



Ideology and Subversion in Feminist Short Stories from Africa

Speranza Ndege  & Justus Kizito Siboe Makokha 

Department of Literature, Linguistics and Foreign Languages,
Kenyatta University

ndege.speranza@ku.ac.ke; makokha.justus@ku.ac.ke

© 2019 The Author(s)

This open access article is distributed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 license.

Article Information

Submitted: 9th September 2019

Accepted: 5th October 2019

Published: 27th December 2019

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest was reported by the authors

Funding: None

Additional information is available at the end of the article



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

ISSN 2707-2150 (Online)

ISSN 2707-2169 (Print)

Abstract

This paper examines the oppressive nature of the patriarchal society and the Feminist voice for fair treatment of women to restore her respect and dignity. To illustrate the feminist concerns and the subversive practices, three short stories have been used namely: Tandiwe Myambo's, "Decidious Gazelles", Lindsey Collen's "The Enigma", and Ifeoma Okoye's "The Power of a Plate of Rice". All the three stories appear in Vera (1999). The paper exposes the challenges facing the woman in a patriarchal society. The women in the three short stories live within family units with clearly defined roles and expectations for harmonious living, but the reversal takes place. The man has usurped authority and his domineering nature is being felt both at home and at the work place. The men have accepted their superior roles, granted to them naturally by the patriarchal society. The woman finds it difficult to both accept and play the subordinate roles because of their oppressive nature. The paper will explore the plight of these women, both single and married and attempt to get into their inner lives to see the situations they face, the challenges and their struggle to liberate themselves from the oppressive patriarchal system.

Keywords: culture, feminism, man, oppression, patriarchal, society, woman



1.0 Introduction

Feminism is a literary and social ideology that focuses primarily on the female gender according to Hull E. D (2001). This single-mindedness on women issues is not misplaced. Makokha A. G. (2015) states that, “[t]hroughout the 20th century and, after some inertia, again in recent years, there has been a rising concern about women, and their liberation all over the world,” (p. 1). Women writing and feminist writers thus concern themselves with the roles assigned to women mainly by patriarchal societies, and explores the means in which the woman have been denied power and rights. The feminist ideology can trace its roots far back in antiquity and feminists share a pursuit of freeing the woman from a variety of shackles that target them as women, in addition to sourcing ways in which women lives can be enriched and how women can exploit their unique potentials for their own benefit. While feminists come in a variety of hues and shades, one of their common objectives is to stand against and subdue patriarchy in the society. For the social change feminists, the way to do this is to create a level playing ground for both men and women. They argue that the resemblances between men and women far outweigh any social roles that might be assigned to either of the sexes. The ‘essentialists’ take a different view that women’s interests and abilities are distinctly different from those of men. According to Hull:

...these critics and theorists often point out specific biological differences between men and women, suggesting that women’s emotional and nurturing capacities are distinct from men’s testosterone-driven engagement with the world around them. (p. 200)

Their goal is to have women exploit their unique capabilities to their advantage. In addition to these, another group of feminists endeavor to interrogate and expose the element of double colonization. It argues that in addition to women in post-colonial countries suffering the effects of a colonial past, they also hurt from further denigration as being women. As Ashcroft, B., Gareth G., & Helen T (2000) define it, in double colonization:

...women are subjected to both the colonial domination of empire and the male domination of patriarchy. In this respect, empire and patriarchy act as analogous to each other and both exert control over female colonial subjects, who are, thus, doubly colonized by imperial/patriarchal power. (P. 66)

Marxist feminists are concerned with issues of power and class in the society and the manner the two oppress, exploit and discriminate against women. Post-structuralist feminists like Julia Kristeva and Helene Cixous are concerned with the binaries that place 'man' before 'woman' and endeavor to upset this discourse (Hull, P.). The common concern among the feminists is however the oppression by patriarchal power. For ages, a majority of the world societies have had power and domination by the men over women. Social and economic spheres are dominated by the man from the basic social unit of the family to the highest social, political and economic structures in the government. Women writers have therefore continually used their pens to struggle against this 'penis' domination. The struggle against patriarchal dominance and exploitation has taken as many approaches as the variant societies that the women write from; women in different societies suffer different oppressions and exploitations. This paper will use the Myambo T. (1999), "Deciduous Gazelles", Collen's L (1999), "The Enigma" and Okoye I (1999), "The Power of a Plate of Rice" drawn from Vera Y. (1999), *Opening Spaces* to illustrate the feminist concerns and the subversive practices that are employed by women against patriarchy.

2.0 Feminist Ideology in Selected Short Stories

The three short stories exhibit varying feminist ideologies. Melissa Tandiwe Myambo's "Deciduous Gazelles" is a story about the tribulations that Mai goes through in her marriage to an unfaithful husband, the sanctification of sexual infidelity by men in society, as well as the tendency of men to be unfaithful at will. The story examines the belief system in a society that has indoctrinated women to believe that men have a licence to sexual abandon and need not explain themselves to anyone. Her own niece Irene is involved in an affair with an older married man. The story of Mai is told in contrast to that of her friend Saru. Saru seems to have overcome the oppression against women by going against the grain in the expectations that the patriarchal society has placed against women.

Myambo starts off the story by pointing at the indoctrination of women through a discourse that places the blame on other women as rivals for men's affections and places preference on a woman's sexual attractiveness as the epitome of achievement. Unlike many women, Mai has the presence of mind to analyze her sexual rival in non-emotional way. She avoids disparaging her appearance or character. Obviously when she first finds out that her husband is cheating on her in a party, she's is taken aback and can no longer stay in the party. When she meets Lerato in the supermarket, she is honest enough to admit that she is attractive. Mai says, "[d]espite what my friends say, I am sure she is attractive... when talking about my hurt. My injuries. I know in my heart that she is pretty and voluptuous and has seductive breasts and sensual buttocks" (Myambo, P.16) Myambo

is highlighting the attractive sexual attributes of Lerato. She is underlining that the society has ranked the potential by a woman to attract a man sexually as a very high premise and the lack of it as a deficiency that she has to pay for. Myambo in the same breath is interrogating the tendency by women to buy into this social narrative and thus attack each other, a situation that plays in the interest of men. She draws a comparison of the tendency for the oppressed women to fight amongst themselves with the racially dominated blacks fighting against themselves. Saru says that “black people despise themselves, like women...” (p.16). It would seem that the same demands are not put on men. This demand on women by a patriarchal society justifies the philandering ways of men while excusing them from taking responsibility for their infidelities.

The society has run a discourse that ensures women are submissive and docile even when aggrieved by men’s wrongdoings. Mai as a woman is not expected to speak out. Myambo uses the illustration of an audience watching a play to illustrate this:

Imagine you are at a play. It is a one man act; a long, drawn out soliloquy; the actor is talking out loud but feigning inner thought. He is pretending that you are not there and you permit him to do this. You are complaisant. You do not disturb the action of the play by allowing the reality of its falsity to intrude... although any member can do this...hence violate the pact you have all made-to pretend. That is normal life: everyone makes believe that what is actually going on is the drama unfolding on stage; everyone senses, although at varying degrees of consciousness, that all the action is backstage, and in the audience, but most of us are too frightened to test or threaten the fragility of the performance’s innate falsehood. (P.20)

The women are boxed into silence by the society’s expectations and demands. Although everyone is cognizant of the fact, a majority of women are too afraid to go against the grain by questioning it. Majority of the women are silent about this fact and few are ready to rock the boat. It only takes few courageous women like Saru to speak out, but then the society frowns on them. Mai’s Husband, Mr. Nchube, illustrates this with his regard for Saru: “...he despised her because he was in total awe of her unconventional personality and her uncompromising spirit,” (Myambo, p. 21). Saru is a woman who goes against the grain in everything that is expected of a woman in a patriarchal society:

...her reckless smoking in public; her disregard for womanly dignity he doubted whether she was legally married. What kind of a woman, if she is natural, normal, does not produce offspring? The word ‘whore’ was

scratching his throat but he didn't spit it because he feared her. (Myambo, 1999, p. 21)

Saru is thus not even considered a woman by Mr. Nchube and his like-minded men because she does not maintain the status quo. She does all that society does not expect her to do. The end result is that she drives fear in men like Mr. Nchube and only begets disapproval from the society. Just as Awua-B & Patience A. K. (2010) argues, “[f]ear of public humiliation can drive women to retreat to a private realm, like a cocoon-like security and more control over their destinies (p. 88). When Mai suspects that her niece is involved in an illicit sexual relationship, she does not know what to do. Even when she catches Irene speaking on the phone to her illicit lover, she still avoids a confrontational. It takes Saru to get the truth from Irene but even then she wants to avoid any confrontation. She even thinks of asking a male relative to confront Mr. Kanyangarara. She finally surprises even herself at her success and finally musters the courage to confront him. Myambo is challenging women to speak out, to embrace boldness, and take charge of their lives. When Mai finds out about her husband's unfaithfulness, she says, “I hugged my protective blanket of silence around me for seven days,” (Myambo, p. 27). She suffers in silence and pretends nothing is wrong even as she seethed inside.

Religion is identified as another facet in which women are emasculated. This is clearly brought out in the story that Saru tells Mai about the Africans in Frankfurt. The men were discussing Islam and justifying the Koran's provision that every man was entitled to marrying up to four women. They term the Koran as ‘...even-handed, fair, just in dealing with men's and women's issues,’ (Myambo, p. 29). Saru spins a fictitious tale when they ask about marriage in Zimbabwe. She tells them that a woman is entitled to marrying up to eight men depending on her ability, and the men are shocked. When a patriarchal religion justifies polygamy, the women are expected to accept it without complain. If the same is hinted to be culturally grounded in vice versa, the men are shocked and term it “disgusting and unnatural” (Myambo, p.30). Saru proclaims herself a staunch Christian though, and she abhors nothing more than adultery. She tells of Christian women that suffer domestic violence in the hands of their husbands but remain in the abusive marriages. In the story she tells Mai about Mrs. Mandaza:

...beaten by her husband every Saturday night. Black and blue as they say. When she heard about his mistress, she had in turn gone to the woman's house and beaten her. Black and bluer. Shortly after the incident, she had joined the Gracious Women's Fellowship. (Myambo, 1999, p.18)

It would seem that marriage is heavily skewed against women even in the confines of Christianity and Islam. Mrs. Mandaza's story does not only illustrate the un-protective nature of religion towards women, but it also illustrates the monster of physically abuse that women are expected to endure in the society. Women are illustrated as having no choices or freedoms. The words by Saru "[w]omen are married: we do not marry. Women are thrown out; we don't leave," (Myambo, p.19), clearly illustrates this. The majority of women themselves accept this. Mai's mother-in-law expects Mai to do the same from the confrontation that she has with Mai for daring to choose a different life from the one she lived. She expects Mai to continue living with her husband even after his unfaithfulness. The lack of choices and freedoms is better illustrated in the short story *Enigma* by Lindsey Collen. Marie is a girl living with only her father. She lives under a draconian authority of a father who is keen to keep her in a life that is more of a prison than anything else. Strangely, the father claims to be doing this for her good. He says, 'I don't want anything to happen to you,' (Collen, 1999, p. 43). The father thus drives her to school, picks her from school and locks her in the house anytime she is to be left at home. This routine eats into Marie who can only observe her classmates with longing as she is driven to school:

On the way we pass my classmates. Walking. Yes, swinging their arms. In the open air. In flocks. They shriek. They throw their school bags in the air and catch them. They take short cuts. They stop at the tobacconist's and buy pickled cucumber and put salt on it and eat it right out there in the sun. The wind makes their hair stand out electric. (Collen, p. 44-45)

The little things she observes are the ones that a young girl should be free to do. But, her father's over-protective arm does not allow it. She longs to walk any way she likes, swinging her hands like her age mates. She wants the free air rather than choking dampness of being locked in the house. Marie longs to play and choose the route home, taking a short cut if she wants to. She wants to eat in the open like other girls. The father denies her all this because according to him she only needs "an education to get a bon garcon from a good family, who's got a good job," (Collen, p. 45). When Marie gets an assignment to write an essay with the title, "One thing I can't Stand," she realizes that her whole life is about "waiting for someone to make a request for my hand in marriage," (p. 44). She has nothing else she can write as the same thing she is waiting for, is the same she can't stand. She realizes that what she cannot stand is to live her life as it is presently.

The story "The power of a Plate of Rice" by Ifeoma Okeye, illustrates the oppression of women at work as a result of natural biological responsibilities of getting

children and nurturing them. Mrs. Cheta Etu is a teacher that loses her husband. She spends all their savings in the funeral ceremonies for her husband. She has two sons to take care of but Mr. Aziza the school head does everything to cement his opinion that he doesn't want women teachers in his school. She has to harangue him for a long time with calls, till he gives in and allows her to work in her new station.

Mr. Aziza is a male chauvinist that claims women are no good as workers. He argues, "[y]ou are a lazy lot... You always find excuses to be away from school. Today it's this child of yours becoming ill who must be taken to hospital, and tomorrow it's the funeral of one relation or another," (Okoye, 1999, p. 95). Mr. Aziza is said to have a wife and six children living in Onitsha one hundred and twenty kilometres away, (p. 98). This hints at his having relegated all the nurturing responsibilities of his children to his wife. He emerges as a very insensitive father and husband on terming issues about children's sicknesses and funerals of close family members as 'laziness'. It would seem that by alluding to an opinion that such issues do not pre-occupy men, and then the men have left the burden of raising children solely to the women. His refusal to pay Mrs. Cheta Etu for five months whereas he would only withhold salaries of the other teachers for only two weeks paints him as a man that flaunts his little power on weak women and does not treat them as equal employees to men.

The story "The Power of a Plate of Rice," shines light on the myriad of responsibilities that women have to carry out, and often without any gratitude from the men or the society. The same society that is keen on ensuring that a dead man gets a befitting burial regardless of the cost to the hapless widow, forgets her completely after the funeral. Mrs. Cheta Etu has to continue supporting her mother-in-law in addition to the children, while at the same time getting no pay from her place of work. The three stories bring out various concerns of women. The dispensation of fear among women is meant to ensure their silence in the face of oppression and exploitation, indoctrination of women and the sustenance of a discourse that ensures women are bound to their subjective position in the society, propagation of cultures and traditions that allocate servile roles, duties and responsibilities to women, use of religion to cement oppression of women, withdrawal of rights and freedoms and even blunt discrimination in places of work are clearly identified as feminist concerns in the stories.

3.0 Subversive Practices Against Patriarchy

The stories Tandiwe Myambo's "Deciduous Gazelles," Collen's "The Enigma," and Okoye's "The Power of a Plate of Rice" do not only raise feminist concerns, but also seem to suggest a way forward in an attempt to fight against patriarchy. The characters in the three stories come out better at the end of the story and each manages to find a way to

overcome patriarchy. In Myambo's "Deciduous Gazelles," Mai finds a way to get her self-esteem and dignity in the face of an unfaithful husband. When she first gets to hear of her husband's affair, she breaks down and has to rely on the strength of her more erstwhile friend: Saru. She spends seven days in silence but manages to come out stronger. She reigns havoc in her husband's lover's house leaving a trail of destruction in her wake. She gets a divorce and does not regret it. She says:

So when I left, I was fortunate that I had always kept my own account. Not all women keep their own money; many give it to their husbands, you know. I can pay for the rent of a small flat and company pays for children's fees, but I pay for Irene's with my own salary. I've always been a firm believer in education. Many blame the way I've turned out on education so you will excuse me, won't you? If I appear a bit un-orthodox. (P. 32)

Myambo is obviously offering a way out of patriarchal domination through the words of Mai. The first practice she identifies is in pursuit of subversion patriarchy is financial independence. Mai is lucky to have kept her own account and keeping her own money. If she had not been financially independent, she would definitely have found it hard to delink herself from the husband and would have been under his power. She is able to pay the rent of a small flat and even pay her niece's school fees. Myambo is making the same point as Makokha that, "[a] woman can stand up on her own, develop herself and her children without relying on and drawing her entire strength from a man," (Makokha, 2014, p. 9)

Through Mai's words, the education is termed as indispensable in any attempt to overcome patriarchy. Makokha reiterates this position: "[e]ducation is one of the liberators for a ... woman in the postcolonial era. The woman, through education acquires a social standing, and a state of independence," (Makokha, p. 6). Though it becomes clear that the society views an educated woman with suspicion as an independent woman is bound to live her life in freedom regardless of the many traditions and expectations that shackle a woman to a servile position. Just like Saru who "[h]ad a very direct relationship with speech and utilized it as a blunt but effective tool to bludgeon home a meaning," (Myambo, p. 21), an educated woman would suffer her judgement as "[s]he always caused discomfort and embarrassment and only sometimes antagonism and hostility," (Myambo, p. 21). Myambo seems to be cautioning educated women that fight to be free of the shackles of patriarchy of what to expect while eloquently portraying an educated woman's position as liberating and a small price to pay.

By Mai gaining courage to confront Mr. Kanyangarara, Myambo is actually agitating for women to physically stand up against patriarchy. She debunks the notion that a woman cannot stand up against a man. When Mai confronts Mr. Kanyangarara, it shows that a man can be forcefully be disabused of the tendency to exploit women. As she leaves the meeting with Mr. Kanyangarara:

...he is cowering: a drowning rat trying to cling on a slimy, slippery stone before he is carried away by another flood. Terror soaks through him: it emanates from the pulse beating rapidly on his neck and the hand clinging to his collar, desperately trying to allow him air. (Myambo, p. 33)

A truly domesticated and servile woman would never believe that a woman has the ability to reduce a powerful man to this state. If Mai had not mustered the courage the courage to confront Mr. Kanyangarara, he definitely would have gone on exploiting Irine leading to a total destruction of the young girl's future. Mai has learnt from this experience and has mastered the practice of speaking her mind without fear. The same courage is replicated when she speaks to her mother-in-law. She clearly points out her hypocrisy of always complaining of her husband's philandering ways, doing nothing about and even raising a son with the same bad traits. She challenges her mother in law that she will no longer be responsible for hiding the shame of men. She says, "[i]f you cannot hold him responsible for his mistakes, then it is not I who will take the blame. It is you. If you cannot reproach him for his wrongs, then bear his guilt. Do not blame me for your son's choices," (Myambo P.41).

In Okoye's "The Power of a Plate of Rice," Mrs. Chetu portrays a woman boxed into a tight spot but who comes out victorious against patriarchy. When she is transferred to Mr. Aziza's school, Mr. Aziza refused officially to give him a place in the school. She had to come up with a way. 'I resulted to a tactic I had used successfully before. I kept calling at his office every day, often without uttering a word until I broke his resistance and made him accept me,' (Okoye, p. 95). She chooses not to keep silent. She actually confesses that it was a tactic she had used before, giving credence to an assumption that patriarchy domination is rampant in the society. When she is finally accepted and is made to work for five months without pay, and Mr. Aziza has adamantly refused to pay him, she confronts him relentlessly. She stands her ground and even follows him to his house. She is fearless and uses the only known weakness of Mr. Aziza. "He was known to love food more than anything else..." (Okoye, p. 92). She eats his rice and it turns out to be his weak point. 'Disbelief was written all over his face' (p. 98). The threat Mrs. Chetu now portends leads him to authorizing his pay. The point bared here is that patriarchy isn't

insurmountable if a woman has the courage to stand her ground and is able to identify the weak points she can use launch her subversion.

Direct disobedience is suggested in Collen's "The Enigma." Marie has all her freedom taken away. She cannot socialize, she cannot enjoy the outdoors, and she cannot even make a decision about her future. She is made to understand that her education is only to place her appropriately for the right man to ask for her hand in marriage. Marie realizes that her father's biggest fear is that she might get into a relationship with the wrong man. She suddenly realizes that if she allows her father to continue caging her, she would not have a life. She attacks her father's greatest fear. She gets pregnant, "[t]he result of the test. She reads quickly. She knew it all along anyway. Yes. There it is in writing: 'positive,'" (Collen, p. 45) She waits patiently for the consequences and seems eager for them; "[s]he knows her confinement to a convent, like a prison that will face her. She feels the ostracism in all their eyes. The stares at mass," (p. 46). She is happy because nothing was happening in her life except being driven to school and being locked in the house. She feels "...she's stopped waiting...and something is happening now," (p. 46). She has changed her family as from then her family will consist of her child and herself. She has subverted patriarchy.

This is a society where men are attracted by the physical appearance rather than the inner beauty of the woman. The women know this weak spot in the men and are all set to exploit this fact to their advantage. In "Deciduous Gazettes," Irene and Tendai dress seductively, the skirts were "so short, so skimpy, they barely covered their underwear. Red panties were peeping out," (P.14). Mrs Ncube with reference to her husband's mistress says, "I know in my heart that she is pretty and voluptuous and has seductive breasts and sensual buttocks," (P.16). The men are portrayed as unfeeling and unconscious of the hurt the women experience at the slightest thought of their infidelity. The Patriarchal society cares for the physical nourishment of the women and children and ignore the emotional aspect, the bond that cements the male-female relationships. Naturally, the women value both the physical and emotional nourishments, as well as the security that the man provides, any of these missing would send a negative signal to the relationship, leading the woman to question the husband's loyalty, and harboring thoughts of infidelity. The patriarchal society conditioned the man to live by its principles, a tradition he has faithfully observed. The woman on the other hand, deliberately liberated herself from the male dominance asserting herself to the principles of the contemporary society. The man is unable to come to terms with the questioning tendency and the demands of the modern woman. In the Power of a Plate of Rice, Mr. Aziza is surprised at the insistence of Mrs. Adu to be paid her salary and her audacity to follow him to his house. The defiant Mrs. Adu cannot be stopped. She says:

I followed him to his house, which was situated near the school gate, and he turned and asked me why I was following him I remained silent. He opened the door and walked in. Quietly, I followed him into his sitting room and sat down without invitation. (P. 97)

The modern woman is conscious of her rights and no amount of intimidation will slow her down. Mrs. Adu is not afraid of Mr. Aziza, she demands her pay to feed her child and mother-in-law. It is her right to receive pay for the work done. Mrs. Adu and Mr. Aziza are dealing with each other as equals, the patriarchal rule of the woman submitting to authority of the man does not arise at the place of work. However, as an employee, Mrs. Adu is expected to obey Mr. Aziza, '[I]ook, Mrs. Adu, you will achieve nothing by following me like a dog. You may stay here forever, but you will not make me change my mind,' (p. 98). Reason supersedes threats hence Mrs. Adu is determined to disobey oppressive laws. It not surprising that the defiant Mrs. Adu eats Mr. Aziza's the entire rice that has been placed on the table. The liberal modern woman, her consciousness of the women rights and defiance to the oppressive male dominance laws, leads to the woman being a victor.

The modern woman is angry at the African Culture that encourages the man to marry many women. Marriage as an institution should be guarded by both husband and wife. The African woman wishes the African man can embrace western world monogamous marriages and live to their principles. Hannah envies her friend Saru who is married to a white man. She thinks, "Saru lives in Frankfurt with a middle-aged Austrian professor of economics," (p. 18). Hannah Ncube regrets why she did not take Saru's advice, "[m]y friend, Saru told me to marry a white man, 'Perhaps these problems you're having will disappear,'" (p. 18) Patriarchy is an oppressive reality with women feeling that this reality targets them. Patriarchy creates unequal relations in society oppressing the women and empowering the men. The patriarchy is unjust and often manifests itself in sexual dominion. Mai Shithole suspects that her husband is unfaithful and spies on him. She spends many hours keeping watch over a house the husband entered last night.

When he comes out at half-past six the next morning, dressed and ready for work, she watches him get into his car, start up the engine and leave. At a quarter to seven she comes out, elegant... (p. 33)

Mai is not only upset but she vents her anger out by destroying the gadgets, appliances and other items in the house of the husband's mistress. The damage she does

in the house is so much that it can be seen as the woman's total destruction of the oppressive patriarchal system. The radical and revolutionarily feminists in the western world have almost overhauled the patriarchal systems from their roots that have for centuries subjected women to physical and emotional humiliation. Having lived in the western world Saru is aware of the struggles the white woman has gone through towards liberating herself from the tyranny of the patriarchal societies. She remembers Mrs. Mandaza who is beaten by her husband every Saturday. She desires that the African woman puts similar efforts to liberate herself from the domination of the man. Her conviction is confirmed in the lie she tells to the four white men that in Africa, a woman can marry as many as eight men, and that they are all expected to be faithful to her. Saru enjoys observing the shock and disbelief the men display on their faces,

They were completely taken aback, nausea flitted across their faces, their hands trembled with self-righteousness. And they sputtered out simultaneously: 'But how do you know who the father of the child is?' said one. 'That is filthy. One woman cannot sleep with so many men. It's disgusting,' said the other and the third: 'whose surname does the child take?' (P.30)

However, brief the shock on the men's faces, Saru was happy and satisfied. She had revenged the women's emotional hurt; she had used the same 'infidelity weapon' to whip the men at their own game of keeping many spouses. It is ironical that the men should disapprove of one woman marrying many men, whereas the men expect women to get comfortable with polygamy. It does not matter whether it is the man or woman who has many spouses, the magnitude of emotional hurt is the same. Tandiwe Myambo is making a strong statement that the African feminist should assert herself and like the western feminist come out boldly to assess her present condition and possibly redefine herself in a manner that will make the man treat her with respect and accord her the dignity she deserves. The three stories portray castigates then men's loose sexual morally. They have questionable traits and uncontrollable high sex drives. Mr. Kanyangarara the teacher, Mai Sithole's husband and Hannah's husband have questionable morals.

Women are their own liberators yet they are their own enemies. Single women and girls capitalize on the weaknesses in the Patriarchal systems to exploit the married men of money and material gains, oblivious of their wives' emotional suffering, and even if they are conscious of these sufferings, they do not care. The mistress of Mai Celestina's husband has a new stove, a fridge and a new dress from Truworths all bought for her by Mai's husband. Lerato is happy to be Mr. Ncube's mistress, and even accompanies him to parties:

I believe the official Mrs. Ncube is coming and so is Amainini,” said one in powder-blue.

‘You lie,’ said her friend in green and white. ‘Will they recognize each other? Does Mrs. Ncube even know what’s going on?’

‘Mainini definitely knows what Maiguru looks like but as for Maiguru...Don’t they always say, wives are the last to know? ()

The inability of the women to support each other and protect the institution of marriage, is a contradiction, a confusion created by the patriarchal society. The single women prey on the married men for material support while the wives are suffering humiliation, emotional abuse and are sometimes denied basic material support by their unfaithful husbands. The wives are convinced that their husbands maintain their mistresses better than them. This is a characteristic of the Patriarchal society, also illustrated in *Petals of Blood*, when Wanjira justifying her prostitution to Karega and Munira says, “[a]s for me, it’s a game...of money...you eat or you are eaten...” (p. 293-294). In a society where men treat women as subordinates, grouping them and children together as absolute dependents, the blame goes entirely to the oppressive Patriarchal systems and minimally to the women and girls preying on these married men. Rutere (2010), makes an observation about some African feminist’s scholars who have discussed strategies that women use to maneuver around patriarchy. He cites Rose Ure Mezu’s *Women in Chains: Abandonment in Love Relationships in the Fiction of Selected West African Writers* acknowledging the importance of female bonding to cheer women and enable them endure patriarchal excesses (p.16). In “Deciduous Gazette,” the friendship between Hannah Ncube and Saru fits well into Rose Ure Mezu’s analogy. Hannah regards Saru as a genuine friend and treasures her advice. ‘When I wavered, it was she who said five words that washed away my weakness...’ (P.18), ‘I asked her what I should say, how I should approach this; how I should apologize or explain...’ (P.19)

4.0 Conclusion

Myambo’s “Deciduous Gazelles”, Collen’s “The Enigma,” and Okoye’s “The Power of a Plate of Rice” distinctly capture the issues that affect women; Issues that are definitely products of patriarchy. The fear and the suffering in silence in face of oppression and exploitation, indoctrination of women, acceptance of servile roles, duties and responsibilities so as not to upset patriarchal culture and systems in the society, belief in religions which only relegate them to patriarchal enslavement, withdrawal of rights, freedoms and discrimination in their homes and places of work are some of the identified feminist concerns in the stories. The stories offer a variety of options for subversion of

patriarchy. The practices they highlight include inculcation of self-belief and courage to take action, a conscious decision to stop covering male shames, prejudices and unjust oppressive tendencies, seeking financial independence, education and the conscious decision to stand up and fight because, patriarchy is not going to change its perception towards women without a fight. Reading these stories however one agrees with Leek S. L (2001) that “one must acknowledge as well that male and female roles are societal constructs, and thus, the entire female identity is based more upon societal constraints rather than physiological realities,” (p. 33).

References

- Awua-Boateng, Patience A. K. (2010). The Presentation of the African Woman in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of Savannah*, Amma Darko's *Faceless* and Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye's *Coming to Birth*. (Unpublished Masters Thesis, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology)
- Ashcroft, B., Gareth G., & Hellen T (2000). *Post-colonial Studies; The Key Concepts*. 2nd Edition. New York: Routledge
- Collen, L. (1999). *Enigma*. In V. Yvonne. (Ed.) *Opening Spaces; Contemporary Women's Writing* (pp. 43-46). Oxford: Heinemann Education Publishers
- Hull, E. D. (2001). *Literary and Cultural Theory*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Makokha, A. G. (2015). The African Woman in *Coming to Birth*: a Critical analysis of Kenya's liberation as depicted by the Woman's Liberation in Society. *Educational Research* Vol 6, 1. Retrieved from <http://www.interestjournals.org>
- Myambo, M. T. (1999). *Decidious Gazelles*. In V. Yvonne (Ed.) *Opening Spaces; Contemporary African Women's Writing* (pp 14-42). Oxford: Heinemann Education Publishers
- Ngugi, W. T. (1977). *Petals of Blood*. London: Heinemann
- Okoye, I. (1999). The Power of a Plate of Rice. In V. Yvonne (Ed.) *Opening Spaces; Contemporary African Women's Writing* (pp 91-99). Oxford: Heinemann Education Publishers
- Linda, L. S. (2001). Reading as a woman: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Feminist Criticism. *African Studies Quarterly* Vol.5: p 29-35. Retrieved from <http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v5/v5i2a2.pdf>
- Rutere, M. A. (2010). *Women and Patriarchal Power in Selected Novels of Ngugi Wa Thiong'o*. Baltimore: Black Academy Press
- Vera, Y. (1999). *Opening Spaces: An Anthology of Contemporary African Women Writing*. London: Heinemann