



Overshadowing Masculinity: A feminist Reading of Afuh Margaret's *Born before Her Time*, *Flowers in the Desert* and Tala Julie Enjema's *Daughters of Ekema*

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Abstract— This paper articulates masculinity's diminishing strength in Africa and highlights new women imaging within the interaction of time, cultural analysis and feminist discourse. It limits its search to the 1960s and 1970s socio/economic and political landscapes. Principally, it underlines the timid beginnings of misogyny and stresses on its gradual but steady growth. Guided by a study of Margaret Afuh's *Born Before Time* (2003) *Flowers in the Desert* (2009) and Julie Enjema Tala's *Daughters of Ekema*, (2012) the paper uncovers the female African's pain under the intersection of patriarchy, culture and gender, and challenges the drawbacks by establishing alternative ways to the traditional orchestrated demeaning behaviours. In theoretical assessment, it uses womanism; an African feminist theory positioned by its theorists as a significant tool for Africa's positive transformation. The essay premises that the mindset of the empowered African woman is geared towards developing the entire human society.



Keywords— manhood, empowerment, gender, patriarchy, violence.

INTRODUCTION

Masculinity, a practice noted for cementing social disparity, is an intrinsic male dominant system that is persisting in Africa. Instituted and contested by patriarchy, it is a system in which the male holds power and the female is exceedingly subjugated. Its diligence in the continent stems from the indigenes' lean on socio/economic and political systems that are grounded on tradition, gender bias and colonial heritages— inherent sexist frames that uphold male identity and contrarily impact on the female. Within the above frame, the African traditional woman found herself at the domestic sphere where she assumed the positions of daughter, wife and mother, an angle of discourse that was normalized within the jurisdiction of culture. But feminist discourse demeaned the above shades of women as shadows of themselves and voiceless beings. This was a mind searching frame that registered violence in patriarchal structures and spurred activism and writings against it.

African feminine writings in adherence to feminist thought underlines the cultural norms inherent in patriarchy as distasteful social ascriptions worth questioning and redefining. Their works increasingly x-ray the female outgrowing the dictates of culture especially the myth surrounding manliness and manhood. These works, as exemplified by Nwapa (1970), Dangaremdga (1988), Vera (2002), Ngongkum (2007) vividly further the feminist agenda. No matter their locations in the planet, the writers focus their energies on examining the situation of the African woman. The literary creations reverberate with fights against culture inflicted odd female identities and become contesting grounds against masculinity (Abbenyi 1997, 148). Like their counterparts' engagements on the African woman's experiences, Afuh's and Tala's texts under study unveil the suppressed African female and implicitly brace the feminist agency in Africa. This article analyses the situation with an African fashioned version of feminism, womanism — a cultural frame which celebrates

both black life and the black woman and thus builds against patriarchal gender leanings.

Womanism is a derivation from the adjective 'womanist' and entails believing in, and respecting women's special talents and abilities. It builds on the experiences of the black woman, a people whom Ogundipe holds face "six mountainous problems" constitutive of colonialism and neo-colonialism, tradition, men, backwardness, "their colour and themselves" (Ogini 1996, 17). In line with Walker's enunciation, Nwapa explicates that womanism demands harmonised human relations and especially requires using the woman's naturally talents to solve society's problems (Umeh 1998, 161,187). The theory evidently ferries the ideals of African life and functions towards the liberation of the African woman. It calls for coexistence between the black man and the black woman (Ogunnye 1998, 60) and is committed to the success and continuity of the both sexes and all races (Peter 2010, 35). The theory thus analyses in patriarchy's subjection of the female's existence a limiting of both the woman's possibilities and existence as a whole. It evidently stands tall as a tool for redirecting Africa's socio/cultural crisis for as variedly noted, socio/cultural issues play key roles as developmental hints (Talale 2006, 2).

Born Before Her Time like *Flowers in the Desert* and *Daughters of Ekema*, underline feminine concerns as socio/economic and political issues and market the idea that the voices of women should be listened to for developmental purposes. The texts particularly serve as forums for the exposition of both patriarchy's gender politics in Africa and its negative consequences on society. In highlighting both the illogicality of gender and the violence male chauvinism renders its expansive victims this essay becomes another awareness creator of the unhealthy male mannerisms in Africa. Its African feminist analytical perspective is an attempt to underscore masculinity's impacting force on the African society and advocate a check on this excessive male power.

Male and Female Relations in *Born Before Her Time*, *Flowers in the Desert* and *Daughters of Ekema*

Central to the meaning of feminisms is the call for both the equality of all and equal opportunities to all, a humanist view absent in most African cultural settings as their male/female relationships suffer from rigidly defined gender roles. The male superior tenet of these cultural backgrounds kindles in patriarchy, a power structure that favours the man over the woman to the institutionalising of masculinity. In its frame as a set of values associated with male dominance, masculinity guides the functioning of society on the interaction of the male figure, ideologies and power (Mshweshwer 2020, 2). It emphasises on

manliness—the need for the male figure to be tough, rigid and dictatorial (Mshweshwer *ibid*). The bad side of patriarchal power as echoed in masculinity is its encouraging the exploitation of its subjects (Foucault 1980). In its male chauvinist frame it functions in marginalising the female gender. As a system then, it silences the female, destroys her ego and leaves her at the clemency of the man, Feminism as Alkali et al holds, addresses those issues of inequalities and unfairness in the treatment of woman that have for ages been normalised (2013,248). This is an angle of discourse underlined in the section below.

Most of the women in *Born Before Her Time*, *Flowers in the Desert* and *Daughters of Ekema* act routinely in favour of their families and society. This does not go without saying that some women in power structures (patriarchal constructs) habitually oppress their female folk. The traditional cultural African values are consequently highlighted as oppressing and suppressing the woman. This is an angle of discourse handled below though the texts portray how the suppressing grips on the woman relax with time.

Chukwuma's analysis of Afuh's *Born Before her Time* limits the eminences of the 1960's Cameroonian female to daughter, wife, and mother while stressing that this woman never partakes in decision making, not even with issues about herself (Chukwuma 1990, 133). Afuh exemplifies the outlined identity threats through the protagonist, Abo, a 14 (fourteen) year-old girl whose rights to education and freedom to love are negotiated in a forced traditional marriage to Pah Worewum, a rich man old enough to be "her grandfather" (3). At the age of ten Aboh's father, Mr Mbacham, informs her with a note of finality that she was betrothed to Pah Worewum at birth because the old man saved him from being killed by a wild animal. The old rich man in reciprocity had been providing for Abo and her family. The novelist presents the innocent and naïve Abo as a prey in the hands of two self-centred men; both of them leaning on society's prescribed norms to satisfy their male egos. Pah Worewum would later enrol his would-be wife into elementary school so she would learn the little that will be of use to him when she officially becomes his.

Both men shamelessly and disgracefully treat the young naïve Abo as a commodity. They care not about her desires—her dream to be educated to the standard of a teacher; her wishes to nurture and sustain the mutual feeling between her schoolmate John and herself. But the girl is determined to have her way— not to marry Pah Worewum no matter the clauses outlined in support of the union as she publicly expresses her loath of Pah Worewum. Unfortunately for her, the traditional wedding still holds on Pah Worewum's planned wedding day as Abo is forced into

Pah Worewum's house with her legs and arms bound with "solid twine" (1). Her dismay at the entire social context surrounding her finds expression in her thoughts thus: "I would have sworn that they (her parents) would protect me unto death." (1). Instead her mother simplified her plight with the saying that "...parents choose husbands for their daughters" (21). It is worthy of note that though one of Abo's parents her mother was neither a part of the daughter's husband choosing nor was she pleased with her daughter's predicament. Her statement is obviously made in reflex of her situation as a traditional woman—a woman stocked to listening to and respecting the dictates of her husband without asking questions.

Abo's resolve to immediately defeat this entire despicable social system again comes crumbling as she falls prey to Pah Worewum's sexual manoeuvres. Pah Worewum ties her up, lays her on the bed and has his way. Abo regains consciousness in the morning lying in a pool of blood, her blood which at first sight she mistook for water (31). She has lost her virginity—that which was the pride of every young girl! She is disturbed by the fact that it is forcefully taken away and by someone she does not love. This pinpoints the physical, emotional and psychological torture that emanated from forced marriage, what was a normalcy in the African traditional setting! As pah Worewum's second wife would explain, it was an ordeal suffered by many young girls in that community. Girls would resist in the beginning but end up settling down. Abo's case was not uncommon as she would further clarify. Pah Worewum's wife's elucidation upholds the paper's standing that patriarchal masculinities undervalue the woman.

This established male superior spirit is viewed in the Tasmana/ Aboh relationship. That Abo finds refuge in the independent hunter, Tasmana on her except from Pah Worewum and the former tends to see her as just a woman to own and control can be outrageous. Abo's love and respect for the hunter originates from the perspective of him being an elder brother and her saviour. Contrarily Tasmana sees in her a wife and offensively, one whose position is in his domestic sphere (105). Projecting his assertive nature, he explains that Abo will have to succumb to his needs and desires in sacrifice of hers as implied in his pronouncement; "It depends on what I want." (106). Tasmana's words like his courage, strength and independence are demonstrative of his manliness—a patriarchal coined value that had suppressed the African women up to the 1960s.

The Tali reverent sisters of *Born Before Her Time* foresaw this 1960 tensed gender biased atmosphere slowing down through the 1870s and the 1980s (114). Forced marriages, as Reverend Sister Elizabeth explained, had defined almost all human settings, including her home land, England until

recently. This assertion can be positively analyzed given that word 'Feminism' surfaced in the 1880's France (Freedman 268-271) in critique of that society's gendered injustices. As early as the 15th century Christine de Pisa decried the demeaning patriarchal status of the French woman and talked the women into rising up against the cultural norms that marginalized and positioned them like animals (Christine de Pisa 1495). African writings will later too be revealing how though the woman's position was inferior to that of the man in traditional Africa courageous women variedly stood up against this norm and how his fight was daily progressing.

Afuh's *Flowers in the Desert* like Talla's *Daughters of Ekema*, x-ray the evolved African feminine conditions that Reverend sister Elizabeth's previewed in Afuh's *Born Before her Time*. While forced /arranged marriages are giving way to harmonized relationships, curtailed girl-child's education is becoming an issue of the past. In *Flowers in The Desert*'s Rudolf's mother who is presented as the young protagonist, (Abo) of *Born Before her Time* confirms this new feminine atmosphere and flashes back to her story as a youth thus, "My father tied my hands and feet and carried me to an old man, Worewum." (69). Contrarily to her childish scenario we meet an educated young couple, John and Wendy whose union is backed by choice and love though the novelist still portrays the female stumbling in the grip of long existing obnoxious traditional cultural practices.

Flowers in the Desert underlines conservative ideologies in Anoh's (John's aunt) treatment of the nephew's wife, Wendy. Anoh is presented as that lady who in *Born Before her Time* persuaded her sister, Abo into marrying the rich old man. In the 1980's she, again wants her nephew (John) to divorce the wife (Wendy) on the grounds of Wendy's childlessness. Anoh's manners towards Wendy image the plight of a childless woman in African traditional culture, an atmosphere delineated in Emecheta (1979) where her protagonist Nnu-Ego is menaced for being childless in respect of the Nigerian culture. Ego's increased sufferings would be orchestrated by her denial to embrace the colonial culture of Lagos, a situation that counterparts Anoh's refusal to adjust to the changed Cameroonian ways of the 1980's. *Flowers in the Desert* thus far from only being a critique of patriarchy's and culture's marginalization of women is a voice on how women aid the above dual in the victimization of the women folk.

Talla's *Daughters of Ekema* too x-rays the African woman now enduring both traditionally suppressing dictates and modern oppressing values—a distasteful atmosphere that exposes her grave enslavement. Through the Ekemas the novelist underlines the woman's predicaments spanning

traditional and colonial manipulations. Through the family's daughters, Efeti, Eposi and Limunga, the author highlights both the complex male-induced abuses on the woman and her increasing subjugation of masculinity. Eposi conceals her love relation with Neba (the village school teacher from Vakomi) because tradition forbids it. An age old hatred between Neba's and Efeti's villages traditionally impedes any cordiality between their inhabitants.

Disgust is evidently recorded in Pah Ekema and wife's (Catholic Christians) lean on a culture established enmity to keep lovers apart. They are now a people expected to practice love beyond borders. But despite Neba's seriousness in marrying Eposi, Pah Ekema defines him as "someone from a different tribe" (101), a phrase that outsides and disqualifies him. Odd still, Eposi's mother supports her husband against her daughter with the explanation "Whatever your father says is law." (104). One tends to envision in Mah Joso's words both the patriarchal myth of the man as family head to whom the woman must sacrifice her needs in satisfaction of his, and the postcolonial woman's plight inflected by its colonial tool, religion. Catholicism, a colonial religion to which Pah Ekema and Mah Joso have submitted selves preaches a wife's respect for the husband; a command which harbours the woman's surrendering her will to that of the man.

Talla's narrative equally underlines the traditionally constituted hostility towards widows in women suffering varied lawful suppressions at the deaths of their husbands. The challenges constitute their social exclusion and their being forced to embrace harmful traditional practices. Talla x-rays this group of women beaten, forced to take baths publicly at streams and ripped off their husband's belongings by their late husbands' female relations (120). These are oppressive and dehumanizing engagements that constitute health hazards to the woman. The imposed tasks play down on their emotional, social and psychological states and leave them socially unbalanced. Even this pitting of women against each other in the name of respect for tradition confirms the African traditional culture as a divide and rule policy that keeps women apart for the progress of men.

The narrative captures how increasingly complex modernism is rendering the African woman's conditions in Pah Ekema's response to Eposi's out of wedlock pregnancy, "It is not only wrong to be pregnant when one is not married, it's even worse getting pregnant for a man from Vakomi tribe (98-99). Pah Ekema would be speaking with respect to the Christian and traditional laws as the both demand that a wife submits to established values no matter the impacts on her. Pah Ekema's wife demonstrates strict

adherence to the gendered conditions. Adhering to Christian values tells but Bible stories to the children, not folktales especially because her husband wants it so. To her husband Bible stories are the light of a Christian family. Although Mah Joso doubts this, she does not dare to contradict her husband.

Pah Ekema's strong hold on wife and daughters, in the name of Christianity underscores Riyal's subsuming of colonialism as a struggle between two opposing, yet, entwined forms of masculinities, with the category women being the fatalities and intermediaries of the fight (Riyal 2019, 3). Pah Ekema, though a colonial 'other' is inflicting his control on the African woman—brutalizing her in respect of the colonial order. Ekema here builds on Nandy's feminist perspective that the ongoing political and socio/economic conditions in the third world depict the dominance of man and masculinity— a symbol of the colonial order, over women and feminism — a symbol of the third world (Nandy 1983, 4). This expansive and complicated atmosphere, feminists hold, has to be revalued for the betterment of the 'third world woman' in particular, and their societies, at large

Outdoing the Gender Gap in *Born Before Her Time, Flowers in the Desert and Daughters of Ekema*

Evidently as portrayed above, the African feminist fight far from only liberating the woman from the dictates of patriarchy and culture equally identifies and interrogates the impacts of colonialism on gender. The feminist combat is generated by the need to alter the perception of gender and to awaken and empower the African woman. Chukwuka maps out the route to female empowerment in self-determination, economic power and a supporting family (Chukwuka 2000, 110). The texts under study underline Chukwuka's road map in the changes occurring to their female characters and their immediate surroundings— atmospheres Ezeigbo recaps as emergent, with the explanation that women are becoming cognizant of their humanity and their duties (Ezeigbo 1990, 148). The above view images the new perceptions that are becoming definitive women —the categories of women and insights that permeate the texts under study.

Abo in *Born Before her Time* refuses to give in to the forced marriage her father and Pah Worewum conspired and made her a part. She fights out of the marriage — what previous girls in her situation could not do. Abo is actually a different breed of a girl. She declines the dictates of tradition and upholds her desires above the voice of tradition. In response to one of Pah Worewum's wives who clarified Abo that forced marriage is the plight of all girls in the society, Abo says she will not give in to it and will fight it until she wins (32). She would actually defy all the barriers to her coming

a teacher and John's wife to the result of achieving them. When locked up at Pah Worewum's prison as wife, Abo visualized her salvation at a mission school, by virtue of the setting being a unbiased ground that protects women and children (68). She eventually escapes from the forced marriage and, commence a remote and dangerous midnight journey from Tawi, through the dark and violent atmosphere, for the reverent sisters' home at Tali. Even in this perilous undertaking, Abo, still pities her people and believes their betrayal of her stems from ignorance. She environs going back to them as a professional, as either "a teacher or nurse" (104) — professions she believes God will guide her into achieving. She thus evokes God's help, presenting her intended education as key to marrying John and to helping her people (77).

It is wonderful to note that Abo runs away from Pah Worewum not because she hates marriage but because she does not love him. Marriage as she elucidates is supposed to be the produce of love (155) —what she does not have for Pah Worewum. Obviously she would have stayed in marriage had it been she were John, the person she dreams of marrying after becoming a teacher. Abo visualizes her liberation through education. She positions education as a tool for her enablement and social alteration. She, no doubt, trusts in having a job before marrying John who, unlike Pah Worewum, rates a wife from the perspectives of an intelligent and caring woman who has a mind of her own and who is willing to be a part of his own life. (139)

Abo and John represent a people detached from offensive traditional cultural thoughts; a people who value love and are ready to overcome all the challenges to their savoring it; a people who allow love to have its way. John does not redress from his intent to marry Abo when upon proposing to Abo she tells him that she is already betrothed to Pah Worewum. He holds on to the love the both of them share and is resolved to not allow Pah Worewum destroy their happiness.

Afuh equally captures individuals and groups arguing for a positive turn with the thought that changed times call for the reconsideration and revaluation of the position of the woman. Sophina's mother who doubles as "Mbacham's sister" (23) for one, is for the fact that girls should now go to school. Philanthropic bodies, like the Tali reverent Sisters' Home too are out to help determined girls achieve their dreams. It is thanks to these reverent sisters that Abo completes her education and raises the money for the repayment of her bride price—an atmosphere that restores her freedom that society stole at her birth, and sets the pace for her to achieve her dreams. In Abo's attitude/ behavior, the novelist demarcates violence and transformation as new scopes for reforming the African society—a directory

which becomes quite palpable in the 1980's, as captured in Afuh's *Flowers in The Desert* and Talla's *Daughters of Ekema*.

Tripp et al explicates that the socio/cultural and political transformations characteristic of the 1980's Africa, of which increased female consciousness was a part were constitutive of the "democratization of political regimes" and the "retreat of the state" obligated by the Structural Adjustment guidelines for the continent's growth (2009, 1). This international body questioned injustices and oriented associations towards combating inequalities, expressly, at the grassroots. The resulting atmosphere according to Bouilly, Rillon, & Cross, produced a host of women's organizations advocating for the growth and empowerment of the woman (2016, 1.). Feminist scholars inherently increased in numbers, each of them theorizing gender beyond sexual barriers in challenge of the 1960's feminist arts that merely focused on cultural representations. Their works, as Afuh's *Flowers in The Desert* and Talla's *Daughters of Ekema* demonstrate, deconstruct gender difference in manifold arenas and position men and women on equal hierarchies.

In *Flowers in The Desert* the conditions of the girl child have greatly improved. Rudolf restates the above by saying that child marriage is almost becoming an issue of the past (39). Boba on his part marvels at the higher proportion of girls, in relation to boys, that now go to school. Girls now school right to the university level and inherently graduate with certificates that qualify them for higher paying jobs. We met the female university graduate Wendy serving as a commercial staff in a travelling agency and later as a worker in the Ministry of Industrial Development. When are contract with the ministry expired she intelligently resorted to "petty trading" in a bid to stay useful to herself and society. Her friend Susan was a teacher and Brenda her university classmate, worked at a wood exploitation Corporation.

It is wonderful to note that girls have not only become great nation builders but now marry men of their choices, and amazingly, men with different ethnicities. Wendy marries her university classmate, Rudolf (a boy from a strange tribe). The both worked at a travelling agency and the husband later became a civil servant with the rank of "chief of Service" in one of the country's ministries. When at one moment he went jobless he resorted to taxi driving in a bid to sustain his family. Their marriage captions both how education builds up carrier men and women and the splendor in marrying a partner of your choice. Their childlessness has no negative influence on their marriage. John's mother appreciates the charm in Wendy that captivated her son and respects Wendy for being her son's

choice. By underscoring that this couple live with two family children, whom they sponsor in the secondary school, the novelist visibly underlines the points that education is a developmental factor and the priority of a host of Africans.

Talla's *Daughters of Ekema* follows suit with a more modern atmosphere characterized by the society's increased acceptance of the girl child's worth. The woman is gradually and steadily straddling the professional carrier line into the decision making circle. She has grown above the level of being hypnotized into/ adhering to or taking offensive decisions towards herself and others into becoming a socio/cultural and political reformer. Education has enlightened her as well as brought society closer to the mechanisms of colonialism for the benefit of the both of them. It is worth noting that Pah Ekema educated clearly stated this three daughters against the doctrine of traditionalists who clearly stated that the place of the woman remains in the domestic sphere in spite of whatsoever efforts she puts into studies or religious matters. Pah Ekema with his limited financial resources challengingly educated Eposi and Efeti to high school level. He equally brought up his girls in respect of the traditional voice that girls should not carelessly associate with boys. The novelist describes Ekema's daughters as "a respectful and morally upright breed" (40) that though encountered challenges to their happiness grew up reverencing that self-worth that prostitution erased in other girls.

As the novel progresses two of the Ekema girls—Limunga and Efeti, channel their energies towards restoring the dignity of others; specifically, in erasing prostitution and the oppression of widows. The two fights are risky fights but the Ekema girls are determined to stand up for the subjugated and as well advocate for them (125). Eposi's and Neba's love is established through the lovers' conscious violating of culture/ traditional values that had declared the relationship null. Eposi saw illogically in Efeti's advice to her not to marry Neba because his tribe's men, have "long heads", and are prone to acting illogically (113). This unscientific presentation failed to move her. She analysed cowardice in the act of surrendering one's will to that of others (103) and consequently resolved on disentangling all the obstacles on the way to her marriage. The lovers saw in their education and in the indigenes embrace of Christianity, a new mindset that will facilitate and strengthen their relationship. Their tactful resistance of conservatives yielded the desired fruit—a marriage that brought to an end the long dispute between Vakomi and Wonja. The masses saw in this renewed unity a prosperous future.

Limunga's test to preserving her femininity came up when her desire to engage in a decent job takes her to a

prostitution center labeled Monjoa's business enterprise. Prostitution according to Fayemi, underlines the act of "having sex for money commonly associated with the "Female folk, an act characterized by the male's "brutal sexual desire" and the female's "reluctant and loathing submission" (2009, 4). Prostitution, thus heralds in another form of male oppression, Madam Monjoa's business enterprise, like the other prostitution centers in the city were places where nonconformity yielded pain to the inmates and even cost their lives. By revealing a call girl's murder by her male customer, the novelist x-rays both the stings and irrationalities of masculinity, and the dangers surrounding prostitutes and inherently advocates the need to end it. The narrative, no doubt, paints a glaring picture of the state of prostitution in the contemporary Cameroonian society, from where our authors, Afuh Margaret and Tala Julie Enjema's originate. Though in Cameroon like in most African nations no accurate statistics exist on the wave of prostitution, human rights activists daily expose descriptions that represent individual country's level of prostitution on social media. The novelist consequently demonstrates her adherence to the anti-prostitution feminist site which rates prostitution as a form of sexual slavery and an exploitative patriarchal institution that must be eradicated. This position concurs with Fihonina's (1981) voice that African feminists contest racial, class and cultural dimensions of oppression" with the principle aim of rating women as humans and not mere sexual tools.

Limunga flees the above distasteful atmosphere by smuggling herself into a "pickup van" and fortunately into her saviour's arms. This widower, Mr Okali, a Senior Divisional Officer (SDO), at first sight sees in her a helper for his little daughter and houses her. He would later send her to school and conscientize her into perceiving in her ability to escape from the prostitution house God's desire for her to serve those still at the prostitution house. She has to be a voice against prostitution, a juncture where she would "stop the likes of Madam Monjoa from recruiting more girls into illicit business" (60). Limunga accomplishes the given tasks when she becomes a lawyer. Her good manners yield her the status of wife to her mentor Mr Okali's; a responsible and respectable social position that aided her into actualizing her goals. As governor, her husband helps her in creating an anti- prostitution group, the Female Rights Association (FRA). The association doubled as the spokesperson for women with all sorts of problems, especially those with law suits. Limunga's organization finally, solicits Governor Okali's help and enacts an order that closes all existing brothels and prohibits creation of new ones (123). And thanks to Limunga's successful initiative, the government creates the ministry of Women's

Affairs—a national body with the responsibility of protecting the rights of the woman.

With the death of Efeti's husband Efeti experiences the plight of widows, and tactfully joins her sister's organization in fighting for the restoration of the widow's pride. Efeti educates the female folk on how to cope with their problems and a host of other injustices. (119). Widows correspondingly could protect themselves from all forms of culture-imposed degradation though die heart traditionalists nicknamed Efeti "a woman man" (120) whose aim is to upset traditional values and norms. The influence of the Ekema girls on the entire clan is so great that the villagers regret having insulted Ekema for delivering only girls for children. To Abel, the village boy Pah Ekema has very good children. From an elder's perspective, the entire clan would be a better place if Ekema had more daughters.

The feminist stories in the selected texts unfold within the frame of an evolving culture that is corresponding to historical change, with tenets embedded in colonialism and neo-colonialism. Efeti conceived the ongoing shades of development in the African female as fruits of the possibilities that society has accorded the female. Connecting her father to this thought she said "God has given us the talent; we have to use it to help humanity, especially the woman." (124-125). Her great joy is orchestrated by the society's progressive acceptance of the woman as its developmental force. But out of her experience she carves out a route map for the woman's empowerment — a process constitutive of resoluteness to overcome the barriers to her cherished dreams no matter the risks involved.

CONCLUSION

The paper articulated some experiences of the modern African woman, though from the perspective of the Cameroon feminine writers. It underlined gender inequality as the crossroad of the literatures of masculinities and feminisms and imaged the improved African woman as the model woman of contemporary Africa. It examined the authors' voices against stereotypical representations of male and female constructed by society and concurrently, articulated the progressive devaluation of the derogatory feminine identities previously held in high esteem. As analyses and interpretation of the authors' feminist viewpoints, the article highlighted a multiplicity of issues including the various sites of oppression that dehumanized the woman and the woman's fight against the offensive shades of meanings society had ascribed on her. The article then projected the woman steadily establishing herself as a social pillar—a context that sheltered the nourishment and completeness of the society.

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