



## A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE REAL LIFE WOMAN AND THE FICTIONAL WOMAN

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### ABSTRACT

A common claim of today's world is that women have been subjected to unfair treatment by men. This concern has led to feminist writers and women's Liberation Movements campaigning for the emancipation of women's liberation. The overriding approach from the literary angle has been to draw up fictional women to project the real-life conditions and experiences of women. This study compares the real-life woman and the fictional woman created by these feminist writers bearing in mind the misleading effects that may occur if the imaginary woman of fiction does not reflect the real-life woman. The research was aimed, among other objectives, at providing guidelines for the improvement of feminist fiction in order that it may reflect real-life. Four literary texts- Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'urbervilles*, Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, Mariama Ba's *So long a Letter* and Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest* were selected for the research, and a comparative analysis of the fictional woman portrayed in the texts and real-life was done. The analysis was guided by a review of established bodies of knowledge on the issue. It was concluded from the findings that women are indeed subjected to most of the conditions mentioned at the outset of the research and that a lot of socio-political originations, in collaboration with feminist writers, are campaigning for women's liberation. It was also concluded that literary texts are indeed appropriate tools for the purpose of emancipation of women; and that society stands the risk of being guided into making blunders. The findings also revealed that some qualities of the fictional woman reflect the qualities of the real-life woman while others do not.

**Key words**— Feminist Writers, Fictional Woman, Emancipation of Women, Women's Liberation Movement, Real-life Woman

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### I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of feminism with its accompanying attitude appears to have secured a firm hold on current day literary tradition and thought. Descriptions such as "feminist literature" "feminist writing" and "feminist fiction" have thus become popular. The intended value in such writing is generally to contribute, through literature,

solutions to global practical problems. In addition, Women's Liberation Movements (WLM) consisting of numerous women's groups are also campaigning for various feminist goals. In collaboration with women's movements, feminist literature aims to address the overwhelming unfairness against the female sex, often captioned "gender inequality"

“emancipation of women”, etc. As Wynne-Davies (1989:45) suggests;

... in addition to production analyses of female writing or the masculine representations of women in male-authored texts, feminism must undertake a critique of the mechanisms used by these works in order to transform social and personal relations.

Transformation of relationships in her words is most significant. If wrongly done danger may result if rightly done, benefits may abound. Fears arise however, when some global issues in human history are considered.

For example, the global notion of the earth being flat rather than round was upheld till Archimedes (C287- 212 BC) clarified that issue. The notion that the earth is the center of the universe was upheld and Copernicus (1473- 1543) was persecuted nearly to death for teaching the opposite. Yet, that opposite was found correct. Science and technology have produced more deaths through guns and bombs, whereas human well-being and comfort are clearly the desired goal. The popular religious notion then was apparently quite sound and should not be overlooked.

... to earthling man his way does not belong. It does not belong to man who is working even to direct his step (Jeremiah 10:23).

Accordingly, whether the move to alter the position of women in relation to man will not be counter productive would need attentive scrutiny. In the literary discipline, attention can be paid to the writer’s effort at exerting didactic influence upon mankind, the alter opinions, attitudes and reactions to woman and womanhood in relation to man and manhood. Fiction writers appeal to the imagination by pictures they draw. Imaginary figures of women (or womanhood) drawn by feminist fiction should therefore reflect the real-life woman. Otherwise, a misguiding effect is at risk. Accordingly, a comparative study of the real-life woman and the imaginary woman of feminist fiction is hereby proposed. In addition, the justification of the exercise and its aims and objectives are implied. Leading journals of international renown, television

and radio programmes contain a stock of information about the unfair treatment of women thus advocating emancipation of women. The reasons forwarded for emancipation of women are summarized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton, a member of the Women’s Rights Movement, New York. In *A Declaration of Sentiments*, she carefully enumerated areas of life where women were treated unjustly. These include the following:

Married women were legally dead in the eyes of the law;

Women were not allowed to vote;

Women had to submit to laws when they had no voice in their formation;

Married women had no property rights;

Husbands had legal power over and responsibility for their wives to the extent that they could imprison or beat them with impunity;

Divorce and child custody laws favored men, giving no rights to women;

Women had to pay property taxes although they had no representation in the levying of these taxes;

Most occupations were closed to women and when women did work they were paid only a fraction of what men earned;

Women were not allowed to enter professions such as medicine or law;

Women had no means to gain an education since no college or university would accept women students;

With only a few exceptions, women were not allowed to participate in the affairs of the church; and Women were robbed of their self-confidence and self-respect, and were made totally dependent on men. According to Stanton;

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. Similarly, and in agreement with Stanton, Wynne – Davies, Marion (1989: 1026) claims that; Wives and their property were entirely in the power of their husbands according to the law, though in practice they might take the management of both into their own hands. In more practical terms, the common knowledge of conditions imposed by the Chinese and Indian cultures upon women should be recalled. In both cultures, special esteem is attached to parents who

have sons. In India, an economic undercurrent has effect. The parents of daughters are obliged to pay expensive dowries to win husbands for their daughters. The daughters then get into unquestionable submission to the husband. Parents are therefore disposed to antagonize girl children. The scanning of pregnancy and abortion to prevent a daughter is a common practice. Wives who escape the scrutiny and give birth to daughters are often uncared for or under-provided for. In china, population explosion required in the late 20th Century that a couple beget only two children. Hence, couples whose first child turned out to be a daughter would destroy any second daughter in the India fashion to keep their second chance for a son. Europe, America, Africa, and other cultures have their on version-no voting for women; load carriers are women and bullocks, etc. In order to effect a change in this condition several formulae have been applied, among them the use of literature. In view of the unjust laws and treatment mentioned (1.1.1) and because women do feel themselves aggrieved, oppressed, and fraudulently deprived of their most sacred rights, many Socio-political movements campaigning for the redemption of women have exploded into existence. The concept would need definition, however. Wynne-Davies (1989: 516) presents the meaning and priorities of a women's movement:

The women's movement under many names is dedicated to the campaign for political and legal rights for women. It wishes to prevent discrimination on the grounds of gender and is, generally, a movement for social change.

The *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* extends the focus to a change of attitude. It defines the concept this way:

Social and political movement that aims to achieve women's liberation by legislation and by changing people's attitudes.

The Encyclopedia Britannica views women's liberation movement; also called feminist movement, as a social movement that seeks equal rights for women, giving them equal status with men and freedom to decide their own careers and life patterns. It further states that Civil Rights

Movement in the US during the 1960s inspired women to try to obtain better conditions for themselves through similar campaigns of mass agitation and social criticism. In the current century the movements have assumed several names and are pumping a wind of change across the entire globe. To cite local examples, there are the FAWE (Forum For African Women Educationalist), which preoccupies itself with education of the girl child. There is the *Fifty-Fifty*, which advocates for an equal representation of women in politics. For historical and cross-cultural examples and their performances, the following may be noted:

Some women's Human Rights Councils such as the Asian Women's Human Rights Council (AWHRC) feel that they cannot be contented with just presenting the image of women as victims but also play a great role in changing their status. They even argue that, like other domains, women should be accepted into the armed forces or equal terms with men. According to them, "the exclusion of women from the military can be viewed as exclusion from full citizenship and its attendant responsibilities and rights (Segal, 1982). Supporting this view, Sharon (1987) points out that women experiences of national liberation struggles and revolutions has achieved some attention from theorists interested in whether the greater equality of roles often achieved during disruption will be continued into peace time.

The efforts have gained remarkable effects but may tend also to get overboard into excesses. Their positive effects are regarded next while the excesses are later dealt with.

The introduction of good schools for women in Britain and the activities of women's movements have yielded positive results, which have led to improved women's role in society. An encouraging percentage of women now perform roles traditionally assigned to men decades back. Some are mentioned below:

The number of women working outside the home has doubled in the past 30 years. Women held but 27% of office jobs back in 1970; 14 years later, women held 65% of them.

Furthermore, the "Watch Tower" magazine reports the Russian situation:

Today, the majority of soviet doctors and teachers are women. Women account for nearly two thirds the total number of economist and three-quarters of cultural workers. Forty percent of those working in the sciences are women (The watchtower – August 15, 1987 p.3).

The "Watch Tower" Magazine also reports that, today, women not only vote but also compete with men for political offices. In fact, women have been prime ministers in a number of countries– Golda Meir in Israel, Indira Gandhi in India, Angela Merkel in Germany, and Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain, Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh, Erna Solberg in Norway, Saara Kuugongelwa in Namibia, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in Liberia to name a few. In US a woman was made a member of the supreme court and in 1984 presidential campaign, a woman was for the first time a vice presidential candidate of a major political party. Now, we have Hillary Clinton vying for the position of a presidential candidate and by all indication could be the nominee for the Democratic Party. A similar increase has also occurred in the field of religion. Many women have enrolled in seminaries and a good percentage is already appearing in pulpits. "The New York Times" reported in the (February 16, 1987) edition that some 11 percent of Swedish pastors are women, and there are Anglican women priests in the Orient. Driving automobile is another interesting field which many thought was male dominated. Women were regarded as inferior to men in driving skills but contrary to this view, "The motorist", a journal published by the automobile association of South Africa reports that recently, 83% road accidents in that country in one year involved male drivers. It is believed that women are less aggressive behind the wheel, less inclined to take risk and less likely to be involved in traffic offences. It should be noted, however, that the formation of women's movements and the use of literary solutions arise from the same or identical "thinking caps"– academics. The use of literature is clearly a more popular weapon in the required social reconstruction than guns and bombs or any such

"noisy" implements. Drabble Margaret (1985: 1081) explains how literature contributed to the winning of women's suffrages in England in 1918 (mentioned in 2.1.5). The campaign was supported by many writers; in 108 the *Women Writers Suffrages League* was founded by Cicely Hamilton (1872-1952); journalist, playwright, and novelist and journalist Bessie Hatton. Its President was Elizabeth Robins (1862 –1952) who under the pseudonym 'C.E. Raimonds' had written several novels; her play "Vote for Women" (1907) was very influential. Other supporters included...The lasting effects of *Jane Eyre* (written in 1947) on feminist groups confirm that literature provides a more durable mechanism for the struggle; *Jane Eyre* was the text which acted as a catalyst in feminist criticism in the 1980s through the medium of S. Gilbert and S. Gubar's "The Madwoman of the Attic" (1979), in which the unstable female characters in the texts written by women were seen as doubles of the same heroine and products of the suppression of the feminine. In the resulting text, "The Madwoman of the Attic", Gilbert and Gubar also argue that authorship is itself a break through to place women in equality with men: "... the act of writing itself is a patriarchal gesture". Based on the response that writers get in Western culture, Gilbert and Gubar state that, The text's author is a father, a procreator; an aesthetic patriarch whose pen is an instrument of generative power like his penis. They identify the pen (is) as a metaphor for power especially political and social control. (Wynne-Davis 1989: 43-44). Similarly, Negritude writers effectively used Literature to campaign for the recognition, acceptance, and promotion of a rich and historical Negro's civilization, which hitherto had been denied the Negroes in Western culture. Through the use of Literature they were able to wipe out black inferiority towards the whites. Also, Literature was used to spread catholicism in Spain and Italy but today pertinent questions are being asked about the catholic religion. The questions include; the infallibility of the pope, the celibacy of priest and the exemption of women from being ordained priests. Hence, feminist writers hope that through literature they would mount a successful campaign for women's emancipation. Yet, the fear, which

generates this exercise, hinted in (1.0), should be highlighted. Historically speaking, humanity has been argued into accepting or embracing ideologies and/or concepts the consequences of which turned out to be disastrous. Science and technology, for example, was quite fascinating to mankind. However, despite the improvement it has introduced into man's life-style, some of its consequences are disastrous. The production of weapons of mass destruction such as bombs, nuclear weapons and fighter crafts pose a serious threat to humanity's very existence. The effects of the atomic bombs dropped at Hiroshima and Nagasaki during World War II are still felt today. Societies such as the Eastern Block were argued into embracing the communist system of government and now some of them have gradually adopted the democratic system. Also, black rule in Africa and other colonized continents have come as a result of condemnation of existing colonial governments. Ironically, however, the inadequacies of black rule such as corruption and tribalism among others have lead to wars. Now, some of these countries are even calling for the return of colonial masters and in some cases, white people are invited to head some departments. After the war, Inspector General of the Sierra Leone Police, for example, was a British. Blunders have therefore existed by people arguing society into believing certain ideologies or concepts. Hence, if the feminist literary writers are now advocating for a change, society must be careful about the type of changes it embraces. If society is not to be led into committing more blunders, then literary writers of feminist Literature must be cautious about the changes they advocate. The researchers attempted to eke out and focus on any such blunders or possible blunders.

## II. METHODOLOGY

This section describes the research technique employed in the collection of information (data) for the study. This entails the identification of specific literary texts, the method used and the critical analysis of the information/materials.

### i GENERAL METHOD

Since the issue of women's liberation or the emancipation of women is among the most current development concerns of the world, various

established bodies of knowledge, and disciplines seem to have subscribed to traditions and customs, which in turn have dictated gender inequality. They include religion, psychology, human physiology, etc. These established bodies of knowledge would be explored with a view to describe the real-life woman and compare her with the fictional woman from these sources (Literature review).

### ii RESEARCH SAMPLE.

For the purpose of this study, four literary texts were selected, two Western and two African. They are:

- a. "Tess of the D'urbervilles" by Thomas Hardy.

This text was selected for the study because it is one of those from earlier times. It portrays the unfairness against women at the time. Hardy might have seen a woman hanged to death and would not deviate from it. The text also portrays women in the labour market.

- b. "A Doll's House" by Henrik Ibsen.

This text was selected because it portrays both the economic and domestic domination of women by men, and women's attempts to liberate themselves.

- c. "Kongi's Harvest" by Wole Soyinka.

This was selected because it tends to be a book of transition. It deals with a situation where men are in control when a woman comes and tries to prove her capabilities. Her talents excel at the end, however. It also reflects the political context in Africa.

- d. "So Long a Letter" by Mariama Ba.

It was chosen because it portrays a diversified (religion, education, economic, political, etc.) situation of African women. These are fundamental conditions on the oppression of women.

The take off point established in (2.12) provided a guide for the analysis of these texts.

### III. SPECIFIC METHOD.

Steps for achieving study objectives included:

Established bodies of knowledge and disciplines were studied to;

Establish an acceptable description of real-life woman, Investigate societies application of any qualities or roles assigned to women by these disciplines, and Investigate the possibility of altering such roles without risking the error or misguiding society about the gender relationships.

Records of current affairs were studied to:

(a) Justify the evidence of unfairness against women and gather information about advancements in feminist fiction and its contributions to the efforts of women's movements.

A general study of women in fiction was undertaken using critical works and feminist novels/plays. Description of the imaginary woman as discovered in these was then compared with the real-life properties and roles assigned to women and womanhood as in (I) above.

#### IV. A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE REAL-LIFE WOMAN AND THE FICTIONAL WOMAN IN THE SELECTED TEXTS.

This section seeks to make a comparative analysis of the fictional woman and the real-life woman. Four literary texts—two African and two western, were selected for the study. The texts were treated in the following order: *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* by Thomas Hardy, *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen, *Kongi's Harvest* by Wole Soyinka, and *So Long a Letter* by Mariama Ba.

1. "TESS OF THE D'URBERVILLES" BY THOMAS HARDY (All references to *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* are made to the 1988 edition printed in Great Britain by BPC Paper Back Ltd.)

The poor peddler John Durbeyfield is stunned to learn that he is the descendent of an ancient noble family, the d'Urbervilles. He and his wife decide to send their eldest daughter, Tess, to the d'Urberville mansion, where they hope she could attract the attention of one of the d'urbervilles who might end up marrying her. Mrs. D'Urbervilles in reality, is no relation to Tess at all; her husband, the merchant Simon Stokes, simply changed his name to d'Urbervilles after he retired. But Tess does not know this, and when the lascivious Alec d'Urberville, Mrs. d'Urberville's son, procures her a job tending fowl on the d'Urberville estate, Tess has no choice but to accept.

After Tess spends several months at this job, Alec finally manages to seduce her, taking advantage of her in the woods one night after a fair. Tess knows she doesn't love Alec, she returns home to her family to give birth to Alec's child, which she christens *Sorrow*. *Sorrow* dies soon after he is born, and Tess spends a miserable year at home before

deciding to seek work elsewhere. She finally accepts a job as a milkmaid at the Talbothays Dairy.

At Talbothays', Tess enjoys a period of contentment and happiness. She befriends three of her fellow milkmaids, Izz, Retty, and Marian, and meets a man named Angel Clare with whom she falls in love. They grow closer together throughout Tess's time at Talbothays, and she eventually accepts his proposal to marry him. Still, she is troubled by pangs of conscience and feels she should tell Angel about her past. She tries to write him a confessional note and slip it under his door, but it slides under the carpet; Angel never sees it.

After their wedding, Angel and Tess both confess indiscretions: Angel tells Tess about an affair he had with an older woman in London, and Tess tells Angel about her history with Alec. Tess forgives Angel, but Angel cannot forgive Tess; he gives her some money and boards a ship bound for Brazil, where he thinks he might establish a farm. He tells Tess he will try to accept her past, but warns her not to contact him until he comes for her.

Tess struggles: she has a difficult time finding work, and is forced to take a job at an unpleasant and unprosperous farm. She tries to visit Angel's family, but overhears his brothers discussing Angel's poor marriage. She hears wandering a preacher speak, and is stunned to discover that he is Alec d'Urberville, having been converted to Christianity by Angel's father, the Reverend Clare. Alec and Tess are each shaken by their encounter, and Alec appallingly begs Tess never to tempt him again. Soon after, however, he is again begging Tess to marry him, having turned his back on his religious ways.

Tess learns from her sister, Liza-Lu that her mother is near death, and she is forced to return home to take care of her. Her mother recovers, but her father unexpectedly dies soon after. The family is evicted from their home; Alec offers help, but Tess refuses to accept, knowing he only wants to obligate her to him again.

At last, Angel decides to forgive his wife, and he leaves Brazil desperate to find her. Instead he finds her mother, who tells him Tess has gone to a village called Sandbourne. Here, he finds Tess in an expensive boardinghouse called *The Herons*,

where he tells her he has forgiven her and begs her to take him back. Tess tells him he has come too late; she is unable to resist, and goes back to Alec d'Urberville. Angel leaves in a daze; heartbroken to the point of madness, Tess goes upstairs and stabs her lover to death. When the landlady finds Alec's body, she raises an alarm, but Tess has already fled to find Angel.

Angel agrees to help her, though he cannot quite believe that she has actually murdered Alec. They hide out in an empty mansion for a few days, then travel further. When they come to Stonehenge, they go to sleep; in the morning, they are discovered by a search party. Tess is arrested and sent to jail. Angel and Liza-Lu watch as the black flag is raised over the prison signaling Tess's execution.

One of the major issues women's liberation movements in collaboration with feminist writers is advocating for, and which, Thomas Hardy explores in *Tess of the D'urberville* is women's right to choose their spouses as shown in (2. 12. 1, Pl.3). After Tess's unfortunate encounter with Alec, Joan D'urbeyfield tries to no avail to persuade Tess to accept Alec and get married to him. Tess eventually decides to get married to Angel whom she truly loves and who loves her. Despite the disapproval of the marriage by the Clares on the grounds that it is a "poor marriage" Angel goes ahead to marry Tess. His brothers refer to the marriage as an "ill considered" marriage.

For reasons based on class, mentioned in (2. 12. 1, Pl. 4) they want Angel to get married to Mercy Chant-the parents' choice, but he turns her down in favour of a "dairymaid". Through this presentation Thomas Hardy is advocating for women's right to decide their future partners. He also gets a little further to point out that the right to choose a spouse does not imply that other problems may not arise. Solutions to whatever problems that may arise could be sought later.

By way of reinforcing his message, Hardy makes circumstances to bring Alec and Tess together again and this time Alec has his way but the consequences are, however, disastrous.

Shakespeare also explores a similar situation and its consequences in *Romeo and Juliet* and like Hardy his message is that arranged marriages quite often do not work out well as is the case when Capulet tries to force Juliet to marry Count Paris, Thomas Hardy also attempts to view the issue of arranged marriages from another perspective. The case in point is when Tess before her execution tries to convince Angel to get marriages to Liza-Lu.

She tells Angel that Liza-Lu is "good, and simple, and pure... so gentle and sweet" (Chp.49). However, Hardy's lack of conviction on this view does not allow him to explore it further.

Like Tess, the contemporary real-life woman has got some amount of freedom to choose her spouse. Nowadays, most marriages are based on love rather than an agreement between the parents of the children concerned. The parents may advise but the final decision is taken by the parties (man and woman) concerned. Even in third world countries where arranged marriages are still taking place, feminists and women's movements are fighting hard for their total liberation. Through literature feminist literary writers hope to properly direct society into granting women (and also men, as exemplified by Angel) the right to choose their spouses.

Another important issue expanded in *Tess of the D'urberville* is education. Indicated in (2.12.1,Pl.6) Tess's lack of education undoubtedly contributed to her own low opinion of herself and made her collide with the patriarchal assumption that women are of innately low intelligence. Her relationship with Clare confirms the beliefs that the female mind is intuitive and emotional rather than rational: an assumption brought to a truly sensational conclusion in her subsequent murder of Alec D'urberville. When Clare offers to teach her history for example, her reply indicates that she knew intuitively all that there was to be known; that the lives of women like herself were always tragic: "Because what's the use of learning that I am one of a long row only-finding out in some old book somebody just like me, and to know that I shall only play her part; making me sad, that's all (Chp.25). At the same time, she regards Clare's intellectual

knowledge as altogether “natural” and seen, and thought, I feel what a nothing I am”. This exhibits a lack of self-confidence on the part of women. It is a good reason for feminist writing to sensitize women.

Though there is an indication that she went to school, it seems quite clear that she did not go beyond a junior level. The reader is informed in the early chapters of the text that she “used to... as soon as she left school, to lend a hand at haymaking or harvesting” (Chp. 5).

At Talbothays Dairy she joins Izz, Retty and Marian all of whom are uneducated. Educated women would be equipped with better skills to seek better jobs not work in farms as the girls do. Retty’s irrational behavior of drowning herself after Angel’s marriage to Tess confirms her low educational level.

In this pathetic portrayal of a group of energetic girls determined to make a living, Hardy seems to be making the point that if women are educated they could contribute meaningfully to the economic development of a nation. A look at the contemporary real life women reveals that a greater percentage of women are now in professional fields and many more are pursuing professional courses in educational Institutions all over the world.

Class and economic oppression is another issue, shown in (2. 12.1, Pl. 4) and (2.1.3) recalled, which is of great concern to feminist writers of Literature. Thomas Hardy also devotes some time in exploring this issue in *Tess of the D’urberville*. At all points in the narrative the reader is reminded that Tess’s treatment by both Angel and Alec depends not only on the fact that she is a female, but a socially-inferior female. Alec dominates Tess because of class and economic reasons. When he first attempts to kiss her, he says, “ you are mighty sensitive for a cottage girl”. He also refers to her later in the text as “field girl”. Similar assumptions undoubtedly influence Clare’s treatment of her. Although he exercises what he considers being respectfully restraint in his behavior, there is no doubt that their romance is more demonstrately physical than it would have been were Tess his social equal. He assumes that as Milkmaid Tess has literally “No rights” to be offended. It is unthinkable, for example that he would have

presumed to carry Mercy Chant across a flooded road.

Looking at the plot, it is worthy noting that the reasons for Tess going to Trantridge were economic. The family desperately needed money and her responsibility for the death of prince– “the bread-winner” forced her to comply with her mother’s plan against her own better judgment. Totally dependent, Alec was able to blackmail her with his Charity on different occasions. What she experiences is similar to the experiences of “poor or low class contemporary real-life women, many of them are forced into some relationships against their better judgment for wealth. The rich also blackmail young, beautiful, low class girls with charity. The risk of women experiencing the consequences of job pursuit mentioned in (2.2.2) is also high.

A blend of sexual and economic exploitation appears in the person of Farmer Groby, Tess’s master at Flintcombe-Ash. Groby knows about her history at Trantridge and recognizes her on two subsequent occasions; once with Clare at an inn, and again, after her abandonment, on the road from Emminster. On this second occasion, his familiarity, which begins as mild sexual harassment, develops into something more malicious when he recognizes her:

The man turned and started hard at her. ‘Why, surely it is the young wench who was at Trantridge awhile–young squire d’Urberville’s friend... Be honest enough to own it, and that what I said in the town was true, though your fancy man was so up about it – hey my sly one? You ought to ask my pardon for that blow of his, considering...’ (Chp.47).

On this occasion, Tess escapes what is clearly another sexual assault by taking to her heels. She is revenged alternatively, however, when she has the misfortune to end up in the employment of the same man. The blackmail he was unable to effect sexually, he now exacts through economic tyranny. Having bullied her for her slow work-rate, he declares triumphantly: ‘But now I think I’ve got the better of you’. This chain of events illustrates the relationship between patriarchy and class. The two



forms of oppression not only mirror, but also collide with one another to render Tess, a working-class woman, liable to all manner of oppression, exploitation, abuse and blackmail.

It is worth noting that Tess seems not to be using the common tools, which girls use in defending themselves. For example, she does not shout or flee when seduced or harassed by men.

What Tess experiences in the hands of Farmer Groby is quite similar to what most real-life working class women are experiencing. The secretaries in most departments or offices are very often harassed by either the boss or other male staff members. In some cases, the women are sacked if they refuse to give in to the menfolk's desires. In schools, male teachers also take advantage to harass female students. They are victimized when they uphold their pride and dignity. Through the presentation of the fictional woman in this light the feminist writer of literature hopes to correct this negative attitude of the men folk.

Another central theme in both feminist theory and most feminist Literature is motherhood (2.2.1). Novelist Thomas Hardy also explores this theme in his text *Tess of the D'urbervilles*. Hardy presents three mother figures to his reader-Joan D'urberfield, Tess and Mrs. Clare.

Joan is first introduced through her husband when he sends a message to her "tell my wife to put away that washing, because she needn't finish it" (Chp.1) though she loves and cares for her children she abandons them at home at night to join her husband to celebrate. This irresponsible act of the parents leads to Tess shouldering the burden of the family. It is after the death of Horse Prince that she is forced against her will by her parents- mother in particular- to move to Trantridge where she is violated by Alec. A responsible mother would not force her daughter into danger without educating her about the consequences as Joan did no mater the circumstances. Through this presentation, Hardy is also pointing out that women are also responsible for the problems of women (not just men as is the common belief). In real-life, however, some mothers, especially in third world countries still push their daughters into such unfortunate circumstances

as Joan did because of wealth. Hardy's approach here is didactic.

After the unfortunate incident, Joan advises Tess never to tell anyone about it. She is still a loving mother who wants her daughter to be happily married. The social benefits of motherhood which Harbert, (2000) emphasizes are enjoyed by Joan. Tess endeavors to provide for the family from the meager income she earns through hard labour. Her suitors also provide for the family.

Mrs. Clare is another mother-figure Hardy presents to his reader. She too loves her children and also cares about their future. Mr. and Mrs. Clare bring up their children in the fear of God. Though Angel's two brothers represent all that is worst in institutionalized religion.

In seeking Angel's interest, they advise him not to act in a hurry in choosing a wife though they would not object to seeing her. They are interested in his domestic happiness. Like any mother, Mrs. Clare is very concerned when her child returns from Brazil emaciated. There is a contrast between Joan D'urbeyfield and Mrs. Clare, which we think is a consequence of social class differences; while Joan depends on her daughter, Mrs. Clare wants nothing from her son. Her only concern is reputation.

Tess is the third mother-figure Hardy presents to us. Symbolically, she christened her child *Sorrow*. Unlike Joan and Mrs. Clare, Tess's joy of motherhood is short lived and the child's father who is supposed to be a companion, is the catalyst of all her problems and her tragic end. Alec abandons her as most modern youth do.

(2.10) shows that human beings actually display a blend of masculine or feminine characteristics. Clearly, one of the prominent features of Tess of the D'urberville is the heroine's unrelieved humility, which is typical of females. Apart from a brief period towards the end of the novel in which she expresses a slight bitterness at the injustice of her lot, Tess is never anything but a victim. She appears to be motivated only by guilt (activated, in the narrative), by the death of Prince, and all her actions are performed in the spirit of sacrifice, culminating in her last symbolic "offering" on the "altar" at Stonehenge. As shown in (2.10.3) women are naturally polite and they try to avoid

hurting people's feelings. One could say that the mixture of moral guilt and "natural" humility lead Tess to accept her rejection by Clare after her confession as a just punishment she only wishes to do what will be most convenient for him:

I shan't ask you to let me live with you, Angel, because I have no right to... I Shan't do anything, unless you order me to; and if you go away from me I shall not follow 'ee', and if you never speak to me any more I shall not ask you why, unless you tell me I may... I will obey you like your wretched slave, even if it is to lie down and die. (Chp.35).

In the days following the confession, Tess attempts to honour these vows. She exemplified over-submissive women. Her reaction is a reason for conscientising women, which could be explored by feminist writers. She also considers various alternatives including killing, running away or getting Clare's dinner. The only thing that prevents her from talking her own life is the fear of the scandal it might cause to his name. As shown in (2. 10.3) women avoid doing anything to hurt others feelings.

On the first occasion on which Tess manifests masculine characteristics (androgyny shown in 2.10) when she fights back and hits Alec with her glove, she awaits instant retribution as her just desert: "Now, push me.... whip me, crush me.... I shall not cry out!" (Chp.11). Hence, it seems as if the females attempt at retaliation merely compound her impotence. She also feels guilty after murdering D'urberville and blames herself saying "How wickedly made I was! Yet formerly I never could bear to hurt a fly or worm, and the sight of a bird in a cage used often to make me cry" (Chp.58).

*Tess of the D'urberville* is full of episodes in which the heroine is seen to be in the physical control of her suitors, which are clear examples of the domineering attitude of men, for example, she is forced to ride with Alec; either on his horse or in his gig. The downhill gallop in which he first delivers Tess to Trantridge is a good example.

It is during a journey in a wagon driven by Angel that he finally secures Tess's acceptance of his proposal. Also, men according to (2.10.3) do not care about hurting others feelings. Angel and Alec

on a number of occasions refer to Tess as "fieldgirl", "cottage girl". Farmer Groby also calls her a "young wench who was at Trantridge awhile". Such words would definitely hurt ones feelings. Furthermore, a physical manifestation of masculine qualities by Angel is the blow he gives Farmer Groby at the Inn when Groby calls Tess "a comely maid". After the blow, Clare puts himself in a defence posture and Groby sensing the danger says, "I beg pardon sir".

We would want to note that through men and women are biologically predisposed to manifest certain characteristics, prevailing circumstances in life also contribute to the characteristics they manifest at a particular point in times. Tess reacted violently when "pushed to the wall" by Alec. Hence, as indicated in (2.10.3) a real-life woman could be very caring, loving and nurturing when she is happy but equally aggressive when the situation demands aggressive behavior.

Thomas Hardy also explores the views of socialist feminist (2.6.3). In *Tess of the D'urbervilles*, the society Hardy presents in the Text is a society in which women are exploited by capitalist forces. After the death of the D'urberville "bread winner"—Horse Prince— Tess accepts an offer of a job to look after the poultry farm under the pressure from her family. It is at Trantridge that Alec seduces her. If she were not forced by circumstance to take up the job she would never have fallen victim to Alec's selfish desires. She is therefore exploited economically and physically by the capitalist D'urberville.

Tess later joins Izz, Retty and Marian, her fellow milkmaids at Talbothays. These girls are economically exploited by their capitalist master, Mr. Cricks. It is worth noting that none of these girls leave the dairy farm economically better off than she went there. They later converge at Flitcomb-Ash with the exception of Retty who drowned herself. Here again, Groby the farm master, economically exploits them. Here again, fate brings Alec and Tess together. She gives in to him against her wish due to economic reasons.

## 2. "A DOLL'S HOUSE" HENRIK IBSEN

*A Doll's House* presents a couple, Mr. and Mrs. Helmer, who live on a low income for a long time. The man falls sick and treatment abroad is

recommended. His wife, Nora, takes an illegal loan (without a man as co-signatory) to sponsor their trip to Italy for treatment. On their return the man obtains a new position at the bank where he works and decides to sack Krogstad, a low level bank employee who assisted his wife (Nora) secure the bank loan, on the grounds that Krogstad has a disreputable character.

To prevent Krogstad from making a scandal of the loan, which she has been paying secretly, Nora pleads with her husband not to sack Krogstad to which he refuses. Krogstad writes to Torvald informing him of his wife's illegal loan. Torvald becomes furious and outraged. He calls Nora a hypocrite and a liar, and complains that she has ruined his happiness. He declares that she will not be allowed to raise his children.

Krogstad having been convinced by Mrs. Linde whom he loves, returns the documents of the loan to Nora. Overjoyed, Torvald attempt to dismiss his past insults, but his harsh words have triggered something in Nora. She walks out on Torvald and the children she so loves, slamming the door behind her.

Ibsen's *A Doll's House* could be regarded as a typical feminist play. Nora, Mrs. Linde Helene and Ann-Marie are the female characters in the text. However, only Nora has the good experiences of a mother. Mrs. Linde's mother is only mentioned. Nora loves and cares for her children but in the end she slams the door and walks away on her husband and children. Nora Helmer's decision to leave the family reflects the dilemma faced either to conform to highly restrictive gender roles or to abandon these roles in order to realize their value as individuals. Although Ibsen brings his audience to the moment that Nora chooses to disregard her social role and opt for her "freedom", his play does not clearly reveal the true fate of women who follow Nora's path in the 19th century. Historically, most women who chose not to acquiesce to the socially prescribed roles of marriage were treated as unnatural creatures and shunned by the reputable public.

Though Nora decides to leave the security and comfort of her restrictive domestic life to try to become a human being, Ibsen neglects, however, to show his audience the actual result of that decision.

At the conclusion of *A Doll House* Nora slams the door on her past life hoping to begin a new life that will some how be more satisfying. Yet, the modern audience neither has no genuine sense of what she may have found beyond that door, and perhaps nor did Nora. Although one cannot know Nora's fate after she leaves Torvald, one may assume that her future would be bleak and that the pressure to return to her domestic life would be strong. What credible wife and mother would ever walk out this way on her family? This action suggests that Torvald's claim that "before all else, you're a wife and mother" may not necessarily be true for all women.

In showing a woman trying to create a new identity for herself, however, Ibsen reveals the extent to which people are trapped in societal norms and expectations. Nora's acknowledgement that she "can't go on believing what the majority says, or what is written in books" suggests a social upheaval that is capable of subverting long-established gender roles.

The question one may ask is; is Ibsen, through this presentation of Nora, advocating for women's right to file for and be granted divorce? A lot of women in the modern contemporary society do walk the path Nora chooses. The reasons vary, in some cases the domineering attitudes of men force them while in others the women's desires for absolute "freedom" lead them.

Male dominance noted in (2.2) is another major issue Ibsen raises in *A Doll House*. Though Nora is economically advantaged in comparison to the play's other female characters, she nevertheless leads a difficult life because society dictates that Torvald be the marriage's dominant member. Torvald issues decrees and condescends to Nora, and Nora must hide her loan from him because she knows Torvald could never accept the idea that his wife or only other woman had helped save his life. Furthermore, she must work in secret to pay off her loan because it is illegal for a woman to obtain a loan without her husband's permission as Mrs. Linde confirms; "well, a wife can't borrow money without her husband's consent" (Act.1).

Nora, however, questions it in the following statement:

...hasn't a daughter the right to shield her father from worry and anxiety when he's old and dying? Hasn't a wife the right to save her husband's life? (Act.1).

In addition, women were completely dominated in the domestic sphere by men as Nora puts it:

I mean, then I passed from papa's hands into yours. You arranged everything the way you wanted it, so that I simply took over your taste in every thing – or pretended I did – don't really know – I think it was little of both.... You and papa have done me a great wrong. It's your fault that I have done nothing with my life (Act 3).

Despite this domineering role society grants men and in contrast to Nora's desire to be "free" manifested by her walking out on her husband and children, Mrs. Linde longs to be under the protection of a man as (2.2.1,NI.3) indicates. Mrs. Linde left Krogstad for a wealthier man who would enable her to support her family—as some real-life women do. Now, she tells Krogstad that she is free of her own familial obligations and wishes to be with Krogstad caring for his children, she tells Krogstad. "Oh, Nils, give me something-someone-to work for" (Act.3).

This extract summarizes the domineering attitude of men in the society. So, the irony is that, while some women want to be free and independent others want to be under the protection of men. The real-life situation does not seem to be different. Society, however, shuns women who are not under the protection of men. The family unit would stand the risk of extinction if such women were encouraged.

(2.9.2,PI.8) shows that women have some amount of domestic power that could be used to influence men's activities in the public spheres. In *A Doll's House*, Nora uses all the influence she has to convince her husband, Helmer Torvald to offer Mrs. Linde a job at the Bank. Even before discussing it with Torvald Nora tells Mrs. Linde; "He will too, Christine...I'll get him in the right mood" (Act 1). She eventually gets her husband to employ Mrs. Linde. It is in the same vein that Iago in William Shakespeare's *Othello* tells Cassio

"Our general's wife is now the general... Importune her help to put you in your place again" (Act 3).

Women therefore have some amount of power, which if properly exercised could greatly influence men's activities in the public domain. However, it is not in all cases that this power could be successfully used. Men have their pride and are conscious of theory gender role. When women's demands seem to threaten their pride, they don't give in to such demands. This is the case when Mrs. Helmer tries to convince Mr Helmer not to sack Krogstad as planned. She tries to no avail to plead on Krogstad's behalf". It is certain that Nora herself could predict her husband's refusal to grant her request this time as she rightly asked Krogstad;

"How on earth could you imagine that I would have any influence over my husband? (Act 1).

Hence, one could say that when the women's demand is reasonable it is granted and when it is unreasonable it is not granted. In life, a good percentage of women do actually influence men's activities in the public domain. Some women even make their homes very uncomfortable for the men if they refuse to grant their requests. In some homes on the other hand, both husband and wife have an understanding and try as much as possible to draw a line between official and unofficial matters. They endeavor not to interfere in each other's official matters.

(2.6.1) clearly shows women's desire to be employed in paid jobs. Henrik Ibsen in *A Doll's House* devotes some attention to this issue. All female characters in the text are either engaged in or are seeking paid jobs. It is because Nora is working that she is able to take a loan to sponsor their trip to Italy. Now she is secretly paying the loan. She also points out that because they were very poor, they (Torvald and herself) had to work long hours. According to Mrs. Christine Linde, life is meaningless for any woman who is not working and working for somebody is the only thing that would keep her happy as she expresses in the following statement:

I must work if I am to find life worth living.  
I have always worked, for as long as I can

remember; Its been the greatest joy of my life-my only joy. (Act 3)

Mrs. Linde, we suppose, expresses the importance that 19th century women attached to work. Furthermore, the action of Nora's Nurse strongly supported by the points in (2.2.2) indicates that work was regarded very important. The Nurse readily gives out her child to a stranger when offered a job by Mrs. Helmer. Mrs. Helmer's surprise at the nurse's action is expressed in the following statement:

"Tell me Anne-Marie-I've so often wondered. How could you bear to give to give your child away-to strangers?"

Thus, the desire to secure good jobs could lead women into any action. It puzzles one to note that Anne-Marie values a job more than human life. Now that she has given away her child, for whom is she working? Is it herself or somebody else?

Helene is the last female character in the play. She too is employed. She is Nora's maid. Like the women in Ibsen's text, the modern contemporary women have a strong desire to be employed in paid jobs. And like the Nurse, some are ready to do anything including giving up their womanhood in order to secure a good job.

Finally, though not specifically explored in literature review, we think it is important to note the sacrificial role of women in *A Doll's House*. Ibsen paints a bleak picture of the sacrificial role held by women of all economic classes in his society. In general, the play's female characters exemplify Nora's assertion that even though men refuse to sacrifice their integrity, "hundreds of thousands of women have". Nora sacrifices herself for her sick husband. In order to support her mother and two brothers, Mrs. Linde found it necessary to abandon Krogstad, her true but penniless love, and marry a richer man. The nanny had to abandon her own child to support herself by working as Nora's children's caretaker. As she tells Mrs. Linde, the nanny considers herself lucky to have found the job, since she was "a poor girl who'd been led astray". This sacrificial role interests the researchers because a lot of real-life women sacrifice their interests in favour of their relatives though some could be too materialistic (2.1.3).

### 3. "KONGI'S HARVEST" BY WOLE SOYINKA

*Kongi's Harvest* is a political play set in Nigeria. The play is much subtler than it appears on the surface. One could say that it is a representation of a clash between a modern dictatorship and the traditional system, which it has efficiently replaced. From a different perspective, it could also be viewed as an ultimate representation of the clash between the life-giving forces and the death-producing forces. Though there is only one major female character in the play, one must not underestimate the role played by that woman in the political system Soyinka presents.

The main feminist character in the text is Segi who runs a nightclub, which is lit with colored lights in contrast to Kongi's retreat, which is dimly lit. There is music, dancing and beer at the club. In a general sense one could say that Segi's nightclub represents the rest of the society because almost every body visits it.

Soyinka has, however, not presented Segi to his audience in the domestic sphere. The audience is therefore left in suspense especially as regards the way Segi is able to compromise between her domestic role and her public-especially political role. As expressed in (3. 2.3) *Kongi's Harvest* presents the female character in the special context of politics. From this text, we have Soyinka's view of women in violent politics. His major female character is Segi who operates among men and works with other women under her control. The aspects of chapter two that are pertinent to the female picture of "Kongi's Harvest" include (2.4,Pl.7) and (2.10).

Politically, Segi plays a very important role in the coup against Kongi's regime despite the fact that she is Kongi's ex-mistress. She was not just in love with Kongi, but one who had once believed in him and his course and had been prepared to devote her resources to his work. She says; "Kongi was a great, and I loved him" one could say that this is a portrayal of androgyny (2.10). When Kongi becomes a tyrant, she joins forces with Daodu to form a strong opposition force against Kongi's regime. Now that she has lost confidence in him, she plays an active role in a coup against him. Despite the fact that her father, who was in

detention has escaped, she is still determined to ensure that the Harvest goes as planned. Her determination reconciles Oba Danlola to a plan, the details of which he does not even know.

This her great plan starts when she and her women with their sarcastic songs and defiant gestures enter. The entrance sets the scene for a confrontation, which is to be signaled by Daodu's speech, especially when the women "form a ring around Daodu with their pestles". At the crucial point when the dethronement and possible assassination of Kongi should have taken place, the sound of gunfire signaling the death of Segi's father, who was to have done the crucial act, is heard. The plot obviously fails and Kongi goes on to make his speech as Daodu comments:

"There should have been no speech. We failed again" (p. 81).

However, Kongi in his moments of triumph is thrown off-balance by a gift—a hastily thought up gesture by Segi. This gift, which is taken to be the festival yam, is the head of an old man, Segi's father. In the end there is no certainty at the end of the play of the precise fate of Daodu and Segi.

The failure of this coup clearly indicates that though Soyinka supports women's participation in political activities, he is, however, against the type of violent change advocated by Segi. The violent coup she plans seems to be in accordance with (2.6.1, N12) and brings to mind the numerous military coups that have planned the African continent and the role women play in them. Women have become spokes persons in military governments. Rather than playing active roles in political violence, women could organize themselves into women's wings and peacefully advocate for positive political change granting them a more active role in politics. The desire of the real-life woman to play an active role in modern politics is reflected in the ever-increasing percentage of women in the political arena. (1.3.2) shows a number of important political positions held by women.

#### 4. "SO LONG A LETTER" BY MARIAMA BA

Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* is written in an epistolary style and exposes the dogmatic custom imposed by the Islamic religion, of compelling

women to stay in marriages, which gets bastardized by adulterous and polygamous tendencies on the part of the husband. Two educated women, Assiatou and Ramatoulaye, battle it out with their unfaithful husbands. Each woman succeeds in life without a husband. It also tells how schoolgirls may be lured into undesired marriages by poor parents who trade their daughters to win better living for the family.

In exploring the various aspects of feminism in *So Long a Letter*, Mariama Ba presents typical African women in their struggle for liberation. The aspects of chapter two pertinent to the fictional woman Mariama Ba presents include (2.3, PI 6).

Education of women is one other major concerns of Mariama Ba in *So Long a Letter*. The educated female characters she presents to the reader include; Aissatou and Ramatoulaye. The young generation pursuing education is represented by young Nabou, Binetou, Daba and young Aissatou. Mariama Ba starts her exploration of education by stating that

"Books knit generations together in the same continuing affect that leads to progress. They enabled you to better yourself. What society refused you, they granted you" (p 56)

With this in mind Aissatou and Ramatoulaye attend the poorly-ville teachers' training college in Sebikotane, Senegal—and later become teachers. After Aissatou's divorce with Doctor Mawdo, she pursues further education in the school of interpreters in France, which enables her to work in the Senegalese Embassy in France. Young Nabou attended the school of midwifery helping in the delivery of several important personalities. The educational achievements of these women enable them to secure good jobs in the society.

Ramatoulaye associates the high turn out at her husband's burial with the financial support she received with education. She says:

...as I am a schoolteacher on friendly terms with the pupils' parents...I received the greater share of money and many envelopes (p. 6).

The statement seems to imply that the society values education especially when a good

relationship exists between the society and the educators. On the contrary, however, the notion that the women's place is the kitchen still seem to have a hold on the society as expressed by Ramatoulaye in the following statement:

To tell the truth, a woman does not need too much education. In fact, I wonder how a woman can earn her living by talking from morning to night (p. 30)

Ramatoulaye is, however, bent on promoting education of the girl child. Hence, she took young Nabou to the French state school of midwifery, believing that obtaining a certificate would help her through out life. She says

"...you receive an education there... you will earn your living and you will acquire grace for your entry into paradise".

Mariama Ba sets out to advocate quality education for the girl-child. This trend is regarded as acceptable and should cause no harm to society. She presents Ramatoulaye and Aissatou who break the fetters of religion, tradition and male domination through schooling.

Another important thing education does to women is the fact that it leads to the elimination of several traditional barriers. According to Ramatoulaye, education lifts women out of the "boy of tradition, superstition and custom", and also makes them appreciate a multitude of civilization without renouncing theirs. However, the values of education spelt out for women seem to apply to both sexes and not to women in speciality. Education breaks enable women and men cultivate their personalities, strengthen their qualities and make up for their inadequacies to develop universal moral values. This clearly brings out the significance of education to both men and women. These pointers strongly portray how the feminist writers view education as it operates in the present day society where educated women gain high status as indicated in (1.3.2),(1.3.3), and (1.3.5) and pioneer the entrance of more girl children to schools and colleges.

Mariama Ba in *So Long a Letter* also points out that with education, women can unit to fight for equality and liberation in society. Ramatoulaye says, "we were true sisters destined or the same

mission of emancipation" (p.15). This view is pursued right through the text. Ramatoulaye, amidst her rivalry with Binetou cautiously talks about a cynical ploy contrived by her husband to destroy the education of Binetou. Also, education enhances women to view issues affecting their lives from a critical perspective. Aissatou, for example, chooses an independent life when her husband decides to take another wife. Though the Islamic religion permits it, she can not bear it and decides to divorce.

From a political perspective, it is worth noting that equipped with education, women are able to question their marginalization in politics (2.4,PI 7).

Ramatoulaye, for example, asks important questions such as

"when will women be made ministers in the Senegalese society? When will we have the first female ministers involved in decisions concerning the development of our country? When will education be decided for children on the basis not sex but of talent?" (p. 61).

The educated Sierra Leonean women are today asking similar questions. Most of them have joined FAWE (Forum For African Women Educationists) and Council for Women Parliamentarians and Ministers, and are now campaigning for a 50/50 percent representation in politics and education of the girl child.

To further solidify the political stance in the text, Mariama Ba, through Ramatoulaye, questions the number of women in the assembly, Ramatoulaye says to Daouda

"Four women, Daouda, four out of a hundred deputies. What a ridiculous ratio! Not even one for each province" (p. 60).

She further asks when the country will have the first female minister involved in decisions making after nearly twenty years of independence. Such questions bring to mind women's fight for equal political status and the right to be actively involved in the nation's developmental activities. Today, women in most African countries are contributing immensely to the development of their nations.

Ramatoulaye in the fight for political freedom calls herself “a bit of a rebel” (p. 61). She admires men such as Daouda Dieng who fought for social justice. She says Daouda

was an upright man, and each time the situation demanded, he would fight for social justice. It was not love or show of money that had driven him towards politics, but his true love for his fellow man, the urge to redress wrongs and injustice.

This quotation indicates why educated women should be allowed to play an active role in politics or why Ramatoulaye and others express the desire to enter the National Assembly (to correct social injustice and fight for equal rights).

To further justify her claims, Ramatoulaye presents a clear picture of what women are supposed to be and reasons for their participation in politics. She explains that women should no longer be decorative accessories, objects to be moved about, and companions to be flattered or calmed with promises; women, she adds, are the nation’s primary fundamental root from which all else grow and blossom. They ought to take a keener interest in the destiny of the country.

Daba, Ramatoulaye’s daughter, on the other hand, has a contrary view about women’s participation in politics. She says:

I don’t want to go into politics; it’s not that I am not interested in the fate of my country and most especially, that of women. But when I look at the fruitless wrangling even within the ranks of the same party, when I see men’s greed for power, I prefer not to participate. No I am not afraid of ideological struggle, but in a political party it is rare for a woman to make an easy break-through (p. 74).

Daba’s opinion, however, seems too cynical. The reasons she advances should be the more reason why she should join others to intensify the fight for women’s liberation. There are, however, women in society who share her view. They put on an apathetic attitude towards political activities. Feminist writers should sensitize such women to become actively interested in politics.

Religion is another theme Mariama Ba explores in *So Long a Letter*. Her attention is focused mainly on Islamic religion since it is the main religion practiced in Senegal. Ba herself comes from an Islamic background. Generally, the society turns to religion for consolation in times of trouble as Ramatoulaye does when she is shockingly summoned to the hospital where she discovers the tragic death of her husband. She holds tightly to her prayer beads for consolation. One could say Mariama Ba, through such presentations, tends to keep her novel on the track of reality and popular real-life characters and events.

Religion on the other hand is also used by men to suppress women. It is an Imam, Madou’s elder brother, Tramsir, and Doctor Mawdo, who surprisingly reveal to Ramatoulaye that Madou has just got married to Binetou. Though the Islamic religion allows men to marry as many as four wives, it is not morally correct for Madou to treat Ramatoulaye the way he does; shamelessly, without informing her, marries a girl fit to be his daughter. The same set of respected elders come again later, this time to seek Ramatoulaye’s hand in marriage for Tramsir, as tradition demands according to them. Mariama Ba through Ramatoulaye reacts responsibly, to correct the way some members of the society misuse religion to their own advantage. Ramatoulaye says:

I look at Mawdo. I look at the Imam.... I tell my beads. This time I shall speak out...your strategy is to get in before any other suitor... That I am an object to be passed from hand to hand... you don’t know what marriage means to me: it is an act of faith and of love, the total surrender of oneself to the person one has chosen and who has chosen you. (pp. 57-58).

Through this presentation, Mariama Ba is also advocating for marriage to be based on love and mutual understanding between the parties concerned and not on religious or traditional practices. Mariama Ba’s views in this case tend to agree with biblical view that

A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives. If the husband dies, she is free to



be married to whom she wishes, only in the lord (1 cor 7: 39)

Similarly, in the African society today, most women are as vocal as Ramatoulaye when it comes to the matter of deciding who their husbands would be.

Of greater concern to Mariama Ba is the issue of motherhood. In her presentation of the issue, she points to larger underlying problems concerning the Senegalese attitude towards women, wives and mothers. The lady mother-in-law represents mothers that want an improved lifestyle by sacrificing their daughter's education for privileges. From her actions, one can conclude that the problems of women are quite often generated by women.

Ramatoulaye and Aissatou are two friends both of whom are motherly figures. Both are faced with the same predicament but react differently. Though both ladies love and care for both their husbands and children, when the time comes for them to take major decisions regarding their marriage life, Aissatou decides on separation while Ramatoulaye stays at her matrimonial home. Aissatou works at the Senegalese embassy abroad. With her income, she is able to send Ramatoulaye a fiat 125 car when abandoned by her husband. This indicates that with her education she could do without her husband. Ramatoulaye on the other hand decides even against her children's wish to stay at her matrimonial home. Daba, Ramatoulaye's eldest child tells her

Break with him, mother. Send this man away. He has respected neither you nor me. Do what Aunty Aissatou did.... I can't see you fighting over a man with a girl my age (p.39).

Ramatoulaye still prefers her marital home to single parenthood. She says, "I had prepared myself for equal sharing according to the precepts of Islam concerning polygamic life" (2.8,PI 5). Through this presentation, Maraima Ba opens the eyes of girls to both good and bad peers.

According to Aissatou and Ramatoulaye's children, Aissatou seems to have chosen a better option. This seems so because Ramatoulaye's husband has abandoned her infavour of the second wife. If Modou Fall had not abandoned

Ramatoulaye, Aissatou's decision would not have seemed a better option because every woman longs to be under the immorality in the manner in which it is done that the religion does not sanction.

The real-life Muslim woman's reaction to polygamy contrasts with Aissatou's and agrees to some extent, with Ramatoulaye's. The women share the man, who according to the religion, is responsible for both. The man spends time with his wives following a sort of timetable.

Mariama Ba, through her presentation of Aissatou and Ramatoulaye, is advocating for women's right to play an important role in deciding their husbands, and also the right to file for divorce.

The lady mother-in-law (Binetou's mother) is another mother character Mariama Ba presents to her reader. Her love for material wealth makes her disrupt her daughters' education to give her out in marriage. She is carried away by wealth so much so that she forgets to think about her daughter's future incase anything goes wrong. The death of Modou Fall, not long after his marriage to Binetou, is a clear indication that Mariama Ba is completely against the marriage. In traditional Muslim and non-Muslim societies, especially in Africa, such marriages, built on wealth, not love, still taking place today. "Binetou, like many others (in real-life), was a lamb slaughtered on the altar of affluence" (p. 39).

#### V. SUMMARY

Feminist writers and women's Liberation movements are campaigning against the overwhelming unfairness against the female sex. They hope to contribute solutions to this unfairness. Literary texts can be used effectively for this purpose. In furtherance of their goals, feminist writers have created fictional women and formerly existing ones have been pointed at. The purpose of this research was to compare the imaginary women of fiction and the real-life women. This was because a misguiding effect is at risk if the fictional woman does not reflect the real-life woman. A literature review of various established sources was carried out, revealing rich information on the issue. Four texts were selected and critical analyses of the fictional woman in the texts and the real-life woman were done. The researchers also tried to cite examples from practical situations in Sierra Leone.

These were looked under the following sub-headings:

### **I. MARRIAGE**

Thomas Hardy, Mariama Ba and other literacy writers such as Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte and Flora Nwapa, through portrayals of various feminist figures in their texts, are supportive of the fact that women should be allowed to decide on who they want to marry. Any attempt to force them into arranged marriages may end up in failure. Similarly, the fictional woman or the real-life woman, wants to have the final say in deciding who she would marry. Though arranged marriages are still taking place in some third world countries, a greater percentage of them do not seem to work out well. In real-life today, the issue of infidelity of married women creates problems in most homes. Mariama Ba has, however, failed to represent such a character to his readers. The argument she presents in this respect is therefore slant. Aissatou could stay without a husband. In (2.1) it is argued that feminist only differ over the importance accorded sexuality in understating women's oppression. Vance (1984) argues that women who stress sexuality as a form of social control have also been criticized for neglecting its pleasures. If Aissatou stays without a husband, what becomes of the pleasures derived from sexuality? In that case, there is a possibility that she might tend to homosexuality/lesbianism. Hence, one could say that Maraima Ba's treatment of the feminine issue. i.e., economic and political emancipation tends to overtake biological and psychological factors. Maraima Ba could have presented a didactic picture of female marital infidelity.

### **II. EDUCATION**

Regarding education, the findings reveal that for women to secure good jobs in society they must acquire some education. This has led to an increase in the desire of both the fictional woman and the real-life woman to pursue education. From the fictional perspective, the characters such as Ramatoulaye, Aissatou, Binetou and young Nabou are examples. In real-life, it is evident from the numerous girls schools such as St. Joseph's Convent, Annie Walsh Memorial School, Freetown Secondary School for Girls in Sierra Leone that the real-life

woman wants to acquire as much education as possible. The percentage of girls in various educational institutions all over the world has also increased. Some girls, however, still have a negative attitude towards education as exemplified by Tess. This may be responsible for the high drop out rate among women in some developing countries. Also, some girls lack the support they need to achieve their educational goals, while others get pregnant and drop out of programme as is the case with young Aissatou in Mariama Ba's *So long a letter*.

### **III. CLASS AND ECONOMIC OPPRESSION**

On the issue of class and economic oppression, the findings reveal that both the fictional and real-life women are also suppressed on the basis that they come from poor backgrounds. They are blackmailed with charity by the rich in society. Some parents in real-life force their daughters to give in to rich people for material wealth. Some girls even end up as prostitutes.

### **IV. ANDROGYNY**

It was also revealed in the findings that human beings do display a blend of masculine and feminine characteristics. Women tend to be more polite and try to avoid hurting people's feelings, while men rather care less about hurting others feelings. They quarrel and talk as if they are fighting. In addition, men and women do manifest feminine and masculine characteristics respectively, when the situation demands. A close examination of the real-life woman reveals that she too does manifests a blend of masculine and feminine qualities. Like the fictional woman, the real-life woman manifests masculine qualities only when she is "pushed to the wall"; when the situation demands. This, however, must not be taken to imply that men and women can do without each other. However, such arguments could lead women into believing that they could do without the protection of men. This could create room for homosexuality.

### **V. MOTHER HOOD**

Regarding motherhood, the findings reveal that most women long to be under the control and protection of men, and to have children by men. They love and care for the children as exemplified by characters such as; Tess, Ramatoulaye, Aissatou and Nora. Some mothers, however, do not take kindly

to the over-domineering attitude of their male counterparts and prefer separation. Aissatou and Nora are examples of fictional women who prefer separation to the domineering control of men. Some real-life women also prefer separation to the domineering role of men. Regarding Hardy's women, it remains unclear whether such women made it up in alone. It seems as if women are aware of their rights but avoid acclaiming supremacy of men. Trivially, Hardy creates drunken men to match with women.

#### VI. POSSIBILITY OF WOMEN CONTROLLING MEN'S ACTIVITIES

On the possibility of women being able to influence men's activities, it was found out that both the fictional and real-life women have some degree of domestic influence which could be used to influence men's activities in the public domain. There is, however, a limit because the success of the influence depends on the credibility of the women's demands.

#### VII. EMPLOYMENT

Most female characters in the texts desire to be gainfully employed in paid jobs. Education has a vital role to play in this regard because the type of job they are able to secure depends on their level of education. Aissatou works at the Senegalese embassy abroad because of her education. Ramatoulaye is a schoolteacher. Tess, Retty, Marian and Izz secure low paid jobs in farms because they lack education. Working women are able to supplement the family income and can take care of themselves and the children if abandoned by the man, as is the case with Ramatoulaye and Aissatou. They could also take care of the home if anything happens to the man as Nora does in *A Doll's House*. Like the fictional woman, the real-life woman has the desire to be gainfully employed in paid jobs. This rush to secure jobs is not without consequences, however. The fictional woman as exemplified by Nora's Nurse who can do anything including giving away her child to strangers just to secure a good job, while the real-life woman gets frustrated as shown in (2.2.2) and could commit suicide if she cannot secure a job. She might also find herself wanting as far as her domestic duties are concerned.

#### VIII. POLITICS

Politically, the fictional woman is becoming increasingly interested in politics as portrayed by Soyinka and Mariama Ba. This interest is clearly demonstrated by Ramatoulaye and Aissatou. Aissatou works at the Senegalese embassy abroad. Ramatoulaye's interest is shown through the questions she asks about the ridiculous representation of women in the political spheres. Her conclusion is that more women should be involved. Soyinka, on the other hand, presents women actively taking part in attempting to bring about a political change. The attempt is, however, unsuccessful because of the strategy adopted—violence. Soyinka does not support the violence advocated by the women. The real-life woman, like the fictional woman, is becoming increasingly interested in politics. This is evident from the increasing percentage of women involved in politics. In Sierra Leone, for example, in the early 2000s, only five women were in the Cabinet – three ministers. Now, there is a plethora of women parliamentarians and representatives in the political sphere. Some women, however, have an apathetic attitude towards political activities. The common belief exists that there are also those who are often deceived by politicians with little gifts when election are about to be held.

#### V. CONCLUSION

It could be concluded from the research that women are indeed subjected to most of the conditions mentioned at the outset of the analyses (1.1.1) and that a lot of socio-political organizations in collaboration with feminist writers are today campaigning for women's liberation; that indeed literature texts are appropriate tools for the purpose of emancipation of women. It is also concluded that the society stands the risk of being guided into making blunders, and that some qualities of the fictional woman reflect the qualities of the real-life woman while others do not.

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