

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

The question “who is a woman?”, is one of the oldest questions in the history of thought. A woman has been conceived in various ways in different disciplines. We shall consider the way this question has been answered in philosophy and in gender studies. The nature of the question “who is a woman?” is a social problem. Embedded in this question are such things as the role of woman in society and her liberation from oppression. When faced with the question of who a woman is, the answer we give most times is determined by what the male gender says she is. Aderonke Adesola Adesanya avers that “women derive definition by their relationship with men.”¹

Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere argue that women pose certain questions as a way of trying to understand and change their position. Women seek to reject that which is derogatory about their images. They are doing this by forcefully rejecting the idea that they are second class sex.² Women seek social justice in their daily living and experiences. The reason is that justice is not set aside on the basis of sex. Rather, it makes the rule of the game fair and does not treat less fairly society’s goods and services for individual user.

Feminists call our attention to the need to learn and listen to the experiences of women and to think critically about our own experiences and actions. The agitation of feminists can be traced to diverse spheres such as social theories, political movements and moral philosophies, which have been concerned with the experiences of women in contemporary societies. Most feminists are concerned with social, political and economic inequality in society. This preoccupation is directed at promoting equality, justice and fairness for women and thus putting an end to the idea of sexism in whatever we do. This underscores the need to discourage the oppression of women and the underserved disadvantages they experience in the social setting. The historically accepted differences between the sexes, according to Simone de Beauvoir, rest solely on social conditions which permit the subjugation of women by men. Thus Simone de Beauvoir argues in her book *The Second Sex* that gender is socially constructed.

In the words of Anne Minas, “feminists maintain that the oppression of women is conceptualised as patriarchy which is contained in legal, educational, religious and any related systems which we can observe in how women formally relate with one another as noticeable in their psychology and physiology.”³ Among the themes explored by feminists are patriarchy,

stereotyping, objectification, sexual objectification, welfare rights, equal opportunities, motherhood and oppression. Feminists place a higher value on women. To them, a woman is not simply the means through which sexual gratification and procreation are possible; a woman, is more than that. She is an end in herself and should be valued not for what she can do but for what and who she is.

The eighteenth century feminist Mary Wollstonecraft concentrated her works on the political and legal equality of female folks. She emphasised the need for voting right, education right and career right for women. She was motivated by the central themes of the political and philosophical beliefs and controversies of her time. She was critical of philosophers Edmund Burke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. As part of his intellectual treaties, Burke wrote on the political and philosophical critique of libertarian and egalitarian ideals underlying the French Revolution. In *Discourses*, Rousseau presents an analysis of how and why human servitude had come about, while, in *Social Contract*, he offers a conception of a form of government in which it would be possible for a citizen both to follow the “general will” and to obey himself alone. In *Emile*, Rousseau also discusses the principles that should underlie the education of the girl, *Sophie*, which should be solely to please *Emile*. Rousseau argues that the woman should be able to delight herself, not the man. Since both *Emile* and *Sophie* are endowed with reason, then, for Wollstonecraft, it is in no way justifiable to exclude women from the exercise of the capacity to set up standard of excellence.

Literature Review

History shows that the views of early male philosophers about women is a dreary one of misogyny. For example, Aristotle wrote within the tradition of misogyny in which he lived. His thoughts about women reflected in the scientific and philosophic writings of other philosophers after him. Aristotle was a chronic supporter of the inferiority of the female sex. His belief in female inferiority entered into his physiology, biology, as well as political, ethical and aesthetic theories. He employed some of the concepts encountered in his metaphysics. It was his ‘scientific’ proof of the subordination of women to men which tended to dominate so much of Western thinking. Aristotle adopted naturalist and functionalist approaches; the socio-political systems that correspond with the prevailing arrangement, which are observable and readily available for classification, if necessary.

Thomas Aquinas tried to reconcile Christian doctrine with the philosophy of Aristotle. Thomas Aquinas exerted tremendous influence on Western culture. His philosophy became the official philosophic authority of the Catholic Church. He accepted the holistic, all-embracing nature of Aristotle's project but incorporated a divine hierarchy into the ancient natural one. He accepted the Aristotelian account of generation and with it the claims that the female, as the more passive partner to the man, plays a lesser role and that the reproduction of new female is the result of an inferior process.⁴

On his part, Jean-Jacques Rousseau thought that before progress could take place, a moral revolution was necessary and such a revolution could only occur when government itself has been transformed into an expression of popular will. The goal of such a revolution would be to establish a relationship between the male and female, in which men would be active and strong, while women are passive and weak. Rousseau held that it was important that one sex has the power and the will, while the other is subordinated. He believed that those who advocated equality of the sexes with reciprocal duties and obligations are indulging themselves in idle declamations. Rousseau, in *Emile*, the theory of education, presents the prototype *Emile* and *Sophie*, male and female, who are followed from childhood to young adulthood as models of the properly educated male and female.⁵ Rousseau discusses the principles that would underlie the education of the girl, *Sophie*, which should be solely to please *Emile*, the male. Aristotle, Aquinas and Rousseau argued for a natural hierarchical order which confers women with what they perceived is in accordance with their nature.

The anthropologists Michelle Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere analysed the place of women in some societies and argued that "women asked questions not from the abstract void or intellectual curiosity; and the first step in understating women's position and changing it involves the recognition that in learning to be woman in our society, we have accepted and even internalised, what is all too often a derogatory and constraining image of women."⁶

Mary Modupe Kolawole challenged the accepted notion that African women are "voiceless" members of society. According to her, "throwing one's voice is one of the important things to have happened to African women in recent years."⁷ She asserts that African women are sensitive to their condition, they are not 'voiceless'. She notes that a dialogue is needed to understand who the woman really is. This approach "accommodates all perspectives

to the problem as bearing some relevance to the solution. It is therefore open to a diversity of approaches as opposed to a monovalent imposition of a perspective.”⁸

In the opinion of Toyin Falola and S.U. Fwatshak, “the dominant view that ... women are ‘beasts of burden’ which however does not enjoy a monopoly in the scholarly tradition. This is because it may be correct only as a generalization but not in respect of its every material particular (details). There are other views and evidences that show change has been taking place in general with respect to ... women’s statuses and living conditions.”⁹

Simone de Beauvoir’s book, *The Second Sex* is influential. In it, she posits an ideal autonomy and independence for women. She avers that the historically accepted differences between the sexes rest solely on social conditions which permit the subjugation of women by men. Her goal was to study women, with emphasis on their social conditions.¹⁰ The central argument in Simone de Beauvoir’s philosophy is the claim that “one is not born but rather becomes a woman ... no biological, psychological, economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, ... which is described as feminine.”¹¹ This argument introduces the sex-gender distinction. Another central thesis in Simone de Beauvoir’s thought is the view that, from time immemorial, women are positioned to be subordinated to men.¹² This has “resulted in the general failure of women to take a place of human dignity as free and independent existents, associated with men on a plane of intellectual and professional equality.”¹³ The socio-political situation of the human society defines and imposes gender roles. In other words, men are often the ones who arrange society to be the way it is. They are also the ones who make women lose their self-worth and importance.

Another theme central to Simone de Beauvoir is the “*other*”. Women are conceived as “objects” by their male counterparts. The concept, “*other*” became interestingly important in Simone de Beauvoir’s vocabulary. She asserts that “women are not seen as the “*other*”, but seen as barred from empowerment by colour or sexual preference.” To her, “the next logical step seemed the need to define what these ‘*others*’ were in relation to men.”¹⁴

Simone de Beauvoir lays emphasis on the ways in which women are raised to see maleness as the natural human state in which women form the objectified “*other*.” It is the importance society accords biological sex, rather than sex itself, that forces women into playing the role of the “*other*”. “What is a woman?” Simone de Beauvoir would ask. She is described

as the “*other*”. To explain the processes of becoming the *other*, Simone de Beauvoir asserts that human beings consciously or unconsciously see those with separate identities other than itself as “others”.¹⁵ Otherness is associated with oppression and inferiority. It is a condition of exclusion on being shunned, abandoned, marginalised, disadvantaged, unprivileged, rejected and un-free.

Simone de Beauvoir equally argues that woman’s anatomy and biology are used to oppress her. Woman’s biology is seen as a burden. The nature of human sperms determines the gender differences among mammalian species. “The female is the target of the species.”¹⁶

The depreciation of femininity was the essential step in human evolution to enslave women.¹⁷ It must stop. The woman’s biology implicitly carries with it the taken-for-granted assumption of woman’s physical weakness. The most important element, for Simone de Beauvoir, is woman’s inability to transcend her biology. This maternity, caused women to be seen as the “other” and as the immanence. She argues that “woman fulfills her reproductive destiny in maternity.”¹⁸ In her view, the decision to become a mother is never performed in complete liberty. Maternity is one feminine function that cannot be performed in complete liberty. “The female is the target of the species.”¹⁹

Changing laws and the social context would not suffice to ameliorate the conditions and the consequences of maternity for women. It requires overcoming the devaluation of “femininity or perpetuating femininity.”²⁰ Secondly, “it is only the moral, social, cultural and other consequences promise along woman’s economic condition that can transform her.”²¹ In addition, Simone de Beauvoir argued for two different features of reproductive alienation, biological and social.

A major challenge with Simone de Beauvoir’s postulations is that the equating of the biological with the social is both illogical and contrary to reason. Again, to argue that both are determined by biology is itself a circular argument. Simone de Beauvoir contended that biology is one of the factors that account for the dominance of women by men, and that reproductive function enslaves women.²² However, the claim on reproductive alienation, which could be biological or social, is contradictory. Initially she was averse to the castigation of reproductive capacities but her position on biological determinism resulted into another denigration.

Womanism

Womanism concentrates on some preoccupation of feminism; it focuses on other distinctive features, thereby leaving outstanding impression different from feminism. The term “feminism” is inadequate to express issues pertaining to women everywhere. So, Womanism was coined to explain the struggle of black women who could not embrace the issues that feminism typically addresses. Womanists accuse feminists of focusing on finishing gender-based oppression that ignored race and class. Furthermore, feminist movement is seen by many as intrinsically racist. It battled for voting rights for white woman, but never got involved in the civil rights movement to help guarantee social equality for black women. This step behind white women is also shown in the argument of Oyeronke Oyewumi in her book *The Invention of Woman*, with the sub-title “*The Sisterarchy*”: *Feminism and Its “Other”*, where she posits that:

I use the term ‘Sisterarchy’. In using the term, I am referring to the well-founded allegations against Western feminists by a number of African, Asian and Latin-America feminists that despite the notion that the ‘sisterhood is global’, Western women are at the top of the hierarchy of the sisterhood, hence it is actually a “Sisterarchy”.²³

Zulu Sofola also shared the same argument. She asserts that “gender hierarchization is a Western construct.”²⁴

African Womanism

African Womanism, sharing from the description of Womanism, visualises women through the principles of self-reclamation and self-naming based in part on African philosophical thought of naming. This naming is captured in the saying, for instance, *owo ara eni l’a fi ntun iwa ara eni se*; (‘you have to establish your dignity yourself and not leave it to others’. One does not give name to a child in African society; different considerations are thought of, from the father, mother or circumstances in the town, or the circumstance of the child’s birth or having the child. As Mary Modupe Kolawole argues “a stranger with inadequate knowledge of circumstances of the child that is named lacks the capacity for personal possessions of naming.”²⁵ Kolawole, quoting Ogun-dipe-Leslie, notes that African Womanism expresses the positiveness in feminine issues.²⁶ Self-healing is therefore, needed.

That is why African womanism coheres with the ideas of self-naming, self-healing, motherhood and identify with men.

African Womanism emerged with representation of black womandom; the ideology is predicated on the unity and togetherness of the kith and kin of Africans. African Womanism engages in what Mary Modupe Kolawole calls “‘voice-throwing’ by not allowing her voice to be submerged by existing feminist discourse. African Womanism has problems with the true history, description and conceptualisation of feminism particularly as imposed by the West as a universal belief.”²⁷ This is so especially as much of feminism drew from Simone de Beauvoir’s arguments. We can think of Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics*. With reference to the argument of Shulamith Firestone, where she argued that, while women continue to give birth, they would inevitably be subordinate and oppressed; and that the solution lies in extra-uterine reproduction and new forms of communal living.²⁸ She demanded artificial procreation. She wanted to break up the family and to substitute the upbringing of children by groups instead of parents.²⁹

African Womanism has been tagged to the positive family orientation, which is sustained vigorously by Blacks in the diaspora.³⁰ Kolawole argues further: “grass-root women ... belief and in practice prefer a position that enhances woman’s conditions and opportunities for participation in development that does not alienate men, that does not jeopardize the esteemed family system, and that celebrates motherhood.”³¹

Thus, African Womanism fits into African realities of women’s expectations and experiences, and hence, is more appealing to both African scholars and grass-roots activism. Indeed, African Womanism visualises women through the principles of “self-reclamation” and “self-naming”, based in part on African philosophical thought on naming and struggles of another.³² Thus, the self-naming couched in the concept of “womanism” is espoused by Alice Walker, Clenora Hudson-Weems and Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi. But we shall concentrate on African Womanism of Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi, Mary Modupe Kolawole and those we termed African Womanists, even though these authors have not classified themselves as such. In particular, we could say African Womanists present their stories as they saw and experienced them to emphasise complementarity.

The existing literature on African Womanists as response to Simone de Beauvoir work reveals the power gap theory of Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi, and the view of Oyeronke

Oyewumi, who argues that there is the human body viewed from the perception of gender, resulting in the categorisation into male and female.

Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi avers that “the politics of the womanist is unique in its racial-sexual ramifications; it is more complex than white sexual politics, for it addresses more directly the ultimate question relating to power: how do we share equitably the world’s wealth and concomitant power among the races and between the sexes.”³³ Feminist phraseologies are inherited from Simone de Beauvoir that compared the situation of white women with that of “slaves”, “colonials”, the “black minority”, “serfs in a feudal system”, the “Dark Continent”. These comparisons, Okonjo-Ogunyemi notes, “aroused black suspicion that whites will further suppress blacks to make provision for a female victory in the white, sexual, political game.”³⁴

Oyeronke Oyewumi challenged the Western epistemology as projected by Simone de Beauvoir, that the human body is viewed from the perception of gender, resulting in the social categorisation into male and female. Oyewumi argued that “it is well written that in the West, women/females are the ‘*other*’, conceived in antithesis to men/males, who presents the norm.”³⁵ The “body-reasoning” theory stems from Western enlightenment with advantage of sight over other senses. This biological/determinism explanation has advantage above different ways of explaining differences of gender, race or class. Sex is defined as the biological facts of male and female bodies in Euro-America setting. Gender is also defined as the social consequences that flow from these facts. In effect, each society is assumed to have a sex/gender system. Following from the above, Oyewumi argued that “conceiving gender as the epitome of a universal female subordination is a misleading theorisation because it is based on the assumption that these concepts are permeable variations in every society.”³⁶

In the Yoruba conception, “*okunrin* (anatomical male) is not posited as the norm, the essence of humanity, against which *obinrin* (anatomical female) is the other. Nor is *okunrin* a category of privilege. *Obinrin* is not ranked in relation to *okunrin*, it does not have negative connotations of subordination and powerless and; above all, it does not in and of itself constitute any social ranking.”³⁷ Oyewumi thus proposed these concepts “*anamale*” (anatomical males, *okunrin*), *anafemales* (anatomical female, *obinrin*), and *anasex child* – anatomic male and anatomic female – *omo okunrin ati omo obinrin* to indicate the physiological differences between the two anatomies as they have to do with procreation and intercourse.³⁸ In essence, the nature of one’s anatomy does not define one’s social position. The Yoruba social order

requires a social organisation on seniority which is based on chronological age. This seniority is relational and dynamic.

Oyewumi, in another book, *What Gender is Motherhood?* mentioned the exact nature of the shift as a move away from the indigenous seniority-based matripotent ethos to a male-dominant, gender-based one. Her concern is the intersections of power, gender, history, knowledge-making and the role of intellectuals in the process.

In exploring these intersections, Oyewumi focused on *Ifa*. She shows two problems that occur with male academics discussing gender in *Ifa*. She called it “the man question” in *Ifa* as opposed to the standard Eurocentric “woman question”, as the most apposite way of analysing gender in *Ifa*. One, academic writings on gender in Yoruba do not problematise gender categories but assume them to be natural and integral to the culture and knowledge system. Two, their approach exhibits an inherent antifemale bias, because, in searching for images of women in *Ifa*, they have already defined it as a man’s world. These academics also have problems with translating the original language of *Ifa* in Yoruba to English, which has error of translating to English a gendered language in which the male category is privileged, from Yoruba – a seniority-based language in which the social categories did not indicate the type of anatomy.

In addition, Oyewumi posits that the category of *Iya* (mother) is not originally a gender category. *Iya* (mother) is a seniority-based system. She introduced the concept of “matripotency” – supremacy of motherhood – as a lens through which to appreciate and understand the marginalised Yoruba epistemology. For Oyewumi, “matripotency refers to the powers, spiritual and otherwise, deriving from *Iya*’s procreative role. Its efficacy is most pronounced when *Iya* is considered in relation to her birth children. The matripotent ethos expresses the seniority system in that *Iya* is the venerated senior over the children.”³⁹ *What Gender is Motherhood* questions the “fact that in Western discourses that determine intellectual concepts and theories, motherhood is a paradigmatic gender category. However, gender is a social and historical construct, thus we must not impose Euro/American categories on Yoruba unquestioningly.”⁴⁰

Statement of Problem

The primary problem this study addresses is that, Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism suffers from the problem of essentialism, which is the assumption that all women are essentially the same. In feminism, essentialism is the idea that all women are alike, sharing a common "essence" or "certain" "essential traits" that differentiate them from men. The feminist critics of essentialism see it as foreclosing discussion on women's specificity.⁴¹ The upshot of essentialism is that men and women are perceived as essentially different creatures; each category is defined by its own essence. Essentialism fails to put forward any account of historical change in society. Hence, it cannot develop an effective strategy for change, since it ends in polarising the worlds of men and women, while essentialising the two categories.

Simone de Beauvoir's position is that women have, in general, been forced to occupy a secondary place in the world in relation to men. This belief and claim have some evidence in culture, religions, as well as politics and literature. However, this position assumes that women are all the same, that they suffer from the same problem, sharing the same attributes and behaviour. Simone de Beauvoir sees women as being in competition with men. Against this perspective that sees men and women in competition, African Womanism, which is the position pursued by this study, sees the sexes as complementing each other, and not in competition or in antagonism. It tries to overcome the failure in Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism by noting that, though women and men may play different roles in society, they complement each other. Where Simone de Beauvoir sees difference, African Womanism sees role assignment, which does not suggest inferiority of either sex.

In corroboration, Oyeronke Oyewumi argues that African Womanism believes social norms more than being individualistic. She avers that "social identity [between man and woman, *my word*] was relational and was not essentialised."⁴² Oyeronke Oyewumi's central argument is that, in the "pre-colonial Yoruba society, body type was not the basis of social hierarchy. The social category 'woman' anatomically identified and assured to be a victim and socially disadvantaged did not exist."⁴³ The concept "woman" as it is used and as it is invoked in scholarship, is derived from Western experience, especially existential feminism, where the basis for exclusion is their biology. As Signe Arnfred has suggested, "the conceptualisation of gender and sexuality discourses must move beyond that structured by the colonial pejorative imagery of women and men and their sexualities."⁴⁴

Gwendoly Mikell argues that Africans are more conscious of belonging to a social group and relation than otherwise. Furthermore, Ifi Amadiume argues against the essentialist question. She argues that “pre-colonial Igboland was characterised not by men’s domination of women but by a flexible gender system in which women could play roles usually monopolised by men, or be classified as ‘males’ in terms of power and authority over others.”⁴⁵ In addition, she places the blame of rigid gender ideologies and the exclusion of women from the power hierarchy on colonialism and Christian religion.⁴⁶ She also rejects any necessary equation of the social with the physical body. She says the Igbo gender construct is flexible to the extent that there are no roles to the exclusive preserve of men.⁴⁷ Both Oyewumi and Amadiume argue that the most important divisions for women within Yoruba and pre-colonial Igbo societies respectively were constituted through age and seniority.

Apart from the above, the study also fills the gap of scholarship on the need to recognise the role men play in parenting. Simone de Beauvoir claims that woman’s anatomy and biology are used to oppress her. Woman’s biology is perceived as a burden. During copulation, the male puts down his semen; the female accepts it. Stages of pregnancy, birth and weaning debar female individuality. Simone de Beauvoir’s perspective portrays the male as not having a role to play in parenting since he is always keeping and maintaining his individuality.

The man is expected to cater for the female and children materially. The obligation of the man to cater for the female and children means that there is gainful employment for him. This would enable the man to cater for his family. The man is not just a loafer in the way Simone de Beauvoir presents him as one who thinks he needed to abandon the female. This is because, in parenting, the child might be the “other” to the father if he is not available materially and in other means. This might lead us to the assumption that the father is the “Other”. We agree the male and female play equal parts in the process of fertilisation, the male would still be interested in playing his role in the processes of birth and providing for weaning by catering for the female and children materially.

In other cultures in Africa, such as Akan, Igbo, Yoruba and Urhobo, the male also has a very prominent part to play during the rites of passage, especially marriage, where he provides dowry and bride wealth for his child/ren. Bride wealth serves as a source of legalising a marriage and for the man’s kinship to have legitimate claim to the children arising from the marriage. The bride takes some home to start married life with a good wardrobe, while other

items are shared by members of the extended families and their friends. This is another way of announcing the legality of the marriage.

Statement of Thesis

The thesis of the study is expressed thus: African Womanism recognises the fact that the male and female genders play complementary roles in society, rather than being in competition, as assumed by Simone de Beauvoir's existential feminism. There is need to integrate theory with practice, which forms the basis for the search of an alternative terminology that addresses the specificity of African women's experiences. This claim is reinforced by the need for replacement paradigms that speak of how social structures create gendered normative performances for both men and women.

The study analyses the responses of African Womanism which holds that the African man is not an enemy to the woman. The study reiterates the complementarity where male and female as unique individuals, co-exist in mutual love and responsible freedom. "Male and female must be equally involved in projects of creativity and transcendence"⁴⁸, as Sherry Ortner argues. Simone de Beauvoir's account suggests widespread dissatisfaction that no doubt contains a great deal of truth but, at the same time, she might well be accused of presenting a particularly limited or one-dimensional view of what is arguably a complex experience.

Aim and objectives of study

The aim of this study was to examine African Womanism and its complementarity principle with a view to establishing the relationship between gender differences, gender roles and social order in Africa. We interrogated Simone de Beauvoir's book *The Second Sex* and projected the arguments that are meritorious and those that do not apply to the specificity of African women's experiences. There is the need to recognise the role men play in parenthood or parenting. The objectives of the study were as follows:

- i. to examine the way the idea of woman has been understood in religion and culture, and, more importantly, in some philosophical traditions of the past;
- ii. to clarify some essential concepts in gender studies, such as feminism, gender and motherhood, with a view to showing their meaning and social imports;

iii. to critically examine Simone de Beauvoir's contribution to the feminist discourse, especially her existential feminism and her claim that gender is not biological make-up but a social construct; and

iv. to show the contribution of African Womanists to the feminist discourse, especially their recognition of the fact that, in Africa, the relationship between the male and the female genders is not competitive but complementary.

Methodology

To achieve the aim and objectives stated above, we engaged the qualitative method of research. This method used the conceptual-analytic and critical tool of Philosophy. The conceptual-analytic tool enabled us to clarify notions of Existentialism, Feminism, Womanism and African Womanism. Also, we established the major differences and similarities between African Womanism, Womanism, and Africana Womanism.

The critical tool was engaged to interrogate views on the question of "who is a woman?" from Philosophy, religions, like Christianity, African Traditional Religion and Islam, and gender studies. The critical method was also engaged to critique the strengths and the weaknesses of the arguments developed by Simone de Beauvoir in support her existential feminism.

Justification for the Study

The justification for undertaking this study is that the scholarly discourse on the issue of women has a long and checkered pedigree; particular attention is on the views of Oyeronke Oyewumi and works of Mary Modupe Kolawole, Ifi Amadiume, 'Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, Toyin Falola and Nana Amposah. The issue of women and gender would continue to be questioned. The ongoing debates, by their nature, will most likely continue even when a certain level of gender fairness is achieved. Scholars involved in gender and women debates are effectively constructing gender regardless of their stance towards its continuing centrality. Oyeronke Oyewumi traced the question of how Western privileging of the visual ensures that social constructivism and biological determinism cannot be mutually exclusive in Western cultures. Gender categories were one kind of bio-logic new tradition that European colonialism institutionalised in Yoruba and other cultures.

Mary Modupe Kolawole believed African women are sensitive to their condition – they are not “voiceless”. She argues that “throwing one’s voice is ... the best things to have happened to African women in recent years.”⁴⁹ Her recommendation to modern criticism is to dialogue so as to embrace other approaches to African woman’s self-definition. This approach, “accommodates all perspectives to the problem as bearing some relevance to the solution. It is therefore open to a diversity of approaches as opposed to a monovalent imposition of a perspective.”⁵⁰

Molara Ogundipe-Leslie interrogates the oppression of women not solely on radical confrontation – although the subjugation of black women is often associated with the history of imperialism done to different races. In addition, “the study of women must be done from class perspective, taking cognizance of class differences in all societies, Africa in particular. Such an inclusive approach would yield a truer picture of women’s place in society.”⁵¹ She notes that “colonialism put a stop to the economic opportunities for women. Women had engaged in agricultural sectors and industrial labour such as pottery, cloth-making, and crafts work, among other activities alongside their men.”⁵² She suggests “education as the way out of oppression. It is a way of providing the social and economic basis and security from which women can resist subjection and indignities.”⁵³

Toyin Falola and Nana Amposah investigate the fundamental questions that “confront women on whether the paradigmatic frameworks used to examine women have promoted new dimensions to the discourse and whether the visibility has engendered sensitivity to the realities, commonalities, and divergence of African women’s experiences.”⁵⁴ They both call for “replacement paradigms that speak to how social structures create gendered normative performance for both women and men. Such paradigms would topple the idea of men’s monolithic dominance and women’s universal subordination.”⁵⁵

This study is justified by the fact that the questioning should continue. The present study provides an alternative to the core issue of the existential feminism of Simone de Beauvoir. This work is an attempt to present an alternative in which both men and women are accommodated.

Chapter Analysis

The study is divided into six chapters. The Introduction begins with the background to the study. This is followed by Literature Review, Statement of Problem, Statement of Thesis, Aim and objectives of the study, Methodology, Justification for the study, Chapter Analysis and Contributions to Knowledge.

Chapter One: The Idea of Woman

This addresses the question of the complex social problems of the status, rights and roles of women in human society, especially philosophy and religions, like Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion. It also considers the ways the woman is perceived in Philosophy with particular reference to Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. We revisit the arguments of Aristotle in *Generation in Animals*, *Ethics* and *Politics*; Thomas Aquinas in *Summa Theologia* and Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *Discourse*. We bring out from these philosophers the fact that there is a natural hierarchical order which give women what they perceived is cognisance to their nature. These would serve as a build-up to the discussion of what leads to the social problems of the status, rights and roles of women in the areas we are considering. These areas are History of Philosophy and religions, like Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion.

Chapter Two: Clarification of Concepts: Existentialism, Feminism and Womanism

This chapter assesses the following concepts: Existentialism, Feminism and Womanism. Here, we attempt a theoretical framework that gives us various dimensions of Existentialism. We look at Feminism in different forms, notably Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Socialist Feminism and Ecofeminism. For Womanism, we trace the origin and several affixes to Womanism, such as Black Womanism, Africana Womanism or Alice Walker's Womanism and African Womanism.

The work considered it useful to study Feminism and Womanism via the chosen trajectory in order to point out the differences and explain the struggle of black women who could not accept the issues that feminism typically addresses.

Chapter Three: The Existential Feminist Perspective of Simone de Beauvoir

This focuses on the main argument of Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of the nature and causes of women's subordination. The historically accepted differences between the sexes,

according to her, rest on social conditions which permit the subjugation of women by men. The female is trapped within her body in a way which the male is not and because of her inability to transcend her biology. The activities of pregnancy, birth and weaning debar female individuality. These are done to show why the woman is the “other” and search for ways to think about them.

Chapter Four: Various Strands of African Womanism

This chapter provides arguments for the various strands of African Womanism after tracing the origin and the affixes to Womanism. Here we recognise the need to re-conceptualise woman and engender new paradigms in line with Mary Ebu Modupe and Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi’s black consciousness. This womanist alternative emerged from self-naming and self-reclamation based on the African philosophical thought on naming and identity; and is based on the notion that an outsider can hardly understand the experiences and struggle of another. Hence, in this exposition the works of Mary Ebu Modupe and Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi are critically analysed to showcase African Womanism. We also identify certain characteristics which African Womanism shares with Womanism and Africana Womanism. We equally identify peculiar characteristics which African Womanism should possess.

Chapter Five: The Womanist’s Response

It concentrates on the responses of African Womanists to the existential feminist perspective of Simone de Beauvoir. We consider some works which we consider as responses of African Womanist, even though these authors have not classified themselves as African Womanists. Thus, we identify the responses of Oyeronke Oyewumi, whose works go beyond African Womanism and Ifi Amadiume.

The chapter also identifies the womanist responses to include African Womanists not taking African men as enemies. African Womanists are not apprehensive of motherhood. Here we note the gendering of the institution of motherhood that leads to its patriarchalisation. Also, motherhood is a lifelong commitment and motherhood in Africa is not sex-based. We also note that motherhood entails both male and female performing their roles.

Chapter Six: Womanism and Harmonious Coexistence in Society

This provides arguments for Womanism and harmonious coexistence in the society. We anchor our argument to Plato’s ideal State in *Republic* where each sex must perform his/her duties without invading the areas dominated by the other sex. We argue that living the

harmonious existence in society entails each sex utilising his/her unique, endowed natural physiological powers and talents to complement the other. We emphasise the need to use what is inherent in the African value system to organise the relations between males and females.

The conclusion of the work provides a summary of all the major chapters in the work and the reiteration of our position. We point out that Simone de Beauvoir's accounts on the causes of women's oppression rest on social conditions which permeate the subjugation of women by men. We note that Simone de Beauvoir's account suggests widespread dissatisfaction that contains a great deal of truth but she might also be accused of presenting a one-dimensional view, which African Womanism responds to by expanding the repertoire for intersectional analysis beyond gender and biological sex. There is avenue to foster stronger relationship between men and women. This relationship aims at gender complementarity where men and women, as unique individuals co-exist in mutual love and responsible freedom. Men also should not be seen as the "other", so that the father would not be the "other" to the mother or child/ren.

Contributions to knowledge

This study contributes to Feminism, Womanism, African Womanism and Women Studies, in general. It challenges the boundaries of disciplines and knowledge and the construction of knowledge itself. Our contribution to knowledge, in particular includes enhancing of the study of women by Simone de Beauvoir and making it a worthwhile women studies theory. The study points out the nub of Simone de Beauvoir's accounts on the causes of women's oppression. This, in our idea, creates a knowledge which is a representation of activities where women should assume the creation of man as man would have been, that is, having masculine qualities such as competitiveness, aggression, power, and dominance. This is because there is the need to re-conceptualise women and engender new paradigms that unpack the baggage of Western feminist theorisation to the African experience.

Furthermore, this study does not merely focus its idea on pointing out the inadequacies of Simone de Beauvoir's account of motherhood, which treats women both as means and end as the surest way to appreciate motherhood. The study also contends that there is need to recognise the role men play in parenthood or parenting, and the discussion of the social and personal aspects of paternity. "If motherhood is a mystery to some women, given the arrival of a child who is the archetypal other or repetition"⁵⁶, as Simone de Beauvoir argues, then how

much more a child might be the “other” to the father should be accommodated? Nobody would like to be the “other” to other. So the father should not be then “other” to the mother or child/ren. The male provides for both the male and female children. He also plays a prominent part during the rites of passage, especially marriage, through provision of dowry and bridewealth for his child/ren. Hence, this work contributes the complementary principle that serves as a theoretical framework which African Womanism adopts.

The work also contributes to knowledge by considering some works which are responses of African Womanism even when these authors have not classified themselves as African Womanists. Their works reiterate Womanist project and go beyond womanism.

Endnotes

- ¹Aderonke Adesola Adesanya. 2013. Of silences, bended knees and sexuality: insights on the gendered (re)presentations in Yoruba art. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. 76.
- ²Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 1974. Introduction. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo. and Louise Lamphere 1.
- ³Anne C. Minas. 1993. *Gender basic: feminist perspectives on women and men*. 6.
- ⁴Ruth Sheila. 1980. *Issues in feminism: A first course in woman's studies*. 98.
- ⁵Ruth Sheila. 1980. *Issues in feminism: A first course in woman's studies*.115.
- ⁶Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 1974. Introduction. *Women, culture and society*. 1.
- ⁷Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 7.
- ⁸Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 36.
- ⁹Toyin Falola and S.U. Fwatshak. 2011. Ed. *Beyond tradition: African women in cultural and political spaces*. xv. See also Toyin Falola and Nasongo'o S. Wanjala. 2016. Eds. *Gendering African social spaces: women, power and cultural expressions*. 11.
- ¹⁰Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 52.
- ¹¹Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 267.
- ¹²Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. xxxix.
- ¹³Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. xxxix.
- ¹⁴Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. xii.
- ¹⁵Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. xxii-xxiii.
- ¹⁶Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 20.
- ¹⁷Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 719.
- ¹⁸Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 484.
- ¹⁹Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 696.
- ²⁰Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 719.
- ²¹Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 725.
- ²²Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 117.
- ²³Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of Western gender discourses*. 184.
- ²⁴Helen Nabasuta Mugambi. 2007. The "post-gender" question in African studies, *Africa after gender?* Eds. Catherine M. Cole, Takyiwaa Manuh and Stephen F. Miescher. 286.

- ²⁵Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 26.
- ²⁶Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 27.
- ²⁷Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 8.
- ²⁸Shuilamith Firestone. 1979. *The dialectic of sex: the case for feminist Revolution*. 40.
- ²⁹Shuilamith Firestone. 223-224, 233, 261-262.
- ³⁰Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 13.
- ³¹Signe Arnfred. 2005. *Rethinking sexualities in Africa*. 253.
- ³²Signe Arnfred. 2005. *Rethinking sexualities in Africa*. 253.
- ³³Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in english, *signs*. 11:1, 68.
- ³⁴Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in english, *signs*. 11:1, 68.
- ³⁵Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 33.
- ³⁶Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. xii.
- ³⁷Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 33.
- ³⁸Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 34, 41.
- ³⁹Oyeronke Oyewumi. 2016. *What gender is motherhood? Changing yoruba ideals of power, procreation, and identity in the age of modernity*. 52, 58.
- ⁴⁰Oyeronke Oyewumi. 2016. *What gender is motherhood? Changing yoruba ideals of power, procreation, and identity in the age of modernity*. 7.
- ⁴¹Abosedede Priscilla Ipadeola. 2012. A maternal feminist critique of John Locke's contractarian egalitarianism – a PhD Progress report in the Department of Philosophy, University of Ibadan, presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy, December, 16.
- ⁴²Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses* xiii.
- ⁴³Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses* 79.
- ⁴⁴Signe Arnfred. 2005. *Rethinking sexualities in Africa*. 4.
- ⁴⁵Ifi Amadiume. 2015. *Male daughters, female husbands gender and sex in an Africa society*. 185.

- ⁴⁶Ifi Amadiume. 2015. *Male daughters, female husbands gender and sex in an Africa society*. 185.
- ⁴⁷Ifi Amadiume. 2015. *Male daughters, female husbands gender and sex in an Africa society*. 15.
- ⁴⁸Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 1974. Introduction. *Women, culture and society*. 87.
- ⁴⁹Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 7.
- ⁵⁰Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 36.
- ⁵¹‘Molara Ogundipe-Leslie. 1985. Nigeria: not spinning on the axis of maleness. *Sisterhood is global*. Ed. Robin Morgan. 499.
- ⁵²‘Molara Ogundipe-Leslie. 1985. Nigeria: not spinning on the axis of maleness. *Sisterhood is global*. Ed. Robin Morgan. 500.
- ⁵³‘Molara Ogundipe-Leslie. 1985. Nigeria: not spinning on the axis of maleness. *Sisterhood is global*. Ed. Robin Morgan. 503.
- ⁵⁴Toyin Falola and Nana Amposah. 2013. Introduction. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. 10.
- ⁵⁵Toyin Falola and Nana Amposah. 2013. Introduction. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. 11.
- ⁵⁶Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 719.

CHAPTER ONE

The idea of *woman*

This chapter examines the question of the complex social problems of the status, rights and roles of women in the human society, especially in philosophy and religions, like Islam, Christianity and the African Traditional Religion. It considers the ways woman is perceived in philosophy with particular reference to philosophies of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. These philosophers argue that there is a natural hierarchical order which gives women what they perceived was appropriate to their nature. The chapter also considers religions like Islam, Christianity and the African Traditional Religion from the way they perceive women. We argue that some or part of Islam is used to entrench the subservience of women, while, in Christianity, Jesus Christ, who was the founder, worked with women within a patriarchal culture and had regards for them. People are expected to emulate him even as his teachings were restructured to conform to the traditional societal views of female. In African Traditional Religion, males and females play complementary roles, according to the dictates of the god or goddess.

The question of “who is a woman?” is one of the oldest questions in the history of thought. A woman has been conceived in various ways in different disciplines. We shall consider the way this question has been answered in philosophy and in gender studies. The question is a social problem. Embedded in the question are such things as a woman’s role in society and the family, maternity and ways of identity and liberation of women from oppression. When faced with the question, the answer we give most times is determined by what man says she is. Aderonke Adesola Adesanya avers that “women derive definition by their relationship with men.”¹ Simone de Beauvoir answers the question by defining herself as a female who should be respected in society.²

The history of the views of early male philosophers about women is a dreary one of misogyny. Aristotle wrote within the cultural tradition of misogyny. His thoughts about women reflected in the scientific and philosophic writings of other philosophers after him. Aristotle was a chronic supporter of the inferiority of the female sex. His belief in female inferiority entered into his physiology, biology, as well as political, ethical and aesthetic theories.³

Thomas Aquinas reconciled Christian doctrines with the philosophy of Aristotle. He exerted tremendous influence on Western culture. His philosophy has become the official

philosophic authority of the Catholic Church. He accepted the holistic, all-embracing nature of Aristotle's project but incorporated a divine hierarchy into the ancient natural one. He accepted the Aristotelian account of generation, and with it, the claim that the female as the more passive partner plays a lesser role, and that the reproduction of a new female is the result of an inferior process.⁴ This link was also taken by Jean-Jacques Rousseau in *Emile* theory of education, in which *Emile* and *Sophy* prototype, male and female, are followed from childhood into young adulthood as models of the properly educated.⁵ Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that there is a natural hierarchical order which give women what they perceived was appropriate to their nature. All these scholars, in some sense, perceived an organic community in which there is a natural hierarchy. Within this, women are granted a significant role, perceived as consistent with their nature, which gives them a definite place in the order of things.

We also know that women are questioning their own definitions and identities: who they are and who do they represent. For example, there are questions of the relations of race, class and political power. Womanism, for example, is a word coined to explain the struggle of black women who could not accept the issues that feminism typically addresses. The womanist project dismantles racism, neocolonialism, Euro-American patriarchy, as well as power among races and sexes.

Another question is the women's bodies/identities which are objectified and constantly having to balance simultaneously their position in societal perception and their own self-view. One excellent example is the arguments of Nwando Achebe and Bridget Teboh. They contend that "there are significant conceptual challenges that African women face in internalising one's 'womanness' and 'Africanness', especially in circumstances of 'hybridity' where one lives between two worlds – and instituting a sense of balance between one's emerged identity and academic endeavours."⁶

Although Simone de Beauvoir's arguments as indicated above are concerned with defining women and show the hegemony of men over women, the qualities and capacities which women should emulate are masculine. The masculine qualities are competitiveness, aggression, power and dominance. In her opinion for a woman to succeed biologically and economically, and create a social evolution, she must act like man, rejecting all attributes given to her by men who define society. Furthermore, she notes that the upbringing of a male child is

not problematic, but the girl child is denied autonomy. Girls are taught to please others and to bend their will to that of others. They are taught coquetry and compliance, never to assert themselves. Simone de Beauvoir explains that:

The greatest advantage enjoyed by boy is that his mode of existence in relation to others leads him to assert his subjective freedom. His apprenticeship for life consists in free movement toward the outside world; he contends in hardihood and independence with other boys, he scorns girls. Climbing trees, fighting with his companions, facing them in rough games, he feels his body as a means for dominating nature and as a weapon for fighting He undertakes, he invents, he dares.⁷

Simone de Beauvoir thereby creates a position which is a representation of activity with regard to the social role of women. They should assume the creation of man as man would have been.

Tracing the woman question to Greek philosophers

Owing to the growing phenomena of culture and civilisation and the arrival of the Sophists, the interest of philosophers changed to man in society. This generic use of “man” is meant to include both male and female. But we know that the individuated male rather than the generic male was the focus. The Sophists were a group of teachers and philosophers in the fifth century BC who became famous as itinerant teachers of logic, philosophy of mythology and rhetoric, especially to the youths, and gave popular lectures in the cities. This made them to gather a valuable store of knowledge and experience. In addition to grammar and rhetoric, they taught arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy. They laid the foundations for the liberal arts curriculum that was to influence education for many centuries.⁸

While the Milesian scholars try to discover what the truth was, the Sophists did not primarily focus on objective truth, but practical truth. Thus, the Sophists were instructors and trainers in Greek cities, who taught the art and the act of controlling life. They doubted the possibility of knowing anything for certain. Relativism is another characteristic feature of the Sophists, for they were relativists who denied the possibility of man attaining absolute and objective truths. This relativism was what Socrates and Plato mainly reacted to, by establishing the sure foundation of true knowledge and ethical judgments.

Aristotle

Aristotle is a chronic believer in the view that the female gender is inferior. His belief in female inferiority is evident in his physiology, biology, as well as political, ethical and aesthetic theories. He employs some of the concepts encountered in his metaphysics, namely potentiality and actuality. It was his “scientific” proof of this subordination which has tended to dominate so much of Western thinking. We shall try to show some of these theories in what follows.

Aristotle opts for a hierarchical system. He also adopts a naturalist and functionalist approaches: the socio-political systems that correspond with the prevailing arrangement which are observable and readily available for classification. According to him, women are intellectually and morally inferior to men. All men need to prove such inferiority to themselves is to consult the voice of nature, and nature, he feels, is quite unequivocal on male superiority. Aristotle observes that everywhere in the animal world, the male of the species is demonstrably more sophisticated; thus, male domination is willed by nature. Aristotle says “females are weaker and colder in nature, and we must look upon the female character as being a sort of natural deficiency.”⁹ Aristotle evaluates nature on the basis of imagined principle of equality which contradicts the interests of both the individual and the community. The relationship of husband and wife is not that of equals “the male is by nature superior and the female inferior and the one rules, and the other is ruled.”¹⁰

In Book III of *Politics*, Aristotle shifts his attention from the idea of the *polis* to a description and analysis of actual politics from the perspective of the lawgiver, who may properly be called citizens. They are those persons who participate in deliberative and judicial functions. Aristotle excludes from citizenship the larger number of the residents of any State: women, children, slaves, resident aliens, mechanics, farmers and tradesman, since “they do not share the leisure necessary for the growth of virtue nor to be used for political duties.”¹¹ The knowledge possessed by slaves and women is a special type; it varies according to their various natures. Aristotle expresses himself thus:

On the other hand, since slaves are men and share in reason; it seems absurd to say that they have no virtue. A similar question may be raised about women and children. It is evident therefore; that both of them must (ruler and subject) have a share of virtue, but varying according to their various natures. Slaves and women are supposed to partake in such a manner and degree as is required by each for the fulfillment of his duty. For the slave has

no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is ‘without authority’ and the child has but it is immature.¹²

In addition to the above, the best *polis* consists of citizens who are mature men of practical wisdom (*spoudaioi*).

A major challenge to Aristotle’s male superiority argument is the reproduction principle. Aristotle holds that male semen exit; a female does not have. The male semen supplies the form and the female supplies the matter fitting for shaping. Aristotle says, “if the male stands for effective and active; and the female for passive, it follows that what the female would contribute to the semen of the male would not be semen but material for the semen to work upon.”¹³

Flowing from, Aristotle believes women are meant by nature to be passive. They are less temperate and restrive than men in their desires, because they are the weaker sex. Each group in society has different excellence and function. A woman has special goodness, a slave has, though a woman’s is less than a man’s and that of a slave is wholly inferior.³¹ Aristotle explains further:

The slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has, but it is immature. So it must necessarily be supposed to be with the moral virtues also; all should partake of them, but only in such manner and degree as is required by each for the fulfillment of his duty Clearly, then, moral virtue belongs to all of them, but the temperance of a man and of a woman, or the courage and justice of a man and of a woman are not, as Socrates maintained, the same; the courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying.¹⁴

There is an important distinction between the rule of one citizen over another and husband’s rule over his wife, in that, the former is temporary and appropriate, but the latter is permanent. Although exceptions abound to natural order, the male is more for control than the female by nature, just as the elder is superior to and more mature than the younger.

From the above discussion, the household is natural because it houses production and reproduction. It facilitates life. It is necessary to a well-ordered life, and may even participate in a limited expression of the good life. But the household exists on behalf of that higher political institution (more natural in a teleological sense) that is self-sufficient and an arena of the good life itself. Women and slaves exist for the sake of rational male citizens; they remain in the

realm of necessity rather than freedom, a pre-requisite of the good life rather than participants in it. Once women perform their natural function which exists for a higher political institution, they have fulfilled their natural order of things and their function should not be tampered with. Aristotle uses the argument above to accuse Plato of seeking to achieve an undesirable and unnatural degree of unity in his community. John H. Hallowell and Jene M. Porter note from Plato's argument that "a true polis consists of a plurality: the harmonious living together of different kinds of persons, possessing different capacities and sharing different kinds of services."¹⁵

Not only would a community of women and children produce an undesirable kind of unity but also it would be impracticable. It would dilute parental feeling and responsibility to the point where no one would feel genuinely responsible as a parent. Aristotle argues that "every citizen will have a thousand sons who will not be his sons, individually, but anybody will be equally the son of anybody, and will therefore be neglected by all alike."¹⁶ Furthermore, "but which is better – for each to say 'mine' in this way, making a man the same relation to two thousand or ten thousand citizens, or to use the word 'mine' as it is now used in States?"¹⁷ Moreover, Plato's intentions will not be achieved. Plato advocates a community of wives and children in part to avoid nepotism, to prevent parents who were guardians from showing favouritism towards their own offspring. But Aristotle points out that children tend to look like their parents, "for children are born like their parents and they will necessarily be finding indications of their relationship to one another."¹⁸

Aristotle contends that "woman's glory is silence but not the man."¹⁹ He does not feel he is treating women badly or giving them anything less their due. In fact, Aristotle argues that only barbarians treated women as slaves, and he regards himself and his fellow Greeks as far from being barbarians. Aristotle opines that "but among barbarians no distinction is made between women and slaves, because there is no natural ruler among them, they are a community of slaves, male and female."²⁰ The natural hierarchy Aristotle speaks of "is one structured in terms of functional relations such that the functions of inferior is always to fulfill end which conduce to the realisation of yet higher ends by superior."²¹

Could women be included in an Aristotelian theory of nature? We ask the question to interrogate Aristotle. This case is very complex. If he had allowed women the status of rational beings, it would have made impossible one of the major premises of his political theory;

namely, the belief that some classes of human beings were destined to perform menial (and reproductive) labour in order that others might lead a life free from these things. In other words, Aristotle's philosophy could not remain unchanged if women were regarded as equal to men. One anomaly might have been removed, but it would have been at the cost of undermining the foundations of his whole political theory. The above argument conforms to the submission of Susan Okin, that the functionalist theory of form advanced by Aristotle was intended to support the political situation in the then Athens as well as slavery and inequality of women.²²

Thomas Aquinas

Thomas Aquinas is well known for his reconciliation of the Christian doctrine with the philosophy of Aristotle. He accepts the holistic, all-embracing nature of Aristotle's project but incorporates a divine hierarchy into the ancient's natural one. Thomas Aquinas accepts the Aristotelian account of generation and with it the claims that the female, as the more passive partner, plays a lesser role, and that the reproduction of new female is the result of an inferior process. He says, "it was necessary for women to be made, as the Scripture says, as a helper to man; not, indeed, as a helpmate in other works, as some say, since man can be more efficiently helped by another man in other works, but as a helper in the work of generation."²³ It follows from above that woman's purpose, though valuable, is a lesser one vis-à-vis humanity's end, than is man's.

Thomas Aquinas states man's nobler job which is more than generation of life that is intellectual life: "... man is yet further ordered to a still vital action, and that is intellectual operation."²⁴ Thomas Aquinas does not give a nobler job for the woman because her purpose is to help perpetuate a species whose principle lies in man. Woman's natural function is procreation, and similarly, her subjection to her husband is not merely a result of Eve's malediction but a function of the natural order. Thomas Aquinas establishes this point by drawing on Aristotle's rather inconsistent claim regarding the beneficiaries of servility and giving them a religious gloss. Thomas Aquinas proposes an argument which could be abbreviated in this form: "now a woman is subject by her nature, whereas a slave is not"; 'Woman is subject to man on account of the frailty of nature, as regards both vigour of soul and strength of body.'²⁵ From the foregoing, we conclude that Aquinas recognises a unique place for woman in the divine plan, as Aristotle has granted her in the polis. She is not evil or

superfluous, nor is she but a man with additional obstacles to salvation presented by her more corporeal definition. Aquinas thus proclaims the woman as an “incidental” being, that is the accidental or contingent nature of sexuality.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau

Jean-Jacques Rousseau argues that before progress could take place, a moral revolution was necessary and such a revolution could occur when government itself has been transformed into an expression of popular will. Part of such a revolution would establish the ideal relation between the male and the female, where men would be active and strong, and women passive and weak. Rousseau holds that it is necessary that one sex has the power and the will, and the other be subordinate. He contends that those who advocate equality of the sexes with reciprocal duties and obligations are indulging themselves in idle declamations. To cultivate the qualifications of the male in the female implies the neglect of those qualities which are peculiar to the sex, and therefore contrary to human nature.

Rousseau believes the argument is obvious and could be confirmed from experience, that is, “where man and woman are alike, it deals with the species; and where they are unlike; it deals with the sex. The resemblances and differences in man and woman must have an influence on the moral nature.”²⁶ Thus, Rousseau declares that “a woman is a man; she has the same organs, needs and faculties.”²⁷ However, her sexual function is soon discovered to suffuse her entire existence, rather than her humanity defining her. Pregnancy, childbearing, nursing, gaining the father’s love and credulity sufficiently to integrate him into the family, all conspire to fill her life. From this sexual act itself, “the man should be strong and active; the woman should be weak and passive.”²⁸ This is what Rousseau terms the first moral principle. He adds that the woman is specifically made for man’s delight. If she is made to please and to be in subjection to man, she ought to make herself pleasing in his eyes and not provoke him to anger. Moreover, Rousseau would see *Emile* as a weaker party.

He makes the same sort of teleological deductions, documenting the type of qualities a woman must have in order to fulfill her natural function with virtuosity. The ideal woman for Rousseau is like Sophy who remained naturally good and domesticated or those whom he divides into the other class – who eschew their natural duties in order to emulate men and take up positions in the public ward.

Rousseau's likeness for female seclusion in the home is twofold. First, it prevents women from taking their particular powers into the public realm, where they would be inappropriate. Second, women must also be kept out of public in order to safeguard their natural qualities.

Education of the woman

Rousseau argues for different approaches in woman's and man's education. This is because a man thinks of himself. Once he acts right in public space, he may defy public opinion; but when a woman acts right, her task is only half done and what she does in public space people must think of her matters on who she is.²⁹ The woman takes care of the baby from infancy, so also the early education of male or female, morals, passions, tastes, pleasures, and happiness depend on her.³⁰ Rousseau then concludes thus:

A woman's education must therefore be planned in relation to man. To be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood, to counsel and console, to make his life pleasant and happy, these are the duties of woman for all time, and this is what she should be taught while she is young³¹

Physically, training for boys and girls should differ. In boys, it is for development of strength; while in girls, it is for grace. Women should be strong enough to do anything charmingly; men should be skillful enough to do anything effortlessly. Women's strength is meant for their sons to be strong. The tastes of boys consist in movement and noise, drums, tops, toycarts, while girls prefer things which appeal to the eye and can be used for dressingup-mirrors, jewellery, finery and dolls.

In conclusion, as a way of interrogating Rousseau, reasoning is required to discern the general will. Individuals must not only reason, they must do so independently. Should their thoughts be too influenced by others' beliefs or interests, then the delicate balancing of individual differences will degenerate into clusters of particularity. Yet, one cannot think of Rousseau's women making bias judgement of the public good since they have been raised and educated to make no independent judgement: their guide is always the question "what will others think of me?"

Religions

Besides philosophy, religions, such as Islam and Christianity, serve as change agents as they define the social problem of the status, rights and roles of women. Islam secludes women and reduces their chances of economic independence. Christianity ascribes to the male the leadership of the family.³²

Christianity

Christianity shaped Western civilisation. It influenced their institutions, by giving moral steps for Western laws. When Christianity got to Africa, it brought in its patriarchal culture to bear on the gender classification of Africa characterised by mutuality and interdependency. In fact African gender identities have been expressly fluid, spiced with wealth, age, seniority and ritual authority.³³ Oyeronke Olajubu asserts that:

with the coming of colonisation and [European colonising missionary on the other hand, *my word*], women's roles in the African polity was greatly minimised and eventually eroded whereas the services of men were encouraged and invested in through Western education to become interpreters, catechists and warrant chiefs etc., thereby facilitating male migration to urban centre and their wives away from kin groups to embrace a new social identity for females as dependents and appendages of men.³⁴

She further notes:

This cultural contact between Africa and Western civilisation could be described as an exchange as evinced by the creation of African Christianity and the influence of African cultural philosophy on practices and Biblical interpretations in Orthodox Christianity in Africa. A direct product of this exchange was the distinction made between the private and public sectors, which translated to the disempowerment of African woman.³⁵

In another dimension, all the writers of the Bible are males. Male language was generally used and the hegemony of male is entrenched. Thus, the Bible passages talk about the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, never of the God of Sarah, Rebecca, Leah and Rachael or Deborah, Hannah and Ruth. That is why J. Omosade Awolalu argues that “the Oriental world is predominantly male, and since the three religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam) emanated from that kind of environment, they unavoidably have imbibed the prevailing culture.”³⁶ Also,

Mary Daly puts the issue in the starkest of terms: “if God is a male, the male is God. The divine patriarch castle cut off women, as long as God lives on the human imagination.”³⁷ There is also the Talmud prayer which Israelite men recite with pride, vis: praise be He (that is Yahweh) that he did not create me as a heathen, as an ignorant man or as a woman. To the male Jews, to be created a woman was an ignominy, if not a curse.³⁸

Christian concepts came not only from the teachings of Jesus but also from Jewish, Roman and Greek beliefs. Christianity depends upon the Jewish background and adopted more of the ideas and attitudes of Greece and Rome.³⁹ Instances can be seen, in the use of *Logos* in Johannie gospel, the Cynic-Stoic mode of argumentation called diatribe by Paul in Romans 2:1-20; 3:1-9; 9:19 and I Corinthians 9.⁴⁰ Also Paul uses images from the city culture of Hellenist, Greek political terminology, Greek games and Greek commercial terms. Over all, since Christianity was competing with various other redemptive cults for supremacy, it was influenced by what its rivals said or taught, either positively or negatively.⁴¹

Elizabeth Stanton lists and comments on all the passages in the Bible that refer to women to show how woman’s subjugation has been used to hold her in a “divinely ordained sphere prescribed in the Old and New Testaments.”⁴² Stanton avers that:

There are two contradictory accounts of creation. The first account dignifies woman as an important factor in the creation, equal in power and glory with man. The second account makes woman a mere afterthought. The world is running good order without her. The only reason for her advent is the solitude of man. The first account is called Yahwist account found in Genesis 1:26-28 while the second is called Priestly account found in Genesis 2:4.⁴³

Stanton further argues that the fall of man and woman; and “its punishment for woman is also used to support how the subordination of women came about. The curse pronounced on woman is inserted as an unfriendly spirit to justify her degradation and subjection to man.”⁴⁴ Thus, through sin and punishment, the woman was made subservient to the man.

Jesus Christ, who is the Messiah to all Christians was never reported by any writer of the canonical Gospels as having derogatory attitudes towards women. Although Jesus Christ was born into the Jewish environment, he was not influenced by it. The attitude of Jesus to women was contrary to the socio-cultural situation of his time. He broke the tradition and accepted them as part of His ministry. He engaged several women, including Mary Magdalene,

Martha and Mary, the Samaritan woman, the mother of the sons of Zebedee, Canaanite woman, Susanna, Joanna and many others who provided for him and the Twelve out of their own resources (cf. Matthew 15: 21-28, Luke 7:36-50; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; John 4:7-42).

Jesus Christ from his teachings did not proclaim a new code but built upon the Jewish legacy of his time. In his dealings with women Jesus Christ refused to be bound by the shackles of petty convention. An example is when he discussed his mission with a Samaritan woman at the well (cf. John 4: 4-45), though it was considered improper for him both as a Jew and a male, to converse with her because she was a hated Samaritan and an inferior woman. His disciples marvelled at him conversing with a woman, not to talk of a Samaritan woman. They even urged Jesus to come and eat; his answer elongated the surprise.

Furthermore, in Jesus' statements on marriage and divorce, especially in Matthew 5:31-32, 19:3-9; Mark 10:11-12, he applied the same standards on adultery, divorce and remarriage to men as traditionally as had applied to women. Yet, his disciples complained about the severity of this teaching and contended it might be better for men not to marry if it was enforced. Jesus' replies looked somewhat ambiguous for them to swallow.

From the above, we share Vern L. Bullough's argument that "the teaching of Jesus might have offered a higher conception of women and given new meaning and potential to the relationship between man and woman, they were soon adapted to conform to the traditional views that society had of women."⁴⁵ In addition, we agree with Pope Benedict XVI's recommendation that "the Church has the duty to contribute to the recognition and liberation of women, following the examples of Christ's own esteem for them (cf. Matthew 15: 21-28, Luke 7:36-50; 8:1-3; 10:38-42; John 4:7-42)"⁴⁶ knowing that the status of women is changing within the twenty-first century.

The formulation of Christian attitudes toward women is in the works of St. Paul, an apostle of Gentiles (cf. Romans 11:13) who contributed more letters to the New Testament than any other apostles. He claims to have done more missionary work than others (cf. I Corinthians 15:10b), including St. Peter, the head of the Apostles (cf. Acts. 1:15-26, 2:14-41). We also know and acknowledge that women played an important part in the emerging Christian Church. They were among the earliest and most faithful converts (cf. Acts. 16:14-15; 17:4, 12, 34); they displayed charismatic gifts (cf. Acts. 21:9); they devoted themselves to charity (cf. Acts. 9:36-42); dispensed hospitality (cf. Acts. 12:12, 16:15, 40; Romans 16:2); laboured in the tasks of

evangelisation (cf. Romans 16:1, 3-4, 6, 12; Philippians 4:2-3); and imparted instruction in the faith (cf. Acts. 18:26), especially Aquilla and his wife Priscilla instructing Apollos in the faith.

Let us then look at the writings of the various evangelists that helped to shape the life of Christian churches in the Biblical narratives. The evangelists acknowledged the fact that women were equal in spirit to men, yet this fact was relegated to the background and emphasis was on keeping the traditional views that society had of women. While women were recognised as joint heirs of God's gift of life (cf. I Peter 3:7b), they were also called the weaker vessel (cf. I Peter 3:7b) and they reflect the glory of man and were created for man's sake (cf. I Corinthians 11:4-9).

Furthermore, no permission was given to women to teach in the Church (cf. I Timothy 2:12); they were ordered to maintain silent. If there is any questions or what they wanted to learn anything, they were to ask their husbands at home because God had created them from man and for him as well (cf. I Corinthians 14:34-36). In their homes, they were to learn in all quietness and subjection, making sure that they did not usurp authority over the man (cf. I Timothy 2:11-12). It is this I Timothy 2:8-15 that Hilary Mijoga argues as the major contribution to the discussion of women's marginalisation in the Bible.⁴⁷

We could conclude that the writings of St. Peter and St. Paul which we explore in the above texts conform to the traditional views their society had of women. In a letter, women are recognised as joint heirs of the grace of life and equal in spirit to men. In another, with emphasis on the sin of Adam and Eve, it was the woman who was at fault, since "Adam was not led to become lost but the woman who was led astray and fell into sin" (cf. I Timothy 2:14).

Theresa Okure raises a fundamental question: Should we stress the superiority of the woman to the man or reverse the question of man to woman; and shall the man be one of subjection? This is just tantamount to replacing one superior-inferior terminology with another patriarchy with matriarchy or vice versa).⁴⁸ If we accept the replacement of the superior-inferior terminology, would it remove the origin of women's oppression? This is because patriarchal principles would not have been removed if we accept the superior-inferior terminology. It is the entrenching principles that are needed to be challenged and then we can change the state of affairs.

Islam

Islamic scholars argue that the Quran is a book of guidance for what one should do in today's life. Katumi Mahama corroborates this assertion; "the Quran and Hadith the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (P), are the two main sources of Islamic law. They represent the standard by which to judge adherence to Islam."⁴⁹ As a way of guidance, Surah 4, which is called Surah *Annisa* is entitled "Women". Surah 4:1 says: "O people! Be careful of (your duty to) your Lord, Who created you from a single being and created its mate of the same (kind) and spread from these two; many men and women."⁵⁰ This verse recognises the spiritual equality between man and woman at the time of creation. Yet, the same Surah, in verse 34, says "men are the maintainers of women because Allah has made some of them to excel others ... the good women are therefore obedient, guarding the unseen as Allah has guarded; and (as to) women those on whose part you fear desertion, admonish the (women), and leave them alone in the sleeping-places and beat them; then if they obey you, do not seek a way against them"⁵¹ The verse 1 of Surah 4 contradicts verse 34 of the same Surah by countering the equal rights of man and woman given at creation. However, we shall add that there are verses here and there in the Quran which indicate that women, inasmuch as they are good believers should be considered as equals to men (Surah 9:72, 33:35, 48:5).

In the area of offering prescribed prayer in the mosque for the congregation, different rules and regulations are laid down for men and women. Although women are capable of leading the prayer for a congregation of women, the leader of the prayer is always male. Men seat in the front while women seat at the rear. By this arrangement, women are not allowed to lead the prayer. The woman, even when leading other women, has to stay on the same line with her colleagues so as not to portray her as the leader of the prayer. The act does not change the status quo that women cannot lead men in prayer even in the remote areas of Islam, let alone in the Arab world or Islamic countries. However devoted a Muslim woman may be, she cannot be allowed to lead congregation of male worshippers. The religious leaders of all the Muslims have been men. Men make the rules and dictate who the leader should be. The Muslim jurists have been primarily men.

Islam accepts marriage as the highest good ordained by God. These Surahs are used to support this view: Surah 30:21 says, "He created mates for you from yourselves that you may find rest in them, and He put between you love and compassion; most surely there are signs in

this for a person who reflect”⁵²; Surah 42:11 says, “the originator of the heavens and the earth; He made mates for you from among yourselves, and mates of the cattle too, multiplying you thereby; nothing like likeness to Him; and He is the Hearing, the Seeing.”⁵³ In addition, Surah 4:3 allows two or three or as long as justice is done to the women or the man marries one or what his right hand possesses.

No legal age was set out for marriage but, as a general rule, girls are not to be handed over to their husbands until they are fit for intercourse. Usually, a girl of 12 or 13 could marry though it is desirable that the relatives of the bride and the bride herself agree that the bridegroom is going to be a suitable man. This relaxed rule is usually abused by men.

Women are allowed to keep their rights to their dowry. This is in Surah 4:4. Wives and daughters are to inherit, but the portion of a male child is to be twice that of the female. There are exceptions where the female will inherit more, especially where there is no male but, usually, it is one half, and the reason for this is that a woman is not required to maintain herself or her children out of her own property. The husband is required to maintain himself, his wife and his children so that the woman’s property is hers to do whatever she wants with, but the husband is still expected to maintain his wife and the children.⁵⁴ The practice today has manifested in a counterdistinction to what the Quran lays down, in that the dowry is given to the parents of the bride even though Islam instructed that the dowry should be given to the bride so she herself would have independent wealth. This gift that is given to the bride becomes her property completely and her husband has no right in this property. This is fundamental in the setting up of the family.⁵⁵

In the area of divorce, it is easily arranged for men, while for a woman it is difficult. A man is at liberty to divorce his wife twice and take her back once, but before he could marry her a third time, she has to be married and divorced (or widowed) from another husband. After a divorce, a woman is to wait until three successive menses have passed to leave her divorced husband’s house. This waiting period is to ensure that she is not cast onto the streets pregnant. If she is pregnant, her husband is supposed to take care of her until after the delivery.⁵⁶ Usually, he keeps any male children, but she usually keeps the female. If it is mutually agreeable to a husband and his former wife, she could remain in his house after divorce. If she is sent away, her husband has to restore her dowry. In those cases where the woman has persuaded her husband to divorce her, however, the husband could claim part of the dowry (cf. Surah 11:237,

23:49). If a husband divorces a wife before the marriage is consummated, he has to return her dowry and pay half of the marriage fee agreed upon (cf. Surah 53:3).

Muslim men are cautioned about women and told that God would reward the Muslim who shuts his eyes against the beauties of a woman. They are warned not to visit the houses of their male friends when “they were absent from their homes, for the devil circulates within you like the blood in your veins.”⁵⁷ Bullough argues that “this description brought about the institutions which relegated women to harem. Many of the interpreters of the Quran were men from Persia, where women had long been secluded, and it was probably their authority in Islam which made itself felt fairly early.”⁵⁸

There is also the case of polygyny, and the fact that no legal age is set for girls for marriage. Furthermore, the female is only entitled to half as much as the male’s inheritance. There are the issues of dowry that is not given to female, staying beyond a day for divorce to scale through and then there is the harem. All these indicate the attitudes to women with regard to their conception as lesser beings. Some or parts of these assumptions are used to entrench the subservience of women to men.

African Traditional Religion

What happens in African Traditional Religion has close affinity with the life of women and men in the African traditional life. Religion dominates the whole life of the African man and woman. The traditional religion expresses the beliefs, attitudes and practices on the behaviour of the African man and woman. The African woman finds herself exposed to the same religious influence as the man – to know the place of the Supreme God, the minor divinities, the spirits, good and bad, the ancestors, the evil machinations of the enemy and many others. She is not meant to be a passive member of the society in matters of religion; rather, she is also called upon to take an active part in it.⁵⁹

This is the same observation by John Mbiti: “religion is the strongest element in traditional background and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned.”⁶⁰ In fact, whenever and wherever Africans go, they take their religion with them. There is African Traditional Religion in Brazil, Trinidad and Tobago, Haiti, Jamaica, United States of America (USA), Cuba and everywhere black people exist.

In the same line of argument, J. Omosade Awolalu asserts that: “in African Traditional Religion both male and female elements operate together. There are places where the Supreme Being is conceived as male and there are other places where He is female.”⁶¹ This factor, Awolalu says, “makes it possible for men as well as women to perform sacerdotal functions in the worship of the Supreme Being and His functionaries, the divinities.”⁶² Ala/Ale (god of Earth) of Igbo of Nigeria, Obatala (arch-divinity) of Yoruba of Nigeria, Ogun (god of Iron) of Yoruba of Nigeria, Sango (god of thunder, lighting and storm) of Yoruba of Nigeria, Orisa-oko (god of agriculture) of Yoruba of Nigeria – all these are examples of male divinities. While Asase Ya (goddess of the Earth) of Ashanti in Ghana, Osun (goddess of river) of Yoruba of Nigeria, Yemoja (river goddess) of Yoruba of Nigeria – all these are examples of female divinities. There are more than one thousand and seven hundred deities in Yoruba land.⁶³ We shall concentrate on some of them.

The Orisa-oko priesthood is open to men and women, but women predominate. The priests and priestesses bear two vertical lines, one white and the other red, on their foreheads. The female worshippers, however, are more tenacious than their counterparts, and they form themselves into a sort of guild.⁶⁴ The *egungun* cult (the cult of the ancestors) is predominantly male but some women are initiated into the cult and they play as significant roles as men.⁶⁵ In some parts of Ekiti, women take part in the masking of *egungun*. They are responsible for decorating the headpiece and other parts of the *Egungun*'s outfit. Women also act as guides to some masquerades by leading the possession. Also, women who have passed the childbearing age are initiated into the *Oro* cult. This fact notwithstanding, women still have to observe the curfew during the rituals.⁶⁶

In terms of dressing, there is a cross-dressing phenomenon in Yoruba religion, whereby male priests wear female clothing and adorn their heads with female coiffures. There are four Yoruba deities which require masks, staffs, bowls and carved figures: Ifa (divination), Esu/Elegba (trickster), Ogun (god of Iron) and Sango (god of thunder, lighting and storm). Of the four, Sango appears to have the most elaborate repertoire of arts. The sculptures produced for Sango worship include altar bowl (*apere*), carved mortars (*odo Sango*), dance wands (*ose Sango*), altar pedestals, figured posts, figured pots, carved stools and sculpted axes. A greater percentage of these paraphernalia have feminine image adorning them.⁶⁷

Feminine sculptures are part of the ritual utensils of Ifa, Sango, Osun, Saponna and Esu. Modupe Faseke avers that the women representation in ritual is important because of their beauty. Secondly, feminine sight eases a tense atmosphere and helps to pacify the deity.⁶⁸ In Osun rituals, a virgin has to carry a basin containing important materials connected with the rites. She is called the “*Arugba*”, meaning the one who carries the calabash holding the sacred items for Osun.⁶⁹ The *Arugba*, guided by an elderly woman leads the procession to the River Osun, where the rites are performed.⁷⁰ In Yoruba arts especially sculpture, the *Arugba* Sango, the large female figure with outstretched arms balancing her head load, which contains the *edun ara* – thundercelts of Sango, is the principal sculpture found in Sango shrines in Igbomina and Ekiti towns. The female figure surmounting or surmounted by thundercelts is also found in shrine sculptures and dance wands of Sango (thunder god).⁷¹

Although men generally maintain that women do not know how to keep secrets; some secret societies are exclusively meant for men. However, these societies must include some categories of women as traditional members. Without them, the membership will be incomplete and full operation will be impossible. Such women are those who have passed childbearing age and have normally become “man” and are duly initiated. In the Ogboni or Osugbo cult, for example, the position of the Erelu is paramount, thus the saying “*bi ko si Erelu, Osugbo ko le da awo se*” (without the Erelu, the Osugbo cult cannot perform its rituals). The Erelu to perform the ritual is a woman. These women called the Erelu have been estimated to be about 20 per cent of the Ogboni membership.⁷²

Menstruating women are not allowed to touch sacred objects or to come to sanctuaries. Also religious leaders make it one of their duties to refrain from coition before they lead worship. In addition, the Yoruba say *to binrin ba foju koro, Oro a gbe*, (women are not to see *Oro* because it carries some penalty or adverse consequences).

So many questions arise from the foregoing discussion. Why is it that religious leaders in African Traditional Religion refrain from sex before they lead worship? Is sex evil or detrimental in any way? Does each god command the religious leaders – male and female to restrain from sex? Why should the image of the female be the most suitable mediatory and or placatory channel? Can’t the image be that of male? Aderonke Adesola Adesanya also adds to the plethora of questions on the image or sculptural idiom of female: “Do men not kneel to pray in other faiths that there is a widespread depiction of female genuflecting figure in sculptural

idiom in Yoruba arts?”⁷³ Why would women not be allowed in *Igbo Oro* even though they prepare food, fetch water to serve people, sweep the arena of the festivals, sing songs and many others during the occasion? In other words, why is it the case that women who do all the chores cannot have access to all that happens in the shrines, since the festivals are for the well-being of the society?⁷⁴

Could the answer stem from male hegemony, enforced through patriarchal culture, as argued by Aderonke Adesola Adesanya? She writes:

Two contrasting views about women in the Yoruba society and their representation in Yoruba arts are worth considering. One is the argument that women are subjugated in the Yoruba society and that the indexes of this domination are noticeable in their verbal and visual arts. The other is that Yoruba women occupied privileged position in the past and over time lost their foothold as a result of the institutionalization of patriarchy. Both views are right and I will attempt to unite them shortly.⁷⁵

In uniting the two arguments, she notes that the Yoruba culture is patriarchal and the hegemony of the male influenced what some male sculptors depict female to be. She writes; “first who determines what culture stipulates. Second ... whatever informed the widespread depiction of female genuflecting figure in Yoruba art has to do more with male hegemony than anything else.”⁷⁶

We know it would take time before alternative African Traditional Religion is created if at all it would come up. Whatever the gods stipulate cannot be changed, without incurring death from the gods. Listening to the gods on sacrificial victim, either male or female, cannot be unilaterally changed, so also the caution of coition before worship. A male cannot be selected to be *Arugba* of Osun. A priestess cannot disobey what the gods want neither can the priest. Each priestess or priest appreciates refraining from coition before she/he leads worship because coition could render her/his power impotent. Yemi Elebuibon – a respected and practicing Ifa priest - avers that:

In Yorubaland, a woman must not enter the shrine of *orisa* or touch any sacred object when menstruating. Because of the uncleanness associated with it, the belief is that such a contact can remove spiritual power from such objects or reduce their potency. However, this monthly cycle does not prevent a woman from performing her worship at the temple. The woman will need to keep away from important objects until she is through with menstruation. A woman who has reached her menopause is given

more responsibilities at the shrine because she does not suffer those limitations associated with menstruation. More so, such a woman is believed to be retaining vital blood that possesses *ase* (vital forces).⁷⁷

Even with the patriarchal nature of the Yoruba society and, by extension, Africa, our position is that there are complementary roles for male and female in traditional religion. Each of them does not go beyond what the god commands to avoid sanction, shame and the possibility of doom. Females are not the “unprivileged other”. Every male and female are involved equally in the projects of creativity and transcendence to see that each does not go beyond the ongoing dialectic in African Traditional Religion.

We have offered some views in this discussion so far. These are that Aristotle including women in his theory of nature would be a complex case. If he had allowed women the status of rational beings, it would have made impossible one of the major premises of his political theory. Aquinas recognises the unique place for woman in the divine plan, as Aristotle has granted her in the polis. She is not evil or superfluous, nor is she but a man with additional obstacles to salvation presented by her more corporeal definition. Aquinas thus proclaims the woman as “incidental” being, that is the accidental or contingent nature of sexuality.

For Jean-Jacques Rousseau, reasoning is required to discern the general will. An Individual must not only have reason but must do so independently. Yet it is impossible for women, in Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s work, to make any impartial assessment of the public good since they have been raised and educated to make no independent judgement. Christianity and African Traditional Religion have their own weaknesses too.

Our idea again is to develop the discussion of what led to the social problems of the status, rights and roles of women in the history of philosophy, religions, like Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. In the next chapter, we shall analyse the following concepts: existentialism, feminism and womanism. This will help to set the tone needed in this work.

Endnotes

- ¹Aderonke Adesola Adesanya. 2013. Of silences, bended knees and sexuality: insights on the gendered (re)presentations in Yoruba art. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. 76.
- ²Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. xxi.
- ³Vern L. Bullough. 1974. *The subordinate sex*. 65.
- ⁴Ruth Sheila. 1980. *Issues in feminism: A first course in woman's studies*. 98.
- ⁵Ruth Sheila. 1980. *Issues in feminism: A first course in woman's studies*. 115.
- ⁶Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. Introduction. 2013. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. 4. The full paper is in Catherine M. C., Takyiwaa, M. and Stephen, F. M. Eds. 63-77.
- ⁷Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 280.
- ⁸John H. Hallowell and Jene M. Porter. 1997. *Political philosophy: a search for humanity and order*. 4.
- ⁹Aristotle. 1952. *De generatione animalium – generation of animals*, trans. A.L. Peak. 1v, 6, 775a, 15.
- ¹⁰Aristotle. 1965. *politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett. i, 5, 1254b.
- ¹¹John H. Hallowell and Jene M. Porter. 1997. *Political philosophy: a search for humanity and order*. 80.
- ¹²Aristotle. *politics*. i, 13, 1260a.
- ¹³Aristotle. 1952. *De generatione animalium – generation of animals*. 729a, 25.
- ¹⁴Aristotle. 1995. *Nichomachean ethics*, trans. W.D. Ross. viii, 7, 1158a, 410.
- ¹⁵Aristotle. *politics*. i,13, 1260a, 454.
- ¹⁶John H. Hallowell and Jene M. Porter. 1997. *Political philosophy: a search for humanity and order*. 78.
- ¹⁷Aristotle. *politics*. ii,3, 1261b, 456.
- ¹⁸Aristotle. *politics*. ii,3, 1262a, 457.
- ¹⁹Aristotle. *politics*. ii,3, 1262a, 457.
- ²⁰Vern L. Bullough. 1974. *The subordinate sex*. 64.
- ²¹Aristotle. 1965. *politics*. i,2, 1252b, 445.
- ²²Diana H. Coole. 1988. *Women in political theory: from ancient misogyny to contemporary feminism*. 44.
- ²³Susan Okin. 1979. *Women in western political thought*. 50.

- ²⁴Thomas Aquinas. 1981. *Summa Theologica*. pars 1, Q. 92, 420.
- ²⁵Thomas Aquinas. 1981. *Summa Theologica*. pars 1, Q. 92, 420.
- ²⁶Thomas Aquinas. 1981. *Summa Theologica*. pt. III (supp.), Q. 39, art. 3; Q. 81, art. 3.
- ²⁷Ruth Sheila. 1980. *Issues in feminism: A first course in woman's studies*. 115.
- ²⁸Ruth Sheila. 1980. *Issues in feminism: A first course in woman's studies*. 115.
- ²⁹Ruth Sheila. 1980. *Issues in feminism: A first course in woman's studies*. 116.
- ³⁰Ruth Sheila. 1980. *Issues in feminism: A first course in woman's studies*. 119.
- ³¹Ruth Sheila. 1980. *Issues in feminism: A first course in woman's studies*. 119.
- ³²Ruth Sheila. 1980. *Issues in feminism: A first course in woman's studies*. 119.
- ³³For Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. See her argument on this issue in p. 8 of General introduction; Bridget N. uses the concept of a sexuality of women's power and authority to describe how women manipulated certain periods of time in their lives, otherwise referred to as seasons to their advantage. She suggests that over an Igbo woman's lifetime, specific seasons can be identified in which female power is elevated. She categorises these into chronological, positional/locational, and reproductive seasons, as well as planting and harvesting seasons of power.
- ³⁴Mercy Amba Oduyoye. 2007. *Women in religion and culture – essays in honour of constance buchanan*. 130.
- ³⁵Mercy Amba Oduyoye. 2007. *Women in religion and culture – essays in honour of constance buchanan*. 129.
- ³⁶J. Omosade Awolalu. 1976. Women from the perspectives of religion, *Orita – ibadan journal of religious studies*. 95.
- ³⁷Mary Daly. 1973. *Feminist theology: a critical survey of masculine image of god*. 19.
- ³⁸J. Omosade Awolalu. 1976. Women from the perspectives of religion, *Orita – ibadan journal of religious studies*. 95.
- ³⁹Vern L. Bullough. 1974. *The subordinate sex*. 103.
- ⁴⁰Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer and Roland E. Murphy. 1995. *The new jerome biblical commentary*. 1385.
- ⁴¹Vern L. Bullough. 1974. *The subordinate sex*. 111.
- ⁴²Elizabeth C. Stanton. *The women bible*. 7.
- ⁴³Elizabeth C. Stanton. *The women bible*. 20.
- ⁴⁴Elizabeth C. Stanton. *The women bible*. 25.
- ⁴⁵Vern L. Bullough. 1974. *The subordinate sex*. 100-101.

- ⁴⁶Pope Benedict XVI. 2011. *Africa's commitment –Africae munus*. 32.
- ⁴⁷Hilary B.P. Mijoga. 1999. Gender differentiation in the bible: created and recognized, *Journal of humanities*. 13:90. See also H. J. Wood. 2019. Gender inequality: the problem of harmful patriarchal, tradition and cultural gender practices in the church. *HTS Theologiese Studies/Theological Studies*. 75. 1.
- ⁴⁸Theresa Okure. 2007. Unwise words in a wise book: Ephesians 5:21-33. *Women in religion and culture – essays in honour of Constance Buchanan*. Ed. Mercy Amba Oduyoye. 22-23.
- ⁴⁹Katumi Mahmuh. 2007. Empowering Muslim women for the third millennium. *Women in religion and culture – essays in honour of Constance Buchanan*. Ed. Mercy Amba Oduyoye. 147.
- ⁵⁰*The Quran*. 2018. M.H. Shakir, trans. 47.
- ⁵¹*The Quran*. 2018. M.H. Shakir, trans. 51.
- ⁵²*The Quran*. 2018. M.H. Shakir, trans. 267.
- ⁵³*The Quran*. 2018. M.H. Shakir, trans. 322.
- ⁵⁴Katumi Mahmuh. 1976. Women, the Islamic view. *Orita – Ibadan journal of religious studies*. 177.
- ⁵⁵Katumi Mahmuh. 1976. Women, the Islamic view. *Orita – Ibadan journal of religious studies*. 177.
- ⁵⁶Vern L. Bullough. 1974. *The subordinate sex*. 141.
- ⁵⁷Vern L. Bullough. 1974. *The subordinate sex*. 146.
- ⁵⁸Vern L. Bullough. 1974. *The subordinate sex*. 144.
- ⁵⁹S. N. Ezeanya. 1976. Women in African traditional religion, *Orita – ibadan journal of religious studies*, 108.
- ⁶⁰John Mbiti. 1970. *African religions and philosophy*. 1.
- ⁶¹J. Omosade Awolalu. 1976. Women from the perspectives of religion, *Orita – ibadan journal of religious studies*. 99.
- ⁶²J. Omosade Awolalu. 1976. Women from the perspectives of religion, *Orita – ibadan journal of religious studies*. 99-100.
- ⁶³J. Omosade Awolalu. 1976. Women from the perspectives of religion, *Orita – ibadan journal of religious studies*. 20.
- ⁶⁴J. Omosade Awolalu. 1976. Women from the perspectives of religion, *Orita – ibadan journal of religious studies*. 39.
- ⁶⁵J. Omosade Awolalu. 1976. Women from the perspectives of religion, *Orita – ibadan journal of religious studies*. 100.

- ⁶⁶Modupe Faseke. 1998. The roles of women in traditional Yoruba society: a review. *Culture and society in Yorubaland*. Eds. Deji Ogunremi and Biodun Adediran. 152.
- ⁶⁷Aderonke Aderonke Adesola Adesanya. 2013. Of silences, bended knees and sexuality: insights on the gendered (re)presentations in Yoruba art. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. 81.
- ⁶⁸Modupe Faseke. 1998. The roles of women in traditional Yoruba society: a review. *Culture and society in Yorubaland*. Eds. Deji Ogunremi and Biodun Adediran. 152.
- ⁶⁹Aderonke Aderonke Adesola Adesanya. 2013. Of silences, bended knees and sexuality: insights on the gendered (re)presentations in Yoruba art. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. 88.
- ⁷⁰Modupe Faseke. 1998. The roles of women in traditional Yoruba society: a review. *Culture and society in Yorubaland*. Eds. Deji Ogunremi and Biodun Adediran. 152.
- ⁷¹Aderonke Aderonke Adesola Adesanya. 2013. Of silences, bended knees and sexuality: insights on the gendered (re)presentations in Yoruba art. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. 84.
- ⁷²Bolanle Awe and Omotayo Olutoye. 2003. Women and warfare in 19th century Yorubaland: An introduction. *War and peace in Yorubaland 1793-1893*. Ed. Adeagbo A. 122.
- ⁷³Aderonke Adesola Adesanya. 2013. Of silences, bended knees and sexuality: insights on the gendered (re)presentations in Yoruba art. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. 88.
- ⁷⁴Segun Ogungbemi. 2011. Women at the receiving end. *Beyond tradition: African women in cultural and political spaces*. Eds. Toyin Falola and S.U. Fwatshak. 10.
- ⁷⁵Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. Introduction. 2013. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. 252.69.
- ⁷⁶Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. Introduction. 2013. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. 252. 88.
- ⁷⁷Yemi Elebuibon. 2008. *Invisible powers of the metaphysical world: a peep into the world of witches*. 63.

CHAPTER TWO

Clarification of Concepts: Existentialism, Feminism and Womanism

This chapter examines, in detail, the following concepts – Existentialism, Feminism and Womanism. This is to set the tone for the discussion of each concept. In Existentialism, we shall argue for those factors that make Existentialism an interesting and challenging philosophy. For Feminism, we shall look at various strands in it. For Womanism, we shall trace the origin and several affixes to Womanism such as African Womanism, Alice Walker's womanism or Africana Womanism.

The idea and focus of Existentialism

The argument that Existentialism is neither a philosophical school nor a system of philosophy which is reducible to any set of tenet is shared by most existentialist writers (Barrett, 1962; Olsan, 1962; Collins, 1964; Blackham, 1965; Warnock, 1967; Solomon, 1974; Jean Wahl, 1980; Macquarrie, 1982; Kaufmann, 1989; Bhadra, 1990; and Omoregbe, 1991). As useful as Existentialism is to the philosophical movement of the nineteenth century, it is yet not a school of thought. Blackham posits that “above all, existentialism does not belong to a school because it is not a system of philosophy which can be worked at and taught.”¹ While Joseph Omoregbe believes that “Existentialism is, no doubt, the most influential philosophical movement in nineteenth century; it is better to describe it as a movement rather than as a school. This is because; Existentialism is not a homogeneous school the member of which hold basically the same doctrine as is the case, for example, with Thomism.”²

The shape of philosophising for Existentialism starts from man rather than from nature. In the words of John Macquarrie, “Existentialism has been described in the title of his chapter not as a ‘philosophy’ but rather as a ‘style of philosophizing.’”³ Also, it is for this reason that Max Charlesworth prefers to describe Existentialism as a label, mood or style of philosophising rather than a school and clearly a protest against any systematised abstract. Existentialists do not agree to a common body of doctrine, neither agreeing on the same essentials. What Existentialist philosophers, including those of the theistic persuasion, chiefly share in common is the realisation that the concrete individual human being is the inescapable point of departure for all philosophies worthy of their name.

As a philosophical movement, Existentialism begins with the writings of Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche. For them, the question is Christianity was paramount,

even though in different direction. Kierkegaard interrogates whether Christianity can still be lived or the Christian confesses spiritual bankruptcy. For Kierkegaard, the crucial questions that have to be answered are: what should man do? And what should he believe?

Kierkegaard interrogates people, so that they would begin to look at themselves and at the way they live. Once people have been made sufficiently uncomfortable, they might then commence the quest for a meaningful basis for human existence. Kierkegaard describes the quest through stages of life's way. The levels of existence are aesthetic, ethical and religious stages.

Kierkegaard says at the aesthetic level, "bodily impulses and emotions control the person. No knowledge of universal moral standard. The leisure is on the pleasures of the senses."⁴ Being alive can be achieved, with quality of existence. He categorises man's capacity to be *spirit*, on the one hand, and sensuousness, on the other, calling the first the *building* and the second *cellar*.

The second is the ethical level of existence. The ethical man accepts the limitations on his life that moral responsibility imposes. Kierkegaard illustrates the contract between the aesthetic man and the ethical man in their attitude toward sexual behaviour, saying that "whereas the aesthetic yields to his impulses wherever there is an attraction, the ethical man accepts the obligations of marriage as an expression of reason."⁵ When the dialectic process, that is process of choice, begins to work in the consciousness of the ethical person, he begins to realise that he is involved in something more profound than an inadequate knowledge of the moral law. The ethical man comes to realise that he is in fact incapable of fulfilling the moral law; he deliberately violates that law, and therefore he becomes conscious of his guilt. Guilt places before man a new either/or. He must either remain at the ethical level or try to fulfill the moral law, and then respond to the new awareness.

The religious level of existence is the third stage. The difference between faith and reason reaches a striking one. An act of choice and commitment is required for man's movement from the aesthetic to the ethical level. The secret of religious consciousness is in all eternity impossible because God is subject; and therefore exists only for subjectivity in inwardness. In the final analysis, arriving at authentic existence is not a matter of the intellect; it is a matter of faith and commitment, a continuous process of choice by the existing individual in the presence of varieties of *Either/Or*.

For Nietzsche, the message from his spokesman, *Zarathustra*, is that “God is dead”. Nietzsche meant that all things people thought primarily as absolutes – the Cosmic order, Divine will, Reason, History and Platonic forms – have been shown to be human constructions, with no authority to tell us how to live our lives. Christian morality, especially as set forth by St. Paul, Democratic Theory as espoused by John Stuart Mill; the pessimism expressed by Schopenhauer, are all denials of man’s deepest urges. One should, therefore, proclaim “yes to reality”, that is, accepting the real human situation and not try to suppress it. What is needed is a “trans-valuation of values”, that is, what has been called bad is good and viceversa. Such an affirmation would lead to genuine creativity, to the construction of a meaningful world of man. With the realisation of the that God was dead, man would have to find himself and his values by himself.⁶ The existing individual for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche must struggle for self-realisation.⁷

Existentialism as a literary movement, with its leaders Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Simone de Beauvoir, bequeathed its present form and popularity. Art and literature used Existentialist methodology as expression in the novels of Franz Kafka, Dostoyevski, Camus and Simone de Beauvoir. In the plays and novels of Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, Existentialism found its most persuasive media.

Definitions of Existentialism

As the term itself suggests and within the above historical survey, Existentialism is characterised, first of all, by the tendency to lay emphasis on or to accentuate existence. In Existentialism, the word “existence” means something different from its ordinary (day to day) meaning. In ordinary usage, “stone”, “table”, “tree” and “animal” exist. But in Existentialism, “existence” is restricted to human existence, with all its features. Only human beings exist; all other kinds of beings are, but they do not exist.

Christopher Agulanna avers that existentialism addresses itself to what are today called the ‘existential’ problems of man – the meaning of life, about its end, its value and purpose, of birth and death, of suffering.⁸ It is the philosophy of concrete man. It does not want to understand man as the manifestation of a pre-given cluster of qualities known as essence, nor does it want to inquire into the nature of man as bound by the logical rules of a system; but to study the uniqueness of the individual man.

The question “ho am I?” requires a decisive answer, as H.J. Blackham argues, “I am totally responsible for my world because I give it meaning by my thoughts and projects, totally responsible in the sense of being solely responsible and in the sense of being responsible for all of it. I answer the question by decision, response, trust and fidelity rather than by opinions for which there is good evidence.”⁹

Furthermore, Kaufmann opines that, “existentialism discusses human existence and tries to shed light on its problems. The nature of existential thinking and the focus on the existential situation is an attempt to focus on modern man’s alienation, uprootedness and absurdity, which has vast ethical and political implications.”¹⁰ So the shape of philosophising starts from human being rather than from nature.

Characteristics and themes of existentialist thinkers

There are some recurrent traits, characteristics and themes common in the tendencies and stances of all the better known existentialist thinkers. These themes, drawn from human experience shall be discussed below.

a. Existentialism emphasises existence

Existentialists think that the existence of the individual is the highest truth. To them, existence is more important than essence. This is premised on the fact that, for essence, we are not able to find out the individuality. Existence is the fact of being here and now. The central focus is the *existing person* and not the *ideal* essential person who is dissociated from the concrete realities of real life. Existence preceding essence means that the actual life of the individual is what constitutes what would be called his or her essence instead of there being a predetermined essence that defines what it is to be a human. Thus, the human being, through his/her consciousness creates his/her own value and determines a meaning to his/her life. In essence, a person defines himself/herself only in so far as he/she acts and he/she is responsible for his/her action.

Sartre asserts that, until man exists, he cannot be defined, that is, man’s existence precedes his essence. After man has existed, whatever choices he makes will establish what he is – essence. In addition, man exists and makes himself develop into what he wants to be. He does not have a fixed essence that is given to him in a readymade manner. Sartre argues further that, “if existence really does precede essence, there are no explaining things away by reference

to a fixed and given human nature. On the other hand, if god does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to which legitimise our conduct.”¹¹

Kierkegaard, corroborating the idea of Sartre, avers that “practical life is shown in individual’s existence. Life expresses the totality of experience and such an experience expresses itself in action.”¹² It means man’s existence cannot be discovered in logical abstraction but in the various modes man tries to realise his existence. These modes include man’s choice, his freedom, his responsibility, his feeling of despair, guilt and finitude. They have essential roles in what constitute human existence. Expanding Kierkegaard’s argument, Mirinal Bhadra quotes Kierkegaard as saying, “existence is not something which has to be striven for. Man has to realise his existence by separating himself from the anonymity of the crowd. The meaning of existence, therefore, lies in the significance which man provides for his freedom and autonomy, through passionate commitment, through responsibility and the accompanying passions.”¹³

Kierkegaard thinks human beings can realise the problem of existence when he/she takes a decision. When he/she is plunged into a crisis and do not know how to get out of it, the individual has to make a choice. In the tragedy of the existential choice, there is no promise of success. This then produces a state of anxiety. If the individual wants to choose himself/herself as the eternal being, he/she realises that, in his being, eternal is far removed. This attraction from the infinite and yet a tie with the finite produces acute tension for which an individual suffers. In the inescapable choice, the individual has to bear the responsibility of what he/she chooses.

The individual existence is, therefore, discovered in the emotional turmoil experienced in the face of crisis. All the elements of existence: choice, anxiety of the decisions, passionate involvement and the burden of responsibility, meet at this point. It is in the whirl of these aspects that the individual realises that he/she exists as an individual.

Going by the arguments of Sartre and Kierkegaard, one can rightly conclude that the existence of the individual is the highest and most important truth. Thus, the philosophy of the existentialists is the “philosophy of individual existence”. Life moves on through action. In life, there is the question of decision, uncertainty, anxiety or dread expressed.

b. **Movement of protest**

Central to Existentialism is the development of a system or culture of protest, polemics and the study of the nature and conditions for overcoming man's depravity. There is revolt against the rationalist concept of system as well as the mechanistic idea of modern life. This characteristic has favoured the growth of Existentialism. H. J. Blackham claims that:

Existentialism is characterised by a refusal of the alternatives posed either of idealism, or positivism, or materialism These established oppositions are rejected because they cover up the extreme nature of the problems. They propose the wrong kind of solutions. They dispose of the problems which cannot be disposed of because they make the human condition.¹⁴

The movement of protest starts with Kierkegaard against Hegel's abstraction.¹⁵ He opposes idea of systematic philosophy exhibited in Hegel's writings. His criticisms are directed against the pre-suppositions of the system and not its details. His opposition to the system can be reduced to the following point: Philosophy in Hegel's system left no room for wisdom, "ethics". Kierkegaard says the most important thing which escaped Hegel is how one should live. Hegel might have achieved knowledge of reality, but he forgot to state that ethical reality exists for individuals.

Logic cannot capture the peculiarities of an individual's feelings, thoughts, emotions and dispositions. Philosophical understanding should take into account all such psychological characteristics, rather than logical similarities. An individual would have to encounter the paradoxes of ethics in his/her confrontation with choices of alternative courses of action. So Kierkegaard establishes that the ultimate ethical choices are choices "*Either/Or*". Ethical knowledge involves risks, for one has to act always without a certain idea of the results. Ethical decisions involve paradoxes and they cannot be viewed reflectively and in a disinterested way. They are viewed in the "passion of crisis" and their solutions always point to a particular way of life.

The protest, moreover, is manifested in the work of Nietzsche, who rejects the traditional morality based on reason, as slave morality fits only the weaklings. He proposes morality based on instinct – the morality of struggle and ruthlessness – as the master morality, a morality destined to produce the "superman".

Simone de Beauvoir also protests against the common assumptions that the female is the “*second class sex*”. The historically accepted differences between the sexes, according to her, rest on social conditions which permit the subjugation of women by men. She asserts that: “no biological, psychological, economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, ... which is described as feminine.”¹⁶ Put differently, the socio-political situation of human society defines and imposes gender roles. Gender, is socially constructed. Similarly, the meaning that is assigned to a given sex is as a result of childhood socialisation. Gender is a matter of becoming and is thus subject to choice and change. Gender is a process, however limited, and is open to social action and an individual’s choices.¹⁷

Simone de Beauvoir further expresses her analysis of women’s subordination by showing how men are creating an artificial creation – human culture but not biological reproduction. She discusses the negative implication of women’s enslavement in relation to human culture creation. She argues thus:

Here we have the key to the whole mystery. On the biological level a species is maintained only by creating itself anew; but this creation results only in repeating the same Life in more individuals. But man assures the repetition of Life while transcending Life through Existence; by this transcendence he creates values that deprive pure repetition of value ... Whereas in serving the species, the human male also remodels the face of the earth, he creates new instruments, he invents, he shapes the future.¹⁸

In other words, the woman’s body dooms her to giving birth - the male or female. The woman lacks natural creative functions which man has through the means of technology and symbols. Sherry B. Ortner observes that, “man creates relatively lasting, eternal, transcendent objects while the woman creates only perishable – human beings.”¹⁹

Furthermore, Simone de Beauvoir contends that male activities (hunting and warfare) which involve life destruction are often widely celebrated than the female’s ability to give birth, which creates life. It is not that the killing is the relevant and warfare value; rather, it is the transcendental (social, cultural) natures that are celebrated, as opposed to the process of giving birth.

But we know women are not part and parcel of the category of culture. Have they played a middle course in human development? As Segun Ogunbemi also observes “this

middle status of women definitely becomes the problem of women because it enables men to exploit and treat them in some ways as means only and not as end in themselves.”²⁰ The woman is blessed with consciousness just like man and she is human being. Yes, it is true that the woman is involved in culture. Her full involvement in and commitment to cultural project over nature may ironically explain another puzzle of “the woman problem” – her universal unquestioning acceptance of her own depreciation.

Simone de Beauvoir answers the woman devaluation thus;

For she, too, is an existent, she feels the urge to surpass, and her project is not mere repetition but transcendence towards a different future—in her heart of hearts she finds confirmation of the masculine pretensions ... Her misfortune is to have been biologically destined for the repetition of Life, when even in her own view Life does not carry within itself its reasons for being, reasons that are more important than the life itself.²¹

Thus, even with the woman’s membership of culture, it is evident that she accepts her own devaluation. But what the woman demands today is “to be recognised as existing being having the same right as men.”²²

She also shows her protest against the common assumption that the female is passive. She approves the argument that the baby always develops from the combination of the two gametes; the new life is not the property of either male or female. The female appears as a separated individual with the activities of pregnancy, birth and weaning; while the male is different. The man keeps now and again and maintains his individuality completely. The domestic tasks consign women, while men embark on a cultural adventure, using their freedom to define the world.

c. **Freedom, choice and responsibility**

Existentialist thinkers lay predominant stress on human freedom and personal responsibility as they are tried and tested in the personal choices and decision of daily life. Freedom, decision and responsibility constitute what make a person. The usage of freedom and the ability to shape the future distinguish man from other animals. Free and responsible decisions make a human being authentically himself/herself. According to Sartre, freedom is identical with existence. “Freedom is determining oneself to wish (in the sense of choosing).”²³

Choice is inseparable from freedom. Choice is actualisation of freedom. To be free is to be compelled to make choices. Human cannot refuse to choose because he is choosing being. A denial of choice is choice itself. Freedom is the freedom of choosing but not the freedom of not choosing. Freedom of choice demands commitment and responsibility.

d. **Subjectivity**

The Existentialist subjectivity is not a denial of “objective truth” in favour of opinion biased and prejudiced by the individual and fluctuating personal experience. Existentialist subjectivity is recognition of man’s personal experience, his inner life and immediate awareness which is manifested and revealed in his search for truth. Arriving at truth involves personal experience and acting on one’s own convictions. Sartre claims that man will be what he will be by planning to be. By the “will”, man makes a conscious decision. Thus, an individual takes decision or chooses; he/she takes his/her decision for the whole mankind because every man/woman is an individual being and the decision of one individual is the decision for the whole humanity. In this way, an individual is a humanist developing fully his/her existence.

e. **Anguish**

Anguish – which is called dread or anxiety - is a term common to many Existentialists. It is one of the characteristic conditions of human existence. It comes with reflection. When we reflect on the contingency of our being, the basic problem of life which defy any satisfactory solution, then we are seized with tormenting anguish. That we do not know the meaning and purpose of our existence, that we have no answers to our own questions about our existence, that our existence is gratuitous and unnecessary, that we might very well not have existed and that sooner or later we shall cease to exist, and many others give rise to disturbing anguish.

In the view of Sartre, anguish is, “like the man who involves himself and who realises that he is not only the person he chooses to be, at the same time, choosing all mankind as well as himself, cannot help escape the feeling of his total and deep responsibility.”²⁴ So “anguish” is evident even when it conceals itself. The anguish which leads to quietism or inaction is a matter of a simple sort of anguish that anybody who has had responsibilities is familiar with.

In the view of Simone de Beauvoir, anguish comes with reflection. Man is free, with no external power holding him. Man finds from his experience that he is weighed by dark things from other. As long as there are men and they live, they feel the tragic ambiguity of their condition. Man must not attempt to dispel the ambiguity of his being; on the contrary, he must accept the task of realising it. So the pain of man is due to the failure in not *being* being (God) but in man's vain attempt to be *being*, he succeeds in disclosing being, bringing it to light investing it with meaning.

Simone de Beauvoir, therefore, develops a theory of Theory of Human Being as essentially situated. As a suited being, man is a psycho-physiological unity. Our ontological freedom, our status as pure and isolated consciousness, is always there at the background of our existence, and this is why life is a continuous moral project.

f. **Others**

Sartre maintains that the existence of an individual implies the existence of *others*, since the individual himself could not exist without *others*. Man is not only a being-in-the-world, but also a being-with-others. Sartre affirms that:

Through the 'I think', we reach our own self in the presence of *others*, and the *others* are just as real to us as our own self. Thus, the man who becomes aware of himself through the *cogito* also perceives all *others*, and he perceives them as the condition of his own existence This being so, in discovering my inner being I discover the *other* person at the same time.²⁵

In another text of his, Sartre observes that the *other* is the indispensable mediator between myself and me. I recognise that I am as the *other* sees me. In addition, "the *other* looks at me and as such he holds the secret of my being, he knows what I am. Thus, the profound meaning of my being is outside of me. The *other* has the advantage over me. In looking, I identify myself with other's freedom, a freedom I recognise as grounding the self revealed to me by the other's gaze."²⁶

To illustrate the existence of the other, Sartre employs the phenomenon of shame. According to him, shame is shame before the other. Put simply, if the other does not exist, then there will be no shame. Ordinarily, one does not feel shame before a robot, no matter how perfect the robot could be. For one to be ashamed of one's vulgar gestures means that there

must be another human being who has a sense of value or rationality to make a distinction between one's vulgar gestures that are agreeable. The so-called vulgar gestures that I am ashamed of before the *other* will not have any effect on the robot. Following Sartre, the knowledge of the existence of the other follows a sequence. The knowledge begins from observed physical acts and gestures and then points to an organising unity which is located outside our experience.

Sartre also introduces the words "object" and "subject" in trying to describe or identify the **other** in relation to the One. He says:

In the first place, gestures and expressions, acts and conducts display the appearance of the other in my experience. These organised forms refer to an organising unity which on principle is located outside of our experience. The other's anger appears in his inner senses and is by nature not open to my perception, gives the meaning and the cause of the series of phenomena which I apprehend in my experience under the name of gestures or expressions.²⁷

The introduction of these words, object and subject by Sartre to ascertain the existence of other mark a step further into the depth of the existence that Sartre calls the "other". In perusing the other, the "*other*" is first given as object. One perceives the 'other' first as an object which is a coherent system of representations like gestures, acts, conducts and expressions.

The theme of the "*other*" is central in Simone de Beauvoir's philosophy. For her, from time immemorial, women are positioned to be subordinate to men. They are constructed as man's "*other*", denied the right to own subjectivity and to be responsible for her own actions. The word "*other*" became increasingly important in Simone de Beauvoir's vocabulary. Thus, she writes:

Humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being. Man can think of himself without woman, she cannot think of herself without man, and she is simply what man decrees; thus she is called the sex. ... She is the incidental, the inessential opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute – she is the *other*.²⁸

To explain the processes of becoming the *other*, she contends "the category of the *other* is as primordial as consciousness itself. Otherness is a fundamental category of human

thought.”²⁹ She resorts to Hegel’s analysis of the relationship between two consciousnesses. She identifies the point when two human beings exist together. Each tries to impose his/her sovereignty on the *other*. If both resist, then the relationship between them would be one of reciprocity. However, if a person, by virtue of a particular difference, no matter how minimal, is more privileged than the other, then such a person dominates the other in whatever form of relationship they enter into. A group sets itself up as the one while at once set up the other against itself.

g. **Method of phenomenology**

Existentialist thinkers depend largely on phenomenology. As a method, phenomenology is basically descriptive, that is description of phenomenon as observed. Phenomenology also means science of phenomena: *that which shows itself* or appearance: *that which appears in the light*.

Phenomenology is understood by Hegel as a metaphysical study or ontology, while Husserl uses phenomenology as a philosophical method which goes to the foundations of sciences and other branches of knowledge so that it would be possible for us to have apodictic certainty in those areas. The analysis of different meanings of phenomenology does not fall within the scope of this study. There are varied connotations of phenomenology. Phenomenology is distinctively the method of Heidegger, Husserl, Jean-Paul Sartre, Jaspers, Marcel, Merleau-Ponty and Simone de Beauvoir. They used phenomenology as a method of examination and description of the various manifestations of existence. Others might not have used the method but their analysis of human existence exhibits a phenomenological tendency.

The existential literature of Sartre, for example, is rich in classical descriptions of human phenomena. In Sartre’s short story titled “*The Wall*”, he describes his prison experience with his two friends, Juan and Tom, the experience of the fear of death even when alive and the capture of Ramon Gris.³⁰ Nietzsche uses a strict description of phenomenology. His task was the pitiless unmasking of the morals and spiritual falsehoods on which our culture is built. His book gives a genuine phenomenology which can be used to the totality of moral phenomena. He traces the spirit of humility from the will to power and of the demonic from the project of saintliness. One rather sharp difference between Husserl, the originator of phenomenology and Existentialist phenomenologists arises from the fact that, whereas Husserl lays emphasis on

essence and thinks of phenomenology as an eidetic science, the Existentialist lays emphasis on existence.³¹

Furthermore, it may be the case that in making the description different people will see things differently. Of course, the techniques of phenomenology and its concentration on essences and universal structures are designed to reduce the effect of personal preferences and idiosyncrasies. Yet, it could hardly be denied that, especially in so personal a matter as attempting phenomenology of the human existence, a personal equation will enter into the description, and personal attitudes of the investigator will announce themselves.³²

Diversities among the Existentialists

In the foregoing, we have drawn attention to what we have called themes and general characteristics of Existentialism, but there are divergences among Existentialists that are worthy of consideration. We shall draw up a loose classification of Existentialist thinkers using the existence of God as a criterion for distinction, but we shall add Agnostics; like Heidegger, in separate classification even though Sartre classifies him as Atheistic Existentialist.

From Sartre's assertion, we could classify Existentialists into Atheists and Theists. Some Existentialists rejected the label. Sartre classifies Gabriel Marcel as a Theist existentialist, but he denies being an Existentialist. Jaspers maintains that he is neither a believer nor a non-believer, neither a theist nor an atheist.³³ Heidegger claims to be neither theist nor atheist. He refuses to be called an Existentialist, because he wants to dissociate himself from Jean-Paul Sartre who has become the "embodiment" of Existentialism.³⁴ So in terms of classification, we can say Theist Existentialists include Soren Kierkegaard, Vladimir Solovev, Miguel de Unamuno Y. Jugo and a number of Christian theologians, such as Rudolf Buttman, Paul Tillich, John Macquarrie, T.S. Robinson, Karl Bath, Joseph Omoregbe. Atheist Existentialists include Friedrich Nietzsche, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Agnostic Existentialists include Karl Jaspers, Martin Heidegger and Marcel Gabriel.

The neglect of Simone de Beauvoir in the philosophical canon of Existentialism

Despite Simone de Beauvoir's contributions to formulating an existentialist social philosophy and ethics, and her post-World War II fame as an existentialist writer, co-editor of *Les Temps Modernes*, and author of *The Second Sex* by the early 70's, her name has practically disappeared from histories of texts on Existentialism. Could it be as Jeans Grisham argues that "the most useful starting point, I think, is to look at the ways in which women have been excluded by many philosophers from philosophical ideals of such things as human nature and morality, and the inconsistencies and problems this may generate in their theories."³⁵

Jean Wahl establishes the tone when he says, "we should mention, without discussing, Simon de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, whose theories are akin to those of Jean-Paul Sartre."³⁶ In a comparable thread, Walter Kaufmann's book does not mention Simone de Beauvoir at all, although he includes literary writers such as Rilke, Kafka and Camus. William Barrett in *Irrational Man* initially praises Simone de Beauvoir with Sartre and Camus as "brilliant and engaging writers and are still phenomenally productive."³⁷ But soon her name disappears from the text. Mrinal Bhadra also mentions Simone de Beauvoir twice. The first is the discussion on Sartre's Ethics. He discusses Sartre as non-cognitivist and a cognitivist as far as the world *en-soi* is concerned. He writes, "... Sartre is a non-cognitivist with regard to the world *pour-nous* (for-us) and this, because we are after all in both worlds at one. This is the gist of the ambiguity of which Simone de Beauvoir refers to."³⁸ The second mentioning of Simone de Beauvoir is "in 1945 Sartre and some of his friends among whom were Merleau-Ponty, Simone de Beauvoir, Albert Camus and others brought out the first issue of the journal *Les Temps Modernes*."³⁹ Yet there is no Simone de Beauvoir's contribution to his book.

Once again Simone de Beauvoir was not included as a separate contributor in the ambitious project of *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (1972 edition). This is a project in the formulation of the American philosophical canon edited by Paul Edwards. Although she is mentioned in the entry on Sartre, where she is cited with Merleau-Ponty as one of the founders of *Les Temps Modernes*, of the four French Existentialist philosophers mentioned in this entry - Camus, Simone de Beauvoir, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre - only Simone de Beauvoir lacks an entry under her own name.

Simone de Beauvoir is also mentioned in the entry “existentialism” written by Alasdair Macintyre, under a discussion of Sartre: “Sartre’s psychological analyses are used too, in the novels of Simone de Beauvoir, whose moral and political writings also employ the Sartrean concept of choice.”⁴⁰ This is an odd claim since, in *The Second Sex*, for example, or even in *Ethics of Ambiguity*, one obvious area of Simone de Beauvoir’s philosophical difference from Jean-Paul Sartre is her rejection of a Sartrean concept of absolute freedom, choice and others.

Still in the *Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, the “Bibliography of the History of Ethics” includes a mention of Simone de Beauvoir’s *Ethics of Ambiguity*, with the comment, “important on its own right and in relation to Sartre.”⁴¹ But in the article itself, there is no mention of Simone de Beauvoir or her important work, although there is a lengthy discussion of Albert Camus. The contrast between the treatment accorded Albert Camus and that given Simone de Beauvoir is particularly dramatic in this instance. The author of the article remarks that Albert Camus wrote no technical philosophy. In this case, the author has seemingly better philosophical grounds for including Simone de Beauvoir than Albert Camus, but again, it was Simone de Beauvoir who was excluded.

Joseph Omoregbe adopts the same trend in shaping the reading canon of texts for students, lecturers and readers of Philosophy on Existentialism. Regurgitating the same canon of history, Omoregbe in his third volume of the treatment of “Existentialism” omits Simone de Beauvoir as a contributor to “Existentialism”. He treats seven major Existentialist philosophers, with emphasis on Jean-Paul Sartre.⁴² He posits that the major Existentialist philosophers of the nineteenth century include the following: Martin Heidegger, Gabriel Marcel, Karl Jasper, Albert Camus, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre. Because of the importance and influence of Existentialism in the nineteenth century, more space is devoted to it than to any other school.⁴³ Yet, he feels Simone de Beauvoir makes no contribution to existentialism by not giving her space in his book.

Most histories of texts on Existentialism mentioned above continue the pattern of either ignoring Simone de Beauvoir or reducing her work to an appendage of the work of Jean-Paul Sartre. (see Collins James, 1952; Heinemann, 1958; Breisach, 1962; See also Blackham H.J., 1952; 1959; John Macquarrie, 1972; Mrinal Bradha 1990).

Some exceptions to the neglect

There are exceptions to the dismal treatment received by Simone de Beauvoir's work by philosophers, especially Hazel Barnes. Barnes - the translator of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, provides a landmark reading of Simone de Beauvoir's first published novel, *She Came to Stay*, and tries to leave open the question of whether it was Simone de Beauvoir or Jean-Paul Sartre who originated the philosophical framework shared by both the novel and *Being and Nothingness*.

A later and less well-known example with contemporary relevance is Albert Rabil. Rabil, whose interest in Simone de Beauvoir is tangential to his main concern of differentiating Merleau-Ponty from Sartre, argues that: "Mlle de Beauvoir did not hold Sartre's view of freedom in the early postwar period. In *Ethics of Ambiguity*, for example, she outlines a phenomenology of freedom in which approximate realizations of freedom are described and arranged in an ascending order of validity. Here the 'mixture' of man and the world is the point of departure."⁴⁴

In completing the discussion of Existentialism, Simone de Beauvoir should always be given a space. She should be mentioned as we did in themes of method of phenomenology, movement of protest, anguish and others. In this way, the reading and teaching of Existentialism would be complete. We should incorporate Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialism when the subject is to be taught to students of Philosophy and related fields.

The idea and concern of feminism

The notion of feminism can be traced to diverse spheres, such as social theories, political movements and moral philosophies which are concerned with the experiences of women in contemporary societies. Nonetheless, the preoccupation of most feminists concern social, political and economic inequality. It is directed at promoting equality, justice and fairness for women and thus putting an end to the idea of sexism in whatever we do.⁴⁵

As a concept, feminism is applied to all those who look for, no matter on what grounds, how to put a stop to women's oppression. Feminists share the same aim - promoting equality, justice and fairness for women in order to put an end to the idea of sexism in whatever form. Jean Grimshaw defines feminism as:

a response to a belief that women have been oppressed and unjustly treated, and sometimes also to a belief that women have available to them more than to men certain resources for developing a critique of the damaging and destructive aspects of human institutions and social relationship and for tracing the links between these things and the subordination of women to men.⁴⁶

As a political human-rights activism, feminism aims at bringing about equality between sexes in society. It argues against any form of injustice, degradation or dehumanisation of women in a male-dominated world. Feminism operates as an aspect of a long social history of rebellious opposition to social institutional discrepancies and oppression in human relations.⁴⁷ It is grounded in the belief that women are oppressed in comparison to men, and that this oppression is undeserved or disadvantageous.

Gayle MacDonald defines feminism:

as that which encompasses both a political activism and an academic or theoretical stance, both stressing the lived experience and action of women's lives as crucial to any understanding of the social aspects of humanity and offering a critique of and a remedy for the prevailing male ideology which influences the lives, the ideas, and the physical, emotional, or financial well-being of women.⁴⁸

By these definitions of feminism as political human-rights activism, two categories of feminists emerge: the activists and the theorists. A feminist in mainstream academia often falls into both camps, a social reformer outside the academy remains, to a large extent, a practitioner, even though both often share the same ideology and goal.

Feminists generally also differentiate between the concepts of sex and gender. Sex, to them, refers to the biological differences between female and male, while gender refers to the psychological, social and cultural features and characteristics that have become strongly associated with the biological categories of female and male. Gender concerns societal beliefs, stereotypes and ingrained views about the fundamental nature of female and male. They are created and maintained through complex socialisation within a cultural environment that considers them just and appropriate.⁴⁹ In essence, feminism is an unmistakable sign of the worldwide uncertainty about the nature and roles of the sexes.⁵⁰ Anne C. Minas opines that feminists maintain that “the oppression of women is conceptualised as patriarchy which is contained in legal, educational, as well as religious and non-religious systems ... which we can

observe in how women formally relate with one another, as noticeable in their psychology and physiology.”⁵¹

Among the themes explored by feminists are patriarchy, stereotyping, objectification, sexual objectification, welfare rights, equal opportunities, motherhood and oppression. Feminists place a higher value on women. To them, a woman is not simply the means through which sexual gratification and procreation is possible. A woman, so called, is more than that. She is an end in herself and should be valued not for what she can do, but for what and who she is.

The feminists’ criticism of patriarchy is exemplified in three themes: equality, community and empowerment of women. Bell Hooks writes:

Feminism is a commitment to eradicating the ideology of domination that permeates culture on various levels – sex, race and class, to name a few – and a commitment to reorganizing society so that the self-development of people can take precedence over imperialism, economic expansion and material desires ... to be “feminist” in any authentic sense of the term is to want for all people female and male, liberation from sexist role patterns, dominations and oppression.⁵²

Hooks argues that feminism encompasses some men too because not all women are feminists. In another vein, feminism, just like post-colonial criticism, is an offshoot of Marxism. It has to do with the struggle towards the dissolution of the patriarchal institution even as Marx preaches the displacement of the strata that exist in every society. The bourgeoisie of Marx found in feminism is man, while the proletariat, woman, is to assert her freedom in all its ramifications.⁵³ Marx’s theory provides a platform for the theme of women as an oppressed class. His theory evokes questions about the relationship of women’s oppression to class oppression. This made possible the discussion of “ideology” of the ways in which theories about human nature or social relationship might be used to legitimise the interests of a ruling or dominant group, and justify or reinforce oppression, and the ways in which liberal or egalitarian political ideals might themselves sometimes serve to disguise the existence of other forms of inequality or oppression.

The promotion of sexual autonomy in the answers to gender oppression seems to have attracted a lot of attack on feminists who support the idea. For example, a strand in feminism –

(radical feminists) rejects motherhood and everything associated with it as the basic mechanism of woman's subordination.

An alternative to marriage was suggested by Ti-Grace Atkinson, who maintains that lesbianism rides on the back of feminism.⁵⁴ The focus of the feminist thought is to excuse them from the "burden" of childbearing. Thus, the woman has the right over "her" pregnancy. This has been taken further as a ground for the demand for abortion since men are free from carrying pregnancy to term. Alternatively, the society should sign in for the responsibility of child-rearing. Shuilamith Firestone demands artificial procreation. She wants to break up the family and to substitute the upbringing of children by groups instead of parents.⁵⁵ In a similar view, Jeffner Allen argues that motherhood destroys females and should be considered for rejection. She avers that:

A mother is she whose body is used as a resource to reproduce men and the world of men. Motherhood is dangerous to women because it continues the structure within which females must be women and mothers; and conversely, because it denies to females the creation of a subjectivity and world that is open and free.⁵⁶

The radical feminists give the impression that their warfare is against man. But we shall argue that feminism is not indeed a female thing; rather, it is the expression of all the human persons who are genuinely aware of humanity as a mix of cultures, orientations and predilections that we characterise feminine and masculine. Feminism, for us, is the expression of all human persons who desire a society that welcomes all and sundry to self-realisation. We do not subscribe to a strand of feminism that is not fighting for women's right in a man's world, but rather calling for a complete change.

Adrienne Rich's work marks a change in the revolutionary de-construction of sexual autonomy. She distinguishes between motherhood as an encounter and motherhood as a perpetual establishment; and she asks whether the experience of bearing and caring for children does not, regardless of its incessant ostracisation and deprivation, give women certain energies and rewards. Many women continue to wish to be mothers. Some of the feminist activists and writers had a child earlier and are often "single parent".⁵⁷ Since Rich's work, a lot has been written by feminists about mothering and the fact that desecrating motherhood can be extremely offensive to those who have been mothers for almost a lifetime.

Variation within feminism

Definitions of feminism differ as we have seen above and from the movement in the late 1960s. The variations arise from divergences in thoughts, viewpoints and political stances which could be seen in the Liberal, Marxist, Existentialist, Womanism, or Radical types.⁵⁸ In this part, we shall look at the variations within feminism and their approach.

Liberal feminism

Liberal feminism has its roots in the Classical view that all should enjoy the liberty to creativity and resourcefulness. The works of Mary Wollstonecraft provides the liberal feminist long historical background. Wollstonecraft used the natural rights arguments inherited from John Locke with utilitarian claims to state her concern of the social benefits of sexual equality. She leans on the radical argument of natural rights theories which say, "If all individuals are born free and equal bearers of such rights; then it is 'both inconsistent and unjust' to exclude women from the enjoyment."⁵⁹ There was no logical reason for excluding women from voting right, education right and career right. Attacking Edmund Burke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Mary Wollstonecraft argues that the birthright of man was a degree of liberty compatible with the liberties of other individuals.⁶⁰

Mary Wollstonecraft recommends educational reforms and urges equal treatment of women since men and women are rational beings. Her agenda for women's emancipation is a typically liberal one: education right, voting right, career right and political right. Education is the most important.⁶¹

Similarly, J.S. Mill emphasises the vital equality of male and female, using the rationality argument. Mill's argument has to do with women's legal infirmities, especially those which reflect a range of social and economic disparities.⁶² Mill, using utilitarian grounds, claims that the society would benefit if it fully exploits the rational endowments of women just as well of men.⁶³

Using the above as foundation, many liberal feminists believe the argument here is the opening of equal opportunities, particularly in education and work. They pursue the aforementioned through the introduction of legislation and attitudinal change; by sharing in the fundamental beliefs in the power of education as the recipe of social rebirth.⁶⁴

Liberal feminist clearest political commitments are very important to the emancipation of women. The liberal feminist argues on the premise that society would gain tremendously

from the principles of fairness and sportmanship, since men and women would discover their originality and society also will reap the gain from that.

Alison Jaggar, Bryson Valerie and Rose Marie Tong are examples of some liberal feminists. Jaggar maintains that, the thesis of the liberal feminist contention is that a woman has the liberty to decide her social responsibilities like a man.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the liberals consider freedom for women as the right to choose their own civil obligations and rival men on equal terms.⁶⁶ Women would be free when social, political and cultural impediments that hinder their participation in public affairs are removed and civil rights protected. Men would also be beneficiaries, as they would participate in public life and, in addition, explore the private realm hitherto ceded to women.

One major criticism against liberal feminism has been advanced by Allison Jaggar. To her liberal feminism is criticised for being committed to abstract individualism.

Radical feminism

Radical feminism rejects liberal feminism in the sense that reforms called for by Liberal feminism are not sufficient. Radical feminism views patriarchy permeating most societies (if not all) so it advocates the fundamental (radical) alternation of the term. The foundation of gender, say radical feminists, is the biological fact that only women bear children. There is need to look towards a new reproductive technology that would free women's bodies from childbearing.

Once motherhood is defeated, the entire family system could be revolutionized by freeing women, men and children from the tyranny of family.⁶⁷ Radical feminists refocus our understanding of society, by rearranging it with new radically set of women-centred meanings. They aim to represent personal identities, strip language and norms of their privileged masculinity.

The radical feminism's agenda is visibly presented when women are understood existentially as the *other* of men. The historically accepted differences between the sexes, according to Simone de Beauvoir, rest on social conditions which permit the subjugation of women by men. She sums up her thesis in the pregnant phrase: "one is not born but rather becomes a woman". She avers that women should undertake an existential reconstruction that

allows identity rebirth and lifestyles in their sundry social-cultural domains. She insists that the woman's body yields a situation rather than a destiny. She propagates an ideal of humanity's future beyond male and female. With the option of birth control and other means of aided birth, the woman enjoys the full control of her body and takes her position with man in creating culture by becoming a subject to be discussed.⁶⁸

In addition, radical feminism draws on gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender activism to criticise conventional attitudes towards sexuality. Radical feminists, for example, have observed that a woman who carves out her life and lives independent of men's endorsement may easily be charged as a lesbian. Bopnie Kreps, a radical feminist, has been in the vanguard of fighting traditional institutions and moral values. To her, "we must combat the corrupt notion we now call 'love' which is more of controlling another person rather than on 'love' for the growth of another. The institutionalization that suppressed women must be fought – especially the institution of marriage."⁶⁹ The focus of the thought is to excuse women from the "burden" of child-bearing. Thus, she has the right over "her" pregnancy. This has been taken further as a ground for the demand for abortion since men are free from carrying pregnancy to term. Alternatively, society should sign in for the responsibility of child-rearing.

Kate Millet, in *Sexual Politics*, develops a comprehensive theory of patriarchy of male dominance anchor to society, its structures and values depicting hostile to women. For Millet, the location of male power is the nuclear family, which inhibits the sexual and social possibilities of women to the demands of one man and his children; and removes reproduction and nurturing from the public domain. So the destruction of the nuclear family is essential, if women are to achieve their freedom.⁷⁰

One of the oppositions to radical feminism is from men and women who suspect a social movement that attacks the traditional family, by dislocating the male-female relationships known before. Some see the emphasis of radical feminists on gender-neutral God as debasing and rebellious against God.⁷¹

Most critics of radical feminism state that their aim is often not only to abolish patriarchy, but also to undermine men by replacing patriarchy and reversing the genders. Many critics, particularly men's rights and father's rights advocates, hold the view that radical feminism is solely misandrist and a sexist version of racial supremacy. So also liberal feminists

often see radical feminists as upturning the gain of women's movement with rhetoric thereby overemphasising sexual politics at the expense of political reform.⁷²

Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminism is a brand of feminism that hinged upon both the public and private spheres of the woman's life. It argues that liberation can be got by working to stop both economic and cultural sources of women's oppression. Socialist feminism is a dualist theory that expands Marxist feminism's argument on the role of capitalism in the oppression of women and radical feminism's argument of the role of gender and patriarchy.

Socialist feminism rejects the aggressive individualism of liberal feminism and centralised state; and aims to achieve the goals of substantive equality between men and women. Socialist feminism realises that the formal rights demanded by liberalism were insufficient to relieve the daily miseries of women and the working class, except a reorganisation of the whole socio-economic fabric.

Since one major principle of socialism is that of public ownership and control of means of production, this socialist system should have the goal of setting people free from the condition of material dependence that has imprisoned them from time immemorial.⁷³ A small number of men have wealth and power through Capitalist tendency. This bourgeois family enriched by capitalism must change. Opposing patriarchy entails opposing capitalism. This goal can only be achieved through a socialist revolution that creates a state-centred economy to meet the needs of all.

Friedrich Engels, in *The Origin of The Family, Private Property, and the State*, provides a classic Marxist account of gender relations, which explains the basis of gender inequality. He argues that the origins of sexual inequality could be traced to the establishment of patrilineal descent that arose with the advent of private property as a mechanism to ensure that property remains with male descendants.⁷⁴ For Engels, the entrance of Socialism would eradicate both private property and the domestic oppression of women.

Socialist feminism is criticised as a theory that relies on a very resilient notion of a standpoint. For such a theory, there is a high risk of erasing the differences that exist among women. When private property and servitude of women are abolished, who then takes over?

There are few women in government even when the state owns private property. At the end of the day, women lose on both sides – with capitalism and within socialist state.

Ecofeminism

Like radical, liberal and socialist feminists, ecofeminism highlights the multiple ways in which human beings oppress each other and the non-human world. Ecofeminism is a relatively new variant of ecological ethics. Ecofeminism shows philosophies and movements that link feminism with ecology. The connections are highlighted in order to understand “why the environment becomes a feminist issue”, as well as “why feminist issues are addressed in terms of environmental concerns.”⁷⁵ This allows a philosophical interrogation to the variety of different connections between feminism and the environment.

Ecofeminists hold the view that there are important connections between the domination of women (and other human subordinates) and the domination of nature and that failure to recognise these connections results in inadequate feminisms, environmentalism and environmental philosophy. The literature of early ecofeminists was founded on “movements” of the Chipco in Himalayan, India; the Green Belt in Kenya, anti-militarist movement in Europe; and dumping of hazardous wastes in Love Canal in New York State, USA. The above events attracted awareness to the role of women in dramatising the links between women and environmental change.⁷⁶ These movements show the “resistance politics” with the connections between women and nature.

“Ecofeminism” first appeared in 1974 at Francoise d’Eaubonne’s *Le Féminisme ou la Mort*. In the work, according to Rosemarie Tong, Francoise d’Eaubonne “expressed the view that there exists a direct link between the oppression of women and the oppression of nature. Francoise d’Eaubonne claimed the liberation of one affected the liberation of the other.”⁷⁷ Ecofeminism was further expanded by Ynestra King in 1976 and it became a movement in 1980.

According to Ynestra King, “the recognition of the connections between women and nature and of women’s bridge-like position between nature and culture pose three possible directions of Feminism.”⁷⁸ One, it cuts the woman-nature connection by totally integrating women into culture and the realm of production. Two, it reaffirms the woman-nature connection, proposing that female nature is not only from, but also somehow better than male culture. Three, it transforms the woman-nature connection by using it to create a different kind

of culture and politics that would integrate intuitive, spiritual and rational forms of knowledge by creating a free, ecological society.⁷⁹ Cecile Jackson also aptly opines that “ecofeminism reflects an awareness of the problem of how we treat the struggles within feminisms generally of how to construct the human in other than masculine characteristics.”⁸⁰

The woman-nature connection is believed by ecofeminists to be pictured through traditional “feminine” values, such as reciprocity, nurturing and cooperation, which women have. This perspective is drawn from the arguments of Sherry B. Ortner, in *Is Female to Male as Nature to Culture?* She argues that the view that women are closely related to nature is primarily due to their motherhood functions, like childbearing, nurturing, training and domestic responsibility. She explains the three reasons:

First woman’s physiology involved more of the time with ‘species of life; second woman’s association with the structurally subordinate domestic context, charged with the crucial function of transforming animal-like infants into cultured beings; third, ‘woman’s psyche’, appropriately molded to mothering functions by her own socialisation and tending towards greater personalism and less moderated modes of relating—all these factors make woman appear to be rooted more directly and deeply in nature.⁸¹

Furthermore, Ortner observes that this nature and culture link has several consequences, each explaining different interpretations of the term “intermediate”. First, “women, though, part and parcel of culture, occupy an intermediate position between culture and nature. This intermediate simply means “middle status” on a hierarchy of being from culture and nature.”⁸² Second, it can mean that women “mediate”, or perform some set of synthesising or converting functions between nature and culture – for example, the socialisation of children.

Third, the term “intermediate” can mean “of greater symbolic ambiguity”. Because society cannot quite understand the nature of women, it is not certain whether to associate women with life or death, good or evil, order or chaos.⁸³ Thus, the way to alter the view of women is to change women’s social actuality so that women as well as men are viewed as fully cultural persons capable of determining the course of history. Although, Ortner’s model assumes a common symbolic system, she fails to investigate further whether women see themselves as closer to nature because we do not know who sees women closer to nature: men, women or anthropologists?

Most feminist scholars, like Cecile Jackson, Janet Biehl, Meera Nanda and Bina Agarwal, have accused ecofeminist of being ethnocentric, essentialist and ahistorical and neglecting the material shape. This essentialism presents women as a homogenous category, both within countries and across nations. Bina Agarwal, for instance, opines that “the essentialism fails to differentiate among women by class, race, ethnicity and so on.”⁸⁴

Ecofeminist essentialism fails to put forward any account of historical change in society, since it ends in polarising the worlds of men and women, while essentialising the two categories. The separation created by ecofeminists between women/men and nature/culture creates a dualism that is too strict and showed the difference of women and men.

Cecile Jackson also sees the “explanations of the women-nature link as producing an essentialism, in which women constitute an undifferentiated category.”⁸⁵ She summaries the problems with ecofeminism thus: “it is ethnocentric, essentialist, blind to class, ethnicity and other differentiating cleavages, ahistorical and neglects the material sphere.”⁸⁶

Ecofeminists do not see nature and environment as culturally constructed but as biological facts. Yet, nature is a product of culture. Douglas Martin argues that “nature must be expressed in symbols, nature is known through symbols which are themselves a construction of expressed ... therefore, the reverse of natural.”⁸⁷

Womanism

Womanism is a word coined to explain the struggle of black women who could not embrace the issues that feminism typically addresses. Feminist movement was mainly led by middle-class white women who were seeking social change for women's rights, but never got involved in the civil obligations to help guarantee black women social equality. This feminist movement focused on finishing gender-based oppression that ignored race and class-based oppression. Furthermore, it was seen by many as intrinsically racist.

Womanism connotes different explanations and meanings. A Womanist believes strongly in the survival and wholeness of male and female. The publication of Layli Phillips brought forth a collection of womanist essays and critiques. She sees Womanism as a “social change perspective rooted in Black women’s and other women of colour’s everyday experiences and everyday methods of problem solving in everyday spaces, extended to the

problem of ending all forms of oppression for all people, restoring the balance between people and the environment/nature, and reconciling human life with the spiritual dimension.”⁸⁸

Womanism does not begin and end with women. A Womanist is triply concerned with herself/himself, other black women/men, the entire Black race – female or male, showing an ever-expanding and ultimately universal arc of political concern, empathy and activism. We infer from Layli Phillips arguments that, “womanism is not woman specific, but focuses on ‘harmonising and coordinating difference, ending all forms of oppression and dehumanization, and promoting well-being and commonweal for all people, regardless of identity, social address or origins.”⁸⁹ Modupe Kolawole says womanism expresses the positiveness in feminine issues.⁹⁰ For Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, “the womanist vision is racially conscious in its underscoring of the positive of black life. The politics of the womanist is unique in its racial-sexual ramifications. It is more complex than white sexual politics, for it addresses more directly the question relating to power and how to share equitably power among the races and between the sexes.”⁹¹

The term Womanism was coined and utilised by Alice Walker in her book *In Search of our Mother's Garden: Womanist Prose*. She captures the changes in the self-perception of the girl-child leading to adulthood. The girl-child is suddenly loaded with such responsibilities that impact negatively on her freedom. Her freedom becomes curtailed and sometimes she becomes a victim of some anti-social behaviour, such as rape, violence and abuse. She describes a womanist as “a woman who loves another woman, sexually and/or non-sexually ... She is committed to the survival and wholeness of an entire people, male and female.”⁹²

We could also argue that there are other contributors to the Womanist movement because of their dissatisfaction with the understanding given by Alice Walker. The description of Alice Walker's womanist as “a woman who loves another woman, sexually and/or non-sexually”, for example, brought about a new understanding of Womanism. This statement seems to give an undisguised approval to lesbianism which is completely strange to the worldview of the African woman. Also, there is the allegation that Alice Walker's agenda is just slightly different from mainstream feminist agenda.⁹³

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and Clenora Hudson-Weems exploited their own Womanist theories independently of Walker's Womanism. For Clenora Hudson-Weems, “Africana Womanism is neither an outgrowth nor an addendum to feminism, Black Feminism

or Walker's Womanism that some Africana women have come to embrace. Africana Womanism is an ideology created and designed for all women of African descent. It is grounded in African culture and therefore it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs and desire of Africana women."⁹⁴

So Africana Womanism is traceable to Clenora Hudson-Weems given in her book *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*. The reason for using the term Africana Womanism is not different from the general reason given by Womanism against white feminist movement. As rightly pointed out by Joyce Ladner, in *Tomorrow's Tomorrow*, "Black women do not perceive their enemy to be black men"⁹⁵

The womanist methods of social change revolve around the activities of harmonising, healing, coordinating, balancing and assertiveness.⁹⁶ These are used by Osita Ezenwanebe in her work.⁹⁷ She argues for a holistic view of the problem between Adugo, her husband Chuma and their four children at a moment of financial crisis. For Adaugo, Chuma's economic bankruptcy prevents him from providing for his family. This is not just his problem but also that of the family and must be confronted as such.⁹⁸ Another of Adaugo's womanist method is the use of creative dialogue. She sees dialogue as a terrain for negotiation and compromise.⁹⁹ Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi characterises womanist arbitration and mediation as "a belligerent form of pacifism".¹⁰⁰ This is because there are no enemies – only parties to a disagreement. The arbiter is a person who serves as a bridge by maintaining simultaneous positive relationship with both parties at once and translating communications in ways that make fresh perspectives possible.

Womanism binds novelists

Womanism is also a concept that binds novelists together. Womanist literature and activism interlink with each other with a considerable effect on the other. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi asserts that Womanists should uphold the issues affecting not just black women, but also black men and other groups that have experienced oppression. In her words, "a white woman writer may be a Feminist, but a black woman writer is likely to be a Womanist. That is, she will recognise that, along with her consciousness of sexual issues, she must incorporate racial, cultural, national, economic, and political considerations into her philosophy."¹⁰¹

This is the advice and thought of Osita Ezenwanebe, when she argues that:

The current trivialization of feminist issues in Nigerian theatre cannot be the way forward. A situation where women's quest for freedom is dissolved in boisterous laughter as in Ayekoroman's *Dance on his Grave* and Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband has Gone Mad Again* or the castigation of professional women as inimical to family life as in Ahmed Yerima's *The Portrait and the Mirror Cracks* are unacceptable affirmations of the illusions. The Eagle of Adaugo's womanhood in the play *Adaugo*, which is her ability to collapse the gender roles differentiation and perform both successfully in an all-inclusive, not separatist, manner, in order to secure the unity, survival and reformation of her family from economic and human threats.¹⁰²

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, a Nigerian literary critic, describes her interpretation of womanism. She observes the overlap in her concept "womanism" and that of Alice Walker's which captures the changes in the self-perception of the girl-child leading to adult. She sees the womanist vision as:

racially conscious in its underscoring of the positive aspect of black life. The politics of the womanist is unique in its racial-sexual ramifications; it is more complex than white sexual politics, for it addresses more directly the ultimate question relating to power: how do we share equitably the world's wealth and concomitant power among the races and between the sexes.¹⁰³

She adds that womanism means "a woman who is committed to the survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female with the ultimate aim of unity of blacks everywhere under the enlightened control of men and women."¹⁰⁴ The womanist project dismantles racism, neocolonialism, Euro-American patriarchy, power among races and sexes. She further argues that:

the black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates blacks. Its ideal is for black unity where every black person has a modicum of power and so can be a "brother" or "sister" or a "father" or a "mother" to the other. This philosophy has a mandalic core: its aim is the dynamism of wholeness and self-healing that one sees in the positive integrative endings of womanist novels.¹⁰⁵

The womanist project then enlists male support. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi puts it succinctly: "... conscious of black impotence in the context of white patriarchal culture, empowers the black man. She (black woman) believes in him, hence her books end in integrative images of the male and female worlds."¹⁰⁶

A lingering debate about the womanist thinking is the neglect of the homosexuality phenomenon in black communities. There are very few studies linking Womanism to lesbian and bisexual issues. Besides, Womanism has been criticised universally, for using the universalist and gradualist approaches. They amount to another form of silencing women. An answer to this accusation is that what would be achieved in the codes of silence outweighs whatever limitation therein. Womanism ridicules patriarchal assumptions that only the male gender should assume the breadwinner tag with the reality in modern African life. Womanism achieves gendered self-definition that asserts dignity and achievement. The Womanist project reforms the whole triad – man/woman, family and society.

We can also conclude conveniently and agree with Kolawole on the view that an African Womanist is the one who, out of the consciousness of the socio-cultural realities of the African woman engages in activities for the liberation and independence of the African woman¹⁰⁷ Thus, the word Womanism can be used for Alice Walker's womanism, Africana Womanism, for those in the Diaspora; Black Womanism from Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi explanation; and Womanism, for men and women in Africa. All of these serve "as the basis for an integrative field of theory and praxis which a host of people are following."¹⁰⁸

Endnotes

- ¹H.J. Blackham. 1965. Ed. *Reality, man and existence: essential works of existentialism*. 1.
- ²Joseph Omoregbe. 1990. *Knowing philosophy*. 38.
- ³John Macquarrie. 1982. *Existentialism*. 14.
- ⁴Samuel Enoch Stumpf. 1993. *Element of philosophy: an introduction*. 556.
- ⁵Samuel Enoch Sstumpf. 1993. *Element of philosophy: an introduction*. 557.
- ⁶Avrum Stroll and Richard H. Popkin. 1979. *Introduction to philosophy*. 389.
- ⁷William Barrett. 1962. *Irrational man: a study in existential philosophy*. 11.
- ⁸Christopher Agulanna. 1997. An overview of camus' existentialist philosophy. *The great philosophers*. Ed. Geoffrey O. Ozumba. 147. See also Oshita O. Oshita, Asira E. Asira, & Ncha, Gabriel Bubu M. 2016. Thoughts on existentialism, social solidarity and conflict management in Nigeria. *Ethics, governance and social order in Africa: essays in honour of Godwin S. Sogolo*. Eds. Olatunji A. Oyeshile & Francis Offor.
- ⁹H.J. Blackham. 1965. Ed. *Reality, man and existence: essential works of existentialism*. 5, 4.
- ¹⁰Martin Heidegger. 1956. The way back into the ground of metaphysics. *Existentialism from dostoevsky to sartre*. Ed. Walter Kaufmann. 10.
- ¹¹Jean-Paul Sartre. 1957. *Existentialism and human emotions*. 22-23.
- ¹²Mirinal Kanti Bhadra. 1990. *A critical survey of phenomenology and existentialism*. 147.
- ¹³Mirinal Kanti Bhadra. 1990. *A critical survey of phenomenology and existentialism*. 159.
- ¹⁴H.J. Blackham. 1965. Ed. *Reality, man and existence: essential works of existentialism*. 3-4.
- ¹⁵Soren Kierkegaard. 1941. *Concluding unscientific postscripts*. 99-133.
- ¹⁶Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 267.
- ¹⁷Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 65.
- ¹⁸Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 64.
- ¹⁹Sherry B. Ortner. 1974. Is female to male as nature is to culture. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 70.
- ²⁰Segun Ogungbemi. 2011. African women at the receiving end. *Beyond tradition: African women in cultural and political spaces*. Eds. Toyin Falola and S.U. Fwatshak. 8.
- ²¹Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 64.
- ²²Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 65.
- ²³Simone de Beauvoir. 1970. *The ethics of ambiguity*. 17.
- ²⁴Jean-Paul Sartre. 1957. *Existentialism and human emotions*. 20 & 21.
- ²⁵Jean-Paul Sartre. 1957. *Existentialism and human emotions*. 37 & 38.

- ²⁶Jean-Paul Sartre. 1966. *Being and nothingness*. 226.
- ²⁷Jean-Paul Sartre. 1966. *Being and nothingness*. 226.
- ²⁸Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. xxii
- ²⁹Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. xxii & xxiii.
- ³⁰Jean-Paul Sartre. 1956. The wall. *Existentialism from doestoevsky to Sartre*. Ed. Walter Kaufmann. 281-299.
- ³¹John Macquarrie. 1982. *Existentialism*. 24.
- ³²John Macquarrie. 1982. *Existentialism*. 25.
- ³³Karl Jasper. 1974. *Introduction a la philosophie*. 723.
- ³⁴Joseph Omoregbe. 1990. *Knowing philosophy*. 71.
- ³⁵Jeans Grisham. 1986. *Feminist philosophers: women's perspectives on philosophical tradition*. 37.
- ³⁶Jean Wahl. 1980. *A short history of existentialism*. 31.
- ³⁷William Barrett. 1962. *Irrational man: a study in existential philosophy*. 8.
- ³⁸Mirinal Kanti Bhadra. 1990. *A critical survey of phenomenology and existentialism*. 374.
- ³⁹Mirinal Kanti Bhadra. 1990. *A critical survey of phenomenology and existentialism*. 380.
- ⁴⁰Alasdair Macintyre. 1972. Existentialism. *Encyclopedia of philosophy*.
- ⁴¹Alasdair Macintyre. 1972. Existentialism. *Encyclopedia of philosophy*.
- ⁴²Joseph Omoregbe. 1991. *The simplified history of western philosophy*. 38-110.
- ⁴³Joseph Omoregbe. 1991. *The simplified history of western philosophy*. vi, 39.
- ⁴⁴Simone de Beauvoir. 1970. *The ethics of ambiguity*. 133.
- ⁴⁵Feminism, Retrieved March 1st, 2018, from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/'Feminism'>.
- ⁴⁶Jeans Grisham. 1986. *Feminist philosophers: women's perspectives on philosophical tradition*. 21.
- ⁴⁷A. Machinery. 1973. The essential contestability of some social concept. *Ethics*, 84, 7.
- ⁴⁸Gayle MacDonald. 1989. Feminist teaching techniques for the committed but exhausted, *Atlantis*. 15:1, Fall/Autumn, 146.
- ⁴⁹Lucia A. Gilbert and Murray Scher. 1999. *Gender and sex in counselling and psychotherapy*. 3, 4, 5. See also Chipu M. Hatendi, Tatenda Mataka, Benjamin Gweru, 2018. Gender and the death penalty law in Zimbabwe: an exploratory essay. *The death penalty from an African perspective: views from Zimbabwean and Nigerian philosophers*. Eds. Fainos Mangena & Jonathan O. Chimakonam, 193.
- ⁵⁰Neuer Werner. 1990. *Man and women in christian perspective*. translated by Gordon J. Wenham. 18.

- ⁵¹ Anne C. Minas. 1993. *Gender basic: feminist perspectives on women and men*. 6.
- ⁵² Bell Hooks, 1993. Ain't a woman: black women and feminism. *Feminist frontiers III*. Eds. Laurel Richardson and Verta Taylor. 507.
- ⁵³ Udentia O. Udentia. 1993. *Aesthetics and the African literary process*. 127.
- ⁵⁴ Erwin W. Lutzer. 1993. *Twelve myths americans believe*. 91.
- ⁵⁵ Shuilamith Firestone. 1979. *The dialectic of sex: the case for feminist revolution*. 223-224, 233, 261-262.
- ⁵⁶ Jeffner Allen. 1984. *Motherhood: the annihilation of women in jean trebilcot mothering: essays in feminist theory*. 315.
- ⁵⁷ Jeans Grisham. 1986. *Feminist philosophers: women's perspectives on philosophical tradition*. 14.
- ⁵⁸ Ruth A. Wallace. 1996. Feminist theory in North America: new insights for the sociology of religion. *Social compass*. 43:3, 467-479.
- ⁵⁹ Diana H. Coole. 1988. *Women in political theory: from ancient misogyny to contemporary feminism*. 20.
- ⁶⁰ Jeans Grisham. 1986. *Feminist philosophers: women's perspectives on philosophical tradition*. 9-10.
- ⁶¹ Diana H. Coole. 1988. *Women in political theory: from ancient misogyny to contemporary feminism*. 127.
- ⁶² Julia Annas. 1977. Mill and the subjection of women. *Philosophy: journal of the royal institute of philosophy*. 52: 200, April, 179.
- ⁶³ Barrie Axford, Gary K. Browning, Richard Huggins & Ben Rosamond. 2002. *Politics: an introduction*. 2nd ed. 284.
- ⁶⁴ Susan Wendell. 1987. A (qualified) defence of liberal feminism. *Hypatia*, 2: Summer. 66.
- ⁶⁵ Allison M. Jaggar. 1977. Political philosophies of women's liberation. *Feminism and philosophy*. Eds. Mary Vettering-Braggin, Frederick A. Elliston & Jane English. 6-7.
- ⁶⁶ Allison M. Jaggar. 1977. Political philosophies of women's liberation. *Feminism and philosophy*. Eds. Mary Vettering-Braggin, Frederick A. Elliston & Jane English. 9.
- ⁶⁷ John J. Macionis and Linda M. Gerber. 1999. *Sociology*. 317-318.
- ⁶⁸ Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 733.
- ⁶⁹ Erwin W. Lutzer. 1993. *Twelve myths American believe*. 93.
- ⁷⁰ Kate Millet. 1970. *Sexual politics*. 62-63.
- ⁷¹ Benson Igboin. 2004. A philosophical appraisal of gender neutrality in the light of christian eschatological. *Iroro: journal of arts*. 10:1 & 2, 227.

- ⁷²Betty Friedan. 1963. *The feminine mystique*. 30.
- ⁷³L.P. Baradat. 1979. *Political ideologies: their origins and impact*. 174.
- ⁷⁴Friedrich Engels. 1983. *The origin of the family, private property, and the state*. 29-37.
- ⁷⁵Greta Gaard. 1993. *Ecofeminism: women, animals and nature*. 4.
- ⁷⁶Susan Buckingham. 2004. Ecofeminism in the Twenty-First Century. *Geographical journal*. 151.
- ⁷⁷Rosemarie Tong. 2009. *Feminist thought: a more compressive introduction*. 242.
- ⁷⁸Ynestra King. 1989. The ecology of feminism and the feminism of ecofeminism. *Healing the wounds: the promise of ecofeminism*. Ed. Judith Plant. 22-23.
- ⁷⁹Ynestra King. 1989. The ecology of feminism and the feminism of ecofeminism. *Healing the wounds: the promise of ecofeminism*. Ed. Judith Plant. 23.
- ⁸⁰Cecile Jackson. 1993. Women/Nature or Gender/History? A Critique of Ecofeminist 'Development'. *The journal of peasant studies*. 392.
- ⁸¹Sherry B. Ortner. 1974. Is female to male as nature is to culture. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 84.
- ⁸²Sherry B. Ortner. 1974. Is female to male as nature is to culture. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 84.
- ⁸³Sherry B. Ortner. 1974. Is female to male as nature is to culture. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 85.
- ⁸⁴Bina Agarwal. 1992. The gender and environment debate: lesson from India, *Feminist studies*. 122.
- ⁸⁵Cecile Jackson. 1993. Women/nature or gender/history? a Critique of ecofeminist 'development'. *The journal of peasant studies*. 395.
- ⁸⁶Cecile Jackson. 1993. Women/nature or gender/history? a critique of ecofeminist 'development'. *The journal of peasant studies*. 398.
- ⁸⁷Douglas Martin. 1973. Self Evidence. *Proceedings of the royal anthropological institute of great britain and ireland*. 11.
- ⁸⁸Layli Phillips. 2006. Introduction: womanism: on its own. *The womanist reader*. Ed. Layli Phillips. xx.
- ⁸⁹Layli Phillips. 2006. Introduction: womanism: on its own. *The womanist reader*. Ed. Layli Phillips. xxvi.
- ⁹⁰Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 24.
- ⁹¹Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 68.

- ⁹²Layli Phillips. 2006. Introduction: womanism: on its own. *The womanist reader*. Ed. Layli Phillips. 19.
- ⁹³Yetunde Olukemi Akorede. 2011. *Womanism and the intra-gender conflict theory*. 47.
- ⁹⁴Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 25.
- ⁹⁵Layli Phillips. 2006. Introduction: womanism: on its own. *The womanist reader*. Ed. Layli Phillips. xxvi.
- ⁹⁶Osita C. Ezenwanebe. 2012. The eagle of womanhood: dramatizing the strength of Nigerian women in the wake of modern experience. *OFO: journal of transatlantic studies*. 2:2, 107.
- ⁹⁷Osita C. Ezenwanebe. 2012. The eagle of womanhood: dramatizing the strength of Nigerian women in the wake of modern experience. *OFO: journal of transatlantic studies*. 2:2, 97-113.
- ⁹⁸Osita C. Ezenwanebe. 2012. The eagle of womanhood: dramatizing the strength of Nigerian women in the wake of modern experience. *OFO: journal of transatlantic studies*. 2:2, 101.
- ⁹⁹Osita C. Ezenwanebe. 2012. The eagle of womanhood: dramatizing the strength of Nigerian women in the wake of modern experience. *OFO: journal of transatlantic studies*. 2:2, 103-104.
- ¹⁰⁰Layli Phillips. 2006. Introduction: womanism: on its own. *The womanist reader*. Ed. Layli Phillips. xxvii.
- ¹⁰¹Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 64.
- ¹⁰²Osita C. Ezenwanebe. 2012. The eagle of womanhood: dramatizing the strength of Nigerian women in the wake of modern experience. *OFO: journal of transatlantic studies*. 2:2, 112.
- ¹⁰³Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 68.
- ¹⁰⁴Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 68, 71.
- ¹⁰⁵Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 72.
- ¹⁰⁶Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 69.
- ¹⁰⁷Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 34.
- ¹⁰⁸Layli Phillips. 2006. Introduction: womanism: on its own. *The womanist reader*. Ed. Layli Phillips. xx.

CHAPTER THREE

The Existential Feminist Perspective of Simone de Beauvoir

In this chapter, we shall provide the main arguments of Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of the nature and causes of women's subordination. We shall concern ourselves with the causes of woman's oppression. The historically accepted differences between the sexes, according to her, rest on social conditions which permit the subjugation of women by men. She sums up her thesis in the expression "one is not born but rather becomes a woman".

In her highly important work, *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir asserts as follows; "one is not born but rather becomes a woman ... no biological, psychological, economic fate determines the figure that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature, ... which is described as feminine."¹ Put differently, socio-political situation of human society defines and imposes gender roles. Gender, according to Simone de Beauvoir, is socially constructed. Similarly, the meaning that is assigned to a given sex is as a result of childhood socialisation. Gender is a matter of becoming and is thus subject to choice and change. Gender is a process however limited, and is open to social action and individual choice.

Existentialism, says Simone de Beauvoir, is relevant to human existence and to the experience of women's lives. Women, she says, are more than their anatomy, that is, though female biological functions play an important role in women's lives, it should not "determined" them nor be an extrinsic factor. The existential feminism of Simone de Beauvoir fundamentally recasts the issue of women's oppression and offers deeper insights into the theoretical imagination of the situation of the female in a complex world. The methodical remark is to leave behind all earlier debates on the position of women and to start all over again.

Thus, Simone de Beauvoir sought to "study women with emphasis on her social condition."² The Second World War was crucial for Simone de Beauvoir in demonstrating that individuals cannot always define their own fate and that the search for personal autonomy has to be accompanied by a battle for a form of society in which individual liberties are safeguarded.

The war demonstrated to Simone de Beauvoir that personal freedom and liberty cannot exist within an un-free society, and that those individual choices and modes of self-expression which they so valued had to exist within a general context of respect for individual freedoms, if

they were to be anything except meaningless. The right to express oneself freely, to publish dissenting works, to be critical of the status quo or to live in an unorthodox or deviant manner were all threatened, and curtailed by the German occupation. The general limits imposed on intellectuals by the occupation were clearly neither as harsh nor as punitive as those invoked against the Trade Unions and the Communist Party.³

It is, therefore, hardly surprising, given the traumatic impact that the Second World War had on Simone de Beauvoir, that in her first major post-war work, she should turn to an examination of constraint, and, in particular, the constraint on women.

The theme of “others”

The theme of the “*other*” is a central idea for Simone de Beauvoir. She argues that women have been reduced to objects for men: woman has been constructed, as man’s “*other*”, denied the right to her own subjectivity and to be responsible for her own actions. The word “*other*” became increasingly important in Simone de Beauvoir’s vocabulary. She asserts that “not only were women the “*other*”, but seen as considered barred from empowerment by colour or sexual preference. To her, the next logical step seemed the need to define what these “*others*” were in relation to men, then study the historical situations which made such alterity possible in the first place and what circumstances made it legitimate.”⁴

Simone de Beauvoir lays emphasis on the ways in which women are raised to see maleness as the natural human state in which women form the objectified “other”. It is the importance that society accords to biological sex, rather than sex itself, that forces women into playing the role of the *other*. It is a condition of exclusion on being shunned, abandoned, marginalised, disadvantaged, unprivileged, rejected and un-free.

She resorts to Hegel’s analysis of the relationship between two consciousnesses. She identifies the point when two different human beings are living close to each. Each tries to impose his/her power on the *other*. If both resist, then the relationship between them would be one of reciprocity. However, if a person, by virtue of a particular difference, no matter how minimal, is more privileged than the other, then such a person dominates the other in whatever form of relationship they enter into. A group sets itself up as the one, while, at once, set up the other against itself.

The problem of the 'other' is further corroborated by Kolawole A. Owolabi when he posits that "the problem of the 'other' refers to the worry that an individual develops when he is confronted with another person. It is precisely the type of feelings going through the mind of Robinson Crusoe, the very moment he first encountered another person on his lonely island."⁵

Account of female data of biology

Simone de Beauvoir comes up with her essential arguments about the nature of female biology by affirming the dissimilarity between male and female mammals, which is essentially that "the female is the target of the species."⁶ She affirms that "man finds another justification from the biology data to call woman; a womb, a female. A man is proud to say 'I am a man'."⁷

Simone de Beauvoir brings out the implication of the female biology thus: there is an absolute polarity between man and woman; and that woman's biology implicitly carries with it the taken-for-granted assumption of woman's physical weakness, the most important element of which is woman's inability to transcend her biology. Women, it would appear, are trapped within their bodies in a way in which men are not.

Simone de Beauvoir concludes the argument by stating thus:

The two gametes play a fundamentally identical role, together they create a living being in which both of them are at once lost and transcended. But in the secondary and superficial phenomena upon which fertilisation depends, it is the male element which provides the stimuli needed for evoking new life and it is the female element that enables this new life to be lodged in a stable organism.⁸

In the process of copulation, the male deposits his semen; the female receives it. The male recovers his individuality intact at the moment when he transcends. The egg separates from the female body when fully mature. It emerges from the follicle and fall into the oviduct, but if fertilised by a gamete from outside, it becomes attached again through implantation in the uterus. The female is then alienated; she becomes in part another than herself. The more clearly the female appears as a separate individual, the more imperiously the continuity of life asserts itself against her separateness, because she carries the foetus inside her abdomen until it reaches a stage of development. After the birth, she feeds the newborn upon the milk of her breasts.⁹ Woman, through her biological considerations, "is not a completed reality but rather a

becoming, and it is in her becoming that she should be compared with man; that is to say, her possibilities should be defined.”¹⁰

Simone de Beauvoir argues that Platonic myth explains the division of sexes from the outset. There were at the beginning men, women and hermaphrodites; the gods decreed that new human beings should be created through the coupling of dissimilar halves. Aristotle did not explain the division of sex. She quotes Aristotle as saying “for if matter and form must cooperate in all action, there is no necessity for the active and passive principles to be separated into two different categories of individuals.”¹¹ Furthermore, Thomas Aquinas proclaims woman an “incidental” being, which is a way of suggesting – from the male point of view – the accidental or contingent nature of sexuality.

Furthermore, Simone de Beauvoir cites Hegel as saying:

Sexuality represents the medium through which the subject attains concrete sense of belonging to a particular (*genre*). The sense of kind is produced in the subject as an effect which offsets this disproportionate sense of his individual reality, as a desire to find the sense of himself in another individual of his species through the union with this other, to complete himself and thus to incorporate the kind (*genre*) within his own nature and bring it into existence. For the uniting process to be accomplished, there must be sexual differentiation.¹²

Thus, “the two sexes were of necessity different, the one active and the other passive, and of course, the female would be the passive one. Man in consequence of that differentiation, is the active principle while woman is the passive principle because she remains underdeveloped in her unity.”¹³

Turning to the activities of pregnancy, childbirth and weaning, Simone de Beauvoir argues that they debar female individuality:

... the female appears as a separate individual, the more imperiously the continuity of life asserts itself against her separateness. She regains some autonomy after the birth of her offspring ... and it is following upon a separation that she devotes herself to them.... She does not seek to affirm her individuality; she is not hostile to males or to other females and shows little combative instinct.¹⁴

But on the contrary, “the lot of the male is different even in his transcendence towards the next generation; he keeps himself apart and maintains his individuality within himself.”¹⁵

Simone de Beauvoir adds that:

The male is thus permitted to express himself freely, the energy of the species is well integrated into his own living activity. On the contrary, the individuality of the female is opposed to the interest of the species. It is as if she were possessed by foreign forces – alienated. The male finds more and more varied ways in which to employ the forces he is master of, the female feels her enslavement more and more keenly, the conflict between her own interests and the reproductive forces is heightened.¹⁶

Although Simone de Beauvoir accepts that “the fact of biology take on the values that the existent bestows upon them,”¹⁷ she states what, for her, are the ‘facts’ of biology, that is, body as a situation. To this weakness must be added instability, lack of control and fragility:

Woman is weaker than man, she has less muscular strength, fewer red blood corpuscles, less lung capacity; she runs more slowly, can lift less heavy weights, can compete with man in hardly any sport; she cannot stand up to him in a fight. To all this weakness must be added the instability, the lack of control, and the fragility already discussed: these are facts.¹⁸

These facts cannot be denied – but in themselves they have no significance. Finally, in all, “it is impossible to measure in the abstract the burden imposed on woman by her reproductive function. The bearing of maternity upon the individual life, regulated naturally in animals by the oestrus cycle and the seasons, is not definitely prescribed in woman – society alone is the arbiter.”¹⁹

To conclude her argument, she says, man gives significance to the sexes and their relations through sexual activity, just as he gives sense and value to all the functions that he exercises. But the sexual activity is not necessarily implied in the nature of the human being. The perpetuation of the species does not necessitate sexual differentiation.

To further her attempts to locate the causes of the subordination of woman, Simone de Beauvoir turns next to what she describes as the psychoanalytic point of view. The reason for this is because; biology is not enough to give an answer to the question that she poses: why is woman the Other?

The psychoanalytic point of view

Simone de Beauvoir looks at the commitment of therapy to the investigation of lady. She accepts that Freud did not demonstrate genuine worry on the fate of lady or her sexuality, yet he just received the sexuality of man with inconsequential changes of ladies. Freud never demonstrates that lady's sexuality was created like that of man's. Or maybe, he sees the

"charisma always and normally male generally, regardless of whether it shows up in man or in lady. Freud declines to see the female moxie as having its very own unique nature, and hence it will essentially resemble an intricate deviation from the human charisma in general."²⁰ Also, Freud thinks "human drive creates at first indistinguishably in the two genders – every newborn child goes first through an oral stage that focuses it upon the maternal bosom, and afterward through a butt-centric stages; at last it achieves the genital stage, so, all in all the genders become differentiated."²¹

Simone de Beauvoir claims that Freud brings in another important factor: namely masculine eroticism which is definitely located in the penis; whereas, in woman, there are two distinct erotic systems: one the clitoral, which develops in childhood, the other vaginal, which develops only after puberty. When the boy reaches the genital phase, his evolution is complete. Woman's libido has a more complex process, it passes through clitoral pleasure to vaginal. Thus, there is only one genital stage for man, but there are two for woman. She runs a much greater risk of not reaching the end of her infantile stage and thus of developing neuroses.

The history of each stage is described by Freud. In the auto-erotic stage, the child becomes strongly attached to an object. The boy becomes fixed to his mother and desires to identify himself with his father; this presumption terrifies him and he dreads mutilation at the hands of his father in punishment for it. Thus, the castration complex springs from the Oedipus complex. Then, aggressiveness develops towards the father, but, at the same time, the child interiorises the father's authority; thus, the child builds super-ego and censures his incestuous tendencies. These are repressed, the complex is liquidated, and the son is freed from the fear of his father, whom he has now installed in his own psyche under the guise of moral precepts.

The girl's history is in the process of the Electra complex. The girl has a mother fixation, but the boy is at no time sexually attracted to the father. This fixation of the girl represents a survival of the oral phase. The girl identifies with his father, but towards the age of five, she discovers the anatomical differences between the sexes. She reacts to the absence of the penis by acquiring a castration complex – she imagines that she has been mutilated and she is pained at the thought. By renouncing his virile pretensions, she identifies with her mother and seeks to seduce the father. The castration complex and the Electra complex; reinforce each other. The super-ego is built in her and the incestuous tendencies are repressed; but her super-ego is not so strong, for the Electra complex is less sharply defined than the Oedipus complex,

because the first fixation was upon the mother and since the father is himself the object of the love that he condemns.²²

Simone de Beauvoir raises two objections to the above. She believes Freud bases his theory upon a masculine mode. Freud assumes that woman feels that she is a mutilated man. This idea of mutilation implies comparison and evaluation. The comparison could not arise from a simple anatomy and, in fact, little girls discover later the masculine construction only by sight.²³

Secondly, the concept of Electra complex is very vague because it is not supported by a basic description of the feminine libido. Where do we put the defining emotion as distinguishing from sexuality? She says, "if we say that in a child of ten the kisses and caresses of her father have an 'intrinsic aptitude' for arousing clitoral pleasure, it is to assert something that in most cases is nonsense."²⁴ What deifies the father is by no means the feminine libido (nor is the mother deified by the desire she arouses in the son); on the contrary, the fact that the feminine desire (in the daughter) is directed towards a sovereign being gives it a special character. It does not determine the nature of its object; rather, it is affected by the later. The sovereignty of the father is a fact of social origin, which Freud fails to account for.²⁵

In the final analysis, the true problem for the woman is to reject these flights from reality and seek fulfillment in transcendence. The thing to do then is to see what possibilities are opened up for her through the virile and the feminine attitudes. Thus, biologically speaking, women have two essential traits that characterise them: her grasp upon the world is less extended than man's and she is more closely enslaved to the species.

The view of historical materialism

In the opinion of Simone de Beauvoir the epochal conquest of the feminine sex begins with the development of primitive technology; and the means of controlling and organising subsistence agriculture. In the Stone Age land belonged to all. Man hunted and fished, woman remained in the home, doing pottery, weaving, gardening and discovering copper, tin, bronze and iron. With the expansion of agriculture, man began to using other men and women as labour. While at the same time, he reduced other men to slavery thereby bringing in private property through acquisition. The second explanation on why woman is oppressed is woman's consciousness enslavement. Who exactly are human beings and the other? Simone de Beauvoir asks us to agree that the human consciousness has a natural tendency to attempt to dominate

others. Human beings, for her are males, who dominate (because of “natural” female characteristics). It is a form of power relations. It creates a power relation because when the man confronts the other – woman, he will be anxious to dominate rather than to be dominated. Social relations or individual relations, therefore, always manifest as the desire to dominate.

Matrimony and occupation

Simone de Beauvoir’s solution for escaping marriage is occupation. She knows women’s entering to the field of production, and supply of industrial and economic products is the first step in their release. She opines that a woman needs economic freedom. Civil liberties, such as obedience as a duty of a wife to her husband and voting right “remain theoretical as long as they are unaccompanied by economic freedom... It is through gainful employment that woman has traversed most of the distance that separated her from the male; and nothing else can guarantee her liberty in practice. Once she ceases to be a parasite, the system based on her dependence crumbles; between her and the universe there is no longer any need for a masculine mediator.”²⁶

In her opinion, having job is the first step in women’s real independence because she knows financial need as the only reason of woman’s marriage. She asserts that “when woman is productive and active, she gains her transcendence; in her projects she concretely affirms her status as subject in connection with the aims she pursues, with the money and the rights she takes possession of, she makes trail of and senses her responsibility.”²⁷

However, Simone de Beauvoir cautions that a female does not enjoy the same destiny as a male. This is because:

She is not looked by the society in the same way a male is looked. A male enjoys from childhood his vocation as a human being to fulfill his destiny as a male ... He is not divided. Whereas for a female to realise her femininity she must make herself object and prey, which is to say that she must renounce her claims as sovereign subject.²⁸

Moreover, “femininity is artificially shaped by custom and fashion, it is imposed upon each woman from without ... The woman who does not conform devaluates herself sexually and hence socially, since sexual values are an integral feature of society.”²⁹ Even the ways women dress and keep the house are made burdensome to them. This is because “woman knows that when she is viewed, she is not considered apart from her appearance; she is judged, respected, desired by and through her toilette. Man, on the contrary, hardly has to take thought

of his clothes, for they are convenient, suitable to his active life, not necessarily elegant and they are scarcely a part of his personality.”³⁰

In doing what we itemised above:

... woman resembles those actors who fail to feel the emotion that would relax certain muscles and so by an effort of will contract the opposing ones; she realizes this, and it irritates her; over her blankly naïve face, there suddenly passes a flash of all too sharp intelligence; lips soft with promise suddenly tighten. Thus in imitating abandon the intellectual woman becomes tense.³¹

Once woman feels awkward from the above arts, she becomes worried at her terrible case; she revenges by deploying masculinity as a weapon; she does not listen but talks instead, she unveils the shrouded ideas, temperament, and disposition that contrasts the man rather those which normalizes him.³²

To further her opinion, Simone de Beauvoir advocates that having job gives married ladies possibility to get divorced from their husbands in the case of emergency, need and desire. According to her, “gainful economy in woman’s condition upsets marriage institution: since marriage is a union freely entered by two independent persons; the obligations of the two contracting parties are personal and reciprocal; adultery is a breach of contract for both; divorce can be obtained by either parties.”³³ In addition, “showing young women driven to sacrifice professions for the sake of peace and family, are rather outdated. Women are “leech” and they suffer for it.”³⁴ Is the changes in woman’s economy enough condition? One may ask Simone de Beauvoir. She believes so, even as she adds that “economic condition remains the basic factor in her changes, but a new woman cannot appear until moral, social, cultural and other consequences that they promise and require are brought forth.”³⁵

There are criticisms against Simone de Beauvoir’s arguments. For a woman to succeed biologically, economically, and, thus, create a social evolution, she must act like man, rejecting all attributes given to her by men, who defined society. So women should assume the creation of man as man would have been. In effect, Simone de Beauvoir considers worthy of emulations all those attributes that define masculinity. The masculine qualities are competitiveness, aggression, power and dominance.

In the second place, Simone de Beauvoir is guilty of having written about women. She separates herself from them. Francis Jeanson, quoted by Deirdre Bair accuses her of writing as

someone who understood the feminist condition only because she herself had escaped from it. A similar view is reiterated by Stevie Smith, that Simone de Beauvoir wrote an enormous book about women. The book showed she does not like being a woman.

Thirdly, Simone de Beauvoir is of the view that “generative function enslaves women by keeping her in domestic work and prevented her taken part in creating culture.”³⁶ She spells out two different dimensions of women alienation in reproduction. First, women are alienated due to lack of control over their bodies. Second, they are alienated from social control. She points out the first sense of alienation by maintaining that “... instead of integrating the powerful drives of the species into her individual life, the female is the target of the species.”³⁷ Simone de Beauvoir equally maintains that the epochal conquest of the feminine sex begins with the development of primitive technology. With the expansion of agriculture, man resorted to using other men and women as labour. He also reduced other men to slavery thereby bringing in private property through acquisition.³⁸ So there are two aspects of reproductive alienation, biological and social.

Biologically, woman can use contraceptives to control her body. There is, however, no biological viability in the assumed loss of control over own's body. Most women become mothers as a matter of social demands than a free decision. This decision does not explain the refusal of social access to women in the public sphere because of their reproduction. So, patriarchy contradicts and aligns women with nature and procreation. This is used to defend and validate their denial of access to the public sphere to females and their domination by rational males. Biological alienation does not condemn women, because, birth control means are subscribed to by heterosexual women to control their bodies.

The problem with Simone de Beauvoir's argument is that her explanations equate both the biological and social; and conclude that the two are determined by biology. She states that biology is one of the reasons to explain the dominance of women but, more importantly, reproductive function enslaves women. Initially, she was averse to the castigation of reproductive capacities but her position on biological determination resulted in another denigration. In addition, Reyes Lazaro also notes that Simone de Beauvoir accepts the traditional view that women are doomed by biology but alters this conclusion: whereas conservative thinking suggests that women cannot participate in social life, Simone de Beauvoir concludes that women must repudiate motherhood.³⁹

Also, Simone de Beauvoir sees female sexuality as problematic and contradictory. What is not clear in this account of how men and women act, and should act, towards each other is the extent to which Simone de Beauvoir argues that all sexuality is problematic; or if it is only female sexuality, and most particularly female sexuality that is expressed heterosexuality, that created difficulties and tensions between men and female.

In her discussion of heterosexuality in the chapter entitled “*Sexual Initiation*”, she suggests quite unequivocally that:

Woman is penetrated and fecundated by the way of the vagina, which becomes an erotic centre only through the intervention of the male, and this always constitutes a kind of violation. Even if a man is deferential and polite, the first penetration is always a violation. Because she desires caresses on lips or breasts, or even longs for a known or imagined pleasure more specifically sexual, what happens is that a man’s sex organ tears the young girl and penetrates into regions where it has not been desired.⁴⁰

It would appear that any act of heterosexual coition is unwelcome to women. The second discussion of heterosexuality is her account of maternity in the chapter entitled “*the Mother*”. The first false preconception that is problematic and contradictory “is that maternity is enough in all cases to crown a woman’s life. It is nothing of the kind. There are many mothers who are unhappy, embittered and unsatisfied.”⁴¹ The second part of the statement expressly implies the first, “the child is sure of being happy in its mother’s arms. There is no such thing as an ‘unnatural mother’, to be sure, since there is nothing natural about maternal love; but precisely for that reason, there are bad mothers.”⁴²

Evan Mary buttresses the argument by pointing out that Simone de Beauvoir is suggesting quite rightly and, more or less uncontroversially that society can shape (or mis-shape) sexuality, but she is also implying that “feeling of disgust and denial” are an inevitable part, for women, of the physical expression of heterosexuality. What is not openly acknowledged is the issue of deciding the extent to which human sexuality, and its expression, is naturally given or socially constructed.⁴³

Another important missing ingredient in Simone de Beauvoir’s account of motherhood is the role that men play in parenthood and the discussion of the social and personal aspects of paternity. If motherhood is a mystery to some women, given the arrival of a child who is the archetypal other or repetition – where, “every child born is a god who is made man,”⁴⁴ or

“becoming a mother in her turn, the woman in a sense takes the place of her own mother; meaning a complete emancipation for her.”⁴⁵ The question is: How much more might that child be an “other” to a father?

What women felt about motherhood in the past and to a large extent the present is only partially recorded. However, Simone de Beauvoir’s account suggests widespread dissatisfaction that contain a great deal of truth – but at the same time she might well be accused of presenting a particularly limited or one-dimensional view of what is arguably a complex experience. She posits that the historically accepted differences between the sexes, rest on social conditions which permit the subjugation of women by men thus social disparities between men and women. Woman has been reduced to an object for man; she is denied the right to her own subjectivity and to be responsible for her own actions. Men create artificial creation - human culture, not biological reproduction. However, it should be noted that motherhood entails both male and female performing their respective roles. The duties of motherhood are not tied exclusively to conception, pregnancy and birth, as discussed by Simone de Beauvoir.

Female autobiographies speak of some of the trials of maternity. Yet these female autobiographies, diaries and letters also speak of the positive aspects of motherhood. In Simone de Beauvoir’s account we hear so much of the negative aspects of motherhood as if there were no positive aspects at all. We know there are positive aspects of motherhood.

Endnotes

- ¹Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 267.
- ²Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 52.
- ³Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. xxii, 3.
- ⁴Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. xxi.
- ⁵Kolawole A. Owolabi. 2003. *Fictional tribes and tribal fictions: ethnicity, ethnocentrism and the problem of the 'other' in Africa*. 7.
- ⁶Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 372.
- ⁷Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. xxiv.
- ⁸Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second Sex*. 3.
- ⁹Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. xxiv.
- ¹⁰Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second Sex*. 34.
- ¹¹Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second Sex*. 6.
- ¹²Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second Sex*. 6.
- ¹³Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second Sex*. 9.
- ¹⁴Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second Sex*. 22-23.
- ¹⁵Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second Sex*. 23.
- ¹⁶Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second Sex*. 25.
- ¹⁷Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second Sex*. 36.
- ¹⁸Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second Sex*. 34.
- ¹⁸Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second Sex*. 35.
- ²⁰Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 39.
- ²¹Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 39.
- ²²Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second Sex*. 40-41.
- ²³Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second Sex*. 42.
- ²⁴Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second Sex*. 42.
- ²⁵Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second Sex*. 42.
- ²⁶Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 679.
- ²⁷Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 680.
- ²⁸Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 682.
- ²⁹Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 683.

- ³⁰ Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 685.
- ³¹ Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 683.
- ³² Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 425.
- ³³ Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 694.
- ³⁴ Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 724, 725.
- ³⁵ Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 725.
- ³⁶ Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 117.
- ³⁷ Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 372.
- ³⁸ Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 54.
- ³⁹ Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 54.
- ⁴⁰ Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 117.
- ⁴¹ Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 372 & 383.
- ⁴² Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 523.
- ⁴³ Dale Spender. 1984. Ed. *Feminist theories: three centuries of women's intellectual tradition*. 356-357.
- ⁴⁴ Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 497.
- ⁴⁵ Simone de Beauvoir. 1989. *The second sex*. 493.

CHAPTER FOUR

Various Strands of African Womanism

In Chapter Three, we analysed the main arguments of Simone de Beauvoir's discussion on the nature and causes of women's subordination. The historically accepted differences between the sexes, according to her, rest on social conditions which permit the subjugation of women by men. In all, we found out that Simone de Beauvoir focuses on inability to create culture, reproductive rights and social disparities. These create inherent tensions which include, asking woman to act like man; and having masculine qualities, such as competitiveness, aggression, power, and dominance. In explaining the domestic and religious terms, of woman's war, she is playful and somewhat puritanical;¹ In addition, she does not describe nor ascribe any role to men in parenthood, and the social and personal aspects of paternity.

In this chapter, we shall look at the various strands of African Womanism. This is necessary to project the fact that the West (Euro-American) female cannot speak authoritatively for African women. We will also examine African Womanism and its complementarity principle with a view to establishing the relationship between gender differences, gender roles and social order in Africa. As Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amponsah observe, that "many researches recognise the need to re-conceptualise women and to engender new paradigms that unpack the baggage of Western feminist theorization to the African experience."²

Furthermore, we wish to indicate that African women's voices and perspectives as grounded in the paradigmatic trend of self-naming couched in different concepts, such as Stiwanism, by Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie; Mothersim, by C.O. Acholonu; Nego-feminism, by Obioma Nnaemeka; Iwalewa Obinrin, by Mobolanle Ebunoluwa Sotunsa; Snail Sense Feminism, by Akachi Ezeigbo and African Womanism, by Mary Egun Modupe Kolawole and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. We shall not concern ourselves with other alternative indigenous African concepts but concentrate on the brands of African Womanism. Let us begin with Mary Egun Modupe Kolawole's brand.

Mary Egun Modupe Kolawole

Mary Egun Modupe Kolawole is a celebrated literary critic who upholds the use of the term Womanism to delineate black consciousness in gender discourse.³ She contends that critics and women writers from the African continent are responding to the challenges,

condition and needs of African women from their different ideological spaces. These women include Awa Thiam, in *Speak Out, Black Sister*, Daphine Williams-Ntiri, 'Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi, Helen Mugambi, Obioma Nnaemeka, Irene Assiba D'Almeida, Abena Busia and Siga Jajne.⁴

She argues forcefully on the dangers Africans would face by not speaking out or assuming what the Western feminists just present. This agrees with the argument of Mobolanle Sotunsa, who classifies a group of African female writers, scholars and critics who identify themselves with Western Feminism. She avers that "this group deems that the term feminism is adequate to express issues pertaining to women everywhere. As such they see no reason for bringing forth an alternative concept to Feminism."⁵

The African equivalent of Euro-American things did not start with these scholars. It appears in the works of first generation of scholars, especially Bolaji E. Idowu. Idowu avers on religion that "if they [European] have God, we have Olodumare; if they have Jesus Christ; we have Ela the god of salvation, same as them."⁶ We should understand that African women "did not need to learn self-assertion from the West. Some maternal grandmothers have strong personality; they are firm, strict and feared by both men and women. They took no nonsense from anybody, male or female, and were often invited to help discipline other people's children. For Kolawole and others, these maternal grandmothers are the first symbol of firm self-assertion."⁷ Kolawole notes that Africans have always been concerned with gender issues before the advent and influence of the West.

The alternative Womanist theory, arose principally because self-naming is a common trend in African societies and African women believe it is fundamental and sacred status. A stranger with inadequate knowledge of names lacks capacity for personal possession of naming.⁸ In other words, as noted by Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amponsah, "this principle of 'self-reclamation' and 'self-naming' is based in part on African philosophical thought on naming and identity, and on the notion that an outsider can hardly understand the experiences and struggle of another; and hence, provide the appropriate naming solutions for such experiences and struggles."⁹

Kolawole defines African Womanism as expressing the positiveness in feminine issues.¹⁰ She acknowledges the efforts and contributions of blacks in Diaspora. She argues that blacks in Diaspora are retrieving the values of feminine self-expression, self-realisation of

culture in them for a reorientation of womanism in Africa to reflect the reality of African women. In addition, blacks in Diaspora have sustained African perspective oriented towards family-life vigorously and self-consciously.¹¹

These definitions then mean “to many women on the African continent, the men are not their enemies. ... This necessitates a dialogic stance, a mutual understanding and not a dogmatic or diachronic ideological posture.”¹² Kolawole contends that:

Grass-root women are not concerned about conceptualization which is considered as an academic preoccupation, but in belief and in practice; many prefer a position that enhances women’s conditions and opportunities for participation in development that does not alienate men; that does not jeopardize the esteemed family system, and celebrates motherhood. This provides a meeting point between grass-root women and scholars, between working class and middle-class women, between theory and practice, and between concept and activism.¹³

Moreover, Kolawole posits that “women do not see the family as an anathema. They cannot adopt the Western Feminists’ attitude. African women insist on the essence of womanhood.”¹⁴ She, therefore, concludes that an African Womanist is the one who, out of the consciousness of the socio-cultural realities of the African woman engages in activities for the liberation and independence of the African woman.¹⁵

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi

Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi explains her understanding of Womanism. She observes the overlap in her concept of womanism and that of Alice Walker’s, which captures the changes in the self-perception of the girl-child leading to adulthood. The girl-child is suddenly loaded with such responsibilities that impact negatively on her freedom. Her freedom becomes curtailed and sometimes she becomes a victim of some anti-social behaviour, such as rape, violence, abuse, etc.¹⁶

Okonjo Ogunyemi sees her Womanist vision as “racially conscious in its underscoring of the positive aspect of black life. The politics of the Womanist is unique in its racial-sexual ramifications; it is more complex than white sexual politics, for it addresses more directly the ultimate question relating to power: how do we share equitably the world’s wealth and concomitant power among the races and between the sexes.”¹⁷ Womanism means “a woman

who is committed to the survival and wholeness of the entire people, male and female. The ultimate aim of Womanism is to work for the unity of blacks on earth”¹⁸

Just like Mary Ebum Modupe Kolawole, Yetunde Olukemi Akorede and many others have acknowledged many African writers and critics, Okonjo Ogunyemi asserts that these African writers and critics are “exploring the work of other positions and producing an existing fluid body of work that defies rigid grouping.”¹⁹ The writers and critics are doing this because of their race, their experience arising from the control exercised over them by Western-culture.²⁰ Okonjo Ogunyemi gives examples of female writers whose book integrate womanist objective. They are Ama Ata Aidoo, who proposes a synergy between sexes as a means of achieving solidarity.²¹ Also, while exposing and condemning the oppressive culture of the Fulani people with reference to the female folk, Mariama Ba questions the rationale for the dominance and demand a fair treatment for the female folk.²² Bessie Head’s Womanist novel shows that widowhood involves the care of male and female children in South Africa.²³ Okonjo Ogunyemi opines that “womanism binds together many black female novels in English.”²⁴ Womanist literature and activism are interwoven, with each having causal effect on the other. The Womanist project also dismantles racism, neocolonialism, Euro-American patriarchy, power among races and sexes.

Discussing the issue of patriarch for example, Okonjo Ogunyemi differentiates between feminism and womanism by pointing out how each of these two ideological orientations perceives patriarchy. It is a domestic affair without the wide reverberations on the black, while in white patriarchy it is real power.²⁵

The issue of patriarchy is also clearly captured in Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amponsah’s view that many of the works available on patriarchy, especially those of radical feminist and Marxist feminist scholars have focused on theorising as well as historicising male dominance. Often times they have presented an indelible impression of patriarchy as resolute and fired by an indiscriminate and unswerving male devotion to controlling every aspect of life. Radical feminists have asserted that patriarchy involves configurations of misogynistic control of the sexuality and reproduction of women by men. Early Marxist feminists conceived of patriarchal domination as traversing women’s reproductive exploitation and their exploitation in the capitalist market economy.

Others in the opposite side argue that, even if control over reproduction and economic production was a necessary feature of societies, such controls need not necessarily be by men, nor need it be inimical to the interest of women.²⁶ Corroborating this, Oyeronke Oyewumi argues that conceiving gender and patriarchy as the epitome of a universal female subordination is misleading because it is based on the assumption that these concepts are permeable variations in every society.²⁷

Okonjo Ogunyemi also rejects feminism based on certain tendencies in Western feminism which she considers unacceptable to black/African women. Patricia Collins also corroborates the rejection by arguing that African American may embrace the ideas on which feminism rests, large numbers of them reject the term ‘feminism’ because of its association with whiteness which they can see.²⁸

Following from the above, Okonjo Ogunyemi avers that:

Black Womanism is giving a balanced presentation of black womandom. It concerns itself as much with the black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates blacks. Its ideal is for black unity where every black person has a modicum of power and so can be a “brother” or “sister” or a “father” or a “mother” to the other. This philosophy has a mandalic core: its aims is the dynamism of wholeness and self-healing that one sees in the positive integrative endings of womanist novels.²⁹

The womanist project thus enlists male support. Accordingly, the standpoint of womanism should not be that men are enemies; rather, much could be achieved by enlisting their support to achieve some fair dealings. Womanists do not hate men; they love them like their female counterpart and they cherish harmonious co-existence with the family settings.

Characteristics of African Womanism

There are certain characteristics which African Womanism shares with Womanism and Africana Womanism. These features are similar and some differ.

1. Womanism, African Womanism and Africana Woman recognise the tripartite subjugation of black women – racial, classist and sexist oppression which white women ignored and the early Feminist movement portrayed. In addition, there is the tendency of Euro-American feminism to assimilate all differences and, in particular, to exhibit both racism and

cultural imperialism rather without self-selfconsciousness. Thus, Womanism, African Womanism and Africana Womanism do not emphasise or privilege gender or sexism; rather, they elevate all sites and forms of oppression, whether they are based on social address categories like gender, race or class, to a level of equal consideration.

2. Womanism, African Womanism and Africana Womanism do not hate men.
3. Womanism, African Womanism and Africana Womanism bind novelists together. We see the examples given by Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi as an African Womanist. The novelists include Mariama Ba, Ama Ata Aidoo, Bessie Head and Osita C. Ezenwanebe.

African Womanism has the following peculiar characteristics.

- a. African Womanism fears the appropriation of the voices of African woman because of Western theorisation that puts forward women issues as universal and relevant to all women globally.
- b. African Womanism is grounded in the paradigmatic principle of “self-reclamation” and “self-naming” based in part on African philosophical thought on African values, naming and identity.
- c. African Womanism fits into African realities, expectations and experiences of women.

After discussing the two brands of African Womanism, where we identify the contributions of Mary Ebum Modupe Kolawole, Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi and some characteristics which African Womanism share with Womanism and Africana Womanism, and those that differ from Womanism and Africana Womanism, the next chapter will address the African Womanist response to the existentialist feminist perspective of Simone de Beauvoir. We have identified some responses, which include womanism insisting on the essence of responding to the challenges, condition and needs of African woman from their different ideological spaces by deconstructing the distorted images of African woman. The emergence of African Womanism is to be seen as awareness of the principle of self-reclamation and self-naming, which are based on the African philosophical thought of naming and identity. The efforts and contributions of blacks in diaspora are vigorously and self-consciously sustained. Men are not the enemies in the institutionalised power play to oppress Africa/Africana woman as White men. Black female writers integrate womanist objectives that revolve around ideas of motherhood, spirituality, community, hospitality, healing, mutual aid and self-help. These and many others shall identified in the next chapter.

Endnotes

- ¹Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*.11:1, 76.
- ²Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amponsah. 2013. Introduction. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amponsah. 10.
- ³Mobolanle Ebunoluwa Sotunsa. 2012. Glocalizing the gender discourse: a synthesis of indigenous African women's theories. *Women in Africa: contexts, rights, hegemonies*. Eds. Mobolanle Ebunoluwa Sotunsa & Olajumoke, Yacob-Haliso. 98.
- ⁴Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 4, 5.
- ⁵Mobolanle Ebunoluwa Sotunsa. 2012. Glocalizing the gender discourse: a synthesis of indigenous African women's theories. *Women in Africa: contexts, rights, hegemonies*. Eds. Mobolanle Ebunoluwa Sotunsa & Olajumoke, Yacob-Haliso. 97.
- ⁶E. Bolaji Idowu. *Olodumare: god in Yoruba belief*. 18-106, 204-206.
- ⁷Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 10.
- ⁸Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 26.
- ⁹Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amponsah. 2013. Introduction. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amponsah. 10.
- ¹⁰Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 24.
- ¹¹Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 13.
- ¹²Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 30, 36.
- ¹³Signe Arnfred. 2005. Ed. *Rethinking sexualities in Africa*. 253.
- ¹⁴Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 32.
- ¹⁵Mary E. Modupe Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 34.
- ¹⁶Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 72.
- ¹⁷Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 68.
- ¹⁸Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 71.
- ¹⁹Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 63-64.

- ²⁰Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 64.
- ²¹Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 75.
- ²²Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 75.
- ²³Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 75, 76.
- ²⁴Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 79.
- ²⁵Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 69-70
- ²⁶Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amponsah. 2013. Introduction. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amponsah. 5.
- ²⁷Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. xii.
- ²⁸Layli Phillips. 2006. Introduction: womanism: on its own. *The womanist reader*. Ed. Layli Phillips. 60.
- ²⁹Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in English. *signs*. 11:1, 72.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Womanist's Response

In Chapter Four, we identified the two strands of African Womanism which are the contributions of Mary Ebum Modupe Kolawole and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. For Kolawole, African Womanism delineates black consciousness in gender discourse. Women are deconstructing distorted images. The womanist alternative emerges from self-naming. This principle of self-reclamation and self-naming is based on the African philosophical thought on naming and identity. For Okonjo Ogunyemi, the Womanist vision radiates on the racial consciousness by underscoring the positive aspect of black life. Womanism works for the unity of black men and women on earth. She also gives examples of female writers whose books integrate womanist objectives.

In this chapter, we examine some responses of African Womanism to the existential feminist perspective of Simone de Beauvoir. We consider some works which are responses of African Womanist even though these authors have not classified themselves as African Womanists. Their works, we argue, reiterate the Womanist project. They show how in the West, biological explanation which Simone de Beauvoir canvasses as privileged over other ways of explaining differences of gender, race or class cannot be sustained. This is because “the universality attributed to gender asymmetry suggests a biological basis rather than a cultural one, given that the human anatomy is universal whereas cultures speak in myriad voices.”¹ We have identified the responses of two authors namely Oyeronke Oyewumi and Ifi Amadiume. Let us start with Oyeronke Oyewumi, which we consider as constitutive of an African Womanist project as response to the existential feminist perspective of Simon de Beauvoir.

Oyeronke Oyewumi responses

Oyeronke Oyewumi challenges the Western epistemology as projected by Simone de Beauvoir that the human body is viewed from the pereceptive of gender, resulting in the social categorisation into male and female. Oyewumi argues that “it has been well documented that, in the West, women/females are the “*other*”, being defined in antithesis to men/males, who presents the norm.”²

The above quotation sets the tone against the argument of Simone de Beauvoir that the socio-cultural challenges experienced by women are traceable to men, body reasoning and category of privileged argument. As opined by Oyewumi “in the Yoruba conception, *okunrin* is not posited as the norm, the essence of humanity, against which *obinrin* is the other. Nor is *okunrin* a category of privilege. *Obinrin* is not ranked in relation to *okunrin*, it does not have negative connotations of subordination and powerless, and; above all, it does not in and of itself constitute any social ranking.”³ The “body-reasoning” theory stems from Western enlightenment privileging of sight over other senses. This biological determinism has advantage above different ways of explaining differences of gender, race or class.

In the beginning of the second-wave feminism in Euro-America, sex was defined as the biological facts of male and female bodies. Gender was defined as the social consequences that flowed from these facts. In effect, each society was assumed to have a sex/gender system. In view of this, Oyewumi argues that “conceiving gender as the epitome of a universal female subordination is a misleading theorisation because it is based on the assumption that these concepts are permeable variations in every society.”⁴

If the body-reasoning is not always in view for categorisation, what are those principles that determine the social organisation prior to the Yoruba’s sustained contact with the West as Oyewumi argues Oyewumi contends that, in the pre-colonial Yoruba societies, “the social category ‘woman’ – anatomically identified and assumed to be a victim and socially disadvantaged – did not exist, rather, there were varieties of female roles. For women and men alike, the primary principle of social categories – seniority within the lineage – was the medium of social differentiation and not a gendered division between women and men.”⁵ Also, according to Oyewumi, there is an error of translation when the Yoruba categories *obinrin* and *okunrin* is translated as “female/woman” and “male/man”. The error occurs because many Western and West-influenced Yoruba thinkers fail to recognise that, in Yoruba practice and thoughts, these categories are neither binarily opposed nor hierarchical,⁶ whereas in the Western hegemonic binary male/female is absolute. Oyewumi, thus, proposes these concepts ‘anamale’ (anatomical males, *okunrin*), anafemales (anatomical female *obinrin*), and anasex child – anatomic male and anatomic female – *omo okunrin ati omo obinrin* to show the physiological differences between the two anatomies as they have to do with procreation and intercourse.⁷ In essence, the nature of one’s anatomy does not define one’s social position. The

Yoruba social order entails a social organisation on seniority which is based on chronological age. This seniority is relational and dynamic.

Oyewumi's womanist project serves as the alternative ways of looking at anatomic sex-distinctions. For example, addressed to a woman, *oun lo nsoko tabi oun loko* – (she is the husband) can either mean she has taken the responsibility of providing for the family or she is in control of the man through extra-terrestrial means. These roles are social, not sexual, whereas in Western thought, “the thinking is rendered as homosexual or transvestitism.”⁸ Thus, in the *agbo-ile* (a compound), women possess multiple identities: as a member of *omo-ile* – ranked by birth-order, an *aya-ile* (mother) in her marital lineage and also an *omo* – children in the lineage, and an *oko* (owner/member) in her natal home. In essence, the crucial difference is the birth and timing of entry into the clan for the *oko* and marriage for the *aya*. In this context, seniority is best understood as an organisation operating on the first come, first served basis. The priority of claim was established for each newcomer, whether she or he entered the lineage through birth or through marriage. Seniority was based on birth order for *omo-ile* and on marriage order for *aya-ile*. Children born before a particular *aya* joined the lineage were ranked lower; to this group, she was not an *aya* but an *iya* (mother).⁹

Furthermore, Oyewumi avers that kinship terms are also encoded by age relativity.¹⁰ She uses the kinship terms of *aburo/egbon*. The kinship term *aburo* refers to all relatives born after a given person including sisters, brothers and cousins. The word *egbon* performs a similar function. *Egbon* and *aburo* are the words denoting siblings, regardless of sex, the distinction being between younger and older siblings.¹¹ The kinship terms “show that what is privileged socially is the youth of the child, not the anatomy.”¹² The age relativity reveals the pivotal principle of social organisation. Seniority thus becomes “situational in that no one is permanently in a senior or junior position, from one moment to the next or from one speaker to the next; the position changes. It all depends on who is present in any given situation.”¹³ Rather than defined chronologically, then, age is measured temporarily by when an individual enters a lineage, and it confers power and prestige. This is in line with the crucial difference in the birth and timing of the entry into the clan by anasex that is *omo okunrin* and *omo obinrin*, literally “child”, anatomic male and “child”, anatomic female.

One objection to Oyewumi's argument is this: Are there no exception in which seniority is the social organisation based on chronological age? We know that the age grade initiation

and witchcraft cult are exceptions to the seniority theory based on chronological age. You might be an adult initiator to witchcraft yet a younger person is the leader of the cult. Even if age is measured temporarily by when an individual enters a lineage, which confers power and prestige; this is not the case in witchcraft cult. Also age grade consists of people who are roughly of the same age. They are young boys and girls, adults, junior elders and senior elders. Members of each age-group are initiated during the same period, that is, they enter into the age-organisation as they move from one group to another, which is marked by public rites and ceremonies. An age grade is a marked social status with duty and responsibilities appropriated to the age group concerned. The elders may be concerned with the government of the society while the younger grade of able-bodied men may be concerned with defence matters and many others.¹⁴ Lynn M. Thomas also comments thus: “Oyewumi does not demonstrate that the anatomic distinction between the bodies that are capable and incapable of reproducing was free of gender associations. The existence of process of male and female initiation in so many parts of the Continent suggests that anatomic distinctions have often been a basis for generating elaborate and complex ideologies of gender differences.”¹⁵

Oyewumi continues her arguments in the second book by mentioning the move away from the indigenous seniority-based matripotent ethos to a male-dominated, gender-based one. Her interest is the intersections of power, gender, history, knowledge making and the role of intellectuals in the process.

In exploring these intersections of knowledge and gender, Oyewumi focuses on *Ifa*. She shows two problems that occur with male academics' discussions of gender in *Ifa*. Oyewumi calls it “the man question” in *Ifa* as opposed to the standard Eurocentric “woman question”, as the most apposite way of analysing gender in *Ifa*. One, academic writings on gender in Yoruba do not problematise gender categories but assume them to be natural and integral to the culture and knowledge system. Two, their approach presents an inherent anti-female bias, because in searching for images of women in *Ifa*, they have already defined it as a man's world. These academics also have problems with translating the original language of *Ifa* in Yoruba to English, which has error of translating to English - a gendered language in which the male category is privileged, from Yoruba – a seniority-based language in which the social categories does not indicate the type of anatomy.

In addition, Oyewumi posits that the category of *Iya* (mother) is not originally a gender category. *Iya* (mother) is a seniority-based system. She introduces the concept of “matripotency” – supremacy of motherhood – as a lens through which to appreciate and understand the marginalised Yoruba epistemology. “Matripotency refers to the powers, spiritual and otherwise, deriving from *Iya*’s procreative role. Its efficacy is most pronounced when *Iya* (mother) is considered in relation to her birth children. The matripotent ethos expresses the seniority system in that *Iya* (mother) is the venerated senior over the children.”¹⁶ *What Gender is Motherhood* questions “motherhood as a paradigmatic gender category which is expressed in Western discourses and determines their intellectual concepts and theories. However, gender is a social and historical construct, thus we must not impose Euro/American categories on Yoruba unquestioningly.”¹⁷ Oyewumi notes that matrophobia is the central theme in White feminist theorisation of motherhood in the United States, which Oyewumi opines that Adrienne Rich defines as “the fear not of one’s, other or motherhood but of becoming one’s mother.”¹⁸ The reason Adrienne Rich offers, is “the fact the patriarchal conditions under which motherhood takes place in their society.”¹⁹ Oyewumi reiterates the argument again in this book, as she does in *The Invention*, that:

The dominant Western feminist accounts of motherhood reduce it to a gender category. As such, a mother is represented as a woman first and foremost, a category that is perceived to be subordinated, disadvantaged, and oppressed because women are subordinate to males, who are privileged group. The gendering of the institution of motherhood leads to its patriarchalisation. In turn, because of the privileging of the males, reproductive processes like parturition, gestation and childbirth, which has no male equivalents, are erased from many feminist accounts of motherhood.²⁰

In summary, *Iya* (mother) is not gendered because its rationale and meaning derive from *Iya*’s role as co-maker with Eledaa (the Creator) of humans. *Iya* (mother) is also a singular category incomparable to any other. Furthermore, both anamale and anafemale children spiritually choose their *Iya* (mother) in the same way, and *Iya* (mother) are connected to all their born children similarly without any distinction made of the type of genitalia they may have.²¹

Ifi Amadiume responses

Ifi Amadiume also brings forth her Womanist response by challenging the Western epistemologies as applied to the culture of origin. She places the blame on colonialism and Christianity. According to Amadiume, in the indigenous society, the dual-sex principle behind social organisation was mediated by the flexible gender system of the traditional culture and language. Sex does not constitute intellectual weakness reserved for men.²² She expatiates further that Igbo gender construct is flexible to the extent that there are no roles to the exclusive preserve of men that women cannot perform.²³

Amadiume uses the practice known as *nhayika* or *nhanye* – a kind of replacement to explain daughters becoming sons and consequently male, which shows the flexibility of Igbo gender construction. This is what Eileen Boris calls “the dual-sex system which emphasises complementarity based on separate but equally significant contributions to the well-being of the society.”²⁴ She gives example of Ojukwu Isi Ana, a priest of the Land Spirit and father to Nwajiuba. Although Ojukwu was a very wealth man, a *dibia* and successful farmer who cultivated very large type of yam, he was poor in people, as he had no sons, and his only brother died without issue. According to Nwajiuba, because of this absence of close relatives, when her father became ill, he decided to recall her from her marital home and allowed her to remain in his house as a male. She would then have the status of a son, and be able to inherit her father’s property.²⁵

Also, Amadiume examines a practice known as *igba-ohu*, which means woman-to-woman marriage. This shows how obtaining wealth or attaining age rather than maleness or femaleness determines rank. She discusses the practice of *igba-ohu* woman-to-woman: rich or powerful women were able to form client/patron or master/servant relationships by undertaking to pay bride wealth for a man’s marriage. In such cases, the man and his potential family would remain obliged to the woman patron. This way, women were able to recruit a large labour force and strong clientage. A barren woman was also able to gain her husband’s favour through woman-to-woman marriage. Rich and powerful women, too, were able to free themselves from domestic responsibilities through woman-to-woman marriages. First daughters especially had this privilege of woman-to-woman marriage, particularly where there were no males in their natal homes. Men and women were therefore involved in the practice of marriage exchange.²⁶

From the above, gender has worked along with, rather than apart from, wealth, lineage and other social factors. Womanhood, as well as manhood, was multiple, intertwined with life cycle and additional social positions. With emphasis on lineage and kinship, as well as age, African womanists expand the repertoire for intersectional analysis beyond gender, race, class, nation and biological sex.

African/Africana men are not the enemies

Another Womanist response is the statement by African Womanists that African men are not the enemies in giving Womanist philosophy. Alice Walker's multiple definition of the term "womanism" sheds light on why African/Africana womanists do not see men as the enemies. Womanism provides room to enlisting support to achieve some fair dealings between blacks on earth. African/Africana women would not hate their counterpart men because of what they see as the association of whiteness, which connotes colonialism. They love their female and male counterparts and they cherish harmonious co-existence with the family settings.

The second part of Alice Walker "Womanism" presents a visionary meaning. As part of her second definition, Walker has a black girl pose the question "Mama, why are we brown, pink and yellow, and our cousins are white, beige and black?"²⁷ The response is "well, you know the coloured race is just like a flower garden, with every colour flower represented."²⁸ To corroborate Alice Walker, Patricia Hill Collins sees "Womanism as furnishing a vision where women and men of different colours coexist like flowers in a garden yet retain their cultural distinctiveness and integrity."²⁹ Clenora Hudson-Weems' Africana Womanism is also presented "as perceiving herself as the companion to the Africana man, and works diligently towards continuing their established union in the struggle against racial oppression."³⁰

Joyce Ladner also expresses the relationship between African/Africana men and women, and which does not view the former as the enemy of the latter thus: "Black women do not see their enemy to be black men but rather the enemy is considered to be oppressive forces in [traditional family] and the larger society which suppress black men, women and children."³¹

According to 'Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, "men are not the enemy ... The enemy is the total societal system, which is a jumble of neocolonial and feudalistic."³² To Mary E. Modupe Kolawole, "there are more pressing problems that require the concerted efforts of all for women to see men as enemies. To many women on the African continent, the men are not their

enemies.”³³ Moreover, the non-hating attitude necessitates dialogic stance, mutual understanding and not a dogmatic or diachronic ideological posture. According to Olabisi Aina, “the success of women not hating men will depend not only on raising the consciousness of women but on how much cooperation women receive from the men in creating a more humane world, that is, one devoid of gender oppression.”³⁴

In the word of Osita Ezenwanebe, this non-hating posture “aim at gender complementarity, where men and women as unique individuals, co-exist in mutual love and responsible freedom.”³⁵ Thus, “the man is not considered as an outsider or a target to be hunted down or subdued since negotiation and compromise [are terrain for dialogue – my word]”³⁶ We read how Ezenwanebe used womanist method of harmonisation and coordination in analysing the Igbo patriarchal myths and the Igbo woman’s strategy for dismantling them in the arts of *Adaugo*.³⁷

Thus, we can conclude that the survival of both sexes, and the desire for where both sexes can co-exist, is paramount to the heart of Womanist posture. This inclusion of men and not hating them provides African/Africana women the room to address gender oppression without attacking men directly.

Womanists are not apprehensive of motherhood

The institution of motherhood constitutes an important foundational building cell upon which the super-structure of a society can be built. It is the pivot around which the family life rotates. This institution – motherhood symbolises familial ties with regard to the well-being of the child, the mother, the father and other members of the family – both nuclear or extended. Thus, African Womanists are not apprehensive of motherhood. According to Oyeronke Oyewumi, the Yoruba value motherhood within the family system and the culture promotes effective motherhood even if it affects other engagements.³⁸

In addition, Bridget A. Teboh, quoting Oyeronke Oyewumi, says “in all African family arrangements, including matrifocal ones like the Akan of Ghana, the most important ties within the family flow from the mother, whatever the norms of marriage residence. These ties link the mother to the child and connect all the children of the same mother in bonds that are conceived as natural and unbreakable.”³⁹

Conversely, Oladele Balogun, quoting Oyewumi Oyenroke, argues that “the gendering of the institution of motherhood leads to its patriarchalisation.”⁴⁰ As such, a mother is

represented as a woman first and foremost, a dichotomous biological category that is perceived to be subordinated, disadvantaged and oppressed because women are subordinate to males who are the privileged group. We have earlier shown how Oyeronke Oyewumi also argues that Western feminist reduces motherhood to a gender category.⁴¹ Within this patriarchalising model, motherhood cannot be understood in and of itself, outside the lens of women's oppression. Thus, powerlessness and lack of agency are attached to the definition of motherhood. The Womanist's conception of motherhood transcends gender and is understandable outside gender categorisation, which does not necessarily involve oppression. Motherhood here is dissociated from its purely biological connotation and even from its strictly gendered connotation.

Also, motherhood is a caregiving commitment and one remains a child to one's mother regardless of one's age. At adulthood, the thread is unbroken and continues to bind the duo at the posthumous state of existence of the mother. The attainment of motherhood for married African women moves them out of the position of "wife" to that of "mother". It is thus least baffling that the sole defining marker of motherhood in Africa is bound to motherhood. The ascension of a woman to the status of a mother brings a new title, "*iya X*" where *iya* means "mother of" and "X" is the mother of the first child.

Motherhood in Africa is not sex-based. According to Oladele Balogun, "fathers or male relatives (from the maternal side) who are more maternal than the biological mother of a child or who actually performed the mothering responsibilities and duties on a child (perhaps as a result of the death of the biological mother) are referred to as mothers."⁴² In fact Oyeronke Oyewumi corroborates the above argument by noting that:

The living arrangements in large compounds, offering a multiplicity of mothers and fathers, meant that child-rearing was not an individualized experience that devolved only to the mothers. Many mothers were able to share child-care responsibilities among themselves, freeing large numbers of mothers of childbearing age to engage in whatever activities they pleased."⁴³

Basically, motherhood derives from caregiving, hearing, endurance, meditation. Thus, anyone, regardless of gender, age and climate who imbibes these attributes earn the identity of a mother.

A major criticism against motherhood in Africa is taking abuses by the majority of African women as part of endurance in marriage. Wife battering, child abuse and many others are sometimes accepted by women, especially most women at the grassroots who constitute the large majority of African women, as that enduring part of marriage which should be settled out of court. Sometimes, the ability of women to endure such outright brutality from their husbands determines the type of social respect they receive. A common phrase of the dutiful wife and mother is: *titori omo ni mo se njiya* (I am enduring all the domestic victimisations because of my children). This notion, according to Olabisi Aina, becomes an enduring fact of a society which gives all rights over children, including child custody, to the father.⁴⁴

What we have discussed above is contrary to what we have in Simone de Beauvoir's discussion on motherhood, where she eliminates motherhood from her project for female liberation. In discussing the issue of motherhood, she claims that female reproductive capacities are the cause of patriarchal oppression. The generative functions enslave and prevent women from shaping the world.⁴⁵ The generative functions are reproductive processes like parturition, gestations, childbirth and weaning. She sums the argument thus "... however strong the women were, the bondage of the production was a terrible handicap in the struggle against a hostile world. Pregnancy, childbirth and menstruation reduced their capacity for work and made them at times wholly dependent upon men for protection and food."⁴⁶

Simone de Beauvoir claims that a woman is brought up, first by her mother and then by teachers and society in general, to accept that motherhood is expected from her. This is so because "from infancy, woman is told over and over that she is made for childbearing, and the splendors of maternity are forever being sung to her. The drawbacks of her situation – menstruation, illnesses, and the like – and the boredom of household drudgery are all justified by this marvelous privilege she has of bringing children into the world."⁴⁷

According to Simone de Beauvoir, "pregnancy is drama that is acted out within the woman herself. The woman feels pregnancy as at once an enrichment and an injury; the fetus is a part of her body, and it is a parasite that feeds on it."⁴⁸ This act only makes pregnancy an illusion. This is because "the woman does not really make the baby, it makes itself within her; her flesh engenders flesh only, and she is quite capable of establishing an existence that will have to establish itself."⁴⁹

Women also show their secrecy on pregnancy. Some women are delighted in the mystery of pregnancy. Some are baffled by the inner contradictions and conflicts of pregnancy. Some women fear and long for pregnancy with hallucination and all sorts of anxieties. Some women enjoy exercising a maternal authority over children in their care, without being disposed to assuming all responsibilities. And some women have attitude of fearing pregnancy for themselves and they become midwives, nurses, governesses and devoted aunts.⁵⁰ In fact, “maternity is usually a strange mixture of narcissism, altruism, idle daydreaming, sincerity, bad faith, devotion and cynicism.”⁵¹ Simone de Beauvoir thus explains woman’s physiological situations.

Corroborating Simone de Beauvoir’s argument, Sherry B. Ortner posits that “woman’s body space, for a greater percentages of her lifetime, cost her personal health, strength and general stability which is taken up with the natural processes surrounding the reproduction of the species.”⁵² Furthermore, in doing the above, “man creates relatively lasting, eternal, transcendent objects while the woman creates only perishables – human beings.”⁵³

To avoid maternity which society destines for woman as the perpetuation of the species and as the prey of the species, thereby constraining womanish choices, option of birth control and other means of aided birth would permit woman to undertake her maternities in liberty.⁵⁴ Those who denied abortion its legalisation are absurd.

According to Simone de Beauvoir, “the practical considerations advanced against abortion are without weight; as for the moral considerations, they amount in the end to the old Catholic argument: the unborn child has a soul, which is denied access to paradise if its life is interrupted without baptism.”⁵⁵ She continues thus: “if baptism is lacking for fetus, why should in the times of the ‘Holy Wars’ the infidels were killed, yet unbaptized, and their slaughter was heartily encouraged The stumbling-block to abortion is an old obstinate tradition that has nothing to do with morality.”⁵⁶ What this means is that the life of unborn child is as important as the lives of the infidels that were killed unbaptised.

Furthermore, Simone de Beauvoir discusses the negative implications of woman’s “enslavement to the species” in relation to the project in which humans engage. She arrives at the crux of her argument thus:

Here we have the key to the whole mystery. On the biological level a species is maintained by creating itself anew: but this creation results only on repeating the same life in more

individuals. But man assures the repetition of life while transcending life through existence; by this transcendence he creates values that deprive pure repetition of all value ... the human male also remodels the face of the earth, he creates new instruments, he invents, he shapes the future.⁵⁷

From the above, it is clear that artificial insemination would complete the evolutionary advance to reproductive function and would advance humanity to master the reproductive function.”⁵⁸ Simone de Beauvoir’s idea of motherhood is also the same as matrimony, as we discussed in Chapter Three. That is, the solution for escaping matrimony is occupation. Having a job is the first step in women’s real independence as financial need is the only reason of woman’s marriage. This gives married ladies possibility to get divorced from their husbands in the case of emergency, need and desire. Simone de Beauvoir does not give a specific solution to escaping from motherhood, except recommending women by different ways to refuse motherhood through abortion and artificial insemination.

She likens motherhood to slavery, claiming that the fear of death and destruction – which is one of the fears in existentialists’ idea - leads women into motherhood, and to bringing copies of themselves. Simone de Beauvoir forcefully states that woman, by accepting motherhood, will ruin her future and the ways of realising noble existence to herself. Motherhood is men’s snare for capturing women. These are her reasons for not accepting motherhood’s role. These prescriptions, if fully accepted and implemented in life, would be problematic. This is because men and women value women throughout the known world to us for their ability to procreate. Treating women both as means and end is the surest way to appreciating motherhood. The way Simone de Beauvoir treats women portrays them as a means, not an end. Her account shows there is no independent meaning of motherhood outside the mother’s primary and sexualised identity as the patriarch’s wife. The mother’s sexual ties to her husband are privileged over her relationship to her child; she is not so much a woman as she is a wife. With this patriarchalising model, motherhood cannot be understood in and of itself, except through the lens of women’s oppression.

Recognising the role men play in parenthood or parenting

Simone de Beauvoir argues that woman’s anatomy and biology are used to oppress her. Woman’s biology is seen as a burden. During the activities of copulation, the male drops his

semen, the female receives it while the activities of pregnancy, birth and weaning debar female individuality. Simone de Beauvoir's perspective portrays the male as not having any role to play in parenting, since she claims that he is always keeping and maintaining his individuality. This assumption is biological as usual. That is, it comes from the argument of genderising male and female. Simone de Beauvoir's argument, for example, shows that, once impregnated, a woman cannot be impregnated again, whereas the man can continue to father children without any obligations.

We argue that the male is expected to cater for the female and children materially. The obligation of the male to cater for the female and children means that there is gainful employment for the male. This would enable the male to cater for the female and children materially. The male is not just a loafer, in the way Simone de Beauvoir presents him who thinks he needs to abandon the female. This is because in parenting, the child might be the "other" to the father if he is not available materially or otherwise. This might lead us to the assumption that the father is the "other". We agree that, in the process of fertilising the egg, the male and female play equal parts; the male would still be interested in playing his role in the processes of birth and providing for weaning by providing for the female and children materially.

In other cultures in Africa, such as Akan, Igbo, Yoruba and Urhobo, the male also has very prominent part to play during the rites of passage, especially marriage, where there is need to provide dowry and bride wealth for one's future children. Bride wealth serves as a source of legalising a marriage and for the man's kinship to have legitimate claim to the children arising from the marriage. The bride takes some home to start married life with a good wardrobe, while other items are shared by members of the extended families and their friends. This is another way of announcing the legality of the marriage.

The Cultural Revolution envisaged by Simone de Beauvoir puts in question all the convictions, traditions and customs on interactions between the sexes that have developed in the course of human history. This Cultural Revolution which has been taken up and developed by other newer feminist movements has not completely overridden the entire humanity because of the need to use motherhood as a means and an end. Motherhood entails both male and female performing their respective roles. The duties of motherhood are not tied exclusively to conception, pregnancy and birth as discussed by Simone de Beauvoir. While it is true that safe

delivery of a child is a necessary requirement for the assumption of the identity of a mother; that alone is not sufficient for motherhood.

In this chapter, we analysed some responses of African Womanists to the existential feminist perspective of Simone de Beauvoir. Although the authors of the works that provide the responses do not consider themselves as African womanists, their works, we argued, reiterate the womanist project. We identified the responses of two authors namely Oyeronke Oyewumi and Ifi Amadiume. The next chapter addresses African Womanism and the harmonious coexistence of male and female in society.

Endnotes

- ¹Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 10.
- ²Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 33.
- ³Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 33.
- ⁴Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. xii.
- ⁵Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 79, 33.
- ⁶Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 32-33.
- ⁷Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 34, 41.
- ⁸Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 175.
- ⁹Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 44, 45.
- ¹⁰Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 40.
- ¹¹Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 158.
- ¹²Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 41.
- ¹³Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 42, 167.
- ¹⁴Onigu Otite and W. Ogionwo. 2001. *An introduction to sociological studies*. 51-52.
- ¹⁵Lynn M. Thomas. 2007. Placing schoolgirl pregnancies in African history. *Africa after gender?* Catherine M. Cole, Takyiwaa Manuh, and Stephen F. Miescher. 57.
- ¹⁶Oyeronke Oyewumi. 2016. *What gender is motherhood? changing Yoruba ideals of power, procreation, and identity in the age of modernity*. 52, 58.
- ¹⁷Oyeronke Oyewumi. 2016. *What gender is motherhood? changing Yoruba ideals of power, procreation, and identity in the age of modernity*. 7.

- ¹⁸Oyeronke Oyewumi. 2016. *What gender is motherhood? changing Yoruba ideals of power, procreation, and identity in the age of modernity*. 213.
- ¹⁹Oyeronke Oyewumi. 2016. *What gender is motherhood? changing Yoruba ideals of power, procreation, and identity in the age of modernity*. 213.
- ²⁰Oyeronke Oyewumi. 2016. *What gender is motherhood? changing Yoruba ideals of power, procreation, and identity in the age of modernity*. 213.
- ²¹Oyeronke Oyewumi. 2016. *What gender is motherhood? changing Yoruba ideals of power, procreation, and identity in the age of modernity*. 59.
- ²²Ifi Amadiume. 2015. *Male daughters, female husbands gender and sex in an Africa society*. 185.
- ²³Ifi Amadiume. 2015. *Male daughters, female husbands gender and sex in an Africa society*. 15.
- ²⁴Eileen Boris. 2007. Gender after africa!. *Africa after gender?* Catherine M. Cole, Takyiwaa Manuh, and Stephen F. Miescher. 195.
- ²⁵Ifi Amadiume. 2015. *Male daughters, female husbands gender and sex in an Africa society*. 32.
- ²⁶Ifi Amadiume. 2015. *Male daughters, female husbands gender and sex in an Africa society*. 72.
- ²⁷Layli Phillips. 2006. Introduction: womanism: on its own. *The womanist reader*. Ed. Layli Phillips. 19.
- ²⁸Layli Phillips. 2006. Introduction: womanism: on its own. *The womanist reader*. Ed. Layli Phillips. 19.
- ²⁹Layli Phillips. 2006. Introduction: womanism: on its own. *The womanist reader*. Ed. Layli Phillips. 60.
- ³⁰Layli Phillips. 2006. Introduction: womanism: on its own. *The womanist reader*. Ed. Layli Phillips. 41.
- ³¹Osita C. Ezenwanebe. 2012. The eagle of womanhood: dramatizing the strength of Nigerian women in the wake of modern experience. *OFO: journal of transatlantic studies*. 2:2, 107.
- ³²Molara Ogundipe-Leslie. 1985. Nigeria: not spinning on the axis of malesness. *Sisterhood is global*. Ed. Robin Morgan. 502.
- ³³Mary E. Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 30.
- ³⁴Olabisi Aina. 1998. African women at the grassroots: the salient partners of the women's movement. *Sisterhood, feminisms and power: from Africa to the diaspora*. Ed. Obioma Nnaemeka. 76.

- ³⁵Osita C. Ezenwanebe. 2012. The eagle of womanhood: dramatizing the strength of Nigerian women in the wake of modern experience. *OFO: journal of transatlantic studies*. 2:2, 99.
- ³⁶Osita C. Ezenwanebe. 2012. The eagle of womanhood: dramatizing the strength of Nigerian women in the wake of modern experience. *OFO: journal of transatlantic studies*. 2:2, 100.
- ³⁷Osita C. Ezenwanebe. 2012. The eagle of womanhood: dramatizing the strength of Nigerian women in the wake of modern experience. *OFO: journal of transatlantic studies*. 2:2, 101. Adaugo is a social realistic theater that captures the relationship of the female protagonist Adaugo, her husband – Chuma and their four children at a moment of financial crisis. Chuma, Adaugo’s husband and the man of the house suddenly goes bankrupt when the shipload of his goods disappears on the high sea. Adaugo takes the mantle of sustaining the large family with her meager salary as a clerical officer in a health Ministry. Chuma’s temporary economic dependency awakens the myriad of patriarchal myths about women – domestic bound, incapable of decision-making, bottom power, feeble-and-fickle-minded, capacity to stray and hence in need of constant surveillance – which put serious strain on their spousal relation, threatening the collapse of the family, if not for Adaugo’s strategies of holistic view of the problem, use of creative dialogue, ridicule patriarchal assumption, etc. See also Osita C. E. 2011. *Adaugo*. Ibadan: Krafts Books.
- ³⁸Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 75.
- ³⁹Bridget A. Teboh. 2013. 2013. Motherhood, women’s bodies and “eating well”: pregnancy, a metaphor of life in the Cameroon grassfields. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amponsah. 277.
- ⁴⁰Oladele Abiodun Balogun. 2011. Yoruba-African understanding of authentic motherhood. *Beyond tradition: African women in cultural and political spaces*. Eds. Toyin Falola and S.U. Fwatshak. 23.
- ⁴¹Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 77, 78, 79.
- ⁴²Oladele Abiodun Balogun. 2011. Yoruba-African understanding of authentic motherhood. *Beyond tradition: African women in cultural and political spaces*. Eds. Toyin Falola and S.U. Fwatshak. 20.
- ⁴³Oyeronke Oyewumi. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. 73.
- ⁴⁴Olabisi Aina. 1998. African women at the grassroots: the salient partners of the women’s movement. *Sisterhood, feminisms and power: from Africa to the diaspora*. Ed. Obioma Nnaemeka. 80.
- ⁴⁵Simone de Beauvoir. *The second sex*. 117.

- ⁴⁶Simone de Beauvoir. *The second sex*. 62.
- ⁴⁷Simone de Beauvoir. *The second sex*. 491.
- ⁴⁸Simone de Beauvoir. *The second sex*. 495.
- ⁴⁹Simone de Beauvoir. *The second sex*. 496.
- ⁵⁰Simone de Beauvoir. *The second sex*. 493.
- ⁵¹Simone de Beauvoir. *The second sex*. 513.
- ⁵²Sherry B. Ortner. 1974. Is female to male as nature is to culture. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 75.
- ⁵³Sherry B. Ortner. 1974. Is female to male as nature is to culture. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 75.
- ⁵⁴Simone de Beauvoir. *The second sex*. 492.
- ⁵⁵Simone de Beauvoir. *The second sex*. 486.
- ⁵⁶Simone de Beauvoir. *The second sex*. 486.
- ⁵⁷Simone de Beauvoir. *The second sex*. 64.
- ⁵⁸Simone de Beauvoir. *The second sex*. 121.

CHAPTER SIX

Womanism and Harmonious Coexistence in Society

For Plato, an ideal society would be one in which each class performs its duties without attempting to invade the areas dominated by the others. Such a society would provide the stability requisite to domestic tranquility. The ideal state requires a hierarchical class structure where there are (a) leadership, (b) soldiers to defend, and (c) workers to provide the necessities of life. The ideal society has a tripartite class structure: the ruling class is analogous to the rational element in the soul; the soldiers resemble the spirited element; and the workers correspond to the appetitive element.

Although Plato's meritocracy ends up creating class society because the composition of each class in his framework ought not to be determined by family background. Rather, it is better to determine it by natural endowments such that the natural gifts or talents of the individuals and the occupations for which they are best suited. Accordingly, society will be better for this because it is hoped that it will "create public prosperity and happiness."¹ The issue we raise here is that, for a harmonious existence in society, each class must perform its duties without invading the areas dominated by others.

So in discussing African Womanism and the harmonious coexistence in society, we shall draw our argument from Plato's ideal state where each sex must perform its duties without invading the areas dominated by the other sex. We shall argue that living the harmonious existence in society entails each sex utilising his/her unique, endowed natural physiological powers and talents to complement the other.

African (Yoruba) genderless ontology

We begin our argument by noting that African (Yoruba) ontology is genderless. So we can argue that all humans are equal in essence. We exemplify the ontological status of a person through Yoruba ontology. The Yoruba believe that a person consists of two basic elements: *ara* - the bodily frame that is visible and tangible; and *emi* - the life-giving element that is invisible and intangible. This psyche in each individual connects the creature to the Supreme deity - Olodumare. This *emi* is genderless and it contains the fundamental stuff all persons are made of. Zulu Sofola points out, "the African worldview underscores the idea that both genders have

the same divine source even though each has its own distinctive roles to play in the life of the community.”²

In fact, each activated body goes to Ajala to select an *ori*, which is called destiny. A person’s destiny is known as “*ipin-ori*” that is, the *ori*’s portion or lot. Other terms used to symbolise *ori* include *akunleyan* – that which is chosen kneeling, *akunlegba* – that which is received while kneeling, and *ayanmo* – that which is chosen or fixed to self. According to Adebola Babatunde Ekanola,

The act of selecting *ori* in Ajala’s house has three important aspects; first, it is supposed to be one of free choice, you are said to be free to choose any of the *ori* available in Ajala’s storehouse. Second, the *ori* selected determined, finally and irreversibly, the life course and personality of its possessor on earth. Third, each individual is unaware of the content or quality of the chosen *ori*, that is, the person making the choice does not know if the destiny embedded in an *ori* is good or bad.³

In the above explanation, we notice that the ontological explanation is genderless and all human beings are equal in essence, since each activated body goes to Ajala’s house to select an *ori*. In African ontology, each being, whether male or female, has a vital place in the scheme of things which constitute it. In many Euro-Western societies, males and females have derived their gender identities from the elaboration of anatomic types. So, concepts such as “public versus domestic domains”, “complementary versus competition”, “we versus other”, “activity versus passivity”, “mind versus body” and “senses versus rationality” are used to describe the dichotomous views of male and female.

These dualisms are inappropriate to and for understanding the conditions of African woman and woman in Diaspora. African life and society, as Zulu Sofola affirms are lived from “a holistic reality whose existence and survival can be achieved only through a positive, harmonious social organization in which all the members are relevant and effective.”⁴ This helps to create complementarity, not the problematic rigour of stratifying status categories or one against the other.

The harmony

In creating harmony, we argue that it is right to use what is inherent in the African value system, such as dual-sex system, to counteract any form of alien influence that tends to organise the relations between males and females. We may not adopt hook, line and sinker the

Simone de Beauvoir feminist agenda which, at the end, perpetuates antagonism; fight for self-assertion will never end. But this value, for example, can be adopted. That is, let woman be economically empowered not because occupation would allow women to escape marriage but because obligations of motherhood and fatherhood are the primary reasons for gainful employment for all adults.

With the focus on race, gender, class, culture and nation, one question that may arise concerning the harmonious Womanist's position on sexuality issue is the relationship between heterosexuality and homosexuality. Gay and lesbian liberation movements have all identified sexual orientation as a critical factor of social difference. Any attempts to undermine these movements always create disharmony called homophobia. That is why, Sylvia Tamale opines that "homosexuality presents a challenge to the deep-seated masculine power within African sexual relations and disrupts the core of the heterosexist social order."⁵

In addition, Kathleen O'Mara stresses that:

When discussing homosexuality, the struggles for indigenous expressions of same sex intimacy should be identified as part of the process of new sexual identity communities coming into being in an environment where same-sex intimacies are changing, labeled – homosexual, and condemned as not authentically African. They straddle the divide between accepting and rejecting Western sexuality identity regime and the homo-social continuum of African societies.⁶

Also, Alice Walker defines a womanist as "a woman who loves other women, sexually and/or non-sexually,"⁷ Thus, Alice Walker's womanism clearly endorses same-sex love and relationships. Clenora Hudson-Weem's *Africana Womanism* conversely, rejects homosexuality outright. Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi's *African Womanism* takes a more different perspective on homosexuality. For Mary E. Kolawole, "lesbianism is a non-existent issue because it is a mode of self-expression that is completely strange to their world-view."⁸ Ebunoluwa O. Oduwole also corroborates the argument on homosexuality: "it does not exist in African societies, and indeed, was unheard of in many African cultures prior to Africa's contact with European colonial rulers."⁹ Discussing the issue of Womanism, Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah claim that "womanism provided, for many, a more acceptable mode for analysing and understanding women and gender issues in Africa than Feminism, Womanism stance on sexuality remains non-specific."¹⁰

In our discussion of Womanism generally, we know that Womanism still opposes oppression based on sexuality. To support the argument, Layli Phillips aptly opines that “the process of interpolation that shapes womanist theory and praxis beyond its original progenitors allows room for differences of opinion about sexuality While questions of sexuality are far from settled among Womanists, productive dialogue is taking place.”¹¹ Layli Phillips expresses her personal perspective thus: “Her womanism is avowedly antihomophobic and antiheterosexist; it also rejects discrimination or oppression based on gender expression.”¹² But, she “recognises that others may have different views. She retains her ability to remain in relation with people whose views are different on whatever basis she may decide to do so.”¹³

We have a woman-to-woman marriage; one is husband and the other wife-female husband. We should not confuse this idea of female husband with same-sex marriage. This is because a childless woman is culturally permitted to marry another woman in Africa. The barren woman plays the role of a husband. She is entitled to the rights and privileges of a husband within the cultural context. This arrangement enables the woman to maintain her position in the household and there is harmonious coexistence in the society for both male and female.

Secondly, there is a strong kinship system in Africa that recognises married women who are economically and politically powerful in their communities who marry women in order to raise children in their own family lineage. Such women are called female husbands; Ifi Amadiume calls the practice *igba-ohu*, meaning woman-to-woman.

Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo argues in support of the above: “Among Lovedu ... for instance, a woman may win power, status and autonomy by taking over her husband’s estate or by accumulating capital and marrying wives (the Lovedu have queens who, in the ritual aspects of marriage, perform in the role of a man).”¹⁴ Jane Fishburne Collier also writes that, among the Nuer ethnic group, female husband is a common phenomenon. The autonomy the women of Nuer enjoyed could be attributed to the rapid expansion of Nuer through conquest. Jane Fishburne Collier notes that there is “a tendency for the women born into aristocratic conquering lineages to adopt male roles through women marriage or to marry men of lesser lineages who agreed to live with the wife’s kin group.”¹⁵

In addition, there is the Mende ethnic group in Sierra Leone, where biological facts are given a different cultural interpretation. This creates the necessary harmony in the life of

community and the individual. We shall look at the case of Madam Yoko – a ruler of the Kpa Mende Confederacy. According to Carol Hoffer, “Mende women begin their procreation role when they are initiated at puberty into Sande - the pervasive women’s secret society. Secondly, their society discourages a man marrying an uninitiated woman.”¹⁶

The initiation is called Sande – a women’s social institution enjoys a monopoly of transforming girls into marriageable women as a fact of political significance.¹⁷ The case of Madam Yoko is worthy of example because of the tragedy of her barren situation with no descendants to keep her memory alive. But during her life, biological inadequacy was compensated for her through the taking of wards. She utilised her consanguine alliances, and friendship relationships, even with colonial officials, to expand the base of political support until she became the ruler of a vast confederacy.¹⁸

Madam Yoko was in power in the latter part of the nineteenth century where rapid social and political change occurred in the Mende ethnic area of Sierra Leone. She was born in 1849 in Gbo chiefdom. She was known by her baby name as Soma. At puberty she was initiated into the Sande society. She had three brothers, Ali Kongo, Lambai and Goba.¹⁹ She was married to three men – Gongoima, Gbenje and Gbanya. She left Gongoima because he became an increasingly jealous and suspicious husband.²⁰ Gbenje died after a brief illness.²¹ Before Gbanya died, he asked his kinsmen to allow Madam Yoko to succeed him as Chief of Upper Bumpe river area.

The colonial officials also were interested in a person who was friendly to their commercial interests.²² So Madam Yoko was recognised as the “Principal Lady of Sennehoo” and later as the “Queen of Sennehoo”.²³ In summary, Madam Yoko acquired power through traditional avenues as well as displaying innovative behaviour. “She had some claim to aristocratic descent, and enjoyed support from her brothers and other consanguine, even while living in the towns of her three husbands.”²⁴

Since Madam Yoko at age twenty-nine did not bear any child, she never married again. Madam Yoko made all alliances by receiving “young woman through initiation and wardship, and then giving her out later as a wife into another family. Thus, Yoko had a special relationship with the young woman’s family, acting as their daughter’s ‘mother’ in a society where fosterage is a wide spread institution. Later she would be mother-in-law to the influential man who received the ward as his wife.”²⁵

In all, Madam Yoko demonstrated that women are not necessarily passive pawns moved about in patrilineal-virilocal societies. She created harmony for herself, her kin and domestic slaves; her personal supporters and her husbands' households. She earned the respect to enjoy the authority of head wife, and to succeed her third husband in his chiefly office, thus extending the area of hegemony in Sierra Leonean history.²⁶ Thus, harmony and biological facts are given different cultural interpretations.

We could argue that African Womanist's social world is a collaboration of both sexes. Any meaningful understanding of the society and any viable social change programme will have to incorporate the goals, thoughts and activities of both male and female.

From our discussion so far, we have distinguished between homosexuality, woman-to-woman marriage and examined the harmony and the disruption of the core of the heterosexist social order. The discussion of Womanism generally opposes oppression based on sexuality. Within the ambit of Womanism, we also identified African Womanism, which is more polyvalent and projects a rejectionary approach to homosexuality or same-sex marriage. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amponsah argue that homosexuals are human beings. They have inalienable right to exist and not stigmatized against. Yes, they claim it is their right and choice of action but this choice is still contending with African value that sees sexual organs functioning for procreation. Anything short of this is an exercise in futility and an unnatural misuse. Procreation serves the purpose of reproducing the husband and wife biologically.

Furthermore, homosexuality threatens the family. African family values are not only preserved but also guarded jealously because the family is where the society is preserved. Moreover, within the idea of reincarnation, the spiritual reproduction of grandparents and great grandparents, the fire is quenched if homosexuality is embraced. Thus, the community, family or clan loses its descendants when marriages do not produce children.²⁷

Homosexuals would also have to contend with various laws in different African countries such as Anti-Homosexuality Bill in Uganda. We have to wait until these acts are amended or repealed in future. We then conclude that, when females have control over their reproduction, that is, have control over their bodies, males complain of reduced control or enjoyment but, it is the privilege of the female to stand by her choice, and thereby, allow the choice to define her.

Endnotes

- ¹Benjamin Jowett. 1995. trans. *The dialogues of Plato – Republic*. Reprinted in Robert Maynard Hutchins, *Great Books of the Western World*. 370, d1-4.
- ²Zulu Sofola. 1998. Feminism and African womanhood. *Sisterhood, feminisms and power: from Africa to the diaspora*. Ed. Obioma Nnaemeka. 52-53.
- ³Adebola Babatunde Ekanola. 2006. A naturalistic interpretation of the Yoruba concept of *ori*. *Philosophia Africana*. 2.
- ⁴Zulu Sofola. 1998. Feminism and African womanhood. *Sisterhood, feminisms and power: from Africa to the diaspora*. Ed. Obioma Nnaemeka. 53.
- ⁵Sylvia Tamale. 2007. Out of the closet: unveiling sexuality discourse in Uganda. *Africa after gender?* Eds. Catherine M. Cole, Takyiwaa Mamuh and Stephen F. M. 19.
- ⁶Kathleen O'Mara. 2013. Kodjo besia, supi, yaga and eagles: being tacit subjects and non-normative citizens in contemporary Ghana. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. 167.
- ⁷Layli Phillips. 2006. Introduction: womanism: on its own. *The womanist reader*. Ed. Layli Phillips. 19.
- ⁸Mary E. Kolawole. 1997. *Womanism and African consciousness*. 15.
- ⁹Ebunoluwa O. Oduwole. 2013. Homosexuality in africa: the Yoruba example. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. 11.
- ¹⁰Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. 2013. Introduction. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. 156.
- ¹¹Layli Phillips. 2006. Introduction: womanism: on its own. *The womanist reader*. Ed. Layli Phillips. xxxvii.
- ¹²Layli Phillips. 2006. Introduction: womanism: on its own. *The womanist reader*. Ed. Layli Phillips. xxxvii.
- ¹³Layli Phillips. 2006. Introduction: womanism: on its own. *The womanist reader*. Ed. Layli Phillips. Xxxviii.
- ¹⁴Carol Hoffer. 1974. Madam Yoko: ruler of the kpa mende confederacy. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 37.
- ¹⁵Carol Hoffer. 1974. Madam Yoko: ruler of the kpa mende confederacy. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 95.
- ¹⁶Carol Hoffer. 1974. Madam Yoko: ruler of the kpa mende confederacy. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 174.
- ¹⁷Carol Hoffer. 1974. Madam Yoko: ruler of the kpa mende confederacy. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 174.

- ¹⁸Carol Hoffer. 1974. Madam Yoko: ruler of the kpa mende confederacy. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 175.
- ¹⁹Carol Hoffer. 1974. Madam Yoko: ruler of the kpa mende confederacy. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 177.
- ²⁰Carol Hoffer. 1974. Madam Yoko: ruler of the kpa mende confederacy. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 177.
- ²¹Carol Hoffer. 1974. Madam Yoko: ruler of the kpa mende confederacy. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 178.
- ²²Carol Hoffer. 1974. Madam Yoko: ruler of the kpa mende confederacy. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 180.
- ²³Carol Hoffer. 1974. Madam Yoko: ruler of the kpa mende confederacy. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 180.
- ²⁴Carol Hoffer. 1974. Madam Yoko: ruler of the kpa mende confederacy. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 181.
- ²⁵Carol Hoffer. 1974. Madam Yoko: ruler of the kpa mende confederacy. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 183.
- ²⁶Carol Hoffer. 1974. Madam Yoko: ruler of the kpa mende confederacy. *Women, culture and society*. Eds. Michelle Z. Rosaldo and Louise Lamphere. 187.
- ²⁷Ebunoluwa O. Oduwole. 2013. Homosexuality in Africa: the Yoruba example. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Eds. Toyin Falola and Nana Akua Amposah. 159.

General conclusion

In this thesis, we interrogated the question of the complex social problems of the status, rights and roles of women in the human society, especially through Philosophy and religions, namely Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion. This serves as a build-up to the discussion of what leads to the social problems of the status, rights and roles of women in the History of Philosophy and religions, like Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion. We considered the ways the woman is perceived in Philosophy, with particular reference to philosophy of Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

The conclusion we reach here is that, Aristotle including women in his theory of nature would be a complex case. If he had allowed women the status of rational beings, it would have made impossible one of the major premises of his political theory, namely the belief that some classes of human beings were destined to perform menial (and reproductive) labour in order that others might lead a life free from these things.

Thomas Aquinas reconciled Christian doctrines with the philosophy of Aristotle. He exerted tremendous influence on Western culture. His philosophy became the official philosophic authority of the Catholic Church. He accepted the holistic, all-embracing nature of Aristotle's project but incorporated a divine hierarchy into the ancient natural one. He accepted the Aristotelian account of generation and, with it, the claim that the female, as the more passive partner, plays a lesser role, and that the reproduction of a new female is the result of an inferior process.

Following Jean-Jacques Rousseau, we contend that reasoning is required to discern the general will. An individual must not only have reason, but must also do so independently. Yet, it is impossible for women, in Jean-Jacques Rousseau's work, to make any impartial assessment of the public good since they have been raised and educated to make no independent judgement.

As for religions like Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion which we are familiar with, we also concluded that some part of Islam is used to entrench the subservience of women to men. Conversely, in Christianity, Jesus Christ, who is the founder, worked with women within a patriarchal culture and had esteem for them. Everybody is expected to emulate him even if his teachings were restructured to align with the traditional views that society had

of women. Male and female in African Traditional Religion have complementary roles they play according to the dictate of the god or goddess.

We critically assessed the theoretical framework of Existentialism, Feminism and Womanism. We established those factors that make Existentialism an interesting and challenging philosophy. For Feminism, we looked at various strands in it: Liberal Feminism, Radical Feminism, Socialist Feminism and Ecofemism. For Womanism, we traced the origin and the several affixes to it such as Womanism of Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Africana Womanism for those in Diaspora or Alice Walker's Womanism and African Womanism.

We identified the main arguments of Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of the nature and causes of women's subordination. We focused on the accounts of the causes of woman's oppression. We showed how woman is "the other". We identified the account of the female data of biology which, for Simone de Beauvoir, affirms the distinction between male and female mammals which is essentially that "woman". Simone de Beauvoir argues that the "female is the target of the species". Thus, women, it would appear, are trapped within their bodies in a way which men are not and because of their inability to transcend their biology. The activities of pregnancy, birth and weaning, also debar female individuality. We also examined the contribution of psychoanalysis to the study of woman. This is where we examined the fact that Simone de Beauvoir thought Freud was wrong to show much concern with the destiny of woman or sexuality.

We also examined the so-called epochal materialism shortcoming of the feminine sex, which began with the development of primitive technology and the means of controlling and organising subsistence agriculture. Thus, human beings, for Simone de Beauvoir, are male, who dominate (because of the "natural" characteristics) of the woman.

According to Simone de Beauvoir, having occupation is the solution to escaping marriage. It is through gainful employment that the woman has traversed most of the distance that separated her from the male; and nothing else can guarantee her liberty in practice. This also accounts for having a job which gives married women the possibility to get divorced from their husbands in the case of emergency, need and desire.

We then offered criticisms against Simone de Beauvoir's arguments. For instance, for a woman to succeed biologically, economically and thus create social evolution, she must act like a man, rejecting all attributes given to her by men who define society. In effect, Simone de

Beauvoir considered worthy of emulation all those attributes that define masculinity. The masculine qualities are competitiveness, aggression, power and dominance.

We also argued that she is guilty of having written about women; she separates herself from them. Simone de Beauvoir is also of the view that generative functions enslaved women by keeping them in domestic work and preventing them from taken part in creating culture. She spells out two different dimensions of women alienation in reproduction. First, women are alienated due to a lack of control over their bodies. Second, they are alienated from social control. She points out the first sense of alienation by maintaining that the female is the target of the species. With respect to the second sense of alienation, she maintains that the epochal shortcoming of the feminine sex exists when considering the new inventions.

So there are two types of reproductive alienation, biological and social. The problem with Simone de Beauvoir's argument is that her explanations equated both the biological and social; and concluded that the two are determined by biology. This reveals the contradiction in her argument. Initially, she was averse to the castigation of reproductive capacities but her position on biological determination resulted in another denigration.

Another important missing ingredient in Simone de Beauvoir's account of motherhood is the failure to mention the role that men play in parenthood and the discussion of the social and personal aspects of paternity. We, thus, concluded that, Simone de Beauvoir's account suggested widespread dissatisfaction that contains a great deal of truth – but at the same time she might well be accused of presenting a particularly limited or one-dimensional view of what is arguably a complex experience.

We identified the various strands of African Womanism. This was to create the awareness that the West (Euro-American) female cannot speak authoritatively for African women. We also examined African Womanism and its complementarity principle with a view to establishing the relationship between gender differences, gender roles and social order in Africa. We advanced the African women's voices and perspectives, which were grounded in the paradigmatic trend of self-naming couched in different concepts, such as Stiwanism, by Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie; Motherism, by C.O. Acholonu; Nego-feminism, by Obioma Nnaemeka; Iwalewa Obinrin, by Mobolanle Ebunoluwa Sotunsa; Snail Sense Feminism, by Akachi Ezeigbo; and African Womanism, by Mary Ebun Modupe Kolawole and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. But we concentrated on the brands of African Womanism of Mary Ebun

Modupe Kolawole and Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. These Womanist projects dismantled racism, neocolonialism, Euro-American patriarchy, power among races and sexes.

The Womanist project also enlists male support. We also argued for certain characteristics which African Womanism shares with Womanism and Africana Womanism. These features are similar and some differ. They are:

1. Womanism, African Womanism and Africana Womanism recognise the tripartite oppression of black women – racial, classist and sexist oppressions, which white women ignored and the early Feminist movement portrayed.

2. Womanism, African Womanism and Africana Womanism do not believe man to be their primary enemy.

3. Womanism, African Womanism and Africana Womanism bind novelists together.

However, African Womanism has the following peculiar characteristics:

a. African Womanism fears the appropriation of the voices of African woman because of Western theorisation that put forward women issues as universal and relevant to all women globally.

b. African Womanism is grounded in the paradigmatic principle of “self-reclamation” and “self-naming” based in part on African philosophical thought on African values, naming and identity.

c. African Womanism fits into African realities, expectations and experiences of women.

We offered some responses of the African Womanist to the existential feminist perspective of Simone de Beauvoir. We considered some works which we termed as responses of African womanist, even though these authors have not classified themselves as African Womanists. Their works, we argued, reiterate the womanist project and go beyond African Womanism. They show how, in the West, biological explanation, which Simone de Beauvoir canvasses as privileged over other ways of explaining differences of gender, race or class, cannot be sustained.

We showed how Oyeronke Oyewumi challenges the Western epistemology as projected by Simone de Beauvoir that the human body is viewed from the perception of gender, resulting in the social categorisation into male and female. Ifi Amadiume’s Womanist response

challenges the Western epistemologies as applied to the culture of origin. She places the blame on colonialism and Christianity. The dual-sex principle behind social organisation was mediated by the flexible gender system of the traditional culture and language.

We reiterated the statement by African Womanists that African men are not the enemies in the philosophy of Womanism. Womanism provides room for unity of black women and men whether in Africa or Diaspora. This non-hating posture aims at gender complementarity, where men and women as unique individuals, coexist in mutual love and responsible freedom. Thus, the man is not considered an outsider or a target to be hunted down or subdued since negotiation and compromise are a terrain for dialogue. We concluded that the continuous existence of both males and females, and the wish for men and women can co-exist is at the heart of the Womanist project. This inclusion of men, and not hating them, provides African/Africana women room to address gender oppression without directly attacking men.

We argued that African Womanists are not apprehensive of motherhood because motherhood symbolises familial ties with regard to the well-being of the child, the mother, the father and other members of the family – both nuclear and extended. The gendering of the institution of motherhood leads to its patriarchalisation. It was Western Feminist's accounts of motherhood that reduced it to a gender category. As such, a mother is represented as a woman first and foremost, a dichotomous biological category that is perceived to be subordinated, disadvantaged and oppressed because women are subordinate to males who are the privileged group. The Womanist conception of motherhood transcends gender and is understandable outside gender categorisation and does not necessarily involve oppression.

We concluded with a harmonious coexistence in society for African Womanism. We argued that living the harmonious existence in society entails each sex utilising his/her unique endowed natural physiological powers and talents to complement the other. In many European/Western societies, males and females have gender identities deriving from the elaboration of anatomic types. These dualisms are inappropriate to and for understanding the conditions of African women and women in Diaspora. In creating harmony, it is right to use what is inherent in the African value system, such as dual-sex system, to counteract any form of alien influence that tends to organise the relations between males and females. We also concluded that we may not adopt hook, line and sinker the Simone de Beauvoir feminist agenda which, at the end, perpetuates antagonism; and thus, the fight for self-assertion will never end.

References

- Agarwal, Bina. 1992. The gender and environment debate: lesson from India. *Feminist studies*. 18,1, Spring.
- Agulanna. C. 1997. An overview of camus' existentialist philosophy. Ozumba, O. Geoffrey. Ed. *The great philosophers*. Uyo: Tamaza Publishing Company.
- Ajayi, S. Ademola and Ayantayo, Kehinde. 2015. Editors. *Women in development: essay in memory of Professor Dorcas Olubanke Akintunde*. Ibadan: John Archers Publisher.
- Akanmidu, R.A. 2006. *Footprints of philosophy*. Ibadan: Hope Publishers.
- Akorede, Yetunde Olukemi. 2011. *Womanism and the intra-gender conflict theory*. Porto-Novo: Sonou Press.
- Amadiume, Ifi. 2015. *Male daughters, female husbands: gender and sex in an African society*. London: Zed Books.
- Annas, Julia. 1976. Plato's republic and feminism. *Philosophy: journal of the royal institute of philosophy*. 51: 179.
- _____. 1977. Mill and the subjection of women. *Philosophy: journal of the royal institute of philosophy*. 52: 200, April.
- Anne, C. Minas. 1993. *Gender basic: feminist perspectives on women and men*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Publishers.
- Aquinas, Thomas. 1981. *Summa theologica*. Maryland: Christian Classics.
- Aristotle, 1995. *Nichomachean ethics*. Ross, W.D. Translator. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica.
- Arnfred, Signe. 2005. Editor. *Rethinking sexualities in Africa*. Uppsala, Sweden: Almqvist & Wiksell Tryckeri, AB.
- Ascher, Carol and Minnich, Elizabeth Kamarck. 1984. Simone de Beauvoir: A life of freedom. *Feminist studies*. 11, Summer.
- Awolalu, J. Omosode. 1981. *Yoruba beliefs and sacrificial rites*. Essex: Longman.
- _____. 1976. Women from the perspectives of religion. *Orita – ibadan journal of religious studies*. X: 2, December.
- Axford, Barrie. Browning, K. Gary. Huggins, Richard and Rosamond, Ben. 2002. *Politics: an introduction*. 2nd Edition. London: Rutledge Publishers.
- Balogun, Oladele Abiodun. 2011. Yoruba-African understanding of authentic motherhood. *Beyond tradition: African women in cultural and political spaces*. Eds. Toyin Falola and S.U. Fwatshak.
- Baruch, Elaine Hoffman. 1987. The female body and the male mind: reconsidering Simone de

- Beauvoir. *Dissent*. 34, Summer.
- Beauvoir, de Simone. 1970. *The ethics of ambiguity*. Frechtman, Bernard. Translator. New York: The Citadel Press.
- _____. 1989. *The second sex*. H.M. Parshley. Translator. Introduction by Deirdre Bair. New York: Vintage Book.
- Bhadra, Mirinal Kanti. 1990. *A critical survey of phenomenology and existentialism*. New Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research.
- Blackham H.J. Editor. 1965. *Reality, man and existence: essential works of existentialism*. New York: Bantam Books.
- _____. 1959. *Six existentialist thinkers*. New York: Harper and Row Publishers.
- Bishop, Sharon and Weinzweig, Marjorie. 1979. Editors. *Philosophy and women*. California: Wadworth Publishing Company.
- Brown, E. Raymond, Fitzmyer, A. Joseph and Murphy, E. Roland. 1995. Editors. *The new jerome biblical commentary*. Bangalore: Theological Publications.
- Bullough, L. Vern. 1974. *The subordinate sex: a history of attitudes toward women*. Baltimore: Penguin Books.
- Buckingham, Susan. 2004. Ecofeminism in the Twenty-First Century, *Geographical journal*. June, 170:2.
- Cole, M. Catherine, Manuh, Takyiwaa and Miescher F. Stephan. 2007. *Africa after gender?* Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Coole, Diana. 1988. *Women in political thought: from ancient misogyny to contemporary feminism*. Sussex: Wheatsheaf Books.
- Daly, Mary. 1973. *Feminist theology: a critical survey of masculine image of god*. Yale: Yale University Press.
- Dietz, G. Mary. 1992. Introduction: debating Simone de Beauvoir. *sign*. 18, Autumn.
- Eleuibon, Yemi. 2008. *Invisible powers of the metaphysical world: a peep into the world of witches*. Ibadan: Creative Books.
- Ekanola, Adebola Babatunde. 2006. A naturalistic interpretation of the Yoruba concept of ori. *Philosophia africana*. March.
- Engels, Friedrich. 1983. *The origin of the family, private property, and the state*. Moscow: Progress Publishers.
- Ezenwanebe, Osita C. 2012. The eagle of womanhood: dramatizing the strength of Nigerian women in the wake of modern experience. *OFO: journal of transatlantic studies*. 2:2.
- Falola, Toyin and Fwatshak, S.U. 2011. Editors. *Beyond tradition: African women in cultural and Political Spaces*. Ibadan: African World Press.

- Falola, Toyin and Amponsah, Nana Akua. 2013. Editors. *Women, gender and sexuality in Africa*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press.
- Falola, Toyin and Nasongo'o S. Wanjala. 2016. Editors. *Gendering African social spaces: women, power and cultural expressions*. Durham: Carolina Academic Press.
- Firestone, Shuilamith. 1971. *The dialectic of sex: the case for feminist revolution*. London: The Women's Press.
- Friedan, Betty. 1963. *The feminine mystique*. New York: Norton Publisher.
- Gaard, Greta. 1993. *Ecofeminism: women, animals and nature*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Gilbert, A. Lucia and Scher, Murray. 1999. *Gender and sex in counselling and psychotherapy*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Grimshaw, Jean. 1986. *Feminist philosophers: women's perspectives on philosophical tradition*. London: Wheatsheat Books.
- Gwendoly, Mikell. 1997. Editor. *African feminism: the politics of survival in sub-saharan*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Hutchins, Robert Maynard. 1995. Editor. *The dialogues of Plato – Republic*. Chicago: Oxford University Press.
- Idowu, E. Bolaji. 1962. *Olodumare: God in Yoruba belief*. London: Longman.
- Igboin, Benson. 2004. A philosophical appraisal of gender neutrality in the light of christian eschatological. *Iroro: journal of arts*. 10:1 & 2.
- Igbuzor, Olive. 2001. Constitution marginalisation of women in Nigeria. *The comet*. November 26th.
- Jackson, Cecile. 1993. Women/nature or gender/history? A critique of ecofeminist 'development'. *The journal of peasant studies*. 20:3, April.
- Jaggar, M. Allison. 1983. *Feminist politics and human nature*. New York: Rowman and Allen Publisher.
- Jasper, Karl. 1974. *Introduction a la Philosophie*. Paris: Union General d' Edition Libraire.
- Katahweire, Ernest. 1989. The position of women in kinyankare culture with particular reference to the church of Uganda in Ankole. *The African mind*. 1:1.
- Kaufmann, Walter. 1956. Editor. *Existentialism from dostoevsky to sartre*. London: Meridian Books.
- Kierkegaard, Soren. 1941. *Concluding unscientific postscripts*. Princeton: Princeton University, Press.
- Kolawole, Mary E. Modupe. 1998. *Gender perceptions and development in Africa: a socio-cultural approach*. Lagos: Arrabon Academic Publishers.

- _____. 1997. Editor. *Womanism and African consciousness*. Trenton: African World Press.
- Lazaro, Reyes. 1986. Feminism and motherhood: O'Brien vs Beauvoir. *Hypatia*. 1:2, Fall.
- Lutzer, W. Erwin. 1993. *Twelve myths americans believe*. Chicago: Moody Press.
- Macintyre, Alasdair. 1972. Existentialism. *Encyclopedia of philosophy*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Machinyre, A. 1973. The essential contestability of some social concept. *Ethics*. 84.
- Macquarrie, John. 1973. *Existentialism*. London: Penguin Books.
- Mahmuh, K. 1976. Women, the islamic view. *Orita – Ibadan journal of religious studies*. X:2, December.
- Mangena, Fainos and Chimakonam O. Jonathan. 2018. Editors. *The death penalty from an African perspective: views from Zimbabwean and Nigerian philosophers*. Malaga: Vernon Press.
- Martin, Douglas. 1973. Self evidence. *Proceedings of the royal anthropological institute of great britain and ireland*.
- Mbiti, John. 1970. *African religions and philosophy*. Garden City, New York: Double Day and Company.
- Millet, Kate. 1970. *Sexual politics*. London: Cox and Wyman.
- Nnaemeka, Obioma. 1998. Editor. *Sisterhood, feminisms and power: from Africa to the diaspora*. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press.
- Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. 2007. Editor. *Women in religion and culture – essays in honour of Constance Buchanan*. Ibadan: Sefer Books.
- Okin, Susan. 1979. *Women in western political thought*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Okonjo Ogunyemi, Chikwenye. 1985. Womanism: the dynamics of the contemporary black female novel in english. *Signs*.
- Ogunremi, Deji and Adediran, Biodun. 1988. Editors. *Culture and society in Yorubaland*. Ibadan: Rex Charles Publication.
- Omogbe, Joseph. 1990. *Knowing philosophy*. Lagos: Joja Educational Research Publication.
- _____. 1991. *The simplified history of Western philosophy*. Lagos: Joja Educational Research Publication.
- Osagie, Evelyn. 2008. Beijing 'spirit' at work. *The nation*. November, 26th.
- Otite, Onigu and Ogonwo, W. 2001. *An introduction to sociological studies*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books.

- Oyewumi, Oyeronke. 1997. *The invention of women: making an African sense of western gender discourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- _____. 2005. Editor. *African gender studies: a reader*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- _____. 2016. *What gender is motherhood? changing Yoruba ideals of power, procreation, and identity in the age of modernity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Oyesile, A. Olatunji and Offor, Francis. 2016. Editors. *Ethics, governance and social order in Africa: essays in honour of Godwin S. Sogolo*. Ibadan: Zenith Book House.
- Owolabi, A. Kolawole. 2003. *Fictional tribes and tribal fictions: ethnicity, ethnocentrism and the problem of the 'other' in Africa*. Ibadan: John Archers Publishers.
- Ozumba, O. Geoffrey. 1997. *The great philosophers*. Uyo: Tamaza Publishing Company.
- Phillips, Layli. 2006. Editor. *The womanist reader*. New York: Routledge.
- Pope Benedict XVI, 2011. *Africa's commitment – Africae munus*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications, Africa.
- Rains, Mors Prudence. 2007. *Becoming an unwed mother: a sociological account*. London: Aldine Transaction.
- Robin, Morgan. 1985. Editor. *Sisterhood is global*. New York: Anchor Doubleday.
- Romero, W. Patricia. 2015. *African woman: a historical panorama*. Princeton, New Jersey: Markus Wiener Publishers.
- Rosaldo, Michelle Zimbalist and Lamphere, Louise. 1974. Editors. *Women, culture and society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Roubiezek, Paul. 1966. *Existentialism: for and against*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. 1998. *The social contract*. Tozer, H.J. Translator. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Publishers.
- Ruth, Evans. 1998. Editor. *New interdisciplinary essays*. New York: St. Martins.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. 1957. *Existentialism and human emotions*. New York: Philosophical Library.
- _____. 1996. *Being and nothingness*. Hazel, Barnes. Translator. New York: Pocket.
- Sheila, Ruth. 1980. *Issues in feminism: a first course in women's studies*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Solomon, C. Robert. 1974. Editor. *Existentialism*. New York: Modern Library.
- Sotunsa, Egunola Mobolanle. 2009. *Feminism and gender discourse: the African experience*. Lagos: Asaba Publications.
- Spender, Dale. 1983. *Feminist theories: three centuries of women's intellectual traditions*.

- London: The Women's Press.
- Stanton, Cady Elizabeth. 1984. *The women bible*. New York: European Publishing Company.
- Stroll, Avrum and Popkin, H. Richard. 1979. *Introduction to philosophy*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Stumpf, Samuel Enoch. 1993. *Element of philosophy: an introduction*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- The *Quran*. 2018. M.H. Shakir. Translator. Yaba: Abiola Bookshop Press.
- Udegbe, I. Bola, 2003. Gender, power and political leadership in Nigeria. *The comet*. August 12th.
- Ukaulor, S. Chidimma. 2013. *In praise of African feminism*. Owerri: Cel-Bez Publishing Company.
- Valerie, Bryson. 1992. *Feminist political theory: an introduction*. New York: Paragon House.
- Wahl, Jean. 1980. *A short history of existentialism*. New York: Philosophical Library.
- Wallace, A. Ruth. 1996. Feminist theory in North America: new insights for the sociology of religion. *Social compass*. 43:3.
- Warnock, Mary. 1969. *Existentialist ethics*. London: Macmillan and Company.
- Weinberg, S. Jay. 1988. Editor. *Retrieving women's history: changing perceptions of the role of women in politics and society*. London: Berg Publishers.
- Wendell, Susan. 1987. A (qualified) defence of liberal feminism, *Hypatia*, 2: Summer.
- Werner, Neuer. 1990. *Man and woman in Christian perspective*. Wenham, Gordon. Translator London: Hodder and Stoughton Publishers.
- Wood, H. J. 2019. Gender inequality: the problem of harmful, patriarchal, tradition and cultural gender practices in the church. *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies*. 75. 1.