ramatoulouye a few days after her husband's death. Accompanied with Mowdo and the Imam, Tamsir says, "[y]ou are my good luck...I prefer you to the other one," (58). Rama replies that she has a mind; she is not an object to be passed from hand to hand (p 58).

Ba suggests that men are beasts due to their inability to control their natural desires. She asserts that it is through self control, ability to reason, to choose... that the individual distinguishes himself from an animal (87).

The African man- Brute and Sexual Pervert

Saadawi (1985) and Ndagarembga (1988) present the African man as the brute and pervert and suggest that he should be killed. "I was not sorry when my brother died," goes the first sentence in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (1988). Tambudzai, the heroin of the story is so tormented by the father's brutal favourism for the brother that she rejoices when her brother dies.

When the story begins, the men are depicted as bosses to be served by women. Her brother Nnamo orders her to fetch his luggage (10). Nnamo beats Netsai for refusing to fetch the luggage. Jeremiah, the heroine's father detests it when Tambudzai reads the newspaper because by so doing she would be emulating her brother to fill her mind with ideas that would alienate her from reality of feminine living (p.34). He brutally denies

Tambudzai a place in school. He asks, “ Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and be clean. Grow vegetables,” (p. 15). While the brother, Nnamo is taken to a mission school, Tambu is denied right to education. The gender othering makes her feel like “by product of inexorable natural process” (p. 40). Tambu is ill provided for; whereas the brother has many clothes and exposed to the world at their uncle’s home, Tambu wears the underwear when she visits the uncle after the brother’s death (76). At her uncle’s house, Tambu has never seen the switch, biscuit, sieve and cake (p.134). men’s insensitivity is also evident when during the Christmas ceremony men sleep in good rooms while the women sleep in the kitchen. A man called Tete refuses to sleep in “public places”- the living room (p. 134). Ndagarembga depicts the worst cruelty in men when Babamkuru, Tambudzai’s uncle gives her fifteen strokes of the cane for refusing to attend an uncle’s wedding. She has to obedient because she is a girl (p.174).

Tambu’s behaviour is a sign of independence of mind which is a preserve of men. A woman has no mind of her own. Tambu’s mother’s mind belonged first to her father and then to her husband; it had not been hers to make up (p.155). Girls who are assertive are insolent and disrespectful. When Nyasha, Babamukuru’s daughter, defends herself, sigeuke warns her not to talk. African tradition suggests that women should always be quiet (p115). Babamukuru is so infuriated because Nyasha has answered back. BabaMukuru hits her, spits in her face and curses, “[s]he is not my daughter” (p. 116). He is also furious because Nyasha wears a short skirt and goes out to dance. Such dressing to him is ungodly. Nyasha’s mother asks him whether he is proud of Nyasha. Not so; Babamukuru disapproves of that kind of dressing. Nyasha finds African culture queer; she says, “[t]hey control everything you do” (119) and adds that she was comfortable in England. Custom compels girls to kneel before elder men. At one point, Tambudzai having knelt several times in front of a disclaiming uncle grows tired and lets some water slip out (p. 41). There are many other instances that paint a grim picture of African culture in Ndagarembga’s attempt to castigate patriarchy in African societies.

Saadawi (1985), *God Dies by the Nile* also attacks male dominance by presenting African men as callous sex perverts. The Mayor who is the major male character smiles unusually when a beautiful girl is mentioned. He tells Haj Ismail, “[t]he youngest is always tasty,” (p. 12). Lust overwhelms him when he looks at Zeinab. Narrator says, “[h]e could see her firm rounded buttocks pressing up against the long *gabaleya* from behind,” (p. 18). Sheikh Zahran says that she has a strange taste where women are concerned. ‘Once he sets his eyes on a woman, he must have her; come what may’, (p. 70). He is a rapist and this how he rapes Zeinab:

His hands were now sliding on her thighs to her belly as he tried to lift her garment higher. But it was wet and stuck to her flesh. He pulled on it so hard that it split with rending sound. And he tore the remaining fold from around her body. (Saadawi, p. 64)

He kills Elwau after he flees with Neffisa, a girl with whom he had made love. He is even jealous when Hamzawi marries Fatheya, a beautiful girl. He schemes and arrests Galal for marrying Zeinab, a girl he had sex with. He has Hamzawi ruffled up for adopting a child claiming that he has brought evil on the land by adopting a bastard, Fatheya is killed while trying to save the baby: “Fatheya’s clothes were torn away and her body shone white , and

naked like that of a terrible mermaid in moonlit night,” (145). There are several phallogocentric symbols associated with the Mayor to signify his immorality: at the beginning the narrator says:

He loved Cairo. The lamps shining on the dark surface of the tarmac roads. The coloured lights of the river side casinos reflected in the flowing waters of the Nile. The night clubs thronged with eating and drinking as they sat around the tables, the women dancing, their bodies moving, their perfume and soft laughter going through him. (p. 12)

The casino and night club represent sex, which he is obsessed with. The women dancing and bodies moving is the act of sex to him. The lamps represent his manhood and the flowing Nile waters, the female reproductive system. The image of the iron gate associated with him is his manhood and roaring appetite for sex; the Mayor is fixated at the genitals.

Apart from the Mayor, sheikh Metwali is the most eccentric and sexually immoral in *God Dies by the Nile*, a man whose ID has trampled on the super ego in spite of his virtuous title. Like the Mayor, he is fixated at the genitals because he roams at night exhume corpses to screw. He would exhume corpses:

And if it was that of a female, he would crawl over it until his face was near the chin. If it was male, he turned it over on its face then crawled over it until the lower part of its belly pressed down on the buttocks from behind. (p. 74)

These sexual perversions are manifestation of the wicked instincts in his unconscious mind. His death instincts manifest in the way he seeks his bed among the dead. The writer says, “[h]e lived among the dead year by year,” (p. 73). Women who met him would ask for a blessing. He would stretch out his hand and squeeze any part of their body he wished as saliva flowed down his beard (72). Metwali fondles the women he claims to be blessing. There is displacement in this because he cannot have sex with these women by virtue of his status as sheikh, he opts to bless them but in reality, he fondles them to derive sexual pleasure.

Sheikh Hamzawi is the cleric in Kafr El Teen Mosque. He is a close ally to the Mayor but he arranges for his murder because Hamzawi has a beautiful wife, Fatheya. Although the Mayor claims that Hamzawi is punished for picking an abandoned baby, which is bad omen, the truth is that Fatheya is beautiful and the Mayor wants her to slake his lust for sex. Sheikh Hamzawi stands out as a brute. He is quite aggressive towards the opposite sex in spite of his impotence. He admires Fatheya and compels her to marry him against her will. Surprisingly, he does not have the potency to break Fatheya’s virginity. The traditionist, Om Saber, is invited to break her virginity. The writer observes, “Fatheya felt the burning pain left by the woman’s finger as it probed up between her thighs looking for blood,” (41). Hamzawi’s brutality is evident when he advises Haj Ismail and Masoud to beat the bride, Fatheya, to force her into marrying Sheikh Hamzawi (p. 40). He also loses temper and hits the adopted child.

Kafrawi is Zakeya’s son and father to Neffisa and Zeinab, beautiful girls who the Mayor has designs on. Neffisa rejects the Mayor’s advances and marries Elwau who is murdered by the Mayor out of jealousy. The Mayor demands for Zainab to serve him in his house but

Kafrawi objects because he needs her for daily chores. Kafrawi is arrested, which infuriates Zakeya bitterly.

Kafrawi is portrayed as a sexual pervert, for example, the act of suckling the buffalo is phallogocentric in itself. It resembles the act of sex and he goes further to have sex with his buffalo, Aziza (p. 61). The narrator says, "[t]he penis slid up into the inner warmth and was lost in great stillness, like an eternity, like death," (p. 61). His perverted nature is evident while playing with his daughter, Naffisa; they play around in a phallogocentric manner, "[h]er small hand would play with his whiskers. He opened his mouth, closed his lips over her smooth fingers." This signifies sexual perversion in him.

Kafrawi's dreams depict the sexual perversion. In his dreams, he sees the dead body of his mother lying on the ground, which turns into the body of Elwau, the dead son-in-law. The sex instinct in this dream comes in form of Freud's Electra complex, where boys are sexually attracted to their mothers and change to learn their sex roles due to the fear for their fathers. The main phallogocentric symbol associated with Sheikh Hamzawi is the female buffalo- Aziza. According to Sigmund Freud, Sexual perversion is as a result of fixation during early stages of development. Kafrawi is fixated on sex hence the bestiality in his personality.

Finally, Elwau is the young man who loves Neffisa, Kafrawi's daughter and flees away with her to the Mayor's infuriation. The Mayor pursues and kills him. Elwau is a sex pervert because he recalls how his cousin Yousef sodomised him, "Yousef caught him in an iron grip holding him by the back of his neck, threw him to the ground face downwards and wrenched his *galabeya* up his buttocks. He felt the powerful, heavy body press down on him..." (p. 66). It is evident that men characters in Saadawi (1985) commit unspeakable acts of sexual perversion against women, fellow men and animals.

Context, Representation and Interpretation in African Feminist Writing

Mohanty T. (1984) cross questions the skewed generalisations by Western feminists and treatment of African women as a monolithic subject. El Saadawi, Ba M., Ndagarembga and Ogola use Western radical feminism to castigate the African man and African culture. In her perspective, all African women do not feel oppressed like Zakeya, Zeinab and Fatheya in Saadawi (1985) neither are they oppressed like Tambudzai and Nyasha in Ndagarembga (1988). Ramatoulaye's experience in *So Long a Letter* is not every woman's experience in Africa. It is also interesting to note that some women embrace the culture and do not find their men brutal and perverted. Ramaoutalaye's lady mother-in-law and Binatou have embraced polygamy (p.7) and Ba blames them for Rama's problems. As much as feminist writers condemn polygamy, Mohanty suggests that the reader ought to understand the role of polygamy in the Islamic context to reach a reasonable interpretation. The woman Om Saber in Saadawi (1985) loves African culture and embraces it with pleasure. She does not feel oppressed by the culture. The narrator says of her:

Going from house to house, helping women in labour, circumcising the girls, piercing holes in their ears. At weddings, she would paint the feet of girls and women with red henna...at night tear the virgin's haymen with her finger... she was busy solving the problems of girls and women: carrying out abortions with a stalk of *mouloukheya*, throttling the newborn baby if necessary (Saadawi, 1985a, p. 92).

Whereas Ndagarembga condemns Babamukuru for rejecting Nyasha's scanty dressing, Mohanty refers us to the context. Ba answers Ndagarembga's complaint, "[t]rousers accentuate ample figure of the black woman and should be used sparingly" (76). Nyasha is not in England and she is not a white woman; whereas white women look smart in trousers, black girls look indecent in them because of their different figures; hence Babamukuru's rejection. Mohanty emphasizes the different interpretations given to the veil in the west and Iran. Similarly, whereas Tambudzai's kneeling is a sign of oppression in the western sense, in Tambu's community, it possibly is just a simple sign of respect; whereas female circumcision is women's oppression in the western sense, it is a simple rite of passage to the Kikuyu in Ngugi's *The River Between*. Those Africans with exposure to western culture such as Ndagarembga, Saadawi and Ba apply foreign standards to African culture and dismiss it. In the character of Nyasha, Ndagarembga asserts that life is better in England. It is this that Mohanty refers to as an attempt of first world women to explain third world women to create power hierarchies and cultural domination.

Saadawi's argument that presents African men as sexual perverts and brutes comes under Mohanty's scrutiny. She sees it as an oversimplification of complexities across culture. Daba's husband in Ba's *So Long a Letter* is neither a sexual pervert nor a brute. He shares household chores and declares that Daba is his wife but not a slave or servant (73). Owour Kembo in Ogola (1994) shows not a single sign of sexual perversion and brutality. The narrator says, "Owour treated his wife like a queen..." (47), "and added a scandal to all his sins by failing to ever lay a finger on his wife," (37). Why do some characters like chief Gogni in Ogola (1994) treat their wives lovingly? Why does he appreciate Akoko after his birth if at all the girl child is absolutely appreciated? Gogni says, "[a] home without daughters is like a spring without source," (11). As Mohanty asserts, individual and cultural differences play an essential role in gender issues in Africa. Attributing villainy, sexual perversion and brutality in men to past cultures in Africa is possible misinformation of the world. Ba turns to the past to instruct modern girls on the importance of sexual morals: "Mothers of yore taught chastity; their voice of authority condemned extramarital wanderings," (p. 87).

Similarly, Spivak doubts the writers' capability to represent the subaltern. The intellectuals, feminist writers in this context, stand out to represent the oppressed women. But how is it plausible given that the subaltern is heterogeneous? Africa is a mosaic of cultures; some are matriarchal and others patriarchal. Some communities view women as queens and others as servants. How credible is feminist writers' argument that African men are oppressors? What do they make of the legend of Wangu wa Makeri, a Kikuyu female chief under whose iron rule men were slaves of the women? Underlying this legend is the fear among Kikuyu men that given opportunity, women can lord over them.

Furthermore, not all women believe that African culture encourages men to be oppressive owing to the heterogeneity among them. Om Saber in Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile* and Binetou and lady mother-in-law in Ba's *So Long a Letter* absolutely embrace the culture. Whereas Om Saber effects female circumcision, the latter appreciate polygamy and do not see it a men's ploy to belittle women. Spivak doubts the writers' capability to represent the subaltern. The intellectuals, feminist writers in this context, stand out to represent the oppressed women. But how is it plausible given that the subaltern is heterogeneous? Africa is a mosaic of cultures; some are matriarchal and others patriarchal. Some view women as queens and others as servants. How credible is feminist writers'

argument that African men are oppressors? What do they make of the legend of Wangu wa Makeri, a Kikuyu female chief under whose iron rule men were slaves of the women? Underlying this legend is the fear among men that given opportunity, women are oppressors.

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The Male Sentence: Rationality and Moderation

Camara Laye in his work *African Child* presents African culture that is contrary to feminist writers. It is evident from his novel that Africa is vast and not all communities belittle the position of women. He writes:

In our country, the woman's role is one of fundamental independence... she has great personal pride...we despise only those who allow themselves to be despised. (58)

Laye (in this autobiography) observes that his father had absolute respect for his mother and her prominence is further intensified by the miraculous powers she possesses due to her dignity. Unlike Saadawi's society where women are passive participants in religious matters, Laye's society allows women to perform certain rituals. There is an episode of the lying horse where she decrees:

If it be that from the day of my birth I had knowledge of no man until the day of my marriage; and if it be true true that from the day of my marriage I have had knowledge of no man except my lawful husband...then I command you horse to rise up. (59)

The horse rises up to Laye's amazement. Laye's mother also has innate ability to discern witchdoctors. She warns some that if they continue with their evil, she would expose them. Her totem is the crocodile and she therefore draws water from the river without fear of any harm by the crocodiles.

The feminists argument that Male African writers relegate women to mundane roles, Laye gives her mother a supreme character as important as the narrator himself. When presiding over meals, she forbids the young Laye from gazing at older guests. Even after Laye's formal induction to manhood, which is a preserve of men, she exerts great influence over him. She enters his heart without any warning to check his female friends and send away any that she dislikes. This is unlike the Mayor's son, Tariq, in Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile* who harasses female servants and is visiting a prostitute in town (51) but the Mayor's wife is just helpless. Although it is the father who presides over meals in Laye's society, it is the mother's presence that is felt as she controls the conduct and etiquette throughout meal time. At the end of the novel, Laye's father is reduced to insignificance. She almost bows for the mother to permit Laye to leave for Paris:

“Have you told my mother yet?” I asked.

“No,” he replied, “we'll go together and give her the news.”

“You wouldn’t like to tell her yourself?”

“By myself? No, my son [...] even if both of us go, we’ll be outnumbered.” (146)

Laye (1953) clearly proves that not all African communities and families relegate women. In his community, particularly, his family, the woman has a chance to assert herself, guide the moral of children, including sons and be consulted before major decisions are made. The notion that African women are problems to be solved is non-existent in Laye’s society. Even Laye’s friends such as Fanta and Marie do not exhibit the negative image that female characters are supposedly assigned by male writers. Laye’s father who should be given the most heroic depiction by Laye, the male writer, is weak and insignificant.

Conclusion

This study set forth to examine representation of men, women and African culture in African feminist writing. The researcher discussed the diverse perspectives of feminist scholars in Africa and the West and compared them to feminist literary writers in Africa. It was evident that most African feminist present men as sexually perverted brutes poised to exploit and oppress the weak, innocent and helpless women. The researchers applied the ideas of Chandra Mohanty and Spivak to analyse the representation. It was clear that most feminist writers misrepresent and misinform foreign audiences by treating Africa as a homogeneous society. Africa is vast and heterogeneous and so if women are despised in *Kafr El Teen*, it should not be generalized to all African villages. African women are different too; not all find African culture oppressive.

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