

September 2021

Patriarchal Limitations Imposed on African Women: A Deconstructive Reading of Chinweizu's Anatomy of Female Power

Itang Ede Egbung

Follow this and additional works at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws>



Part of the [Women's Studies Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Egbung, Itang Ede (2021). Patriarchal Limitations Imposed on African Women: A Deconstructive Reading of Chinweizu's Anatomy of Female Power. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 22(9), 79-91.

Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol22/iss9/6>

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

This journal and its contents may be used for research, teaching, and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply, or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. Authors share joint copyright with the JIWS. ©2022 Journal of International Women's Studies.

This journal and its contents may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden. ©2021 Journal of International Women's Studies.

Patriarchal Limitations Imposed on African Women: A Deconstructive Reading of Chinweizu's *Anatomy of Female Power*

By Itang Ede Egbung¹

Abstract

Patriarchy is one of the crippling limitations that women face in contemporary societies despite the effects of modernism. Patriarchy is a system that thrives on the domination of women and promotes the superiority of men. The system places so many limitations on women to the extent that the subversion of these limitations is considered a violation of social norms and values. This paper discovers that patriarchal limitations have confined unassertive women to be at the whims and caprices of men and their domination. Using deconstructive critical theory, this paper deconstructs Chinweizu's *Anatomy of Female Power* which claims that women wield power over men through motherpower, bridepower, and wifepower. This paper concludes that the confinement of female power to the domestic domain is one of the patriarchal strategies to confine and limit some African women to the private space, while the public space is reserved for some men, thereby perpetuating the inferiorization of some women.

Keywords: Patriarchy, Limitation, Woman, Deconstruction, Feminism

Introduction

Human society is made up of men and women, both sexes can swap gender roles as the need arises, the concept of gender complementarity is entrenched in some traditional African societies; they believe that women should complement men. Ifi Amadiume, in *Male Daughters, Female Husbands*, captures the relevance of women outside the domestic domain as they were conferred with chieftaincy titles such as the 'Ekwe' title. She notes that²:

This title was taken only by women, and was associated with the goddess idemiri. From all descriptions of the title, it was believed to be based on involuntary possession (beyond one's wish or control), but, in reality, it had a strong association with a woman's economic abilities and charismatic attributes, real or potential. Thus taking the title might mark the climax of economic success, but the Nnobi

¹ My name is Dr. Itang Ede Egbung, and I am a scholar in the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria. My area of research interest is Gender Studies and Feminism in African Literature. I have contributed book chapters and articles to scholarly publications, and I have presented papers in local and international conferences. I am an author of the book "Gender Complementarity in African Literature", a critical text, and *Wounded*, a novel.

²According to S. Katz-Wise (2020), "Gender is a social construct as against sex that is biological. Apart from the two major genders that are male and female, there exist other forms of gender such as intersex, transgender individuals, non-conforming, personal, eunuch and gender fluidity. Gender fluidity refers to change over time in a person's gender expression or gender identity, or both. That change might be in expression, but not identity, or in identity, but not expression, or both expression and identity might change together."

(<https://www.health.harvard.edu>)

people would generally claim that it was the goddess herself, through her possession of the woman, who would give her the money or wealth with which to take the title. (42)

Women were 'husbands' to other women for the following reasons: some wealthy women married new wives for their husbands to afford them ample opportunity to take care of their businesses; others who could not either have male children or any child at all also married new wives for their husbands for the purpose of inheritance. This was because female children were not allowed to gain inheritance in their father's house, because it was reasoned that they would be married out to another family and she would automatically adopt the family name of the husband. Amadiume hints that in the Nnobi community, the *Ekwe* title holder practices what is called:

igba ohu, woman-to-woman marriage. Such wives, its seems, came from other towns. The 'female husband' might give the wife a (male) husband somewhere and adopt the role of mother to her but claim her services....Potential *Ekwe* women were, therefore wealthy women, who through control of others' services were able to create more wealth. (42)

Catherine Acholonu in *Motherism: The Afro-centric Alternative to Feminism* notes that in pre-colonial settings, Igbo women had positions such as ritual rulers, priests, griots, and warriors; and they attained these positions of power through their sweat, wisdom, age, and physical strength. She states that "for many African people, gender is not necessarily a biological concept but rather a social construct which reveals itself or is created in the course of a person's life within his or her particular community" (22). Amadiume affirms this as she argues that "the flexibility of Igbo gender construction meant that gender was separate from biological sex. Daughters could become sons and consequently male. Daughters and women in general could be husbands to wives and consequently males in relation to their wives" (15).

Chinweizu corroborates Amadiume's position in traditional society, as he states in *Anatomy of Female Power*:

In many traditional African societies, men and women have long had parallel organizations and complementary powers. It is usual for the king, the queen (who, by the way, is not the wife of the king, but the head of the women's parallel branch of public organization), the war marshal and the queen mother, with their respective councils and officials, to exercise separate and countervailing powers. (70)

Therefore, the confinement of the female gender to the domestic domain came with colonialism which is where Chinweizu places the woman in his book. Amadiume notes that Victorian society saw gender and sex as meaning the same thing:

In their system, male attributes and male status referred to the biologically male sex – man- as female attributes and female status referred to the biologically female sex – woman. To break this rigid gender construction carried a stigma. Consequently, it was not usual to separate sex from gender, as there was no status ambiguity in relation to gender. (15)

However, for many people around the world, there is a conflation of gender and sex; including in some African societies. While colonialism certainly imposed western patriarchal beliefs and practices, these often interacted with existing patriarchies.

Chinweizu's argument is that the woman wields power over the man through "motherpower, bridepower, or wifepower" (14). This paper aims at deconstructing Chinweizu's claims from the feminist point of view. The scope is to examine women's experiences in relation to patriarchy as part of a broader in-depth study of the topic.

The Theory of Deconstruction

The application of deconstruction theory to this paper is apt because the paper aims at elucidating the double standards patriarchy plays in limiting women in Chinweizu's *Anatomy of Female Power*. This paper deconstructs the sham of female power as argued in the text and rejects the confinement of the woman to the domestic space alone.

Sreekumar Nellickapilly in "Deconstruction, Feminism and Discourse Theory" states that 'Deconstruction has originated in France in the late 1960s...deconstruction is associated with certain techniques for reading texts developed by Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man and some other thinkers' (1). He continues, 'Deconstruction asserts that, texts, institutions, traditions, societies, beliefs, and practices do not have unambiguously definite meanings, as they do not have very strict and rigid boundaries' (2). Charles Bressler in *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* argues:

Deconstruction aims at an ongoing relationship between the interpreter (the critic) and the text. By examining the text alone, deconstructors hope to ask a set of questions that continually challenges the ideological positions of power and authority that dominate literary criticism. (82)

Also, in *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham argue:

Deconstruction, as applied in the criticism of literature, designates a theory and practice of reading which questions and claims to "subvert" or "undermine" the assumption that the system of language provides grounds that are adequate to establish the boundaries, the coherence or unity, and the determinate meanings of a literary text.

Typically, a deconstructive reading sets out to show that conflicting forces within the text itself serve to dissipate the seeming definiteness of its structure and meanings into an indefinite array of incompatible and undecidable possibilities. (56)

In the same vein, Chioma Opara in "Making Hay on Sunny Grounds" argues:

Deconstruction, in effect, is a function of decomposition. This could be seen as decomposition of traditional passivity, prejudices and stereotyping which in essence prefigures the spawning of scholars and activists who have sown thriving seeds in the field of Women's Studies. (1-2)

In the context of this paper, deconstruction is the rebuttal of Chinweizu's claim in his book that women wield power over men through motherpower, wifepower, and bridepower. The rebuttal is important because this confinement limits women who wish to assert themselves in other spheres of human society.

Deconstruction and Feminism

Deconstruction and feminism have a lot in common because both theories subvert and unpack established institutions and norms that are oppressive. Nellickapilly argues:

Feminism can be understood as a form of resistance against all forms of patriarchal domination in all aspects of life. In other words, it aims at ending different forms of sexist oppression. It has very strong social and political implications, as it raises very important questions concerning equality and justice in human societies, most of which traditionally follow the patriarchal social order. (4)

Deirdre Byrne in "Decolonial African Feminism for White Allies" argues that "Feminism is a word, a discourse and a political position that is frequently met with suspicion in African circles.... feminism is a western colonizing construct, which has been imposed on the country by imperialists".

This paper, however, argues that feminism has always existed in some African countries even before the advent of colonialism. This was exhibited in Nigeria in 1929 by the Aba Women Riot where women revolted against the imposition of tax and reacted against economic depression. Their action was unprecedented as no one had ever spoken to them about feminism. A. E. Afigbo in "Igbo Women, Colonialism and Socio-Economic Change" notes:

The interest or rather consternation which the women's war of 1929 generated at the time and has continued to generate can be explained partly in terms of the fact that it was considered an unusual phenomenon – without precedent and without sequel (1).

Deconstruction is "applied to the interpretation of literary, religious, and legal texts as well as philosophical ones, and was adopted by several French feminist theorists as a way of making clearer the deep male bias embedded in the European intellectual tradition" (Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy).

Diane Elam in "Feminism and Deconstruction" argues:

Feminism and deconstruction have influenced literary criticism by rethinking the terms of sexual difference, identity politics and ethics....By undermining ontological readings of the category of women and providing serious challenges to descriptivist accounts of women's identity, deconstructionist feminism argues that women are a political not a metaphysical category. (1)

Esther Smith in "Images of Women in African Literature" notes that apart from female writers and critics who project women in a positive light, there are a number of male writers who portray the relevance of female characters in their literary works. They include: *The Brave Huntress* by Amos

Tutuola, *The African Child* by Camara Laye, *Ambiguous Adventure* by Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *God's Bits of Wood* by Ousmane Sembene, and *A Grain of Wheat* by Ngugi wa Thiong'O (30,33,35,37). She notes:

In the changing images of women in African novels about the colonial period, from the mother protecting her children and her culture against the first incursions of alien ways, to those who sought more practical approaches to preservation through accommodation with colonialism in full sway, to those who found themselves changed by the roles they played in the nationalist struggles against colonialism, reflections of African women's responses to inequality mirror the progressive movements characteristic of the psychology of oppression. (38)

In the context of this paper, deconstructive feminism is the merging of feminist and deconstructive features in refuting Chinweizu's consignment of female power to the domestic domain only.

Dimensions of Patriarchy's Constraints on Women

Patriarchy is a system that favours male superiority and female inferiority. It considers men as superior to women in all aspects of human life, hence, the reason for Chinweizu's confinement of women to the domestic domain. This is because Chinweizu, a patriarchal figure, assumes that other domains—political, social, economic, and religious—are too superior and highly technical for women to handle because they are considered as the weaker sex. However, studies have shown that women are also agents of patriarchy, who are used to dominate other weaker women. They are often acting out the script written for them by patriarchy. Romanus Aboh in *Language and the Construction of Multiple Identities in the Nigerian Novel* argues that “women sometimes play dominant roles in the debasement of other women” (110). Nneka Okoye in “Cracking the Eggshell, Infiltrating Patriarchy” argues that patriarchy is:

A system of male authority which oppresses women making them submissive, docile and religiously adherent to tradition and culture which consider them as mere appendages to the society. It is a system which urges the accentuation of the logic of women isolation and subtle exclusion from participation in national politics (334).

In “Feminist Consciousness”, Monique Ekpong argues:

Patriarchy is a system of sexual relationship in a social order where males rule females as a matter of birthright priority. And it has been so long in societies and so worldwide that men have always regarded women as their inferiors both physically and mentally (84).

The above definition captures the crux of this paper; Chinweizu has confined women to the domestic space because of his perception about women as people who are bereft of physical strength and mental ability to function in other areas of life.

Chibueze Orie in *Who is a Woman Being?* notes that “patriarchy favours men, and subjugates women” (30). Chinweizu, in *Anatomy of Female Power*, argues that feminists claim

that men dominate and control women in society, but his argument is that “women rule the men who rule the world” (12). His argument of female control of the men is limited to the domestic domain which is a patriarchal limitation of women. This implies that women are incapable of functioning well outside the domestic hearth. This is counter-productive to the tenets of feminism which encourage all women to assert their voices in all spheres of society: politically, socially, economically, culturally, domestically, and religiously. Chinweizu acknowledges these limitations:

All it shows is that in the public structures, which form the domain of male power, women are not well represented. If this under-representation is to prove that women are less powerful than men, it would need to be also true that those public structures exhaust the modes and centres of power in the society. Alas, for feminist claims, they do not; for there indeed are other modes and centers of power which women monopolize (11).

Chinweizu has confined women to the domestic domain, therefore, his assertion that there are other modes and centers of power which women monopolize, is a clear reference to the domestic domain where he feels women use to control the men. According to Chinweizu, the other modes and centres of female power are:

Women’s control of the womb; women’s control of the kitchen; women’s control of the cradle; the psychological immaturity of man relative to woman; and man’s tendency to be deranged by his own excited penis. These conditions are the five pillars of female power; they are decisive for its dominance over male power. (14-15)

This paper refutes Chinweizu’s restriction of female roles in the society to motherhood, wifhood, and the manipulation of men by women that leads to their psychological immaturity. Contemporary African women have grown beyond these limitations as we see them making their impacts felt in all areas of human life. It is a disservice to women if they are confined to these domains. Rose Acholonu in “Women in the African Novel and the Quest for Human Rights” argues:

Hitherto, many African novelists have made serious efforts to use the medium of their creative works to debunk many of the myths and taboos that inferiorise women, degrade their status and stunt the growth of their capabilities and potentials. (106)

The potential of women in society, if properly harnessed, is to complement that of the men. The complementary role both genders are expected to play in life is further manifested in the procreation process. A child is formed in the womb of the woman through the collaborative process of the male sperm and female egg. Chinweizu recognizes this fact:

Consider any man and any woman when they set out to reproduce themselves. She needs his sperm; he needs her egg; without the one, the other cannot procreate. At

the level of their complementary biological donations to the child, neither has the whiphand over the other. A fair and uncoerced collaboration is possible. (17)

This collaboration is what was designed from creation; to be implemented in all facets of life, Chinweizu therefore contradicts himself by jettisoning the complementary role played by both genders in other areas of life by confining women to domestic responsibilities while the men are made to occupy the public space. The author has stated elsewhere that "The idea behind gender complementarity is to bring to the fore the relevance of both genders to the growth and development of the family in particular and the society in general" (vii).

Chinweizu also argues that women tactically annexed the kitchen to themselves because through it they can wield power over the hungry man; he seems to forget the fact that it is patriarchal structure that has confined the woman to that space to subjugate and oppress her, a practice which feminists are fighting against. This accounts for the recent uproar against the Nigerian President's comment where he relegates his wife to the kitchen, the sitting room, and the other room. This therefore contradicts Chinweizu's assertion of the woman annexing the kitchen to her advantage. In Chinweizu's words:

In quietly annexing the cradle, and in seizing control of the kitchen during the original division of labour between the genders (alias the fall of man in the Garden of Eden!), woman pulled off the most sequential coup in human history. That coup guaranteed that, however mighty a man may become, he will submit to be ruled by woman. (21)

It seems to this researcher that Chinweizu does not fully understand the ideals of African feminism. He seems to be alluding to the fact that feminists are seeking for equality and identical roles in the society as that of the men. It is imperative therefore, to point out that African feminists are not looking for equality, but complementarity and recognition. They do not want their roles in the society to be undermined and swept under the carpet, but seen as complementary to that of men which has been ordained from the beginning. It is interesting to note that even Chinweizu recognizes this fact. He notes that "men and women are biologically complementary rather than identical" (93).

Chinweizu goes further, arguing that in some cultures the essence of female circumcision is to enforce female restraint in sexual relationships in order for the woman to have advantage over the sexually deranged man who must worship her in order to gain access to her treasured vagina. He forgets the fact that, as against Biblical injunction, patriarchy instituted female circumcision to control the woman's sexuality, because an erected clitoris is an affront to the erected penis. Therefore, in order for the woman to not compete with the man, her clitoris has to be excised.

In recognition of this obvious fact, Siendou Konate in "Virility and Emasculation..." argues that:

In the process of female socialization, the clitoris of the young girl is removed in order to prepare her for a more responsible and moral role: the subservience and docility of the woman and the subsequent endorsement of male supremacy. It is believed that if a girl is not incised, her sexuality will be uncontrollable because the clitoris is thought to be that which makes a woman more assertive, promiscuous

and prone to overstepping the bounds of the place carved out for her by customs and culture.

The ablation of the clitoris is deemed to foreclose any such situations. In short, the excision of the woman's erectile organ plays the function of damning or even curtailing her hyper-sexuality and thereby making her really feminine, i.e; having her abide by the customs and rules that regulate social life. One might also say that the ablation of the clitoris which can be construed as the counterpart of the penis because of its erectile nature, is the neutralization of any masculine tendency in the female. (212)

In radical feminist ideology, the excision of the female organ translates to the emasculation of her personality and sexuality. In some cultures, African women, by patriarchal standards, are considered impure if they do not present themselves for infibulation. That accounts for the reason Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in *The River Between* compels women to be circumcised in order to avert danger and defeat in the land. Tobe Levin in "Women as Scapegoats of Culture and Cult" notes that "For without removal of the clitoris, without 'purity' it is assumed that female sexual energy would threaten the tribe with destruction" (211). This therefore counters and deconstructs Chinweizu's argument that female circumcision is to restrain the woman and make her have advantage over the sexually deranged man. As a matter of fact, the female children who undergo this process are forced to do it. This is the fight which feminists are championing; they consider it as female genital mutilation which has to be resisted by women because so many young girls have lost their lives in the process. Mary Kolawole asserts that "...these women are not only speaking back, they are fighting back as they deconstruct existing distorted images or representations of African women" (4). Women lose their lives just to abide by the norms and traditions of Africa. In this sense, they are used as scapegoats. Levin notes that "women are indeed the scapegoats of tradition" (218). In Chinweizu's assertion, he argues that:

For the magnification of wombpower, mothers primarily rely on female sexual restraint as taught through codes of modesty. Codes which teach a girl coyness; which train her not to take the initiative in sexual encounters; which teach her to defer her gratification for as long as possible, on pain of seeing herself (and being seen!) as sexually forward, loose or even immoral – such training makes a girl more sexually restrained than she would otherwise be.

In some cultures, this training is combined with clitoridectomy, an operation which reduces the sexual excitability of a woman. This restraint, regardless of how achieved, gives a woman an enormous advantage in her dealings with sexually deranged men. (33)

Chinweizu's argument no longer holds sway as feminist writers now create female characters who defy patriarchal expectations of women who assert themselves sexually without feeling ashamed. Akachi Ezeigbo explores this in *The Last of the Strong Ones* where Ejimnaka falls in love with Obiatu at first sight and woos him without feeling ashamed. Despite the opposition she faces from Obiatu's family, she finally marries him, and their marriage turns out to be the best in the community as it is a union of two equal partners. Ezeigbo subverts patriarchal limitations of African (Nigerian) women by creating female characters who transcend the confinement to domestic hearth to be active agents of social and political change.

Some African women have broken through the oppression either from male or female oppressors through education or financial power. Olanna in *Half of a Yellow Sun* who is betrayed by Odenigbo by sleeping with Amala, the village girl through Mama's manipulation pays back by making love with Richard, her twin sister's boyfriend, as an act of revenge. Mama debases Olanna by calling her an educated witch because she could not give Odenigbo a child. She brings Amala from the village and manipulates both of them to have sexual intercourse that resulted in a pregnancy. Her expectation of having a male child is cut short as Amala delivers a female child. She eventually abandons her, which also reflects debasement. Aboh notes that "gender identities interweave at multiple layers of subjectivities; the woman can be her own oppressor just as the man can be his own subjugator" (123). Olanna breaks through the oppression because she is educated and conscious of her personality regardless of what patriarchal society represented by Mama thinks of her. The imposition of motherhood biologically is what Ester Espinoza-Reyes and Marlene Solis consider as "obstetric violence" in "Decolonizing the Womb". They argue that "obstetric violence as a result of a colonization of the womb, that is, of the occupation of the concept of motherhood by the dictates of patriarchal ideology". In *Purple Hibiscus*, Auntie Ifeoma also breaks away from oppression through self-consciousness; she rejects the imposition of a Sole Administrator in the University. She leaves the lecturing job because it seems oppressive. Beatrice also rejects oppression by poisoning her husband Eugene to death. In *Americanah*, Auntie Uju had to relocate to America when she discovers that her late husband's family wanted to dominate her. She seeks her personal freedom by relocating to a neutral place. Aboh notes that "some women contribute in one way or another in constructing a negative identity for other women" (117).

Not all women go into marriage "voluntarily" and "eagerly", as claimed by Chinweizu. In traditional society, some young girls are used as pawns by their fathers who consider them as properties. This accounts for forced marriages where female children are given out in marriage and the brideprice is used to educate the boy child, because female education will be an asset to the husband's family. These issues are highlighted in female writers' works as injustice against the girl child. Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* explore these issues. To buttress this argument, Konate argues that:

"Women must be prepared for wifhood and motherhood. To achieve that end, they are educated by an old lady, ... whose task it is to perpetuate traditional practices by seeing to it that young girls know their social role in traditional communities" (212).

For the purposes of procreation, marriage in Africa is a union of two people: man and woman, but the process and preparation leading to it is one-sided. The young maiden is socialized by the elderly women on the role of wifhood and motherhood, but the husband does not go through any form of socialization and education on his role as a man.

Moreover, in contemporary society, women are considered as social misfits if they not married. The patriarchal society ethos has made it look like a taboo to be unmarried; therefore, some women go into marriage to be accepted and respected in the society, so that the society will consider them as responsible and honourable, irrespective of the fact that some of these marriages are enslavement.

Also, African women value children and motherhood, either biologically or by fostering, which is why Carole Boyce Davies in her introduction to *Ngambika* argues that African feminism "respects African woman's status as mother but questions obligatory motherhood and the traditional favouring of sons" (9). This point buttresses the fact that African feminists value

children; and the process through which children are procreated is through consummation with the opposite sex.

In Africa, single parenthood carries a stigma, hence the desire for young women to be married and bear the husband's name. This accounts for the practice of marriage by levirate because it is viewed as inappropriate for a woman to be alone after the demise of her husband. This marriage by levirate places an extra burden on the widow who is expected to have more children for the new husband in addition to the one she already has for her late husband, thereby having more mouths to feed irrespective of her economic situation. This phenomenon is explored in Ray Amadi's *The Trials of a Widow* where Ego the widow is compelled to marry her late husband's cousin, and has more children in addition to the ones she already has for her late husband. Afterwards, the new husband abandons her to suffer alone with her children.

Chinweizu's perception of female power residing in marriage completely contradicts feminists' ideology. This is because feminists view marriage as confining for assertive women, hence the theme of marriage as a site for gender struggle in African female writers' works. This also accounts for why female writers create female characters who walk out of a confining marriage. We find this with Amaka in Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough*, who walks out of her marriage with Obiora who, in collaboration with his mother, was maltreating Amaka because of childlessness for six years. But she achieves motherhood with the birth of twin boys outside the marriage. Ejimnaka in Akachi Ezeigbo's *The Last of the Strong Ones*, walks out of her first marriage to old Alagbogu because she thought marrying an old man would give her ample opportunity to concentrate on her business, since the man has other wives. But the reverse is the case; the man refuses to build a hut for her like other wives, rather, he keeps her in his *Obi*, taking advantage of her youthfulness for his selfish reasons. Alagbogu also restricts Ejimnaka from trading in other markets outside of Umuga. She views the marriage as confining and walks out. Aissatou in Mariama Ba' *So Long a Letter*, also adopts the going-away motif from a marriage that is full of betrayal, abandonment, and class consciousness. She relocates to a heterogeneous society where she achieves individuality and self-identity for her contribution to the society and is not inferiorised. Enitan, in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good will Come*, walks out of her marriage to Niyi after achieving motherhood, a feat that seemed impossible from the onset. She walks out to enable her to achieve her dream of becoming a social activist and freedom fighter. These are feats she is not permitted to achieve in marriage as they contravene patriarchal expectations of African women. These female characters walk out of their marriages because it limits them, it prevents them from achieving self-fulfilment and self-actualization. Chinweizu argues:

marriage is the central institution of female power – not political parties, parliaments, armies, business enterprises, bureaucracies, etc. The nest or family home, where a woman is both mother and wife, is the seat of female power – not barracks, factories, offices or other such places where large numbers of persons gather to work together. In making marriage its central institution, female power has chosen the organizational form most suited to its nature and its needs. (111)

If marriage is the seat of female power, as claimed by Chinweizu, why would women abandon their seat of power, as whoever has power wields authority?

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to interrogate Chinweizu's *Anatomy of Female Power* by refuting the claims that women control the men who rule the world. The rebuttal is contingent on the deconstructive theory which undermines norms and values that favour patriarchal tenets. Feminism as a deconstructive theory interrogates the lopsidedness of social structures and advocates for a level playing ground for both genders to actualize themselves by playing complementary roles for the good of society. Uga Onwuka in "Igbo Women in Education" argues that "For any society to survive, both men and women have to play not only their respective parts as either men or women, but also their co-operative parts as members of society" (50). Okereke in "African Feminist Dialogics" notes that "This co-operation and relevance of both genders in decision making and governance, intertextualize pre-colonial and colonial historical reality in many parts of Africa especially Igboland..." (24). This is the only way through which equity and justice can be achieved and the society will be the better for it. This paper also rejects the assigning of female power only to the domestic domain and concludes that women are active contributors to societal development and positive change, as they have made their impacts felt wherever they have found themselves, hence, the rejection of oppression by some African women from both male and female oppressors. Therefore, confining them to the domestic space alone where they purportedly wield their female power is one of the patriarchal mechanisms to limit assertive African women who desire to be seen, heard, and recognized in their society.

All these are explored through literature which mirrors the society. The role of literature is to conscientize the society about the ills and vices that pervade it and proffer solutions going forward. The literary artist acts as the conscience of the society to criticize and satirize systems, customs, norms, cultural practices and patterns, behaviours, and traditions that are lopsided in order to bring about an egalitarian society where both men and women are treated equally regardless of their sexes.

References

- Aboh, Romanus. *Language and the Construction of Multiple Identities in the Nigerian Novel*. Grahamstown: African Humanities Program, 2018.
- Abrams, M. H. and Geoffrey Harpham. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 8th Ed. Boston: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005.
- Acholonu, Catherine. *Motherism: The Afro-Centric Alternative to Feminism*. Owerri: Afa Publications, 1995.
- Acholonu, Rose. "Women in the African Novel and the Quest for Human Rights". *Beyond the Marginal Land: Gender Perspectives in African Writing*. Ed. Chioma Opara. Port Harcourt: Belpot, 1999. 93-109.
- Adichie, Chimamanda. *Americanah*. Lagos: Farafina, 2013.
- . *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Lagos: Farafina, 2006.
- . *Purple Hibiscus*. Lagos: Farafina, 2003.
- Afigbo, A. E. "Igbo Women, Colonialism and Socio-Economic Change". *New Brides, More Hopes: Igbo Women in Socio-Economic Change*. Eds. E. J. Otagburuagu & A. E. Afigbo. Nsukka: Institute of African Studies, 2008. 1-14.
- Amadi, Ray. *The Trials of a Widow*. Lagos: Young Brain Publisher, 2014.
- Amadiume, Ifi. *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*. London: Zed Books, 1987.
- Atta, Sefi. *Everything Good Will Come*. Cape Town: Double Storey Books, 2004.
- Ba, Mariama. *So Long a Letter*. London: Heinemann, 1980.
- Bressler, Charles. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994.
- Byrne, Deirdre. "Decolonial African Feminism for White Allies". *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 21(7), 37-46. Retrieved November 2020 on: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol21/iss7/14>
- Chinweizu. *Anatomy of Female Power: A Masculinist Dissection of Matriarchy*. Lagos: Pero Press, 1990.
- Davies, Carole. "Introduction: Feminist Consciousness and African Literary Criticism". *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*. Eds. Carole Davies and Anne Graves. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1986. 1-23.
- "Deconstruction". Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. Retrieved October 22, 2019 from <https://www.iep.utm.edu/deconst>
- Egbung, Itang. *Gender Complementarity in African Literature*. Calabar: University of Calabar Printing Press, 2018.
- Ekpong, Monique. Feminist Consciousness in Aidoo's *Our Sister Killjoy* and Hurston's *Their Eyes were Watching God*. *CAJOLIS: Calabar Journal of Liberal Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*. Vol. 2(1), 1990. 84-96.
- Elam, Diane. Feminism and Deconstruction. *Gender and Sexuality*. Ed. Christa Knellwolf & Christopher Norris. 2008. Retrieved October 22, 2019 from <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/cambridge-history-of-literary-criticism/feminism-and-deconstruction/08C27304576B41D4D2CA266788B8B22F>
- Espinoza-Reyes, Ester and Marlene Solis. "Decolonizing the Womb: Agency against Obstetric Violence in Tijuana, Mexico". *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 21(7), 189-206. Retrieved November 2020 on: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol21/iss7/14>
- Ezeigbo, Akachi. *The Last of the Strong Ones*. Lagos: Lantern, 2006.

- Katz-Wise, Sabra. "Gender Fluidity: What it Means and why Support Matters". Retrieved August 2021 on: <https://www.health.harvard.edu>.
- Kolawole, Mary. *Womanism and African Consciousness*. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1997.
- Konate, Sonate. "Virility and Emasculation in Ahmadou Kourouma's Novels". *Masculinities in African Literary and Cultural Texts*. Eds. Helen Mugambi & Tuzyline Allan. Oxfordshire: Ayebia Clarke, 2010. 200-215.
- Levin, T. Women as Scapegoats of Culture and Cult: An Activist's View of Female Circumcision in Ngugi's *The River Between*. *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*. Eds. Carole Davies & Anne Graves. Trenton: Africa World Press, 1986. 205-221.
- Millet, Kate. *Sexual Politics*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1969.
- Nellickapilly, S. Deconstruction, Feminism and Discourse Theory. Aspects of Western Philosophy. Retrieved October 22, 2019, from <https://nptel.ac.in/courses/109106051/Module%206/Chapter%2040.pdf>
- Nwapa, Flora. *One is Enough*. Enugu: Tana, 1982.
- Okereke, Grace. African Feminist Dialogics: Gender and Multi-Dimensional Politics in Selected African Novels. *CALEL: Currents in African Literature and the English Language*. Vol. ix, (2014). 19-36.
- Okoye, Nneka. Cracking the Eggshell, Infiltrating Patriarchy: Nafissotou Diallo's *De Tilene Au Plateau* and Aminata Sow Fall's *La Greve Des Battu*. In Joy Eyisi, Ike Odimegwu & Ngozi Ezenwa-Ihaeto Eds. *African Literature and Development in the Twenty-First Century*. Owerri: Living Flames, 2009. 333-341.
- Onwuka, Uga Igbo Women in Education. E. J. Otagburuagu & A. E Afigbo (Eds.) *New Brides, More Hopes: Igbo Women in Socio- Economic Change*. Nsukka: Institute of African Studies, 2008. 49-63.
- Opara, Chioma. Making Hay on Sunny Ground. *Beyond the Marginal Land: Gender Perspective in African Writing*. Ed. Chioma Opara. Port Harcourt: Belpot, 1999. 1-23.
- Orie, Chibueze. *Who is a Woman Being? 21st Century Nigerian Female Debut Novels*. *Moods in Essays*. Enugu: Samdrew, 2011.
- Smith, E. Images of Women in African Literature: Some Examples of Inequality in the Colonial Period. *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*. Eds. Carole Davies & Anne Graves Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990. 27-44.