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MEMOIRE DE MASTER

**Images of women in the African Feminist novel:
Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*,
Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: A love story* and
Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero***

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my late father Kory Sène and to my late sister Fatou Sène; May Allah grant them mercy, forgiveness, love and the highest place in Jannah.

I also dedicate this work to the source of my inspiration, my mother, Ndeye Coumba Diouf, who has always been an endless source of an unconditional love, support and encouragement.

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Introduction

Feminism is a movement which advocates equal rights between men and women. It is an ideology the ultimate goal of which seeks to bring to an end the multifarious forms of sex-based discriminations that women are subjected to in their societies. The Nigerian African literature critic and professor Ernest Emenyonu gives us more insight into what the term feminism stands for. He observes:

Feminism is a pro-women movement that evolved in the west and America as part of the women's liberation movement. As a critical perspective, feminist scholarship both originates and participates in the larger efforts of feminism to liberate women from structures that have marginalized them; and as such it seeks not only to interpret, but to change the world in favour of women.¹

In the light of Emenyonu's definition, it is clear that the primary struggle of feminism is to give women a sense of self as worthy, effectual, and contributing human beings. As a theoretical and ideological framework, it seeks to liberate women from all forms of subjugation, to erase discrimination on the ground of sex and to fight for the equality of sexes.

Feminism as a movement for the social, political and economic equality of men and women has originated in Europe, especially in England and France in the 18th century. Mary Wollstonecraft, Simone de Beauvoir are among the first and prominent female thinkers whose works respectively *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) and *The Second Sex* (1949) call for women emancipation. They have been prominent voices in the struggle for better living and equity of women. Their feminist ideologies are expounded in their landmark books. In *The Vindication of the Rights of Women* Mary Wollstonecraft recognized the exigency

¹ Emenyonu, Ernest. "A Matter of Commitment" *Goatskin Bags and Wisdom: New Critical Perspectives on African Literature*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000.

of equality of women while De Beauvoir wrote in *The Second Sex* that the female is born the woman is created.

From then onwards, feminism begins to gain momentum. It receives worldwide attention and later on expands its horizons into the rest of the world. Firstly, the movement spreads in countries like The United States where one of the figureheads and prominent feminist writer remains undoubtedly Betty Friedan. Her book, *The Feminine Mystique*, is groundbreaking in the American literature, it is heralded as having paved the way for the movement to become a theory in the 1960s. Later on, the movement reaches the third world countries, especially African countries. Many African women who were influenced by the feminist movement and began to struggle to free women from the bonds of subservience and patriarchy. They realized that their situation as black women was dreadful because they faced repression and discrimination in the real and literary world. As a result, they speak out against women's relegation to a subsidiary position, and the misrepresentation of female characters in male literature. This misrepresentation of female characters in male literature is the result of the fact that African women writers are latecomers in the literary sphere, for the first African female writers made their entrance into the literary canon in the 1970s. Flora Nwapa, Buchi Emecheta, Ama Ata Aidoo are part of the pioneering figures of African female writers whose works are not art for art's sake but a commitment to the service of women cause. They took the responsibility to emancipate women from the shackles of slavery both in literature and society.

Even though the main goal of feminism is to achieve equal rights for women politically, economically, and socially, there is a striking discrepancy with regard to the movement's ideological perspective, accounting thus for the existence of various strands of feminism. For instance, white women mainstream feminism in the US, did not take into account black women in the struggle for women's liberation. They had left on the sideline this minority in their feminist agenda in so far as they thought themselves as being the most victimized by the

sexist oppression. The American feminist Bell Hooks, in *Ain't I A woman* denounces this exclusion of African American women from the white feminist movement. For Hooks, this disregard of white feminist regarding the dual burdens (racial issue and patriarchal dominance) that women of color are subjected to, finds its root in the fact that black women are viewed as second class citizens, living at the bottom of the social ladder. She points out that:

The upper and middle class white women who were at the forefront of the movement made no effort to emphasize that patriarchal power, the power men use to dominate women, is not just the privilege of upper and middle class white men, but the privilege of all men in our society regardless of their class or race.²

In this passage, the author emphasizes that all men use patriarchal power to subjugate women, irrespective of their race, or social standing. For her, in the same manner that white women are oppressed by white men, black women are as well subjected to the same form of oppression by their black counterparts. As a result, it was difficult for black women in the US to identify themselves with the white mainstream feminism. They could not address the dual oppression they face because their voices were almost nonexistent. Bell Hooks, in the preface to the new edition of the aforementioned book, articulates the reasons why black women could not fit in the white feminist movement. She observes:

My intense engagement with feminist consciousness raising compelled me to confront the reality of race, class, and gender difference. Just as I had rebelled against sexist notions of woman's place, I challenged notions of women's place and identity within women's liberation circles, I could not find a place for myself within the movement. My experience as a young black female was not acknowledged. My voice and the voices of women like me were not heard. Most importantly, the movement had exposed how little I knew about myself, my place in society³

² Bell Hooks. *Ain't I a Woman : Black Women and Feminism*. New York : Routledge, Taylor and Francis group, 2015

³ Ibid

This extract above echoes that white mainstream feminism is failing to address the needs of women of color who have been marginalized and unrepresented by the movement. Consequently, women of color theorized a new feminism grounded in the experience of being a black woman that will not only struggle for gender inequality, but also race and class-based oppression. In this regard, the standpoint of Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka seems to us an insightful illustration as far as the discourse reform in feminism is concerned :

The feminist movement which gave impetus to feminist critical theory had been based mainly on the history of White women's experience and gender construction. By the middle of the 1980s, women of color begin to question the basis of the mainstream feminist theory, the dominance of the feminist movement by white women.⁴

As Omofolabo Ajayi-Soyinka's words showcase, the women of color have always been marginalized and made invisible in white feminist movement. This is one of the reasons why most women writers in Africa have rejected the feminist label. Their approach regarding the movement takes diverse dimensions due to the cultural, racial, and sociological variations. While western feminist writers struggle to have equal rights with males in different fields such as marriage, politics, economy, African women fight to break the shackles of abuse, victimisation, and oppression they go through under the hand of tradition, norms and culture. Seeing eye to eye with the fact that "Feminism differs according to cultures; the scope of feminism in the West is different from the African concept of feminism."⁵ Khadidiatou Diallo puts forward:

While feminism- which is said to be the Movement to end women's oppression (Hooks, 2000, p. 26) - was the spearhead of women's revolution in the western countries, it knew a less intense expression in colonial and neocolonial African nations. Those societies were still deeply sinking into patriarchy as a social norm, and where women

⁴ Amofolabo Ajayi- Soyinka: "Black Feminism Criticism and Drama: Thoughts and Double Patriarchy", *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, Spring 1993, p. 161.

⁵ Ugwanyi, Dele Maxwell. "Subverting the Patriarchal Narrative of the Female Character in the African Novel : A Feminist Reading of Amma Darko's novels." *Covenant Journal of Language Studies (CJLS)* Vol. 5. No. 1 (2017) : 48-64.

themselves refused to appropriate the radical position of western feminists⁶.

In this excerpt, the author sums up the idea that “African feminism is quite different. Most African women do not want to be called feminists because of the way men view it and because Africa is indeed a rigid patriarchal society.”⁷ In the light of this, it turns out that the main struggle of African women was to escape from patriarchal claws. In addition to that, most women writers in Africa have rejected the feminist on the grounds of its misapprehensions as being anti-male, anti-culture and anti-religion in its theoretical framework Examining this situation Ogundipe-Leslie articulates:

Male ridicule, aggression and backlash have resulted in making women apologetic and have given the term ‘feminist’ a bad name. Yet nothing could be more feminist than the writings of these women writers in their concern for and deep understanding of the experiences and fate of women in society⁸

Therefore, most African female writers feel more at ease with the term womanism, a word coined by the Afro-American writer Alice Walker in her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983); distinguishing the experience of black women from that of white women. Womanism, according to Elizabeth Oguni, “... recognizes that the needs of the black woman are not the same as those of the white woman, while equally affirming that the African woman has passed through a chain of oppressions under the system of patriarchy.”⁹

⁶ DIALLO, K. (2020). Mariama Ba: An Early Intersectional Feminist. *International Journal of English Language & Translation Studies*. 8(4). 13-25.

⁷ Ugwanyi, Dele Maxwell. “Subverting the Patriarchal Narrative of the Female Character in the African Novel : A Feminist Reading of Amma Darko's novels.” *Covenant Journal of Language Studies (CJLS)* Vol. 5. No. 1 (2017) : 48-64.

⁸ Ogundipe-Leslie, Molar. *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformations*. Trenton N.J.: Africa World Press, 1994.

⁹ Oguni, E. (1996). Feminism then and now: A historical perspective. In A Adebayo. (Ed.) *Feminism and black Women's creative writing: Theory, practice and criticism*. (pp. 11-20) Ibadan: AMD Publishers.

African women have always been on the sidelines from the literary field. This ostracism was mainly due to the patriarchal system where formal education was almost denied to the female children. So African written literature has remained for decades a male-dominated space. The early African literature was replete with faulty, stereotyped and degrading image of women. Indeed, male writers used to relegate women's experiences to the background. The roles they assigned to their women characters are limited to domestic chores. Emmanuel Ngara expresses this subservient position of women in males' writings in these lines:

I wish to draw the attention to the fact that in most novels of the early period, i.e novels written before, say, 1970, the hero is almost inevitably a male member of the african intelligentsia – Camara in the child, waiyaki, in the river between, obi in no longer at ease, odili in A man of the people and so on. In all these and other novels of the time women play a secondary role in the affairs of society and the principale female characters are portrayed as adjuncts to the main male characters¹⁰

As Ngara highlights it, male characters represented the backbone in the masculinist literary creation since the plot of their literary works mostly revolved around their heroic achievements. So, until 1970s the literary field remained exclusively the preserve of men writers. Such a situation prevented women from expressing their viewpoint as regard to such disadvantaged situation.

However, it is only in the 1970s that African women started to find back their lost voice in the literary space. Consequently, literature became the medium through which they vented all the grievances that they had been nursing against the society. Since then, writing has been serving as a strategy to expose the demeaning, biased and stereotyped image of women characters in male literary texts. In *theorizing African Feminism(s)*, Pinkie Mekgwe puts forward that “African women's writing when it emerged in the 1970s mainly set out to dispel

¹⁰ Ngara, Emmanuel, “The Portryal of Women in African Literature.” kunapipi, 11(3), 1989.

male-representations of African womanhood that proliferated African literature at the time.’’¹¹

Gender issues as a central theme is given special emphasis in female African writings. Indeed, for decades, women are under the sway of a traditional African society that was overwhelmingly male-dominated. Therefore it is not surprising that such society shuns to grant social equality to women as it does to their male counterparts. They are subjected to some degrading traditional norms, at the heart of patriarchy. As a result, African women deemed it unfitting to keep a stiff upper lip in the face of such dramatic situation. Through their fictional writings, they set to investigate the bad living conditions of African women in traditional and contemporary African patriarchy. Among writers who foreground the condition of women, by questioning and denouncing an oppressive social norms, we can mention Zimbabwean Tsitsi Dangaremba, the Ghanaian Ama Ata Aidoo and the Egyptian Nawal El Shaadawi. They are among the prominent African female voices who are committed to women’s plight.

Therefore, the analysis of the condition of women in African feminist writing will be based on their respective work: *Nervous Conditions*, *Changes : A Love Story* and *Women At Point Zero*. The choice made on these three African female authors is not fortuitous. Even though they are geographically distance, there are discursive intersections in their literary production. Dangaremba’s analytic discourse is closely related to Aidoo and Saadawi’s standpoint on gender issue, and they are known for their commitment to the emancipation of women.

Set in colonial Rhodesia in the late 1960s, Tsitsi Dangaremba’s *Nervous condition* expounds on how patriarchal oppression fosters discriminatory treatment against women. The novel deals with the coming-of-age of a young girl named Tambudzai, who struggles to receive education within a very rigid and

¹¹ Mekiwe, Pinkie. “Theorizing African Feminism(s) the colonial Question.” *An African Journal of philosophy* (2008) : 11-22.

restrictive male-dominated society where the education of boys takes precedence over that of girls.

Such discriminatory treatment against women is also foregrounded in *Changes : A Love Story*. In her book, Ama Ata Aidoo showcases the challenges faced by the African educated women who struggle to cope with the issue of being assertive in contemporary Ghanaian society. Esi Sekyi is Aidoo's central character in the novel. She is a well-educated, financially independent and liberated woman, who works as data analyst with the Department of Statistics in Accra, Ghana's capital city. She divorces from her first husband and later falls in love and become the second wife of Ali Kondey.

In the same vein, Saadawi makes the denunciation of gender-based discrimination an underlying theme in her novel. Indeed, *Women at Point Zero* chronicles the traumatic experiences of Firdaus, the main protagonist whose name means paradise but who is subjected to sexual assaults and other forms of oppression from childhood to adulthood. She tells her story while being on the death row for having killed a pimp.

The objective of this work is to show how women's condition in African feminist writing is dealt with in *Nervous Conditions*, *Change: A love Story* and *Women At Point Zero*. These feminists have brought out the multifarious forms of subjugation and disempowerment experienced by women in the hands of oppressive aspects of traditional norms and practices. The paper also examines ways in which women who are oppressed liberate themselves from the chains of traditional society. Furthermore, this study explores the ways in which women can achieve self-empowerment.

Thus, this study undertakes a comparative analysis of the three texts as the writers come from different horizons with different social backgrounds, even though they address differently the same issue of women's oppression and empowerment.

Geocriticism, feminist literary criticism and post-colonial literary theory provide an appropriate theoretical framework to analyse

Many prominent writers and critics agree on the fact time and space are the two first elements to be scrutinized in the analysis of any literary work. They are intrinsically tied to the fictional texts and play a determinant role in the building of what is defined as ‘the setting’. When starting to read a book, the first question that infallibly comes to the mind of the reader is: when and where do the the events in the book take place? Therefore geocriticism can be a crucial tool in the analysis of any literary text. Theorized by Bertrand Westphade, geocriticism as a literary theory is concerned with the study of place, space and territory in literature. It is a new means of reading and literary criticism, a new interdisciplinary method of analysis that gives priority to space, place and geographical practices in literary criticism. This theory will offer an insight into how these women deal with representations of the traditional norms and practices in their society which have led to the marginalization and gender oppressions.

Such an aspect of women’s representation can be further analysed leaning on Feminist literary criticism, a school of thought that emerged in 1960s. While feminism is the quest to recognize women’s right to be free from various forms of gender oppression, Feminist literary criticism examines the representations of female characters in literary works including those written by men and women.

Last but not the least, it remains fundamental to analyse post-colonial criticism to better deal with the representation of female characters. It examines the experience of colonialism, its past and present effects on these countries. Thus, Post-colonial theory contends that, in many different societies, women, like colonized subjects, have been relegated to the position of ‘other’ by the authority of patriarchy but also by colonialism. This why using postcolonial theory can be helpful in analysing the dual burdens of colonial and patriarchal oppression women suffer from, because it concerns itself with questions related to representation, voice, marginalization.

To carry out such a task, we will center our analysis on three main chapters. Each of the chapters will be divided into two sub-chapters. The first chapter thoroughly focuses on women at the intersection of oppressive institutions. We will elaborate on the treatment of marriage as an institution that hinders women from developing a full sense of selfhood; this leads to an exploration of social and cultural norms that are obstacles to women's empowerment.

The second chapter will expound on the feminist agenda of Dangaremba, Aidoo and El Saadawi. Here, the aim is to show that, as committed feminist writers, Dangaremba, Aidoo and Saadawi, on the one hand, set to denounce oppressive aspects of African tradition sustained by patriarchy. On the other hand, they suggest ways in which women can break free from such system of gender inequality that is responsible for their painful life. Additionally, we will bring to the fore how deconstructing masculine domination through satire can lead to demystification of gender roles distributions.

Lastly, we will explore the narrative strategies by putting the emphasis on narrative enunciation to show how this distribution of voices enables the three African writers to challenge the notion of subordinate position of women, and to empower female voices previously marginalized. In addition, characterization will be scrutinized to highlight the various forms of oppression with which women are beset, and to showcase the ways in which they can attain various forms of empowerment.

Chapter I: Women at the intersection of oppressive institutions

Women have generally been the victim of discrimination in society. Even though one cannot ignore the invaluable role they play in building of a developed and thriving community, women are however mostly degraded and dominated. Their conditions are almost the same in every society: they are treated with disdain rather than being a fully-fledged member of society, they are viewed as objects of sexual desire that men can have at their possession.

This belittling and demeaning image of objectifying women did not grow out of vacuum. It has been underpinned by some theories such as the psychoanalytic Freudian theory and the phallocentrism doctrine. In his psychoanalytic theory, Freud posits the idea according to which men have inherent psychological need to subjugate women. The source of men's compulsion to dominate women and women's minimal resistance to subjugation lies within the human psyche. He introduces the concept of interest and envy of the penis in his 1908 article: "*on the sexual of children*" Freud describes women as inferior to men, this feeling of superiority of men over women is the result of the latter's lack of phallus. Furthermore, he points out that women are envious of men's penis and this accounts for their inferiority to them. This has given birth to the concept that comes to be known as phallocentrism, a doctrine centred on the phallus or penis as a symbol of male dominance.

Thus, the domination and exploitation of women stem from oppressive aspects of traditional norms and practices. In reality, the plight and predicaments of African women is the result of oppressive traditions, backed up by a misinterpretation of religion. This chapter casts light on ways in which African women are subjugated by traditional and cultural norms. It will focus on two points namely the issue of marriage and the weight of patriarchy.

1-1/ The Treatment of marriage in the novels

It is widely believed that the primary goal of a traditional society is its own preservation. In order to fulfil the function of a traditional society, the survival of the component, woman upon whom nature has bestowed the ability of a life-giver is therefore entrusted with the abovementioned task. However, it goes without saying that the woman only cannot meet society's expectations as far as the multiplication of human species is concerned. She needs her male counterpart in order to ensure the existence of the society. But it is noteworthy that this contact between men and women is subjected to a set of customs and traditions to which everyone must adhere for the maintenance of a harmonious life in the society. Thus marriage is enacted as an institution a dimension of which is to regulate the sexual relationship between men and women.

The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines marriage as “a legally and socially sanctioned union, usually between a man and a woman, that is regulated by laws, rules, customs, beliefs, and attitudes that prescribe the right and duties of the partners and accords status to their offspring (if any).”¹² This definition asserts clearly that marriage is usually the union between a man and a woman which allows them to live together and have children. It is seen as an important institution in traditional and contemporary African society because it represents an indispensable factor for the continuation of family line.

Nevertheless, it is important to underscore that in traditional African societies, marriage is at the core of women's existence. Indeed, those societies are of the opinion that marriage is the one of context within which women are better able to fully realise themselves. What is meant by self-realization here is nothing

¹² www.britannica.com. Accessed 01/12/2021

but having a husband, bearing children and taking care of the household. Besides, in African society marriage is often “positively portrayed as the zenith of feminine achievement : it is the institution that legitimately enables a woman to carry out the female function, biological and social, for which she has been groomed since birth”¹³. Echoing the same idea according to which marriage seems to represent the destiny of women in society, the French philosopher Simone De Beauvoir writes :

The destiny that society traditionally offers women is marriage. Even today, most women are, were, or plan to be married, or they suffer from not being so. Marriage is the reference by which the single woman is defined, whether she is frustrated by, disgusted at, or even indifferent to this institution.¹⁴

Simone de Beauvoir is one the most acclaimed and outspoken French feminists writers. Her book, the *Second Sex*, is no doubt considered as a groundbreaking work of feminism, in which she has expounded her stand on the question of women and their disadvantaged position in society. In challenging the traditional perception of the social relationship between the two sexes, De Beauvoir famously states that one is not born, but rather becomes, woman. Nevertheless, the passage above seems to us revelant in the analysis of the issue at stakes for, in this excerpt, De Beauvoir’s viewpoint lays bare the fact that in every society women are not considered as such, outside marriage. And since “a woman alone...is a socially incomplete being”, marriage seems to be therefore the solution for women to fill up the void that exists in them.

In the African context, marriage is a fundamental aspect of civilization that brings African societies together. It is a central issue in African women’s literature. As committed writers, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Ama Ata Aidoo and Nawal El Saadawi have brought the issue of marriage to the fore as it represents a real

¹³ Olufunwa, Henry. “No woman’s Land : Marriage in the fiction of Buchi Emecheta.” *Asian Woman* Vol. 24. No. 3 (2008) : 25-41.

¹⁴ Simone De Beauvoir. *Second Sex*. Trad. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany Chevallier. Paris : Gallimard, 1949. p.451.

impediment that puts a brake on women's emancipation. Indeed, the three African female authors have, through the stories of their female protagonists, been instrumental in the depiction of the various hardships that women experience in marriage. They have raised an outcry against the social institution which keeps women in bondage and tightens the belt of oppression around them. Marriage does not only constitute an unbearable ordeal women have to put up with, but it represents a factual hindrance to their empowerment.

From childhood to adulthood, women's lives are affected by a multifarious forms of oppressions. In fact, when it comes to the upbringing of girls, parents, in most African societies, see to it that the emphasis is laid on the tasks related to the domestic sphere : cooking, washing and taking care of the household. This is not done at random since: “a girl's life (...) was not accidentally but essentially a preparation for marriage. It was her great object in life, if she failed in that she was considered to have nullified her existence.”¹⁵

Set in Rhodesia in the late 1960s to the early 1970s, *Nervous Condition* by the Zimbabwean author Tsitsi Dangarembga foregrounds the life of a young girl, Tambu who is relentless in her efforts to come to grip with the various obstacles that her shona male-dominated society puts on her path to education. Her quest of education has almost been compromised by her gender, for holding degrees is not the end of women's life. Instead, in the shona community, “a girl's training from the onset is geared toward marriage.”¹⁶ So Dangarembga's heroine does not escape this pression often puts on girls when they are old enough to get married. When she has grown into a young lady, her mother who embodies tradition endeavours to explain to her daughter the situation that lies ahead of her as a young girl. Speaking with full knowledge, Tambu's mother tries her best to make her daughter understand that as a young girl, she must find a husband as dictated

¹⁵ Jordan, J.P. Bishop Shanahan of Nigeria. Dublin : Eco Press, 1971. Print.

¹⁶ Utoh-Ezeajugh, Ebele Peace Okpala & Tracie Chima. « Inter and intra Gender Discourse in African Prose : An interrogation of the Female Image in Selected Literary Texts. » *UJAH* Volume 19.No 2 (2018) : 1-24.

by the society. Besides Mainini endeavors to explain to her daughter the vicissitudes that would await her once in her married life. So since marriage is fraught with bitter experiences, the word of caution to her daughter was that: “what will help her child, is to learn to carry her burden with strength.” (Dangarembga, 16) in her sermon, Tambu’s mother reveals the entrapment of marriage in which she is caught. As customary, she tries to raise her daughter so as she would follow her footsteps and become as good a wife as she herself has been. Illustrating this idea, Katherine Frank contends:

The Heroines’ mothers (...) embody traditional African values. Like their daughters’ suitors and husbands, these mothers want to see their daughters securely and perpetually pregnant. They cannot imagine a destiny for their daughter other than the one they endure¹⁷

As this quotation suggests, the African women steeped in traditional beliefs like Mainini set great value on marriage. They cannot fancy a life for their daughters different from the one they have lived. They are ingrained in the beliefs that the place of a woman is at home where they should bend over backward to meet their husbands’ needs. Besides, Mainini has broached the matter with her niece Maiguru regarding her daughter Nyasha, when she teases the latter about her physical appearance and asks her mother when will they find her a husband. She observes that “the breasts are already quite large, she declared, pinching one and causing Maiguru to wince with embarrassment. When do we expect our mukwambo, my mother teased her niece” (Dangarembga, 130)

Like Tambu, Aidoo’s main heroine in *Changes: A love story*, is as well confronted with the same problem related to marriage. The story mirrors the life of three professional women who deal differently with the family issue and make attempts to balance their duties towards their husband, children and careers in urban Ghana in the 1980s. Although Esi has decided to walk away from her

¹⁷ Katherine Frank. “Novel in Africa Women without Men: the Feminist.” *Women in African Literature Today*. Eds. Eldred Durosimi Jones, Eustace Palmer & Marjorie Jones. London: Africa World Press Trenton N.J, (1987): 13-34, p. 16-17.

marriage with Oko as a result of the marital rape she has gone through, she has to come to term with the fact that the Ghanaian society does not approve of a single women, no matter how successful she made it in life. In fact, when analysing the plight of educated and middle-class women in Accra, Carmel Dinan puts forward that : “even when women attain economic independence and self-sufficiency, they are still expected to have a husband.”¹⁸ Besides, when she opens up to her best friend Opokuya about her divorce, the latter warns her that she “can’t stay alone” (Aidoo, 46) because “it’s just not healthy” (Ibid). Moreover she draws the attention of Esi about the dangers of celibacy in African societies that look on single women as anti-conformist to societal norms. Okopukya’s discourse stresses the patriarchal assumptions on the need for women to be in wedlock. It throws light on women’s roles and status prescribed by African patriarchal society which expect them to be mothers who must be devoted to their children and tending to their husbands’ needs.

Thus, marriage appears as the most important and indispensable stage for any ‘normal’ woman because it allows them to earn a social status as wife. Therefore, any refusal to abide by that role will turn her into a deviant, insane and unhappy woman. In the following passage Aidoo describes the bleak reality unmarried women face in their societies:

It is easy to see that our societies have no patience with the unmarried women. People thought her single state was an insult to the glorious manhood of our men. So they put so much pressure as possible on her until she gave in and married or remarried, or went back to her former husband. And of course if nothing cured her they ostracised her and drove her crazy. And then soon enough, she died of shame, loneliness and heartbreak. (Aidoo, 48)

From this quotation above, it is clear that Opokuya attempts to caution her friend Esi against the fact that African societies in general and the Ghanaian one in particular do not stand for single women and have no patience with them. Usually

¹⁸ Carmel Dinan, “Sugar Daddies and Gold Diggers” in *Female and Male in West Africa*, ed. Christine Oppong London : Allen and Unwin, 1983, 344-66.

she is compelled to live on the margin of the society. Like Aidoo, Simone De Beauvoir speak also in favour of single women by raising an outcry against the social norms that hold that “A woman alone, (...) is socially incomplete being, even if she earns her living, she needs a ring on her finger to achieve the total dignity of a person and full rights.”¹⁹

Similarly, the issue of marriage as being the alpha and omega of women's life is reflected in the writing of the most renowned Egyptian female writing, Nawal El Sadaawi. Her novel, *Women At Point Zero* delineates the oppression of the female character Firdaus. It mirrors every step of her life from childhood up to her adolescence, which is laden with exploitation, abuse and humiliation. Like Tambu's mother, the actions undertaken by Firdaus's mother are designed to prepare her daughter for the life that awaits her in her household. She recounts the tasks related to the chores her mother would entrust her:

My mother no longer sent me to the fields. Before the sun had started to appear in the sky, she would nudge me in the shoulder with her fist so that I would awaken, pick up the earthen jar and go off to fill it with water. Once back, I would sweep under the animals and then make rows of dung cakes which I had left in the sun (Saadawi, p17)

Furthermore, marriage can be a means for some families to get rid of their daughters, whom they regard as a burden. It is what has happened to Firdaus when she comes to live with her uncle after her parents' death. The uncle forces his niece to marry a sixty-year old and ugly man named Sheik Mahmoud on the advice of his wife, who complains that Firdaus is a burden that they could not afford to shoulder. Since she is of no use to them, and on top of that “she has inherited nothing, and has no income of her own.” (Saadawi, p40). Consequently she is viewed as a parasite that should be gotten rid of, and marriage is the best solution to that. The wife of Firdaus's uncle, in confiding in her husband, complains:

What can she do then?’ ‘Nothing. The house is small and life is expensive. She eats twice as much as any of our children.’ ‘So what do we do with her then?’ Firdaus has grown, your holiness, and must be

¹⁹ De Beauvoir, Simone. *Second Sex*. Trad. Constance Borde and Sheila Malovany Chevallier. Paris : Gallimard, 1949 .p.456.

married. It is risky for her to continue without a husband. (Saadawi, p39)

This statement of Firdaus's aunt bears out the sayings of De Beauvoir that “ a young girl's celibacy (...) ranked her as parasite and pariah ; marriage was her only survival and only justification of her existence”²⁰

We can assert in the light of what has been said above that women are assailed by a psychological pressure societies put on them when it comes to marriage. However, their conditions are altered for the worse as soon as they find themselves in their husband's house. If men and women are supposed to live together in marriage relationship, it is clear that the cultural norms which govern that relationship are often discriminatory against the female sex. They grant more privileges to men at the expense of women. The three female writers under study have well brought up the various hardships their protagonists experience in marital relationship which undermine their effort to achieve self-assertion. Marriage functions as a factor which prevents women from loosening the belt of men's oppression, exploitation and abuse.

It is generally acknowledged that women are almost in charge of caring for the children, the household and all domestic works that their caring roles implies. In this sense, Wolpe. A Quinlan posits that “Many (...) women are entrapped in traditional role men do not take equal responsibility for family care and will not do what they regard as women's work”²¹

In *Nervous Condition*, Tambu's mother has passively submitted to the Shona cultural expectations to assume the domestic roles assigned to women. Ma'shinga has dedicated her whole life to being at her husband's beck and call, Jeremiah. She has carried out all the tasks related to the household to the extent that it has taken a toll on her physical appearance. This harsh living condition in which her mother is trapped troubles her daughter Tambu, who out of pity for her,

²⁰ Ibid P.452.

²¹ Wolpe A Quinlan O & Martinez L 1997: “Gender Equity in South Africa: Report of the Gender Equity Task Team.” Pretoria, Department of Education and Culture.

provides whenever she can a helping hand to alleviate her mother's sufferings.

Tambu confesses:

The thought of my mother working so hard, so alone, always distressed me, but in the end i decided to prepare the evening meal so that she would be able to rest when she returned. For i knew that if there was still work to be done when she finished her watering, she would tire herself further to do it. (Dangarembga, 10)

Even though Tambu is sensitive to the plight of her mother because of the never-ending tasks she is supposed to perform. Ma'shinga, on the contrary, never complains about her fate which confines her to being a bearer of burden. Her attitude is in keeping with the patriarchal ideology according to which, it behoves women to make sacrifices for the sake of the well-being of the family. She warns her daughter about the hard life women in such societies lead:

This business of womanhood is a heavy burden...Aren't we the ones who bear children? ... when there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who have to make them. And this things are not easy. (Dangarembga, 16)

Through this character, Dangarembga castigates the traditional norms which legitimate the exploitation of women by men. Under her pen, she puts under a critical spotlight such societal norms that encourage women to confine themselves to the domestic sphere.

Likewise, Ama Ata Aidoo portrays as well the exploitation women are subjected to at the hands of their husbands. She brings to the surface the multiplicity of tasks women are compelled to perform day in day out. For the Aidoo, the actual predicament of women in marital relationship lies in the manifold tasks a woman as a wife is called upon to carry out. Dele Maxwell deals with the same issue related to the numerous tasks women are called upon to do. In his article, he strives to showcase that a wife has to fulfill the duties of being:

A sexual aid
A wet-nurse and nursemaid for (his) Children
A listening post
An economic and general consultant
Field-hand and

If (he is) that way inclined, a punch Ball.²²

Changes : A Love Story, offers an accurate portrayal of this situation in which women are entrapped, and which makes it harder for them to break free from male's domination. Aidoo puts on stage a character named Opokuya who can be considered as embodying the traditional women. In spite of being a career woman (she works as a nurse), Opokuya, unlike her best friend Esi, is not courageous enough to break away from the norms and practices that restrict her to the traditional wifely duties. Since she considers herself a submissive wife, she fulfills the cultural expectations by putting her family's needs on the front burner. But Opokuya often complains to Esi that she has gotten tired of this situation and that she is at the end of her rope as regard to the bulk of tasks she undertakes everyday. She is all the more frustrated because neither her husband nor her children are willing to lift the smallest finger to help her out with the domestic chores. She is upset that:

The children and their father refuse to organise even their already-cooked supper when i'm around... You' d think that with me being away on duty at such odd hours they would have taught themselves some self-reliance. But no. When I'm home, they try to squeeze me dry to make up for all the times they have to do without me. (Aidoo, 34)

Opokuya gives expression to her despair in the face of all the domestic work she is responsible for. This unfortunate state in which women like her are caught stems from the cultural assumptions that housekeeping is the most valuable role attribute to woman. This shows that Aidoo is not impervious to the sufferings that affect the lives of women. Instead, in depicting the character of Opokuya in the novel, the author alludes to all women around the world who, actually, go through the same lots. As a committed author whose writing to a large extent is concerned with the plight and predicament of women, Aidoo pours scorn on the laws and norms that demanded women to be restricted to the domestic sphere.

²² Ugwanyi, Dele Maxwell. "Subverting the Patriarchal Narrative of the Female Character in the African Novel : A Feminist Reading of Amma Darko's novels." *Convenant Journal of Language Studies (CJLS)* Vol. 5. No. 1 (2017) : 48-64.

The same issue of the manifold tasks pertaining to domestic chores which weigh heavily on women is also raised in Nawal El Sadaawi's fictional work. Sadaawi has not glossed over the ordeals that befall women in the Egyptian society which sets back their ambition to be fulfilled. Being committed to women's plight, her novel makes a diagnosis of the problem of the Egyptian women who are still entrapped by the expectations of their patriarchal cultures, and this entrapment undermines their chance to develop a full sense of selfhood. For instance, Firdaus's hopes to further her education have been shattered by her arranged marriage with Sheikh Mahmoud. As a wife, Firdaus is only expected to "serve her husband dinner, cook for him, and share his bed and his familiarity."²³ In her narration, Firdaus gives a detailed account of her turbulent experience when she went to live with her husband. She confesses:

The day came when I departed from my uncle's house and went to live with Sheikh Mahmoud. Now I slept on a comfortable bed instead of the wooden couch. But no sooner did I stretch out my body on it to rest from the fatigue of cooking, and washing and cleaning the large house with its rooms full of furniture, than Sheikh Mahmoud would appear by my side. (Saadawi, 44)

This confession corroborates the stance of Saadawi on the issue of domestic chores that weigh heavily on women, and which reduces their chances to nil to get ahead in life. She wields her pen to the defense of women by raising protest against the traditional assumptions which have brainwashed women to such a point that they believe "their sole function in life is sweeping, washing clothes and cleaning utensils." (Saadawi, *The Hidden Face of Eve*, 288)

Besides, bearing children is the ultimate purpose of any marriage in African traditional context. The happiness of a married woman in the eyes of most African people lies in how many children she is capable of giving birth. If it so happens that she is not able to fulfill this marital duty, then she is running the risk of being the laughing stock of the community. African societies do not condone

²³ Rahayu, Harsiti HJelen Padang. "Female Violence Reflected At Nawal El Saadawi's *Women At Point Zero* (1983) : A FEMINIST APPROACH." *Seminar Nasional Kajian Bahasa dan Pengajarannya* (2016) : 377-392.

unproductive women who are often forced to live under difficult circumstances, for they are always to be blamed in a childless union. The female writers under study have not shied away from investigating the misfortune that beset barren women.

Within African communities, a barren woman is called all sort of names under the sun. They are likened to a “he-woman”, an “evil woman” and above all a “witch” simply because they cannot bear children or they have failed in their duty as wife. By way of illustration, the narrator in *Nervous Conditions*, recounts how the shona community charges Lucia with being a witch because she never gets pregnant in spite of the fact that she had repeatedly had sexual intercourses with men. The conclusion they draw regarding her case is that “There is nothing of a woman there. She sleeps with anybody and everybody, but she hasn’t born a single child yet. She has been bewitched. More likely she is a witch herself.” (Dangarembga, p126) This tendency to accuse barren women of being witch is discussed by Laurretta Ngcobo who states that “the basis of marriage in the greater parts of Africa is the woman’s ability to transfer her fertility to her husband’s group, and that a good woman was expected to deliver as many children as possible, more importantly male children.”²⁴

Another book that is illustrative of this problem of barrenness that plagues many women in African society is *Efuru* by Flora Nwapa, one the pioneers of African women writer. *Efuru* is indicative of the fact that African society attaches much importance to children and inheritance and this fact accounts for the hostile attitude people have toward unproductive women. In such a society, the bride is expected to bring forth a child within the first two years of marriage. Thus, failing to live up to that expectation will straight away set tongues wagging in the community she lives. It is exactly the same tragedy that befall the eponymous character, Efuru who, despite being married for more than two years to Aduzia,

²⁴ Ngcobo, Laurretta. “African Motherhood- Myth and Reality. In Olaniyan, teyumola and Ato Quayson.” (2007) : 533-541

fails to bear children to him. Her situation became the talk of the town and her husband's relatives are disappointed so much so that they want him to take a second wife. They feel that since :

A year passed and no child came Neighbours talked as they were bound to talk. They did not see the reason why Adizua should not marry another woman since, according to them two men do not live together. To them Efuru was a man since she could not reproduce.²⁵

In the same vein, El Saadawi has brought the issue of women infertility by laying the emphasis on the patriarchal son patronization ideology that plagues many African women in their married life. As matter of fact, it is well known that a woman does not only have to produce children, but more importantly she also has to give birth to sons in order to be considered as a complete woman. Here, in most African society, a woman who gives birth only to female children is seen as a barren one too. In her other fictional work entitled the *Hidden Face of Eve*, Saadawi dramatizes the above-mentioned situation of women in the Egyptian society whose inability to bear male children is the beginning and the end of their misfortune. She denounces the patriarchal attitude consisting in giving preference to male child over female one. Examining this issue, Saadawi observes that:

The first aggression experienced by the female child in society is the feeling that people do not welcome her coming into the world. In some families, and especially in rural areas, this 'coldness' may go even further, and become an atmosphere of depression and sadness, or even lead to the punishment of the mother with insults or blows or even divorce. As a child, I saw one of my paternal aunts being submitted to resounding slaps on her face because she had given birth to a third daughter rather than a male child, and I overheard her husband threatening her with divorce if she ever gave birth to a female child again instead of giving him a son²⁶

As Saadawi's words highlight, a woman without a male child is often subjected to a moral and at times physical ill-treatment as she has witnessed in her childhood. She is despised by everyone in her society. Saadawi's book, the

²⁵ Flora Nwapa, *Efuru*. Op. Cit. , p. 24.

²⁶ El Saadawi, Nawal. *The Hidden Face of Eve*. Zed Books, 2007. P26-27

Hidden Face of Eve is therefore a trial against the injustices inflicted on women who are unable to bear male children.

All things considered, marriage in traditional and postcolonial African societies represents a real plight to African women. The three African female writers, through the eyes of their female heroines, have brought into the focus the fact that the marital relationship is among the key factors that still holds women in bondage. The manifold oppressions, exploitation and social injustices women are subjected to in wedlock, wreck their efforts to break free from men's domination.

1.2/Social and cultural norms : Obstacles to women's empowerment

Since time immemorial, many thinkers have made invaluable attempts to explain the origin of gender inequality, namely the domination that men exercise over women. In this regard, Pierre Bourdieu, in *Masculine Domination*, expounds that male domination is the result of the sexual division of labour. He underscores:

The strength of the masculine order is seen in the fact that it dispenses with justification : the androcentric vision imposes itself as neutral and has no need to spell itself out in discourses aimed at legitimating it. The social order functions as an immense symbolic machine tending to ratify the masculine domination on which it is founded : it is the sexual division of labour, a very strict distribution of the activities assigned to each sex, of their place, time and instruments ; it is the structure of space, with the opposition between the place of assembly or the market, reserved for men, and the house, reserved for women.²⁷

This theory of male supremacy over women is a feature in most human societies, especially in African ones. It is a well-known fact that African traditional social structure is considered a realm in which men hold key positions in all domains of life. The way in which the established norms and practices function in those societies grant men the powers and advantages they enjoy at the expense of

²⁷ Bourdieu, Pierre. *Masculine Domination*. Trad. Richard Nice. Paris. Coll. Liber, 1998.

women. This social institution which is a system based on the exclusive power of men and the relegation of women to the background is known as patriarchy. According to *Merriam Webster dictionary* patriarchy is:

A social organization marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line; broadly: control by men of a disproportionately large share of power’’²⁸

Following the same thread of thought, Olusegun O. Jegede, in his article entitled *A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood* defines patriarchy in a very specific way. According to him, ‘‘Patriarchy is a social system in which males hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, Social privilege and control of property. In the domain of the family, fathers or father-figures hold authority over women and children’’²⁹

On the basis of the two aforementioned definitions, it can be asserted that patriarchy refers to male domination, the relationship between men and women through which men assert their power over women. It characterises a system within which women must assume a subservient position in society. As a result, a patriarchal society is no doubt a male dominated society. Additionally, from a feminist perspective, it is a social system that is oppressive to women in so far as it is an exertion of male dominance over women. This accounts for the fact that many feminists are of the same opinion as Bell Hooks who forwards in *Ain't I a Woman* that ‘‘patriarchy’s foundation is the oppression of women.’’³⁰ It is ‘‘a system of male authority which oppresses women through its social, political and economic institutions.’’³¹

²⁸ ‘‘Patriarchy,’’ *Merriam Webster Dictionary*, <https://tinyurl.com/y6wpaenl>.

²⁹ Jegede O., Olusegun, *A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood*, december. 2019.

³⁰ Hooks, Bell. *Ain't I a Woman : Black Women and Feminism*. New York : Routledge, Taylor and Francis group, 2015

³¹ Makama, Godiya Allanana, *PATRIARCHY AND GENDER INEQUALITY IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD*, Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences Nasarawa State University

The traditional African society is patriarchal as it is marked by the unequal relation between men and women where the latter are denied of all their basic rights and are subjected to various form of oppressions. Patriarchy, ingrained in traditions cultural practices, reinforces the power of men in African societies while women are relegated to a second zone. Besides, it is worth underscoring that in such a system, the life of people are shaped according to gender. Besides since it is a society in which male domination over women is very pervasive, it goes without saying that there will be gender-based discrimination. *Nervous Conditions* is a very significant text in this respect. Gender inequality is clearly depicted by Dangarembga who brings to light some of the way in which the traditional assumptions as regard to the role of women in Zimbabwean societies confine and oppress women, restricting their options of life. In addition, she casts some lights on the way in which those oppressive traditional and cultural norms relegate them to the subaltern position.

This aspect is delat with in *Nervous Conditions* through the representation of Tambu, the central character of the novel. The main heroine grows up in a society where women are under the sway of cultural pratices and traditions that contribute their subordination. Her determined efforts to achieve her ambition to attend school are nearly reduced to ash on the ground of her gender. Tambu is denied access to education simply because she is a girl. Her goal to being educated is therefore compromise since she lives within a very restrictive and selective patriarchal society where the education of boys takes priority over that of girls. This situation explains the reason why Nhamo, Tambu's brother, is the one who is sent to school. In addition, the privilege and responsiblity of being educated in the family is usually reserved to the eldest son whereas the female needs and desires are left stranded and are limited to domestic chores. Tambu, though young, is aware of this situation. She bitterly states:

The needs and sensibilities of women in my family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate. That was why i was in standard three in the year Nhamo died instead of in standard five as i should have been

by that age. In those days i felt the injustice of my situation every time
I thought about it. (Dangarembga, 12)

This statement reveals that Tambu is aware of the injustice that inflicted in her on account of her gender. She comes to realize that, in a traditional patriarchal society little importance is attached to girls needs. The fact that she belongs to the 'second sex' deprives her of her basic right to receive education. In addition, when the family runs out of money and cannot afford keep both Tambu and her brother at school, it was Tambu's education that has to be ended in order to enable Nhamo to carry on with his, which has delayed her schooling. But if we examine Tambu's situation at close quarters, it becomes obvious that her suspended schooling is not for want of money, but it is because girls' education are deemed to be purposeless. This attitude towards girls's education as worthless is in accordance with the mindset of the patriarchal society that promotes male empowerment at the expense of female. Furthermore, since African traditional practices dictate that the eldest son is the one who should take on the responsibility to provide for the family, so he should be given priority. This mindset is further corroborated by the stance of Tambu's father on the question of girl's education. When Tambu wants to find out why she cannot be educated, her father, Jeremiah asks her "Can you cook beans and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables." (Dangarembga, 15) Jeremiah's response to his daughter is indicative of the fact that the traditional Shona patriarchal society does not endorse the education of the female child. Tambu even reveals to the reader that father has even tried to talk her out of her untamed ambition for education:

My father called me aside to implore me to curb my unnatural inclinations : it was natural for me to stay at home and prepare for the homecoming...He did not like to see me over-absorbed in intellectual pursuits. He became very agitated after he found me several times reading the sheet of newspaper in which the bread from magrosa had been wrapped as i waited for the sadwa to thicken. He thought i was emulating my brother, that the things i read would fill my mind with impractical ideas, making me quite useless for the tasks of feminine living. (Dangarembga, 33-34)

This assertion shows that the young girl is trapped in a traditional gender categorisation which attributes cooking to girls. She is culturally restricted to roles that deny her opportunities to break free from domestic life. Thus, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is as an investigation of women's conditions in traditional African society in which they must sustain heavy burdens that emanate from patriarchal cultural assumptions.

Similarly, Ama Ata Aidoo, the Ghanaian novelist whose literary works are acclaimed throughout the world has been consistent and persistent in bringing to the fore the experience of women in African culture. *Changes: A Love Story* portrays the dominance of masculine gender as a recurrent theme in African female writers. Ama Ata Aidoo foregrounds the lives of educated and self-assertive female protagonists who refuse to bow to their society's stereotyped opinion of women who must be a childbearer or who must fight tooth and nail to safeguard their marriage. Even though they have made efforts to assert themselves in modern urban Ghanaian society, these women realize that they are still in the inexorable grip of patriarchal customs and traditions that undermine their chances for social advancement. For instance, Esi Sekyi is a career woman who works for the Department of Urban Statistics and uses her education to assert herself in the face of a myriad of obstacles. Nevertheless, being a career woman doesn't spare her from experiencing the patriarchal oppression which fosters the discriminatory treatment against women because:

Patriarchy is a system whereby women are kept subordinate in a number of ways. The subordination that we experience at a daily level, regardless of the class we might belong to, takes various forms – discrimination, disregard, insult, control, exploitation, oppression, violence – within the family, at the place of work, in society.³²

This idea is echoed in the first chapter of the novel where we see Esi giving free rein to her anger as she is getting ready to go to the offices of Linga to tend to a

³² Sultana, Abeda, "Patriarchy and Woman's Subordination : A Theoretical Analysis." *The Arts Faculty Journal* (2011) :1-18.

business of travel arrangement because the secretary who is responsible for this job has fallen ill. Her frustration comes from the fact that she is always expected to stand in for that secretary each time the latter is not available. According to the narrator:

Esi was feeling angry with herself... In spite of how strongly she felt about it all, why couldn't she ever prevent her colleagues from assuming that any time the office secretary was away, she could do the job? And better still, why couldn't she prevent herself from falling into that trap? (Aidoo, 01)

This showcases that in independent Ghana, cultural constraints still weigh heavily on African women. This subsidiary position that is assigned to Esi is legitimated by patriarchy since she is a woman, and the job of secretary is supposed to be that of a woman. Consequently, it is normal that Esi carries the task out.

Besides, another important point that is worth underscoring is that even driving a car is denied to women. In fact, Esi has her own car that she drives to work. But since to have a car is a luxury only granted to men, Esi is hurled abuse at when she drives past them. Men make all kind of spiteful comments on her because Esi:

Has no business driving all the way to the offices of Linga whatever. The car of course stalled more than once on the way, and of course, all the other drivers were unsympathetic. They blew their horns, and some taxi drivers shouted the usual obscenities about women drivers. (Aidoo, 01)

In addition, Aidoo highlights that the institution of marriage promotes patriarchy since it is a ploy to keep women under male domination. By uncovering the systematic oppression of women which derives from the patriarchal structure, Aidoo's *Changes* presents the picture of a strong female character who withstands cultural expectations of womanhood in patriarchal society. However, her female character Esi, suffers the consequences of her defiant attitude towards traditional norms and practices which dictate women to take their wifely duties seriously. She realizes that her deviance from social conventions is not in keeping with the

interests of the patriarchal society in which she is brought up. The Ghanaian society, like any African societies that are steeped in patriarchal beliefs, does not put up with her subversive stance because it can bring about disruption in the social organisation of the society. In this sense, Nii Okain Teiko articulates:

Both the male and female are expected to conform to certain social cultural behavioural practices which serve the social hierarchy and social harmony. Men are expected, for example, to exhibit a cluster of traits such as control, strength, violence, brute force, and stoicism, while women are expected to be loving ; nurtuning home-maker. Attempts made to subvert these roles are frowned upon, since they disrupt the social order and create marital conflict.³³

This passage illustrates that the uncompromising stance of Esi as regard to her adamant refusal to take on her marital obligation is the bone of contention between her and her husband, Oko. The fact that “Esi definitely put her career well above any duties she owe as a wife” (Aidoo, 08) is not in accordance with the behavioural prescriptions of the Ghanaian society. Besides, the attitude of Esi has given the impression to her Oko that he is not living up to the African traditional expectations of how a respected husband should behave. He becomes the laughing stock of her friends as they embody the voice of patriarchal ideology and assume that he is “not behaving like a man.” (Ibid) This situation leaves him in a malaise, with a sentiment of frustration and lack of masculinity. Thus, faced with her wife’s unwillingness to yield to his demand, Oko resorts to his physical strength as a way to reaffirm his flouted masculinity. The following passage illustrates his desperate attempt to bend his wife to his will:

Oko flung the bed cloth away from him, sat up, pulled her down, and moved on her. Esi started to protest. But he went on doing what he had determined to do all morning. He squeezed her breast repeatedly, thrust his tongue into her mouth, and forced her unwilling legs apart, entered her, plunging in and out of her, trashing to the left, to the right, pounding and just pounding away. Then it was all over. Breathing like a marathon runner at the end of a particular grueling race, he got off her, and fell heavily back on his side of the bed. (Aidoo, 09)

³³ Teiko, Nii Okain. “Changing Conceptions of Masculinity in the Marital Landscape of Africa A Study of Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Changes* and Buchi Emecheta’s *The joy of motherhood*.” *Matatu* 49 (20017) : 329-357.

This situation leaves Esi utterly devastated. She was at a loss for what to do shortly after she becomes aware that she just went through rape. Her situation is all the more knotty to explain because the phrase “marital rape” is unknown to Ghanaian patriarchal society in so far as ‘sex is something a husband claims from his wife as his right’ (Aidoo, 12) and a woman should be pleased, for ‘any ‘sane’ person, especially sane women, would consider any other woman lucky or talented or both, who can make her husband lose his head like that.’ (Ibid). In the light of the depiction of Esi’s situation, it would be fair to bring forward the argument that Aidoo’s concern is to put under the critical spotlight patriarchy and its disastrous effects on the lives of women. She also showcases that African educated women are still battling to come to the grips with the issue of submissiveness.

Likewise, Nawal El Saadawi is also known for having written books that investigate the oppressive experience of Arab women. Saadawi, like Dangarembga and Aidoo, expresses concern about the oppressive nature of cultural norms women are trapped in her Egyptian patriarchal society which leave them with minimal chances for self-empowerment. Her text, *Women At Point Zero* is a moving testimony that unveils the true picture of Arab women living in Egyptian male-dominated society. It exposes the plight of the central character Firdaus who is subjected to different forms of male oppressions throughout her entire life. The stifling environment in which the female character evolves is not conducive for her self-realization to blossom. Moreover, it is obviously true that in oppressive traditional norms and practices underpinned by patriarchal assumptions, women have limited options in all domain of life. Pam Morris points out this fact when he articulates that “The patriarchal oppression of women takes many forms and operates through various media, including the law, education, employment, religion, the family, and cultural practices.”³⁴ Through the narrator’s lens, the readers learn that the unbearable turmoil of Firdaus results

³⁴ Morris, Pam. *Literature and Feminism*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993. Print.

from the unlimited power and authority vested in the hand of men, be it within the family, the society or the state.

For instance, Firdaus' father typifies "the severity of the unlimited powers men have in patriarchal societies. He is presented as an insensitive and an abused man who would do anything to wield power in the home."³⁵ For example, to enforce his supremacy in the family, he would have Firdaus' mother wash his legs, a task that Firdaus has taken over when she has gotten older. She recounts: "when I grew a little older my father put the mug in my hand and taught me how to wash his legs with water. I had now replaced my mother and did the things she used to do." (Saadawi, 25) In addition, the representation of male oppressions and suppression inflicted on women is highlighted through Firdaus's father self-centred manners. The man always puts his needs before those of his children. We learn from Firdaus's narrative that "in winter his father used to shift her straw mat and her pillow to the small room facing north, and occupy her corner in the oven room." (Ibid) Saadawi decries the social norms that grant an overwhelming power to men which they use to oppress women. Those two passages from the book illustrates the way in which Firdaus' father dominates, oppresses and exploits his family. Besides, whenever it happens that there is not enough food to go around, their father will eat everything and let his family members starve. Firdaus confesses:

My father never went to bed without supper, no matter what happened. Sometimes when there was no food at home we would all go to bed with empty stomachs. But he would never fail to have a meal... He would sit eating alone while we watched him. One evening I dared to stretch out my hand to his plate, but he struck me a sharp blow over the back of my fingers. (Saadawi, 26)

Speaking in favour of womanhood, Saadawi turns then the spotlight on the societal norms that expose women to any kind of oppressions. Like Tambuzai, Firdaus is too denied the opportunity to pursue her studies. Despite she works

³⁵ Ragayu, Harsiti Padang. "FEMALE VIOLENCE REFLECTED AT NAWAL EL SAADAWI'S WOMEN AT POINT ZERO(1983)." *seminar nasional Kajian Bahasa dan Pengajarannya*. (2016) :381.

hard at school and passes her exams with flying colours, her dream to go to university is shattered by her uncle who holds that it wouldn't be proper for women to mix with men. When asked "What will you do in Cairo, Firdaus?" (Saadawi, 23), Firdaus answers her uncle that "I will go to El Azhar and study like you." (Ibid) But contrary to her expectation, her uncle sarcastically replies that "El Azhar was only for men" (Ibid) This discriminatory treatment regarding women's education is also foregrounded in the article of Sundus Quyoom who states:

Firdaus was also deprived of education initially and the shocking part is that she got education only when her parents died. Once she asked her uncle to take her along with him to Cairo. He asked her what she will do there and when she replied that she will study in the university, to which her uncle laughed and said, 'University is only for men'. This is what males do to women making them feel that they are inferior. And this leaves a great mental scar in the mind of the girls in the form of inferiority complex.³⁶

Saadawi uses fiction then to launch an onslaught against the multifarious schemes of patriarchy the aim of which is to foster women's oppression. This aspect has been sophisticatedly portrayed through Firdaus's character who is a bright student and graduates with excellent grades, but who has seen her dream of becoming a doctor, an engineer and a lawyer reduced to nothing, simply because she is a woman and therefore cannot attend University. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that even her secondary school certificate seems to be of no use to her in a patriarchal society which does not accord any value to women's education.

Another salient aspect to emphasize as regard to the multifarious of patriarchal domination is that patriarchy does not give women room for self-expression. In fact, women's voices are stifled or suppressed. They are denied the right to have freedom of expression on issues of vital importance. They are often excluded in the process of decision-making or their voices are inaudible during the meetings held within the community to discuss matters that concern

³⁶ Quyoom, S. (2017). Women Struggle: A Critical Analysis of Woman at Point Zero and the Color Purple. PEOPLE: International Journal of Social Sciences, 3(1), 890-907.

everybody. This lack of women's voice in a male-dominated society is what Iren Asiba D'almeida refers to as 'silence'. She highlights that: "Silence represents the historical muting of women under the formidable institution known as patriarchy, that form of social organization in which males assume power and create for females an inferior status".³⁷ One can understand from D'almeida's statement that rendering the voice of women inaudible in all walks of life is part of the plot hatched by men in their struggle to maintain supremacy and to keep women in subsidiary position.

In *Nervous Condition*, Babamukuru is the epitome of authority and power who has unquestionably the last word on almost every matter concerning his family members. For example, Ma'Shingayi has no saying over the matter regarding her own children because her opinion has never weighed on the decision taken by Babamukuru. Even Tambu reveals that "it had been my uncle's idea that Nhamo should go to school at the mission." (Dangarembga, 04) Besides, dependance, voicelessness and obedience are the lot of many African women. Maiguru is an example in case, for despite having the same degree as her husband, she still is in the grip of the same impediments most African intellectual women face, and that keep them under the sway of oppressive culturale norms. Maiguru's lack of assertiveness towards her husband is at the root of all her plight. She is often voiceless in front of Babamukuru who has full control over her life and the money she earns. She is Babamukuru's faithful servant and often bends over backwards to tend to his desires.

Besides, she always supports any decision he takes, and never raise her voice towards her husband. Maiguru always shys away from sticking up for her daughter Nyasha who does not get along well with her father, and often get into argument with him. Instead, she always upbraid her daughter for her rebellious

³⁷ D'Almeda, Irene Assiba. *Francophone African Women Writers : Destroying the Empitess of Silence*. University Press of Florida, 1994.

attitude and often finds ways to appease her husband's anger by offering her more food. She tries to calm his husband down with questions like: "Are you sure you have enough meat, my Daddy-d? Maiguru interrupted fondly. Let me give you some more." (Dangarembga, 81) Worse, Maiguru is exploited by her husband who uses the money she earns to meet the needs of his family members. Reflecting on the unfortunate situation of her aunt, Tambu feels for Maiguru who is kept in this men's clutches. Through her narration, she says "she felt sorry for Maiguru because she could not use the money she earned for her own purposes and had been prevented by marriage from doing the things she wanted to do" (Dangarembga, 102) Maiguru's academic qualifications and economic contribution did not set her free from patriarchal claws. Instead, she has no choice than to compromise her freedom and happiness for the sake of marriage. Later on, she opens up to Tambu that she, like Ma'Shingayi, has made sacrifices for the sake of the family:

What it is', she sighed, 'to have to choose between self and security. When I was in England I glimpsed for a little while the things I could have been, the things I could have done if- if – if things were- different- But there was Babawa Chido and the children and the family. And does anyone realise, does anyone appreciate, what sacrifices were made? As for me no one even thinks about the things I gave up. (Dangarembga, 102)

As the extract above reveals, Maiguru doesn't seem to come to term with the idea that her country does not hold well-educated women in high esteem. Despite all the sacrifices she has made and the thankless works she has done, she is not given the attention she deserves and even worse she is equally treated like the rest of women.

Like Dangarembga, Ama Ata Aidoo, a fervent advocater of women's rights, also addresses the thorny issues related to women's muteness which foster their subjugation. The author touches on the central theme of marriage to better throw light on how such institution suppresses women's voice. According to Ogundipe-Leslie, once a woman becomes a wife "she becomes a possession, voiceless and

often rightless in her husband's family.''³⁸ *Changes* then is the fictionalization of the Ghanaian society in which societal norms stand against women's freedom of speech. This point is quite apparent in the marital relationship between Opokuya and her husband Kubi. Every morning, the couple squabble over who should have the car at his possession, an argument that most of the time ends up with Opokuya backing down. Through the voice of the narrator, the readers learn that:

Each morning's argument ended with one of the them giving in. The winner drove the car. When it was Kubi, which is most of the days, he would deposit Opokuya at the hospital and take the car, whistling all the way to the regional administrative offices. (Aidoo, 19)

Kubi uses his patriarchal dominance to impose his willpower on his wife. Even even though Opokuya is an African intellectual woman, she is still ingrained in the belief that "for any marriage to work, one has to be a fool" (Aidoo, 49) and that role of the fool should be played by women who must be subjected to their husband's will in all things. Fusena, one of the three female protagonists, doesn't escape also the weapon of silence used by patriarchy to limit and restrain her freedom, though she went to a school training to become a teacher. As it is observed in the novels, she succumbs to the stereotyped image of women whose personhood ends in the kitchen.

It is obviously true that not allowing women to work outside the house is another ploy devised by patriarchy to silence them. For instance, while Fusena's husband Ali, "after finishing his degree examination...began to study part-time for a Master's in Economics and Business administration" (Aidoo, 65), "Fusena on the other hand sat at home in their bedroom apartment or did her housework." (Ibid) She has, as shown in the above-mentioned excerpt, given up her professional career as a schoolteacher in order to conform to her wifely duties. So this passage shows the commitment of Aidoo to depict and castigate the traditional expectations and customs that obstruct the progress women make towards breaking the silence.

³⁸ Ogundipe-Leslie, M. "The female writer and her commitment. *African Literature Today*" (1987) : 5-13.

Like Dangarembga and Aidoo, Nawal El Saadwi, in *Women at Point Zero*, has looked into the issue of voicelessness women are subjected to in the Egyptian patriarchal society. Silence is at the origin of female character's repeated sexual abuses by all the men with whom she has come in contact in her life. The passive stance Firdaus displays in the face of the sexual harassment she is victimized of at the hand of men is due to the fact that she was raised in a deep rooted cultural and religious beliefs that suppress her voice. In this regard, Uwakwe states:

Silence comprises all imposed restrictions on women's social being, thinking and expressions that are religiously or culturally sanctioned. As a patriarchal weapon of control, it is used by the dominant male structure on the subordinate or muted female structure³⁹

As a heartrending narrative, *Women at Point Zero* pinpoints the married life of the central character, which is fraught with both physical and sexual violence. As a matter of fact, Firdaus relates that her husband, Sheikh Mahomoud, used to beat her at the slightest thing. She recounts: "One day 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." (Saadawi, 45) One day, Firdaus runs away from her household on the grounds of her husband's beatings, and which have left her with a bruised and swollen body. She goes to her uncle's house to seek refuge. But to her dismay, "she was told that men do beat their wives, especially religious ones, and women have to accept it."⁴⁰ The domestic violence she experiences is itemized in these following lines :

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. But my uncle told me that 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

³⁹ Uwakwe, A. P. (1995). "Debunking patriarchy: The liberation quality of voicing in Tsitsi Dangarembga's nervous conditions." *Research in African Literature*. 26 (1), 75-84

⁴⁰ Firense, Giunti. "On the Condition of the Colonized Woman: the Nervous of Firdaus in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1983)." (2001).

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. (Saadawi, 45)

This statement brings to the forefront the extent to which misinterpretation of religious texts plays a role in fostering the belf of women's oppression. It appears that, through the speech of Firdau's uncle, the author denounces "what she considers as a male-oriented approach to Islamic teachings. Such a biased reading of the Scriptures is done with the view to giving a certain credit to cultural dictates."⁴¹ The sentence above exemplifies the way in which religion is used as tool to stifle women's voice. As a way out to her husband's beatings and abuse, Firdaus abandons her household and begins a life on the streets. She comes across a coffer shop owner Bayoumi, who offers to buy her some fruits. But since Firdaus never experiences the freedom to voice her opinion about what she wants, consequently she did not know what to say to such question. She betresses this point in her narration:

'Do you prefer oranges or tangerines?' I tried to reply but my voice failed me. No one had asked me before whether I preferred oranges or tangerines. My father never bought us fruit. My uncle and my husband used to buy it without asking me what I preferred. As a matter of fact, I myself had never thought whether I preferred oranges to tangerines, or tangerines to oranges. I heard him ask me again, 'Do you like oranges or tangerines?' 'Tangerines,' I answered. But after he had bought them, I realized that I liked oranges better, but I was ashamed to say so, because the tangerines were cheaper. (Saadawi, 47)

Unfortunaltely, Firdaus's oppressions was far from coming to an end. Bayoumi who at the beginning seems to proffer a helping hand to young girl is as cruel as Sheikh Mahmoud. Firdaus finds herself again at the mercy of male sexual abuse. Bayoumi does not only rape her, but he allows his friend, in exchange for money, to sleep with her. He even uses physical violence on Firdaus as a deterrent method against her wish to get a job. The narrator emphasizes:

I was speaking in low tones, and my eyes were fixed on the ground, but he jumped up and slapped me on the face, saying, 'How dare you

⁴¹ Diallo, K. (2020). Mariama Ba: An Early Intersectional Feminist. *International Journal Of English Language & Translation Studies*. 8(4). P14.

raise your voice when you're speaking to me, you street walker, you
low woman ?'' (Saadawi, 49)

This passage is eloquent of the deplorable situation of Arab women in Egyptian society. Many of them are still in the clutches of male oppression because their voice are rendered unaudible by their traditions. Saadawi seeks to draw the attention that as long as women accept their voices to be muzzled and resign to the fate society dictates them, they will always give men the opportunity to keep on discriminating them. For her, women should break away from their passive attitude which result in nothing but women's self-victimization.

All in all, this sub-chapter was concerned with shedding light on social traditions dictated by patriarchy to oppress women. It has disclosed that patriarchal assumptions are at the core of women oppressions and subordination. Its oppressive forces such as societal norms, and religious misinterpretation to name but a few deter the progress of women in their society. Those aforementioned social injustices are what these authors denounce in their feminist discourse which militate for the emancipation of women.

Chapter II : The Feminist Discourse of Dangaremba, Aidoo and EL Saadawi

The previous chapters have demonstrated that Dangaremba, Aidoo and EL Saadawi are committed writers who use their pen for the sake of women's conditions. In their narrative works, they have displayed an unwavering commitment to expose the multiple forms of oppressions with which women are beset. They have as well delineated the heart cry of their female characters for freedom and emancipation in an oppressive context. In this regard, they can be considered feminist writers.

Feminism in a layman's terms, is a movement the aim of which is to end sexist discrimination, oppression and to fight for equality and justice. Though it must be acknowledged that all feminists pursue the same agenda which is to liberate the woman from any traditional belief that relegates her to a disadvantaged position. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the nature of feminism varies according to race, place and culture. In fact, western feminism which militates for the exclusion of men in their struggle for emancipation holding them as the main culprit of women's plight, is rejected by African and African American feminists insomuch as the western feminist theories are not in tune with the African cultural beliefs. Thus, most African female writers stand aloof from the European concept of feminism which they criticize as being Eurocentric. As a result, this rejection of European mainstream feminism has eventually led to the coinage of the term womanism or black feminism that will be in line with African women's need and social values. In rejecting radical feminism, Buchi Emechata states:

I am a feminist with a small 'f' ; i love men and good men are the salt of the earth. But to tell me that we should abolish marriage like the

capital 'F' (Feminist) women who say that women should live together
and all that i say no.⁴²

These words of Emecheta buttress the idea that black women do not see men as the enemy, they are not at war with one another. In fact, they hold that the issue confronting Africa, including the problem the woman faces, calls for the efforts of both genders. They reject the narrow perspective of western feminism that does not leave room for men to participate in the feminist agenda. Being on the same wavelength, Ghanaian feminist writer Ama Ata Aidoo encourages women as well as men to support feminist agenda in order to build a fair society. She puts forward:

Every woman and every man should be feminist especially if they believe that Africans should take charge of African land, African wealth, African lives and the burden of African development. It is not possible to advocate independence for the African continent without also believing that African women must have the best that the environment can offer.⁴³

This chapter seeks to demonstrate on the one hand the strategies devised by the African female writers to tear down the wall of patriarchy by subverting its discourse. On the other hand, it pictures the way in which men are described as irresponsible being

2.1 Denouncing patriarchy as a system of gender inequality

It is assumed that patriarchy, from a feminist viewpoint, is at the root of women's suffering. Many African women writers have held patriarchy accountable for all the social impediments women have faced in their society. As a result, literature serves as a medium through which they mount protest against this oppressive system by creating female characters who challenge and resist biased gender roles distributions. According to Muthoni Gachari,

⁴² Buchi Emecheta. *Feminism with small 'f' in Criticism and Ideology*. Second African Writers Conference, Stockholm, 1986. Ed, Kirsten Holst Peterson. Uppsala, Sweden: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1988, P175.

⁴³ Ama Ata Aidoo. 'The African Woman Today'. *Sisterhood, Feminism and Power : From Africa to Diaspora*. Ed. Obioma Nnaemeka, Trenton, NJ : Africa World Press, 1998, p47.

African women writers usually focus their writing on resistance to all forms of patriarchal behavior and the belief that women can live their lives the way they want to and also be responsible for their own livelihoods and future. Novels by women writers therefore can be looked at as a protest against patriarchal dominance attempting to bring out the inequalities, injustices and abuses inflicted on women by a patriarchal tradition that subordinates women.⁴⁴

African female writers put the resistance of African women against patriarchy and colonial power at the heart of their concerns. They challenge the stereotyped viewpoint according to which women willingly accept their lot. Since feminism has been always viewed as “women’s conscious struggle to resist patriarchy,”⁴⁵ most African female authors defy the prevailing tradition and social norms that condemn women to subjugation and oppression. Tsitsi Dangarembga, Ama Ata Aidoo and Nawal El Saadawi subscribe to the same logic. Their commitment to women’s conditions are unquestioned, and account for the fact that their novels are often based on females quest for freedom and emancipation.

Tsitsi Dangarembga’s acclaimed first novel, for instance, offers a profound portrait of the struggle for women’s emancipation. *Nervous Conditions* uncovers the methods of resistance utilized by several female characters in an effort to challenge or comply with the traditional structure of their society. Through the narrator’s lens, the readers learn success and failure of the female characters in their struggle for emancipation. The character-narrator Tambudzai, sets the record straight from the outset of the story. She declares:

My story is not after all about death, but about my escape and Lucia’s, about my mother’s and Maiguru’s entrapment, about Nyasha’s rebellion- Nyasha, far- minded and isolated, my uncle’s daughter, whose rebellion may not in the end have been successful. (Dangarembga, 01)

⁴⁴ Gachari, Muthoni. “Raising Thier Voices: Women’s Quest For Freedom And Identity In African Women’s Wriring.” *International Journal of Resarch and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS)* Volume IV, (2020): 2454-6186.

⁴⁵ Selden, Raman, Widdowson, Peter & Brooker, Peter. (1997). *A Reader’s Guide to Contemporary Literary Theory*. (5th ed.). London: Prentice Hall.

This sentence of Tambu sums up the life of each female character. She chronicles how she and her aunt Lucia have succeeded in breaking out from the claws of an oppressive system whereas her mother, Maiguru and Naysha, despite their struggle, still remain in the clutches of male's domination.

Thus, *Nervous conditions* depicts the path that these four women take to resist patriarchal authority. Tambudzai perceives education as an opportunity to overcome the social expectations of her Shona community. Attending school helps her get through the twofold impediments women face in their society, a dual burdens that her mother refers to as “the poverty of blackness on one side and the weight of womanhood on the other.” (Dangarembga, 16) She does not succumb to the various obstacles and difficulties with which her journey to receive education is beset. Tambu's first act of defiance against patriarchy is her attempt to break out of the role of domesticity. She adamantly refuses to abide by her father's traditional viewpoint when he says to her “she does not need to be educated” (Ibid), and “she must learn to be a good wife” (Ibid) Owing to her family's poverty, Tambu's education has to be ended so that her brother Nhamo “if given the chance...would distinguish himself academically, at least sufficiently to enter a decent profession... He would lift their branch of the family out of the squalor in which they were living.” (Dangarembga, 04) This gender-based discrimination did not dampen Tambu's spirit.

On the contrary, through sheer determination, she leaves no stone unturned to reach her goal of being educated which would enable her to escape from the nest of patriarchal oppression. Since her family cannot afford to send her back to school, Tambu starts to raise money by selling maize she cultivates in her grandmother's land so that she can pay for her school fees. She sets forth her plan to her father:

‘I will earn the fees,’ I reassured him, laying out my plan for him as I had laid it out in my mind. ‘If you will give me some seed, I will clear my own field and grow my own maize. Not much just enough for the fees’ (Dangarembga, 17)

Through the depiction of Tambuzai's desperate quest for education, Dangarembga throws more light on how education can be a source of women's empowerment. She is aware that education imparts knowledge and the latter in return generates power.

Another female character whose behaviour goes against patriarchal values and traditions is Nyasha, Tambu's cousin. Nyasha is the most rebellious character of the novel. She often gets into a fight with Babamukuru because she utterly refuses to comply with her father's attitude. She stands up to him and challenges his authoritative way of doing. She adamantly refuses to fall into the trap of a system of domination grounded in patriarchy and tells Tambu that:

“You've got to have some conviction, and I'm convinced I don't want to be anyone's underdog. It's not right for anyone to be that. But once you get used to it, well, it just seems natural and you just carry on. And that's the end of you. You're trapped. They control everything you do”
(Dangarembga, 117)

Nyasha's words show she is determined to cling on to the freedom she used to enjoy while she was living in England in her Shona society. Her foolhardiness is indicative of a desire to resist and break free from the unfair female roles. The representation of Tambu and Nyasha reveals the aspiration of these young female's empowerment. In analysing the defiant attitude against patriarchy of Dangarembga's two young female protagonists, Smith posits:

Through her representation of Tambu and Nyasha, the adolescent girls, who, in their defiance of the patriarchy, however ultimately successful or unsuccessful, actively refuse that 'long sad slide' into the oppressed adult femininity of their respective mothers, Dangarembga anticipates contemporary notions of 'girlpower'⁴⁶

Tambu and Nyasha are not the only female characters involved in the struggle for emancipation from the yoke of patriarchal authority. Maiguru, Babamukuru's wife, has taken, at one moment of her life, a challenging stance against masculine domination. Through the lens of the protagonist's voice, Dangarembga presents

⁴⁶ Smith, Ann. “Girl Power in Nervous Conditions: Fictional Practice as A Research Site.” *MCGILL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION* VOL. 35. N 3 (2000) : 245-260.

us with the unfortunate life of Maiguru who is not successful in untying the shackles of her Shona traditional society, in spite of her European education . She reduces herself to the role of the traditional woman who complies with the duties of her husband. Additionally, the money Maiguru earns always ends up in the hands of her husband who spends it on the needs of his family. She grows fed up with being exploited by Babamukuru, and plucks up her courage to express her discontent. She complains:

When it comes to taking my money so that you can feed her and her father and your whole family and waste it on ridiculous weddings, that's when they are my relatives too. Let me tell you, Babawa Chido, I am tired of my house being a hotel for your family. And when i keep quiet you think i am enjoying it. So today i am telling i am not happy. I am not happy anymore in this house. (Dangarembga, 172-173)

Maiguru has then broken free from the vicious circle of silence she is subjected to. The fact that she stands up and speak in front of Babamukuru can be seen as a resistance against male domination. So in *Nervous conditions*, Dangarembga raises awareness of how muteness perpetuates women's discrimination. By the same token, she seems to suggest that making their voice heard is what can help women resist patriarchal domination.

Like *Nervous Conditions*, *Changes* exposes the extent to which African educated women deal with the thorny issue of self-assertiveness in Ghana. As a committed feminist writer, Aidoo depicts women characters who are bold enough to make their voices heard and refuse to be left out in the cold. In so doing, they break away from the traditionally stereotyped image of women that used to permeate in men's literary works. D'Almeida considers writing by women as a "weapon to destroy the idea that perpetrate subjugation and inequality."⁴⁷ This assertion of D'Almeida reinforces the idea that

African women writers have reached a level of using their creative works to reconstruct a new face that seem to reduce those stereotypes

⁴⁷ D'Almeida, Irene Assiba. *Francophone African Women Writers : Destroying the Emptiness of Silence*. University Press of Florida, 1994.

of women that existed in novels years back. Through their creative abilities, there are now examples of strong capable female characters.⁴⁸

Changes is therefore a vivid account of three careers women who, through education and economic independence, have been capable of liberating themselves from the bondage of patriarchy for the betterment of their conditions. Esi sekyi, the protagonist of the novel, is the epitome of self-assertive women. She is a counter example of the stereotyped image of African woman as subordinated, submissive and voiceless. She is a woman who uses her education to break out from the role of domesticity expected of her by her husband. In so doing, she defies societal norms by refusing to kow tow to the stereotypical ideas holding that women should bear children and take care of their husband. Instead, Esi is relentless in her effort to pursue her career for which she neglects her wifely duties. As the narrator reveals:

Esi definitely put her career well above any duties she owed as a wife. She was a great cook who complaint endlessly anytime she had to enter the kitchen. Their home was generally run by an elderly house help, whom they both called 'Madam' behind her back. (Aidoo, 08)

Besides, her assertiveness and self-empowered are showcased through her reappropriation of her body. she is a woman who has full control over her body and does not go along with the thought that a wife should acceded to her hasband's sexual desire even if she is not in the mood. The fact that she thinks Oko "wanted too much of her and her time" (Aidoo, 38) has caused a rift in their marriage. Thus, when Oko could not take it anymore, he forced Esi into having sexual intercourse with him. Shortly after she is raped by her husband, Esi is in a state of shock and trauma. But "when her mind was cleared, she realised that she had made a decision." (Aidoo, 13) She files for divorce. Certainly, Aidoo illustrates how Esi does not let her traditional society nip her voice in the bud. She does not

⁴⁸ Abaka, Georgina Brookman-Andoh Martin Gyekye-Ampofo Confidence Gbolo Sanka Philomena A. Okyeso. "EDUCATION AND THE ASSERTIVE WOMAN: A CASE STUDY OF AMA ATA." *British journal of Education* (2019) :1-20

assume a passive and a submissive attitude towards her situation as it would have been the case for a traditional African woman. Besides, no amount of explanation from her husband was enough to make Esi change her mind. Instead, and after much thought, she reaches the conclusion that this is the last thing she can put up with and then decides to end her marriage. The narrator reports:

Esi had not only refused to be convinced, but had in fact got angrier and angrier the harder he had tried to explain. In any case, she had not thought it necessary in the days that followed to change the decision to leave him. Of course she was aware that although the incident was not the only cause of her disaffection, it had helped her to make up her mind (Aidoo, 37)

Another female character who has been able to get out of the clutches of patriarchal domination is Opokuya. The latter is introduced to the reader as a state-registered nurse and a midwife. But contrary to her best friend Esi, Opokuya seems to cope well with her professional career alongside with her family responsibilities. Caring for the family wellbeing does not prevent her from being self-assertive and independent women. For example, the decision to only have four children is eloquent of her freedom of action. The narrator underlines:

For herself, Opokuya had decided she wanted four children. She had had them, and brought the matter out in the open to discuss with her husband, Kubi. After they had agreed that, indeed, four were enough, she had gone to one of the gynaecologists she respected, sorted things out with him, booked herself on to his surgery schedule, and for a bed in the gynae ward. She had then gone in to have the ends of her fallopian tubes tied or singed, whatever. Finish ! (Aidoo, 15)

Through Opokuya's daring decision to only have four children, Aidoo alludes to the second wave of feminism, a feminist movement among the principles of which were the struggle to gain reproductive's right. This school of thought militates for women's rights to have control over their body, and the right to birth control is among them.

In the same line of thought, Nawal El Saadawi's *Women at Point Zero* can be read as a vivid testimony of women resistance and struggle for emancipation. In her novel, "El Saadawi tries to expose the lies of patriarchal dominance and

reveals the truth by deconstructing its hegemonic structures.’’⁴⁹ Firdaus, the female protagonist who has faced all sorts of social injustices and oppressions has, at one stage of her life, hatched her own ploy to set herself free from men’s oppression. As she delineates, her first act of resistance and defiance is her elopment from her husband’s house, to escape the daily beating she was subjected to. But this time, Firdaus does not run back to her uncle’s house, on the contrary she seeks refuge on the streets. Recounting the event that happens on that day, she says:

One day he hit me with his heavy stick until the blood ran from my nose and ears. So I left, but this time I did not go to my uncle’s house. I walked through the streets with swollen eyes, and a bruised face, but no one paid any attention to me (Saadawi, 46)

Once on the streets, Firdaus encounters men such as Bayoumi who not only abuses her sexually but turn her into an sexual object. After she escapes from the claws of that man, she meets a prostitute, Sharafia who introduces her to the world of prostitution, telling Firdaus how she can use her body to gain self-empowerment and to free herself from men domination. She narrates:

I became a young novice in Sharifa’s hands. She opened my eyes to life, to events in my past, in my childhood, which had remained hidden to my mind. She probed with a searching light revealing obscure areas of myself, unseen features of my face and body, making me become aware of them, understand them, see them for the first time. (Saadawi, 53)

However, Firdaus’ body is once again victim of exploitation in the hand of this woman. Sharifa, under false pretence to ensure her safety, profits from Firdaus’ naivety to exploit her in order to enrich herself. It is the client named Fawzy who makes Firdaus realise that “Sharifa’s fooling her, and making money out of her, while all she get out of it is the pain.” (Saadawi, 56) Upon hearing the dispute between Sharifa and Fawzy over who should control her body, she “tiptoed back

⁴⁹ Shihada, Isam. “Patriarchy And Sexual Politics In Woman at Point Zero.” *Published Academic Paper* (2007): 1-12

to her room, put on the first dress she could lay her hands on, took her little bag, and hurried down the flights of stairs into the street.’’ (Saadawi, 58)

After escaping from Sharifa, Firdaus decides to become a prostitute in order to rebel against patriarchal culture. She is aware that her society has robbed her of all her basic rights; she then turns to prostitution as a scheme to liberate herself from the chain of patriarchal domination and recover her freedom. She recounts: “because I was intelligent I preferred to be a free prostitute, rather than an enslaved wife. Every time I gave my body I charged the highest price.” (Saadawi, 99) Selling her body gives Firdaus economic independence that grants her the freedom she has always yearned for. She becomes financially autonomous, and can afford everything she desires. She relates:

A quarter of a century had passed, for I was twenty-five years old when I first started to have a clean apartment of my own, overlooking the main street, engage a cook who prepared the food I ordered, and employ someone to arrange for my appointments at the hours which suited me, and in accordance with the terms which I considered acceptable. (Saadawi, 64)

This part of the story to suggest that “only the profession of a prostitute permits Firdaus to have access to everything she seeks that her lower-class origins otherwise denied her.”⁵⁰ So being a sex worker is the only avenue for Firdaus to gain economic power in order to climb up the social ladder and be at liberty to make her own choices. In giving a detailed account of how she is now at the helm of her own life and in charge of her body, she confesses:

How many were the years of my life that went by before my body, and my self became really mine, to do with them as I wished? How many were the years of my life that were lost before I tore my body and my self away from the people who held me in their grasp since the very first day? (Saadawi, 64)

Being a ‘successful prostitute’, Firdaus gets the power to act on her own free will without any cultural restrictions emanating from patriarchal norms. She can

⁵⁰ Ibid

decide what kind of food she wants to eat and the kind of man she wants to sleep with. She states:

Now I could decide on the food I wanted to eat, the house I preferred to live in, refuse the man for whom I felt an aversion no matter what the reason, and choose the man I wished to have, even if it was only because he was clean and well manicured. (Saadawi, 64)

It is clear that Saadawi emphasises prostitution as a strategy of defiance that liberates women from the shackles of patriarchy. As her words suggest, Firdaus has extricated herself from the oppressive forces that used to dominate her on the day she decides to be a prostitute. She is now able to control and use her body to withstand the hegemonic power of men. Oyeh O. Otu, in his article, spotlights the representation of female prostitution as a wherewithal to defy prevailing tradition

Many feminist writers and critics have projected female prostitution as a radical and aggressive strategy aimed at undermining patriarchal values and wresting power and subjectivity from men. Many have argued that through prostitution women revolt against the traditional double standards which on one hand grant men license to be sexually adventurous, promiscuous and unfaithful to their partners, and on the other hand legislate and enforce grave moral and social sanctions against women who engage in the same acts. Such critics aver that women move from the position of passive sex objects designed for men's sexual pleasures to the position of agency and subjectivity that enable them express their sexuality, and more importantly use their bodies to turn men to objects of sexual and economic exploitation.⁵¹

However, at one moment of her life, Firdaus wants to turn her back on the world of prostitution, and makes up her mind to find a decent job as a mean to earn her bread. Even though she only holds a secondary certificate, she manages to find a job in a company. But living in a phallocentric society, she is once again faced with men's sexual harassment at her workplace. But she did not yield to their sexual advances. She confesses :

A man came up to me and whispered. I look him straight in the eye and said 'No.' Another man came up to me and muttered something in a secretive voice which could barely be heard, I examined him carefully from head to toes and said, 'No' (Saadawi, 73)

⁵¹ Otu, Oyeh O. "Prostitution: The Economics Of Sex And Power Dynamics In El Saadawi's *Woman At Point Zero*, Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Trafficked* And Unigwe's *On Black Sisters Street*." *World Journal of English Language* Vol 6.No 4 (2016) : 8-14.

An analysis of Firdaus attitude reveals Saadawi's radical feminism. She is known for her caustic writing against oppressive forces sustained by patriarchy that are responsible for women's plight. So in *Women At Point Zero* she projects a female character who is a telling example of the author's radical strand of feminism. As the extract above illustrates, Firdaus gives up her job in the company and resumes her life as prostitute since it was the only avenue left to her in her male-dominated society. Additionally, observing the disadvantaged status of women in society, she comes to the realization that: 'a woman's life is always miserable. A prostitute, however, is a little better off.' (Saadawi, 97) She becomes very rich as a prostitute by charging higher prices to men who lust her body. She says:

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. As a result my price kept going up. A man cannot stand being rejected by a woman, because deep down inside he feels a rejection of himself. No one can stand this double rejection. And so every time i said no, the man would insist. No matter how high i raised the price he could not stand being refused by a woman. (Saadawi, 97)

Through her narrative, we learn how Firdaus uses her genitalia to wield power over men. Therefore prostitution is the path that Firdaus takes to resist the patriarchal authority. It is the wherewithal by which she has succeeded in breaking free from unspeakable oppressions and mistreatments she was subjected to. However, toward the end of the novel Firdaus comes across Marzouk, a pimp who wants to control her and have share of her money. The fierce row that Firdaus has with the man, and order to save her skin and safeguard her precarious freedom, she ends up killing him. Firdaus confesses:

I continued to look straight at him without blinking. I knew I hated him as only a woman can hate a man... I raised my hand even higher that he had done, and brought it down violently on his face. The white of his eyes went red. His hands started to reach for the knife he carried in his pocket, but my hand was quicker than his. I raised the knife and buried it deep in his neck and then thrust it deep into his chest, pull it out of his chest and plunged it deep into his belly. (Saadawi, 104)

The act of killing the pimp is indicative of the extent to which Firdaus has become self-empowered. Her action is expressive of her bravery as a woman who has broken the chain of silence and who fights for her rights. Moreover, Firdaus is not worried about falling foul with the justice because the death of the pimp means to her another victory towards her freedom and emancipation.

All in all, this part has showcased that the three female writers are committed feminists writers who are very sensitive to women's conditions and militate for women's right. We have noticed that their female characters have been strenuously involved in the fight for resistance and assert themselves in a patriarchal society. Through their strategies of defiance and resistance, they have been able to break the yoke of men oppressions.

2.2 Deconstructing masculine domination through satire

Nervous Conditions, Changes: A love story and *Women At Point Zero* have been written from a feminist perspective. An in-depth study of Dangarembga's, Aidoo's and Saadawi's fictional work has disclosed that they have been much committed in the global struggle for the liberation of African women from patriarchy and for gender-based equality.

To achieve such goals, they deem it necessary to deconstruct the patriarchal discourse that is ingrained in women's mind and that reduce them to the status of inferiority. In so doing, they have endowed their female characters with qualities that symbolize self-reliance, resilience and resourcefulness in order to overcome the impediments imposed on them by society, in their search for freedom and emancipation.

Apart from this strategy devised by women to overturn patriarchal ideology, Dangarembga, Aidoo and Saadawi have also worked out other ways to express their feminist stance such as the negative depiction of male characters. In

fact, literature provides an avenue for African feminist writers to challenge the male dominant system through the representation of the latter as wicked, weak and irresponsible. This is a common practice among female writers who condemn the domineering attitude of men.

Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is a case in point. Indeed, the novel depicts a grim and unfavorable image of male characters. For instance, Jeremiah, Tambu's father, is depicted as a weak, irrational and powerless person. Even Tambu is aware of these flaws her father embodies. She says "I discovered to my unhappy relief that father is not sensible." (Dangarembga, 16) Jeremiah is portrayed as somebody who has lost the privileged position that men usually hold in the patriarchal society, for he has failed to take on the culturally expected role assigned to men. He is incapable of supporting financially and materially his family which lives in dire poverty and which struggles to make both ends meet. Additionally, he is depicted as a lazy man who never finds himself a job to help his family to get out from their rugged conditions. For example, Jeremiah is unable to provide the tuition fees for Tambu and her brother Nhamo. And if Tambu's brother was able carry on his studies, it was thanks to Mainini's resourcefulness, who provides the money by selling foodstuff. Tambu recounts:

Fortunatey, my mother was determined in that year. She began to boil eggs, which she carried to the bus terminus and sold to passengers passing through. (This meant that we could not eat them.) She also took vegetables- rapes, onions and tomatoes- exenting her garden so that there was more to sell. (Danagrembga, 15)

Normally, it is men who are supposed to assume the duty of providing for the family because they are head of the house in the domestic realm. But in the case of Jeremiah, as the above passage illustrates, it is the other way round. The fact that his wife takes on such responsibility is sufficient evidence of the irresponsible character jeremiah embodies. He and his family live off Babamukuru's income, his brother. This financial dependency has emasculated Tambu's father to the extent that his voice is no more audible in the decision-making. All the decisions

affecting his family are made by his brother. Katharyn Holland observes that jeremiah displays a “simpering pliability, [...] ready to obey every command issued from his brother’s mouth whether or not it contradicts what he himself said.”⁵² Holand’s statement corroborates the fact that Jeremiah is just a plaything in the hands of Babamukuru. Moreover, he is very work-shy so much so that he even resents the prospect of having to fend for himself during the long absence of his elder brother. The narrators tells:

My father, of course, thinking that five years without his brother to provide for him was a long time in which to be obliged to provide for himself, consoled himself with the knowledge that on Babamukuru’s return with his high qualifications, he would provide for more abundantly than before. My mother was hopeful. She thought my father would grow at least be responsible. (Dangarembga, 14)

Jeremiah is unwilling to part from his laziness and to learn to stand on his own two feet. As the above passage illustrates, he intends to wait for his brother’s return to provide for him. Additionnally, Tambu’s mother has entertained hopes that the departure of Babamukuru would change her husband into a more responsible man. But to her dismay, Jeremiah chooses to sit on his hands, awaiting his brother’s return. In the light of the representation of the male character as irresponsible and unreasonable, it can be noted that Dangarembga applies feminist agenda that consists in portarying negative image of male with the view to subverting patriarchal hegemony. Such method of fight against male domination is almost perceptible in many feminists literary works. Through a feminist perspective, men have unlimited power that they wield to put women under their domination. So this is what feminists endearvour to exhibit and to denounce in their texts. Thus, creating male characters with flaws is a means by which women overcome their domination.

By the same token, Nigerian female writer Flora Nwapa’s fictional work conveys the same negative picture of male characters. *In Efurū*, Adizua is

⁵² Katharyn Holland. “The Troubled Masculine In Nervous Condiotions”. *African Masculinities: Men in Africa from the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*. 2005. 121-136.

presented as lazy, powerless and a good-for-nothing. He does not live up to his Igbo's society expectations as regard to how a "real man" should be. In such society, to be considered a "real man" one has to either bear a title, or be a wealthy man. Unfortunately, Adizua doesn't fit any of these criteria, and worse his family lineage is unknown among the community. Moreover, when the question of the dowry was arisen, it is Efuru who provides the money that has sealed their union. Unlike his wife who is a hardworking and resourceful woman, Adizua proves himself to be a lazy man. For example, few days after their marriage, he begins to complain about his work on the farm. According to the narrator:

Life in the farm was becoming unbearable. Adizua no longer worked as hard as before. In the morning he slept while others went to work. When they had done more than two hours' work, he came to work, and left the farm before everybody else. He was so lazy that his neighbours gossiped. (Nwapa, 18)

The excerpt echoes how Adizua is struck by the vice called laziness. He is the last to go to work and the first to go home. Besides, he depends on his wife's successful trade business for survival. As a result, it comes to light that in *Efuru*, Nwapa tackles the issue of men failure. If we refer to the gender-role prescribed by culture, it becomes crystal-clear that Adizua has failed to fulfill his social responsibilities as man. He has lost the position men occupy in the patriarchal society.

Likewise, it is common knowledge that all feminists movements support the idea that men are responsible for women's plight. Thus, speaking out against male-domination and contending with all forms of societal injustices becomes the main aim of the movement. In order to subvert masculine domination, feminist writers seek:

to deconstruct and demolish the patriarchal status quo by reducing men both to worthless, irresponsible, physically grotesque images and to

wicked husbands and fathers in order to engineer a new social order in which women are in control of their destiny.⁵³

The same negative portrayal of men is dealt with in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes: a love story*. Aidoo has been vocal in denouncing the selfishness and the deceitful nature of some men who deem it unworthy to show love to women. Men who subscribe to such ideas posit that to show women you love them is tantamount to giving them the occasion to trample underfoot your rights as a husband. In *Changes*, Oko Seyki is the among the male characters who tipify the wicked and lusful husband. He believes that if his wife bluntly disrespects his right, it is because he has shown her much love. He remorsefully wonders if his society is not right to assumes that:

It is not safe to show a woman you love her...not too much anyway, some male voice was telling him. But whose voice was that ? His father ? His uncle Amoa's ?... of course those men and their kind hid their their hearts very well. They were brought up to know how... they were always saying things of the sort. Showing a woman you love her is like asking her to walk over you. How much of your love for how heavy her kicks. And were they wrong. (Aidoo, 07)

These lines buttress the deceitful character of some men who refuse to show love toward their female partners, whom they believe do not know how to value it and often profit from it to mistreat them. Here, Aidoo is raising consciouness about such backward ideas men still hold on to. For her, such ideas are at the root of all strained and unhappy marriage, for they do not create an environment where both partners can experience true and mutual love.

Moreover, Aidoo brings out the struggle of the contemporary African women who have been able to break free from the stereotypical roles of women. Indeed, the three major characters move away from being traditional African women to more assertive and empowered one. However, it is not surprising that men characters, out of arrogance and self-centeredness, take a dim view of such social

⁵³ Adjei, M. (2009). "Male-bashing and narrative subjectivity in Amma Darko's first three novels", in *SKATE Journal of Literary Studies*, vol. No. 1. Pp. 47-61.

changes affecting women's role. They see this changing role as a threat to the privileged status the African traditional society bestow on them. As a result, the fight for women to claim their rights in the one hand, and the ambition of men to maintain the status quo has resulted in the latter acting more and more in an aggressive, and unreasonable way. For illustrative purpose, we can take the case of Oko whose desire to satisfy his sexual greed pushes him to rape Esi, his wife. After his immoral and abominable act, he offers no apology to his wife since "he was...convinced he mustn't." (Aidoo, 10) This shows out that men are capable of evil actions. Oko who is supposed to ensure his wife's protection, turns out to be his own rapist. On the same wavelength, Aly Kondey is another male character who epitomizes unfaithfulness, selfishness and self-centered. He is as well represented as a deceitful character who pretends to endorse the life of independent African educated women, whereas his utmost concern is to keep them under his domination. In a discussion with Esi, Opokuya tells her friend that:

Men are not really interested in a woman's independence or her intelligence. The few who claim they like intelligent and active women are also interested in having such women permanently in their beds and in their kitchens. (Aidoo, 45)

This statement of Opokuya echoes the idea of men as self-centred and deceitful characters. Besides, Ali Kondey has even convinced his wife to abandon her career. Indeed, Fusena is Aly's wife, a trained teacher who, on the insistence of her husband, has given up her career to become a woman whose life is limited to "being pregnant, nursing the new baby, looking after Adam and Ali and staring at London's bleak and wet views." (Aidoo, 66) "Ali and Fusena had been classmates at the post-secondary teacher training college at Atebubu." (Aidoo, 57) however, Aly argues his wife out of pursuing her teaching career while he furtheres his studies to complete his master's degree. His selfishness is emphasized in the following discussion with Fusena:

'But, Fusena, teaching is out of the question,' Ali would insist during the regular discussions they had on the issue. ' There should be a more

lucrative job you could do and still have time to look after the children.
(Aidoo, 67)

Men constitute real obstacle to women's emancipation. They never want to let them work outside the house. And as the narrator illustrates, Ali epitomizes the selfishness of some African men who always make sure to put their interests first before anything else. He demands that her wife Fusena, abandons her profession to become traditional women. Moreover, some men are never satisfy and are hardly ever grateful to their wives who always bend over backwards to meet their slightest needs. Insteads of being loyal to them, they betray them by either cheating on them or by finding them co-wives. This lack of faithfulness and gratefulness is denounced by Aidoo. For instance, despite all the efforts and sacrifices Fusena has made for the sake of her marriage, Ali informs her "that he was thinking of making a woman with a university degree his second wife." (Aidoo, 67) Ali's wish to take a second wife is considered as a betrayal towards Fusena.

Aside from the representation of men as irresponsible, eccentric and unreasonable, we also notice a widespread depiction of degraded masculine image in many radical feminist literary works. For example, Nawal El Saadawi is mostly known for her controversial and radical stance on the issue of women's plights. Her portrayal of male characters in *Women At Point Zero* as animals corroborates the extent to which her writings is reflective of her radical feminist orientation. As Isam Shihada maintains: "Saadawi's harsh criticism extends to patriarchy's exploitative masculine figures of authority who are portrayed as animals."⁵⁴ Through the narrative voice of Firdaus, we have seen how Saadawi likens men's behaviour to that of animals. For example, Firdaus's description of her father's way of eating is significantly illustrative:

⁵⁴ Shihada, Isam. "Patriarchal and Sexual politics in Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*." *Published Academic paper* (2007): 1-12.

I sat in front of him watching as he ate, my eyes following his hand from the moment his fingers plunged into the bowl until it rose into the air, and carried the food into his mouth. His mouth was like that of a camel, with a big opening and wide jaws. His upper jaw kept clamping down on his lower jaw with a loud grinding noise, and chewed through each morsel so thoroughly that we could hear his teeth striking against each other. His tongue kept rolling round and round in his mouth as though it also was chewing, darting out every now and then to lick off some particle of food that had stuck to his lips, or dropped on his chin. (Saadawi, 26)

The account that Firdaus gives about the way his father was eating, comparing his gestures to that of a camel depicts his father like an animal that eats. Additionally, the author paints a loathsome and an appalling picture of Sheikh Mahmoud, who lives with a deformity that makes his face unbearable to look at. His deformity is described by Firdaus who points out that:

On his chin, below the lip, was a large swelling, with a hole in the middle. Some days the hole would be dry, but on others it would turn into a rusty old tap exuding drops red in colour like blood, or whitish yellow, like pus. (Saadawi, 44)

Moreover, Sheikh Mahmoud is also compared to a dog by Firdaus when she was at the mercy of his repeated sexual harassment. She recounts:

He leapt on me like a mad dog. The hole in his swelling was oozing drops of foul-smelling pus. I did not turn my face or my nose away this time. I surrendered my face to his face and my body to his body, passively, without any resistance, without a movement, as though life had been drained out of it, like a piece of dead wood or old neglected furniture left to stand where it is, or a pair of shoes forgotten under a chair. (Saadawi, 46)

Thus, men are irrational beings, devoid of any sense of humanity. Their actions are reckless and not well-thought-out. Here the representation of men as dogs is very significant insofar as it demystifies the image of men as sensible beings. In addition, when Sharifa meets Firdaus on the street in a pitiable state, she asks her “what did the son of a dog do to you?” (Saadawi, 51) we notice that all men are referred to as dogs in the novel because they are responsible for the sufferings of women. Sharifa confesses:

‘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, Hassanein, Fawzy, Sabri, Ibrahim, Awadain, Bayoumi... ‘I know them all. Which one of them started it? Your father your brother...one of your uncles? (Saadawi, 51)

Here Sharifa tells Firdaus that all men are responsible for the dramatic situation of women. And the experience of the female protagonist is a living example of the suffering of women. Firdaus’s life is ladden with sexual assault other forms of oppressions from infancy to adulthood in the hands of men.

Many male characters, in the three novels under discussion, are depicted in an unfavorable manner. They are described as irresponsible, unfaithful, self-centered and lazy. The evil behaviours they embody have left a negative imprint on the the lives of women. Therefore, through the satirical depiction of male characters, African women writers aim at overthrowing male hegemony by exposing the destructive effects of patriarchy. Likewise, narrative strategies ensure an aesthetic of women’s protest against the negation of their rights and for gender equality.

Chapter III : Narrative Strategies in the novels

Writers use literature to express their feelings, thoughts, and concerns about issues. There is no denying that the influence of literature is highly significant on readers and on the world in general. It is in this vein that, to raise concerns about social norms that deprive women of their dreams and ambitions, Dangarembga, Aidoo and Saadawi deploy narrative devices, in their novels, to draw an aesthetic image of the above-mentioned ordeals upon women.

Thus, the study of narrative devices in literary works is of paramount importance for the understanding of the text. It is the means by which the encoded message of a literary text can be apprehended. In *Nervous Conditions*, *Changes : A love Story and Women at Point Zero*, the authors have used different narrative devices to castigate the social injustices women are subjected to and to deconstruct the patriarchal discourse which still holds them in bondage. Among the artistic devices we have narrative enunciation and characterization. These tools are in one way or another indicative of the unfailing commitment of the three novelists about the plight of African women.

3.1 Narrative Enunciation

Narrative techniques in a novel are the various literary elements. It is an indivisible part of the novel. Henry James corroborates this view by stating: “the story and the novel, the idea and the form, are the needle and the thread, and I never heard of the guild of tailors who recommend the use of the thread without the needle, or the needle without the thread.”⁵⁵ This emphasizes that narrative technique is not secondary but a primary tool of the novel because it is the logical sequence of events presented to the readers in a way that enables the author to convey the themes which are embodied within the literary work.

⁵⁵ James, Henry. “The Art of Fiction”. *Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent Leith. New York: Norton, 2001.

However, the term ‘narrative’ has parked off a disagreement among theorists who have attempted to define it in different ways. They have often debated over what constitutes the narrative, whether it is a set of events that constitutes a narrative or a single event which is potent enough to constitute a narrative. As a result, different theorists have expressed their individual and varied opinions on this matter. For instance, Gerald Genette, in the introduction of his *Narrative Discourse*, underlines that the term *narrative* has defied precise definition in the sense that it has several and changing meanings. Nevertheless, he provides three definitions of the term one of which articulates that “‘narrative refers to the narrative statement, the oral or written discourse that undertakes to tell of an event or a series of events.’”⁵⁶ Genette stresses that the term narrative is simply the set of events told by a narrator to a narratee.

There are various narrative devices employed by Dangarembga, Aidoo and Saadawi to explore their themes. But this study will focus on the narrative voices to bring in the limelight the way in which the three postcolonial African female writers expose gender oppression and patriarchy. Moreover, it uncovers the ways in which their female characters challenge and offer a stiff resistance to patriarchal dominance and oppression.

Dangarembga, Aidoo and Saadawi have made use of the novel as a mode of expression to represent the plight of African women. A literary work can provide an in-depth depiction of the cultural, social, religious, economic and political outlook of a people more than history textbooks and anthropological record do. In *The Dialogic Imagination*, the Russian theorist, Mikhail Bakhtin spotlights three characteristics that distinguish the novel from other genres which are :

Its stylistic three-dimensionality which is linked with the multi-
linguaged consciousness realized in the novel, the radical change it
affects in the temporal co-ordinates of literary image; the new zone

⁵⁶ Genette, Gerard, Jane E. Lewin, and Jonathan D. Culler. *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*. , 1980. Print.

opened by the novel for structuring image, namely the zone of maximal contact with the present with contemporary reality in all its openedness⁵⁷

The cogent observation made by Bakhtin about the novel reveals its multiple dimensions, especially its use of language, imagery and its interwoven relation with contemporary realities. Bakhtin simply implies that novels are in a better position to explain or rather describe what the society goes through. Since literature is the mirror of society, African who suffers from oppressive and discriminatory social norms could not have chosen a better genre than the novel to speak out against such injustices.

Composed of ten chapters and written in the first-person narrative technique, Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* chronicles the story of five women who struggle against patriarchy and colonial domination. From the onset of her story, Tambudzai shockingly states : "I was not sorry when my brother died." (Dangarembga, 16) She sets about detailing the events that have taken place before her brother's death as well as the fight she waged to receive education. She recounts how impervious she has been to her brother's sudden death, a feeling about which she is not apologetic. She says:

Nor am I apologizing for my callousness, as you may define it, my lack of feeling. For it is not that at all. I feel many things these days, much more than I was able to feel in the days when I was young and my brother died, and there are reasons for this more than the consequence of age. Therefore I shall not apologize but begin by recalling the facts as I remember them that led up to my brother's death, the events that put me in a position to write this account. (Dangarembga, 16)

The excerpt shows that Dangarembga gives her protagonist, Tambudzai Sigauke, a voice to tell her story. In a homodiegetic retrospective narrative, Tambu starts out her narration by foregrounding the reasons why she does not mourn Nhamo. This results from the fact that her shona family is entrenched in traditional beliefs where the education of boys is prioritized over girls. The impediment she faces in

⁵⁷ Bakhtin, M M, Michael Holquist, and Caryl Emerson. *The Dialogic Imagination : Four Essays.* , 1981. Print.

her journey to receive education make her realize that: “The needs and sensibilities of women in her family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate” (Dangarembga, 12). Besides, the aversion Tambu feels for Nhamo stems from the fact her brother used to manhandle both Tambu and her sister, and never missed the occasion to make them feel his superiority. This is illustrated by Tambu when she says: “knowing that he did not need help, that he only wanted to demonstrate to us and himself that he had the power, the authority to make us do things for him, I hated fetching my brother’s luggage.” (Dangarembga, 10)

Nervous conditions unfolds the experience of five female characters who explore a variety of strategies of resistance against traditional and colonial patriarchy. According to Uwakweh, since women in *Nervous conditions* are silenced by their men in the family which is largely steeped in tradition, the first means of resistance against patriarchy is to give her a voice to her characters to narrate her story about her ambition to educate herself in the face of many obstacles, and about the various ways the others female characters challenge the practices of male domination in their quest for emancipation. Uwakweh contends:

Dangarembga's approach to the task of debunking patriarchy is couched in Tambudzai's story of the four women closely related to her and in their various responses to male power. She explores not only the sources of the "silence" surrounding the women, but also their muted challenges to the dual burden⁵⁸

This voice retrieval in resisting patriarchy is the expression of feminist agency. The upholders of the second wave of feminism encourage women to use their voices as a means to unfasten the belt of domination. Uwakweh emphasizes that Dangarembga’s female character, Tambu is able to recover her voice through the use of autobiographical genre. She explains:

The self-referential nature of the autobiographical mode adopted by Dangarembga as a literary strategy marks her attainment of voice in the Zimbabwean male-dominated literary arena. Voicing is self-defining,

⁵⁸ Uwakweh, Pauline Ada. “Debunking Patriarchy: The Liberational Quality of Voicing in Tsitsi Dangarembga *Nervous Condition*” *Research in African Literature, New Voices in African Literature* (1995): 75-84.

liberational, and cathartic. It proclaims an individual as a conscious being capable of independent thought and action. Dangarembga illustrates this point in the status of Tambudzai as narrator or "implied author" of *Nervous Conditions*⁵⁹

He underlines that, by narrating the stories of these women, Tambudzai's voice is effected as a tool of resistance. Uwakweh concurs with this idea when he observes that: "Tambu achieves voice through narration, an act that gives her liberation from patriarchal-imposed silence and offers hope in the resilience and success of female challenge"⁶⁰

However, it should be noted that, though Dangarembga's text investigates the systematic oppression of women, she does not dwell extensively on their suffering but on the negotiation and resistance of their dual burden. She challenges the notion of subordinate position and empowers female voices previously marginalized. The novel focuses on the revolt of the five female characters. According to Helen Nabusato Mugambi:

Their engagement with masculinity ranges from passive acceptance, through admiration, aspiration, and emulation, to active and confrontational challenge. Significantly, most of these responses are toward Babamukuru, the identified icon of masculinity.⁶¹

Therefore, Dangarembga provides her female characters with different strategies to resist the different forms of male hegemony. In her books, women of different status are shown to use different means of resisting patriarchy and violence in their quest of liberation. For instance, she depicts how resistance can manifest itself through the body. In *Politics of the Female Body*, Ketu H. Katrak, analyzing the body response by female characters against patriarchal and colonial domination posits that "in resisting they often use their female bodies via speech, silence, starvation, or illness."⁶² In *Nervous Conditions*, Nyasha exemplifies the character

⁵⁹ Ibid

⁶⁰ Ibid

⁶¹ Mugambi, Helen N. "Reading Masculinities in a Feminist Text: Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*." *Twelve best books by African Women: Critical Readings*. Eds. Chikwenje O. Ogunyemi and Tuziyline J. Allan. Athens: Ohio UP, 2009. 199-218.

⁶² Katrak, Ketu H. *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers*. Rutgers University Press, 2006.

who resists by refusing food. Through the narrative voice of Tambu, the reader is made aware that Nyasha and her father Babamukuru are not on speaking terms and often get into an argument, because ‘‘Nyasha is caught between independence of mind fostered by her education and the suffocating social restrictions of being a ‘proper daughter’.’’⁶³ Babamukuru holds patriarchal authority over his family members whose customs, eating habits and education he seeks to control. But Nyasha does not behave in her father’s expected manner, she does not fit in the traditional role of the obedient daughter. And Babamukuru disapproves of her daughter’s desire to take autonomy over her body. For instance, he throws a fist when Tambu, Nyasha and Chido have come home late from ‘‘a ‘raving’ Christmas party at the Beit Hall’’ (Dangarembga, 109) the three of them went. The narrator describes the strained father-daughter relationship and suggests that Nyasha’s plight is the outcome of the opposition between becoming a woman and being a daughter. She narrates that, according to her uncle

‘No decent girl would stay out alone, with a boy, at that time of the night,’ Babamukuru was insisting in a quavering tenor. ‘But *you* did it. I *saw* you. Do you think I am lying, that these eyes of mine lie?’ Nyasha, unfortunately, was still unrepentant. ‘What do you want me to say?’ She asked. ‘You want me to admit I’m guilty, don’t you. All right then. I *was* doing it, whatever you’re talking about. There. I’ve confessed.’ ‘Do not talk to me like that, child,’ warned Babamukuru. ‘You must respect me. I am your father. And in that capacity I am telling you, I-amtelling-you, that I do not like the way you are always walking about with these — er — these young men. Today this one, tomorrow that one. What’s the matter with you, girl? Why can’t you behave like a young woman from a decent home? What will people say when they see Sigauke’s daughter carrying on like that? ‘You must learn to be obedient,’ Babamukuru told Nyasha and struck her again. (Dangarembga, 113-115)

What stands out from this passage is that Nyasha’s misfortune has something to do with her father’s opinion about her. In the mind of Babamukuru, a woman must be chaste and respectful of traditions. As a result, the fact that his daughter goes to a dancing and befriends boys has aroused his anger and sharpened his desire

⁶³ Ibid p123

to curb the development of her sexuality. Now, faced with the dilemma of being an obedient daughter and a sexually mature adult, Nyasha unable to confront her father, resorts to “eating disorder...as a response to the authority presented by her father.”⁶⁴ Defined as anorexia nervosa, this eating disorder is a powerful wherewithal to resist in the novel. Throughout Tambu’s narration, we are presented with many instances in which Nyasha’s refusal of food is depicted. For instance, her mother complains that “she does waste a lot of time cooking... food that isn’t eaten.” (Dangarembga, 102) In addition to that, Nyasha’s refusal to feed herself upsets Babamukuru to the extent that he threatens to “stop providing for her – fees, clothes, food, everything.” (Dangarembga 189) Babamukuru feels that rejecting food is Nyasha’s challenge his authority as patriarch. So in a very authoritative way, he forces her to “eat her food, all of it.” (Dangarembga, 189) Tambu describes the strained atmosphere surrounding the scenario at the dinner table and how Nyasha is forced to eat her food, who shortly after, goes to the bathroom to vomit it :

Nyasha breathed and with a shrug picked up her fork and began to eat, slowly at first, then gobbling the food down without a break. The atmosphere lightened with every mouthful she took. ‘You may go now,’ her father said when she had emptied her plate. She went straight to the bathroom, spent a long time there. Excusing myself from the table, I waited in the bedroom. I could hear her gagging and choking. (Dangarembga, 189-190)

Nyasha suffers then from anorexia as a result of her fight against her father’s authoritarian behaviour. Deepika Bahri contends that Nyasha’s resistance which is couched in the refusal of food, showcases how she refuses “to occupy the honorary space allotted [to] her by colonial and patriarchal narratives in which she is required to be a good native and a good girl.”⁶⁵ As Dangarembga words suggest, “Nyasha’s anorexia is an expression of her rejection literally of the food

⁶⁴ Parnis, Roberta Borg. “Colonialism and its Impact on Women in Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* and The Book of Not.” *Symposia Melitensia* 17 (2021): 81-94.

⁶⁵ Bahri, Deepika. “Disembodying the Corpus: Postcolonial Pathology in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s ‘Nervous Conditions’.” *Postmodern Culture*, vol. 5, no. 1, 1994.

that her father forces her to eat, and metaphorically of her vomiting out the aspects of both English-ness and her Shona-ness that oppress her as a female.’’⁶⁶ It turns out that it is in anorexia nervosa that Nyasha finds a way to resist the dual nature of her oppression by exercising control over her own body. This reappropriation of one’s own body is what feminist literary criticism, especially the upholders of the second wave militate. For the latter, the female must take autonomy over her body in the resistance against patriarchy. Additionally, the first person narrative deployed by Dangarembga is a way for her to express her feminist stance. It enables her female character to find ways to speak about her experiences as a woman in a patriarchal and colonial society.

Unlike Dangarembga, Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Changes: A Love Story* is written in the third person narrative. The third person narration is the most commonly used narrative mode in literature because many writers see it as the most flexible mode of expression. Partitioned into twenty three chapters, Aidoo’s novel focuses on women’s position and role in the post-colonial African society. It puts on the front burner the difficulties and obstacles faced by three African women who are caught between tradition and modernity. However, it should be noted that the fact that Aidoo sets her novel in urban Ghanaian society is not fortuitous, for it enables her to depict strong-minded and rebellious female characters who break customs, question and challenge the values set by male-dominated society. Thus, “*Changes* is indeed an urban African novel and that urbanization is exploited in Ama Ata Aidoo’s African novel *Changes: A Love Story* for the enhancement of women’s liberation.”⁶⁷ As the plot reveals, *Changes* “is an urban novel because most of the episodes like Esi and Ali’s erotic relationship, Esi and Oko’s and Opokuya and Kubi’s marital lives are situated in the city.”⁶⁸

⁶⁶Katrak, Ketu H. *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers*. Rutgers University Press, 2006.

⁶⁷ Ekpong, Monique O. “Exploitation of the Urban African Novel for Women’s Liberation in Ama Ata Aidoo’s *Changes A Love Story*.” *LWATI : A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 11(2) (2014) : 150-163.

⁶⁸ Ibid

In fact, women writers such as Aidoo portray the struggle of the African women who fight to move away from facing patriarchal subjugation to self-assertion. In *Antagonistic Feminisms and Ama Ata Aidoo's Changes*, Kirsten Holst Petersen describes Aidoo's latest novel as a 'provocation', she reasons that

[i]t is by breaking out of the expected or predictable configurations of and solutions to a set of problems faced by an African woman that Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes* challenges hardened battle positions in the discussion of the role, power, desire and agency of the modern African woman⁶⁹

Changes is centered around the lives of Esi Sekyi, Opokuya Dakwa and Fusena Kondey, three educated Ghanaian women who challenge and question the role of women in modern African society in general and Ghanaian one in particular. Even the title of the novel *Changes* has a symbolic meaning. It is reflective of "the numerous personal and cultural transformations that lie at the heart of the narrative."⁷⁰ For instance, the narrative begins with the central character, Esi Sekyi, an educated middle-aged black woman and professional who works at the Department of Urban Statistics in a ministry in Accra, Ghana. Aidoo emphasizes how education can be a major weapon to enhance assertiveness in women by "representing the so called emancipated women of the city like Esi who before going out to her office, takes sufficient time in doing things or making up"⁷¹, as described by the third person omniscient narrator:

She unwrapped the cloth from her body, moved to the dressing table, took what she would need and brought the things to her side of the bed: some cream for her skin, a deodorant stick, a very mild toilet spray. She sat down, and picking these one by one, she started getting her body ready for the day. (Aidoo, 06)

The narrator describes the manner in which Esi does her makeup, the time she takes to dress as she gets ready to go to work which is indicative of the fact that she typifies the new image of woman who challenge and question the role of

⁶⁹ Peterson, Kirsten Holst. "Antagonistic Feminism and Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes*." *Resistance and Reconciliation : Writing in the Commonwealth* (2003): 346-57.

⁷⁰ Labo Bouché, Abdou. "Women Self-affirmation in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes*." *CASE STUDIES JOURNAL II* (2013): 23-30.

⁷¹ Ibid

African women. Indeed, Esi is the representative of a strong, successful, self-assertive and confident woman who “put her career well before any duties she owed as a wife.” (Aidoo, 08) Waleska Saltori Simpson states that Esi is:

a woman who appears to have both a well-paying career and a family, but who is not sure what she expects of a life lived in a modern world grounded in a traditional society. At the same time, she is sure that the traditional roles of wife and mother, the spheres of marriage and family, are no longer sufficient to ensure her happiness.⁷²

Simpson illustrates that Esi is achieving her own independence from her husband and family. As a result, she freely pursues her ambition without any constraint neither from her family nor from her husband. Besides, working as a professional at the Department of Urban Statistics takes up almost all her time, something that her husband, Oko, cannot stand. Esi confides to her friend, Opokuya:

As you know, my job can be very demanding sometimes. I have to prepare materials for ministers, permanent secretaries...you know, such people. And then I have to do a lot of travelling; inside the country, outside. Oko resented every minute he was free and I couldn't be with him. (Aidoo, 44)

Esi's husband, Oko, is irritated and frustrated by her wife's devotion to her career and her refusal to fulfill her traditional role as a wife and mother. Oko resents Esi's self and professional and his anger and discontent are related by the third person omniscient narrator through this passage:

He knew she was very much respected by her colleagues and other people who knew the work she did. So she should not really be trying so hard to impress: leaving the house virtually at dawn; returning home at dusk; often bringing work home. Then there are all these conferences. Geneva, Addis, Dakar one half of the year; Rome, Lusaka, Lagos the other half. (Aidoo, 08)

We notice that the author positively portrays her female characters. This positive representation of female characters can be understood insofar as a black feminist Aidoo concerns herself with the emancipation of women in most of her works. So, it can be said that most of her works are revolving around the idea of

⁷² Simpson, Waleska Saltori. “What Fashion of Loving Was She Ever Going to Consider Adequate? Subverting the Love Story in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes*.” *English in Africa* vol. 34 No. 1 (2007) : 155-171.

challenging and questioning the role of the African women in the modern African society. Indeed, to resist stereotypical representation of women as worthless and weak creatures who are emotional and unable to make decisions, the author creates strong-minded and rebellious female characters who break customs, question and challenge the values set by the male-dominated society. As it is illustrated in the above passage, Esi's job entails traveling to many parts of the world such as "Geneva, Addis, Dakar one half of the year; Rome, Lusaka, Lagos the other half." This makes the narrator wonder "is Esi too an African woman?" (Aidoo, 08) Here it should be highlighted that the urban African environment in which the novel is set is crucial, because it has enabled Ama Ata Aidoo to give a new image of black women in the modern African society by portraying her female characters as agents of change. Consequently, "urbanization allows Esi to strive for self-empowerment and self-actualization which reflect her liberation."⁷³

Likewise, Opokuya is depicted as an assertive woman. Throughout the novel, she is presented as an outspoken woman who is not afraid to express her stance on any issues that bother her. Unlike others, she always debates and argues her point of view and thoughts with her husband without fear, which is something not all women can do. As the voice of the narrator relates: "Every morning, Opokuya and her husband, Kubi, argue over "the car's movements" (Aidoo, 17) because even though Kubi Dakwa does not need the car in urgent, he always makes sure that he has it at his disposal. The voice of the third person omniscient narrator relates the frustration of Opokuya as she complains to her colleagues about her husband's unreasonable attitude in the following lines:

Opokuya thought this was absolutely ridiculous and even mad. A car is to be used. How was she to work full-time, and medical work at that, and look after a family as big as theirs without transportation of her own? Was he aware of the amount of running around one had to do to feed and clothe four growing children? (Aidoo, 17)

⁷³ Ekpong, Monique O. "Exploitation of the Urban African Novel for Women's Liberation in Ama Ata Aidoo's *Changes A Love Story*." *LWATI : A Journal of Contemporary Research*, 11(2) (2014) : 150-163.

Therefore, it can be said that Opokuya is a modern and traditional woman who takes both her career and family duties in a serious way. She is an assertive woman because she has a voice that draws attention to inequity and she refuses to allow herself to be suppressed. The narrator emphasizes that education helps a woman to become assertive and this aids her in her decision making and enables her not to yield to societal pressures. So, it appears that the employment of the third person narrative uncovers the feminist stance of Aidoo who uses it to convey an intimate and gender-focused perspective on the themes of love, marriage, sexuality within marriage, and motherhood. In addition, with this narrative mode she has defined the struggle of African women against oppressive aspect of cultural norms.

Similar to Dangarembga in *Nervous Conditions*, Nawal El Saadawi, too, uses the first person narrator to produce one of her most acclaimed book, *Women At Point Zero*. Firstly, in terms of structure the novel is divided into three parts. The first and the third parts are centered on the first narrator who happens to be the author of the novel. She tells her experience as a researcher and how she, after repeated attempts, meets Firdaus in the Qanatir prison. The second part, which is the longest, is centered on the main character's confession.

Set in the Egyptian society, *Women at Point Zero* chronicles the story of an Egyptian woman who is on the death row for having killed a pimp. One aspect to underline is that the novel is based on true story as Bilal Ahmad Dar points it out that *Woman At Point Zero* is: “a factual narrative and not a fabricated or invented tale.”⁷⁴ According to him, “the novel belongs to the genre of creative non- fiction or what we call as narrative non- fiction. creative non- fiction is a genre of literature that uses literary styles and techniques to create factually

⁷⁴ Dar, Bilal Ahmad. “Gendering the self : A Thematic Study of Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero*.” *New Man International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* Vol. 5 (2018)

accurate narrative.”⁷⁵ This realistic aspect of the novel is shown in the following lines:

This is the story of a real woman. I met her in Qantair Prison a few years ago. I was doing research on the personalities of a group of women prisoners and detainees convicted or accused of various offences. The prison doctor told me that this woman had been sentenced to death for killing a man. (Saadawi, 01)

The excerpt bears out that Saadawi has drawn inspiration from ‘the story of a real woman’ to write her book. The narrator in this passage above is Saadawi herself. She presents the homodiegetic narrator Firdaus, a successful prostitute who is about to be executed for having killed a pimp. The story changes course when the woman who has been introduced in the first part picks up the narration to tell the traumatic experience she has gone through: “let me speak. Do not interrupt me. I have no time to listen to you. They are coming to take me at six o’ clock this evening.” (Saadawi, 09) These lines show that *Woman at Point Zero* is a homodiegetic narrative in the sense that the narrator also a character in the story. The fact that Firdaus decides to recount her heartrending story to the doctor on the day of her execution is a way for her to “*destroy the emptiness of silence*” as Irène Assiba D’Almeida suggests. According to her:

Silence creates an emptiness generated by the knowledge of one's potential and the impossibility within patriarchal society of fully developing that potential. Women's social possibilities are linked with their ability to articulate their experience, understanding, and desire, an articulation that cannot be realized unless the silence imposed upon these women is destroyed.⁷⁶

Thus, Saadawi uses the homodiegetic narration in *Woman at Point Zero* to give the female character a chance to express what she has gone through. It is from the sad confession of Firdaus who is the homodiegetic narrator that the readers come to know about “the tragic, exploitative, and embattled life of Firdaus.”⁷⁷ By

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ D’Almeida, Irene Assiba. *Francophone African Women Writers : Destroying the Emptiness of Silence*. University Press of Florida, 1994.

⁷⁷ Dar, Bilal Ahmad. “Gendering the self : A Thematic Study of Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero*.” *New Man International Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies* Vol. 5 (2018)

opening up to the doctor, Firdaus gives out a detailed account of what happened to her from childhood up to adulthood. She takes the reader through a horrific experience she underwent in the hands of men. Firdaus explains the aversion she feels towards men which is the outcome of the male oppression she has experienced throughout her life. She narrates:

Each time I picked up a newspaper and found a picture of a man who was one of them, I would spit on it. I knew I was only spitting on a newspaper which I needed for covering the kitchen shelves. Nevertheless i spat, and then left the spit where it was to dry. ...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. And because I am a prostitute, I hid my fear under the layers of make-up. (Saadawi, 09-10)

The spitting of Firdaus on the newspaper that bears the image of men tells the extent to which she hates them. The reasons Firdaus wants to lift her hand and bring it smashing down on the face of every man are quite obvious. It is because she has been the subject of oppression from every man she has met. Firdaus even tells that she is filled with happiness to face her execution because the world in which she is living is fraught with injustice and oppressions. She confesses:

Tomorrow morning, I shall no longer be here. Nor will I be in any place known to man. 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 will fill me with pride, make me feel superior to everyone else including kings and princes. (Saadawi, 13)

Firdaus reveals that she welcome her execution with great relief as it means liberation from all sorts of oppressions she underwent in society. 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 for nothing. I fear nothing. Therefore, I am free." (Saadawi, 110) Firdaus brings into the open all the experiences that she underwent from being sexually molested by her uncle to being a successful prostitute who is about to be convicted for having killed a pimp. She describes how her uncle would run his fingers over the intimate parts of her body:

My galabeya often slipped 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. The next moment I could feel the hand travelling up my thigh with cautious, stealthy, trembling movement. Every time there was the sound of footstep at the entrance to our house, his hand would withdraw quickly. But whenever everything around us lapsed into silence, broken only every now and then by the snap of dry twigs between my fingers as I fed the oven, and the sound of his regular breathing reaching me from behind the book so that I could not tell whether he was snoring quietly in his sleep or wide awake and panting, his hand would continue to press against my thigh with grasping, almost brutal insistence. He was doing to me what Muhammadain had done to me before. In fact, he was doing even more... (Saadawi, 13)

Firdaus disclose the sexual exploitation she is subjected to in the hand of her uncle. This latter profits from the little girl's ignorance on sexual acts to continually assault her. Firdaus' uncle corroborates the idea that the family is sometimes the first pattern of sexual violence. He is the oppressor who uses every opportunity to exploit her niece.

However, Firdaus's first attempt of rebellion happens when she runs away to the streets. Her act figuratively means the escapes from the injustices of patriarchy. After escaping from Bayoumi's house and going to the streets, Firdaus describes how peaceful is the environment of the street which is a symbol of freedom :

At the end of the day I found myself walking down a street without knowing where I was. It was clean, paved thoroughfare, which ran along one bank of the Nil with tall trees on either side. The houses were surrounded by fences and gardens. The air which entered my lungs was pure and free of dust. I saw a stone bench facing the river. I sat down on it, and lift my face to the refreshing breeze. (Saadawi, 54)

Living on the street is a new form of freedom for Firdaus. She turns to prostitution in order to free herself from man's control and sexual exploitation. But when she comes across the pimp, Firdaus says: "I realize I was not nearly as free as I had hitherto imagined myself to be." (Saadawi, 103) In fact, as soon as Firdaus becomes a wealthy and successful prostitute, she attracts the attention of a man, Marzouk, a pimp, who wants to exploit her work in exchange for protection. The homodiegetic narrator gives a description of her relationship with the pimp:

So he began to share everything that I earned in fact to confiscate the larger part for himself. But each time he tried to come near me, I pushed him away, repeating: It's impossible. It's no use trying' Then he beat me up. And each time I would hear the same phrase repeated as he struck me: 'the word does not exist in me'. I discovered he was dangerous pimp who controlled a number of prostitutes, and I was one of them. He had friends everywhere in every profession, and whom he spent his money generously...I realized I was not nearly as free as I had hitherto imagined myself to. (Saadawi, 102-103)

In this part of the story, Firdaus describes her relationship with the pimp as the relationship of a slave to a master because she has to work for him for days and nights without pay. Though she is kept hostage and oppressed by the pimp, she constantly struggles to free herself from this burden of oppression. She narrates:

One day I said to myself I can't go on like this. I packed in a small paper bag and got ready to leave, but suddenly he appeared, standing in front of me. 'Where are you going?' He asked. 'I'm going to look for work. I still have my secondary school certificate. 'And who said you are not working?' 'I want to choose the work I want to do'. Who says anyone in this whole wide world choose the work he wants to do?' I don't want to be anybody's slave. 'And who says there is anyone who is not anyone's slave?' There are only two categories of people, Firdaus, masters and slaves. 'In that case I want to be one of the masters and not one the slaves. 'How can you be one of the masters? A woman on her own cannot be a master, let alone a woman who is a prostitute. Can't you see you are asking for impossible? 'The word impossible does not exist for me,' I said. (Saadawi, 103-104)

This excerpt highlights the determination of the character to liberate herself from the clutches of the pimp. She is ready to use every possible means available to be free. She is the main reason that leads her to kill the pimp. She divulges:

I raised the knife and buried it deep in his neck, pulled it out of his neck and then thrust it deep into his chest, pulled it out of his chest and plunged it deep into his belly. I stuck the knife into almost every part of his body. I was astonished to find how easily my hand moved as I thrust the knife into his flesh, and pulled it out almost without effort (Saadawi, 104).

The killing of the pimp by Firdaus is symbolic. It is symbol of liberation from the societal norms. For her, killing the pimp has set her free from the oppression she has undergone in the hands of all men she has come across with. The retaliation by Firdaus is a clear indication that she is metaphorically obtaining revenge for

too many years of abuse. She wrests the knife from her pimp's hands and plunges it into his throat. She repeats this movement in every part of his body, in and out his stomach, in and out his chest. According to Fedwa Malti-Douglas:

This repeated act of penetration, graphically described with the pulling out and pulling in of an instrument, is nothing short of a reversal and repeated male acts of aggression that for years metaphorically killed Firdaus⁷⁸

So the killing of the pimp “has a cathartic effect on Firdaus: such violent action was Firdaus’ first action as a “conscious subject”. Almost a metaphorical act for Firdaus’ emancipation, such violent action gave her freedom, and it allowed Firdaus to find her own identity.”⁷⁹ It becomes crystal-clear that Firdaus, through the killing of the Marzuk, avenges herself on all the men who have oppressed her from childhood up to adulthood. She is a radical representation of women’s struggle for emancipation. Therefore, the use of homodiegetic narrator by Nawal El Saadawi is appropriate in bringing to the fore the courageous voice of a woman who is ready to tackle her oppressor. Such portrayal of the struggle of African women against patriarchal subjugation is further analyzed the characterization.

3.2 The promotion of gender equality through characterization

Characterization is part of the narrative techniques deployed by Tsitsi Dangarembga, Ama Ata Aidoo and Nawal El Saadawi to encode their message. Characters are distinctive personalities involved in the events described by the story. According to *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms* the term characterization refers to “the various means by which an author describes and develops the characters in a literary work.”⁸⁰ Thus, the analysis of characters is then instrumental in a study of narrative structure. In the three novels under study,

⁷⁸ Malti-Douglas, Fedwa. *Men, Women and Gods*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995.

⁷⁹ Frenze, Giunti. “On the Condition of the colonized Woman : the nervous condition of Firdaus in Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero* (1983).” *Deportate, esuli, profughe* (2006): 430-434.

⁸⁰ Murfin, Ross, Supriya M. Ray. *The Bedford Glossary of Critical and Literary Terms*. Boston: Bedford, 1998.

the analysis of characters is all the more relevant since it provides more insight into the predicament that befalls women and the struggle for emancipation in a male-dominated society. An in-depth exploration demonstrates that the characters depicted in *Nervous Conditions*, *Changes : A Love Story* and *Woman at Point Zero* serve as means by which their thematic concerns are wrapped.

In *Nervous Conditions*, for instance, Dangarembga “focuses in particular on a group of women who struggle to be heard and to succeed in a world that often aggressively seeks to silence and control them.”⁸¹ These women challenge some of the decisions that are the prerogative of the patriarch and battle to break out of the role of domesticity.

Tambudzai is the central female character and narrator in *Nervous Conditions*. She is a young thirteen-year-old girl attempting to overcome the obstacle of a colonial, patriarchal society. As a young woman, Tambu faces discrimination and oppression in her family on the ground of her sexuality. However daring and determined, she boldly challenges some restrictive norms and forms of authority that seeks to thwart her journey toward personal empowerment. In this regard, Eustace Palmer states:

While [her brother] takes it for granted that he will be educated and will enter the wider world of knowledge, opportunity, and development, Tambu knows that the odds of prejudice and tradition are heavily stacked against her and that she has to put up a determined struggle⁸²

This quote from Palmer echoes the idea that Dangarembga’s text investigates the unequal power relations between men and women in the Sigauke family which is deeply entrenched in tradition. Through the novel, the reader is made aware that male offspring in the family are prioritized over the female one. The unequal treatment is seen in the privileging of boy’s education while girls are taught how to be a good wife. Dangarembga presents us with a female character, Tambu who

⁸¹ Moslehuddin, Tasmia. “Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions* : The Emancipation of Women in Africa.” *Determination of Home Loan Repayment Performance Company...* (2011) : 78-84.

⁸² Palmer, Eustace. *Of War and Women, Oppression and Optimism: New Essays on the African Novel*. Eritrea: Africa World P, 2008.

displays resilience and resourcefulness in the face of a myriad of obstacles in her desperate quest for education.

Tambu is denied access to education because she is a girl. Instead, it is her brother Nhamo, the male child who is “singled out for preferential treatment and given the privilege of living at the mission with his father’s elitist educated brother, Babamukuru, to facilitate his education.”⁸³ Tambu is indignant that her parents do not endorse her schooling. First, her father Jeremiah always finds ways to discourage her daughter each time she raises the issue of her schooling. Tambu says ;

My father thought I should not mind. Is that anything to worry about? Ha-a-a, it’s nothing he reassured me, with his usual ability to jump whichever way was easiest. Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables. (Dangarembga, 15)

Tambu’s father is not supportive of his daughter’s ambition to get education like Nhamo. Besides, when she goes to complain to her mother that her father thinks she does not need to be educated, Tambu realizes that the latter is of the same opinion as her father. She confesses:

My mother was too old to be disturbed by my childish nonsense. She tried to diffuse some of it by telling me many things, by explaining that my father was right because even Maiguru knew how to cook and clean and grow vegetable. (Dangarembga, 16)

Therefore, seeking her mother’s help was of no avail because Tambu only gets discouraged by Mainini when she tells her:

And do you think you are so different, so much better than the rest of us? Accept your lot and enjoy what you can of it. There is nothing else to be done.’ I wanted support, I wanted encouragement; warnings if necessary, but constructive ones. (Dangarembga, 20)

Besides, Tambu could not count on the help of her brother Nhamo whose cutting words shocked the narrator: “Nhamo laughed when I related my story...he shrugged, shocking me with this disrespectful language that I had not heard

⁸³ Grace Eche Okereke, Itang Ede Egbung. « Significant Others, Family Responsibility and the Freedom of the African Child in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s *Nervous Conditions*. » *Mediterranean journal of social Science* vol 5. No 20 (2014) : 2059-2066.

before.” (Dangarembga, 21) It becomes obvious that Tambu’s family tries to stifle the girl’s dream of becoming an educated and independent woman. In addition to that, “it had been her uncle’s idea that Nhamo should go to school” (Dangarembga, 04) Despite the injustices and discrimination she face on the basis of her sex, the female protagonist does not accept her mother’s fatalism. On the contrary, she is more than ever to pursue her dream of getting an education. She is able to come up with the money for her school fees by growing her own mealies to raise. Tambu gets the chance to go to school as the result of her brother’s death. She leaves the homestead to live with her uncle at the mission and describes her move as an emancipating step for herself, and a lesson for others women. She narrates:

It was up to them to learn the important lesson that circumstances were not immutable, not burden so binding that it could not be dropped. The honour for teaching them this lesson was mine. I claimed it all, for here I was, living proof of the moral. (Dangarembga, 58)

Thus Tambu, despite her father’s sexism and her mother’s fatalistic acceptance, has fulfilled her dream of being educated. So by succeeding in attending school, the character of Tambu is a symbol of the possibility for girls to challenge the traditional role of women.

Another female character is Nyasha, Tambudzai’s cousin. Nyasha is depicted as one of the most complex and rebellious female character in *Nervous Conditions*. One striking characteristic that makes Nyasha stand out from the other female characters is her mental agility and precocious intelligence. She is presented as a girl who feels she must be able to speak her mind. Nyasha is the female character who exemplifies the ‘nervous condition’ in the novel, for she finds it difficult to negotiate the western and the Shona culture. In fact, at a tender age Nyasha moves to England with her parents when they were granted scholarships for their Master’s degree. After having spent her childhood years in England, she moved back to Rhodesia with her family. As a result, Nyasha experiences difficulties fitting into her extended family and their Shona culture.

She has forgotten about their cultural customs such as traditional greetings. More significantly, she has forgotten how to speak Shona. Tambu relates the difficulty she experiences trying to strike up a conversation with her cousin:

I did my best to talk to Nyasha when she came. I racked my brains for odd English words that I could slip into my sentences to help her understand what I was saying, but it was no use. She did not talk beyond a quick stuttered greeting. Nor did she smile any more at all. Most of the time, much to Babamukuru's irritation, she stayed close to Maiguru, refusing my invitation to play pada or pound maize or take a trip to Nyamarira. When she did venture away from her mother, our games were strained and silent. In the end I felt stupid and humiliated for making such a fuss over my cousin, but it was difficult to leave her alone. I missed the bold, ebullient companion I had who had gone to England but not returned from there. (Dangrembga, 52)

Tambu's words reveals that, Nyasha lives through identity crisis, having been brought up in the western way. She is torn between two conflicting cultures. Additionally, the main obstacle to Nyasha's happiness is her father Babamukuru, a traditional man who does not accept his daughter's disobedience to him. Actually, 'Nyasha's exposure to British culture which allows the child multi-dimensional freedom under the law, and their attainment of greater awareness as they develop and grow physically and mentally, set her towards a collision course with their patronizing authoritarian father.'⁸⁴ She refuses to conform to feminine ascriptions as Babamukuru expected her to. She speaks her mind and argues vehemently with her father. Babamukuru, representing patriarchal ideology in the novel, feels that his authority is being challenged by her daughter. As a result, he begins to heap verbally and physically violence on Nyasha. In one of their arguments, Babamukuru calls her daughter a whore because she has stayed out late at a party and was speaking to a white boy. Tambu narrates how she has felt about her cousin being accused of a whore:

I feeling bad for her and thinking how dreadfully familiar that scene had been, with Babamukuru condemning Nyasha to whoredom, making her a victim of her femaleness, just as I had felt victimised at home in the days when Nhamo went to school and I grew my maize. The

⁸⁴ Grace Eche Okereke, Itang Ede Egbung. "Significant Others, Family Responsibility and the Freedom of the African Child in Tsitsi Dangrembga's *Nervous Conditions*." *Mediterranean journal of social Science* vol 5. No 20 (2014) : 2059-2066.

victimisation, I saw, was universal. It didn't depend on poverty, on lack of education or on tradition. It didn't depend on any of the things I had thought it depended on. Men took it everywhere with them. Even heroes like Babamukuru did it. And that was the problem.... But what I didn't like was the way all the conflicts came back to this question of femaleness. Femaleness as opposed and inferior to maleness. (Danagrembga, 115-116)

This shows that Babamukuru disapproves of her daughter's expression of her sexuality. In her insightful analysis, Tambu emphasizes that the traditional culture is conservative, sexist, patriarchal, regarding women as second-class citizens. But even though Nyasha gets brutalized by her father, she is still determined to defy subjugation and challenges his male authority. The following passage shows that she takes Tambu into confidence about her conflict with her father:

'You know Tambu,' she began again painfully, 'I guess he's right, right to dislike me. It's not his fault, it's me But I can't help it. Really, I can't. I'm just not made that way. Why not? Why can't I just take it like everybody else does? I ought to take it, but really, I can't.' (Dangarembga, 190)

Nyasha is simply unable to allow herself to be crushed by masculine domination. She will do everything in her power to fight it even if she does not wholly succeed.

While it is important to illustrate the role that Tambu and her cousin Nyasha play in the novel, the representations of other female characters such as Mainini, Muguru and Lucia are also significant for this paper. In *Nervous Conditions*, Dangarembga illustrates how MaShingayi and Maiguru who sacrifice their lives for their husbands, families and children get nothing as rewards. Mashingayi is Tambudzai's mother and the wife of Jeremiah. She represents the woman who passively accepts the men's hegemony in her family while continuing the fulfillment of the traditional African feminine role. Additionally, Mainini as shown previously, is under the weight of patriarchal domination. She complies to the position in the traditional norms of her shona society. when Tambu complains about the fact that she wants to be educated, Mainini her answers that :

This business of womanhood is a heavy burden," as she knows about the condition of the woman. She said. How it could not be ? Aren't we the one who bear children ? When it is like that you can't just decide

today I want to do this, tomorrow I want to do that, the next day I want to be educated! When there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them. And these things are not easy ; you have to start learning them early, from a very early age. (Dangaremba, 16)

Mainini is entrapped in the patriarchal assumptions that women's place is at work, tending their husbands and children with no opinion of their own to express. Unlike Mainini, Maiguru is as Tambu states "a kind different kind of woman from my mother...who was not poor and had not been crushed by the weight of womanhood." (Dangaremba, 16) She is a strong, educated, and successful professional woman who holds a Master's degree from a Western university. Ironically, Maiguru's education does not help her escape the patriarchal authority of her husband. In spite of her European Education she still fulfills gender expected role of women as obedient. But unlike Ma'Shingayi, there is one moment in *Nervous Conditions* where Maiguru decides to break the chain of silence and let her voice be heard in the homestead. She confronts her husband about the lack of respect and recognition she suffers from in the family :

I am tired of being a housekeeper for them. I am tired of being nothing in a home I am working myself sick to support. And now even that Lucia can walk in here and tell me that the things she discusses with you, here in my home, are none of my business. I am sick of it Baba Chido. Let me tell you, i have had enough. (Dangaremba, 173-174)

For Dangaremba Maiguru's liberation from the yoke of patriarchal oppression was possible when she decided to break the shackles of silence. She leaves the homestead which, through a feminist perspective, is the symbol of her entrapment. Tambu remarks that "to our surprise, Maiguru did leave, by bus, early the next morning. She did not slink away in the dark, but quit openly pack a suitcase, put on her travelling clothes, had her breakfast and left." (Dangaremba, 173) in addition, Dangaremba illustrates how Lucia's character displays a more radical stance in the fight against social norms. Lucia is portrayed as a strong-willed woman who is referred by Babamukuru "like a man herself" (Dangaremba, 171) because she always "says the first thing that comes into her head." (Ibid) Lucia's voice is not stifled because she speaks up for herself. Her

emancipation is feared by the weaker men in her family. For instance, Lucia challenges patriarchy when she gate-crashes into the family meeting and attacks Takesure who accuses her of being a witch in the presence of all the elders:

It was no use telling Lucia not to go into the house, so we did not even try. We just watched her as she strode in there, her right eye glittering as it caught the yellow paraffin flame, glittering dangerously at Takesure, who wisely shrank back into his corner of the sofa. 'Fool!' Snorted Lucia, looming over him, arms akimbo. 'Fool!' And she whirled to face Babamukuru, so that now her left eye glittered. 'Look at him Babamukuru! Look at him trying to hide because I'm here'. Takesure looked braver when he had only Lucia's back to contend with, but his reprieve was brief. 'If you have an issue with me,' Lucia advised him, 'stand up and let us sort it out plainly.' In two strides she was beside him and, securing an ear between each finger and thumb, she dragged him to his feet. 'Let me go, let me go,' he moaned. (Dangaremba, 173-174)

Although Lucia's attack was directed at Takesure, her challenge is aimed at the whole gathering of elders. Raising Takesure by his ears is a symbolic way of reprimanding the whole gathering for trying a case without the accused. She expresses her disapproval that a meeting about her 'pregnancy' was being held without her. In addition to that, Lucia is a female character whose voice is not stifled by the patriarchal authority because she always dares to speak up herself. The day she visited Babamukuru's home, she was angry because Tambu was punished for not partaking in her parents wedding. Consequently, Lucia tells Babamukuru bluntly her disapproval of his punishment of Tambu:

Did you ask her what was on her mind ? She demanded. Did you ask my sister whether she wished her daughter was present ? Even the wedding. Did you ask my sister if she wanted that wedding ? i do not see that the child did you so much wrong by preferring not to be there. (Dangaremba, 171)

Through the portrayal of her female characters, Dangaremba illustrates how each female subject's journey differs from the other in their mutual struggle for liberation.

Similarly to Dangaremba, Ama Ata Aidoo challenges the traditional representation of African woman by crafting female characters who question and

challenge their positions and roles. In *Changes: A Love Story*, she spotlights the dilemma faced by three urban Ghanaian women who daily struggle to negotiate tradition and modernity.

Esi Sekyi is Aidoo's main character in the novel. She is a self-empowered, strong-willed woman who works at the Department of Urban Statistics in a ministry in Accra, Ghana. She lives with her husband, Oko with whom she has a daughter, Ogyaanowa. However, Esi is not happy in her married life because she did not marry Oko out of love, but out of gratitude as the narrator relates: "...looking back she didn't admit, even to herself, that perhaps what she felt for Oko in the first years of their married life was gratitude more than anything else." (Aidoo, 41) Besides, the issue of gender expected roles has always been the bone of contention between the couple. In the beginning of the novel, Oko complains about the refusal of Esi to assume her wifely duties. According to the omniscient narrator, Esi "was a great cook, who complained endlessly any time she had to enter the kitchen." (Aidoo, 08) She also refuses to bear any more children. The narrator comments on the fact that Oko gets almost nothing out of the marriage:

Two solid years of courtship, six years of marriage. And what he got out of it ? Little. Nothing. No affection. Not even plain warmth. Nothing except one little daughter ! Esi had never state dit categorically that she didn't want any more children. But she was on those dreadful birth control thing : pills, loops or whatever. She had gone on them soon after the child was born, and no amount of reasoning and pleading had persuaded her to go off them. He wanted other children, at least one more...a boy if possible. But one more girl would have been welcome. (Aidoo, 08)

Thus, Esi neglects her wifely duties. She is devoted more to her career than to her marriage. So during one of their dispute, Oko, out of anger, rapes Esi. The latter decides to break off the marriage when she realizes that "what she had gone through with Oko had been marital rape." (Aidoo, 11) But Esi's plight did not end with the divorce, for she has difficulty to explain the reasons why she wants to leave Oko. For instance, when she went to see her mother and grandmother to

inform them about her desire to divorce Oko, they both react angrily: “what is the problem? Both her grandmother and her mother really screamed this time: the former with her walking stick raised as though to strike her, and the latter bursting into tears... Are you mad?” (Aidoo, 38) the two women take Esi as a fool because “how could she tell them she did not want oko.” (Ibid) Their attitude can be understood in so far as marital rape is a concept unknown in their culture. In addition, when Esi brings up the issue of love, her grandmother answers her question in the following terms:

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

Indeed, Esi’s mother and grandmother’s words drive her to despair “as she got into her car to drive back to Accra.” (Aidoo, 39) She went to the village to talk to them hoping that they would back up her decision to get divorced. Moreover, when her husband’s people find out that Esi wants to divorce, they verbally attack her, calling her a “semi-barren witch and told her that they thought their son and brother was well rid of her thank God.” (Aidoo, 70) In the face of this dilemma, Esi wonders :

Why is life so hard on the professional African woman? “ Esi asked, her voice showing that she was a little puzzled. Why is life so hard on the non professional African woman? Eh? Esi, isn’t life even harder for the poor rural and urban African woman? „I think life is just hard on women, “ Esi agreed, trying to calm Opokuya down. But remember it is always harder for some other women somewhere else, “ Opokuya insisted. Both of them sighed (Aidoo, 50-51)

Through this extract, Ama Ata Aidoo tries to show the changing roles of women and how they actually struggle in order to combine the emergence of changing roles with the traditional ones. Esi’s inability to balance between her motherhood and career is unacceptable to her husband and fellow women. Despite the

struggles she is facing, ‘Esi had carried out her determination to leave and even asked for divorce.’ (Aidoo, 70)

Compared to Esi Sekyi, Opokuya Dakwa is also a self-assertive woman who works as a state-registered nurse and a midwife. She is married to Kubi Dakwa and is a mother of four children, three girls and a boy. It is noticed throughout the novel that, unlike her best friend Esi, Opokuya is able to manage both her duties as a wife, mother, home keeper and her career as a midwife. She does not seek to divorce from her chauvinistic husband who would have nothing to do with the kitchen, and above all does not want to let her use the car to run errands. Nevertheless, Opokuya in no way epitomize the traditional submissive wife. Caring for her wifely duties does not prevent her from liberating herself from the stereotypical roles of women. She is a daring woman who always expresses her opinion on any given issue and always does what feels right to her. The narrator describes this attitude of Opokuya by noting:

Compared to Esi, Opokuya was definitely fat. Not that she cared. She moved like lightning, and laughed through the days of the year. Any time the question of her obesity cropped up, she made it quite clear that the fact she was fat had nothing to do with knowing what to do about it...In those years...Opokuya had thought hard about the politics of population and fat. She had concluded that the way population, especially, was being handled in relation to Africans left her frightened. It seemed to her that any time someone else showed such a keen interest in your not making children, then for sure, he is not just interested in your good health, your prosperity, and the good health and prosperity of your children. (Aidoo, 14-15)

This statement buttresses the self-affirmation of Opokuya. She is described as an educated woman who does not shy away from voicing out her point of view and has the freedom to make her own choice in life without any restriction. This freedom of speech allows Opokuya to even argue with her husband over the use of the car. Now being fed up with having to dispute with Kubi over the same problem. The narrator gives a detailed account of the conversation between Opokuya and Esi regarding the desire of Opokuya to buy her friend’s car:

...Opokuya asked Esi what she she planned to do with her old car. Esi told her the truth : that she had not thought about it. 'sell it me' said Opokuya...Esi was taken aback. Sell that useless thing to Opokuya of all people ? 'Opoku, it is scrape!' Well sel lit to me as scrap... 'Opoku, if you want the car you can have it for free' she surrendered. But Opokuya was not having any of that. Before Esi left the Sweet Breezes Hill, they had agreed on a price that was reasonable enough for Opokuya to have the car for next to nothing and still maintain her dignity. (Aidoo, 154)

In the end, Opokuya is able to put an end to morning disputes with her husband by purchasing her own car, thereby proving her ability to be both an independent, modern woman, and a responsible wife. Concurring with the same idea, Elia Nada in her article *"To Be an African Working Woman" : Levels of Feminist Consciousness in Ama Ata Aidoo's "Changes"* emphasizes: "tired of depending on her husband's goodwill for rides, for example, she proposes to buy Esi's old car, thus asserting her physical and financial independence from Kubi, as well as her desire for greater freedom of movement."⁸⁵

Another character of Aidoo is Ali Kondey's first wife and mother of three children Fusena, a schoolteacher. Ali and Fusena attended the same teacher training college. Prior to her marriage with Ali, Fusena was an intelligent and ambitious young woman who wanted to complete her degree and continued her teaching career. However, following her marriage to Ali, she gives up her career as a teacher and follows her husband to London, where she stays home giving birth and nursing their children while her husband is in school. According to the narrator Fusena:

was busy being pregnant, nursing another infant, helping Ali to find them somewhere to live and making a home. By the end of those two years, she could not even remember how it felt to be in a school room. Clearly, to go back to teaching after those years and what they had contained was going to be hard enough even if Ali had not kept telling her that it was not really necessary.

⁸⁵ Nada, Elia. *"To Be an African Working Woman" : Levels of Feminist Consciousness in Ama Ata Aidoo's "Changes"*. *Research in African Literatures* Vol. 30. No. 2(1999) : 136-147.

So Fusena has abandoned her teaching career to become a full-time wife and mother. Unlike Esi and Opokuya, she epitomizes the obedient traditional woman who accepts what she is told by her husband and the patriarchal society. Despite the sacrifices Fusena has made for the sake of her marriage, her husband, Ali, decides to take a second wife. And now “here was Ali telling her that he was thinking of making a woman with a university degree his second wife. So Allah, what was she supposed to say? What was she supposed to do?” (Aidoo, 67) Fusena resents the fact that she lets herself be talked into giving up her higher education to have children. She feels betrayed by Ali who decides to take a second wife. Worse, she realizes too late that she can do nothing about her situation. As a result, she submits to the role of a dependent housewife:

The rain was not the only problem Fusena had with her life as Ali's wife in London. One rainy day, it occurred to her that life should offer more than marriage. That is, if the life she was leading was in fact marriage. To begin with, she was beginning to admit to herself that by marrying Ali, she had exchanged a friend for a husband. She felt the loss implied in this admission keenly, and her grief was great. The first time that this hit her, she actually sat down and wept. She also knew immediately that there was nothing she could do about her situation... Fusena had stared hard at London and admitted that she had another problem. It was this business of Ali getting more and more educated while she stayed the same. Sometimes she truly felt desperate. For whereas she could console herself that she would leave the wetness of London behind her once they went back home, she knew the other problems would stay with her. (Aidoo, 66)

Fusena has reduced herself to the role of the traditional woman who submits to the will of her husband and the patriarchal society. As illustrated by the narrator, she upbraids herself for having sacrificed her career in order to play the role of the ideal housewife. In this regard, Ibrahima Ndiaye foregrounds:

More than the climate, distance, and solitude, it is the time Fusena has wasted before and during her London years, which she could have otherwise devoted to her studies, that makes her feel extremely bitter. Her frustrations have taken the form of thwarted abilities and ambitions sacrificed to the widely held "good Muslim wife" notion.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Ndiaye, Ibrahima. "Space, Time and Empowerment." *CASE STUDIES JOURNAL* (2013) : 1-11

As Ndiaye's words suggest, Fusena's frustration and bitterness do not result from the climate or the new environment she finds herself, they lie actually in the time she has wasted before and during her years in London, which she could have devoted to her studies. Additionally, she feels a lot of resentment due to the fact her husband wants to marry a woman who has a university degree despite the decision she has made to sacrifice her career for her family.

Likewise Nawal El Saadawi uses characterization to expose the painful reality of Arab woman in her Egyptian patriarchal society. Her novel *Wamen at Point Zero* deals with the oppression of a female character Firdaus, a prostitute prisoner awaiting execution for having murdered a pimp. The novel mirrors the various stages of the main protagonist's life from childhood to adulthood which is replete with sexual exploitation, abuse and oppression. From childhood, Firdaus' oppression begins in her home. She tells her childhood life experience where she was oppressed by her real biological father. She narrates:

My father, a poor peasant farmer, who could neither read nor write, knew very few things in life How to grow crops, how to sell buffalo poisoned by his enemy before it died, how to exchange his virgin daughter for dowry when there was still time, how to be quicker than his neighbor in stealing from the fields once the crop was ripe. How to bend over the headman's hand and pretend to kiss it, how to beat his wife and make her bite the dust each night. (Saadawi, 10)

This extract presents the ruthless nature of the protagonist's father who stands for patriarchy. Firdaus describes her father as being an illiterate, ignorant and lazy father who uses his patriarchal power to exploit his family members. In addition to that, the young girl recounts the clitoridectomy she undergoes at a young age. She discloses that her mother "brought a woman who was carrying a small knife or maybe a razor blade. They cut off a piece of flesh from between my thighs I cried all night" (Saadawi, 12) This unhuman practice has left a devastating effect on the sexual life of the young female. Since she underwent female genital mutilation, she is unable to experience sexual pleasure again. Firdaus reveals that "a part of me, of my being, was gone and would never return" (Saadawi, 13)

After her father, Firdaus is sexually exploited by her uncle who, under the pretext of reading a book “rubs her thighs and gradually moves upwards to her private part.”⁸⁷ Later on, her uncle forces Firdaus to marry a sixty-year old rich widower, Sheik Mahmoud. In her married life, Firdaus is subjected to a physical and sexual abuse in the hand of her husband. She is constantly beaten and mistreated by this old man. She narrates:

He had retired from his job, was without work, and without friends. He never went out of the house or sat at the coffee house; lest he obliged to pay a few piasters for a cup of coffee. All day long he remained by my side in the house, or in the kitchen watching as I cooked or washed. If I dropped the packet of soap powder and spilled a few grains on the floor, he would jump up from his chair and complain at me for being careless. And if I pressed a little more firmly than usual on the spoon as I took ghee out of the tin for cooking, he would scream in anger, and draw my attention to the fact that its contents were diminishing much more rapidly than they should. When the dust man came to empty the refuse from the bin, he would go throughout carefully before putting it on the landing. One day he discovered some leftover of scraps of food, and started yelling at me so loudly that all the neighbors could hear. After this incident, he got a habit of beating me whether he had a reason for it or not. (Saadawi, 46)

This detailed account of Firdaus’ daily life at her husband’s house shows that she lives like a slave. Her every move was constantly watched by her husband who even beats her at the slightest thing. But to escape the brutal beating she suffers, Firdaus runs away from her husband’s house to the street. Nevertheless, her life on the street is not different from the one she experienced her husband’s house. Firdaus is sexually assaulted and physically abused by Bayoumi, a coffee shop owner she meets on the street. She represents a sexual object in the eye of this man, who not only enslaves her for his sexual pleasure but allows his friends to sexually abuse her too. Firdaus narrates:

Then one night his body seemed heavier than before, and his breath smelt different, so I opened my eyes. The face above me was not Bayoumi. Who are you? ‘Who are you?’ I said Bayoumi’ He answered.

⁸⁷ Fwangyil, Gloria Ada. “Cradle to Grave : An analysis of Female Oppression in Nawal El Saadawi’s Woman at Point Zero.” *An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies Bahir Dar* Vol. 1 (1) (2012) : 15-28.

I insisted 'you are not Bayoumi. 'Who are you? What difference does it make? Bayoumi and I are one (Saadawi, 53)

What comes to fore is that the female character is turned into a subject of oppression from every man she meets. To Bayoumi, Firdaus is just a sex object. Thus, the oppressive patriarchal system forces her to become a prostitute as a way out of social injustice and oppression she faces. After becoming a successful prostitute, Firdaus meets Marzuk, a pimp who wants to exploit her body and have a share with her earnings. She recounts:

I thought I had escaped from men, but the man who came this time practised a well-known male profession. He was a pimp. I thought I could buy him off with a sum of money, the way I did with the police. But he refused the money and insisted on sharing my earnings. He said every prostitute has a pimp to protect her from other pimps, and from the police. That is what I'm going to do.' 'But I can protect myself' I said. 'There isn't a woman on earth who can protect herself.' I don't need your protection.' You cannot do without protection, otherwise the profession exercised by husbands and pimps would die out. I refused your threats. But I'm not threatening you. I'm just giving you a little of advice.' And if I don't want your advice ? The I may be obliged to threaten. I went to the police only to discover that he had more 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. (Saadawi, 100-101)

Firdaus thought that by becoming a prostitute she would attain freedom and liberation from male expression. But the encounter with the pimp makes her realizes that she is still in the clutches of men exploitation. So being fed up with the injustice she is constantly subjected to, Firdaus kills the pimp in self-defense.

When the police comes to arrest her, she boldly confesses:

'I am a killer, but I've committed no crime. Like you, I kill only criminals...No woman can be a criminal. To be a criminal one must be a man. 'I am saying that you are all criminals, all of you: the fathers, the uncles, the husbands, the pimps, the lawyers, the doctors, the journalists, and all men of all professions.' (Saadawi, 109)

Thus, after having killed the pimp, Firdaus is taken to prison. She recalls that: "they put steel handcuffs around my wrists, and let me off to prison." (Saadawi, 110) Besides, she reveals that the prison's "windows and the doors were always

shut.” (Ibid) For men are afraid of her because she “‘was the only woman who had torn the mask away, and exposed the ugly face of their reality.’” (Ibid) Firdaus says that : “My life means their death, my death means their life...The freedom I enjoy fills them with anger” (Ibid) As the above sentence illustrates, killing the man is for Firdaus synonymous with her freedom and liberation, despite she is sentenced to death. It symbolizes her victory over the patriarchal domination. That is why she feels no remorse in facing her death because she says that: “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 for nothing. I fear nothing. Therefore I am free.” (Ibid)

All in all, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Ama Ata Aidoo and Nawal El Saadawi have leaed on narrative strategies to bring to surface the predicament that befalls women, and the various ways in which they struggle for self-empowerment. To carry out such project, they have focused on the aesthetic devices such as narrative enunciation and characters study to spotlight the horrific experiences women undergo in society deeply entrenched in traditional norms.

Conclusion

In this study, our purpose has been to analyse the condition of women in African feminist writings, with a focus on *Nervous Conditions*, *Changes: A Love Story* and *Woman at Point Zero*. The analysis reveals that Tsitsi Dangarembga, Ama Ata Aidoo and Nawal El Saadawi, as icons of African women literature, are committed to laying bare the ways in which women's lives are oppressed in male-dominated society

Dangarembga, Aidoo and Saadawi ably bring to surface the plight of the African woman by uncovering her daily struggle in a society which favours man in all aspects of life. They bring social awareness by examining the various issues women face in their society.

For decades, African women have undergone multifarious forms of oppressions to a large extent due to traditional practices and cultural norms that serve men's interests. They are repressed and persecuted through oppressive patriarchal beliefs and old norms that give boys privileges to the disadvantage of girls, nurturing in the latter a feeling of inferiority. In addition, female gender has been for long time a subject of many stereotypical perceptions. Their voices are often stifled, for they are not allowed to express their opinions, they are denied education because their ultimate goal is to take care of the household chores, the children and their husband.

The first chapter has been devoted to cast light on the predicament that befalls women by having a cursory survey on the issue of marriage and patriarchal oppression. The first chapter has provided us with a better understanding that women's subjugation is hidden under the cover of the institution of marriage and patriarchy, making it difficult for them to untie the chain of oppression. Marriage stands out by far as an institution that works against women self-assertion. Therefore, through a feminist perspective, such institution

perpetuates the oppression of women. It is one part of the multifarious oppressive forces that assailed her gender. This is what account for the fact that it is an issue which is prevalent in some African female literary discourse. The three female writers, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Ama Ata Aidoo and Nawal El Saadawi through their novels, *Nervous Conditions*, *Changes and Woman at Point Zero* have tackled the issue from different perspectives.

For example, in *Nervous Conditions* characters women are faced with sufferings related to marriage, and various cultural practices associated with it, which demean them. We have shown that both the main protagonist's aunt and mother, Maiguru and Mainini are crushed by the weight of marriage. They have accepted their passive role in their marriage and made sacrifices to keep their husband happy. Therefore, they are trapped in the nest of male domination. Moreover, the fact Tambudzai is denied opportunities to receive education is reflective of the assumption that the sole purpose of a girl's life is to make life better for the male child or her husband and family. Tambu has to give up her desire for an education because her family runs out of money for both her and her brother's school fees. Further to this, she is expected to be a wife and mother, so her education is deemed to be of little benefit to her family.

As far as Aidoo is concerned, she presents the plight of educated African women who are caught between tradition and modernity. Their struggle to change the position and role of African women and their abilities to achieve an equal part regarding their marriage in a society that favours men is at the core of their misfortune. Indeed, the female characters such as Esi, Opokuya and Fusena have been seen fighting against the unjust traditions that undermine their chances for social advancement. Even though Esi and her best friend Opokuya have avoided being crushed by the weight of womanhood, Fusena, on the contrary, despite her education, did not succeed to break free from the clutches of patriarchal domination.

As for Saadawi, she brings to the forefront the verbal and physical oppression women undergo in the hands of their husband. Like Dangarembga, Saadawi depicts the extent to which young women in societies are viewed as destined for marriage. Women are not accorded the right to independent selfhood and neither are they granted the space to express their own needs and desires. Her female character and main protagonist, Firdaus is pushed into an early marriage as a result of her uncle's greed. She is married off to an old man Sheikh Mahmoud who beats her from dawn to dusk until she runs away from her oppressive marriage.

The second chapter has demonstrated that Tsitsi Dangarembga, Ama Ata Aidoo and Nawal El Saadawi are considered as an active, vibrant voice in the feminist movement in modern African literature. Their works contribute significantly to give women the place they deserve be it in society, home or the literary world. Thus, this chapter has shown how these female writers deal with Feminsim in their respective novels.

It is common knowledge that African women are under the sway of an oppressive system called patriarchy that continually keep them in a subsidiary position. Thus, in the face of such social injustices, women turn to writing as a powerful weapon to decry their predicament. In this respect, Irene D'Almeda points out:

African society *is* strongly patriarchal, and so, for contemporary women writers, writing becomes a crucial step in challenging those patriarchal restrictions. Thus, writing becomes an extraordinarily liberating force because *what you cannot do or say, you can write*. Writing makes it possible to *dire l'interdit* speak the forbidden. And language in the writing of African women is necessarily both an aesthetic expression and a powerful weapon, able to convey a committed message while destroying the emptiness of silence.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ D'Almeda, Irene Assiba. *Francophone African Women Writers : Destroying the Emptiness of Silence*. University Press of Florida, 1994.

Thus, African female writings are devoted to the denunciation of all forms of social illness underpinned by patriarchy. Their novels depict and castigate the persecution and repression of women in the patriarchal society. As a result, they attempt to debunk the patriarchal assumptions by creating female characters who challenge and resist the unfair treatment of women, old beliefs, and tradition that reduce the role of women to nothing than just a house wife. Thus, Dangarembga, Aidoo and Saadawi portray the fight for women emancipation and self-empowerment in a male-dominated world. They expound on ways in which women attempt to unfast the belt of oppression. D'Almeda observes that: "Saadawi sees writing...as a weapon to destroy the ideas that perpetuate subjugation and inequity."⁸⁹ Additionally, this part has shown that there are other ways these women use as strategic ploy to express their feminist stance. In fact, literature provides an avenue to African feminist writers to challenge patriarchal oppression through the negative representation of male characters as wicked, weak and irresponsible.

In the third and last part, the focus was on the narrative strategies deployed by the three female authors under discussion. It lays emphasis on some literary devices which have enabled them to uncover the possibilities for their female characters to attain self-actualization and fulfillment. The analysis of some aspects of style in their texts reveals that they explore a variety of strategies to escape tradition constraints. They have illustrated that education is a path to escape forms of entrapment as depicted in *Nervous Conditions and Changes*. As for Firdaus in *Woman at Point Zero*, she has to rely on prostitution to get through oppression.

All things considered, the three books in this study offer us various insights into the lives of African women, they bring into focus both the forms of oppression they experience and the avenues for empowerment available to them.

⁸⁹ Ibid

Thus, they have played the role of consciousness-raissers to the daily deprivations and oppression with which African women are beset and the need to inspire them to strive for empowerment. Indeed through their pens they have been instrumental in inspiring African women to break free from any form of oppression. In this regard, Ama Ata Aidoo highlights the significant contribution women's movement has made in the stride toward women's emancipation. She postulates:

The women's movement has definitely reinforced one's conviction about the need for us to push in whatever way we can for the development of women. But I don't think that one woke up one morning and found that they were talking about the development of women, and one should also join the band wagon - no. What it has done is that it has actually confirmed one's belief and one's conviction. Our people say that if you take up a drum to beat and nobody joins then you just become a fool. The women's movement has helped in that it is like other people taking up the drum and beating along with you.⁹⁰

Even though Aidoo acknowledges that women's movement makes headway to ensure their freedom, the fight for empowerment is not yet over. As we have noticed, many women in various parts of Africa are still grappling with some forms of oppression. Therefore, there is still an effort to be made so that women will be awake to the forms of oppression which may beset them. So it is in this mind that Tsitsi Dangarembga, Ama Ata Aidoo and Nawal El Saadawi are among the most acclaimed African women writers for their invaluable contribution in challenging gender stereotypes previously prevalent in the African literary discourse. They have also played valuable roles in affording an insight into the understanding of the obstacles that beset women's lives in their journeys towards empowerment.

⁹⁰ James, Adeola. *In their Own Voices: African Woman Talk*. London: Heinemann, 1990.

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