NEW IMAGE OF WOMEN IN SELECTED NOVELS OF TERRY MCMILLAN AND CHIKA UNIGWE

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i

CERTIFICATION

I certify that this work was carried out by **Iyabo Adedoja Falode** in the Department of English, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, under my supervision.

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DEDICATION

The study is dedicated to the Almighty God, for knowledge, strength and wisdom.

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ABSTRACT

Representations of new image of women constitute a motif in the writings of Terry McMillan and Chika Unigwe. Such representations have been critically engaged in many studies, mostly from the feminist (individualistic) perspective without adequately addressing the issue from the womanist (collective) angle; including Terry McMillan and Chika Unigwe novels. The study was designed to examine the representations of the new image of women in selected novels of Terry McMillan and Chika Unigwe with a view to mapping out the most dominant images of women which allow for more inclusion and flexibility in the selected novels, as well as identifying the intertextual links in both novelists' portrayals of women's images.

Alice Walker's model of Womanism which privileges family values and complementarity between the sexes served as framework for the study. Chika Unigwe's *Phoenix, Night Dancer* and *On Black Sisters' Street* and Terry McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale, Disappearing Acts* and *The Interruption of Everything* were purposively selected due to similarity in the experiences of their female protagonists. The texts were subjected to critical literary analysis.

The most recurring images of women in the selected novels are depictments of female emancipation, motherhood and female bonding towards happiness, independence, assertiveness and advancement. The novels positively portray women, suggesting that marriage and family enhance a woman's quest for emancipation. Female bonding, irrespective of cultural background, creates a sense of collective experiences among women. From this gendered union and interdependence, laudable decisions were reached, and behavioural changes emerge. In *Night Dancer*, Ezi consults Mama Gold whenever she is confused. Ezi, who was voiceless, becomes eloquent. Similarly, in *Disappearing Acts*, Zora Banks' friends; Claudette, Portia and Maria, help her decision-making about her relationship with Franklin Swift. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, Sisi, Efe, Ema and Joyce are incapacitated to challenge their enemies, until Sisi's death, after which they adopt sisterhood relationship and confront their oppressors. In *Waiting to Exhale,* the three friends (Robin, Savannah and Gloria) help Bernadine to recover from depression when her husband left her for his White secretary. The therapeutic potentials of the family are well espoused in the novels. For instance, Nma, in *Night Dancer,* resorts to her grandparents and father for blessing before getting married. Motherhood is a viable motif for self-realisation. In *Phoenix,* Oge's problem of marital misunderstanding is resolved on her mother's arrival, as her psychological state begins to heal with her mother instilling a new orientation in her. In *Disappearing Acts,* Zora and Maria show behavioural changes after chidbirth. In *Night Dancer* and *On Black Sisters' Street*, Ezi and Efe exhibit similarbehavioural changes after child delivery. In *The Interruption of Everything,* Marilyn became independent and adopts coping strategies such as patience and tolerance in relating with her husband.

Unigwe's and McMillan's novels are replete with new images of women which valorise certain gendered notions (female interdependence and support) of female bonding to negotiate love, marriage and family life. Therefore, their novels reflect the wide range of factors that constitute and condition the existence of women in the enabling milieus of both novelists.

Keywords: Women's image in novels, African and African American novels, Chika Unigwe, Terry McMillan
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE   PAGE

CHAPTER THREE

IMAGING AFRICAN WOMEN IN CHIKA UNIGWE'S *NIGHT DANCER, ON BLACK SISTERS' STREET* AND *PHOENIX*

CHAPTER SIX

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

The objective of this chapter is to provide insights into the kernel of the study. It identifies the gap in scholarship in terms of investigating the new image of women in selected novels of Terry McMillan and Chika Unigwe. The chapter also dwells on the scope, purview, implications and methodology of the study alongside a glimpse of its theoretical framework.

Background to the study

African women have been placed in the position of second-class citizens within the continent as some African female writers have ascertained. African female writers like Buchi Emecheta, Flora Nwapa, Ama Ata Aidoo, Adimora-Ezeigbo, Zainab Alkali, Tess Onwueme and Aminatu Sow-Fall, among others, have depicted this fact in their writings. A lot of women are subdued by tradition and its laws, and subjugated by some customs. This is as a result of the nature of African societies which are mainly patriarchal. This is also foregrounded in various literary productions as men are often at the helm of their production.

Early Africans had a huge sense of respect for women because it was believed that the bringing forth of new lives lies within the purview of females. For this reason, she is seen as a model of the Supreme Being. The vital role of men did not lead to the dominance of male on the female as the relationship was complementary to ensure harmony. The respect for women then was demonstrated in Egypt where the Queen Mother had the right to choose the next Pharaoh before the 12th century. Diop (1987) explains through an African proverb that one can never be sure of the father of a child but of the mother, one can always be sure. This African matriarchal related opinion depicts the respect for women in African culture but, another school of thought insinuates unfaithfulness.

Elebuibon (1998), a scholar and traditionalist, opines that Yoruba traditional belief system reveals that Osun, a Yoruba deity, was actually sent to earth to give knowledge because she was alive during creation. She is the initiator of women's liberation issues. This might be one of the reasons Yoruba women display a lot of social activism.

Bolanle Awe (1992:10), a female historian, captures the female perception during the pre-colonial era when she asserts:

> Most oral traditions, surviving religion cults and extent political institutions still attest to the significant position, which women occupied in the social, economic, and political evolution of different African communities. Such evidence shows conclusively that there was not merely a passive and supportive role, but was also dynamic and constructive. Indeed, it is suggested that an analysis of the leading figures of pre-twentieth century Africa will show that there were more women than men in the forefront of social, political and economic life, than us contemporary African society.

From the above assertion, one can deduce the fact that women were not relegated in all areas life based on historical antecedence, unlike what operates among the Western counterparts. African women contest the issues of gender inequality based on sexuality and the right to own their bodies or socio–political disempowerment based on their peculiar colonial past.Alkali (2008:8) postulates that African women do not have disagreement on voting right or the legalisation of abortion among others, but that women should not be placed on the secondary position in social, economic and political spheres.She further avers that "women's role in the society was not in any way unnoticeable, but they were very active in the areas of craft, commerce, governance, military, politics and generally in their social life." Women have been the uncelebrated heroines of war. They give the psychological, emotional and biological needs to the warriors at war by playing the roles of cooks, food vendors, agents, nurses and the likes.

Looking back at pre-colonial African women, the revelation is that all regions of Africa produced exceptional women who impacted the destiny of their regions positively. Women like Queens Hatshepsut (1490 B.C.) and Nefertiti (1300 B.C.) of Egypt; Queen

Nehanda (1863-1893) of Southern part of Africa; Queen Nangha (1581-1663) of Central Africa; Yaa Asatewaa (1840-1921) from the Ashanti tribe of Ghana, Queen Amina of Hausa land (1500) and Moremi of Ife (from West Africa) and the likes. These women fought valiantly like men to save their people. Some of them were great administrators and political rulers like Nana Usman Danfodio. From the foregoing, it is assumed that it is a deliberate attempt that Western and African writers, theorists and scholars paint African women as weak, passive and lazy in political matters. It is a subtle way of downplaying African women's spirit of patriotism and cultural consciousness.

The status of the African woman started to decline gradually as foreign incursions, especially colonialism and imperialism, started in Africa. Erroneously, a lot of people believe that the current status of African women is a reflection of what it used to be in the traditional African societies.According to Jones et al (1987) It used to be healthier in the pre-colonial era. Colonialism came to Africa with its negative policies on the women, stripping them of their status as they were treated as second-class citizens. Business-wise, African women were the major food producers then; they were the economic power-house of their nations. Spiritually, women were in charge of the spiritual system of their communities. Awe (1992) is of the opinion that, Africans were known for their high level of spiritualism and seriousness with their religion. This helped the female-figures maintain their status in the society during the pre-colonial era. In the area of governance, African women had smaller units of age-grade groups. For instance, newly-wed women would belong to their age mates or newly-wedded groups, whereby if the man misbehaved, the group would confront him and keep an eye on him until he changed. The notion of the Queen Mother in many African countries is to ensure women's full participation in governance.

During colonialism, African women experienced different forms of oppression due to the changes the colonial masters introduced into the system. One of such changes was the migration of the male into cash crop production which was a source of wealth and an area of interest to the colonial masters. Their interest was basically in the area of exportation of cash crops. As a result of this, women were left to produce food crops for their families to eat, leaving the cash-crops for the colonial masters who hired native men to produce them

at cheaper rates. Also, the colonisers brought the Victorian concept of the woman with them to Africa. This belief is that women are creatures for the private domain. That is, they are to preoccupy themselves with domestic issues, leaving the affair of the nation such as politics and economy to the men. This was not the African concept for women in the pre-colonial era. African women, in the pre-colonial era, were fully involved in the running and ruling of their nations. Again, as colonialism progressed, Diop (1987) avers that, colonial policy moved men into migrant labour leaving behind the women in the rural areas with heavy-laden work. This made the condition of the rural women to deteriorate, and cities became more attractive. In the cities, women did not have much to do, but the opportunities for them to make money were high. For this reason, African men tried to curtail the movement of their women as well as their sexual exposure in order to ensure the purity of their clan as well as to make sure that their control was intact over their women.

At a point in time, colonial administrators helped the African male by passing ordinances and laws, such as the 1926 Adultery Ordinance and 1929 Native Affairs Act. This was done to control the movement of women in Zimbabwe. In modern Africa, women are still coping with a lot of subjugations because they are women, but there is a rise in women's consciousness and self-expression as they resist social scorn and disrespect from their male counterparts.

According to Ogundipe (1994), the duties of the female writers are to tell about what it is like being African women and to show the realities of their societies from the African women's perspectives. This is in respect to the oppression the women go through as well as the gaps that are obvious in both the real and the literary worlds. Historically, women in the African American society have been looked upon as inferior to their male counterparts emotionally, intellectually and morally. Women have been portrayed to lack inner drive and ambition. Similarly, women are portrayed to be basically childlike, highly emotional, as well as being highly dependent on their male counterparts Anderson (1988). They are equally seen as being tender, warm nurtured and gentle. On the other hand, Smith and Stewart (1990) consider African American women to be aggressive, rude, loud and

rebellious. All these assertions, arouses an interrogation on clarifying how true these statements are.

In spite of the differences between race and sex, the consequences of race and sex for different women and the changes experienced made their world view differ greatly. King(1988). As a result of these images of the African American women, there seems to be a need to protect them. However, the aggressive, loud, rude and rebellious tendencies attributed to African American women give a suggestion that they are a threat. Therefore, there is an urgent need to put them on check due to their assumed volatile nature.

African American women, however, take a double position, which is, being an African American woman, as well as being a woman. The development of an individual starts from the family, and it proceeds to the community. The understanding of oneself, one's world and the intersection between the two are seen first from the family. Many opportunities and constraints that one faces in life are determined by one's family. Social roles are equally assigned, and role models are initially taken from the family. Many problems the African American women encounter are due to breakdown in the family. Moynihan (1965) posits that lack of family values can be seen in most African American family models. Poverty and deviance permeate the received norm, especially marital and gender roles.

The black family

Family structure in African American homes is a problem that can be witnessed because a lot of black families are living in poverty due to lack of blue collar jobs for the adult male and single motherhood syndrome. Therefore, there is a high tendency for the children to be involved in the social ills. However, African American women, no matter their family size, have a historically higher rate of participation in the labour force Malson (1983). This shows that an average African American woman has taken strong roles in the family by providing for her family. In gender role, men are known to be the providers, while women are the care-giversHill(2000). This is the idealfamily where the mother is the homemaker, the father the finance provider with the children all living together under the same roof. Another way of viewing a family is the ability of all members to perform their

socially prescribed roles. Traditionally, for women, the roles include domestic functions of getting married, raising children, maintaining their homes and giving their husbands sexual satisfaction as well as emotional support. The men have a slimmer role, such as being providers and leaders of their families Staple (1985).

Collins (1994) opines that African women prefer the traditional family structure. Unfortunately, the reverse has always been the case for African American women. Their roles include both the domestic role as care-givers, as well as providers. For the African American family, gender roles are not possible due to many reasons among which are faceless men, absence of father-figure in the home and high rate of divorce Hill (2000).

Walking down memory lane, most African American males were not allowed to perform their roles as providers to their families during the period of slavery. This, therefore, made African American women to be independent. It also brought about an image of matriarchs or female-headed families. In the contemporary American society, other factors that can hinder the African American males from performing their roles as providers, can include unemployment, low population of males compared to women, as well as high rate of drop-outs from school. As a result of these problems, African American women are being forced to take on or to share the role of providers, which is a re-definition of womanhood.

According to Beckett (1976), the foregoing factors have contributed to the image of the African American women as been strong and independent. At a point in time, it was mammy, sapphire and tragic mullato, and in the contemporary era, they are referred to as matriarchs. They exhibit greater decision-making power within their families as compared to white women.

Dickson (1993) argues that in a society where there are more women than men, women are faced with no choice than to be self-reliant. They get educated, get jobs and earn their salaries. Men of marriageable age are scanty and emasculated by the society. This results in less chances of getting married and a greater risk of getting divorced when they get married. They equally raise their children. They have adapted to what the new economic and social factors have given them, which is a new image. The present-day African American women are the role models for the future women to emulate.

One assumption within the literature of African American women is that they differ from other women who are dependent and emotional. African American women are said to be strong, independent and self-reliant. Harrison (1989) reiterates that this assumption is based on multiple factors, some real and some unreal, to justify exploitation of African Americans and to maintain their level of subordinate negative images. This idea of African Americans was sold into the larger society according to Collins (2000). Parts of the negative images include matriarchs who emasculate their men, while the African American women become fathers to their children. The outcome is the breakdown in the family structure (Moynihan, 1965).

In Africa, child birth or evolving events attract a naming process. This act of naming rests solely on the father or inventor of such an event. Different names are given at such an occasion. However, that of the father is officially recognised and acceptable. The meaning of the names the female children are given reflect how precious and important they are to their parents. By extension, it reflects their position in society. Among the Yoruba, there are names, such as Ìyániwúrà (mother is gold), Iyùnádé (royal bead), Àdùké(collective nurturing), Àbíké (born to be cared for), Wúrà (valuable), Àbèké (plead to be cared for), Àdùnfé (loved collectively) and the likes. Among the Ibibio of South-south Nigeria, there are names such as Ekanem (my mother is good) and Ekaette (my father's mother). Among the Igbo, there are names such as Esinma (good path) Nneka (my mother is supreme) and the likes. Literally, all these names reflect the love and great worth many African societies place on their female children. The naming aspect of female children in Africa points to the fact that women are eulogised by the society for their laudable contributions in the process of societal regeneration and preservation through childbearing. In addition, it is important to note that before the advent of western education and the writing culture, orality was the major means of preserving history. At that time, folklores, folktales and legends were captured more by women and were passed down orally from generation to generation. These stories were carriers of the culture, ethics, values and customs of the people.

Many great African and African American writers, such as Achebe, Soyinka, Ngugi wa Thiong, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, Chimamanda Adichie, Zora Neale Hurston, Alice

Walker, Terry Macmillan, Richard Wright and James Baldwin, openly voiced their indebtedness to the great stories of their cultural milieus. Some of the African creative writers weave their literary corpus around the beautiful and rich African cultural heritage enshrined in oral tradition. African American writers equally return to their African root by embellishing their works on African oral folklores, folktales, legends and many others. The disturbing question is that if the African woman has been a channel through which societal norms and values, myths, legends and historical facts were passed down from one generation to the other, why is she misrepresented and dehumanised by the phallic writers who were formerly part of her audience during the story telling sessions?

Taking a good look at the literary engagement of the first generation of African writings such as*Efuru* by Flora Nwapa, Mariam ma Ba, *So Long a letter*, as well as African American writings such as Alice Walker, *The Color Purple,* Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eyes*and others.The women are pictured in a decorated style with negative laurels such as she is dangerously beautiful, but barren; she is a demon and possessed; she has the power to lure men to their destruction; she is a witch or sorcerer, an adulteress, prostitute or an agent of chaos and war. (Mark,1976)

For generations, the history of the world had been characterised by men ruling and women being ruled. Traditionally, women have been relegated to the margin of the society, history and culture in a male-centred environment. Lynnel (1976) maintains that this issue is in existence because the basic ideology of the patriarchal rule states that the male is superior, while the female is inferior. This patriarchal system also denies women the opportunity of playing their appropriate role in nation-building and venturing into the society to perform public functions. Carol and Mark (1976:16) state: "men and women enjoyed different spheres of activity." They are generally seen as incompetent and only fit for domestic work. What makes it difficult to absorb them is the fact that men keep re-echoing this to women's ears indirectly, making it sink in their sub-consciousness. Lener (1986) opines that women, for millennia, participated in the process of their own subordination because they have been psychologically shaped by their society. African and African American female writers have confronted this challenge partly in the cultural, political and spiritual realms in their writings, through which they expose the sufferings

and agonies that women are faced with due to patriarchal world view in their communities.

Since the early times, literature has been used as a tool for different purposes, which include entertainment, commentary, social reforms, as well as pleasure to readers. African and African- American writers also use literature to increase people's awareness to different aspects of their lives. Imploring the same medium, African and African American female writers have tried to change the negative stereotypes of women in their literary works. In their different societies, the pains, traumas and sufferings women experience due to patriarchal dominance are revealed and questioned. In African and African American writings, literatures have been used to challenge women to find their highest happiness in loving and being faithful to one man, living through his achievements, having children or making a home Cheryl and Karen(1978).

Before the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the perception of women is described by Carol and Mark (1976:99) thus:

> A woman was considered too weak physically to venture into the world outside the home and too deficient in reason to make important decisions. (She) was relegated to the domestic sphere where under the guidance and direction of the rationally superior husband she tended the house, raised children and gave her family comforted pleasure.

Resisting this negative treatment of women, female writers have always advocated their rights through the weaponry of their literary creativities. As a quest to fight for good placement and question the patriarchal-dominated theories, they have propounded such female-centred theories as liberal or radical feminism and the other variants. Womanism, which Walker (1983) propounded to distinguish between Western feminism and black feminism to look at issues that concern African women in regards to their class, race and sexuality. Ezeigbo (2012) argues that womanism is a coinage used to describe the feminist engagement of black women or women of colour as opposed to feminism used by white women. Womanism is a variant of feminism which captures the needs of the

9

African and African American women. Due to the misrepresentation of women, social feminism and womanism attempt looking into literary works from different angles. There is a further expression that, at a point in time, the images of women in literary texts are performers of traditional roles, undertaking modern activities they are not equipped for, and they are denied access to modern support systems O'Barr(1987). Since pioneer literary writings were controlled and produced by men, the social feminist/womanist recovers the written works of women to query sexual oppression, denial of women to basic rights of life, misrepresentation of women, as well as other things detrimental to women.

Against this background, this study attempts to apply a womanist approach to investigate three selected African American and African novels to explore the new image of women in the novel.

Womanism

Looking for an alternative concept of feminist in the "Black/African sense", the term womanism was coined by Alice Walker, an African-American novelist, poet and feminist. In her book, *In Search of our Mothers' Garden* (1983)*,* Walker (1983:12) draws a line between the West and the Black Feminist movements. According to her:

> a black feminist or feminist of colour usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or willful behaviour. Wanting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one… Responsible. In charge. Serious… A woman who loves other women sexually, and/or non-sexually… committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Not separatist except periodically for health.
> (1983: XI-XII)

In her definition, she eulogises black feminists or feminists of colour, who believe in the harmony of black men and women as against the Western separatists who do not believe in complementarity between male and female.

Womanist ideology also lays emphasis on sharing and caring. In this regard, it is committed to humanity. In the same vein, Okonjo-Ogunyemi (1998:665) posits that:

> Womanism is black centered; it is accommodationist.
> It believes in the freedom and independence of women
> like feminism… it wants meaningful union between
> black women and men and black children… It is also
> interested in communal well-being….

Both Walker and Okonjo-Ogunyemi seek to project the needs of the Black Woman within the context of patriarchal, colonial and post-colonial experiences. Okonjo-Ogunyemi (1988) maintains that the ultimate aim of womanism is the unity of blacks anywhere. She establishes that a womanist is committed to the core and loves struggling for survival of both sexes in the society.

Furthermore, not connecting with Black men means turning their back on their own race. A vital component in womanism is being in concert with male struggles. Hudson-Weems (1993) avers that like black feminism, womanism strays away from the white patriarchal values posed by feminism. The major aim of womanism is to aid in bringing to light the independence and authenticity of the African race. The target is to bring all African Americans together as a single unified body that will become visible to the domineering white majority.

Ntiri (2004:174), notes that: "black women do not perceive their enemy to be black men, but rather the enemy is considered to be the oppressive forces in the larger society which subjugates black men, women and children". Ntiri (2001:174) opines that: "men and women must work together to make the world a better place". Yaa Asantewaa (2001:529) is of the opinion that: "without the male, African-American women lack the means to create a structured family". The black family is family-centred in nature due to the fact that, it embraces the concept of a "collective struggle''. A womanist also values one of her most important connections in life; it is genuine sisterhood. Morrison (1992:137) states that: "some women stop the promotion of other women; other women must come to their aids". It is expected that women support their fellow females from all forms of oppression. It is against this backdrop that womanists team up with men to find the ultimate panacea for racial oppression.

The image of African and African American women should, therefore, be investigated in a way that considers their unique experiences and the distinct backgrounds of their

cultural groups. In this study, it is argued that the image of women tends to change based on their different societal and cultural norms, experiences and expectations. Understanding the new image of African and African American women can provide a better understanding of women generally and specifically African and African American women's behaviour, hence creating a better family lifestyle.

Statement of the problem

The image of women is a constant trope in literature. In the book *Feminist Literary Criticism Exploration in Theory,* Donovan (1993) explains different subcategories of feminist literary criticisms. Existing studies on similar topics, such as Oritsatimeyin's (1992) "Feminist Perspectives in the Novels of Alice Walker and Buchi Emecheta" andAsinobi- Ireadwu's (2005) "Comparative Criticism of Black Womanhood in the Fiction of Selected Anglophone and Carribean Women Writer*s*" share a common method in the area of approach to literary criticisms. They examine the images of women by individual authors or a couple of authors who belong to the same period and region. Some critics have even focused on either male or female authors. Many comparative studies have been carried out on the analyses of the prose texts of Terry McMillan and Chika Unigwe. In this type of quest, one cannot but notice a certain gap which is the comparative analysis of the new image of women in African and African American novels. This study, therefore, examines the representations of the new image of women in selected novels of Unigwe and McMillan such as motherhood, sisterhood, male and female complementary roles and communal living, replacing the previous images of dangerously beautiful witches, women who totally depend on their husbands, barren and women capable of causing doom.

Aim and objectives of the study

This study examines the new image of women in selected African and African American novels, such as motherhood, sisterhood, male complementary roles, communal living and family-centred tendency using the templates provided in Chika Unigwe's *Phoenix* (2007)*, On Black Sisters' Street* (2009) and *Night Dancer* (2012)*,* and Terry McMillan's

Disappearing Acts (1989)*; Waiting to Exhale* (2002)and *The Interruption of Everything*
(2012).

The specific objectives of the study are to:

   i.   examine Unigwe and McMillan's depiction of the new image of women in their
        selected novels;

   ii.   critique the representations of women characters in the selected novels;

   iii.   compare and contrast the images of women characters as portrayed in the selected
        novels.

Research questions

   i.   How do Unigwe and McMillan depict the new image of women in their selected
        novels?

   ii.   How do they represent women characters in their novels?

   iii.   What are the similarities and dissimilarities in the portrayal of the new image of
        women in the selected novels?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it critically explores how African and African American
women are presented with emphasis on certain experiences that condition their (re)action
to the happenings in their polities. It also provides useful information on different bodies
in the existing societies of the writers and about the new and emerging image of African
and African American women. Moreover, the study expands the frontiers of knowledge
on contemporary African and African American novels. Furthermore, the study is a
worthy contribution to the field of comparative literature as it examines two different but
similar literary spaces.

Scope of the study

This study investigates the representations of new image of women in purposively
selected novels of Chika Unigwe *The Phoenix* (2007)*, On Black Sisters' Street* (2009)and
Night Dancer (2012), and Terry McMillan's *Disappearing Acts* (1989), *Waiting to Exhale*
(2002)*,* and *The Interruption of Everything* (2012) respectively.The novels are critiqued,

using womanism as the theoretical framework. The selected writers offer a quintessential template for assessing the new image of women in African and African American novels. This promotes complementary roles of male and female in the families, as well as the society. It is an essential tool for societal regeneration and cohesion.

Methodology

This study is basically descriptive and comparative. In this process, the six purposively selected African and African American novels are closely studied with the intention of investigating the new image of women, using the theory of womanism propounded by Alice Walker in 1983. The novels are analysed using additional secondary materials which are employed to make the analyses of the primary texts robust and critical. Consequently, library method, content analysis and internet materials are used for interpreting the selected texts.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study is Womanism which is an offshoot of Feminism. Defining the term feminism is not an easy task because the word does not have a stable meaning for all women. It contains strains of ideas and concepts which are diverse. For instance, Evans (1997:63) conceptualises feminism thus:

> Feminism has become more complex in its traditions, and the very word now demands a measure of deconstruction if we are ever to tease out from it the various appeals that this diverse movement makes to different constituencies.

Evans further explains that since contemporary women are subdivided into smaller groups, it is, therefore, difficult to arrive at an all-encompassing definition of feminism that addresses all the groups. Barker (2008:34) sees feminism as: "a field of theory and politics that contains competing perspectives and prescription for actions". In *Feminist Theory: A Philosophical Anthology,* Cudd and Andreasen (2005) examine the fluidity of the word feminism. Meanwhile, all the different meanings mark interesting turning-points in the history of feminist thought. These different meanings have their origin from different periods of struggles within the general movement of women's liberation.

The historical movements are believed to have occurred in 'three waves', according to Barker (2008). Edgar and Sedgwick (2002) argue that there are different theories within the umbrella of Feminism as a theory. It is further argued that women are subordinate to men in Western culture, while feminism seeks to subvert this situation by constructing a culture that embraces women's desires and purposes. Therefore, feminism obviously tilts towards subverting or reforming the existing culture which has formed an unfair patriarchal environment for women, thereby replacing this undesirable culture with a new culture, womanism, which ensures women's participation and place.

Womanism celebrates the harmony of Black men and women because their complementary roles bring forth balancing in the children's upbringing and this is paramount to womanism. Also, womanism ensures unity among blacks anywhere as they do not see black men as the enemy but the oppressive forces which suppress the men, women and children in the society.

Justification of the study

An exploration of the new image of African and African American women will contribute new knowledge to how women are viewed, to have a better understanding of whom they are and their standpoints. This will also foster an improved relationship among them. Invariably, a better African and African American family dynamics and parental socialisation is expected. Health wise, this would help to improve the mental state of these women, thereby enhancing a lot of coping strategies with adaptive methods which can be passed down. A new orientation that the image of women can change at any time due to unique experiences will be formed; therefore, adaptive methods are dynamic. In Africa, as well as African American societies today, it is seen that a lot of women are raising their children single handedly, and the issue of female-headed homes is on the increase. From the tenets of womanism, basic coping strategies can be relevant to illustrate that changes in the image of women should be expected as they face and find survival strategies. Looking at Africa as the cradle of African Americans, one cannot but notice situations of hybridity due to many factors. However, from the standpoint of Alice Walker, womanism seems relevant as she posits some insights to help women cope with their different

challenges so as to emerge stronger. This can be of immense benefit towards the understanding of women and the sustenance of long lasting relationship among women, families and the society at large.

Organisation of the study

This study is divided into six chapters. The first chapter focuses on the introduction of African and African American women's new image due to the impact of racism and neo-colonialism respectively. The scope, justification, statement of the problem and methodology of the study are also highlighted in the chapter. Chapter Two reviews the existing literature relevant to the study. Chapter Three presents a critical investigation of Chika Unigwe's selected texts, *The Phoenix* (2007)*, On Black Sisters' Street* (2009) *and Night Dancer* (2012) with specific emphasis on the representations of African women to reflect the new image of women. Similarly, Chapter Four explores the new dimension to women's issues in Terry McMillan's *Disappearing Acts* (1989), *Waiting to Exhale* (2002*) and *The Interruption of Everything* (2012). Chapter Five subjects the selected authors' narratives to a comparative analysis in order to establish the areas of convergences and divergences in their presentations of the new image of African and African American women. Chapter Six offers the summary and appraisal of the findings. In a similar vein, conclusions are drawn, while recommendations for further research are offered.

CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter, the existing literatures relevant to this study are reviewed under the following sub-headings: Feminism, Evolution of Womanism; Womanism; Basic tenets of Womanism; Feminism and Womanism; African Women; Womanhood in Pre-colonial Era; Womanhood in Colonial Era; Image of Women in Post-Colonial Era; Slavery; Slave trade and African American women.

The new image of African and African American women is investigated to foreground the parameters that bring about changes in the image of women. African women are seen from different perspectives by different people. A retrospective look at some literary texts reveals that women are relegated in the scheme of things. Women are equally portrayed as the prime movers of history because they make history in the chauvinistic sense of the word. African American women have also, at different times, been given different stereotypes.

Feminism

The ideology, feminism, could be linked to Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792) where she reveals the negative portrayal of women as being sentimental and instructive. She proposes that women should "aspire to the same rationality prized by men". From this point, Feminism has undergone first, second and third waves. Wollstonecraft opines that: "women should enjoy social, legal, and intellectual equality with men and draw support from the work of progressive philosophers" (94). The first 'wave' of feminism primarily focused on the issue of the

right to vote, resulting in the right for women to vote in 1920 through the combined pressure of intellectuals and organisations in the United States of America. The secondwave of feminism started in the 1960s with particular emphasis on civil rights, social and economic equality. Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1972) is a foundational text for this phase with its central message that "one is not born, but one becomes a woman". However, the first and second waves of feminism are strictly Western-oriented as the interest of women of colour and third world countries were not taken into consideration. This shortcoming in feminist movement led to the emergence of the third-wave of feminism in the 70s which sought to accommodate the neglected or relegated women of colour. It is within this premise that Black feminism fills the missing gap.

In pursuance of the feminist quest, different terms, concepts and coinages have come to limelight which includes gender, radical feminism, liberal feminism, socialist feminism, womanism, motherism and patriarchy. For the purpose of this research, it is important to contextualise some of these concepts as they are used in this study.

Before the third-wave, the feminist movement had not been all-inclusive in the areas of race and class. Although there were various patterns of masculinity and feminism reflexive of the cultures present in the Anglophone America, feminism has often been denounced by Black women writers, scholars and activists as a disturbance to the social development within the Black Diaspora. Aidoo(2006:45)sees feminism as a hindrance to the growth of the Black community. "Feminism, you know how we feel about that embarrassing Western Philosophy? The destroyer of homes, imported mainly from America to ruin nice African women".

Walker (1983) admits to the fact that Black women need to carve out their own niche around the issues of patriarchy. Due to historical and racial maltreatment of African Americans, there has been a natural togetherness as a means of self-preservation. In the eyes of the feminist, the spirit of togetherness is absent because the culture of the Whites does not preach communalism. On the other hand, it preaches existentialism. Delaney (1998) expresses the importance of masculine power to nationalist doctrine and the need

for women to be trained exclusively for motherhood. The notion of Black male supremacy and Black female respectability were widespread during Garvey's era as a nationalist leader. The upper-class elite of the African American community begins to educate Black women about social moves, such as espousal of men's role as family leaders and the woman playing the role of the supporter who never challenges her mates' position (Oba, 1995). It is believed that when they stay together, it protects them from life-threatening situations brought about by racism. Hooks (1994) contributes to this discussion by positing that Malcolm X (1965) urges Black men to assert their masculinity in taking good care of their families by respecting their women and raising their children. Thus, Black men are conscientised to taking over the politics of their communities.

Delaney (1998:23) also enunciates the advantage of unity among African American males and females so as to bring advancement into their community. At a point, Malcolm X's impression about women changes as he sees their importance in the role they play in the fight against a racist regime. He further opines: "I'm forgiving them all the leeway possible. They've made greater contribution than many men." By and large, African American women have had more unique experiences as a result of social disparities than men because of the interference of sexism, racism and classism. Despite these challenges, Black women's commitment towards their struggle against racism remains unwavering. Due to the above point, feminism was replaced with womanism. It is believed that it will be able to capture the essence of African American experiences.

First-wave feminism

The exact time first-wave feminism emerged seems uncertain, but according to Cudd and Peter (2005), it is primarily a response to the publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). However, Elizabeth (1982) states that first-wave feminism began precisely sometimes in the mid-nineteenth century. She further explains that it became rooted due to its convergence with some political and economic contexts. This is the development of liberalism, capitalism and social movements during this period.

However, among feminists, a certain degree of differences with regard to when exactly first-wave feminism began is yet unresolved. In all these disagreements, collectively the feminists agree upon the positive changes it has brought to the movement. These include equal political opportunities for women, the right to own property and freedom to acquire education and work. All the above expectations had been denied women before the inception of this movement. In addition, this movement also addressed the ill-treatment of women both in public and private spheres.

Second-wave feminism

Literature for this period is not scarce because the whole history of second-wave feminism is fully documented in fiction and non-fiction literatures. According to Cudd and Peter (2005), second-wave feminism came into limelight in 1949 with the publication of Simone de Beauviour's *The Second Sex,* where she disagrees with the fact that biology is the root cause of gender differences which patriarchy had continued to use to suppress women for centuries.

Apart from *The Second Sex,* other scholars, through their works, contribute to the propositions of the second-wave feminism: Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1977), Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1993) and Betty Freedain's *Feminine Mystique* (1963). Millet examines the total annexation of public and private life of men. She employs the term 'patriarchy' to refer to the male-dominated system. Cudd and Peter (2005) categorise the salient point of second-wave feminism into three major areas: first, the real causes of sexist oppression were seen as deeply embedded in all aspects of human social life; second, women must be economically reformed, and third, it investigates various issues like institution of marriage, motherhood, heterosexual relationship, women's sexuality, and the like. The conclusion of second-wave feminism is to radically transform almost every aspect of men's personal and political life in order to attain liberation.

Third-wave feminism

Third-wave feminism started in 1990 and extends to the present. The main focus of third-wave feminism is to bring neglected female issues to the fore. The movement unitarily rejects the notion of patriarchy, and seeks to put an end to this knowledge which oppresses women. This movement equally argues that the first and second-waves turned a blind eye to the social circumstances of women leaving out their interests, concerns and experiences, especially of coloured women. In essence, third-wave feminism realises that women themselves are different from one another in terms of race, ethnicity and class; it rather emphasises the individual differences undermining the concepts of class identity and collective identity. As a result of the foregoing, different types of feminism emerged.

Types of feminism

The central argument of feminism is to bridge prevailing inequalities of women. However, it is observed that feminism lacks similar vision on how to achieve this goal as a common aim of the seeming inequalities is lacking. As a result of this, feminism branched into different classes. Among the classes are radical, liberal, Marxist and womanism.

Radical feminism

Radical feminism's discourse is different from others. Bryson (2003) opines that radical feminism came to limelight in the 1960s when different political and social movements, as well as civil right movements emerged. Men and women activists in different parties were highly involved. However, these women received ill treatments from their male compatriots. They were left with only the roles of secretaries, housewives, sex objects and so on. Anytime they raise issues that are related, they were met with stiff oppositions from men. Hence, the women managed to organise revolutionarystands with radical feminist theory.

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism claims that biology is the only factor that brings about differences between the male and female. It does not accept the radical feminist position. Barker (2008:12) claims that it is "socio-economic and cultural constructs" that produce the differences. It prioritises the tenets of liberals which state that freedom, being a

21

fundamental value, should be granted to all citizens. It also insists on freedom for women. To achieve the above for women, liberal feminists postulate that laws need to be changed; opportunities must be opened to women for them to be empowered in the society. Invariably, there will be equality of opportunities for women in all fields. Legal reformation of laws can achieve these by providing women with special privileges, altering aspects of patriarchy that are found in traditions and institutions.

Marxist feminism

Marxist feminism considers a different factor as the underlying cause of women's inequality. It anchors on dismantling capitalism as a way to liberate women and holds that the root cause of inequality is capitalism, an unfair distribution of wealth and power. It is theory that feminist who ally themselves with the principles of Karl Marx embrace. Marxist feminism, therefore, sees women as the oppressed class being forced to serve the interest of the upper class which dictates the capitalist mode of distribution.

Finally, it is worth noting that there are a number of feminist theories, more than the three types discussed above, and each with its own distinct approach to the issue of women. Some of them include womanism, post-structuralism or post-modernist feminism, postcolonial feminism, lesbian feminism, eco-feminism and the like.

Feminist literary criticism

Feminist literary criticism generally holds that literature and literary criticism have been used for many years as vital and essential mode for perpetuating patriarchal ideologies. It centres on the notion that the discipline of literature which has been seen as independent and free is indeed not free. On the contrary, it has been the subservient of the culture of the society all these years. Renowned feminist literary critics, such as Donovan, Belsey and Moore are proponents of this position.

Millet (1977) observes that education and literature are strong tools in strengthening the values of patriarchy by ingraining them into the behaviour of men and women. Due to this reason, feminists came up with another awareness about literature and literary criticism as

they realised that the notion of literature they held on to was a repository of "timeless truth" and a simple depiction of reality was actually incorrect, since literature is expected to be a cultural product which mirrors how the society perceives and affects each other Catherine and Belsey (1997).

Since the inception of this literary criticism based on the perspectives and experiences of women, it is viewed as a 'counter production, a retort or a mode of negation'. Justifying this resistance, Register (1993) opines that the tradition of literature has been filled with female stereotypes that are both positive and negative. Many books have been published on feminist literary criticism by both male and female writers. Some are directed on assessing women's image in literature, while others investigate the criticism given on female writers. For instance, Nwapa portrays Efuru as a beautiful but barren woman, whom the society eventually tags as a witch.

The image of women's criticism

The image of women's criticism is the earliest of all kinds of feminist literary criticism, according to Register (1993). It can be dated far back to the time of ancient Greece and Rome where Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas first depicted the nature of female. From the feminist point of view, Aristotle's statement, such as the female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities or Aquinas' expression that in the woman is an imperfect man, can be taken as the earliest negative stereotypes of women.

At some point in the seventeenth century, it was discovered that women were identified with powerful deities and influential muses, queen mothers and so on. However, in recent centuries, Wollstronecraft (2004) observes that women are presented as helpless and silly.

The tradition of examining the image of woman in literature not only persisted particularly in the twentieth century but also flourished as many feminist critics followed this practice and produced many works, including Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Mary Elleman's *Thinking about Women* (1966) and Kate Millets' *Sexual Politics* (1977).

Lynn (2004) points out that Simone de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* (1972) argues that women have been depicted in literature as either Mary or Eve, the angelic mother or the

evil seductress. Lynn, therefore, categorises them into positive and negative stereotypes as idealisation (women as saints) and misogyny (women as monsters). It is important to note that cultural changes aggravated by the social impact of World War I led to the development of the new woman, who seeks suffrage, increased sexual freedom and a career.

A critical shift occurred in the mid-1970s in the portrayal of women when the works of men were replaced with the study of the works of women. Worthy of note is Kali Thai who depicts both Asian and American women as "whores", "inscrutable lovers" or "will-less mistress", "useful for pleasure Americans", "difficult and troublesome", "untrustworthy", appears most often as betrayers. The reading of these important feminist critical approaches to the image of women in American novels clearly indicates that there has been a long tradition in American literature to portray two extreme images of women in literary works. It is against the foregoing that images of women in both African and African American literatures are compared and contrasted in the narratives of Unigwe and McMillan so as to investigate the positive and negative stereotypes of women.

Evolution of womanism

African American women were not carried along in the Western-styled feminism. For this reason, womanism emerged. Before then, feminism claimed to be able to save all women from sexism and oppression. However, the peculiarities of African American women were not put into consideration; whereas, there was more concentration on the middle-class white women in Britain and America. Collins (1990) opines that Black women intellectuals have long expressed a unique feminist consciousness about the intersection of race and class in structuring gender. To Collins, African American women historically have not been full participants in white feminist organisations. This expression is a way of showing an agitation of not participating in the organisation which they claim to belong. African American women were inactive members. Therefore, a new front was needful.

To further point out the obvious, Hooks (2000:17) accuses feminism of excluding African American women from participating:

> Feminism in the United State has never emerged from women who are most victimised by sexist oppression; women who are daily beaten down, mentally, physically, and spiritually – women who are powerless to change their own condition in life. They are the silent majority.

The gaps in feminism as practised by middle-class white women and the essence of bringing up a theory that would help to meet the needs of African American women evolved into another branch of feminism called womanism.

The ideology of womanism is coined by Alice Walker in her collection of essays titled *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden: A Womanist Prose* (1983) where she declares that, womanism puts up the beauty of black female literary experiences. Women who call themselves Black feminists need another word to describe what their concerns are; hence, womanism was developed.

To Walker (1983:12), a womanist is defined as

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

The foregoing establishes some strengths and weaknesses of the womanist ideology. Some of her points are laudable as they are in conjunction with African ways of life. However, some of her beliefs are an offshoot of western influence which has produced her. Walker adds that womanism is about women loving one another sexually and asexually. This further foregrounds Walker's view which is conditionedby Western ideology. On the contrary, Kolawole (1987) rejects the notion of feminism as

25

unacceptable to African tradition, while Ogunyemi (1988:63) comes up with another definition of womanism as

> black–centered; it is an accommodationalist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like radical feminism, but unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men will begin to change from their sexist stand.

The above definition seems more encompassing as it captures the needs of African and African American women. It succinctly spells out the role of men towards their families as well as the commitment of African women in realising this vision.

In this study, womanism is pertinent in investigating the new images of African and African American women because unity in families is what the society needs in producing a peaceful and developing nation. The notion of individualism and other foreign concepts which are anti-African tradition must be imbibed carefully. After all, Africans had their own ways of life before the advent of colonial masters.

Hudson Weems (2004:24) explains her own version of womanism:

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

Within the nineteenth century, images of African and African American women have changed. As the number of women entering into workforce continued to increase, the once prevalent views of women being barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen, while men bring home the food have changed for many. A lot of historical reasons contributed to this change. In the main, changes in the image of women generally started during World War I (Burgess, 2003). When the number of women working outside the home increased

drastically, it brought about a change of impression about roles and responsibilities of women.

African women had a unique place in the history of image changes. McDaniel (1990) maintains that traditionally, women were well esteemed as the givers of life, the carriers of life and queen mothers, but as colonialism sipped into the picture, the image of the woman started dwindling. It, therefore, becomes imperative to look at the changes from the traditional, modern and post-modern milieus to establish what brought about these changes in the image of the African woman.

African American women started with hundreds of years of enslavement as well as oppression, coupled with the separation of their families and forced labour among men and women. Mc Daniel (1990) reiterates that in addition to the above, the images of the African American woman varied from being a worker, a mother with torn-apart families which destroyed them physically, emotionally and psychologically, that pain became a reality they had to live with. This was their experience during slavery.

After the abolition of slavery, another image of the African American women emerged as they found it difficult to gain employment: lack of quality education, poor transportation and unpleasant work environment. McDaniel (1990) further stresses that, due to these problems, traditional patriarchal household arrangements broke down. In this vein, socio-economic problems brought about a change in the image of these women. After some time, African Americans were given access to quality education, and the women took advantage of this. This opened up their level of awareness to their civil rights and they joined political groups. On the part of the African American men, having Western education was not a priority. Therefore, they sought illegal employment in the drug markets as posited by Collins (2000). As a result of this, they fell under the control of the criminal justice system which brought about another fresh image of African American women as the issue of single mothers increased. These women automatically assumed their traditional roles as mothers and care-givers, as well as their absent husbands' roles within the family.

The idea of extended family which they brought from Africa started collapsing at this point due to economic pressure. The African American women were saddled with the responsibilities of single-handedly raising their families. This masterminds the resurgence of another image of strong black women and weak faceless men.

Basic tenets of womanism

What makes womanism different from other theories is the much attention on African American female. To Hooks (1998:242), the concerns of an African American female writer include:

> resisting oppression, black female protagonists, spiritual journeys from victimization to the realization of personal autonomy or creativity, a centrality of female bonding or networking, a sharp focus on personal relationships in the family….

Hooks is of the opinion that African American female writers suffer from various forms of oppression which can be relieved if women can be supportive and helpful towards one another in overcoming different life–challenging problems they faced. At the same time, Hooks (1998) emphasises the need for a good family relationship.

Sotunsa (2008) states that there are three things which are central in distinguishing feminism from womanism, which are racial, sexist and classist issues. Hooks (1987) explains that racism is prevalent in feminism, and that it is used to further create divisions so as to achieve a false maxim of divide-and-rule by the Whites. According to her: "racism abounds in the writings of White feminists reinforcing white supremacy and negating the possibility that women will bond politically across ethnic and racial boundaries" (20). It is thus clear that, without the freedom of the whole race, there cannot be freedom for the black womenfolk. This makes acceptability of their male easy, and it is the communal spirit which was carried into the diaspora from Africa; this is evident in the fact that the core themes in the lives of African American women revolve around their history of struggle in America.

Similarly, womanism focuses on family relationship and the importance of motherhood. It preaches against motherhood as it is viewed as an hindrance to women by feminists. Walker (1983) eulogises the mothers, grand and great mothers, in their outlooks on different aspects of life. For Christian (1985:8), "the concept of motherhood is of central importance in the philosophy of African American people. It is related to the historical process with its intertwining of tradition, enslavement and the struggle for their people's freedom". For her, motherhood is not worth celebrating. However, womanism eulogies motherhood and admonishes women to embrace it.

For a womanist, emphasis on family relationship is very important. This is further extended to the extended family members, and it further reveals the communal living in Africa as it is also revealed in womanism. Members of the community are even referred to as family members. Womanism preaches open-arm accommodation to all. This makes the male to be welcomed and appreciated. This is lent credence by Hudson-Weems (2004:8) who posits that "The African womanist also welcomes male presence and participation in her struggle. Moreover, the Africana womanist desires positive male companionship."

Feminism and womanism: comparative overview

With the third-wave feminism came the feminist movement which was not all inclusive in terms of race and class.Multi-patterns of feminism and masculinity showing different cultures in America came to limelight. African American women writers have always denounced feminism, and they present it as a hindrance to social progression within the Black Diaspora.

Thomas (2006) takes the meaning of womanism to another dimension by developing it to mean a unique form of experiences shared by Black women and girls, an experience heavily influenced, no doubt, by race and racism. Due to the fact that there is racial mistreatment of Black Americans, it is postulated that there should be a natural agreement between male and female as a means of self-preservation. In one of Erykah Badu's songs, *Orange Moon*, there is an attempt to assure men that the Black women's quest for independence should not be misinterpreted to mean rivalry but that which will improve

the whole community in *Mama's Gun* (2007). According to her: "Now don't you let my ambition make you feel like competition we should both play a role in our whole living condition" (75).

Jacques-Garvey, in Taylor (2000), instructs African American women when she states that women are not as physically strong as men, but they are endowed with God-given gifts that would repay them for this weakness to be competent mothers. They are to be guided by African consciousness and to make their voices heard in political and civic affairs, while they are not to stray from their innate gender-specified roles as mothers, wives and nurturers as well as in general roles that she believes to be beneficial to both men and women; hence, the community as a whole.

In an interview with Clenora Hudson-Weems, a Professor of Gender Studies, Daphe Williams Ntiri asks what it is about Africana womanism that makes it stand out from its precursors? Hudson-Weems (2004:49) replies:

> What makes African Womanism different from any other female-based theory is that we are inseparable and one-as the other, I should say the other side of the coin from the Africana man-collectively struggling, as we've always done as Africans: A people collectively working. We come from a communal past. "It takes a village to raise a child" as the old African adage goes. Well, it takes a village to do everything, because we work together.

From the foregoing, it is apparent that womanism as an ideology sees the interest of children and husbands as important. Their needs are strongly rooted in the welfare of their community. To achieve this, womanists prefer gender-supplement, dialogue and compliments. Whenever there is a complaint, dialogue and settlement are preferred to confrontation. This method is purely African in nature. According to Hudson-Weems (2004), the biological differences between the man and the woman are put together to complement each other in the bearing and raising of their children.

Womanism, just as feminism, is out to put an end to women's sufferings. Hudson-Weems (2004) avers that; It is true that in the nature of every human being, there is a desire to live

in freedom, security, peace and comfort. If this condition is absent, a response is expected. For this assertion, feminism and womanism are the reactions of women to patriarchal injustice, subjugation, oppression and repression. However, womanism dwells on issues that concern African American women and their peculiar problems. It tackles the tripartite oppressions faced by African American women, which are class, race and sex issues. From the premise of womanism, it becomes obvious that the needs of a feminist are quite different from the needs of a womanist.

Womanism differs from feminism because male participation is welcomed and appreciated. The combinatorial efforts of both gender increase productivity and development of the society. This is a root from Africa. Gender roles are well spelt out; hence, there is no competition or power tussle. Womanism is embedded in African culture.

Womanism sees to the fact that family and community are united. This accounts for motherhood being central; it is a unifying force. The ideology of womanism is well highlighted by Kolawole (1997:24) thus:

> Womanism is a philosophy that celebrates Black roots, the ideals of Black life, while giving balanced presentation of Black womanism. It concerns itself as much with the Black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates Blacks.

African women

Until recently, African women were recognised as queens, warriors, fortune tellers, poets, herbalists, sorcerers, and business women. According to Adebayo (2015), these are the high social roles the men hijacked before women were abused. Akintunde (2001:34) describes the four epochs of women experiences. In the beginning, there was the age of total female submission. Here, the woman was treated as a slave or possession. She describes it further:

> a daughter is a vain treasure to her father. From anxiety
> about her, the father does not sleep at night during her
> early age least she be
> seduced, in her marriageable years least-she does not
> find a husband; when she is married least she becomes
> childless and when she is old, least she practices
> witchcraft.

However, women have been too secretive and loyal for so many centuries. He or she who is silent accepts what is done to him or her. From the above, it can be submitted that the culture of the patriarchal society is used as a tool to oppress women. As the controller of culture, men have taken over from women the position of authority.

In many ways, women have always remained silent right from centuries ago, and it is partially the same in this dispensation. Under the hold of religion, she is placed behind a veil where she is domesticated (Pudah). In Europe, Mba (1982) captures it that, witch-hunt trials took place between the 15th-18th centuries. For over 300 years, women endured this woe and remained silent. During the era of slave trade, women coped with it all and complained slightly. The fact still remains that women forbear, to a large extent, what ordinarily they should resist. This time, feminists have vehemently decided to fight. Once the feminists achieve this, women activists in other different races are excluded from their groups. For this reason, hypocrisy of the white Americans emerges.

Similarly, complaints of discrimination against a minority and a powerless majority are revealed. White women begin to vent their power and lordship over the Black Americans what the men had previously done to all women without exception. The stand of womanism is not new to Africa. In the pre-colonial era, the question of whether men and women had equal rights in the society was never posed because each gender independently controlled its own different spaces. For instance, the king was the ruler, and the queen also had her own roles. These different offices were independent; therefore, the question of who had a right or had none did not exist.

Equally, during the pre-colonial era, women were never culturally defined as housewives as they were autonomous and contributed to the family economically. They complimented their husbands. Mba (1982:13) is of the opinion that:

> the African woman excelled in trading skills,
> artifacts, farming, animal husbandry, crafts, sorcery
> and herbalism. In this way she had property rights
> even though she was denied an inheritanceright.
> Irrespective of sex, men and women complemented
> each other's efforts in economic acquisition by hard
> work.

Despite this economic autonomous power, there are some businesses that women are not allowed to venture into due to superstitious beliefs, such as stereotypes and sexism. To measure the oppression of women, like in other institutions, discrimination can be quite difficult to measure but it is typical of any situation of oppression. Those who profit from it do not see anything wrong with what they are doing. One can even see such a situation in the case of African Americans who came to Liberia. These female returnees saw themselves as half whites and wanted to lord it over the indigenous blacks who received and accommodated them after the slave trade. Some of the political instability in Liberia originates from superiority complex of the returnees. Another theory that shares similar objectives with womanism is motherism.

Motherism

This is a branch of womanism that emphasises certain aspects of womanism and develops them.   Acholonu (1995) argues that a motherist is any woman who believes in the survival of Mother Earth as a unit, motherism is love, tolerance, service and mutual cooperation of the sexes. The motherist writer is not a sexist. A motherist male writer or artist does not create his work from patriarchal, masculinist or dominatory perspective.

Writers are called motherists when they express solidarity with women. Laye (1954) equally sees his mother from this milieu, a nostalgic representation of the mothers, as one who gives birth and nurtures to maturity. Biologically, a man is different from a woman. However, motherism underplays this because there are spelt roles; it focuses more on the free development of their personality and self-realisation. Motherism arises as an African alternative to the female model of motherhood. As the mother-continent, Africa has to show a model of feminity. With the commitment to literary representations of the

female,they started expressing themselves as essentially mothers. Lessing and Acholonu (1995) support this;

> An Afrocentric feminist theory therefore, must be anchored on the matrix Motherhood which is central to African metaphysics and has been the basis for survival and unity of black race through the ages. Whatever Africa's role maybe in the global perspective, it could never be divorced from the quintessential position as the mother continent of humanity, nor is it coincidental that motherhood has remained the central focus of African Art, African literature (especially women's writings).

From the above, motherhood is a concept that encapsulates a collective consciousness where African women can relate as a family under the umbrella body of African female sharing their challenges and creating solutions.

Laye (1954:58) posits that the mother gives birth to the child and helps the child to grow as well; "mother was kind, very correct, she also had great authority, and kept an eye on everything we did; so that her kindness was not all tempered by severity…and my mother was not a very patient woman". He also portrays the collaborative relationship between his father and mother in the following expression: "my father would never have dreamt of despising anyone, least of all my mother. He had the greatest respect for her and so did her friends and neighbours" (59).

From the above, it is obvious that gender roles in motherism differ and they are meant to complement each other. Motherism celebrates the innate values, such as leadership and ethics. Proponents of this theory, therefore, anchor on the fact that the woman is the spiritual base and last hope of every family, every community and every nation. At this juncture, there is a conscious shift from concepts, such as oppression, colonialism and imperialism which are bad experiences to achieve social development by men, women and children. Here lies the message of womanism and motherism. This connotes the emancipation of the whole community.

Therefore, in motherism, women have their innate values which are used to perform their roles. This is unlike what obtains in *The Second Sex* (1972*)* where De Beauvoir views marriage and motherhood as factors that hinder women from achieving their aspirations in life. In the light of the foregoing, she celebrates women who pursue their careers instead of a family. This is one of the reasons for the shameful encouragement of lesbianism in some societies in Africa today.

Womanhood in pre-colonial era

No matter the degree of stereotypes against women in traditional Africa, it does not reduce the fact that women are saddled with the huge task of organising the family and society at large. To this end, man and woman complement each other in creating a balance to achieve this end. St Clair (1994) observes this fact. Leith (1967) equally recalls that the future of any marriage, family and society solely lies in the hands of women because they possess the power that binds together.

Culturally, African women are the transmitters of language, history, oral culture, music, dance, and the habits. They are teachers and are responsible for instilling traditional values and knowledge in children. Men are also essential in the transmission of knowledge to the youths because they have a different type of knowledge. In essence, Leith (1967:10) submits that each gender has different roles in complementing the society:

> Women are gatherers, which meant that their communities depended on them to provide nourishment. They held vital knowledge of herbs and medicines that also ensures the survival of their communities.

The above shows that African women play important role in teaching their children social, ethical and moral values which are cultural standpoints for evaluating proper societal behaviour. Leith (1967:14) explains further:

> Women are treated with unparalleled respect because they are seen to be closer to the creator than men. This is because women also have the ability to create due to the fact that they give birth. They are charged with the responsibility of caring for the needs of the next

generation. Because of this, they are regarded as the
originators of the idea that is now known as
sustainable developments.

As a result of the above view, a societal sustainable development has a lot to do with a good family. Women are often the backbone of the family in traditional African societies as they procreate, nurture and nourish to maturity.

Looking at womanhood in the south-south of Nigeria, Ikperha (2003:20) argues that:

> Women have played a significant role in Urhobo
> culture. They are highly adorned in many fashions
> throughout several clans. Essentially, the women's role
> is not only that of a caretaker, but extends to many
> other forms of procreator, goddess, mother, ancestor
> and sage.

In Urhobo traditional family structure, the female influences the moral character of the traditional society although that is gradually changing as more women are no longer spending quality time at home with their families. Aside this, due to civilization, lifespan is no longer what it used to be as many people do not get to a ripe age before they die due to their lifestyle. However, to instil socio-religious values and morals in the family, especially in regulating sexuality and family life in general, it is solely the woman's responsibility because she spends more time at home with the children. For this reason, the woman quickly observes any vice in the child's behaviour than the father. At the same time, the man goes out to ensure that there is food for his family. It distinctly shows that there are defined roles for men and women.

It is noteworthy to state that African women are functional in both formal and informal roles in their various societies. At the formal level, women influence politics and some are actually leaders. For instance, in Yoruba history, there were instances when women served as traditional rulers. They are exceptional rulers, among them are Yeyenisewu in Ado Ekiti who was a traditional ruler (Regent) during the 16th century and Eye Aro in Akure who ruled during the 15th century. The role of Iyalode in the Yoruba traditional council is very important politically. In addition, among the Mende and Serbo of Sierra Leone, women held positions as chiefs. In Zambia, the Tonga people also had women who were

herdsmen. Also, in Africa, during the pre-colonial era, according to Olajubu (2003), the queen mother was not just politically influential, she was also in charge of selection of kings. In Dahomey, women have been paraded as warriors who led people to battle. According to Ogunyemi (1988), Nainga of Angola, who led the most effective resistance against the Portuguese, was also a prototype of African women warriors. Despite all the indispensable roles, responsibilities and positions of women, men are still heads of their families. Most African societies are purely patriarchal in nature. This is the picture that was seen during the pre-colonial era.

Womanhood in the colonial era

Colonialism is a system of rules which assumes the right of one person to impose his power upon another. It has been seen as a tool used by European powers to control and dominate third-world countries, most especially African countries. It is the policy of exercising total or partial control over another country as recorded by Rodney (1981:18). Colonial masters occupied and exploited Africa in all spheres. Colonialism answered the needs of the capitalist countries that wanted to access raw materials, had ready market for their goods and a field to invest their excess capital. Colonialism engulfed Africa leaving grave consequences behind. The underlying motive of colonialism is basically economic exploitation. Colonial masters exported the profit created by African labour to Europe for development, while Africa remained underdeveloped.

Rodney (1981:19) further explains that:

> the African women were not spared from the pangs of colonialism. African women were denied of social, religious, constitutional and political privileges and rights. Economic exploitation was intensified because the division of labour according to sex was frequently disrupted.

From the above, it is evident that colonialism reduced Africa to a state of nothingness. It shows that Africans were no more makers of history. Generally, there is an assumption that gender inequality cuts across all human societies, which invariably means that the issue of inequality is an age-long agitation. Also, it indicates the fact that the claim of

women's complementary position to men in promoting the family as well as the society is not reasonable to the colonial masters. Women always complement the roles of men. In pre-colonial era, some notable women, such as Madam Tinubu, Queen Amina and others made landmarks progress in politics, commerce and other spheres of development in their societies. At the point that Africa had contact with European colonialism, the issue of gender inequality in Africa began Boserup (1970). Today, the complementary roles of women to men no longer exist in Africa, but African women's subordination to men and gender inequality can be seen in various forms.

Buttressing the foregoing argument, Hunter (1973:94) posits that the indigenous people had contact with the Europeans who had different morals and value systems from their own. He explains that looking at the Victorian era, fundamentally, women were subordinate to men as they were restricted to the family unit. The decision-making power and potentials to build their societies lie solely with the men. In other words, one of the impacts of colonialism is the change in assessing the female in Africa. Hunter (1973:94) explains:

> But since the era of colonialism, women have been placed on the lower rungs of the proverbial ladder by the dominant forces of capitalism and now globalization which emphasizes this need of power, superiority and compartmentalization of roles and responsibilities with different values attached to them.

Looking at Hunter's position, the image of the African woman changed at the arrival of colonialism. This gave birth to another image of women oppressed by men, imposed religion, law and customs that relegate women, made them to be relegated to the background. The new image of women that emerged then was the one who must be supervised by men. Dennis (1974:188) opines that:

> the religion of many Nigerian societies recognized the social importance of women by emphasizing the place of female gods of fertility and social peace, but women are associated with witchcraft which appeared to symbolize potential social danger of women exercising power uncontrolled by men.

Invariably, women suffered a restriction from participating in whatever they desired due to Western influence. In response to this emerging women's image, some enlightened and powerful women kicked against the white intruders. Women like Dona Beatrice who led a rebellion against pre-Portuguese Congo leadership and Eastern Nigerian women in Aba revolted against the British colonial masters because of unreasonable taxation in the 1920s (Abubakar and Saje, 1997).

The image of women in post-colonial era

As a result of the impact of colonialism on the roles of women in Africa, women embraced a passive voice with regards to their roles. They continued without any resistance. Nonetheless, in about two or three decades after independence, a new image of women emerged in Africa.   Many parents have now seen the importance of education irrespective of sex; there is a decline in early marriage; the quota of women in all professions has increased (Bulkachuwa, 1996).

Africa is not left out of the world's quest for gender equality to create a better image for women. Several women groups and organisations emerged, while conferences to advocate women rights and positions in the society also came to the limelight. Hence, in recent times, we see women in key positions. Examples include Indira Ghandi of India, Benazi Bhutto of Pakistan, Madam Acquino of Philippines, Margaret Thatcher of Britain, and the first female President in Africa, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf of Liberia. In Nigeria, a lot of women are taking up political positions, such as ministers, speakers of the House of Representatives, senators, deputy governors, as well as contesting for presidency. In other areas, women are taking up important leadership positions. Due to this political, social and economic empowerment of the African women, a new image of the women has been birthed as against the traditional role of caregiver or home maker which was known as the identity of wives, mothers and workers.

It is not a new trend that women earn significant wage as it was wrongly expressed that women were housewives during the pre-colonial era. It is just that the profession they engaged in then gave them ample opportunities to tend their homes. Such occupations as

farming, fishing, pottery, cloth making and others were prominent among African women then. This invariably makes pursuing a career by women more tasking. The African woman plays her role as a mother, wife as well as being a professional at her work place.

The pursuit of career by women has affected their places as teachers through socialisation which keeps the home and the society vibrant through moral values because discipline in the society is at its lowest ebb. This is evident as virtues and societal values continue to dwindle.

Slavery and slave trade

These are age-old institutions and practices in almost all the continents of the world that had been in existence before the emergence of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. In a paper delivered on 5th April, 2001 at the University of Illinois, United States of America, Perbi Akosua states that the earliest documents ever known are not that of houses, cattles, boats or lands but the sales of slaves. This proves the fact that slavery is as old as time. There is no consensus among scholars on the reason for the rise of slavery. A school of thought explains that it was the increase in the need of labour especially in agriculture that led to the emergence of slavery. Others are of the opinion that politics and commerce are responsible for the rise in slavery.

 TheAfrican continent became connected to slavery and became one of the major areas in the world where slavery was paramount. Similarly, right from ancient civilisation, out of the medieval world and all the continents of the modern period, Brazil is believed to have the greatest African community with a population of about 200 million and they engaged in slavery then. Next is the Caribbean Island as well as the United States of America where slavery business equallythrived. In West Africa, slavery was common among many states and societies. In all parts of Africa, slavery was a familiar institution.

Two dimensions of slavery

According to Akosua (2001), there are two dimensions to slave trade: the external and the internal dimensions. The external dimension had trade interactions across the Sahara, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. At that time, African slaves were found working with slaves from Asia Minor, Greece, as well as Eastern and

Northern Europe. The slaves, during ancient medieval era, were Blacks and Whites working together.

According to Mckay et al. (1992), Mediterranean Europe turned to Africa for slave labour when it was cut off from its traditional source of slaves. Miers (1975) further expatiates the fact that in the Islamic world, slaves were for both economic and social reasons. The white slaves, usually the Caucasian or Georgian girls, were most highly prized as they were purchased to become concubines; hence, they were highly expensive. In Arabia, Ethiopian men were more expensive than the black men because it was believed that they were more refined and intelligent.

All the West African states along the Atlantic Coast were linked by a Southern trade route expanding from Senegal to Nigeria. Due to the wealth of Ghana in gold and Nigeria in cocoa, they exchanged slaves for such commodities. Other things for slave exchange included beads, cotton and cloth. Due to the fact that Benin Kingdom in Nigeria was always at war with its neighbours, it possessed many captives. According to Petterson (1982), in Africa, there were five major ways in which a slave was acquired.These are kidnapping, tribute, pawning, buying as well as through warfare.

Slavery: journey into the diaspora

During the era of slavery, which was between the colonial era till the end of American civil war, the Africans who were forcefully taken to America encountered so much hardship that they were depressed because their sojourn from the shores of Africa to America was another challenge that those who survived it were deemed strong Petterson(1982). Many slaves died in the course of this transatlantic slave trade. Africans found themselves on American soil. They were taken there by land owners who turned to Africa to meet the labour needs of the rapidly growing colonies. During the late 17th and 18th centuries, England was able to transport millions of Africans across the Atlantic Ocean.

Slavery spread quickly in the American colonies, and from the 1660, the colonies began enacting laws that defined and regulated slave relations. Paramount among these laws was that slaves and their children would serve their masters for life. Several tasks were

41

performed by the slaves: forest clearing, trapping, craftsmanship, nursing, and house servants, but essentially, they were agricultural labourers.

By the mid-18th century, American slavery had acquired a number of distinctive features. More than 90 percent of the American slaves lived in the south. In the Caribbean colonies, blacks outnumbered whites. Slaves often lived on huge estates with quite a large population of other slaves. They lived in colonies of between five and fifty slaves together. Initially, there was high mortality rate, but in the 18th century, birth rate rose in the American colonies, and slave population became self-producing. Even when slavery was abolished in 1808 in America, the number of slaves continued to grow rapidly (Mier, 1975). In order not to mould a docile labour force, planters resorted to harsh repressive measures that included liberal use of whipping and branding. It became really repressive, and some slave masters continued to rely on the whip for discipline.

Resistance from women during slavery

One of the great complexities of slavery was the role of women during slavery. They were subjected to dual oppression due to their race and gender. At the same time, they were faced with the burden of negative stereotypes; they were oppressed in many ways, having to cope with obstacles and strenuous work days. Dual oppression was the experience that was peculiar with female slaves. Reproductive and productive challenges are some of their unique experiences. The reproductive oppression is what made the female slave different from the male slave. Reproductive labour included forced reproduction and child raising, although the offsprings were automatically the properties of the slave owners. The productive labour consisted of field and domestic work, as well as other jobs that both genders were involved in.

Women were not protected from the frequent instances of rape and abuse by their masters as they were seen as mere objects and properties. Due to these and many other problems, slave women were constantly struggling to protect themselves.

Quite a number of negative stereotypes were given to the slave women, such as mammy who was a black slave woman that was completely in charge of the domestic affairs of her master's house. She was dedicated to the white family, especially the children in that

family as she served as the surrogate mistress and mother to the children. She was equally a friend and an adviser. It was erroneously believed by the white society that the fulfilment of the black woman came while serving in a white family's kitchen. She must care for whites from birth until death with loyalty because it was believed that her happiness was derived from serving whites. As unrealistic as this image was, the white advertisers who controlled the media used the mammy stereotype to sell their products, such as Aunt Jemina's Pancake Mix. Mammies really did not have a choice than to remain good and obedient because beating, starvation, threat of being sold and of death would be the consequence if they did otherwise. The stereotype of the mammy became more real because the black female slaves rarely ran away unlike the young black male slaves (Dates, 1993).

Black female slaves always stayed, especially when they had children of their own. The mother's instinct in them made them endure the hardship because of their children. For them to succumb to their master's threat of sending their children to the field or selling them away, the black female slaves agreed to everything their masters wanted, not minding the fact that most times the white masters owned these children who were the products of the sexual harassment from their white masters, who denied their paternity. At some points, the mammy image on advertisement showed a proof to the world that the black female slave was content and happy as a slave because of her wide grin, hearty laughter and long servitude. This is just a make believe with the intension of covering up the emotional affliction they experienced.

According to Dates (1993), during civil rights movement, the production of the pancake stopped because African Americans felt that the images were derogatory and degrading. White (1984) explains other black female slave's stereotypes, such as the stereotype of Jezebel. She was portrayed as a black slave woman who desired, wanted but eluded sex. It was a counter-image of the mid-nineteenth-century and ideal of the Victorian lady. She did not lead children to God because piety was foreign to her, and she was seen as a lascivious slut. This image was a widely used justification by slave owners to rape black female slaves. On one hand, this stereotypical image was used by slave women to manipulate their masters to their advantage. Another image was the sapphire which was

seen as the emasculation of black woman. The crack mother is another image. She was unable to take care of her children as viewed by the slave masters. Welfare queen was another stereotypical image as she was depicted as often too lazy to work and she lived on hard-earned tax payer's money (government support).

African American women's resistance

During slavery, black female slaves devised ways of showing key resistance, including infanticide, marronage and petit marronage. Infanticide was the killing of one's infant; it was a common form of rebellion for slave women in different areas which was done to free their children from slavery, and they were taking ownership of their own children. Meanwhile, slaves also employ marronage, which is the act of a slave running away, sometimes permanently with no intention of returning. They could run to the forests, swamps and mountains in order to liberate themselves from slavery. Furthermore, black female slaves embarked on petit marronage, which is when a slave runs away for a few days because he or she is angry or upset with his/her owners. It is a form of resistance by the slaves to react to an unreasonable treatment from the slave owners. It equally makes the slave owner to know that they do not have complete control over their slaves. So many   black female slaves exhibited such behaviour.

Harriet-Tubman was instrumental to the creation of an underground slave 'railroad' in 1849 which was a route for slaves to escape from the South to the North as freemen. McDaniel (1990) tells of Cecia in Missouri in 1855 who fought her master Newsome that raped her. Although she was executed, her story demonstrates intense resistance.

African American family structure: an overview

Quite a high number of African American children were born into single-parent homes. When compared to White women, African American women were more likely to become teenage mothers, stay single and have marriage instability. They are much more likely to live in female- headed single-parent homes. Thistype of family is called black matriarchy, that is, households headed by women. Moynihan (1965) examines the connection between black poverty and family structure and reiterates the fact that the destruction of the Black nuclear family structure would stop further progress towards economic and political

equality. In Moynihan's 1965 report where he explains the destruction of the black family, it is observed that the out of wedlock children was 25 percent among blacks. In 1991, it rose to 68 percent, and in 2011, 72 percent of black children were given birth to out of wedlock.

This African American family structure that seems to be tilting towards becoming single parent in nature took its cue from historical roots of family separation during the era of slavery. (Ruggles 1994). According to data from U.S Census reports, married households of the father and mother were not the most prominent form of African American family structure between 1880 and 1960.

Billingsley (1992) shows that the African American family can be divided into three major structures: nuclear, extended and augmented families. He further expounds that the nuclear family is seen in three ways; incipient nuclear, simple nuclear and segmented nuclear as well as segmented I and segmented II. Billingsley (1992) defines African American incipient family structure as a married couple with no children. In 1992, African American simple nuclear family was seen as a married couple with children. Traditionally, this was the norm for African American family composition. Furthermore, African American segmented nuclear I family comprises unmarried smother and children, while segmented nuclear II comprises unmarried father and children.This family relationship was based on parent-child relationship. From this time, the research shows that single parent family continues to increase among African Americans.

Billingsley (1992) maintains that African American extended family consists of nuclear, incipient simple, segmented I and segmented II with the addition of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and additional family members. However, he stresses the fact that extended family structure is predominantly in the segmented I family structure. It is revealed that the extended relatives are often the grandparents. Another type of African American family is called the augmented family structure which consists of the primary and non-relatives. It combines the nuclear and extended family units with non-relatives.

Frazier (1974) describes the African American family structure in two models. The father is viewed as a patriarch who is solely the breadwinner, while the mother is seen as the matriarch, who is the sole breadwinner in a broken household. James Stewart (1990) describes a family as an institution that interacts with other institutions forming a social network. However, Ruggles (1994) observes that the modern African American family has changed from the traditional pattern, and it is seen as a predominantly single mother household. It is usually referred to as black matriarchy.

Aidoo (2006) opines that African American families are regarded as poor, fatherless, relied on governmental support and have many children out of wedlock. Thomas et al. (2007) make use of a 2002 survey to explain that the lack of a father's presence in the African American home has brought about serious vices on the children, such as poor educational performance and teenage pregnancy. In addition, it is observed that many African American youths do not even know how to approach their fathers. From the foregoing, it is observed that part of the father's role, such as spending quality time with their children, providing discipline, being role models and making vital decisions for the household, are absent. All these and many other roles cannot successfully and effectively be carried out by the mothers. Therefore, the gap is left vacant. This imbalanced upbringing is reflective in the behaviour of African American children.

The status of the mother, either single or married, determines her role in African American family structure. This is the finding of Wilson (1995) who observes that the dominant role of a mother is her household responsibilities. However, in African American families, the mother does not have specific gendered roles. Her first job is her regular eight hours work. She spends this time outside the home, while, household responsibilities become her second job. This is the pattern of a married African American mother.

Brown (2000) asserts that single-parent motherhood is fast becoming a "proactive" choice in African American culture with 94% single parenthood. Wilson (1995) discovers that there are 62% African American single mothers compared to 33% single white mothers. For this reason, African American single mothers play both the roles of the mother as well as the father, in addition to her full time work. Since there is no partner to assist

financially, most children raised in single-mother household have weak upbringings. In her study, Spencer (2000) portrays the fact that enculturation is the most appropriate way for children to grow. She bases this on three areas: child rearing practices, individual heredity and experienced cultural patterns. Also, the skin colour of African American children exposes them to inconsistencies in the society resulting to environmental stress, as well as inability to attain their full potential.

In all races, challenges are based on age groups, but African American families experience a great deal of mortality within the infant and toddler age groups. This is due to illnesses at the pre - and post- natal stages, as well as a lack of a positive progressive environment for them to grow in. Due to this, African American children are exposed to juvenile detentions, teen pregnancies and other behavioural decadence. Jones (1987) admits that most single mothers rely on, at least, one extended family member for assistance in raising their children. In single mother household, extended family members play important role in ensuring the total wellbeing of the child. Their responsibilities range from child-rearing to providing shelter and feeding, as well as providing financial support, if the need arises. From this standpoint, it can be deduced that African Americans are communal in nature as part of their imported traits from Africa.

Theorising African American family structure and economy

There are many theories that explain African American kinship system. Some of them portray the low economic status of the newly freed slaves in 1850 and the extreme poverty they faced. The result was instability within the African American families. Extreme poverty, due to high female labour participation, low job opportunity for males and differences between wages for men and women are some of the problems which result in continuous marriage instability in African American families.

Collective lifestyle from Africa can also be seen as one of the family patterns exported from traditional African culture, and transported into the diaspora by slave trade. In this case, there is a high reliance on kinship networks for emotional reliance, financial and social support. According to McDaniel (1990), this trend can be traced back to Africa. It can be convincingly explained that during slavery, slaves lived together as extended

kinship ties. Due to their situation and environment, the slaves were culturally adaptive and formed a family pattern that suited them. This extended kinship ties equally enabled the mothers to leave their children in the care of extended family members, hence, they found emotional support when their husbands separated from them. The responsibility of taking care of the children fell on the eldest members of the family. Federal Welfare, under the Great Society Programme, was also said to be responsible for the present state of African American families. The black families had coped with years of slavery and discrimination, and embraced liberal state welfare which was supposed to be a way-out during emergencies totheir ways of life. They completely depended on government support, instead of working hard.

Other factors, as observed by Wilson (1995), include advancement in technology and reduced need for manualhuman labour. The birth of women's rights movement also brought about employment opportunities for women who invariably became more financially empowered than the men. Statistically, African American marriages are declining faster than those of white Americans. However, the birth rate is increasing. At the same time, African Americans marry later than their white American counterparts, but this does not imply that they do not have children before marriage. Hence, the number of single mother households has increased.

According to Wilson (1995), from 1960, a gradual decline is seen with regards to African American male earnings. This is one of the reasons for marital instability. The males are the sole providers, but when they are incarcerated by their society, the possibility of becoming irresponsible becomes higher. As a result, the men flee from their families and homes. This is the portrayal of Bigger Thomas in Richard Wright's *Native Son.*

According to the US Bureau of Justice's (2006) statistics an estimated 4.8 percent of Black Non-Hispanic men were imprisoned or jailed. For the current trends in African American family structure, some structural barriers are seen as reasons for the decline in conjugal rates. Imbalanced sex ratio, caused by high mortality and incarceration, is one of the reasons. In the United States Bureau of Justice's findings, it is revealed that the rate for black males to be arrested and jailed, at least once in their lifetime in many parts of the

country, is very high. In Washington D. C, for instance the probability is between 80% and 90% (Dixon, 2009). It is suggested that, due to few labour force opportunities and reduction in real earnings for black male since 1960 for technological advancement, desirable males have reduced drastically, while divorce is usually the end-result when they get married.

Cultural norm is fast changing because prior to 1970 and early part of the 80s once a relationship resulted in pregnancy, marriage became compulsory, but it is no longer so. For African Americans who get married, the rate at which they divorce is equally high according to McDaniel (1990) . Furthermore, it is observed that there is no more societal stigma for a divorced family; therefore, there is an increasing acceptability in divorces both in African and African American societies.

On the educational achievement of African American children, there is a consensus in literature on the negative consequences of raising a child in a single-parent family. For example, in Richard Wright's *Black Boy* and *Native Son,* boys who grow up in single parent households tend to perform poorly and display behavioural problems. They go through the challenge of disturbances while growing up. Generally, the family structure of a child determines a lot about him/ her, especially for children who are born out of wedlock and raised in single-parent households.

Another argument about homes headed by mothers in this context is that most single mothers often have lower wages and remain at work for more hours. Consequently, the responsibility of the mother is not adequately attended to. Due to meagre income, the family deems it fit to move to a poorer neighbourhood where there are less educational facilities. This invariably affects their academics negatively.

According to Krampe and Newton (2007), it has been psychologically proved that the place of the father as a role model in the home is very important, especially for the male children because it helps them develop cognitively and emotionally. As a result of this, falling into depression or anxiety is reduced greatly. The fear of children's involvement in juvenile delinquency or drug-related issues does not arise. For the female children, they are faced with the challenge of unplanned pregnancies. They often abandon their

education at this point, becoming an economic burden on their parents (Zimmerman, 1995).

Looking at African American family structure, there is no gainsaying the fact that some traditional elements travelled with them to the diaspora. Communal living has greatly helped African American women and given them the opportunity of proving themselves in their different work places. However, the home front suffers as a result of this. Their husbands are out of the house, while their children often have imbalanced upbringing. There is often a crave for their father's presence in the home which the extended family members cannot satisfy. This has led to moral decadence and unruly behaviour among the children.

As a result of the foregoing, African American women suffer from a lot of depression because there is a vacuum in their family. If this is not checked, the rate of single motherhood may continue to increase. Due to proliferation of the new media in Africa, contemporary African women seem to take a clue from African American women. They put in their best in their careers, give little attention to their husbands and depend on extended family members to take care of their children. The communalist spirit gradually gives way to the existentialist spirit of "I alone" as against "WE" "We". From foreign films, magazines, shared experiences from the social media, contemporary African women take cues from African American women on how to live their lives to be self-reliant and independent.

Dickson (1993) argues that in a society where there are gender imbalances, women are left with no choice than to find a way of adapting to the situation they find themselves. Unless African women return to the pre-colonial ways of family living where the gender roles were well spelt out and performed, social ills in the society are imminent. Never the less, to accommodate complementarity, gender roles are becoming more flexible due to postmodern tenets such as globalization, quest for greener pasture, materialism and the likes.

Existing studies on Chika Unigwe's novels

Literary research has revealed that other scholars have subjected the selected authors and their works to literary criticism. This part of the thesis highlights and acknowledges some of the efforts of these scholars, criticisms of their works and the thematic preoccupations of their texts.

Writers have given diverse views on Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street, Night Dancer* and *Phoenix*. *The Independent,* for example, posits that Unigwe's novels are important, and they leave a strong aftertaste as she gives voice to those females who are voiceless, fleshes out the stories of those who offer themselves as meat for sale, and bestows dignity on those who are stripped. In the case of the voiceless, the four African women whose stories are highlighted are given a voice at the end of the text, *On Black Sister's Street.*

Maggie Gee in an interview with Unigwe, examines "Push factors" which masterminded characters' migration in *On Black Sisters' Street.* Kehinde and Mbipom (2011:63) explicate the push factors as; "absence of an environment capable of offering its citizens meaningful existence". The four different women make their way from Africa to Brussels in search of greener pastures. Unfortunately, Sisi, the most enigmatic woman is murdered; their already fragile world is shattered. According to Maggie Gee:

> The women are drawn together by tragedy; the remaining three women – Joyce, a great beauty whose life has been devastated by war. Ama, whose dark mood hide a past injustice; and Efe; whose determination to earn her keep is motivated by a particular zeal. Slowly began to share their stories. They are stories of fear, displacement, love and most of all; they are stories of a sinister man called Dele. (142)

The plot, characters, settings and language as used in Unigwe's novels contribute significantly to the verisimilitude of the novels. Ibemesi (2016:144) maintains that "in realistic literature, everyday life of people is carefully described". Ibemesi further reveals that:

the global sex trade is a major theme in the novel, an ugly
reality that we are often confronted with through different media.
The fiction has different characteristics and at times the narrator
employs satirical mode of presentation in the language and action
of the narrative.(144)

Ibemesi (2016:143) identifies realism in the language of *On Black Sisters' Street* as characters express their identity:

> The Pimp Dele speaks in vulgar and ruthless manner depicting his business (230). He speaks Pidgin English (34, 42, 162 and others) the protagonists of the novel (the four sisters) speaks colloquial, pidgin, standard and native tongue as the situation demands. Expressions loaded with imageries are employed in the narrative to bring home to the audience the realities of the action (143)

Eze (2014) observes that the need to redress patriarchal subjugation of the female is emphasised in Unigwe's narratives because the world is controlled by the male gender. This, therefore, necessitates the feminist voice. Eze (2014:1) observes that Unigwe's novels *Phoenix, Night Dancer* and *On Black Sisters' Street:*

> Belong to the new generation of African women writings that recast feminism as a moral issue of our times. The novel draws attention to some of the central issues of feminism: rights and dignities of the body of a woman. In so doing, it establishes women's rights as fundamental human right that has to be addressed in Africa.

In a review of *Night Dancer* in *The Guardian Newspaper* by Bernardine Evaristo (2012), it is opined that the novel narrates the story of a young university educated woman called Ezi, who tries to conceive a child. The novel focuses on the traditional Igbo culture which believes that a wife has the responsibility of producing children, especially a male child. Evaristo (2012) observes that the plot of *Night Dancer* is full of digressions and flashbacks. Unigwe gives her characters the opportunity to defend their actions and inactions. The plot further favours individuality over family, free will conformity and

women above men. This is in sharp contrast to what is obtainable in the African society, as such a novel "tackles big issues" and portrays complex female characters. The religious clash between Christians and Muslims during the beauty pageant foregrounds social realism in *Night Dancer.*

Thompson (2012), in her review of *Night Dancer,* states that the writer explores the choices available to Nigerian women as they identify themselves in a patriarchal world. It is a story of a woman who tries to make a living and "live life on her own terms". Oge in *Phoenix*, Ezi in *Night Dancer* and Eze, Ema, Joyce and Sisi in *On Black Sisters' Street* are female protagonists who are in conflict with themselves, societal values and the disintegration of self. Unigwe also relates the concern of the migrants which African writers have grappled with. Thompson (2012) further notes that the migrant writers try to portray aspects of African cultures in their narratives to espouse Africa's rich cultural heritage. This equally helps the writer to globally portray African culture and negate the erroneous impression that Africans lack culture. Unigwe uses literature as a cultural exponent. Oge migrates to Europe along with her African culture. Therefore, we have the movement of an African as well as the movement of the African culture. This gesture affords the opportunity for globalisation and inter-cultural dialogue.

Ndiaye (2002) claims that the womanist movement is moving from the phase of thematic preoccupation which foregrounds the stereotypical depiction of women as dutiful wives, prostitutes, mothers and the like to women not only taking active and shared roles with men but also taking charge of their own destinies.

In an interview Unigwe granted Darie Tunca, Vicki Mortimer and Emmanuelle Del Calzo (2013), she opines that she is not comfortable to be referred to as a feminist. She prefers to adopt Obioma Nnaemeka's coinage "Nego feminism" which means "No- egofeminism" or "negotiative feminism". According to Unigwe (2013:57)

> It is a feminism which stays within the boundaries of
> social and cultural norms but which also manipulates
> the space… it is not confrontational it recognises the
> strength of culture and the limitations of what you,
> as one person or as a woman can do within that
> culture.

Going by what scholars have observed about Unigwe's writings, using womanism to interrogate her selected narratives will be a worthy cause as it expands the frontier of literary scholarship.

Previous studies on Terry McMillan and her works

Terry McMillan's novels show the creativity that women bring to everyday quotidian life. The protagonists are used to reflect the socio-economic changes which take place at the turn of the 21st-century. The model of female tradition depicted in McMillan novels is far more enriching than restrictive as Gilbert and Gubar (2000) postulates in "Anxiety of Authorship".

The features of orality are one of the basic attributes of McMillan's writing just as it is seen in the writings of Toni Morrison and Zora Neale Hurston. They evoke the sense of the community by making use of the oral story telling tradition in their fictions where they portray African American and African cultures. This is also part of the tenets of African American writings. They want to impact their community because African Americans are communal in nature. They believe in the wholeness of the community.

McMillan employs silence at the initial contact with the (usually female) protagonist who gradually grows from a voiceless state to a voiced one. This is one of the recurring themes in her work. Henderson (1989) is of the opinion that her female characters have encoded oppression as a discursive dilemma. Due to the writings of female African Americans, there is a rise in the black woman's relationship with power. McMillan's works are a blend of realism with oral features of literature and formal innovation.

Iser (1978:67) explains that the aesthetic responses of a reader do not come from nowhere, but he/she is confronted with circumstances arising from his/her own environment, which stimulates him/her to assess and critique their surroundings. Therefore, this affects the style, language and other strategic choices the authors make. It is also seen that the author is usually caught in a triangle of the author, work and the reading public. Iser (1978) further clarifies that the authentic response of the reader stems from his/her assessment and the stance she takes. In Terry McMillan's works, there are some criticisms on

somethemes, but just as Iser (1978) concludes, such should be expected from different readers due to the singular notion of one's environment which informs our perception. This is what Jauss (1970:15) portrays as "horizon of expectation". Thus, he opines that a reader's response is depended upon the extent to which the work does or does not conform to those existing norms and expectations.

McMillan has equally been seen as not identifying with her roots (Bernice L, McFadden, Terry O'Neal, Crystal Wilkins, Lisa Teaskey, Wanda Phipps) unlike Morrison. However, McMillan looks ahead of a loss of identity to a reconstruction of the identity of black women whom she usually depicts in their community. As she claims in *Breaking Ice: An Anthology of Contemporary African American Fiction* (1990), one's identity is inevitably rooted in the community's sense of identity. She deliberately looks away from slavery as she sees no need for that, but this does not prevent her from showing women as central and powerful figures in her work. To further buttress this point, McDowell (1994) adds that "imagine a black female novelist throughout their literary history" (24). This projects the fact that these black female writers express themselves from their community's point of view.

By the 1990s, African American popular fiction experienced a boom due to a new phenomenon some call "sister girl" and "brother man." Dietzel (2004) portrays the two genres in sometimes steamy novels that cover ups, downs and sexual politics of romantic relationship from either male or female perspective. Terry McMillan started this transformation with her third novel, *Waiting to Exhale* (1992) and *Guerrero* (1990:354) calls McMillan's works: "popular and successful founding force" in the genre of African American women's popular fiction. From this view, her presence and marketability in this genre, promoted (*Sistah Lit).*

African American popular novels tend to centre round growing black middle class. Therefore, Dietzel (2004) labels them directly as black novels of manners. It focuses on recording the social and love lives of the black petty bourgeoisie who also pursue happiness and romance with professional success. This explains why emphasis is placed on material possessions which mark the newly emerging class. There is a quest for career,

education, cloths, houses, cars and so on. It is obvious in how the characters relate in this new circumstance; women and men, parents and children, gays and straights, all struggle to figure out where they belong and ascertain the meaning of blackness in the twenty-first century.

Positively, Gates (1984) is of the opinion that this emerging genre has not only dispelled an age- long myth that blacks do not read but also shows the publishers that white readers can pick up black author books for entertainment. In addition to McMillan, other female writers include Pearl Cleage and April Sinclair. Their focus is basically on their fates and everyday struggles with careers and relationships interwoven with the African American cultures specificities as well as current social changes facing black women. Themes, such as racism, racial prejudices, sexuality, spread of AIDs/HIV, threat of imprisonment and others are given great attention.

Gates (1984) notes that McMillan makes use of the indigenous language, humour, colloquial speech and other oral features to create a masterfully well mixed novel which reveals scatology. In her narratives, it is observed that female narrators are employed. The heroine's voice is strengthened and it appeals to the reader's identification with her. It gives a feeling of escape from being constantly watched or controlled by a male dominated society. She makes use of the first person narrative voice as a means of employing the autobiographical structure. This creates a similarity in what is expected of women to emulate. She situates women in her female protagonists.

Marriage to McMillan's characters is never an ultimate goal as represented in many of her black female protagonists. There is a constant attempt to escape from marriage by the female protagonists. To these female protagonists, as Gates (1999) observes, it creates the freedom they desire. She often portrays her female protagonists as running away from domesticity in an attempt to disconnect from history of forced compliance with the roles of care givers, breeders and sexualised objects. Therefore, these novels reveal the image not only as a mere representation of a new African American woman but also a revolutionary one for this new womanhood. Another image that emerges is that of black women in the American society belonging to the low social hierarchy. There is an

indelible connection of black women with domestic sphere in the American society. Though they have been seen as the underclass citizens for long in the American world view, these new writings portray African American women with a distinctly different vision of black womanhood. Similarly, McMillan exposes the complexities in the romantic lives of contemporary black professional women. Both these "sisters" and "brothers" depict black middle-class communities with particular emphasis on interpersonal relationship.

From the foregoing, it is necessary to interrogate the above assertions to check if they are real or unreal to African and African American situations.

CHAPTER THREE

IMAGING AFRICAN WOMEN IN CHIKA UNIGWE'S *NIGHT DANCER*, *ON BLACK SISTERS' STREET* AND *PHOENIX*

Introduction

Nigerian literature has been an answer to quite a number of contesting issues in the country. This chapter investigates the image of the African woman in Chika Unigwe's *Phoenix* (2007), *On Black Sisters' Street* (2008) and *Night Dancer* (2013).Unigwe is a third-generation Nigerian writer. In her works, she blends the Western and traditional world views to evolve something that is totally new and modern in nature. Invariably, a new identity is created for the third-generation Nigerian fiction writers.   Kehinde (2008:19) applauds this new mode of writing by asserting that it is an "unproblematic blend of Western and African modes of fiction" which enables "critical waves of thinking". Womanism is one of the resultant ideologies of such blends which form an important tool in explaining this rich literary narrative tradition among black women where important issues that have to do with them are depicted. They include self-naming which defines family as the centre of life, sisterhood, healthy positive male and female relationships, emancipation, self-discovery, as well as motherhood.

Womanism: A new dimension to seeing life

Female writing in Nigeria started with Flora Nwapa as the first Nigerian female novelist with published works. According to Mojola (1989:18), Nwapa's works are specifically on "her commitment to the cause of women and their freedom from practices and beliefs which impede their material and spiritual progress". Shortly after Nwapa, Nigerian female writers at home and in the diaspora emerged. Among them are Buchi Emecheta, Ifeoma Okoye and Zainab Alkali. Their writings challenge existing patriarchal modes. Chukwuma (2000:28) observes that new female writings: "address the subjugating position of women in the marriage institution and the attendant problems" such as the

woman's right to choose a marriage mate and not have one forced on her, childlessness, marital infidelity and economic independence. In Kolawole's (2004:26) view, these emerging female writers are: "presenting and representing their gender". The issue of representing women in the light of their various challenges in different spheres of life is what is portrayed in Chika Unigwe's narratives.

Unigwe deals with issues of modern women and their challenges, such as economic dependence, childlessness, drug addiction, polygamy, lesbianism, homosexuality, forced marriages and marital infidelity. Mariama Ba, a female writer from an older generation, in her epistolary *So Long a Letter,* through her female characters, provides an outcome to the above challenges.

Unigwe experiments with one of the ways out of a bad marriage through her protagonist Ezi in *Night Dancer.* Mariama Ba and some other female writers such as Buchi Emecheta, Ifeoma Okoye and Sefi Atta reveal that when a marriage is not working, then, the woman should break out of it, reclaim her name and get an identity. Unigwe tries to present a twist with women who break out of a bad marriage as strong, independent, successful career builders and fulfilled mothers, who might not end well. She creates a change to reflect the dwindling economic situation in the country. Ezi, (the protagonist) in *Night Dancer,* turns into prostitution as a means of survival. She eventually raises her daughter, gets a house, buys more houses and saves a large amount of money that her daughter inherits. Her daughter suffers shame, Ezi dies untimely and was buried without any celebration of rites of passage despite all that she possesses.

In line with a tenet of womanism, Unigwe portrays Ezi as a strong woman who challenges tradition; polygamy and resists a cheating husband as she struggles to survive in a male-dominated world. This is part of the changes that are experienced in this present generation. She does not desire to return to Mike's house despite the diverse hardship she faces, including unemployment, gender discrimination, poverty and social stigmatisation. These are some of the hurdles that single mothers experience. She believes that staying in a bad marriage can make her do more despicable things; therefore, she thinks of how she would survive. She still deems it fit to remain single in spite of the economic hardship; she

59

wonders how she will cope. However, she decides to look for a job since she is a graduate, while she neglects all persuasions from her mother and friends. She expresses it in the following way:

> Things must have changed since her mother's time,
> when women were terrified of living alone. Society
> had become more intelligent, more tolerant, surely.
> There was no need to stay in a marriage which no
> longer suited her just so that she could lay claim to a
> husband… mother, times have changed (201)

Ezi leaves Mike and remains a single mother. She has to endure many difficult situations. For instance, she cannot get a job which propels her to borrow money from Goody Goody, a money lender. She can no longer cope; therefore, she resorts to prostitution, not of her free will, but to make ends meet. She eventually becomes rich and leaves an inheritance for her daughter. From the house rent on Nene Street, Ezi buys properties This is further explained by the narrator:

> Ezi could rent out the two flats under theirs and she did,
> with the money she saved, she bought other properties
> in the city in New Haven and two duplexes in Trans
> Ekulu. (88)

Unigwe uses her protagonist, Ezi, to challenge patriarchy, custom and tradition. She starts this when her principal tries to convince her to go for either nursing or teaching, which are the professions considered as women friendly but she kicks against it and goes for accountancy. She depicts Ezi as a woman who is highly assertive and non-conformist in her ways. She vehemently kicks against any role conceived as female roles in the society. Ezi is described as an intelligent woman, who believes in living her life to the fullest and "on her own terms" (71). She does what is best for herself: "Her teachers liked her a lot. Good report cards every term. Her principal wanted her to go into nursing and teaching. Respectable professions for women but your mother [Ezi] refused, she had her own plans" (102).

Ezi sees marriage as inhibitive. She is of the view that marriage can hinder one's life and tells her mother that she does not want to get married because of its excessive demands and challenges. It is not really a true form of happiness:

> "Yes they might all have looked happy and satisfied, but I knew better than most that marriage and happiness don't often go hand in hand. They are like oil and water, except in soup, and how many marriages are like soup?" (53).

Ezi emphasises that men are dispensable, while, she equally thinks that love is for fools as it disappoints. She further compares love and marriage with oil and water that can never become one unless when it is hot. Ezi refuses to listen to anything that will make her remain under patriarchy. When family members and friends try to preach forgiveness to her, she refuses. For Ezi, "Love disappoints". She writes further that "he who trusts in love is a big fool" (91) "… love-love nonsense never does anyone any good" (92). After Mike's betrayal, she refuses to take up the two options left for her, which are: living in her house with her house help who has given birth to a male child for her husband or leaving her daughter behind and walking out of the marriage. Her hurt is against tradition that encourages patriarchal institutions. These traditions equally favour men against women, such as preference of the male child above the female child "… no one asks a man to give up his son" (240). Mike hides behind patriarchy to encourage himself not to feel bad about his actions. Mike declares that:

> He had resisted so long, not many men would. And what had he done that was so bad that he had to lose sleep over it? He was no worse than his friends. No better, but surely no worse. Why some of the things they got up to, sleeping with their daughter's friends. (185)

Tradition gives the male child preference over the female child, which is one of the anti-female issues that Ezi seriously kicks against. Tradition makes a way for the men and insists that women should suffer in silence. Ezi's mother represents such traditional voice thus:

61

> Mama! He slept with Rapu, Mama! Rapu my maid!
> 'Yes, He's betrayed you. Stop. O zugo: And she has
> his baby! His son! His son! And that dear makes all the
> differences…because at this moment you're standing
> only with one leg inside the house. This Rapu has
> landed on both feet. (195-196)

Ezi returns to Mike after a while just to allow her daughter have a father-daughter relationship but she cannot stand the humiliation of sharing her husband with her housemaid. For this reason, Ezi tells Mike to send Rapu away. He replies that; "no one asks a man to give up his son" (240). She is resolute in her decision. She is expected to either accept Rapu as her co-wife or adopt her son. However, she opts to leave the bad marriage and face whatever consequences that come her way. She becomes a night dancer just to sustain herself and her daughter. Through this, she becomes wealthy. Nma states that "I don't want your money! My mother was rich!" (239).

Womanism celebrates collectivity against individualism. Kolawole (1997:34) opines that "introspection and individuality characterise feminism but African thought is largely collective." (34). She moves on to hinge on the fact that, "no form of gender separatism can solve African problem" (201). In Unigwe's *Night Dancer,* Ezi individually fights her husband; hence she does not achieve much success in relation to her marriage. If all her family members had supported her, maybe Rapu would have been sent back home. A collective fight is more likely to attain victorious outcome than an individual fight against the society.

Moreover, Rapu's family totally supports and counsels her on what to do. Rapu is to be treated honourably because it is expected that she takes them out of poverty "… they waited patiently for Rapu to rescue them from the poverty in which they were mired" (136). Getting Rapu ready for the journey to Kaduna, Rapu's mother tells her daughter some things secretly in her ears. It may be that she is told to try to seduce Mike when they get to town. This is vividly described thus:

> Her mother had given her own words of advice the way women do: discreetly, whispering into her daughter's ears as if she were afraid that if she spoke them out loud, some evil person or thing would spirit them away before they reached Rapu's ears. (139)

From the above, it seems Rapu is sent to Mike's home to provide a child that Ezi is finding difficult to give her husband. Rapu seems to have appeared in Mike's marriage to act out a role she was prepared from home to enact.

Negative effects of tradition on women in *Night Dancer*

In *Night Dancer*, Unigwe portrays the fact that a woman's happiness in life is not linked with marriage only. She questions the traditional belief which states that a woman's status is only linked to marriage. According to womanists, men are welcome; they also show that happiness really resides in a family but women need to be happy. Unigwe, through Ezi, presents scepticism towards feminist "grand narrative" and presents women who break away from their marriages trying to live fulfilling lives. However, Ezi's choice to leave her husband emanates from betrayal from her husband, Mike, who has a sexual relation with their teenage maid, Rapu, who gets pregnant and subsequently gives birth to a male child. This same son grows up to become a medical doctor. Unigwe proves the fact that as a womanist, when the family stays in unity that is when there is development and progress. Rapu's three children attain heights academically in the university. Ezi who decides to remain a single mother also raises Nma (daughter) academically through her profession as a night dancer. She has no family love and no lasting relationship, except for her friend, Madam Gold.

Traditionally, Ezi is not expected to frown at infidelity because, for adult males, it is a societal expectation. The choice of the adult male in question does not matter. The wife is supposed to remain in marriage and accept her husband's choice if he desires to bring another home. In *Night Dancer,* Ezi challenges tradition by getting out of an unfaithful relationship despite all the pleas from the representatives of traditional voices: his mother, Mike and her friend, Madam Gold, as she states that:

Your mother was stubborn, very stubborn. Every man deserves a son… not even a man carved out of stone would turn away a son when his wife had only been able to give him a daughter. I'm not saying what he did was right Mba nu I'm only saying that he did what any man in his position would have done… It's only natural. They would have planted their seeds in many places. Anyone who tells you otherwise is lying (11-12).

In order to portray that tradition has a great hold on people, Unigwe downplays the grievous crime Mike commits under the covering of tradition which approves it when a man does not have a male child. It becomes necessary for a man to have a male child at all cost. To play safe, Mike does not look at the repercussions of his sexual infidelity. Mike blames adultery and promiscuity on destiny. At Rapu's birth, a prophecy that she is going to lead her family out of poverty is gradually coming into limelight. This can only be the explanation for Rapu's promotion from the position of a maid to a wife. She further says that destiny leads Mike to see Rapu's nakedness and leads him to her room when his wife was attending a friend's wedding. Destiny makes Rapu who is a young teenage virgin not to resist the sex advances of her mistress' husband towards her at the first and subsequent times. Destiny takes the blame thus:

> …he found himself quite against his will going to Rapu's room… it seemed like destiny when she did not fight him but opened up warmly to welcome him as if she had waited her entire life for this. (185)

Womanism appreciates culture and gives credence to what tradition says but it does not support discrimination against women. Unigwe deploys her narrative to undermine the fixed tenets of marriage by celebrating female independence. Ezi wants to be who she really is without any restraints from any man, not even her husband who betrays her. Her mother further tries to convince her against her choice of leaving her husband but Ezi does not regret any move to change her mind saying: "l will take that risk…we will be fine; I have a degree after all. I can get a job. Easy'' (200).

Unigwe thematises lesbianism which is one of the issues emphasised by womanists. According to Walker (1983), womanism implores women to love one another sexually and asexually. Walker's strand of womanism encourages lesbianism but in the other strands of womanism, lesbianism is not encouraged in Africa as well as in African novels. lesbianism is one of the traditionally repressed topics which find an outlet in Unigwe's *Night Dancer*. Mama Chikezie, one of the minor characters depicts this theme. This woman is one of Ezi's neighbours. She has a bad marriage but endures it because she wants to earn her respect from the society. She keeps an affair with a young female whom she claims is her relative. She reveals that she is neither too shy nor too conservative to present true forms of reality in our contemporary Nigeria:

> …always had a young female visitor every time her husband was away on a business trip. She said the young woman was a relative but everyone knew that she was more than that… touching each other like man and woman. (60)

The first part of *Night Dancer* is set in Enugu. Ezi leaves behind a box of letters which she titles "My Memoirs; The truth about my life". In this box, one gets to know Ezi's story. The challenges she passes through when she leaves her marriage, the sacrifices that accompany each challenge, her neighbour's assessment of her, her perspectives on marriage and many other societal issues are shown in these letters. Adamma goes through these letters to really know and understand her mother. This is an instance of womanist consciousness that states that women need to be happy. Ezi tells of her frustrations in marriage and the challenges she encounters out of marriage. Through the protagonist, Ezi, suggests that with determination, one can live a fulfilled life without marriage, but it is not womanist standpoint because complementary is the hallmark in womanist. However, Unigwe portrays that Ezi did not live a fulfilled life but enjoys prosperity through prostitution. This is one of the standpoints that Walker (1983) expresses in *In Search of Our Mothers' Garden*. It is all about "getting to be happy". If Ezi did not get out of the marriage with Mike, she would not have been as prosperous as she becomes before her death. She responds: "I want to dwell on happy-happy things" (60). Also, Nma declares: "Her mother's is dominated by a wide, wide smile as if that was all her face was; a smile

which swallowed everything else" (74). "… come sweetie, come dance-dance with your mummy-mummy; her mother said, the smile never diminishing" (74). Ezi further enunciates that she understands she owes herself happiness, and this she enjoys to a great extent. Womanism conscientises women to work towards their happiness against all odds.

In *Night Dancer*, Unigwe utilises the flashback technique. This is the only way of meeting Ezi in the narrative. Through her letters the reader gets to meet Ezi, most of whose stories are unfinished. The reader solely relies on her friend, Madam Gold, to have a complete picture of what she says. Through Ezi's letters, Unigwe creates a balance because there is every tendency to blame Ezi for most of her actions; however, Unigwe gives her an opportunity to express herself. Womanist's consciousness demands that women should express themselves in their own way. Madam Gold throws more light to the dark part of the narrative. Hudson-Weems (2007:66) submits that "womanism gives women a good vantage point and platform to discuss issues about their lives in their own way and explore the positive qualities of women who she describes as the very foundation of life whether they know it or not.". From the diverse major and minor female characters in *Night Dancer*, Unigwe presents different voices in relation to different challenges African women experience.

Night Dancer reiterates the fact that the family is central. Kolawole (1997:97) brings this point to limelight: "… but womanism sees the cohesion of the family as the stability of life and society." It is equally seen that the breakdown of the family unit is responsible for the high rate of crime, drug use, alcoholism, suicide and many moral pervasions in contemporary human society. The centrality of the family is the primary source of life as the tenet of womanism enunciates. Ezi leaves her family because she thinks she cannot help feeling betrayed by her husband, and a supposedly young naïve village girl takes over her home and keeps it. She gives birth to three children, including a medical doctor, but Ezi continues to struggle on her own, and her daughter studies Theatre Arts which is a lucrative profession and leads to stardom in contemporary Nigeria as Medicine and Surgery and they are regarded as graduates:

> Rapu answered, grinning from ear to ear, 'Prince is a doctor, he's doing his internship'. A smile lit up her eyes. My son, the doctor, her father said, and pride in his choice hit Nma with the sharpness of a blade. (221)

Motherhood is pertinent to womanist consciousness. This is well portrayed in each family Unigwe showcases in *Night Dancer.*Positive qualities that come with being a woman and mothers aver strongly to pursuing the general wellbeing of their families. Womanism does not see motherhood as a burden to be disposed of at any slightest opportunity. This is shown when Ezi leaves her betraying husband; she does not abandon her daughter, Nma because she is not working. On the contrary, she takes her daughter and goes into the shameful business of prostituting just to feed herself and her daughter. Kolawole (1997) reiterates that womanism uses motherhood to enhance women's strength in a positive and wholesome way by highlighting and not effacing femaleness. Unigwe uses motherhood to enhance and promote Rapu (a young naïve maid). If she does not get pregnant and have a male child, Mike will not decide to pay her bride price. Motherhood, in this case, is what Unigwe employs to elevate Rapu's status. The narrative captures it in this manner:

> …afterall, what power did this woman have that she did not have? They were both sleeping with the man, with the boss of the house, and so whatever line there was before them which placed one higher than the other had been erased. (190)

> … so that Aunty Ezi knew that they were now equals. Both carrying babies for the same man. (191)

As a result of securing and continuing the family name, Ezi's mother-in-law mounts pressure on him to marry a second wife when Ezi does not get pregnant after four years of marriage. Mike's brother, Silas, too constantly pressurises Mike: "He turns to Ezi, our wife, are you inviting us soon?" (144). Mike reminiscences on what his mother tells him about marrying another wife so as to have children for him:

> Had he not resisted his mother's attempts to get him to
> take a second wife 'you don't even have to love her.
> Just get her to give you a baby. People are starting to
> talk. They are starting to say that you're not a man.'
> (184)

Mike sees God as the only one who can help a person increase the family size and at His own time. When his mother insists that he must marry another wife and moves back to the south, he refuses to listen to her. Mike's mother gets angry and says "he was a stubborn son, an obstinate son who deserved nothing good" (174). He replies that he already has everything good, that nothing could add to the joy, to the fulfilment of being with a woman he loves in a city he loves. As far as Mike is concerned, his immediate family's interest must be protected and preserved.

Unigwe uses Mike to portray the interest of the family as very important. Silas also tries to disintegrate Mike's family by telling him that he thinks Ezi has slipped something in his water, some powerful love "juju" because nobody but a possessed man would talk like this: "You don't care that nothing will be left of your immediate family when you go?" (174). He appreciates his family and tries to protect and preserve it. Mike states that "I cannot separate sex and love. And I'll not get a wife just so she can give me a baby. Besides, God will give us a baby in His good time" (174). In other words, he endeavours to protect his family from external intrusion.

Most feminists envision a world where women will have everything the way they want them. There is no more consideration given to compromise, ground shifting and tolerance as keys to healthy development of a people and a society. Ezi, due to her exposure to education, decides to quit her marriage for Rapu because she does not believe in polygamy and cannot tolerate sharing her husband with a housemaid. In this case, Unigwe challenges the tradition of polygamy which insists that women should suffer in silence. Ezi's mentality changes due to her contact with western education. She is more of a hybrid personality that kicks against the oppressive tool of tradition. Her mother tells her to endure. Madam Gold asks her to remain for the sake of her baby, but she declines. Rapu decides to endure whatever attitude Mike puts up because she knows that it will not

last for too long before he warms up towards her, but "he spent his nights away and his days in the shop … he would shout for Rapu to bring him the baby" (203). Anwuli, Rapu's friend, counsels her not to worry because "hot water will eventually cool down. It will not be like this forever" (203). In response to the above good counsel, Rapu remains patient and, after sometime, Mike calls her thus:

> Leave the baby! he said, and come and sleep in my bed.
> She had hoped then that she would not be sent back to
> the guest room… and she was willing to wait for it to
> cool. (204)

If Ezi does not move out of her marriage and decides to endure the crisis of Rapu, she will not remain in that house. Mike's son will be taken from her probably after he grows and stops breastfeeding. Mike even promises Ezi this, but Unigwe uses her protagonist to reflect everyday realities and changes that are coming up to challenge the existing norms and traditions.

Moreover, there is a constant questioning of the tenet of tradition which is also seen as one of the major weapons of women's domination. For instance, in tradition, virginity is a crowning glory of a woman, but in *Night Dancer*, it is not to be celebrated in the contemporary times, virginity is rarely appreciated and celebrated in cognisance of the fact that times are changing.

Unigwe reveals that things are changing, and there are many things and concepts that are changing. When Rapu starts to see that Mike does not show any interest in her anymore, she becomes devastated because she believes that: "it (virginity) was the most precious gift you could give a man" (189). The general belief before now was that "a man who took your virginity was supposed to desire you so much that he thought of nothing else" (189). This is Unigwe's way of reflecting on the fact that times are changing. What seemed to be normal and sane are no longer so as tradition and societal norms are gradually fading away.

The notion of instability in *Night Dancer* is so rampant that everything seems different. Unigwe tells a particular story from different characters. Truth is shown from the different

voices. This helps the reader to have a balanced insight into the different character's actions and inactions. Hence, a better judgment or conclusion is achieved. For instance, Mike tells Silas that "he cannot separate love and sex" (194). Yet his action of sleeping with Rapu contradicts his expression. The novel is divided in an unconventional way into parts one, two and three. Each part opens with an Igbo proverb. Through letters, many revelations come to limelight about Unigwe's protagonist, Ezi. This is one of the womanist tenets whereby women want to express themselves in their own ways because their experiences are unique. In this vein, the uniqueness of writing is seen.

Changes are the main reflections in *Night Dancer*. Women's mentality equally undergoes a process of change whereby nothing seems to be the appropriate or inappropriate thing. The most important thing is its suitability to the person. Although the relationship between Ezi and Mike disintegrates, both of them still live their separate lives with their hurts. In this case, tradition and culture cannot force a party to endure while the husband enjoys the pains of the wife who shares her husband with another woman. As a means of survival, Ezi turns to prostitution. Culture and tradition frown against it, but they provide no better alternative for her. For this reason, Ezi remains in prostitution unperturbed.

Invariably, the culture that preaches that no two wives co-habit peacefully in a man's house, preaches polygamy. Ezi revolts and shows no pretence about her dislike of sharing her husband and suffering in silence. Apparently, Unigwe in *Night Dancer* avers that women must live their lives in the way that pleases them. After all, they are responsible for their wellbeing. Anything is possible in this postmodern age.

Complementarity in Unigwe's *Night Dancer*
Complementarity in marriage is one of the tenets of womanism. This negates the natural role division of the husband/father who is the provider and the mother/wife to be the care giver. The picture was never so, because the mother and the father in Yoruba milieu, always complement each other. The mother and father are actively in business, farming, trade etc. women were not domesticated before colonialism. Olajubu (2003)

Colonialism emerged and robbed Africans of their unique ways of peaceful co-existence in the family. Women were to be idolised at home and not to be seen outside. In fact,

before colonialism in Africa women were actively in politics. That is why we have portfolios such as "Iyalode", "Iya loja" and "Iya Egbe" etc. These are female leaders who oversee the market, these positions are reserved for women because Africans believe in complementarity of both the male and female roles towards the development of the family, society and nation at large. Taking a cue from Hudson-Weems (2004) who posits that womanists also welcome male presence and participation in her struggle. Moreover, Africana womanist desires positive male companionship unlike radical feminism which believes that males are the main problems of women therefore, they do not want to have anything to do with them. Walker and the propounders of the other variants of womanism believes African and African American nations cannot achieve greatly without their male counterparts. Collectively, they can rescue their community from the common oppressor. This proves that without the support of the male in any struggle, it will be a futile attempt that is set for failure. For these reasons, an agreement of the gender in fighting the common enemy is vehemently reiterated in the tenets of womanism.

Jacques Garvey in Taylor (2000) succinctly admonishes that women have been endowed with God given gifts which will repay them for their weakness. This is the gift of motherhood. Despite this, they should be actively involved in politics and civic affairs but they must not stray away from the gender specified roles. This connotes that the image of women tends to change due to role flexibility.

In Unigwe's *Night Dancer (2013),* Ezi singlehandedly raises and educates her daughter. She builds houses which enriches her and secures an inheritance for her daughter Nma. These are roles performed by men. Nma declares to her father "I don't need your money! My mother was rich." (293) In spite of all odds, Ezi works assiduously, summons all her might into the business, (night dancer) and becomes wealthy. This is a new image of role reversal. Culturally, the father works hard to give an inheritance to his children but in this scenario, Nma's mother (caregiver) is also the father (provider) which is the male traditional role. The protagonist in *Night Dancer* combines these roles. Contrary to what obtained during and after colonialism, gender roles are no longer rigidly fixed. Due to the fact that Ezi was a single mother, she perfectly combines the traditionally spelt out roles of Nma's mother as well as father. Unigwe explains further:

71

> Ezi could rent out the two flats under their flat and
> she did, with the money that she saved, she bought
> other properties in the city in New Haven and two
> duplexes in Trans Ekulu.(88)

For Ezi, culturally assigned roles changes and she copes with the challenges by adopting coping strategies. Africans are therefore urged to embrace complementing each other in the family because the development of the family is not solely the responsibility of the male (father figure) in the family but a complementary style whereby the father contributes and the mother augments where necessary. This will help the family, society and nation at large. This can also be seen in the development of Africans in the pre-colonial era. As a result, womanism preaches the cooperation of genders in order to achieve sustainable development which will be reflected in the society and nation at large.

Womanism preaches that women must not be slothful but be able to contribute to the development of their families and community. In the definition of womanism by Alice Walker (1983). She opines thus; "A black feminist of feminist of colour…wanting to know more and in greater depth" (11)

Another cogent point of womanism is that, a womanist is a woman who is willing to learn, understand and discover newness in all areas of life. It is a clarion call to women of this era to be forthcoming by breaking grounds in diverse aspects of life. Walker, through essay, *In Search of our Mothers' Garden*(1983) foretells the future. Due to colonialism, neo-colonalism, globalisation and immigration, there is a plethora quest for knowledge among women in order to compete with their counterparts globally, women need to seek knowledge. This is a salient point in womanism. This tenet of womanism will enhance new image of women. To achieve this point, women must be actively involved in anything going on around them. To be actively and not passively involved.

The issue of complimentary from the stand point of Walker (1983:11) is further reinforced by Okonjo Ogunyemi ((1998:665) who posits that; "womanism is black centered, … It wants meaning ful union between black woman, men and children." The above assertion differentiates womanism from feminism. African and African America women love their men as well as their children, nevertheless, Walker's strand of womanism tilts towards

sexual and asexual relationship. They are not men haters neither are they against motherhood. The common enemy can only be overpowered when the genders are in agreement. Bestman (2012:115) corroborates the above by looking at Okonjo Ogunyemi's view on this issue. She buttresses four significant points; collaboration, consensus, conciliation and complimentary relationship between men and women. These four points aim at achieving agreement between both genders. Anything void of these points is a deterrent to womanism because to attain cohesion in the family, community and nation, anything outside these points is like putting a round peg in a square hole. Ezi in *Night Dancer* did not recognise these points hence; Ezi fails to regain her marriage from Rapu.

In fact, in the present era, it is surprising that some men still insist on the fact that they want their women to remain as complete housewives. They do this based on the traditions and customs which they are deeply enshrined in, such as, the traditional role of the man is to provide for his family. To further have a masculine control over his wife, he restrains her to the domain of the home. One should have thought that with the influx of the internet, globalisation and a fluidity in culture, such impression should have been eroded but to assert their power of masculinity over the women, they are reduced to housewives.

In Unigwe's *Night Dancer,* Ezi decides to separate from Mike due to an illicit relationship with her housemaid (Rapu) which produces a male child, which is preferred in African society as against her own legitimate child who happens to be a female. At the time she refuses this patriarchy dominance, her mother and father frown against her action. Instead of them to support their daughter who is experiencing trauma in her marriage, Ezi's family rejects and abandons her to fate. The father says he will disown her and she must not return to his house. The mother is of the opinion that Mike cannot allow his son to grow outside his home. However, he can abandon his daughter from an illegitimate relationship with his wife to be raised outside his home with proceeds from prostitution. Mike allows his masculinity expectation to overwhelm his judgement.Nma is a female child but Rapu's child is a male child who will carry on the family name.

Ezi's friend, Mama Gold equally agrees with oppressive culture and tradition by calling her friend a stubborn woman who expects too much from her husband and refuses to bear

his excesses as Mama Gold avers: "Not even a man called out of stone would turn away a son… not even when his wife had only been able to give him a daughter," (11)Erroneously, it is a known fact that the men determined the sex of a child and not the woman.

Looking at tradition and culture, it can completely become a strong hold on the female gender using patriarchy as a weapon of oppression. Nma decides to visit her father despite his non-challant altitude towards Ezi and Nma. Traditionally, Nma is aware that if her father and his relatives are absent at her wedding ceremony, then she will be looked down upon. What an unfair judgment on a female child? She visits her father at Kaduna and it reveals to her the reason why her mother abandons her marriage. Nma's visit her father's house at Kaduna becomes an eye opener for her. She appreciates her mother's efforts over her. Rapu remains an housewife. When her father's business experiences a setback due to the religious crisis, where his shop was damaged, she did not have anything to augument the house with. This is where the issue of complementarity comes in. she could have supported her husband to feed the family but, her husband sees himself as a failure because of his inability to fulfill his role as breadwinner and absolute sole provider. Therefore, he reinforces traditional values which inhibit women. This is what womanism kicks against as woman must be responsible, in charge and serious." (1983:11). Nitri 2004:174 is of the opinion that men and women must work together to make the world a better place, this statement preaches complementarity between the gender. Nma angrily responded to Rapu who believes she visited to request for her inheritance that: "I don't need your money! My mother was rich" (239).

These are the evidences of changes in the image of women. Roles for Ezi are seen as not rigid. Due the fact that societal expectations for both genders are often culturally embedded, it becomes binding on them. However, societies are electric and have the potentials to change. White (2011) avers similarly thus; "culture is both evolutionary and revolutionary; it is an adaptive mechanism that constantly adjusts to satisfy human, biological and social needs" (205). This portrays that culture goes through a process of change and adaptation as a result of contact with other cultures," (206)   Ezi in *Night Dancer* tells her mother that she should not remain with her age long traditions and culture

because Ezi expresses thus: "things must have changed since her mother's time, when women were terrified of living alone…. Mother times have changed." (201) Culture and tradition will never remain static, therefore, changes in the image of women should be expected.

Portrayal of women's new image in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*

African women are products of multiple subjugations, in forms of patriarchy, tradition, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism and gender imperialism. All these combine to act against the African women's self-assertion. In the midst of this plight, women try to negotiate a path through the multiple maze of oppression positively; the lives of the majority of African women reveal resilience and not defeat.

Speaking out is, therefore, encouraged as a means of self-healing to correct the representation of African women as they exist in the world's view. Thiam (1986:23) succinctly captures it thus*:*

> You should think that Black women did not exist. In fact, they find themselves denied, in this way, the women who claim to be fighting for the liberation of women.

In a bid to search for a place of their own, African women writers start to look at mythical representation and a re-writing to further break the silence as seen in some writings of some earlier female writers such as of Flora Nwapa, Zainab Alkali, Mariama ma Ba and Nawal El Sadaawi. However, they present women who embrace change within a society that still imposes traditional values on her. In looking at the level of awareness revealed in African Women's Literature, one cannot but observe the social changes and individual consciousness in different phases and how they are gradually taking shape.

Unigwe, who was born in Nigeria, now lives in Belgium. In a rich mix of schoolmarm British and Pidgin English, spiked with smatterings of Igbo and Yoruba world views, she tells the stories of four African sex workers sharing an apartment in Antwerp's red-light district. But it is only when Sisi, the rebel among them, is murdered, that her three housemates emerge from their self-protective anonymity to share their family histories.

The person that brings these women together is Dele, a "big man" back in Lagos whose wealth comes from selling African women to European brothels. Dele proclaims thus: "Every month I send gals to Europe. Antwerp, Milan, Madrid. My gals dey there. Every month, four gals. Sometimes five or more" (42). He boasts to Sisi when she first visits his office.

> You be fine gal now. Abi, see your backside, na dat
> Jennifer Lopez get the finest nyansh?... As for those
> melons wey you carry for chest, omo, how you no go
> fin' work? (43)

Dele's offer is brutally upfront: the fee he charges his "gals" for spiriting them into the longed for Western countries is 30, 000 euros, a debt that is combined with the rent they will owe "Madam", which will take many years to repay. Yet each of these four women accepts Dele's hard bargain, simply because their alternatives are worse. They believe that escaping from their immediate homelands will offer them better opportunities tolive better lives.

Ama, raised in a middle-class milieu in which ladies debate the respective merits of houseboys versus serving maids, has been kicked out of her home for revealing that her saintly seeming stepfather, assistant pastor at the Church of the Twelve Apostles of the Almighty Yahweh, perpetually rapes her since she was eight years old. It is as much a revolt against human hypocrisy as material need that drives Ama to become one of those lewd women the pastor likes to curse from the pulpit.

Efe, who at 16 is impregnated up by the local hair-weave on merchant, goes abroad so she can support not only her baby but the three siblings who depend on her. Determined to give her beloved son a better life, Efe aims to amass wealth to open a warehouse of her own one day.

The woman, who calls herself Joyce, also known as Alek, is a Sudanese refugee who is gang-raped as a child by the Janjaweed militia and witnesses the massacre of her family. Alek is coaxed into prostitution by Polycarp, the Nigerian peacekeeper whom she hopes to marry. It is a testament to Unigwe's ability to convey that the human mind is complex. Polycarp tries to clear his conscience at having jilted Joyce. Although Polycarp yields to

family pressure by quitting his relationship based on racial differences, he pays off Joyce's debt to Dele. This act gives Joyce a unique privilege in the brothel hierarchy.

The dead Sisi is the woman whose story is in some ways the most wrenching. Hers is a tale not of incest, rape or genocide but of the accumulated disappointments that grinds even the most determined soul into defeat. In the scattered chapters revealing the events that lead to Sisi's murder, we learn how her father, a bright and ambitious village boy, is obliged by his parents to give up his studies to become a lowly clerk in order to help his nine younger siblings through school: "I had bookhead, *isi akwukwo*. I could have been a doctor or an engineer. I could have been a big man" (19), Sisi's father fumes. Education is everything that parents must give to their daughters. "Face your books, and the sky will be your limit" (18). They place all their hopes in their only daughter, whose brilliant academic career will surely win her an important job. Together the family members dream, laugh and squabble about the kind of company car and driver Sisi will have, the sort of big house she will live in, with a high-walled garden.

Upon graduation however, Sisi discovers that without the right connections, her Business degree will not get her an interview for even the humblest of jobs.It is from a kind of defiant determination "to grab life by the ankles and scoff in its face" that she decides to make her fortune as an Antwerp "window girl" (232) enticing men into her booth for paid sex. It is from defiance, too, that she makes the fatal decision to flee the brothel, stop her monthly payments to Dele and start a new life with her gentle Belgian boyfriend.

Unigwe has a deep understanding of poverty and its hungers. The writer represents her four central characters as cool-eyed gamblers, not passive victims, as women willing to play "the trump card that God has wedged in between their legs" in exchange for the material goods they crave, the chance of coming home rich enough to buy their families cars, apartments and businesses. The narrative is presented in such a way that one feels a heart wrenching sympathy for Efe's willingness to lose her virginity to a fat, smelly old man because she hopes he will give her mauve lipstick and "good-quality hair extensions." When Sisi newly arrived in Belgium, she is greeted with a paper-bag lunch of orange juice, bananas, supermarket rolls and jam. Unigwe shows her calculating just

how much this feast would cost in Nigeria: "how it was enough to feed her family…. The magenta-colored spread delighted her taste buds. She could get used to this, to living like this. The life of the rich and the newly arrived" (7).

Unigwe conveys both what is miraculous about the West to foreign eyes and what is awful, how people live and die alone, unmourned, without the sustenance of family and neighbours. She equally reveals how the women who survive their pact with Dele choose to deploy their hard-won wealth.

Despite the horrors it depicts, *On Black Sisters' Street* also boils with a sly, generous humour. Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* marks the arrival of a latter-day Thackeray, an Afro-Belgium writer who probes with passion, grace and comic verve the underbelly of globalised new world economy.

Negotiating power: silence, sexuality and subtlety in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street.*

Adimora Ezeigbo's "snail-sense feminist theory" explains that the strength of the woman lies in her potential to stoop low to conquer, negotiating her way into power without really being confrontational. Equally from this position, a woman is represented as being capable of exhibiting much power and influence from the comfort of her bedroom. From this standpoint emanates the power and sexuality of the woman and in extreme cases, prostitution becomes a significant tool for female empowerment. African writings are fraught with both positive and negative representations of women's deployment of their sexuality as a tool for self-empowerment, revenge and negotiation for space in the social economic space in the society.

Chiweizu (1990:12) avers that, generally, whereas male power seems crude, confrontational and direct, female power tends to be manipulative, subtle and indirect. Literally, this type of power can be easily categorised as inferior because it is not boastful, hard or aggressive like the highly visible male form.

Unigwe employs a similar prostitution motif after Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana* (1961). In the same vein, she avers that for the beautiful, manipulative and ravaging bodies of

these four African ladies, most men will do anything just to possess them. In *On Black Sisters' Street,* Unigwe shows elements of her postmodern world by rooting out the four ladies from their local setting (Africa) to a foreign land (expected to be more civilised and decent in character). However, this easy virtue motif is well patronised by the Whitemen in Belgium. These women are ready to explore their sexuality to the fullest to make up for their inadequacies. Nwahunanya (2011:199) maintains that prostitutes feature in literatures around the world but in the African literature, Ekwensi blazed the trail in portraying Jagua Nana as "the matriarch and archetypal prostitute of African literature." In the same line of thoughts, he posits that:

> …every other prostitute created in post-colonial African literature is a modification of Jagua Nana; or a fictional representation of some of the attributes of Jagua Nana as a character. As a literary archetype, the image of the prostitute adopted by Ekwensi goes far back into history. Prostitution is acknowledged as one of the oldest professions the human race has ever known. But despite its age, prostitution is still used pejoratively to describe the occupational engagements of women of cheap virtue who thrive on unbridled sexual promiscuity. (197)

Some African novel characters such as Okot P' Bitek's Malaya, Naguib Mafouz's Hamida, Ngugi wa Thiongo's Wanja, El Sadaawi'sFirdaus*,* among others, depict that prostitution can be categorised into classes. The bitch-witch who embodies wickedness and cruelty, the seductress who leads others to ruin or death; the femme- fatale who is weak but wonderful prostitute, who is also a whore with a good heart who despite her profession is often humane, loving and even innocent. Others are the saved prostitutes who essentially are virtuous women, that are redeemed from their professions; the seduced and abandoned prostitutes who suffer loss of virginity which leads them to a life in the streets; the helpless harlots who are forced into prostitution by misfortune and poverty, who never enjoy moments of success and comfort; the proud prostitutes who turn entrepreneurs, building successful business and finally, the cast-of thousands, a group of nameless and faceless people who are lonely most of the time and tend to evoke the reader's disdain or sorrow.

Nwahunanya (2011) establishes the fact that there are quite a number of reasons for engaging young girls and women in prostitution. Among them are economic reasons predicated by poverty, as in the case of Efe and Sisi in *On Black Sisters' Street*, war situation where girls are raped and forced into prostitution like in the situation of Joyce. Some are forced into prostitution to better their economic power as in the case of Efe. For some, prostitution enables them to revenge on men and the society that push them into it. All these situations are represented in the four protagonists Unigwe portrays in her novel *On Black Sisters' Street*.

Unigwe, in *On Black Sisters' Street,* presents the different scenarios that introduce Ama, Joyce, Sisi and Efe into prostitution. In Efe's situation, when she realises she needs to pay for her son's L.I.'s necessities that the thought of dating Oga Dele crosses her mind. Unfortunately, he shows no interest in her but suggests she goes to Belgium for prostitution:

> …Dele never asked her out; and it was not until seven
> months later, when she started to complain about
> finding a good school, that Dele asked her if she would
> like to go abroad. Belgium: A country we dey Europe.
> Next door to London! (81)

Frustration from Ama's mother and stepfather pushes her to accept Dele's offer of going to Europe for prostitution. Ama's stepfather rapes her at the young age of eight and constantly sneaks into her room to have carnal knowledge of her. She endures this until when she clocks eighteen, and Brother Cyril (her stepfather) wants to continue to treat her with disregard. At this point, she rebels but this yields no positive result because her mother who is supposed to help her out sees her as an ungrateful child, who intends to destroy her marriage. The marriage is such that Ama's mother tries to save her face from the wrath of tradition by nurturing her pregnancy from another man. She marries Cyril with someone else's pregnancy. Ama's mother views this as a great help and decides to endure anything she experiences from her husband. She calls Ama "an ungrateful child," a wicked child whose sole aim in life is to ruin her mother's life. Her mother believes that Ama has no right to report her husband to her for fear of losing her marriage. In order to

keep Ama silent, she sends her to her friend, Madam Gold, in Lagos, where she meets Dele, who tells her that she deserves a better life:

> One day he came in the morning, rather uncharacteristically of him. He was the only customer and Ama came out to greet him and take his order. 'Today, I just wan' talk to you.' … If you wan' make easy money, if you wan' go abroad, come my office on Randle make we talk. (163)

Joyce's situation is that of a case of war in Sudan where the militants killed all her family members and raped her. She receives help from Polycarp when she thinks the world has come to an end for her. Polycarp stands by her and decides to marry her. They return to Lagos together to start a new life. However, Polycarp's parents reject his intention of marrying a stranger. Joyce, whose original name is Alek, feels betrayed because, she expects Polycarp to defend their love. Polycarp, in order to clear his conscience though without her consent, sends Joyce to Europe to start life afresh. It is revealed as thus;

> …arrangements that she never understood neither head nor tail … A passport and visa would be organized. Money will be paid. Lots of it… she would be taken to Belgium. Make you go look, after people. Nanny work. (231)

In Sisi's case, the economic situation in the country pushes her into prostitution abroad, as a means of escaping hardship as well as providing a better life for her parents. Chisom, as her parents call her, meets Oga Dele at the salon when he brings in one of the girls he is sending to Spain to get her hair fixed at Adeniran Ogunsanya Street. Oga Dele expresses: "… Braid? I tell you say she dey go abroad, you wan makes shuku for am? Perm am, put relaxer. Make she look like Oyinbo woman!" (31). Due to the frustration Sisi passes through as a result of unemployment and economic hardship in the country, she resolves to see Oga Dele who earlier proposes work abroad to her:

> Wetin you dey go do abroad? She dey go work. You wan go too? You wan go abroad too?... If you wan' comot from dis our nonsense country, come see me make we talk . (32)

From the experiences of the four protagonists that Unigwe presents in *On Black Sisters'* *Street*, it is shown that they are in search of wealth, love, money and material possessions. Hence, Marx (1955) opines that these quests of materials possessions will begin to stand in for their human relations and human beings, objectifying them and robbing them of human essence. The four protagonists are in a state of exclusion and alienation even in Belgium. Oga Dele indirectly robs them of their human essence.

Revolutionising the existing order in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*

Unigwe in *On Black Sisters' Street* moves her narrative beyond discussing issues pertaining to denial of opportunities for the girl child and the economic exploitation of the female gender to contemporary issues that reflect living in the twenty-first century. To reveal that times and issue are changing, topical themes, such as susceptibility of women to HIV/AIDS, challenges of couples in same-sex marriages, a woman's right to casual sex, abortion, fertility treatments, discourse of artificial reproduction alternatives and prostitution in advanced dimension are foregrounded in the narratives of contemporary female writers to showcase the changes in the country and the world at large.

Unigwe emulates the pattern of many female writers who highlight the challenges women face as daughters, sisters, wives, mistresses, concubines, sex partners as well as those they have to contend with as a result of the economic and political situation in the country. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, Unigwe reorders the traditional notions of marriage, family, motherhood, quest for materialism, decadence in the society as well as other contemporary issues. Womanism, one of the theories that emerged due to a rejection of some tenets of feminism, is therefore, a new way of viewing life. Thus, elements of womanism are inherent in this narrative.

Unigwe challenges the traditional notions of marriage by viewing the various marital problems that hinder or subvert it. Ama reflects on her mother's marriage to Brother Cyril who calls himself an assistant pastor in the church but lies that he marries his wife as a virgin. Meanwhile, Ama's mother gets married to him with Ama's pregnancy from another man. Brother Cyril always introduces her as "My Rose, whom I married a virgin"

(130).   Brother Cyril who disregards the purity of marriage constantly has carnal knowledge of his stepdaughter without any regrets for his action or fear of what the society will say if it leaks out. Brother Cyril hides under the umbrella of religion to perpetrate his insincerity as a pious man, thus, marriage is founded on insincerity from both parties.

In the case of Alek (renamed Joyce), the notion of marriage to Polycarp gives her a reason to leave her country, Sudan, for Lagos with the impression of finding love and eventually marriage. According to the narrator, "she felt lucky to have been given another chance. And with Polycarp by her side there was little else she wanted" (218).Unigwe metaphorises the refusal of a foreign daughter-in-law by Polycarp's parents to stop the relationship that is gradually progressing to marriage. It reveals a subtle way of rejecting a foreign woman in their family. Polycarp declares:

> …I'm the oldest! Polycarp began when they lay in
> bed… I'm the oldest son and my parents want me to
> marry an Igbo girl. It's not you, Alek, but, 1 can't
> marry a foreigner. My parents will never forgive me.
> (225)

Due to the death of Efe's mother, in order to satisfy her desires, she gets sexually involved with Titus who walks away when he gets to know that Efe is pregnant with his baby. His wife, due to the material satisfaction she receives from him, protects him from the various women he has illicit affairs with. She never rebukes her husband or quarrels with him. On the contrary, she picks a quarrel with any strange woman who comes to their home and chases them away: "Titus on his own part, let his wife get away with chasing his out-of-wedlock children from the house" (74). The narrator declared that:

> So when the seeds of his tryst sprouted and their
> mothers who came knocking at his door, he let his wife
> handle them. She had earned that right. And if his
> mind sometimes wandered to those children he would
> never get to know he showed no sign of it. (75)

From the above, it is inferred that rightness is no longer emphasised but a lot of compromises are endured in marriages. It is no longer an umbrella rule because, what can

be endured by one may not be tolerated by another. This makes Unigwe to challenge culture and tradition based on changes masterminded by globalisation. Chisom's (Sisi's) view about marriage is succinctly revealed. The love relationship between herself and Peter is a vivid portrayal to the fact that it will end in marriage from Peter's view but for Sisi, who sees far beyond Peter's salary as the best teacher, she believes that she will continue to wallow in abject poverty if she marries him.

Sisi vehemently refuses the lifestyle that Peter offers her as "she did not want to be sucked into that life" (43). As Peter pleads, she refuses to change her mind because she knows that he will remain on the same salary; hence, she demands: "how much will his condition change if he continues working at the same school and looked after his five siblings?" (46). As far as Sisi is concerned, there are more things to achieve in life than marriage. Therefore, marriage is not a priority to her, but living a good life with all the necessities of life. Peter tries to persuade Sisi to change her mind, saying;

> I love you; he tried. Peter, she thought but did not speak out loud for fear of hurting him, right now, you're not the man for me. (46)

She displays the postmodern tendency in her by questioning tradition saying "Peter had nothing to offer me. Maybe after she had made her money and if Peter was still available, she would marry him… one could buy anything, an attentive husband included" (118). Traditionally, the man provides and marries a woman and not the other way round. However, in Sisi's postmodern world, she prostitutes to make money and intends to marry Peter. Sisi believes that with her money, she is capable of buying anything she desires, even an attentive husband.

Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* and the image of African women

Womanism, as a theory, is postmodernist in nature. It emanates as a result of rejection of some aspects of feminism. Due to contact with the global world, via the social media, changes in different aspects of the human race evolve. Women embrace vivid presentation of what is happening around the world at this present dispensation. Therefore, the expression of sexual descriptions, such as lesbianism, homosexualism, incest and any

other relationship must not be pretended about because they are happening right amongst people. Hence, there is a need to interrogate their representations in Unigwe's novel.

Morality is subjective in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*. It is a reflection of a contemporary social relationship. Traditionally, these expressions are repressed issues, but in order to revolutionise the world order of heterosexual life, she buttresses further that everyone is entitled to social relationships that give them peace and happiness. To Walker (1983), being happy is a major postulation of womanism. However, in some parts of Africa, heterosexual relationship is openly and proudly celebrated. Never the less, this is a postmodern expression which one cannot shy away from. Whereby, a woman can love another woman sexually or asexually. It is noteworthy to understand that it is not well accepted

In *On Black Sisters' Street*, sex is foregrounded. Unigwe's different characters get involved in fornication, adultery and one-night stands. This act is trivially handled and repressed traditionally but in *On Black Sisters' Street*, Unigwe expresses it vividly. Although these issues are commonly avoided in African literature, it is part of daily realities and Unigwe presents them in such a way to show that contemporary Nigerian fiction writers are not shy or conservative in talking about such down-to-earth representations. The four protagonists have different perspectives about sex issues. It similarly shows a revolution against the existing order. Ama gets involved with her stepfather sexually but, she never expresses her satisfaction with him because, she was naïve then; however, in Efe's case, it is a means to meeting her needs but for Cyril, it is always pleasurable. The same thing happens in the case of Dele who cannot resist Ama. We see a vivid portrayal of the act as represented thus:

> She took hold of him and squeezed and Dele let out a
> sigh… he released the string of his danshiki trouser…
> "see you dey make me shake. You na one real fire oo.
> See as small Dele just dey stand for attention, dey
> salute you". He drew her hand again to his crotch and
> Ama cupped and stroked, slowly increasing rhythm and
> intensity… He moaned and tried to shake his hand
> under her blouse… he undid her brassiere… buried his
> head between her breast sighing as he reached for her

skirt. Ama kept her hand on his penis stroking until he
let out a long moan and spurted in her hand before he
had a chance to remove her skirt (168)

From the above excerpt, it is implied that Ama uses Dele to get what she really desires most in life as she succinctly proclaims that the men she sleeps with are like Dele, just the tools she needs to achieve her dream. To further show changes in the act of sex too, Unigwe tells of sex services in "the flesh trade" such as blow job, penetration, no use of condom etc. The prices of such services also differ: as such "one of the two just wanted a cheap service. I'm on a budget so, just a blow job, sugar. The money was in delivering all the works; Penetration, blow job, no condom" (259). This foregrounds that the prices for different sex services they render vary.

Efe, who gets to meet Titus due to the needs of not having basic things of life that her parents are not providing equally, expresses her sex ordeals with Titus thus:

She preferred it when they meet at the back of the
house because their love making did not last long.
When they went to hotel, Titus likes to take his time.
He would drag her unto the bed, undress her, have her
parade the room naked, before jumping on her… He
would make love to her, sleep, wake up and start again.
Everything happened in silence save for Titus's
moaning for pleasure. (59)

Joyce, also known as Alek, shows her sexual experience without any disguise. This is to show that the problem of moral decay haseaten deep into the fabric of the world. Unigwe, as a writer, is of the opinion that it must be revealed through literature. Her first sex customer exclaims that:

He gushed, Oh I like. I like it. Very much. Just like
being with a virgin. Tight. Tight. Tight! Many
women. Many. But nobody do it like you. His gush
becomes orgasmic.   "I like! I like! I like!
Ahhhhhhhhhhh! (234)

In womanism, the idelogy of existentialism is frowned at, while communalistic relationship is emphasised in Walker (1983) In this vein, Unigwe reveals the fact that

financial and economic independence of women is not enough or sufficient for their emancipation because they do not have "a room of their own". The four female protagonists in *On Black Sisters' Street* aim at becoming financially independent, but in their quests, they desire to get married and have families of their own. Sisi proclaims thus;

> …instead she tried to crowd her head with visions of a future where she would have earned enough to buy herself a good man who would father her children (172)

From the above expression from Sisi, no matter the wealth she makes, her husband (the male figure) is necessary in her life. In Joyce's expression, she makes it known that her desire is to settle with a man: "…I thought I would marry, give my parents grandchildren, work in the government hospital" (243).

The issue of men-hating in radical feminism is at the apex of feminism, but womanism is immersed in female struggle for emancipation and self-discovery, and as Kolawole (1997:203) explains, "it strikes the balance between the inner reality and the sociological determinants and it emphasises the impact of the collective values and not individuality." Unigwe depicts that Efe, who, despite the fact that she has given birth to a child, whose father refuses to identify with, still desires to have a relationship with the opposite sex. She even hopes that the relationship culminates into marriage:

> She hoped she had given enough hints that she was available but not loose, the sort of girl he could have an affair with but treat with respect at the same time. And if she played her cards right even marry. (80)

Against this backdrop, it becomes an anathema for the African women to assert individualism at the expense of a collective good. This is where Ezi misses the collective spirit when she refuses to listen to her friend and parents but Rapu tilts towards the collective spirit as she listens to the counsel her mother whispers to her ears as well as her friend.According to Kolawole (1997) the community and family are the only paradigms through which one's individuality and freedom can be measured. "Introspection and

individuality which characterise feminism, but African thought is largely collective." (Kolawole 1997: 34). Due to this assertion, womanism admonishes dialogue, accommodation and compromise in a case of conflict between the sexes, because it is "family-oriented." Therefore, compromise and tolerance are hinged on the fact that "no form of gender separatism can solve African problem." (Kolawole 1997: 201) Efe, in *On Black Sisters' Street,* uses most of the money Titus gives her to cater for her family members. She claims that: "he (her father) left it up to Efe to look after the house and her three siblings. The money… was barely enough for food". Efe decides to use what she has to get what her family needs, and she further says "if Titus was what she had to endure to get the things she wanted then so be it. Dat one na small price to pay" (58).

Ama tells her mother about how Brother Cyril has been molesting her sexually. She justifies her rude tendencies towards him "mba, No I will not shut up. Mama, do you know what he did to me while I was little? He raped me. Night after night" (147).Ama's mother does not react fiercely to her daughter's revelation about her husband but pleads with him for forgiveness just to preserve her family: "Ama's mother was on the floor, kneeling, hand stretched out in front of her palm outwards" (148). She scolds Ama for such a revelation and she becomes a commodity because her mother sends her to Mama Eko in Lagos. She states that:

> Just shut up. Shut up, Ama, before I am thrown out of
> my husband's house because of you. Mechie Orukita
> 'There was a strange hardness to her voice that
> silenced Ama. Just pack your things. Pack your
> things. First thing tomorrow morning, ututu echi, you
> will be on the bus. (150)

The centrality of the family as the primary source of life is at the heart of womanism. Kolawole (1997) further reiterates that womanism sees cohesion of the family as the stability of life and society because womanism sees the family as a step in the right direction toward ending every form of societal ill. Although, Walker's strand of womanism shifts slightly from this point. From the foregoing, it is revealed that Unigwe's female protagonists are not men haters. This is one of the strong points of womanism. They try to bring their men to a point of compromise, acceptance and harmonious living in

order to build a formidable society, and a good legacy for posterity. Titus's wife exemplifies this tendency:

> None would share the money she had waited so patiently and so good humouredly for Titus to make. It was her right and her children's legacy, and so she guarded it jealously. (74)

There is an impression that third-generation female writers are content with living alone, independent of men. This seems to be radical approach to marriage, career and motherhood and that they prefer to go to their men for sexual pleasure when they desire it. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, Unigwe admonishes women to embrace their career as well as their marriages. It can also be part of the direct or indirect changes or demands of the postmodern era. Kehinde (2004:10) maintains that: "it may not mean an overstatement to state that some of the female writers are reactionaries. That is, they write totally in rejection of the image projected by male writers" (107). Unigwe's protagonists only try to cope with what they have no influence over than to cope with it but, there is a longing to get married as depicted in the character of Joyce: *"she told them how often she thought of marriage these days. Of being a mother and a wife"* (199).

To further show her decision towards marriage, it is emphasised that, "at night she dreamed of him. She dreamed of the children she would have for him" (198) It is obvious they want their men around them; however, economic and political changes push them to points of survival at all cost.

Sisterhood is another basic tenet of womanism. It is a belief that coming together helps in achieving greatly. It is equally in line with the African concept of communal living. There is a search for a theory that will really capture the essence of the female. As a result of this thirst, Audre Lorde in Kolawole (1997) explains that:

> the master's tool will never demolish the master's house. This shows two major trends in 'African women's polemics – they are not only criticizing Western hegemonic methods, they are formulating new definitions and worldview. To this end, the ultimate is on enhancing cultural identity, even as

they reject the image of Black women as victims. (99)

In Walker's (1983) expectationof womanism, she counsels women to appreciate and prefer women's culture. This is a clear cultural delineation which is important in creating women's self-definition. In this vein, new terms are expected to emerge as mediums to defining African women's collective self-consciousness. Unigwe captures this succinctly when her four female protagonists are lured to Belgium in disguise for lucrative jobs by Dele. They are always at logger heads. They use any opportunity to quarrel and kick against one another. They refuse to focus on their common enemy (Dele and Madam; their tools of oppression) who perpetually keeps them in bondage. Dele, Madam and Segun are their weapons of torment as Dele constantly threatens "no try cross me o. Nobody dey cross Senghor Dele" (217).Sisi individually crosses Senghor Dele's path as she "filled in a Western Union money transfer form and sent three hundred euros to her parents" (285). She refuses to pay Dele's dues as she laments "And Dele Oh well, Dele has more than enough girls working for him, he doesn't need me" (283). This earns her a permanent state of silence: death. Sisi confirms prophetically thus:

> Yes, again and she said to the room as if she was addressing a Sisi that was separate from her, "Tomorrow, it will be all over. Tomorrow, you shall be dead. (273)

After the death of Sisi, the remaining three women see the need for unity which is a vital tool in fighting their common enemy. In their mourning state, they open up on their past by telling how and why they find themselves in Belgium. They equally decide to collectively seek help; hence, Ama says:

> 'now we are sisters'. …she knew that they would be friends forever… their conviction gives them some relief. (290)

After ascertaining the fact that they are sisters, they collectively decide to fight their common enemy by asking of the next steps they need to take. In the course of mourning

90

one of their sisters, Madam tells them that "Tomorrow, I want all of you back at work. I have to find a replacement." (289) However, Joyce rebelliously bursts out:

> We're human beings! Why should we take it? Sisi is dead and all Madam can think about is business" Doesn't Sisi deserve respect from her? What are we doing? Why should she treat us any how and we just take it like dogs? (289)

The above metaphorises the birth of agitation for total liberation from their oppressor. The beauty of sisterhood is candidly reflected. The use of the pronouns 'we' and 'us', in the above questions, shows a mode for change is put in gear as they collectively look for a solution as Ama asks:

> What do you suggest we do? Ama asks…, we fit go to de police Efe answer… we are not happy here. None of us is, we work hard to make someone else rich. Madam treats us like animals. Why are we doing this? But I want to make sure that Madam and Dele get punished. (290)

As the three female protagonists reach this consensus, there is a resolution. This reflects the proverbial saying "in unity we stand". Unanimously, women can come together to collectively achieve success against any opposition.

Womanism preaches the complementary roles between men and women. Ogini (1996:20) asserts that "womanism is a special culture that reminds men with special indication that without women's full involvement in the system, man is incomplete in action as well as in achievement" (20). This is one of the central messages of Unigwe in *On Black Sisters' Street.* When Efe's mother dies untimely, the father finds it difficult to raise his children because he cannot cope without his wife's support. He tactfully shifts the responsibility to Efe.

In African culture, the moment of fulfilment for a woman is childbirth Adebayo, (2015). This view of motherhood is the same with the European view of fecundity and the myths of the feminine mystique which conforms with the fecundity of the earth as well as the assurance of patrimony. It implies that the woman should forfeit her life for her family

and society. For Negritude writers, such as Leopold Cedar Senghor, Birago Diop and Camara Laye, the mother is a symbol of reverence, patience, long-suffering and fecundity. In African fictions, such as *Efuru*, *Joys of Motherhood* and *Woman in her Prime,* motherhood is a female role that is highly respected. However, she is expected to be seen on the farm, market place and at home toiling to improve the state of her family. Laye, in Adebayo (2015), describes his mother thus; "Mother stands resolute, like the rock of Gibraltar behind her child, eternally bonded to the child through the unseverable umbilical cord" (179). This shows that the success of the child lies heavily on the devotion of the mother towards her children, family and consequently, the society at large.

An important area of difference between African and Western ways of viewing motherhood is that Western women, such as Simone de Beauvoir, Kate Millet and Jeffner Allen launch attacks on motherhood. They view women as forced mothers. This concept is seen by Nfah-Abbenyi (1997:24) as

> the critique of motherhood… can be problematic to most African women simply because motherhood and family have historically represented different experiences and social practices to Western and African women … Western women may view multiple. Childbirth as both oppressive and restrictive… Most African women find empowerment in their children and families.

The foregoing is represented in *Night Dancer* by Unigwe as Ezi resorts to prostitution just to raise her only child and will to her a lot of wealth so that Nma (Ezi's daughter) does not experience financial hardship. This is a new image of women. If Ezi exhibits the typical nature of an African mother, she will remain in her marriage, endure it and bare more children. Ezi will not see prostitution as the only option left to meet her financial challenge.

In *On Black Sisters' Street,* the four protagonists portray their mothers in different ways. Sanusi (2015:30), posits that; "certainly African women are valued, idealized and glorified as sweet mothers and as nurturers of children. Their depiction shows their patience, resignation and suffering of African women." (30). Joyce tells of her mother's patience

and how she nurtures them: "… sometimes, the "do not" were screamed at her frustration. At other times they were whispered to her … taking her along with her to milk cows. Finding chores for her in the kitchen." (186)

Still on nurturing and good upbringing, when Joyce sees her menstrual flow after the circle of womanhood, Joyce's mother guides her daughter on how to protect herself from unwanted pregnancy: "when her period arrived, at twelve, her mother took her aside. She gave her a list of things boys were never allowed to do to her. Do not let them touch you." (186)

Ama's mother represents a different motherhood contrary to what Sembene Ousmane in Adebayo (2015:180), sees a mother to be: "the liberator, the symbol of resistance to oppression, the purveyor of truth and justice even when the men are cowed." Ama's mother refuses to protect her daughter from her husband who sexually abuses her from the early age of eight years. On hearing such an incest, she sends her daughter away and tells her not to destroy her marriage. For Ama's mother, a different type of motherhood is unmasked. It reflects that changes in different aspects of life can evolve. Ama's lamentation is presented thus:

> What has she ever done for me? She let that man rule
> her, let him ruin my life. She did nothing. Nothing to
> help me. What sort of mother is that? Yet when she
> thought of her mother, she felt miserable and cold (136)

One can equally deduce from Achebe's portrayal of a good mother in Sanusi (2015) as someone who kneels down and drinks the dregs after her husband. This kind of a submissive wife is considered a perfect African woman. However, Thiam and Herzberger, in Sanusi (2015:31), argue that "this glorification of African women as idealized mothers veils their submission and exploitation." In essence, Ama is of the impression that her mother seems not to be able to protect herself from her husband's oppressive tool, but she is ready to subvert roles to help her out. It portrays changes in the contemporary times. From Ama's standpoint, her mother's type of motherhood seems to be motherhood in bondage both physically and biologically, hence, it is averred that: "even though it

angered her that her mother allowed herself to be subjugated, she still loved her and felt the urge to protect her from something Ama herself was not even aware of." (146)

In African context, a biological mother is not the only one that can raise a child. One who does not give birth to someone but is old enough to be one's mother can also be referred to as one's mother. An adage in Yoruba language says one person gives birth to a child but many people raise the child. The society collectively raises the children so that, the deficiencies of the parents in raising their children are adequately augmented by parent figures in the society. This is what happens to Ama. When her mother tells her to leave Enugu for Mama Eko's house in Lagos, Ama remarks that: "Mama Eko was nice. Almost like a real mother. A proper working mother." (166)

Ama further reveals about her adopted mother thus:

> Mama Eko loved her with a mother's love. That would
> do for her. And as for Brother Cyril, he could jump off
> a fucking bridge, her mother holding on his shirt tails.
> She did not bloody care. (171)

This is to show that one does not necessarily need to give birth to a child before the person is referred to as a mother. To buttress more on this point, Ama does not miss her biological mother but her mother's friend who takes her as a daughter. She states that:

> Mama Eko is the only person I really missed… one day
> when I make it, I'll go back and build her a mansion…
> Mama Eko is the only one who comes close. (177)

At the same time, a biological mother might not be recognised as a mother. Ama cares less about her mother but rates Mama Eko high. Efe's mother fulfills that assertion of Ogini (1996:20) where she states that "womanism is a special culture that reminds men with special indication that without women's full involvement in the system, man is incomplete in action as well as in achievement" (20).

Efe's mother must have really supported her husband. Though it is not stated, it is implied that Efe's mother works as a housewife and takes care of the family. Her absence leaves the house in shambles and her husband shows his inability to take care of himself and the

children after her demise. Automatically, the responsibilities of nurturing her siblings rest on Efe: "He left it up to Efe to look after the house and her three siblings." (58) This is more like role reversal and culture frowns against it, but Unigwe showcases this act to reveal further changes in contemporary human society. The tradition that kicks against prostitution leaves Efe, a young unemployed girl, to cater for her siblings after her mother's demise.   Just as womanists postulate that a man is incomplete without a woman, in Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street.* Efe reveals that:

> A man who, never having contemplated living without
> his wife, had fallen apart completely with her death two
> years ago. He regularly drowned his grief in glass after
> glass of ogogoro at the local beer parlour run by Mariam.
> (58)

Efe's father also reiterates this point of incompleteness without his wife when he says

> God, why did you take my wife? Why? Isn't heaven full
> enough? What am I to do with four children who still
> need a mother? (57)

It is obvious that the absence of the mother creates a great vacuum and this introduces Efe to prostitution right in Nigeria before she travels to Antwerp to continue in the same act of prostitution for survival.

Marriage: the subordination of women and her aspiration in Unigwe's *Phoenix*

Unigwe's *Phoenix* is about Oge, a young Nigerian who gets married to a whiteman from Belgium in Europe. She relocates with her husband to Belgium. On getting there, she realises that she needs to learn a new way of life from what she has been used to in Nigeria. Cultural and traditional differences leave her in a state of confusion. She conceives and gives birth to Jordi which is an accomplishment in a foreign land. However, Jordi dies when he falls from the stairs in his school. Oge refuses to accept that Jordi is dead. She continues to tell herself that he is asleep and will soon wake up. Oge becomes chattered and cannot control her mind. This act greatly irritates Gunter, her husband and it begins to tear up their marriage. Another issue is that she battles with a dreadful disease like cancer which takes over her and negatively affects her marriage. Gunter seems not to be able to put his wife back on track. The gulf between them widens when Gunter decides

to cremate Jordi. To Oge, this culture is strange to her. In this vein, she becomes completely devastated. Her mother's intervention helps her to remove the burden of her son's death and restore her marriage.

To be able to access a woman's life succinctly, three basic areas are key, which are marriage, womanhood and motherhood. In most female writings, marriage is usually presented vividly as a tool for female enslavement. Marriage appears to be a battleground where her strength is shown as a wife and a mother. To further buttress this point, in Africa, marriage is every woman's greatest aspiration, while childbearing is a mark of fulfilment. Society expects women to pass the test of fertility and at the same time have children of both sexes because in Africa, according to Chukwuma in Imoh (2005:105), "fertility is a continental flag and childlessness a terrible curse." At this juncture, one cannot fail to infer that the power of culture and tradition goes a long way in defining what obtains in different environments. In *Phoenix*, Oge finds herself in an environment (Belgium) different from where she grows (Nigeria) and learns the culture and tradition of womanhood. As she marries Gunter (foreigner) and moves to Europe, her African cultural and traditional expectations of a woman begin to crumble fast. She is alone without anyone around her to teach and guide her in the new environment's expectations of married woman. As she applies the teachings of her indigenous cultural and traditional expectations of a woman, wife and mother, she is met with disappointment. She becomes frustrated and disillusioned which makes Gunter tell her: "You need psychiatric help! You need counseling! He screamed back his eyes bulging out like a frogs". Jordi can't ever come back. He is ashes, he's gone! I do not care what any tin god tells you." (129)From the foregoing, it is depicted that society often defines as mad those whose speeches and actions do not align with acceptable standards, conventions and modes of behaviour of their community.

The locale setting of the narrative moves from rural area to an urban setting. Oge shows her state of evolving from passivity and acquiescence to self-assertion and even rebellion as the White culture allows. In the process of her battle against patriarchy (Gunter) following Gunter's cremation of the corpse of their late son, she starts to lose her consciousness to depression and battles with cancer: "it had started the day of Jordi's

funeral… when the urn arrived with Jordi's remains, and he told her what it was, she had gone livid with rage." (149) From the following, Oge sees no reason for Gunter's action. This is strange to her cultural inclination of burying a child. She interprets this act of his differently, due to cultural differences. The same thing happens when she loses her son, Jordi. She remains alone to mourn the death of her son. In African tradition, people rally round such a woman to comfort and counsel her to get pregnant quickly so as to forget the demise of the other son. The narrator states that:

> Nobody should mourn the death of a child alone, she had told Doc. But he had told her that Oge was married to a European, and they did things differently. People who had coffee and tea at funeral were bound to mourn in a different way. (140)

In African culture, the reverse is the case; a bereaved person expresses his/her grief and people rally round such to console her. Soothing words are given to help them recover psychologically and emotionally. The following captures the cultural differences; "A wife who did not collapse in loud tears (accompanied with the necessary moaning and praise-singing) at a husband's burial was simply announcing that she was responsible for his death (140). From the foregoing, people of different cultures see things from different points of view. This is the reason why Oge finds it difficult to understand her husband, and Oge misunderstands her husband. She takes his calmness at the face of their son's death for an attitude of indifference. This behaviour really hurts and torments Oge, but her impression about her husband's behaviour at the death of their son is false. It is a problem of cultural differences.

Womanist reflections in Unigwe's *Phoenix*

Another major tenet of womanism is the fact that, complementary roles between men and women are the best ways to live life successfully. They are not men haters but they love their men around them. Sanusi (2015:20) is of the opinion that "womanism is a special culture that reminds men with special indication that without women's full involvement in the system, man is incomplete in action as well as in achievement." This reiterates the fact that womanism derives its strength from the complementary roles of men and women in

any given society. The absence of one is the unfulfilment of the other. Similarly, Kehinde (2008:73) explains that the theory of binary opposition is from linguistic counterparts. This connotes that the woman cannot function perfectly without the man and vice-versa. For them to function perfectly, they need to relate together:

> The necessary condition of binary oppositions is that, the existence of one element requires the co-existence of the other, its opposite and complement.

From the stated theory, the existence of a particular thing automatically requires the existence of its opposite because they cannot exist perfectly without each other. Adeleke, in Kehinde (2008:73) further affirms that:

> The theory of binary opposition is the basic law of existence … In order to aid continuity of life; providence puts two opposite sexes on earth. Without the real unity of opposites, life will end.

The foregoing implies that, there is a need for inter-dependence of humans in different aspects of life to foster progress and a viable society. When both males and females contribute their quotas in the society, progress and development are the end result both in families and the society at large. In *Phoenix*, the crux of the matter starts when there is no more agreement between Gunter and Oge as they display at the beginning of their relationship. Oge explains that:

> At the choice of either traditional or registry wedding, Oge prevails over you and you eventually agree to traditional marriage; you insisted on a traditional wedding. It would make you feel more married, you said. More than the registry wedding which Gunter told you was the only one that mattered. He grumbles but gets caught up in the preparation.(59)

They agree over issues initially until they begin to show assertive tendencies.

Oge's relationship with Gunter starts to develop hitches when they start to disagree on issues that they are supposed to mutually agree on without which the home will

disintegrate. Shortly after that, if there is no quick intervention to correct it, divorce will be the way out of such relationship. Oge argues further thus:

> As you put the present on top of a kitchen cupboard, you wondered what Gunter would think of your choice. You will like him to approve of it. You will like him to look at the race track and tell you what an appropriate choice you had made… it was not often that, Gunter approved of what you did. In fact, it was like that lately, you could not get anything right. He was always right behind you, like an inner voice telling you all the things you were doing wrong. (84)

Despite the disagreements between Gunter and Oge, she still loves him, and she strongly declares thus: "You looked at him and felt love surge through your veins. Love made your toes tingle. You had always loved Gunter. No matter what he did you did not think you could stop loving him." (85)

In another similar situation, Oge gets pregnant, and she approaches Gunter with so much excitement but Gunter shows no happiness at the approach of a baby in his family. He says "he had not wanted a change in your relationship. In a way, he would tell you he had been jealous of having to share you with someone else, even if it was with your baby." (88)

On the part of Gunter, he really loves his wife, but the way at which disagreement on different issues crop up makes him really uncomfortable. It becomes so bad that he seeks pleasure in the arms of other women. However, he does not derive satisfaction:

> He used to be concerned about her but that concern was slowly turning to anger and annoyance. He cared about what happened to her, but he wished he did not. It would have made things easier for him. The nights he spent in the arms of different women, beautiful women … he found his heart wishing he was with the one person he was trying hard to forget. (148)

Womanism celebrates the family. This is one crucial aspect it hinges on tenaciously as African world view is basically family-oriented and this is an aspect that even Blacks in

America have sustained vigorously. Humm (1992:14) enunciates by recognising the centrality of a family when she claims that "… and often, the family might be a source of succour and collective support."

It is shown that, Gunter comes from a culture where individualism is the order of the day and this is what Oge faces when she relocates to Belgium with her husband. She becomes lonely because of the newness in her new environment. She needs to adopt coping strategies. In Africa, communalism is prioritised. At a time in the narrative, Gunter realises that his mother-in-law is the best person to curb Oge of the problem that brews which causes a big rift between them He keeps his family away:

> "they marked boundaries and it was difficult for an outsider to penetrate: husbands held wives across their waists as they strolled. Parents held to their children. Dogs were leashed or carried. There was nothing communal." (73).

However, Gunter grows to see that communal lifestyle can save his marriage; hence, he has a re-think. He allows his mother-in-law to visit them, and within two days, there is a turn-around. Oge's mother succeeds in telling her daughter that her son is dead, but there is a way out: "He is not coming back. He is dead. Onwugo." (154) When this seems not to be impacting much, she says further: "Nne. Jordi. Is. Dead. O nugo. He can't. Come. Back. Dead. People. Do. Not. Return. He. Is. Dead. I. Wish. He. Were. Not. But. He. Is" (155) Oge's mother knows how to handle her daughter. She helps her through the grief, pain and sorrow which her husband cannot handle. The situation threatens to rock their marriage. From this point, we see Oge gradually accepting the bitter truth which seems really difficult for her to accept. Oge's mother does not stop there; she encourages her to forget Jordi, dress well and assures her that another baby will come into her home that will replace him:

> You have to look good. If not for yourself, for your husband. You have lost a son, it is true. But you do not want to lose your husband as well. You are young. Look young. Dress young. Keep your man and God will send you another child. (171)

A focal point in womanist concept is unity of the family unit. It is not only seen from the nuclear family alone, but the entire community's wellbeing, a sense of communal living where every member of the society is considered a family member. Oge's mother exemplifies this when she thinks of removing Jordi's clothings to give them to Oby's son in Nigeria:

> Oby, her former house help had a son who was about
> the right age for the clothes, she would be glad to take
> them back to Nigeria with her (153)

She thinks of a former house help who is in need, which is a trait of womanism which makes it different from feminism that is mainly a separatist ideology.

Hudson-Weem (2008:24) contends that:

> The Africana womanist names and defines herself and
> her movement… she is family centered. The Africana
> womanist is more concerned with her entire family than
> with just herself and her sisters even though genuine
> sisterhood is very important to her reality. Her role as
> homemaker, as it has always been. She demands
> respect and recognition… The Africana womanist is
> committed to the act of mothering and nurturing her
> own in particular and humankind in general. (24)

Oge is aware of her mother's commitment to her family that when she realises that she is down with cancer, she desires her mother's presence to help her fight the disease. She believes that her mother will battle with it until it disappears: "my daughter cannot have cancer because it is not an African disease. But your mother is not there," (26) she decides to send for her mother for help. This reveals that Oge longs after her mother and feels lonely in a foreign land. Oge virtually worships her son's world and enjoys all the pleasures that they share together. She looks forward to when he grows to be a man, recalls how handsome he looks and how brilliant he is before his demise. All these attributes make it difficult for Oge to believe that Jordi is dead. She continues to buy gifts for him, speak with him as though he is with her, put his pyjamas on his bed and enjoys pretending that he is alive. Oge's actions establish her commitments as a good mother.

Gunter lends credence to this when he says: "the boy is very lucky to have you as a mother. You are going to be a wonderful mother he told you." (91)

Furthermore, migration in the era of globalisation is at the peak of human existence. This is as a result of insecurity situation in third world nations. According to Oguibe (2004), people leave their countries for another not because home is inhospitable, but because they are under the leadership of selfish people who do not mind destroying the country and her citizens. The rigours of political instability, hardship, economic instability and poor living condition are some of the reasons why people voluntarily or involuntarily seek greener pastures. In Unigwe's *Phoenix*, living in the diaspora is a pivotal point. A sense of exile is equally worthy of note. Kehinde (2008:149) avers that: "diaspora and exile may not connote the same thing, but they nurture each other in that diaspora can be a response to exile's deprivations." The interconnectedness of diaspora and exile, therefore, depends on their experiences because both diaspora and exile are foreigners in an unhomely dwelling, miles away from their homeland. Suleiman (1998:27) maintains that:

> whether émigrés, exiles, expatriates, refugees, diasporans or nomads, these people experience a distance from their homes and often their native languages, they occupy a space where memory of lost homeland is cherished above all. (27)

In *Phoenix*, when Oge remembers that in her homeland, such a disease as cancer will be refuted by saying "return to sender" (26). When her friend Angel dies of HIV/AIDS, Oge's mother counsels her by telling her that: "fantasies die… Realities live", Oge, fantasies die "Realities live". Then he had put the coin in your palm and walked out of the room. The coin was dull. Fantasies die. Realities live. (67). Her mother's expressions always come back to her. This corroborates Kehinde's (2008:149) position that:

> in current (multi) cultural theory has been applied to all expatriate groups who choose or were forced to leave their native countries for variety of reasons, including indentured labour and the slave trade. In their new countries, these diasporic subjects form ethnic or cultural minorities, while retaining strong affiliations with their and more often, their "ancestors"- homeland.

Oge holds a strong affiliation with her homeland that she recalls her parents, especially her mother; her friends, growing up in Enugu as well as her past life. At this point in Oge's life, she craves for female bonding; her mother and her late friend. This is a tenet of womanism. The relationship that will help her at this level of psychological pain, goes beyond what her husband can offer her. Motherhood and sisterhood are well explored to fill a vacuum in Oge's life. She tells these experiences in a painful, injurious and frustrating manner. Oge suspects her husband (Gunters) is into an illicit relationship but cannot prove it saying:

> Often you want to cry. You had no physical proof that Gunter was seeing another woman, yet you were certain that he was. Women always know when their partners are cheating on them. It is an instinct those women are born with; your mother said all the time" (70) Oge further says; "You missed Angel. You missed not having friends" (73) "You were never lonely in Enugu. Here, loneliness has become your way of life. (74)

Oge has an impression that is false about her husband about infidelity. This eventually turns out to be wrong. Her mother's intervention helps to restore sanctity in Oge and Gunter's marriage.

Multiculturalism and the politics of difference in Unigwe's *Phoenix*

The interaction between two or more different cultures is an experience for migrants. As people cross into different borders and cultures, so also different languages are crossed. As Brah (1996:229-230) explicates: "multiculturalism carries the distinctly problematic baggage of being part of a monitorising impulse" … and used as synonym for minority cultures." (229-230) Therefore, interference with another language, culture and people brings about a different identity which is responsible for changes in the image of people(women). This situation becomes antithetically complex as the migrant is neither here nor there totally. In *Phoenix*, many things become strange to Oge. Due to the fact that she gets married to a man from Belgium, she needs to adapt to her new space. For this reason, the syndrome of never completely here and most definitely not there

(hybridity) comes to play. Oge finds it difficult to completely adapt to the ways of the whites. She often times have reasons to remember her homeland. The kind of friendship between Oge and Lisa cannot be compared with that of her late Nigerian friend Angel. Oge tells of her experience with her Belgium friend:

> You were not friends enough to go beyond each other's kitchen. You could not tell her about Gunter. Or later, about your cancer. She was a constant reminder that the parameters of friendship were different in your new environment. (75)

She further explains the strange way of friendship in her new environment. "they marked their boundaries and it was difficult for an outsider to penetrate: husbands held wives across their waists as they strolled. Parents held on to children." (73) Lisa's friendship with Oge is such that she is not interested in sharing her friend's grief or sorrow. She defines the limit to their friendship as well as the tempo. Lisa tells Oge about her parents and how they separate from each other. Oge receives this piece of information to mean Lisa cannot be as supportive as a Nigerian friend:

> Lisa told you all of this without crying. She delivered this bit of information in such a way that you knew, without her saying anything of the sort that you were not to ever refer to it again. You also knew at that moment, that she was telling you that she did not have any room left to carry another person's grief. She had enough of her own sorrow to last her a lifetime. You knew, even before she went back to her normal questions, that she was making a tacit agreement with you that you were never to bother each other with your personal emotional baggage (78)

From the above, it is seen that the type of friendship in Oge's homeland is quite different from what obtains in Belgium with Lisa. Looking at culture through the diasporic space, Brah (1996) defines

> culture as the play of signifying practices; the idiom in which social meaning is constituted, appropriated, constructed and transformed; the space where the entanglement of subjectivity, identity and politic is performed. (234)

104

The interplay of one's religion, beliefs, dressing and language takes an important position in locating the cultural bearer. Similarly, culture is a tool for identification. It also reveals the politics of identity and belonging. In the case of a migrant, a double cultural identity might be imbibed and embraced. This double identity and consciousness become joining two different cultures in one individual. Cultural belongings are very crucial to identification; it is an attempt to kick against the process of exclusion. To defend this, they accept elements of the new world culture as a way out of marginalisation. This situation creates a new image in the protagonist (Oge).

Oge finds some things in her husband's country as different. These scenarios make her feel aloof most times. For instance, no guest can just visit uninvited, whereas, the reverse is the case in Nigeria. This cultural difference is shocking to Oge as she declares: "Your father-in-law called a week in advance to arrange a visit. Gunter will note it in his diary. He would tell you, Darling, Pa is coming on Saturday. I have asked him to stay for supper." (74) Oge sees another difference in her husband's culture when Lisa tells her:

> I never get lonely, she said smiling and kissing Pipo,
> her black Labrador which walked into the kitchen at
> that moment. "Pipo keeps me company, don't you
> beautiful? I would go mad, gele, if I had to live all
> alone" Pipo brought out a long tongue dripping with
> Ogbono-like saliva and licked her face. Lisa called
> him a good boy and rubbed his head. (75)

Oge then concludes that if her mother or father sees such an action of someone kissing a dog, "she would classify her as disturbed." (75)

Another instance of clash of cultures Oge identifies, has to do with the number of children whites give birth to. Oge tells Lisa that "she comes from a large family and she has three brothers and a sister". Their conversation goes thus:

> Do you come from a large family? "Yes" "Oh Very
> African" She smiled across a coffee mug. Black. No
> sugar. No milk. "How many brothers do you have?"
> She pressed on. "Three" "Sisters?" "One". (43)

Lisa replies Oge that she is the only child and that "one child is enough for us in this country. We do not have the stamina of African mothers." (43) As far as Oge is concerned, the white women should have more children than African women. However, due to dwindling economical situations, Afrcans are imbibing this concept of few children.

> How much more trouble did it take to raise a few more children when one had everything to ease the job for them: Washing machine. Drying machine. Self-cleaning oven. Food in tins. Drinks in cans. Microwave oven. Running water. Electricity. Everything conveniently packaged in this place of convenience. (43)

Due to loneliness and a nostalgic feeling, Oge declares: "I am looking for my old life" (104) Oge becomes really homesick that her hope suddenly becomes a dream and fizzles away. She experiences stress and tension, yet she cannot return home as a divorced woman:

> But where will you move to? You could not move back to Nigeria. Your parents would not welcome you back with open arms. A divorced daughter! Anyway, how could you move back home after six years of marriage? (106)

Divorce is alien to African culture as it is seen beyond the fusion of the bride and the groom, but the two families are joined together as one. Therefore, when a problem arises between the couple, settlement is the most appropriate solution.

From the above, Oge has to imbibe some aspects of her husband's culture to give peace a chance. Gunter equally exemplifies this trait when they are preparing for their marriage; he has no choice than to purchase all Oge's family demands. By the time Oge listens to her mother and accepts that which Gunter tries very hard to pass across to her; that Jordi is dead, Peace returns into their relationship and their marriage. Eventually, a nearly disintegrated home and marriage goes through a healing process as Oge states: "Last night, for the first time in an entire year, Gunter and I slept close to each other." (183)

Conclusion

This chapter examines new image of African woman in Unigwe's *Phoenix, Night Dancer* and *On Black Sisters' Street.* The analysis reveals that the selected narratives elucidate the tenets of womanism. The three narratives adequately thematise different subject matters which reflect change in the ways and manners in which situations and happenings around are interpreted and considered. The novels deal succinctly with changes in worldview as cultures and traditions are constantly challenged. New ideologies emerge to reflect the new world order. Due to changes in different worldviews, subjectivity takes the place of norms. In other words, nothing seems right and nothing seems wrong. Unigwe candidly questions issues on morality, marriage, religion, economic instability and the like. From the three narratives, the analysis seriously points to the fact that nothing is right and nothing is wrong. We live in a world of uncertainties where all norms can be challenged hence, new images of women can emerge.

CHAPTER FOUR

CHANGING IMAGE: A NEW DIMENSION TO FEMALE ISSUES IN TERRY MCMILLAN'S NOVELS

Literature reflects many things about writers and the societies which produce them. Ngugi wa Thiong'O (1972:47) describes a writer as a "kind of sensitive needle that records with varying degrees of accuracy and success, the conflict and tensions in his society." African American female writers are of the opinion that they must be sensitive to the problems in their country and to be more particular with challenges they face in every sphere of life. Contemporary female writers, such as Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Maya Angelou continue to expand this canon of African American literature. Many African American female writers refuse to adopt the male dictates and write works that speak of their world and experiences. For African American women, literature came as a blessing for them to vent their pent up feeling. Nevertheless, the black women novelists emerge as innovative forces, opening areas of experimentation. They set the trend for new developments and claim a voice and space of their own. As Henderson (1989:24) points out, they

> … brought into literature a special knowledge of their lives and experiences that is as different from the descriptions and portrayals of women by men as the vision of black writer in the 60's and 50's differed from that of white's writings on black subjects. (24)

Many black female writers have emerged and they represent female identity apart from exploring gender expectations and female experiences. They focus mainly on black experiences.

Terry McMillan is recognised as one of the prominent innovative voices in contemporary African-American female fiction. Through her first novel *Mama* (1987), she has garnered attention and critical praise for herself. She often depicts the lives of economically successful African American men. Her focus is on love and sexual relationships, urban

characters and depictions of true friendship among women has won her a wide audience. By the time she published *Disappearing Acts* (1989), she earned her reputation as an innovative new voice of middle-class black American. *Waiting to Exhale* (1992) earns her a prediction of a potential contemporary writer coming true. *How Stella got her Groove Back* (1996) is an instant success that has been adapted into film. *A Day late and a Dollar short* (2001) and her sixth novel *The Interruption of Everything* (2005) have also been adapted into films.

The novels examined in this chapter are those of an African American female writer, Terry McMillan who falls into the category of a pioneer in a new genre of fiction, the African American urban romance novel. According to Richards (1999:42) McMillan seems to intuitively understand the "backlash to success, especially if you're black and female … black and female."   The changing images of women in her novels can be seen as she experiments with a narrative voice, changes in the structural form of her novels as well as use of autobiographical element to reflect her themes.

McMillan refuses to continue in the path of previous African American female writers as she creates new categories of novels. This is in line with the theory of womanism which is an offshoot variant of feminism. Richard (1999:93) avers:

> compared to the social protest against racial injustice lodged by Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin, McMillan's deft use of the romance plot to protests the intersection of race, class and gender oppression is a significant formal innovation. (93)

In McMillan's narratives, she essentially refrains from ideological concerns of race as found in traditional African American literature but her novels explore different lives in African American relationships. In *Disappearing Acts* (1989)*,* McMillan features the relationship between Zora Banks, a junior high school music teacher, who aspires to become a singer and Franklin Swift, a high school dropout, who works intermittently at the construction site. The different backgrounds become the greatest challenge to the relationship. Zora Banks is in search of an eligible African American man. The relationship eventually crumbles as mutual expectations do not coincide between a professional woman and a Blue collar man:

> I like a clean tall smart, honest, sensuous, spontaneous,
> energetic, aggressive man with white teeth who smells
> good and reads a good book every now and then, who
> votes and wants to make contributions to the world. (18)

From the above, McMillan depicts that African American women are in quest of a pursuit of the survival of an entire race (male and female). This is responsible for a relationship with their fellow African American men. This tradition, according to Lehodziec (2009), embodies the genius, originality and particular concerns of black female.

McMillan's *Disappearing Acts* foregrounds appreciation of sisterhood which is a major tenet of womanism. African Americans are highly communal in nature; therefore, issues of the family, community and sisterhood are very keen in McMillan's narratives. Hudson-Weems (2004:66) maintains that womanism:

> promotes, among other things, self-naming and
> defining, family as the centre of life, sisterhood,
> healthy and positive male and female relationships.
> It gives women a good vantage point and platform
> to discuss issues about their lives in their own way
> and explores the positive qualities of women whom
> she describes as the "very foundation of life
> whether they know it or not.

In *Disappearing Acts*, Zora comments about a collective wholeness thus:

> As it stands, I don most of my singing in the shower. I
> get clean and let out pain at the same time-watch it go
> down the drain. And not just my pain but everybody
> else's that I've known who's ever felt or known hurt.
> And there are millions of us. (23)

McMillan's *Disappearing Acts* focuses on strong intelligent African American women. The protagonist, Zora Banks, a junior high school music teacher, who aspires to become a singer, tells of this wholeness in her song in the bathroom. She has a friend, Claudette who is a lawyer by profession. Most of the women Franklin has relationship with before Zora Banks are all professionals. Gloria works at the welfare department, Theresa works as a banker, Pamela aspires to become a secretary. This is an emerging image of African American women who belonged to the low social hierarchy in American society before

now. However, McMillan's writing portrays African American women in the middle-class communities.

Female bonding in McMillan's *Disappearing Acts*

Female bonding means that all women are seen as a class oppressed by a common enemy (man). This bonding is predicated on the deep sympathy women have for one another. From the African American female's standpoint, the community has been oppressed and alienated, but the black women do not revolt against this oppressive image as literature represents African American women in degrading stereotypes. For this reason, women forcefully attain their goal through female bonding in life and fiction. African Americans have a common history of subordination and repression and have developed a tradition of female bonding which empowers women. Fox-Gernovese (1994) argues that: "female bonding is the female model which has to replace the male model of individualism." (12)

Men have wreaked havoc and death out of domination, Fox-Gernovese (1994:12) "but women with their politics of partnership will bring a renewed commitment of life." Explaining more on female bonding, De Veau (1983:223) says: "I see greater commitment among black women writers to understand self, multiplied in terms of community, the community, multiplied in terms of the world" (223). This is also one of the reflections of womanism in *Disappearing Acts*. It is a means through which women can intimately and positively be involved in one another's life to bring family progress. In *Disappearing Act*, McMillan's females are social sisters rather than biological. Zora wants to hide her pregnancy from her friends, Portia, Marie and Claudette, but she thinks: "I know it was stupid of me to invite Portia and Marie too, but I wanted them all here. I had to tell somebody. And I can't keep this to myself. Not this time." (144) After this meeting with her friends, she decides to go for an abortion, and her friends contribute money for them to support her financially and physically. Female bonding involves identifying with one another.

Female bonding in McMillan's *Disappearing Acts* goes further when Zora Banks reveals her mind to her female friends. She tells her friend that she has been pretending that her relationship with Franklin is hitch-free:

111

> Up to now, I've done a pretty good job of dealing with things. Faking it is what I've really been doing. Pretending that nothing is wrong. That Franklin's being married hasn't bothered me. That his being out of work hasn't bothered me. That his not having a formal education hasn't bothered me. But it's getting too hard, this acting. I'm scared of what the outcome of everything will be. Me and him. (213)

Thus, Zora trusts her friends more than Franklin whom she calls her boyfriend. She cannot disclose her feelings to him but confidently reveals her thought to her friend. This is female bonding which Walker (1983:18) posits that: "… appreciates and prefers women culture, a woman who loves other women."

Zora Banks feels indebted to her female friends who expect that everything that happens to one another must be shared among them. Zora reiterates that: "I swear, I love Portia like a sister but sometimes I wonder why I feel the need to get her approval for everything" (57) Similarly, when Portia visits Zora in her new apartment, she realises that Zora uses phenobarbital drug to check her epilepsy. This hurts Portia because Zora has not confided in her about it. Portia queries Zora:

> What is this for?" she asked me. Shit. I could've sworn I'd put all the phenobaro in the bottom of my trunk. Should I play dumb or go ahead and lie? And just what she doing in my medicine cabinet anyway? … but this ain't for no kind of pain – that much I do know." "I thought I told you", Told me what? "That I've got epilepsy" "You've got what?" "You heard me". You mean you foam at the mouth… Zora, I mean I really. I thought I was your damn friend." … this is deep, Zora. And I thought I knew you. (60)

Portia decries her not knowing much about her friend, Zora, and even scolds Zora for keeping such a big health problem to herself. In case she develops a fit, she would not be able to call her friends who are not aware of her plight. Portia feels further disappointed when she realises that their other friends do not know about Zora's health issue, and she asks: "You mean you haven't told Marie and old dead–ass Claudette? (60)

Chodorow (1974:38) states that:

> in the complex matter of female bonding, women tend to have closer personalities with each other than men have, and to spend more time in the company of women that they do with men. In our society, there is some sociological evidence that women friendships are effectively richer than men's.

McMillan concentrates fully on the bonds between women, their interaction and how their friendship enriches one another. Portia counsels Zora that:" to wait too long "personally, I wouldn't wait that long." (148) Claudette uses that opportunity to relay her experience with her husband Allen when she has to do the job and pay all the bills when he gets his education. She explains further:

> I was making all the money, paying all the bills – while he studied … it is called commitment. And don't think that Allen and I are always lovey-dovey. Honey, we argue, scream, slam doors… You've got to take the bitter and the sweet. (149)

Such an expression is an eye-opener to Zora for her to know that she is not the only one in this kind of situation. This has a cushioning effect on Zora who sees it as an obligation to confide in her friends. Portia tells Zora the truth about what she feels about Zora's relationship with Franklin when they are eating dinner. Portia laments:

> You need to check yourself girlfriend. Your whole world is starting to revolve around this man. don't nobody see you anymore. "sure Zora." You even starting to fool yourself. You better be careful, or you gon' start disappearing a little bit at a time, and before you know it, you gon' be just like them damn step rod wives. Won't even remember who Zora Banks was. (217)

Zora later realises that Portia's verdict on Franklin comes out true. At this point, she has no choice than to reveal some of his deficiencies. This portrays a rich and close relationship.

Furthermore, Zora suddenly realises that her love and affection for Franklin disappear when a stronger feeling of racism, sexism and unfulfilled role expectations become dashed. A true feeling of openness and trust ensues when she is around her friends.

113

Moreover, female bonding in *Disappearing Acts* is portrayed as a healthy relationship which helps women to move in the right direction. It offers women a sense of peace, intimacy, fulfilment and healing. It also alleviates their mental trauma while equipping them to make constructive contribution to their environment.

McMillan employs profane language in order to realistically portray her character the way they are in real life. She speaks the mind of her characters and build on both their conscious and unconscious reasoning. Characters express everything they experience without mincing words.

Zora Banks, the heroine in *Disappearing Acts,* recounts the number of men she has had relationship with and how such relationships end. She frantically laments on how she desires to find a partner who is worthy of herself who is strong, responsible and independent. The black men's manliness, in her view, is seen in the primitive terms of subduing or seducing women with their power. McMillan does not overtly foreground the issue of race, but hints on the unconscious effect of racism on Franklin Swift who happens to be a drop-out. For this reason, he could not meet up with his role expectations as he laments: "now am trying to get my constitution together. I've made too many stupid mistakes, too many bad decisions. I guess dropping out high school was the biggest one." (4) This regret continues to affect his relationship with Zora. Franklin also recalls when his mother hints on the same issue thus: "if you'd just made it through high school, Franklin, you could be playing for the Knicks." (9)

Learning to exhale in McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale*

McMillan explains why the four women that represent African American women in her novel are not 'getting to be happy' asides their race, class and gender issues. She further reveals that lack of suitable Black men who would become their partner is another challenge these four women combat with. Savannah describes her concerns in the following ways:

> And I can't lie. Now I worry. I worry about if and when I'll ever find the right man, if I'll ever be able to exhale. The more I try not to think about it, the more I think about it. (346)

Another point to consider is that African American women share the African American men with the white women. African American men have more potentials for marrying outside their race than their female counterparts. This is similar to the finding of Maria Roots (2001:184) who opines that "marriages between black men and white women more than doubled from the figures in the 1970s census… in contrast, the rate of marriages between white men and black women remained similar."

In *Waiting to Exhale*, Robin's irresponsible boyfriend, Russell, threatens her and he says:

> You know what? You all black bitches are all alike.
> First you complain that don't nobody want your asses
> or know how to treat you, and then when a man shows
> a genuine interest in you, you act simple. An all y'all
> wanna know why we got out with white women. (241)

African American men do not really see the hurt they inflict on African American women as they abandon them and go for white women. Bernadine expresses this hurt against John thus:

> Over the last five or six years, it became apparent to
> her that John was doing nothing but imitating the
> white folks he'd seen on T.V. or read about in Money
> Magazine. At first, he thought he was J. R. Ewing,
> then a black clone of Donald Trump and finally settled
> on Cliff Huxtable. (26)

African American men desire to be like the white men; hence, they lack the ability to be committed emotionally to their African American female partners on a long term basis. This is one of the postulates of womanism. African American males are supposed to cooperate with African American females as well as with their children to fight their common enemy. This is the only factor that would enhance black race liberation.

Womanism canvasses the fact that the race should be well supported. The collective wellness is of paramount interest to womanism. Thus, the wellbeing of their closest ones gives African American women satisfaction, while their lack of commitment and responsibility prevents African American fathers from becoming role models to their sons. Male complementary attributes are one of the anchors of womanism. African American

women believe that their men can serve as noble and worthy role models to their children. Gloria in *Waiting to Exhale* comments thus:

> Also, at times like this, she wished Tarik had a father who lived under the same roof. She was tired of dealing with all this puberty and growing up shit by herself. She wished Tarik had a father who lived under the same roof. She should've had a man in this house a long time ago. Somebody, who executed authority much better than she did. (183)

Ironically, Tarik understands the situation better than his mother who seems to be worrying because of her maturing son. He responds;

> You don't get it, do you? That man is not my father.... if he was my father, he'd a more than drop a check in the mail... I know a whole lot of dudes out here making babies and bragging about it... anybody can make a baby but it takes a man to be a father (64)

To further complicate issues for Gloria and Tarik, David opens up to Gloria on his sexual relationship status, he is a gay. This totally dampens the morale of Gloria who is looking up to David to be a noble role model to his son, Tarik. At this point, Gloria decides not to encourage the relationship between David and Tarik because she knows that David, being a guy, will not add to Tarik's self-esteem.

It becomes obvious that the four female protagonists in *Waiting to Exhale* do not want to live their lives without men. Bernadine eventually gets married to James, Gloria gets into a relationship with her widowed neighbour Marvin, Robin gets pregnant and decides to keep the baby despite the fact that her father refuses to take responsibility. Savannah also still in search of a male partner proclaims that:

> As a matter of fact, if feel pretty damn good. And I mean that. To be honest with you, I do believe in my heart that I will meet him. I just don't know when. I know it won't be until I honestly accept the fact that I'm okay all by myself. That I can survive, that I can feel good being savannah Jackson, without a man.... (348)

The four female protagonists used by McMillan portrays clearly that African American women do not want to live without their men. They equally understand that it is beneficial to raise their children in a well-structured family than in a single family. To create a near well-structured family when the father is absent, is the reason for embracing extended family in African American homes.

A better bonding among African American women in *Waiting to Exhale*

Female bonding is a womanist tenet that is well explored in McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale.* McMillan shows that the four female protagonists in their mid-30s provide solace to one another in a way when family members, husbands and boyfriends fail to proffer solution. They party, cry and recover together as they go through their different challenges of life. Collins (2000) observes that Black women's community work has resulted in several gender-specific outcomes in the past. These outcomes have benefitted African American females collectively. Collins further argues that "these outcomes come at special costs for African American women." (20) In *Waiting to Exhale*, there are active groups in particular towards close friend as it is evident among the four female protagonists and BWOTM. (Black Women on the Move) These groups are ever ready to give a helping hand. McMillan shifts her focal points to avoiding stereotypical views of abusive men and victimised women. Rather, she explains the reason that might subject them to behaving in a particular way.

According to Fox-Gernoverse (1994:12):

> Female bonding is the female model which has to replace the male model of individualism. Men have wreaked havoc and death out of 'domination' but women with their politics of partnership will bring a renewed commitment of life.

The story of the African American women is a saga of the black women's community that is alienated, subjugated and oppressed. Recently, African American women have mustered courage to refuse the sexist images of women in male writings but before now, they remained passive. The projected images of African American women in literature of both white and black writings are degrading. Their worth and claims of identity are

117

rejected. Therefore, women are forced to attain their goals through female bonding in life as well as in fiction. African American women develop a tradition of female bonding to liberate themselves from a common history of subordination, repression and a viable tool to endurance as well as resisting oppression from within and without. De Veaux (1983:248) opines:

> I see greater commitment among black women writers to understand self, multiplied in terms of the community, the community multiplied in terms of the world.

In an attempt to reconnect the present with the past, literature produced during the late sixties appears revolutionary in nature purposely to achieve solidarity among women's community and inspire them to assert themselves. Works of Alice Walker and Toni Morrison for instance, are germane to this fact. In addition to this, female bonding is all the more imperative and inevitable because of the various inadequacies of men. For this reason, Richards (1999:130) maintains that:

> All of McMillan's novels challenge stereotypes about black life. By representing affectionate bonds within the black community, she exposes the contradictions inherent in the images of blacks that have pervaded the popular America imagination for centuries. Her fictions humanise African Americans by demonstrating that they love one another in a complex variety of roles including parent and child, romantic lover, and "sister" friends.

In *Waiting to Exhale,* the concept of female bonding is represented in many instances. It can be called a call to the female community and the term has social implications. McMillan reveals that women are the best helpers for fellow women. Bernadine is Gloria's closest friend and one of her best clients. They confide in each other; she tells Gloria about her miserable marriage and sour relationship with her husband (John) as well as the imminent divorce. Gloria persuades Bernadine to join an organization, (Black Women on the Move) BWOTM. This she believes will keep her mind engaged. As Gloria introduces the organization to Bernadine in the following:

> She belonged to Black Women on the Move, a support
> group that held workshops for women who wanted to
> do more with their lives than cook, clean and take care
> of the kids; for women who had already achieved some
> measure of success but wanted to find a better way to
> deal with the stress that came with it; for women who
> wanted to be more than role models, who were willing
> to make the time to do something for black fold whose
> lives – for whatever reason – were in bad shape. (33)

As soon as Gloria learns of John's desertion of Bernadine, she becomes worried and offers solace when she calls on the telephone:

> She called Bernadine and got her machine again.
> "Look Bernie. I hope you're all right. Joseph told me
> what happened, so call me. I'm, worried as hell about
> you, and I won't be able to rest until I know you're
> okay. So call me. I don't care how late it is. (74)

Gloria does not just stop at calling Bernadine but also calls Robin saying: "she asked Robin if she'd talked to Bernadine and regardless, to call her as soon as possible. It was urgent (74)." This shows that the time Bernadine remains depressed, her three friends, Savannah, Robin and Gloria, support her in order to instil confidence in her.

Through female bonding, the internal and external aspects of culture are consciously developed. The four protagonists flock together when they are happy as well as in times of difficulty. Gloria celebrates her thirty-eighth birthday. Suddenly, Savannah poses a question that they all have in common and that is, they are all single women and that this is really disturbing. Gloria argues that the presence of a man in a woman's life is not everything. She further asks: "Do you think if any of us had a man we'd not be here doing this?" (442) Savannah then answers by saying that if she has a man and if Gloria is alone celebrating her birthday, she would still be here to join her. This is kind of bonding that she and her friends have. Savannah realises that her relationship with her extended family and friends provides her emotional sustenance and the solace which is completely denied her in the relationships with men. Richards (1999) submits that, "if nothing else, the trials of Savannah, Bernadine, Robin and Gloria reassure black women that they are not alone and that their singleness is not a sign of personal failure." (123)

Women begin to rely on one another for succour, approval and support, instead of relying on men. Robin thinks along this line about her friends: "We fight like sisters, but I don't know what I'do without them." (73) Here, the essential feature is not hating men but loving women more and receiving the intended support from one another, female bonding encouragement and inspiration. In dire situations when there is no one to turn to, the only source to vent out their feelings is their female friends who sympathise and empathise with them. Robin is heartbroken when Russell tells her that his wife Carolyn is not comfortable with her calling him at his house. Robin relates this situation to her friends who then take her out for dinner to keep her company and cheer her out of her trauma. It is evident that bonding of females plays a pivotal role in removing or reducing mental trauma or emotional hurt. McMillan depict this positive strength as she embraces female bonding and support groups among women. It provides women with security and a sense of nurturing. This is well portrayed when Robin's parents are in the hospital, Bernadine and Gloria support her in meeting their medical expenses. Emphasising the main principle behind the concept of sisterhood, Donald (2003:53) opines that:

> The sisterhood in the black tradition was founded upon
> a principle of mutual respect for all black women, who
> regardless of the quality of their personal and social
> attributes, were equally deserving of the opportunity to
> move forward and equally important to the survival of
> the race.

In Africa, there is a concept of a family which extends beyond the immediate physical environment which makes mutual assistance remain a priority in Black families. In the same trend, all McMillan's female characters are sisters in the social though and not in the biological sense. This is in line with an aspect of African family ties. To expatiate their level of intimacy, the four friends might not be physically present in a place, but they are present in one another's thought.

Chodorow (1974) gives a twist to the concept of female bonding that most women are heterosexual and that women make a resolution in favour of heterosexual bonding. This favours a positive approach in female bonding. She states further that, "female bonding does not imply lesbian practices or withdrawing from the world of men." (183) Female

bonding is a shared allegiance to the common good. The bonding of females' open avenues for social services. It is easier for groups rather than individuals to be involved in community services which prove to be extremely rewarding. Savannah in *Waiting to Exhale* joins a women's organisation (Black women on the Move) which often visits various schools to counsel the unwed teenagers. Gloria finds this so fulfilling that she shares her mind:

> I know we're all busy with our own lives and
> everything, but I swear, some of these kids out here
> are just lost, and they need any kind of motivation
> they can get, if we help point them in the right
> direction, then, we're doing something (256)

Greiner, (1993:45) rightly opines that the relationship in female bonding are not always reciprocal but "One woman in each pair is more versatile in terms of a known, than the other one is to be known." In *Waiting to Exhale*, Robin is of the view that if she goes out to eat alone, she cannot get a company. This depicts that she is lonely. Savannah then corrects this misconception and tells her that:

> Yes, you can. All you need to do is take your black ass
> to the restaurant, get out of your car, go inside, sit
> down, order and then proceed to eat the goddamn food.
> This is the nineties, Robin. Eating by yourself is not an
> admission of loneliness (279)

From the above, it is established that female bonding is a strategic device for female characters to survive in a crisis situation. It is a kind of defence mechanism in crucial times and it also increases the feeling of joy and reduces the feeling of sorrow. In *Waiting to Exhale*, the four protagonists are like sisters whose strengths and weaknesses complement one another.

McMillan celebrates the advantages of ancient African American kinship patterns, an African pattern of communal living which travelled with the slaves from Africa to the Diaspora during slavery. This is the kinship pattern that extends beyond the nuclear family. This is obvious in the social organisation of black people. Towards the end of the novel, Robin gets pregnant by Russell who is not interested in keeping the baby. Robin

decides to keep the child whom she believes will give her something that the men cannot give. That is a family. Robin responds thus:

> I'll finally have somebody I can love as hard as I want
> to. Somebody, who needs me… And whenever I have
> any question, or any doubts, I can always ask Gloria or
> Bernadine. They always know what to do (537)

Due to urbanisation, the present scenario of African kinship has changed. However, it is still very much present with African American females. In some of McMillan's novels, she reveals the failure of patriarchy in meeting the diverse needs of contemporary African American women. In this situation, kinship groups can play a vital role. McMillan's fiction is an outright revolt against all barriers that come in women's way thereby barring them from attaining fulfilment in life and discovering their true self. Her female characters move from a state of victim to that of an independent being, enjoying autonomy.

In *Waiting to Exhale*, McMillan upholds the concept of motherhood in line with the tenet of womanism. She explores the mother figure as crucial and vital in literature. She captures different facets of motherhood. She portrays the fact that mothering has an inspiring influence on women and it oscillates between weakness and strength which offer a realistic version of motherhood. The peculiar nature of Black motherhood with its faceless fatherhood aggravates and intensifies the difficulties of motherhood which makes it more cumbersome and laborious representations of motherhood in McMillan novels emphasises women's journey from innocence to maturity.

In *Waiting to Exhale,* Bernadine finds it difficult when John, her husband deserts her for his white secretary. After sometime, she becomes confident and begins to cope with her life with her two children. This shows her ability to show resistance and resilience as a black mother.

Diverse patterns in Terry McMillan's *The Interruption of Everything*

The Interruption of Everything chronicles the trials and tribulations of a middle-aged woman, Marilyn Grimes who puts her dreams, education and career on hold in order to dedicate herself to motherhood and marriage. As, a forty-four-year-old homemaker, her children are now out of home, Thus, she finds it difficult to enjoy her new child-free phase of life. She picks up a part- time job in a craft store to combat boredom, loneliness and pursue a life hobby. Her husband, Leon, a workaholic, is absent all day and most evenings. She becomes a chauffeur chef, caregiver to her manipulative and opinionated live-in mother-in law and her dog. She has to tackle another problem of dealing with her foster sister (a single mother and drug addict) who disappears for days leaving her two young children at the mercy of ailing mother who has symptoms of Alzheimer. Things are further complicated when Marilyn's routine visit to her doctors to check her menopausal systems reveals that she is pregnant.

At the apex of her frustration and exhaustion, a lonely, tired and numb Marilyn reclaims her life, dreams and passions. She resolves to reprioritise her life and place her wants and needs first. She applies to schools, looks into starting her own business, changes her hair, and starts to work-out. Leon, also facing his challenges, surprisingly and unexpectedly announces that he is bored with their passionless marriage and he is going to a secluded Costa Rican resort, alone for one month to find himself. Marilyn's best friends (Paulette and Bunny) provide comfort at times when Marilyn's world needs support. Marilyn joggles with her multitasking frenzy till the end of the novel. As she develops with her frustrations and obligations, Marilyn begins to realise that life has nothing but a series of interruption. *The Interruption of Everything* is a universal appeal to all women, reminding them to rekindle their passions and regain their independence.

The bond among female becomes one of three most powerful weapons of the middle class movement when it unfolded in the 1960s and the early 1970s. Black Women Literary Tradition can be traced to Phillis Wheatley (Fox-Gernovese,1994) Giving credence to the above expression, De Veaux (1983:233-248) says, "I see greater commitment among black women writers to understand self, multiplied in terms of the community, the community, multiplied in terms of the world."

In an attempt to re-link the present with the past, more novels are written to achieve solidarity among women, community and an assertion of themselves. This change is evident in the writings of some African American female writers like Alice Walker, Toni Morrison and Terry McMillan. In *The Interruption of Everything,* the issue of sisterhood, mothering, female bonding, family structure and male complementarity are recurrent issues.

The legacy of sisterhood is a constant feature in *The Interruption of Everything*. It is a means of women involving themselves intimately and positively in one another's life to ensure family progress. Marilyn Grimes relates with her foster sister, Joy, who is battles with addiction and has a problem of raising her two children. Marilyn thinks of her sister erroneously as irresponsible, not knowing that, she battles with an addiction. When they intimately open up to discuss about their different challenges, Marilyn has a different impression about Joy. Instead of seeing her from an irresponsible point of view, she starts to have compassion for Joy and she starts to cry. Marilyn wonders thus;

> I can't believe it she is crying. I don't think I've
> ever seen Joy cry. I feel bad for making her feel bad
> because she undoubtedly already feels bad. I walk
> over to put my arms around her, to offer her some
> comfort but she jerks away. (202)

Marilyn goes further to show her sincerity about her sister in the following:

> I wish I could do something to show her how sorry I
> am for never allowing myself to get close to her. For
> never taking time to care or wonder about what and
> how she was doing. (202)

McMillan depicts the bonds of friendship and sisterly relationship in many instances in the novel.

Similarly, McMillan portrays motherhood as the survival of black women for it provides respectable identity and ensures the continuity of their people. According to Fox-Gernovese (1994:268), "black motherhood is the product of African American culture and the issue of race aggravates or intensifies the difficulty of motherhood which makes it all more cumbersome and laborious."

In *The Interruption of Everything*, a mother's role never ends in an individual's life as she is a perpetual mother. Her concern for her children and family is endless and limitless. This brings about her untold sufferings. Marilyn narrates how she abandons her education to raise her three children:

> You remind me of myself twenty-two year ago when I put getting my master's on hold to marry your father and because I was pregnant with you. The next thing I know, here comes the twins. And your daddy wanted me to stay home and be a hands-on kind of mother, which I don't mind doing. (241)

She buttresses her point in the following:

> Being a lifetime wife and mother has afforded me the luxury of having multiple and even simultaneous careers. I've been a chauffeur. A chef. An interior decorator. A landscape architect, as well as a gardener. I've been a painter. A furniture restorer. A personal shopper. A veterinarian assistant … I've been an accountant, a banker, and on occasion, a broker. I've been a beautician. A map. A psychic. Santa Claus… An angel. God. A nurse and a nursemaid. A psychiatrist and psychologist. Evangelist. For a long time, I have felt like I inadvertently got my master's in How to Take Care of Everybody Except Yourself and then a PhD in How to Pretend Like You Don't Mind. But I do mind. (11)

Motherhood in *The Interruption of Everything* depicts that a mother's involvement in her children's life oscillates between resentment and gratification. At times, mothers feel that their children take their pains and sacrifices for granted. This makes Marilyn feel unloved and worthless before her son. Marilyn decides to make dinner for her son, Spencer and his girlfriend. She goes shopping and starts to prepare the meal. Spencer comes to the kitchen to tell his mother that he is going on an outing that cannot be cancelled or postponed. Marilyn hides her anger from her son but throws all she has bought into the dustbin:

> Well, my son forgot I wanted to make dinner for him
> and on his last night being at home after a whole
> week of not seeing him he's going to a basketball
> game because that's more important than having
> dinner with his frigging obsolete mother. But you
> know what? It's cool. It's so fucking cool. (232)

Paulette and Bunny try to ease her of her frustration and help her understand the situation from Spencer's point of view. Paulette tells her:

> Just try to understand that when they grow up their
> friends and girlfriends become important to them.
> But, it doesn't mean he doesn't care or appreciate
> what you do. Believe me. (233)

Motherhood is a representation of realistic manner and it represents the hope of a Black community which relies on women/ mothers to raise noble future men and women who can confront life challenges. In *The Interruption of Everything*, Marilyn symbolises a type of mother who is different from that of Joy. However, Marilyn still takes the pain to teach Joy's children whom she sees as part of her family and as her responsibility to raise them in a right way. She rebukes her niece thus;

> This is Aunt Marilyn. And that is not how to answer
> the phone. You say hello first, then ask who it is ....
> (116)

Marilyn further blames the bad behaviour of her niece and nephew on her sister who "doesn't seem to know how to love her kids.' (118) as she candidly complains thus:

> Lord, what wouldn't I pay to have these kids for
> about a year. They have no damn manners because
> they haven't been taught any. I feel sorry for them.
> To be stuck with a mother like my sister. She has
> been out of control since junior high school. (118)

The rich tribute McMillan pays to motherhood through her characters is in line with the tenets of womanism wherein the mothers are eulogised and celebrated.

Female bonding is another image that is constantly portrayed in *The Interruption of Everything*. It is evident that among the female characters in the novel, there exists a strong tie which is to make up for the loopholes masterminded by the inadequacies of men

in various aspects of the female existence. To further corroborate McMillan's female portrayal, Richards (1999:130) affirms that:

> All of McMillan's novels challenge stereotypes about black life. By representing affectionate bonds within the black community, she exposes the contradictions inherent in the images of blacks that have pervaded the popular American imagination for centuries. Her fiction humanises African Americans by demonstrating that they love one another in a complex variety of roles, including parent and child, romantic lovers, and 'sistah' friends. (130)

The motif of female bonding is germane to African American consciousness because, a collective wholeness is their anchor as Walker (1983) explains in the ideology of womanism. Women are, therefore, seen as the best helpers of women. In *The Interruption of Everything*, Marilyn has a miscarriage at the age of forty-four which makes her feel down emotionally. As soon as she gets out of the hospital where she undergoes an abortion, she is in a state of confusion but when she sees her friends Paulette and Bunny, she says "I feel like I've been rescued.' (110) while her friends reply, "We're here for you." (110) Also, female bonding helps the women to depend on one another for support, approval and succour instead of relying on men. In *The Interruption of Everything*, Marilyn tells her friend about the problems brewing in her marriage. The problem on the issue of marriage depresses her so much that she ponders on "how you can guarantee that you'll love someone until you die?" And her friend, Paulette, responds that "marriage requires cooperation and compromise and patience." (27)

Paulette does not stop there; she goes ahead to tell Marilyn that things like that (husband separating from the wife) happen to women every time. This helps Marilyn to brace up and become relieved as she replies: "friendship can be just as blind as love sometimes." (184)

In the same manner, female bonding implies a bond that develops among different group of women basically for accomplishment and support. It has nothing to do with the issue of age, class, race and background. In *The Interruption of Everything*, Arthurine, the mother-in-law of Marilyn observes a strain in the relationship of her son, Leon and his

wife. Arthurine tries to understand the problem between them. Leon calls his mother and she tells Marilyn what he says on the phone. Along the line, her mother-in-law bluntly asks: "Marilyn, do you want a divorce"? and she responds honestly: "I think I do. "I can't believe what a relief it is to hear myself say it. To finally admit it. And to the woman who happens to be my husband's mother." (299) This reflects that there is a level of bonding that exists between Marilyn and Arthurine.

At another time, Arthurine confides in Marilyn when she decides to move to the senior citizen's home with her friend, Prezelle. Arthurine finds it difficult to tell her son but she tells Marilyn to help her tell Leon:

> No. I don't know how or when to tell him… I am just worried that he might not want me to leave, which is why I thought you'd be much more understanding seeing how we're both women and all. (143)

The bonding between Sabrina and her mother, Marilyn, is also noteworthy. Sabrina tells her mother that gaining admission into school "that is a step in the right direction." (239) She counsels her to give Yoga a try and to enjoy a healthy life and that she should meet with a Chinese doctor and herbalist. She further says: "let daddy do his thing, you start doing yours. Watch and see. Half the things that drive you crazy will cease to even move you." (242) This is a frank talk between a mother and her daughter. This connotes a bond which indicates a healthy mother-daughter relationship.

Men complementary role in the family is part of the tenets of womanism. Men and children are part of the wholeness of the community. Similarly, McMillan does not preach that feminine gender should function without the male. On the contrary, she exhibits that there is a great vacuum in the family when the male figure is absent. She reveals how Gloria constantly desires the presence of Tarik's father. She believes that he will be a good role model for Tarik as he attains maturity. Such exclusions of the masculine gender are a distortion to the natural order of creation. Female bonding does encourage lesbianism but in Africana womanism, female bonding is towards laudable achievement and it is not a move towards the rejection of the heterosexual world. Marilyn uses her battery-operated penis and afterwards, she realises that she reaches orgasm at a shorter

time. This shows that sexually, a woman can attain satisfaction without the man but, Marilyn quickly sees the shortcoming of this act. The couple do not come together for sex alone. Other issues that need the male attention must be put into consideration.

> Damn this thing really works! What is sad is that Leon has rarely made me reach this level of unrehearsed, unpretentious ecstasy, and especially in such a short time. My fear now is that because of the urgency and immediacy and ease with which I achieve this pleasure that I might prefer this gadget to real men because it seems like a sure thing. (224)

From the foregoing, it is established that the images of mothers are in different patterns. It is equally shown that women bond to achieve peace in their lives, homes and communities. A collective wholeness of a community image is evident as men are important in the raising of a complete child. The mothering image is also a portrayal that is worth acknowledging in McMillan's *The Interruption of Everything*.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE NEW IMAGE OF WOMEN: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED NOVELS OF UNIGWE AND MCMILLAN.

Introduction

It is believed that female writers have been keen on issues that relate to their existence as women, just like female writers all over the world. According to Badejo (2012:383), female writers in Nigeria are "creating a whole new genre of women-oriented literature". It is believed that this new genre is "an" improvement on the existing accomplishment of writers of earlier generation."

The chapter, therefore, engages the selective narratives in comparative analysis to ascertain their points of similarities and dissimilarities. This is to establish if the emerging images or new images of women in African and African American novels are cognate.

Points of convergence and divergence in the representations of the image of women in the novels of Unigwe and McMillan.

In Unigwe's three novels, namely: *Night Dancer, On Black Sisters' Street* and *Phoenix,* the new image of the woman is foregrounded as there is a free discussion and description of sex, gay, lesbianism, adultery and fornication which are parts of a new order. In *Phoenix*, prostitutes are seen on the streets of Belgium and Oge reveals her surprise as she thinks the issue of prostitution is limited to Nigeria alone. In *On Black Sisters' Street*, Efe, Sisi, Joyce and Ama are prostitutes from Nigeria and to combat the economic challenges they are experiencing, they work as prostitutes in Belgium. In *Night Dancer*, Ezi embraces prostitution to make ends meet. She leaves her husband due to his infidelity and goes into prostitution to raise her daughter. This reveals that Unigwe portrays a new image of women who struggle to make ends meet through prostitution as a way out of a harsh economic reality in Nigeria. Unigwe's characters use what they have to acquire

what they need. This reflects the realities of the times and a moral decay in the world. Atta (2013:82) refers to this as "alternative energy source" because some engage in fornication (Joyce, Ama, Efe and Sisi) to make ends meet while some engage in adultery (Ezi) to put food on her table as well as to raise her daughter. This is a constant resonate in Unigwe's *Night Dancer.*

In projecting new image of women, oppressive and anti-female traditions are challenged. For instance, virginity is proclaimed as the crowning glory of the woman but Unigwe tones it down as sex is pornographically described. This is vividly highlighted in *Night Dancer* as Mike gets hold of Rapu and puts her in the family way. Rapu is their house help and Mike declines morally on his marital vows. Ezi, his wife, challenges tradition by refusing to share her husband with her house help. She refuses to listen to her mother and her friend. She moves out of her matrimonial home and fends for herself and she single handedly raises her daughter. Therefore, she is a graduate who, reflects her hybrid tendencies. She reveals the changes in the image of the contemporary women. The common issues in these narratives are a clarion call to balancing humanity. These issues touch the life of women generally. Ayalew (2012:36) submits that:

> This world of humanity is possessed of two wings: the male and the female. So long as these two wings are not equivalent in strength, the bird will not fly. Until womankind reaches the same degree as man, until she enjoys the same arena of activity, extraordinary attainment of humanity will not be realized; when the two wings… become equivalent in strengths, enjoying the same prerogatives, the flight of man will be exceedingly lofty and extraordinary.

The above reveals that as a bird is unable to fly properly if one of the wings is defective, by the same token, if one side of humanity, in this case the woman, is not treated equally with the other side, man, the balance of the symbiotic symmetry which should be observed amidst these beings would be affected negatively. This genderic imbalance would stunt the growth and development of mankind. As a result of all these imbalances, the new image of women is emerging. The society seems to be blind towards the feelings of women. When Ezi realises that Rapu gives birth to a son for her husband, she feels

defeated and her mother consoles her. This reiterates the blindness of the society towards women's feelings:

> Whats wrong?   Her mother asked, taking in her tears, her craze look. And when Ezi told her of her world ending, her mother held her and said simply; there is nothing the eyes will see that will ever make them bleed... You hear me? Onwero ife anya fulu gbaa mme. You scared me! I thought someone had died. (194)

Meanwhile, a relationship (marriage) has actually died. Ezi's mother trivialises her daughter's feelings as the society teaches her to understand. She refuses to understand that the times are changing. For the fact that she can accommodate polygamy does not mean that Ezi is expected to accept Mike, move on in her marriage and pretend that all is well when actually the presence of Rapu in her home with an heir is so traumatic for her to bear.   The new image of a woman will not allow the society to trample on her feelings. She will react as Ezi tries to fight for her love. Ezi replies: "I wish I was dead." (195) Her mother corrects that statement thus:

> Don't cry.   Your daughter needs you…. He's betrayed you… And she has his baby! His Son! His Son! And that my dear makes all the difference. You do not want to anger him ooo., do not anger him because at this moment you're standing only with one leg inside the house. Rapu has landed on both feet. You're upset now. You're angry but my dear, after the anger, you'll have to think of how to hang on him. (196).

The above excerpt shows that Ezi's mother represents the society which thrives in the unbalanced asymmetry of the wings. Ezi's mother endeavours to make Ezi the culprit in this scenery, whereas Mike is the culprit who betrays the love between himself and his wife yet, nobody rebukes him of his infidelity. On the contrary, Mike's mother returns to her son's house to establish the presence of a new wife, Rapu, (an househelp) and a son. This is done in order to spite Ezi as a result of her childlessness for a long time. Ezi's mother also does not rebuke Mike for his unfaithfulness towards her daughter. Obviously, this is one of the unbalanced asymmetries of tradition in favour of the men against the

women. Unigwe challenges these unfair tendencies in tradition. When the man breaks the marital vow, the culture celebrates him but, when the woman is caught in a similar act, she is stigmatised, given bad names and she is seen as an enigma in the society. This is the image Unigwe paints of Ezi, who prostitutes to survive in a bad economy and raises her daughter without any support from her father or the society which encourages the man to take as many wives as he desires. Also, when Ezi dies, she was buried quietly without any honour despite the fact that she was wealthy while alive. Similarly, Nma (Ezi's daughter) shares of the same stigma at school as well as her community.

Portraying the new image of women, Ezi refutes her mother's counsel and reverberates: "Hang on to him? I'm leaving him. There's no way I can stay." (196). Ezi's mother reprimands her daughter: "Look at you; Look at you acting as if the world has ended… Your baby is hungry and you're here feeling sorry for yourself. She hissed and went out." (197), but for Ezi, "This could not be happening. Not to Mike and she. They were too solid for that." (197) Ezi's mother tries to trivialise a very painful situation her daughter is experiencing.

In *On Black Sisters' Street*, a new type of motherhood reveals how a mother reacts to infidelity in the person of Ama's mother whose husband, (Brother Cyril) continuously has carnal knowledge of her daughter (Ama). Ama's mother reacts by sending her daughter away to her friend (Mama Eko) in Lagos. She cherishes her marriage above her daughter and watches her husband sexually abuse her daughter from the early age of eight years. Ama reports to her mother in the following:

> Mba, No. I will not shut up. Mama, do you know
> what he did to me when I was little? He raped me.
> Night after night. He would come into my room and
> force me to spread my legs for him…. (147)

In response to her daughter's revelation, Ama's mother slaps her, saying: "How dare you talk about your father like that? What has taken possession of you? "Ife o na-eme gi n'isi"? Have you gone mad?" (148) Ama's mother reacts to her daughter by making her daughter the culprit instead of attacking Brother Cyril (her husband) who is the culprit in this situation:

> Ama's mother was on the floor, kneeling, hands
> stretched out in front of her palms outwards: the
> same position she assumed when she prayed and
> called on her God to forgive her, a poor sinner. (148)

Ama's mother puts her husband in the position of God and makes the culprit (Brother Cyril) look like a righteous man. Brother Cyril, in fury, responds: "I want you out of my house. I want you out. Tata. Today! As God is my witness, you shall leave my house today.!" (149). This also indicates that a woman might refuse to embrace the new image if there is something she hides from the society. Ama's mother's becomes a prey in Brother Cyril's blackmail because she's made to believe that he covered her shame by getting married to her despite her pregnancy by another man and he helps her raise the offspring (Ama) as if the child is his. This gives him the impetus to perpetrate his shameful acts by having carnal knowledge of his stepdaughter. Ama's mother deems it fit to endure her husband's evil act, so that Brother Cyril would not reveal her unacceptable marital behaviour. Ordinarily, Ama's mother should have reacted negatively towards her husband to support and protect her daughter, but she does not do so. Apparently, the theme of incest is clearly a discussion that is trivially portrayed to depict reality. Many females are suffering in silence because of fear of what the society will do to them. This narrative equally reveals the mass exodus of able-bodied youths to the diaspora in a quest for greener pasture. It also reveals that many hopes were dashed as the likes of Oga Dele who capitalises on the naivity of Sisi, Efe and Ama to exploit them. As they relocate, they interact with their environment and the four of them exhibit new images.

In Unigwe's *Phoenix,* the changing image of the woman is revealed by Oge who tells her husband, Gunter about the African Church she attends at Belgium to seek spiritual help because she believes that her son Jordi is not dead but asleep as she proclaims: "they say he is not dead excluding yourself from those who claimed that your Jordi is dead." (122) Oge, full of excitement, announces to her husband, the new pastor's great spiritual powers. Oge tells Gunter: "You told Gunter where you had been and the assurance you had receive that Jordi would be brought back to you." (129)

The above statement infuriates Gunter and he, instead of responding to Oge's statement, remains silent but "he held you by the shoulders and told you that you needed help."

(129). Due to the fact that Gunter does not see the issue from her perspective, Oge gets angry and yells at her husband disrespectfully:

> But I am getting it! You shouted back not having
> any of your mother's inhibitions about shouting back
> at her husband. (129)

The above reveals that the present-day woman can go against tradition just to express her mind irrespective of the consequences that such actions elicit.

At another instance, Oge's mother joins other protesters to riot against Shell. She had herself written a placard indicating that both Shell and the Nigerian Government are murderers as well as destroyers of homes. She does this without her husband's consent. The police attack the rioters, which leads to the death of some, while many others sustain injuries. Oge's father comes to rescue his wife but he gets angry because she disobeys his instruction. This is what Oge's mother says:

> Do you really want me to go on?" She asked of
> course, she said all these in the safety of her head.
> One does not argue with a husband, whether he is
> right or wrong. Not if one was interested in
> remaining in that marriage… but refused to look
> remorseful. She refused to say the one word an ideal
> wife would have said in the face of her husband's
> scolding she would not say "sorry" she shut her eyes
> and pretended to be asleep. She heard when he
> sighed and closed the door behind him. Then she hit
> the pillow in frustration. And anger. (140)

Oge's mother is aware of the fact that her husband is expecting her to apologise but she insists on not apologising. She believes that she is fighting for her community and it is a good fight irrespective of what instruction she is flaunting. This is in line with the tenet of womanism. The community must be rescued from the hands of bad leadership who cares less on the precarious state of the country. It is in a dwindling economy. Oge's mother depicts a new image of a woman.

The problem in the marriage of Oge and Gunter is as a result of Gunter who cremates Jordi (his son). Oge is of the view that: "I cannot believe that Jordis's life meant so little to him that he would make a mockery of his life by cremating him." (182) This act of

dishonour to her son makes Oge not to forgive him and their marriage almost hits the rock except for her mother's intervention. This proves that the subtle woman might not even vent her anger verbally but show negative reactions that will make the marriage unbearable to her partner. Oge succinctly expresses her mind thus:

> I do not know why Gunter choose to have Jordi cremated. Or why he decided on the unlikely muesli of ash, confetti and glitter. I have struggled to understand. I have lain awake nights trying to find reasons. But I have failed. I guess I could easily ask him but I do not think I am ready for that yet. (182)

That is the bone of contention. This silent hurt and agony affects the couple that they become strangers in the house as they do not understand each other anymore. This is in line with the tenets of womanism that seeks the support of their men to achieve a communal goal. After the intervention of Oge's mother, Oge then opens up:

> I know that he loved Jordi as much as I did. I know that he would never have intentionally dishonoured our son's body. But above all these, I also know that after yesterday, I am capable of forgiving him. (185)

In McMillan's *Disappearing Acts*, Zora Banks lives with her lover, Franklin Swift, in her apartment. On Zora's birthday, due to the fact that he has no money to celebrate her birthday, he gets involved in drinking. Zora gets angry and decides to keep off Franklin Swift. Zora tells of how she shows her anger without expressing a word but through her actions:

> We didn't say a single solitary word all the way home. Once we were inside the apartment, Franklin turned on the TV and flopped down on the couch. I went to the bedroom, took my clothes off, and put on some ugly pajama – the ones I knew he hated. I was starving, but I was too mad to eat. I just brushed my teeth and got in the bed. I heard him come to the bedroom and I could feel him standing over me, but I refused to acknowledge him. My face faced the wall. I didn't say anything, but I was thinking, Fuck you, awfully hard. (124)

The above is also seen in *Disappearing Acts*, an African American novel. Women can reveal their resentment over any issue at any time. This resentment can be both verbal and non-verbal.

Furthermore, in McMillan's *Waiting to Exhale,* John declares to Bernadine that he wants to marry Kathleen (his white secretary) and intends to divorce Bernadine. To reinforce his plan, John "closes the account with the exception of the checking account." (128) Bernadine goes to the bank only to realise that the joint account is no more functional. She reacts as she goes to her husband's office:

> Is he still in the same office? Yes, she said. "I'll buzz him". But Bernadine was already on her way down the hall... Kathleen was sitting in front of his desk… When she saw Bernadine, Kathleen sprang up from the chair. Kathleen's face was red. Bernadine's felt redder… She was trembling so that she didn't know her arm had flailed up and she slapped Kathleen in the face until she saw Kathleen fall against John's desk. (130).

After this confrontation, John intervenes to rescue Kathleen from the terrors of Bernadine who is still not comfortable at her victory with her husband, she bares her mind in the following:

> Don't worry. I don't have a gun", she said, and sat down in the chair Kathleen had abandoned "And you better be glad I don't … You are not playing fair, so neither am I. (130)

Bernadine justifies the reason for her action towards her husband and his girlfriend. In Unigwe's *Night Dancer,* Ezi's mother expects Ezi to accept Mike's unfaithfulness without any counter reactions. Ezi refuses and moves out of her husband's house. Bernadine shows more stiff opposition by auctioning and destroying all her husband's expensive properties.

A similar occurrence is seen in McMillan's *The Interruption of Everything* where Marilyn and her husband (Leon) experience a fall out of love. Leon expresses the fact that he

intends to separate from his wife: "I probably am going to have to leave" Your job? "Yes", he says. "And you." (151), while Marilyn states that:

> He wants to leave me? Then go, you son of a bitch!
> Right now, I just need to be as far away from him as
> possible. (152)

Marilyn suddenly realises that since Leon wants to leave her, he should leave as quickly as possible. However, in the case of Ezi in *Night Dancer*, she moves out of her husband's house. Marilyn tells Leon:

> Call the bitch back and tell him you are coming right
> over because am not going anywhere, Leon. You
> said you wanted to leave. So leave. (152)

From the analysis of the six novels, it is evident that women generally react to hurt, pain and betrayal verbally and non- verbally. This establishes the fact that women exhibit some changes in their disposition to patriarchic oppressive tendencies. They do not keep quiet in relationships to continue to bear the pain or hurt alone. They vent their anger and frustration on their victims in as much as it will make them happy. This is in line with the tenet of womanism as propounded by Walker (1983) who admonishes women to be happy in spite of all odds.

In all the six novels, sisterhood, a form of female bonding is foregrounded. This is a cardinal point in the theory of womanism, hence, it is pinned on deep sympathy women have for one another. It also enhances attainment of their goals in life. Fox–Gernovese (1994:12) corroborates this thus: "female bonding is the female model which has to replace the male model of individualism." (12)   In *Disappearing Acts*, Zora and her friends positively help one another to bring about family progress.

Zora gets pregnant by Franklin and tries to hide it from her friends, Portia, Marie and Claudette, but she rebukes this behaviour of hers thus; "I know it was stupid of me to invite Portia and Marie too, but I wanted them all here. I had to tell somebody. And I can't keep this to myself. Not this time." (144).

This decision of Zora helps her in terminating her first pregnancy for Franklin. Her friends support her by paying for the abortion and caring for her afterwards.

At another scenario, Portia visits Zora and gets to know that she uses phenobarbital drug to check her epilepsy. Portia feels hurt because Zora does not confide in her. She, therefore laments: "I thought I knew you." (160) Portia feels further disappointment when she observes that their other friends are unaware of Zora's health issue. She goes on to ask; "You mean you haven't told Marie and Old dead – ass Claudette?" (160).

In addition, in *Waiting to Exhale*, McMillan employs sisterhood as a strategy. McMillan portrays the fact that women are the best helpers for fellow women. Bernadine confides in Gloria about her miserable marriage and sour relationship with her husband, John. Gloria persuades Bernadine to join an organisation that will keep her engaged. Once Gloria learns of John's desertion of Bernadine, she becomes worried and offers solace:

> Look Bernie. I hope you're alright… I am worried
> as hell about you, and I won't be able to rest until I
> know you're okay. So call me. I don't care how late
> it is. (74)

Gloria does not stop at ensuring the safety of Bernadine but also informs her other friends so as to call her and help her recover from depression.

Similarly, sisterhood is recurrent in McMillan's *The Interruption of Everything*. Marilyn Grimes, the protagonist of the novel, relates with her adopted sister, Joy, who battles with drug addiction. She finds it really difficult to raise her two children. Initially, she finds it difficult to understand why she abandons her children and mother uncared for. She later realises her challenge and embraces her to help her: "I feel bad for making her feel bad because she undoubtedly feels bad. I walk over to put my arms around, to offer her some comfort." (202)

McMillan depicts female bonding through the experiences of Marilyn, who goes to evacuate the dead foetus in her womb. The doctor tells her, "I could see the foetus but no heartbeat and there should be one at this stage." (107) As a mark of female bonding, Marilyn tells her friends that the foetus in her womb is dead and she has to do a D and C. Bunny and Paulette feel sorry at the news. On the day of the D and C, they wait at the car park to support their friend, Marilyn. Leon, her husband, does not show up but her friends

are there for her. Female bonding is all the more imperative and inevitable because of the various inadequacies of men. Richards (1999:130) establishes that:

> All of McMillan's novels challenge stereotypes about black life… Her fictions humanise African Americans by demonstrating that they love one another in a complex variety of roles including parent and child, romantic lover, an "sister" friends.

Unigwe, equally portrays the womanist tenet of female bonding. In *Night Dancer*, she employs flashback technique. The reader relies solely on Ezi's friend, Madam Gold, who helps to complete the fragments of Ezi's letters. Through this style of writing, Madam Gold sheds more light on the dark part of the narrative. This narrative strategy is in line with Hudson-Weems (2004:66) who posits that female bonding helps to:

> give women a good vantage point and platform to discuss issues about their lives in their own way and explore the positive qualities of women who she describes as the very foundation of life whether they know it or not.

Still on female bonding, Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street* lends credence to Walker's (1983) admonition to women that they should prefer and appreciate their culture in order to create women self-definition. In this vein, new terms are expected to emerge as a medium of defining African women's collective self-consciousness. The four female protagonists come together to attack their common enemies (Dele, Madam and Segun) who perpetually keep them in bondage. After the death of Sisi, the remaining three females employ female bonding by opening up on their past so as to understand their present situation and collectively achieve victory over their tools of torment (Dele, Madam and Segun). Ama, therefore, says: "now we are sisters… she knew that they will be friends forever… their conviction gives them some relief." (290) They collectively decide to fight their enemies. In an act of rebellion, Joyce declares thus:

> Why should we take it? Sisi is dead and all Madam can think about is business. Doesn't Sisi deserve respect form her? What are we doing? Why should she treat us any old how and we just take it like dogs? (289)

At this point, a consensus is in view and unanimously, they attain victory over their enemies.

However, In Unigwe's *Phoenix,* Oge gives another notion of female bonding. Oge marries Gunter, a European and relocates to Belgium with him. She interacts with another culture and attains a different identity. As a migrant, many things become strange to Oge. This situation becomes complex for her and she becomes a hybrid personality. She meets with a friend, Lisa whom Oge compares her friendship with her late Nigerian friend (Angel). Oge tells of Lisa's friendship thus:

> You were not friends enough to go beyond each other's kitchen. You could not tell her about Gunter. Or later, about your cancer. She was a constant reminder that the parameters of friendship were different in a new environment. (75)

Oge explains the strange manner of friendship in her new environment. It reveals that it is difficult for an outsider to understand or penetrate. Lisa infers that she is not interested in sharing a friend's grief or sorrows she pictures it in the following:

> Lisa told you all these without crying. She delivered this bit of information in such a way that you knew, without her saying anything of the sort that you were not to ever refer to it again. You also knew at that moment, that she was telling you that she did not have any room left to carry another person's grief. She had enough of her own sorrow to last her a lifetime, that she was making a facet agreement with you that you were never to bother each other with your personal emotional baggage. (78)

The type of friendship or female bonding in this novel differs from the type Oge experience in Nigeria. Oge and Angel are so close to the extent that they engage in a blood covenant to connote how close they are. Oge says:

> One day when you were nine, you and Angel had pricked your middle fingers with a needle and mingling your dots of blood and had sworn to be best friends until you were really old, like forty-five. (76)

Another image of a woman is the portrayal of a mother. Motherhood reveals the involvement of a mother in a child's life. Motherhood personality can be viewed from different perspectives. Womanism does not see motherhood as a burden but a positive quality that comes with being women and mothers. In the six novels, different mothers evolve. However, different situations produce the different mothers.

In Unigwe's *Night Dancer*, Ezi leaves her husband due to infidelity on his part. She tries to get a job but because of the societal constraints as well as economic hardship in the country; she turns to prostitution for her daily living. From this illegal business, she buys houses and raises her daughter up to university level. Indirectly, Ezi endures shame, stigmatisation and pain just to be a good mother. Ezi's mother sees motherhood differently. She believes that a mother must sacrifice and endure betrayal and hurt from her husband to remain in his house. Unigwe equally employs motherhood as a motif for elevation. In African society, a married woman without children and especially a male child is trampled upon and called bad names. This is what Rapu holds unto and expresses:

> …after all, what power did this woman have that she did not have? They were both sleeping with the man, with the boss of the house, and so whatever line there was before them which placed one higher than the other is erased (190) …. So Aunty Ezi knew that they were now equals. Both carrying babies for the same man. (191)

Motherhood is also so strong that Rapu's mother tells her to be patient in Mike's house. She assures her that it will not last as Mike will eventually relate with her as a wife and the mother of his children. It is shown that the role of the mother is very strong in the life of a child and family to direct and channel them to the right path in life.

In *On Black Sisters' Street,* the death of Efe's mother exposes her to hardship in life. Due to the fact that Efe needs to fill the vacuum of her late mother as well as an irresponsible father, she falls prey to Titus, who takes advantage of her, impregnates and abandons her. At this point, the absence of a mother exposes her children to untold hardship and molestation. This makes Efe opt for prostitution in Belgium.

The spirit of communal living is a reflection of motherhood where no matter what happens; a child is never void of a mother; if not biological, it will be another woman who will raise the child. Unigwe establishes on this point when Ama's mother erroneously sends her away to Mama Eko at Lagos. Mama Eko is Ama's mother's friend. She embraces Efe and takes good care of her. She does not have a biological child but Ama says this of Mama Eko: "Mama Eko loved her with a mother's love that would do for her." (171)

For the fact that Mama Eko takes her in when her biological mother denies her, she celebrates and appreciates her above her mother:

> Mama Eko is the only person I really missed… one day when I make it, I'll go back and build her a mansion… Mama Eko is the only one who comes close. (177)

Unigwe's *Phoenix* celebrates a mother who is committed to her family. When Oge gets to Belgium and she realises she is down with cancer, she passionately seeks her mother's presence as she believes that her mother has all it takes to battle cancer: "my daughter cannot have cancer because it not an African disease. But your mother is not here." (26) From the foregoing, a mother is depicted as a child's safe haven. In McMillan's *Disappearing Acts*, Zora's mother dies when she clocks three years old. However, Marguerite, Zora's stepmother raises her. Zora claims that:

> Marguerite- that's my step mother… which is how I got stuck with Marguerite as a replacement… she did teach me how to cook, how to shave my armpits and legs, and told me when to douch. (22)

Zora Banks gives birth to a child whose father is Franklin Swifts. Franklin starts to have problems with his mother. In the case of Franklin, another facet of motherhood is depicted. This problem aggravates to the point at which Franklin accuses his mother as the progenitor of his mishap in life:

> She never wanted to hear my side of anything. I was always wrong… she fucked me up… my mom stripped me of my manhood before I was a man…

> Do you know what it feels like not to feel loved by
> your own mother? (306-307)

To further corroborate Franklin, his father also comments about his wife that "she's full of hatred and all these years I've let her unload it on our children." (376) Franklin's mother depicts a different kind of mother who frustrates her children. Meanwhile, Zora displays a motherly tendency when Jeremiah almost gets injured as a baby on the stairs. Zora says: "Lord knows I'd die if anything ever happened to my son." (376)

Waiting to Exhale by McMillan celebrates motherhood in line with womanist ideologies. Different facets of motherhood are captured in McMillan's narratives. She combines the weakness and strength of a mother to portray the realistic version of motherhood. The tint of the faceless father figure in the family makes motherhood in her novels cumbersome and laborious as the mother combines the mother image as well as the father image.

Bernadine experiences absence of her husband, while her two children could not enjoy real fatherhood because the supposed head of the family now abandons them. After a while, she begins to cope with her children. This explains why she puts up a show of resistance and resilience.

Motherhood goes beyond bringing forth a child but involves real mentoring and role modelling in a community. The four women affect their community positively when they go from one school to another, teaching students on what the society expects from them and how to positively impact their community. This is to further buttress the standpoint of womanism. Gloria becomes a super mummy to all the children in the neighbourhood thus:

> She forgot all about men, forgot that she was still an attractive woman, and became a supermom. It was Gloria who took half the neighbourhood boys to little league and soccer practice, flag football, Boy Scout meetings, Karat Class, Puppet shows, and Saturday afternoon movies … for years, Gloria's house was full of children. (70)

From this perspective, motherhood depicts communal living which is an ideology in Africa which the slaves take with them to the diaspora.

Gloria pays particular attention to her son Tarik. She becomes as close to him as he grows up to the extent that she constantly worries about him. Gloria starts to think of what to do when Tarik leaves home for graduate school. This thought rocks her system that she quickly feels lonely:

> What are you going to do when your son graduates and leaves home? Gloria really didn't know. But Tarik would be gone in less than a year, wouldn't he? …she felt a sharp pain shoot through her chest… she closed the sliding glass door, then went to the bathroom to get the Mylanta out of the medicines cabinet. When Gloria reached for the bottle, a pain, sharper than any she'd felt before, cut into her heart and turned. (385)

This is the bond that motherhood is capable of creating. The different experiences they share over the years bring a very strong dependence among the women and their children. They have been able to achieve much as a result of committing themselves to their families.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter provides the summary and conclusion of what the whole study contains. The aim of this study was to examine the new image of women in African and African American novels using the theory of womanism. In order to achieve the aim and objectives of this thesis, motherhood, sisterhood, male complementary roles, communal living, family-centred tendency was explored using the provided templates in Unigwe and McMillan's selected novels. The objectives of this study was to examine how Unigwe and McMillan depicted new image of women in their selected novels. The representations of women characters in the selected novels was critiqued. The new image of women characters as portrayed in the selected novels were compared and contrasted. Whether the experiences of women characters from African and African American cultural backgrounds are similar or different in these selected novels. This study has contributed to the increasing volume of gender studies in general. It suggests that womanism can reference the daily realities of Africans and African Americans. It promotes some African values of complementary roles of men and women in the society and the family. It is equally an essential tool for societal regeneration and cohesion and it preaches that family conflict should be settled amicably through dialogue. From the foregoing, it is inferred that womanist theory is useful in the interpretation of African and African American fictions. It has examined the new image of women in six novels, namely: *Night Dancer, On Black Sisters' Street* and *Phoenix* by Chika Unigwe and *Disappearing Acts, Waiting to Exhale* and *The Interpretation of Everything* by Terry McMillan. Gender discourse has gained a remarkable scholarly attention since the twentieth century when literary theories and criticism pervaded the literary scene. These theories were responses to the realities in

the modern period and a reaction to other literary antecedents. There have been several attempts by African and African American writers to interrogate the female experience in literature. Existing studies have been able to examine the evolving images of women. Nevertheless, there is an obvious shift in the thematic endeavours of African and African American female writers as issues relating to contemporary women as victims are noticeably changing. This study, therefore, examines new image of women in selected novels of Unigwe and McMillan.

Summary

In Chapter one, it is established that traditional African has a high sense of respect for women because it is believed that new life emerges from women. For this reason, she is seen as a model of the Supreme Being. This explains the reason for matriarchy style in Africa. Awe (1992) opines that African women are not relegated in the area of historical antecedent, unlike their Western counterparts. However, issues of gender inequality based on sexuality and the right to own their bodies or social-political disempowerments are recurring challenges that stir women at the face.

Literature, like other works of art in all regions, is based on realities but responds to subtle global influences. At the era of the different waves of feminist movement in Europe, African and African American female writers enrich their writings by expressing their peculiar concerns. However, with slavery and colonialism came the blurring of gendered roles which afforded each gender an opportunity to exercise its assigned roles. To reposition the women, African and African American female writers emerge to give a realistic account from the womanist perspective.

The second chapter dwells on reviewing literatures focused around feminism, womanism and women image. From the concept of feminism, break ups due to racial, classist and sexist issues bring about womanism. Therefore, womanism is portrayed as an offshoot of feminism. From womanism, tenets such as female bonding; sisterhood, motherhood, community gender complementing and getting to be happy were subjected to interrogation in the six texts this thesis analysed.

In the third chapter, new images of the women were observed in the three texts of Unigwe;Complementarity, femalebonding; sisterhood, motherhood including female emancipation and emancipation of the whole community. Unigwe, despite the different cultural milieu, creates new images of women through her writings. Unigwe's *Phoenix* reveals a new Oge at the end of the novel who learns to forgive her husband, Gunter. She gets to understand that he is but human and he is prone to errors. At the same time, they are from two different cultures and the only solution for them to live together peaceably is tolerance and understanding each other's worldview. The same occurrence is observed in *On Black Sisters' Street* where the four major female characters Ama, Alek, Efe and Sisi, become new personalities at the end of the novels. *In Night Dancer,* Ezi and Nma (her daughter) evolves with new identities.

Changes in the image of woman are equally represented in the novels of Terry McMillan. In the fourth chapter, Zora Banks, in*Disappearing Acts,*goes through a transformation process and she becomes really independent without Franklin Swift. Although, at the end of the novel, Zora desires the presence of Franklin. This illustrates the fact that African American women are not happy raising their children without their fathers balancing it up. Gloria equally exhibits a similar trend when she pleads with David, (Tarik's father) to pass the night in their house. She longs for a father figure in their home to give her son a balanced upbringing. The four female characters in *Waiting to Exhale,* Gloria, Bernadine, Robin and Savannah all experience transformation, which reveals the new image of women. Marilyn Grimes, the protagonist in *The Interruption of Everything,* through her numerous experiences, evolves a new image. She reveals her hurt to her daughter, (Sabrina) about her marriage and from her response, she moves on with her life. She tells her friends, (Paulette and Bunny) of her different challenges and they are able to alleviate some of her troubles. At the end of the novel, all the women evolve with changing images as coping strategies. Even her old mother-in-law, (Arthurine) a sixty-eight-year-old widow, finds love in a seventy-one-year-old man, (Prezelle). For her, this act is her coping strategy which should be embraced and not condemned. It shows that every woman can emerge with any form of change in her image just to attain happiness according to the tenet of womanism.

Chapter Five subjects the selected texts of Unigwe and McMillan to a comparative analysis to ascertain their different points of similarities and dissimilarities. Some similarities are the representation of women who desire to be self-independent. Unigwu portrays her female characters such as Ezi, in *Night Dancer*andSisi, Ama, Efe and Joyce in *On Black Sisters' Street*as women who seek to be self-independent. In *Disappearing Acts,* McMillan equally depicts Zora Banks, Portia, Claudette and Maria as career women.Similarly,in *Waiting to Exile,* Bernadine, Robin, Savannah and Gloria are all working class women too. The two female writers desire to complement their men. They both do not approve lesbianism. Unigwe and McMillan celebrate and encourage female bonding in all the selected texts.

The study submits that only when the men and women come together with their children to fight the common enemy (traditions, cultures, patriarchy as well as other challenging factors) that wants to destroy the black race will victory be won. Complementary relationship between men and women makes the children to have noble examples as role model and ensures unity in the family, which is essential for all round development.

Conclusion

This study has explored new image of women as a result of changes in experiences of women. It is observed that when African women experienced colonialism, their image, view and perception of the society about them changed. When African American women experienced slavery and overlapping designated family roles, they became family care givers and providers. This brought about a change in their image. After the colonial era, women's image changed because their designated roles equally changed. As women experience different situations in life, their perception changes, hence, coping strategies emanate female changes.

From the above discussion, it is clear that women's image keeps changing as they encounter different situations. African women were highly placed during the pre-colonial era. At the advent of colonial masters, due to the Victorian image they came with, African women became a piece of furniture that was relegated to the background. The image of

African women equally changes during post-independence era where they struggle with men for everything as a result of women's liberation. African American women also experience different changing images such as mammy, sapphire, jezebel, tragic–mulatto, as well as matriarch. As women's experience changes, their images continue to change. Presently, it is pertinent for African women not to be carried away with the much widespread women's liberation ideology that is targeted at destroying families or completely avoiding procreation by going into homosexuality or lesbianism. Sadly, Africans who are supposed to be good examples to their sisters in the diaspora, who are carried away by this strange and infectious virus are found to be shirking their responsibilities.

Sequel to the above, more images are expected to emerge, but African women are charged to return to their complementing nature in order to progress as a whole. This is the only safe haven, and at that juncture, alone, they can be good models to their sisters in the diaspora who have become hybrid personalities.

Womanism shows concern for the family and the community as it embraces dialogue, complimentary gender roles. The female gender is part of the administrative system (at home and the community) In this case, complaints are minimal and when there are complaints, dialogue and settlement are adapted against confrontation. In this vein, when the father and mother complement each other, a combination of the division of labour in raising their children produces positive results. Issues of separation, divorce and single parenting which produce defiant altitudes in children and the society, are reduced to the minimal. From the aforementioned, a healthy community is achieved. These different families make up a healthy and an egalitarian society.

Since this study has only been able to interrogate comparatively, works of two female writers from two different cultures and traditions using womanism, it is suggested that both male and female authors from similar and different culture and traditions be subjected to interrogation using eclectic theories to validate the new image of women. It is important to pin point these changes in order to establish their implications for posterity.

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