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Men and Women Revisiting Women's Conventional Roles in Selected Contemporary African Novels

By Akinola Monday Allagbe¹ and Yacoubou Alou²

Abstract

Many theorists, feminist scholars, and critics have been divided on the question of if it is possible for both men and women to adequately write about women. This article examines how some contemporary men and women have redefined and represented African women in their fiction, discharging them of conventional roles in patriarchal settings. To prove this, we examine instances of reversal of women's conventional roles through womanist and radical feminist trends in four selected contemporary African novels written by both men and women: *Mema* (2003), *A Beautiful Daughter* (2012), *The Housemaid* (1998), and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010). The first two novels are respectively written by men, Daniel Mengara and Asare Adei, whereas the last two were written by women, Amma Darko and Lola Shoneyin. There are similarities in the ways contemporary African authors write about women in their fictional texts. For instance, they sometimes switch from a patriarchal ideology to a matriarchal one. The authors have revealed these ideologies via the reversal of women's roles, by empowering them through decision-making on matters concerning their children, their children's rights, motherhood, giving the hand of their daughter in marriage, and arranging and financing wedding festivities of their children in their novels. But the writers each adopt different concepts when advocating or addressing problems facing women. Their use of womanist or radical feminist ideology varies from one another irrespective of their gender. By reversing women's conventional roles, the authors seem to have confirmed that a society cannot, therefore, be either "strictly matriarchal" or "strictly patriarchal"; rather, a society can have matriarchal and patriarchal subsystems, and these usually complement each other (Chinweizu, 1990, p.112).

Keywords: Women, Conventional roles, Womanism, Radical feminism, Reversal

Introduction

In African patriarchal societies, gender is a means used to give structural meaning to biological sex. It is based on biological characteristics and attributes that men and women use to play their respective roles in the cultural, social, economic, and political structures of their societies. As a result of the above, Allagbe and Allagbe (2015, p. 386) note that "While men are

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expected to play such stereotypical roles as fatherhood, husbandhood, and leadership, women are traditionally expected to be mothers, housewives and subservient.” In addition to Allagbe and Allagbe’s affirmation on gender roles, Koussouhon and Agbachi (2016, p. 84) argue that people initially learn to perform gender through repeated acts. Through repetition, they naturalize their gender performance. Once their gender performance is naturalized, it is said to be biologically constructed instead [sic] of culturally or socially constructed. Gender performance does not depend solely on the actor. It also depends on social or cultural norms.

In this vein, cultures and social norms give rise to expectations for appropriate gender performances and define ways to ensure that those expectations are repeatedly met. But with time, some postmodern feminists like Simone de Beauvoir, Judith Butler, in their quest for women’s liberation, have discovered that gender is not stagnant; it shifts in the lifetime of a male or female. Accordingly, Cameron’s standpoint on Judith Butler’s approach for gender reads in these terms: “Gender is [...] not something you acquire once and for all at an early stage, but an ongoing accomplishment produced by your repeated actions”(1990, p.13). This idea has influenced the writings of African writers, especially men writers, when it comes to women because in the recent past they have often blindly underrated the representation of women at the expense of men in their novels.

So, the arrival of feminist and womanist movements in Africa has given birth to a new generation of men and women writers. Their aim is to reconstruct distorted images of/about women which are noticeable in early male-authored fictional texts. But some feminist critics and theorists hold that pioneering men writers, to quote Fonchingong (2006), such as Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi, Wole Soyinka, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Cyprian Ekwensi (p. 135) etc., are guilty in that they have depicted women in a reductive manner and perpetuated popular myths of women subordination in their early prose works. These men writers are believed to have influenced their younger brothers (contemporary men writers) in how they portray women in their fiction. Following from this assumption: women do not or will not matter in these young/contemporary men writers’ fictional texts.

Feminist critics and theorists like Susan Gubar, Judith Kegan Gardiner, Lori Saint Martin, Annis Pratt, etc., have argued that gender counts when writing about women. For instance, Gardiner holds that gender influences the development of personality and writing. In this sense, she states that “In a male dominated society, being a man does not mean being like a woman. As a result, the behaviour considered appropriate to each gender becomes severely restricted and polarized” (1980, p. 198). Similarly, Gardiner, Gubar (1980) in her article “The Blank Page and Issues of Female Creativity” states that men writers often use literature as a way to create women the way they would like them to be created; women are the *blank page* (italics ours) upon which the men writers write. Women need to stand up and write back; they need to write their own fiction. Pratt (1981) notes that “Women’s fiction reflects an experience radically different from men’s because [their] drive towards growth as persons is thwarted by [their] society’s prescriptions concerning gender” (p. 6).

But Lange refutes the above-mentioned feminist critics and theorists’ view. She claims that “society’s views of women have changed and gender roles are not as strictly enforced [...]” (2008, p. 3) in the way they used to be in past or early male-authored novels. It is obvious that gender is not static; it evolves along with societal perceptions of reality. To prove this, one can cite such male-authored fictional texts as Chinua Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*, Peter Abrahams’ *A Wreath for Udomo*, Ngugi Wa Thiongo’s *I Will Marry When I Want*, etc. For instance, the way Achebe represents women in his earlier novels, such as *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of*

God (1964) differs from the representation in *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). The aim of Achebe, through the female character, Beatrice, in *Anthills of the Savannah* is to confirm the similarities among men and women ; this is what the womanist concept stands for.

In reality, the womanist concept is different from the feminist idea in terms of strategy of advocating for women's rights. The difference is that the feminists advocate for women's problems alone while the womanists not only fight for the rights of women but they are also "committed to the survival and wholeness of the entire people male and female" (Ogunyemi cited Walker in Layli, 2006, p.28). Womanists and feminists serve as advocates of women in patriarchal institutions.

It is true that most men writers, especially contemporary men writers, belong to the patriarchal institution which has long deprived women of some of their true potential, but they should not be denied the opportunity to embark on the reconstitution of the woman's real image as it is the case with women writers. Lange (2008, p. 2) explains this in a clearer manner: "Writing from the female perspective allows male authors to achieve re-identification." But this does not seem to convince Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie.

According to Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie,

"it is up to women to combat their social disabilities; to fight for their own fundamental and democratic rights, without waiting for the happy day when men will willingly share power and privilege with them- a day that will never come" (1994, p. 36).

However, in quest for ways to combat social disabilities infringing women, it is noteworthy to point out here that some women writers sometimes not only act out their aggression towards the patriarchal system hindering their freedom, but they also even go to the extent of acting out their aggression on their fellow women, men, and children. In this sense, if writing about women were exclusively left to women writers alone, this might seem like empowering them to sentence their oppressors, especially men, in literature. In fact, there cannot be a literature about women without men. As Stratton (1994) observes, "African women's writing cannot be thoroughly appreciated unless it is juxtaposed to African men's literature" (p.12).

So, it is possible for both men and women to adequately write about women. This contention has divided feminist scholars, critics, and theorists as highlighted earlier on. This article seeks to prove this by working on men and women writing on reversal of women's conventional roles in four selected contemporary African novels: *Mema* (2003), *A Beautiful Daughter* (2012), *The Housemaid* (1998), and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010). The first two novels are respectively written by men authors, Daniel Mengara and Asare Adei, whereas the last two were published by women writers, Amma Darko and Lola Shoneyin. Drawing on the ideological underpinnings of womanism and radical feminism, the ongoing study aims to unveil the ways the women in the aforementioned novels are portrayed and how they address the problems facing women.

Theoretical Framework

Social imbalances men between women have given birth to feminism and womanism. Feminism and womanism promote equality and aim to put an end to the social imbalances which have long maintained women in their social status quo. Feminism began before womanism. The history of the feminist movements is divided into three waves. According to Flouli (2017):

- The first wave refers to the movement of the 19th through early 20th centuries, which dealt mainly suffrage, working conditions and educational rights for women and girls;
- The second wave (1960s-1980s) dealt with the inequality of laws, as well as cultural inequality and the role of women in the society;
- The third wave of feminism (1990s-2000s) is seen as both a continuation of the second and a response to the perceived failures [...] The key concerns are intersectionality; the diversity of “women” is recognized and emphasis is placed on identity, gender, race, nation, social order and sexual preference; changes on stereotypes, media portrayals and language used to define women and sexual identities (pp. 5, 9).

Viewing the above of waves of feminism, this article uses radical feminism and womanism, two different women's theories. Indeed, radical feminism, a branch of feminist theory, is used to study the portrayal of female characters in contemporary men and women novels. Ibeku (2015) holds that “[...] Radical feminism [...] uses violence in order to gain their freedom” (p. 430). Similarly, Adei (2009, p.47) points out that “Radical feminism attempts to draw lines between biologically determined behaviour and culturally-determined behaviour.”

Womanism is derived from feminism and both advocate for women, but approaches and topics differ because of womanism’s focus on Black women. Womanism strives for a meaningful union and survival of women, men, and children. For instance, the notion of inclusiveness can be deduced in “Alice Walker’s term of the ‘womanist’ meaning a woman who is committed to the survival of the wholeness of entire people...” (2006, p. 28). Drawing on this, Koussouhon and Dossoumou (2015) claim that “Womanism is an inclusive theory centered on the natural order of things in the nature, society and family” (p. 130).

The theoretical framework of this study falls on radical feminism and womanism. Although radical feminism and womanism are both women’s movements that touch on the social life of women, we shall apply their different ideologies/concepts in order to see how the authors, in advocating for and reversing the conventional roles of female characters, represented them in their novels.

Methodology

Discursive policy analysis, also called interpretive policy analysis, is one of the branches of discourse analysis used in this study. This method allows us to underpin the reversal of women’s conventional roles in selected contemporary fiction written by both men and women. The approach covers notions like narratives, storylines, framing, discourse coalitions, interpretation, argumentation, and meaning to critically explain the initiation, formation, implementation, and evaluation of public policies in various contexts and settings (Glynos et al., 2009, p. 21). It is further argued by Glynos et al (2009) that “[...] discursive policy analysis comes in many different shapes and sizes, ranging from those that seek mainly to supplement positivist viewpoints to those who wish to break radically from positivist perspectives” (p. 21).

Indeed, the above approach is used to capture the plurality through interpretation of the reactions of the women depicted in the selected novels towards conventional roles imposed on women due to gender inequality between men and women in African societies. It is used to test a hypothesis about contemporary African men and women writing about women. Hence, to confirm the hypothesis, few women represented in the contemporary African men and women novels are

chosen.

The women in the novels are purposively chosen based on their reactions or attitudes towards conventional roles attributed to them. The purposive technique is used to check if gender inequality between women and men, in traditional African socio-cultural settings, that is condemned by feminist and womanist scholars, have been reversed in women's and men's literature. Another criterion is based on the fact that the women under study are represented based on socio-cultural African settings and the context of contemporary African fictional oeuvres.

In fact, the above attribute can be traced in contemporary African literature by men and women. Contemporary African literature is a transition from classical African literature, and is written in the period before or just after the large majority of African countries regained their political independence (Fouad, 2018, p.3).

In this vein, the four contemporary African works of literature, *Mema* (2003), *A Beautiful Daughter* (2012), *The Housemaid* (1998), and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010), cover the period after the African countries' independence. That serves as one the criteria of choosing the four novels under study. Another criterion is the fact that they represent gender inequality problems women used to face and continue to face in patriarchal settings of African societies in their novels. The final criterion is the background of the authors.

The contemporary African men and women authors are from different parts of Africa. They are from west and central parts of Africa, and the analyses carried on women's writing women are limited to their fictional texts. Concerning the two men authors, one is from central Africa and the other is from west Africa. Daniel Mengara, the author of the novel *Mema* published in 2003, is from Gabon, central Africa. He was born in Minvoul, Gabon in 1967. Apart from his novel, *Mema*, he has published books and articles in areas of francophone, post-colonial, and African studies. He is the author of "La représentation des groupes sociaux chez les romanciers noirs sud-africains" (L'Harmattan, 1996) and *Images of Africa: Stereotypes and Realities* (Africa World Press, 2001). The second author is Asare Adei. He published *A Beautiful Daughter* (2012). He is a Ghanaian novelist (west Africa). He is also an author of books for young adults. Some of his books include: *Thumbprint of Dishonour: Unworthy mot...* (2011); *A Nation in Denial : or was it a better Ghana* (2012); *Close Enemies* (2013); *Witches of Honour* (2015); *The Smart Witches Club* (2016).

The two women writers are both from west Africa. One is from Ghana, and the other is from Nigeria. Amma Darko is from Ghana and author of the novel *The Housemaid* (1998). She was born in 1956 in Koforidua, Ghana. She studied and grew up in Accra. Her novels illustrate everyday life in Ghana. Her first novel, *Beyond the Horizon*, was originally published in German. Her most recent novels, *Faceless* and *Not without Flower*, were published in Ghana. Last but not least, the second writer is Lola Shoneyin. She is a native of Nigeria. She is the author of *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010). She was born in 1974 in Ibadan, Nigeria. Her work is significantly influenced by her mother's life, notably providing material on polygamy; her maternal father, Abraham Olayinka Okupe (1896-1976) was the traditional ruler of Iperu Remo and had five wives. Her novel has won several prizes such as the 2011 orange prize, the 2011 PEN Oakland Josephine miles literary award, and two association of Nigerian authors awards. Apart from the novel, she has written a handful of poetry including *So All Time I was Sitting on an Egg* (1998), *Song of a River Bird* (2002), *For the Love of Flight* (2010), and the children's book *Mayowa and the Masquerade* (2010).

The above brief accounts of the contemporary African writers reveal that they are calibered African writers who know and have raised issues facing African women today. The aforementioned parameter contributes to one of the reasons why we have been motivated to work on their literary

texts. Since women used to be represented under an attributed role bestowed on them, discursive policy analysis will help to underpin change, if any, in analysing the role attributed to female characters so as to qualitatively examine reversal of women's conventional roles through womanist and radical feminist trends in four selected contemporary African novels by men and women.

Reversal of Women's Conventional Roles in the Novels

In Daniel Mengara's *Mema*, women have challenged the patriarchal thinking that gives men right of decision-making over women in a marital setting. This state of affairs seems to defy the unequal power relations or role assignment between men and women in patriarchal African societies. As Ojo-Ade observes, "[...] woman must keep quiet [in a patriarchal context] when men are talking. Woman is woman, mother, child bearer, supporter of man. If woman talks too much, she is considered uncouth, uncivilized" (1983, p. 159).

The above women's roles are challenged by Biloghe's mother and Old Meleng, her grandmother. A reversal of women's roles is marked when Biloghe's husband, Ntutume, who has quarrelled and refused to reconcile with his wife refugeeing with her parents, finally decides to go and beg her back. It is remarked that this man is forced by women through a prolonged strike to go and beg for his wife back. In fact, the women's strike actually make Ntutume and his people want to settle the dispute. The narrator informs the reader of this in the following excerpt depicting the meeting between Ntutume's people and their in-laws:

'We know we have offended you,' the head speaker from Ntutume's village would say to their in-laws. Our forefathers used to say that he is a fool who does not know how to beg. We have come to beg for the return of our wife (Mengara, 2003, p. 20).

In African context, when a problem arises between spouses, their parents or/and relatives call for a meeting to sort it out. So, in this case, a meeting is held and the fathers of the spouses are allowed to speak. And what the father decides is considered as the final verdict, but one can notice the reversal of roles given to women in Mengara's novel.

During the meeting, Old Meleng (the grandmother of Biloghe) openly counters Nkulanveng, the male speaker who represents Nutume's people. Her speech is considered incontestable and final to the problem between the spouses. Although Nkulanveng is known as a great orator, Old Meleng uses her position as a grandmother to undo his riddle. As the narrator states:

His pride [Nkulanveng's pride] had to be put aside, above all because he had been vanquished, not by a peer, but by an old mother who still had a lot to teach people of his generation...A roar of voices saluted her last words. Ah! These old women [...] No one can be cleverer than they are. Where did they learn all these tricks of knowledge? Well, you know, never play with those old people. After all, didn't they give birth to us? Yes? So why expect younger people to surpass them in wit? (Ibid. p. 25).

In the same way, Biloghe's mother scolds her son in-law, Ntutume, and warns him never to ill-treat her daughter again. In fact, she threatens to return the bride price the man has paid for her daughter. By so doing, she opens his eyes to the fact that he can never provide for her daughter if

he kills her with his brutality. The narrator informs the reader that “As the two communities parted that day, everyone went away pondering over the words of Biloghe’s mother, words that symbolized the respect that men and women used to show to one another...” (Ibid. p. 29). As observed in the novel, Mengara counters the traditional way of representing women. By so doing, he has shouldered a major focus of contemporary scholars, especially feminists and womanists, on the rights of women. He has joined his voice with many scholars of feminist and womanist studies who have largely been unanimous in some aspects of African culture that are hostile to women, and advocated for the need for a paradigm shift so that the supposed hitherto marginalised woman will be emancipated (Familusi, 2012, p. 229). He used motherhood, which is identified in womanist ideology, to empower women. In doing so, he seems to confirm Akujobi’s viewpoint on motherhood: “With motherhood, a woman is considered blessed, she acquires a higher status in society, she is respected and mythologized” (2011, p. 6).

Like in Mengara’s *Mema*, there is a reversal of women’s conventional roles in Lola Shoneyin’s *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi’s Wives*. In this novel, the author has depicted women under the patriarchal setting of Yoruba people of Nigeria. As Familusi (2012, p.300) confirms, the Yoruba nation, like many other African societies, is essentially patriarchal; hence, men are understood to be more privileged than women. Every decision and power is under the control of men. But Shoneyin defied that state of affairs by allowing Iya Segi’s mother and her best friend, Mama Alaro, both female characters, to arrange their children’s marriage. The marriage proposal is made by Iya Segi’s mother to her friend in the following terms:

We have been friends for a long time. I am dying. Why don’t you take my daughter and make her yours? Let me give her to you with my blessing. Let your son take her from me and I will watch over them from the next world (2010, p.100).

Marriage arrangements like this are always done among men and their fellows. The fact that Shoneyin allows her female characters to be in this leadership role and carry out decisions reserved for men leads one to believe that perhaps she is suggesting matriarchal society as a remedy to patriarchal failure.

To answer the above question, one can affirm that she has drawn her idea from matriarchy. The necessary conditions of the definition of “matriarchy” are that mothers are at the center of society, as manifested by matrilinearity and by mothers’ (or women’s) power of economic distribution, both in the context of gender equality (Goettner-Abendroth, 2012, p. xxvi). In addition, she has survived by temporarily switching from patriarchy to matriarchy so as to make the women assume the mantle of leadership in the marriage of their children by depicting the husbands of the women as irresponsible, lazy, or dead.

For instance, Iya Segi is the only child her mother has from her late father. She alone has catered for her daughter right from her womb and raises her alone because her husband has abandoned her for another woman. She reveals this to her daughter: “Your father left me for a beautiful woman. I told him I was pregnant, but he didn’t want to hear it...He pursued another woman’s hole and died inside it,’ my mother said.”

The novel has not said much about Mama Alaro’s husband, but the fact that he does not assume his role as a father makes him fall into the group of irresponsible, lazy, or dead men. Hence, Shoneyin depicts that he has a son who is called Ishola Alaro as the only son of Mama Alaro, as bricklayer apprentice in Ibadan. Iya Segi’s mother and her friend finance the wedding festivities of their children. The narrator reveals this through Iya Segi: “They bought three cows and eight

bags of rice. They invited the chiefs from all neighbouring villages” (Ibid. p. 102). The above attitudes of the women—inviting the chief of the village to the marriage ceremony of their children—shows that they are womanists. As we have mentioned before, the womanists believe in inclusive society. It falls into the trend of matriarchal ideology because in matriarchal society men are not chased away but they are implicated in already made affairs. In other ways, men play the role of figurehead. Also, the foregoing female role indicates a reversed gender role in representations of Yoruba women of Nigeria because the narrator is an aborigine of the Yoruba culture. In addition, the above reversed gender role has been possible due to this era of civilization and acculturation where women are now both seen and heard in Yoruba land. Some of them have become bread winners of their families because of economic realities (Famulusi, 2012, p.309).

Furthermore, if the women’s husbands are, as mentioned before, responsible, hard-working, or alive, in a patriarchal setting, it is their role to give out their daughter(s) in marriage. This role naturally belongs to fathers or paternal aunts. The women have recreated themselves. This female recreation seeks to change the passive roles ascribed to women in a male-dominated society. Chukwuma contends that Feminism means :

“...a rejection of inferiority and a striving for recognition. It seeks to give the women a sense of self as worthy, effectual and contributing human beings. Feminism is a reaction to such stereotypes of women which deny them a positive identity [...] (1994, p. ix).

In a nutshell, Shoneyin has also revealed womanist ideology through the women because they do not hate men. But they have challenged the patriarchal system that subjugates and oppresses them. For instance, in the novel, *Iya Segi*’s mother is depicted as a very rich woman. She hands over all her wealth to her friend, who in turn hands it over to her son. However, the young man does not know where the money comes from: “[...] I knew he didn’t know the source of the money his mother had stuffed into a cash bag. From the way he held his head, it was clear he believed it was a great gift from his mother” (2010, p.102). Not only has this money helped Mama Alaro’s son to establish his own business, but it has also helped him to take care of *Iya Segi*, his other wives, and their children. The above shows how African societies’ switching from a patriarchal ideology to a matriarchal one can be beneficial not only to socio-economic welfare of women but it can also be beneficial to their children. In fact, it has come to confirm Chinweizu’s assumption about societal institution that “A society cannot, therefore, be either "strictly matriarchal" or "strictly patriarchal"; rather, a society can have matriarchal and patriarchal subsystems, and these usually complement each other” (1990, p.112). That manner of doing can allow easy complementaries and resolve problems of gender inequality for incoming African generations. The switch from patriarchal ideology to matriarchal one seems to pave an easy way for reversal of women’s conventional roles in the contemporary African novels under study.

Just like Mengara and Shoneyin, Asare Adei shows a reversal of women’s conventional roles. In his novel, he has given his female characters voice on matters related to their children and rights. For instance, Asamoah, the man who impregnates the daughter of Densua and Omame called Mansa and refuses to marry her. But Mansa struggles to take care of herself and gives birth to a baby boy called Kojo without the help of Asamoah. When the child has grown up, he (Asamoah) comes to claim him, under the pretext of sending him to school abroad. Instead of Omame, the husband reprimanding Asamoah of his bad habit by telling him he cannot have the child as a man, he asks his wife to do so because he is afraid. It is Densua who scolds and answers him in the

following: "I'm sorry, you can't have him. By our custom, a child belongs to the mother. Mansa doesn't have any child apart from Kojo-she won't let him take him away" (Adei, 2012, p.121). Notably, it is in a matriarchal society that a child belongs to the mother. The child can even bear the name of his mother. So, Adei has tried to explore the reality of the Akan tribe of Ghana so as to empower Densua. In addition, the above way of representing Omane shows that he is weak and his wife, Densua, is strong and bold. Apart from that, Densua's attitude can be derived from the traits of the Akan realms. These traits of the Akan realms demonstrate that, in a matriarchal context, queenship stands above kingship ; the queen mother has the last word and is, in fact, the power behind the throne (Goettner-Abendroth, 2012, p.398). As a result, Densua is the power behind the household of Omane, her husband.

Like Mengara, Shoneyin, and Adei, Darko has reversed women's role in the dimension of submissiveness to men/husbands through her female character Sekyiwa. Darko is an aborigine of Ghana, and it is noteworthy to point out that the stories and problems raised in most of her novels originated from the Ashantis who form part of the Akan tribe of Ghana. In her novel, she has not only made her (Sekyiwa) not submit to her husband, but she has also made her challenge his authority. The above attitude of Sekyiwa to her husband is radical to traditional African women's attributes in an African patriarchal setting.

The way Darko portrays her makes her different from Shoneyin's representation of Iya Segi and her husband. In contrast, Iya Segi does not challenge the authority of her husband in Shoneyin's novel. She is rich, and the wealth of her husband comes from her mother, but that does not make her underrate him like Sekyiwa does to her husband.

Conclusion

Contemporary men and women writers have challenged patriarchal roles which impede the development and growth of women in their different novels. Drawing on womanism and radical feminism, they have broken the culture of silence and invincibility associated with women in early African literature. This has created a reversal of women's conventional roles noticeable in Daniel Mengara's *Mema*, Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Asare Adei's *A Beautiful Daughter*, and Amma Darko's *The Housemaid*. As findings, there are similarities in the way the contemporary African men and women authors write about women in their fictional texts by sometimes switching from a patriarchal ideology to a matriarchal one so as to empower them through decision-making on matters concerning their children, their children's rights, motherhood, giving the hand of their daughter in marriage, and arranging and financing wedding festivities of their children in their novels. But the writers do not adopt the same concept when advocating or addressing problems facing women. So their use of womanist or radical feminist ideology varies from one another irrespective of their gender. The authors have confirmed that a society cannot, therefore, be either "strictly matriarchal" or "strictly patriarchal"; rather, a society can have matriarchal and patriarchal subsystems, and these usually complement each other" (Chinweizu, 1990, p.112).

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