**AGENCY AND REPRESENTATION OF FEMALE CHARACTERS IN SELECTED AFRICAN LITERARY TEXTS: A STUDY OF AGENCY IN SELECTED TEXTS OF AFRICAN LITERATURE**

# **ABSTRACT**

This study examined how each female character's sense of self contributes to the formation of agency. It makes the case that women's agreement and collusion in their own subordination are implied everywhere feminist intellectuals embrace male hegemony as the all-powerful ruling principle of androcentric power systems. In a solely library-based study, three novels written by African authors were analyzed utilizing a feminist theoretical framework which affected women literature who were lacked empowerment. Given their superior comprehension of social relationships due to their insider-outsider social location, oppressed people are charged with building their own revolution. This theory's concept of epistemic advantage was highly important to this undertaking. In the findings, the study's conclusions highlight two main categories of feminine reactions to patriarchal authority. The non-agentive female characters who are effectively victims of dominance relationships and their agentive counterparts who overcome the same strong pressures are the two types of femininity that are discussed in Chapter 2. According to chapter three, actors must use their own free will, willpower, and dedication to pursue the ideal of agency, which is neither inherent nor granted. In accordance to the study's findings in chapter four, women's traditionally undervalued selfhood offers both enabling and limiting opportunities for the exercise of situated agency that can transcend systemic barriers to humanist ideals. It also confirms that an actor's level of success is determined by their own volition and active participation. The study comes to the conclusion that any social justice initiative that aims to achieve significant and long-lasting results in support of women's empowerment and liberation must leverage women's sense of self and raise their motivation in the involvement of literature.

***Keywords****: formation of agency, feminist, male hegemony, non-agentive, humanist ideals, social justice*

# **INTRODUCTION**

African literature has grown to include new issues in line with the changing nature of society, surpassing its initial objective of creatively exposing the cultural impacts and persistent, troublesome legacy of imperialism and colonialism (Githire, 2010, 183). The feminist discourse falls under this latter category of literary issues from this part of the world. During the social and political upheavals of the 1960s, feminism evolved as a global movement that spread to almost every continent. In the 1970s, it made its way to Africa (Freedman, 2001, 1; Goodman, x; Coetzee 27). Notwithstanding the fact that women make up the majority of the world's population, feminist ideology in particular acknowledges the historical and cultural subjugation of women. From a literary perspective, the feminist movement was first driven by the goal of rectifying the inaccurate portrayals of women in works that were written by men at the time. In postmodern times, this has also changed to include more general concerns like feminine agency (Rinkanya, 70). Feminism argues for a shift in the social, cultural, economic, and political order of things in order to lessen and ultimately eradicate the long-standing prejudice against women (Freedman, 2001: 1; Hekman, 342).

Feminism and the discussion of change assume human agency because change is "not preordained, neither is it outside the realm of human action" (Collins 274). In other words, when "the arc of history does not bend towards justice by itself," revolutions are not the result of chance or mindless determinism (Musolf, xi). Indeed, it takes driven, purposeful, and enthusiastic people to turn the wheels of social change, such as Wangari Maathai in Kenya's Green Belt Movement in the 1990s and Martin Luther King Jr. in the US Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The dialectical relationship between oppression and activism is the reason why it is the responsibility of the proletariat to lead change in social justice issues. The current situation would be maintained at best if the establishment was left to its own devices. When it comes to the feminist agenda, women should take the lead in promoting the feminist concept. This thesis highlights the agency of female characters, exemplifying this ideal.

Agency is defined as "people's capacity to make choices and take action in the world" by Rinaldo (826). This definition posits that agency is associated with decision-making and behavior. In addition, the decisions must be determined and intentional for the activity to take place. Intentionality, reason, and power are the three interconnected components that govern agency (Samman and Santos, 57). Using her God-given intelligence, the goal-oriented agent must carefully consider her aims and create a plan of action on a personal level. Such an unshackling is called emancipation. Even yet, the agent will still have to deal with external influences; she will require all the resources she needs to act or be active, as well as an enabling environment. Empowerment is the term used to describe this second agent enabler.

Therefore, it is crucial that any politics of empowerment be backed by a unique type of knowledge. For example, before trying to challenge power, it is essential to comprehend how it is structured and functions. Accordingly, feminist researchers recognize that any given matrix of dominance is based on four interconnected dimensions (Collins, 276). The structural domain is at the forefront, organizing dominance through its social institutions and overtly sexist social policies. For a long time, the dominant group has been systematically denying the oppressed people access to society's resources. The disciplinary domain comes in second, prepared to handle dominance with its monitoring methods and bureaucratic structures. Then, like a magician, the hegemonic state of power casts its justification over dominance, making even women support the system that encourages their own subjection. This is achieved by its clever manipulation of concepts, pictures, symbols, and ideologies to alter consciousness. The interpersonal domain finally enters the picture to impact daily lived experience and the resulting individual consciousness, firmly securing the nail of control. Ultimately, a smooth network of politics, the economy, and ideology work together to maintain women in their designated subservient position through a very powerful social control mechanism (Ibid, 5). Fortunately, the understanding of these complex domination connections has been applied by critical theory to empower the marginalized. This is accomplished by exposing the ideological approaches taken in the creation and defense of the sex-gender system as well as how it interacts with other oppressive structures.

This implies that women, like all people, possess an inherent uniqueness that surpasses gender considerations from birth. Essentially, this female self is considerably different from the usual conceptualizations of self in Western epistemology, which are independent and rational (and thus fundamentally masculine), such as the Kantian ethical subject and homo economicus. Alongside the prevalent Cartesian mind-body dichotomy that has dominated its followers' thinking for millennia, this ideology identifies women with the body and emotions and men with the mind and reason (Liebelt, 15; Rawlinson 7; Dubber, 36). In the opinion of feminists, who see it as not only displaying a misogynist legacy but also encouraging the ongoing exploitation of other, less fortunate women, the partiality and political overtones inherent in such a notion of self-undermine its validity (Oksala, 286). Therefore, a self that is rooted in atomistic individualism and equipped only with reason would reinforce long-standing gender stereotypes and prove helpless against the various and conflicting forces that make up the social environment.

According to Fischer (12) and Sullivan (47), interpersonal relationships, cultural mores, and biosocial forces are examples of schemas that become deeply embedded in the psyche and subtly shape a person's behavioral habits and cognitive abilities to the point where a person's rational commitment to duty alone especially in the case of culturally normative bias would inevitably be undermined and limited. As a result, feminists promote the idea that the ideal self is relational and socially situated, a moral being with traits like vulnerability and interdependence that are typically disregarded (Code, 210). The core of the feminist idea of self is an autonomous self-determination that is also equipped with those interpersonal skills typically associated with women. The feminist definition of autonomy rejects self-sufficiency in contrast to its denotative counterpart, instead relying on supporting relationships and thriving on the co-creation of identities with others. Therefore, a community's life serves as the foundation and center for each person's experience, including artists' (McNee, 16). Given the close connection between individual and collective existence, selfhood for marginalized writer’s female or otherwise remains inexorably linked to community, particularly in Africa, where communality is customarily dominant (Olney, 43; Felski, 139).

Literature has a mission to describe the predicament of women because of its function in social critique. In particular, feminism as a literary theory has been helpful in dismantling patriarchy's long-standing assault on women. Male dominance has ensured the rise to and maintenance of its sexist hegemony through meticulously planned structures and ideological maneuvers. Because to feminist criticism's sharpness, academics have been able to identify, describe, and analyze the barriers that have historically and culturally stood in the way of the female species of humanity with remarkable clarity and with measurable outcomes. In fact, the fact that men are no longer regarded as the unquestionable standard of humanity in a large number of global events attests to the advancements made by feminism worldwide

However, coercion or physical force are rarely used to enforce male dominance. Indeed, the cooperation of the oppressed is what keeps hegemony in place. However, in their attempts to explain patriarchy's dominance in society, feminist critics frequently emphasize the structural elements of that domination at the expense of other facets of masculine control. This study focused on how selfhood affects female agency, highlighting the moral obligation for women to lead and set an example for the change they desire. Instead of merely controlling the carefree wave of victimization, encouraging members of the female sex to use their God-given autonomy as a weapon against the inescapable hegemonic influences around them could inspire significant systemic changes and self-driven efforts to secure the elusive social justice that the feminist cause has long sought.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

Examine how individuality influences the development of female characters in a few African literary works.

**JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY**

It is not always clear to everyone in society what kind of oppression women face. A study grounded on feminist analysis is significant because it offers a chance to express a female perspective, giving interested parties access to valuable data. Furthermore, it is mostly the responsibility of those who encounter those experiences to define their own reality. By basing this study on the experiences and deeds of female characters, we are enabling women to express themselves and set their own goals, which is ultimately crucial for their empowerment.

Although Africa is undoubtedly a large continent with over fifty nation states, each with a wide range of cultural diversity and presenting a variety of historical and political experiences, it was reasonable to select the three books from Nigeria, Kenya, and Ethiopia (Julien, 297). The western and eastern edges of the continent are where these three nations are located on the topographical map. A beneficial mix of ethnic, religious, and social environments in which African peoples conduct their everyday lives is implied by such physically disparate locales. The aforementioned nations are also a helpful complement to this English-language effort, as they have been significant locations for the Anglophone tradition of African literature (Ibid, 296). Therefore, the three nations are emblematic of the entire continent since they represent a range of genres of the so-called African literature.

Additionally, there is a wealth of evidence in the academic community that studies on female agency and selfhood are abundant. Though thorough research in this field has not yet been completed, critics like Mariana Ortega (2016) and Lorraine Code (2011), among others, have made several references to selfhood in relation to female sex members. It is hoped that this study would provide a valuable addition to the ongoing research. There are already a lot of critical evaluations of the texts of choice. Silence is my Mother Tongue (2018) was on the long list for the 2019 Orwell Prize for political fiction, *Place of Destiny* (2005) placed second in the 2007 Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature (English Adult Fiction), and *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) won the Wole Soyinka Prize for Literature in Africa in 2006. Because of this, the likelihood of finding something new from a road that has reportedly been so extensively traveled by experienced feet already may seem remote at first glance. However, using these texts to examine the ongoing issue of female agency and selfhood broadens the critical perspectives of past researchers. The study felt justified as having sufficient content to contribute to academics based on the above given facts.

**SCOPE OF THE STUDY**

The three main texts covered in this research where Silence is my Mother Tongue by Sulaiman Addonia (2018), *Place of Destiny* by Margaret Ogola (2005), and *Everything Good Will Come* by Sefi Atta (2005). Furthermore, despite the fact that some opponents point to racism, classism, and heterosexism as legitimate products of patriarchy, the study only looked at sexism and its reified effects on the lives of independent, feminine individuals. This study was further limited by the fact that the precise areas that were subject to criticism in the works mentioned above were limited to those creative representations whose affinity with feminine ideas could be demonstrated and/or justified.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

Margaret Ogola and Sefi Atta are well-known authors whose writings have garnered a lot of scholarly interest despite receiving little recognition. A quick look at the sizable body of work available for the Kenyan author, who achieved modest success in her writing career (winning the Commonwealth Writer’s Prize and the Jomo Kenyatta Prize for Literature in 1995, and again the Jomo Kenyatta Prize in 2007), reveals that critics have focused most of their attention on her first two works. It's important to remember that every single critique this researcher encountered, with differing degrees of fervor, either praised or criticized her as a successful feminist scholar whose influence on the local and regional literary scene was evident. These works include Ogal and Macharia's "Conceptual Metaphors in Margaret Ogola's Novel: A Deconstruction of Her River and the Source" (2018), Kamau's "The Place of Women in Society and Other Themes in 'The River and the Source' (2017), and Nyongesa's "Deconstruction of Margaret Ogola."

In 2016, Oduor wrote "The River and the Source" and "Are Kenyan Literary Feminists Too Militant?" “Margaret Ogola: An African Heroine” by Moynihan (2014); “An Examination of Catholicism as Social Vision for Women’s Emancipation in Post-Independence Kenya in Margaret Ogola’s The River and the Source and I *Swear by* *Apollo*” by Jose (2014); “Writing Alternative Womanhood in Kenya in Margaret Ogola’s The River and the Source” by Tom Odhiambo (2006); and “Masculinity in Margaret Ogola’s The River and the Source and I *Swear by Apollo*” by Ann Hawala (2019). Like many others, almost all of these studies agree that gender is a paradigm that is pertinent to the topics covered in those works. By basing its arguments on the considerably less criticized Place of Destiny, this study not only contributed to the body of knowledge already available on the author but also broadened the scope of gender-related discourse influenced by her works by concentrating on the less addressed problems of women's agency and selfhood.

In *Gender and Power* (1987), Raewyn Connell identifies emphasized femininity as a variation of potential femininities. In Masculinities (1995), she reveals its opposite. Richard Howson adds various types of femininity, such protest and ambivalent femininity, to Connell's concept in *Challenging* *Hegemonic Masculinity* (2006). In "Forms of Femininity at the End of a Customary Marriage" (2015), Elena Moore adopts Howson's models, substituting alternate femininities for the third category. These many definitions of femininity support the study's theoretical position that distinct points of view might exist even among people who share a social place. This study's classification and analysis of the diverse female characters in the chosen texts were influenced by the belief that the homogeneity of women is an impossible concept.

According to Sithabile Ntombela and Nontokozo Mashiya's 2009 article "'In my time, girls...': Reflections of African Adolescent Girl Identities and Realities across Two Generations," girlhood realities and the ways in which femininities are constructed are prone to change. Both during different phases of life and in other contexts, these pliable borders may appear. In "What Is Agency?" (1998), Emirbayer Mustafa and Ann Mische relate the idea of agency to the changeable ideological stances that women exhibit. Human agency, according to these academics, is a temporally rooted social engagement process that is both present-focused and future-informed. This was utilized by the study to support the idea that as female characters grow older and start to renounce some of the ideological stances they have long held, their perspectives may change. Furthermore, the patriarchal system has a way of encouraging some of these changes in femininities. In her 2016 article "Manufacturing Beauty, Grooming Selves: The Creation of Femininities in the Global Economy - An Introduction," Claudia Liebelt argues that over time, male and female subjectivities have been constructed through the practice of body grooming and beautification. In "Lives at the Center of the Periphery, Lives at the Periphery of the Center: Chinese American Masculinities and Bargaining with Hegemony" (1999), Antony Chen identifies the primary socio-cultural institutions that propagate these subjectivities as being the media, education, volunteer organizations, and family. The study was able to analyze female personalities with the help of these situations.

Ingrid Johnston-Robledo and Joan Chrisler, Feminist Views on Identity and Image: The Embodied Self of Women (2018) provided a working definition of selfhood for this study, defining it as the sense of self and the thing that creates reality for each person. The characteristics of situatedness and embodiment are added to this definition of selfhood by Lorraine Code in "Self, Subjectivity, and the Instituted Social Imaginary" (2011). A situated selfhood is one that is influenced by the specific subjective identities it has in the world, including those related to gender and other factors like ethnicity and socioeconomic class. Its subjectivity and self-expression are characteristics of an embodied selfhood. As the foundation of this subjectivity and self-expression, the body is frequently the outward representation of historical abuse and slavery for women. In The Second Sex (1949 [2011]), Simone de Beauvoir makes the case for a female self that has historically experienced systematic subordination throughout history and been made non-subject and non-agent in the patriarchal environment it lives in.

As suggested by XU Ming-ying, SUI Xiao-di, and AN Xue-hua in "The Fragmentation of the Female Selfhood in *The* "*Flight from the Enchanter*" (2014), these unfavorable conditions have led to the fragmentation and brokenness of women's selfhood. Reparations are justified in light of the harm incurred. One of the main goals of contemporary feminism, according to Daniel Ross in "Celie in the Looking Glass: The Desire for Selfhood in the Color Purple" (1988), is the reappropriation of women's bodies from patriarchal culture. The types of bodily oppression are numerous. In "In Between Realms: The Search for Feminine Selfhood in the Essais of Montaigne" (2018), Essais of Montaigne shows how the French philosopher characterized women solely by their physical attributes, thereby exemplifying the practice of biological essentialism against female sex members that dates back to the Renaissance and beyond. This study's examination of selfhood as a component of women's immanence or transcendence benefited from the notion that selfhood is discursively and/or socially produced. In her 1999 article, "Agency," Laura Ahearn helpfully connects the origins of the term's widespread use to discuss the human potential to act to the activism of people in the 1970s who fought against established power structures to achieve gender and racial equality. She asserts that feminist theorists should place a particular emphasis on agency by examining how "the personal" is inherently political that is, how people's behavior both influences and is influenced by broader social and political institutions.   
  
Human agency, according to Emirbayer and Mische in "What Is Agency?" (1998), is a temporally integrated process of social participation that is directed toward the present and the future while also drawing on the past. This implies that the emergence of agency is a highly variable and malleable process, meaning that depending on their ideological maturity, people may exhibit varying degrees of agency or non-agency, for that matter. Indeed, identifying an agentic drive is just as much a continuous process as the individual's personal growth. Humans can (re)strategize in matters of activism because they can connect choices with results, as stated by rational action theories. This concept aided the study in resolving apparent discrepancies in the agentic manifestation of characters at various life stages and in various contexts.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study, which was qualitative in nature and library-based, used Sulaiman Addonia's Silence is My Mother Tongue, Margaret Ogola's Place of Destiny, and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* as its main texts. Because of their content relevance to the study's main concepts of selfhood and feminine agency, these texts were chosen through purposive sampling and stratified sampling where different texts had same context. Reference materials and critical and supplemental works from journal and newspaper articles were examples of secondary sources that offered helpful extra information in addition to the data from the primary texts and to improve the quality if the texts. The data was subsequently presented in standard language after being subjected to content analysis

**THE PERSONALITIES OF AGGRESSIVE AND NON-AGGRESSIVE FEMALE CHARACTERS**

**INTRODUCTION**

The ideological concept of individual agency is becoming more and more relevant in our world (Lerch and others, 38). The subject of individual rights and capacities has really taken on such centrality that it is now considered the legitimate framework for growth and security in any country or community (UNDP, 8; Sen, 56). The capacity for intentional, logical behavior makes humans unique. Given their reason, humans are purposive agents, which means they may select from a variety of options based on how well they will serve their objectives. According to Van der Hoek and Wooldridge (135), a rational [human] agent is an entity that can act on its surroundings and choose to act in a way that serves its own interests.

Only humans possess the ability to make logical judgments and use free will, out of the more than 8.7 million plant and animal species that call the planet home (National Geographic, 2021). According to experts, morality and reasoned behavior are not only possible for all people, but they are also the foundation of personhood (De Monticelli, 153; Renn and others, 14). Considering this, one may wonder why, in reality, some societal segments may prove to be very agentic while others fall short. Feminism views women as belonging to a homogenous group that is marginalized in society and who, because of their socially declared otherness, hold the status of outsiders within. Despite this stark similarity, individual women respond differently to a variety of stimuli, whether internal or external. It's true that people react in remarkably unique ways to various circumstances. Adhering to the feminist ideal of valuing diversity, women actually hold diverse perspectives due to the plethora of diverse realities they experience.

This chapter integrates the everyday lives of female characters with an examination of the social structures that influence those lives, following the feminist perspective's approach to life and politics rather than a series of political conclusions regarding women's oppression (Hartsock, 285; Collins, 40). For this study, the daily is a beneficial supplement to the theoretical arguments since it is a way to reconcile subjectivity and objectivity in developing scholarship. Women's everyday behaviors and ideas mirror theoretical issues. The truth about the human condition can be found in the concrete world of women, which is essentially the antithesis of the abstract conceptual world that males occupy. The value judgments we make about the female characters from the chosen texts in respect to the agentic division are emphasized by the authors' portrayal of women's lived reality their behaviors and experiences in what make up the banalities of life.

**Female Characters Who Are Not Aggressive**

The context of domination relationships is where agency and/or non-agency take place, just as repressive regimes are where activism is especially relevant. In each of these instances of illegal control of dominance, power is the key. However, unlike in tyrannies or oligarchies, domination relationships function so that power moves from superiors to subordinates through consent rather than force. Subjects of this type of enslavement voluntarily participate and even conspire with the dominant group in promoting specific practices and ideas that may really jeopardize the well-being of their own kind through their actions and deliberately held beliefs. Power belongs to boys and men, while girls and women are the objects of this dominance in the patriarchal institutions that serve as the foundation for the writings of Sefi Atta, Margaret Ogola, and Sulaiman Addonia. Paradoxically, women are seen as actively contributing to the preservation of the status quo. People in this category are wired for cognition and action, just like all other people. However, rather than employing this reasoning ability to choose their own survival, this group of women uses it in ways that seem to jeopardize the welfare of women as a whole. This study found several possible ways for this to occur.

**A Defective Consciousness Case**

Female humans are never in their right minds when they set themselves against the interests of their own race. The intricate process of socialization allows the constitutive rules that have been established by unequal power relations to become ingrained in social norms and the collective intentionality of the subjects, to the extent that they accept misogynist cultural presumptions as real, legitimate, self-evident, and a part of their fundamental reality. It's similar like wearing a veil that only partially reveals the world. Reification is the term for this aberrant state that starts in the mind and influences how a person views social reality. In order to create a false illusion that supports the same dominance relations inside the community, it strives to blind people to the dominance relations that make up society (Stahl, 736). The link between gender superiority and actual experiences seems to be lost on or impenetrable to women who are casualties of reified ideology. According to this study, ladies of this caliber are not agents.

One example is the mother of Amor in Place of Destiny. A mother of two boys and two girls, she allows her sons to work little or not at all while driving her daughters crazy to perform all the backbreaking labor and 24-hour maintenance. In reference to her two brothers, Amor Lore remembers:

*I don’t remember them doing anything heavier than holding a stick and following our small herd of scrawny zebus, fat-tailed sheep and half-wild goats to the grazing fields where they would laze their weekends away playing games with others also fortunate to be born with the right kind of reproductive equipment. This was the village norm. Indeed upon growing up they, like my father and most of the males around, would never engage themselves in anything actually as strenuous as wielding a hoe.*

*(Ogola, 19)*

The unequal labor distributions of the patriarchal order, in which men ride carelessly on the backs of women for cultural reasons, are rigorously implemented in this seemingly rational woman's home. Any critical mind would argue that the tradition of assigning women "everything tedious, boring, strenuous, or tiresome" when males are more physically strong due to their better physiological endowments in terms of brawn is, at best, narrow-minded and, at worst, full of entrenched interests (ibid). Any sober-minded mother would find it disgraceful that so much strength should be wasted on trivial jobs like "programming videos, opening jars, and changing light bulbs" or herding a few cows with a stick (Atta, 199). She and many others, however, suffer from a cognitive flaw called non-critical thinking, which is a lack of non-reified reasoning. They are unable to rationally conceptualize the social forms of life in which they engage because of this state.

As an example, Amor's mother starts to impose her son's slothfulness on the women who marry him after her surviving son, Gala (the other one having passed away from drunkenness at the age of thirty) reveals that he is unable to remain married for any significant amount of time. She dismisses them as useless and comes to the conclusion that her son may have been cursed. Mother, who is blind, cannot comprehend the necessity to teach the middle-aged guy how to do more with his hands than simply follow the few zebus, sheep, and goats to pasture every day while clutching a stick. While Igana Magu, her husband, terrorizes a vulnerable seventeen-year-old daughter out of the house with her newborn for a moral trifle, as it were, compared to the horrible crimes he himself commits, it is likely for the same kind of mental handicap that Wairigia's mother sits helplessly by, like a timid mouse at the periphery.

Rahwa, the green-eyed midwife in *Silence* is My Mother Tongue, seems to have completely lost her ability to reason. Rahwa believes that these qualities, which she considers to be exclusively masculine and whose possession is an insult to true womanhood, are aliens or bad spirits that have taken up residence in the damsel and can be expelled with fire because Saba is a girl who is dedicated to and unrelenting in her pursuit of academic excellence. To allow the troublesome bad spirits to burn in the smoke, she covers Saba's head with a blanket and then places a burner with chilli between her knees (Addonia, 92). The blanket catches fire during this process, severely burning the girl's thighs. It takes a lot of non-reified thinking to be so superstitious as to seriously jeopardize a child's bodily safety. Once more, Rahwa responds, "Who will take your daughter as wife now?" and declares, "This explains why Saba is different from all the other girls I have delivered," after physically inspecting the girl and finding that she was unharmed by the circumciser's knife (Addonia, 93). The midwife here contends that social institutions of female control, such as the incision, are unavoidable for any woman who wishes to lead a normal life after being brainwashed into accepting misogynist cultural assumptions as legitimate, and that nonconformity to these requirements

## **Agents of Socialization**

Women typically have the responsibility of educating and modeling for children how to look and act in accordance with the accepted values, beliefs, and attitudes of society because of their roles as nurturers in both nuclear and extended families. It is true that children pick up skills by imitating the behavior of important people in their lives (Mead, 69), and mothers both biological and otherwise often hold this unique position in the lives of young children. These women become conduits for the unintentional spread of norms and ideals about masculinity and femininity that cause patriarchy and female oppression when their hegemonic surroundings limit their ability to reason. There are several ways that this could occur. First of all, nurturers frequently expose their kids to roles that are commonly associated with their biological sex in order to enforce gender norms. A good illustration is the way Amor Lore's mother continually assigns different kinds of chores to her boys and girls. Children learn to associate various tasks with men and women in accordance with this gender-specific division of labor. In *Everything Good Will Come*, this scenario is depicted in the Franco home. The Franco men are taught to take it easy and appreciate excellent service without doing anything to assist. It's "Enitancanyou" this and "Enitancanyou" that too soon (Atta, 308). To the surprise of the new bride, Enitan feels the most pressure to conform to these social norms and become like-domesticated from her mother-in-law, Toro Franco, who, after her own marriage, "swallowed her voice" and left her nursing career to become her family's "kitchen martyr," cooking and cleaning for the rest of her life. Toro is astonished to learn that her final child, Big Foot, can serve meals with his own hands until Enitan enters the picture with her trademark demand for reciprocity. Incredulously, she exclaims: "Big Foot understands how to accomplish this? Big Foot? Do you know how to accomplish this? (Atta, 310).

Similar to this, Victoria Arinola Taiwo in *Everything Good Will Come* is determined to educate her only daughter and child, Enitan, how to survive in the kitchen in spite of the little girl's blatant indifference and her husband's resistance. In the refugee camp, Saba notes in Silence is My Mother Tongue that a woman's identity is defined by her home duties in her Allah-confessing community. She and her silent brother Hagos are chastised for their daring to be different by their scandalized mother Mehret, the midwife Rahwa, and many other camp residents when they switch places in the prescribed order. While the kitchen-loving Hagos stays at home to do all the cooking, Saba, who prefers to be outside, lines up for meals under the blazing sun and draws water from the river and firewood from the forest. It seems that mothers socialize their daughters to take on considered feminine jobs like cooking, cleaning, and other home chores, while their sons take on more relaxed roles.

**Hegemonic Control Enforcers**

Male hegemony, in its typical form, depends on the collaboration of the oppressed classes to sustain its dominance in society. While it is unquestionable, force may occasionally be used to justify violence through "culture, institutions, and persuasion" (Connell and Messerschmidt, 832). Such situations, which are consistent with Machiavelli's conception of power, may involve the use of force and consent, where female collaborators combine the justification of men's moral leadership with genuine menace. For example, young girls are subjected to female genital mutilation by adult women. Take, for example, Rahwa's resolve in Silence is My Mother Tongue to cut off Saba's troublesome organ, which had escaped her notice until recently. This high-ranking woman, who also happens to be "the only woman consulted by the committee of elders" (Ibid, 66), is effectively a police officer working for the male-dominated system, with her secret mission being to quiet female dissidents who pose a threat to the establishment's stability. Speaking in confidentially to Nasnet, Saba stated, "[T]hey wanted to silence me head to toe," making it clear that she is one such menace deserving of retribution. I closed my mouth and severed my vaginal lips (Ibid, 133). The offenders may view these enforced cultural compliance methods as unimportant and informal, but Saba's severe emotional suffering and ongoing psychological trauma demonstrate that patriarchal culture has a crippling control over women and their bodies.

Other times, it needs ideological arguments to get women to support male superiority. Pro-macho assumptions that have been deftly developed by creative minds and popularized by people then serve as a tool to influence other women to settle for less. Even while the false claim that an African man should not, in fact, die without a male heir is unfounded, it nevertheless forces some women to support Bandele Sunday Taiwo in betraying his young bride. In the hopes that it will be a son, his mother uses that reasoning to pressure his wife, Victoria Arinola Taiwo, into having a second child against her choice. Bandele Sunday does not sit quietly at home and cry with his broken wife when the child turns out to be a sickler and passes away at the age of three. He instead finds a willing woman to become his secret wife and bear him the desired male heir while stoically wandering around in the name of his job. Another lady, Peace, Bandele's secretary, enters the picture as an accomplice in order to conceal the situation from his normal family. The support he receives from his mother, hidden wife, and secretary sustains his macho mentality, which allows him to afford to wear a rigid, guiltless face. By making sure that her unsupportive spouse kept his social influence and moral superiority, three ladies stood up to one another. These women are actually victims of dominance relationships, whose effects have left their minds so damaged that they are unable to reflect on themselves because of a faulty consciousness. They are unable to see other types of social reality or collaboration that may be more objectively appealing to other women, nor can they perceive the dominance relations that make up their cultures (Thompson, 225).

**The Pathetically Acquiescent**

Passive acceptance of situations that lead to blind submission is another way that the lack of non-reified thought that plagues the subordinate in domination relations might show up. Since the system is recognized to offer some mitigated sanctions or limited incentives to the obedient, this friction-free path becomes especially alluring rather than risking acrimony within and outside of the family circle (Mishra and Tripathi, 56). Toro Franco, Enitan's mother-in-law, is a prime example in *Everything Good Will Come*. She quits her nursing job early, swallows her voice, gets her "brains all scooped out," as it were, and is happy to make a fool of herself in front of her husband and sons to demonstrate their superiority over her, all out of fear that she will undermine the patrilineal interests of the Franco men. This lady voluntarily chooses a life of passive submission to the active masculine agents that inhabit her environment, living a zombie-like existence confined to the four boundaries of her home, lacking the ability to speak and possessing an empty mind.

In *Place of Destiny*, Wairigia's mother also demonstrates this type of behavior when, for example, she silently observes her husband Igana Magu wreaking havoc on her home and nearly ruining it. That acidic disposition and bilious tongue drive young Warigia and her tiny infant from their home, leave Magu Igana without a wife and in constant misery, and make Tetu bid farewell once she is safely in her married home (Ogola, 11, 182, 183). Due to her financial reliance on her husband, this mother and highly marginalized woman is a stranger in her own home and is afraid to raise an eyebrow or cough. She has no control over the living room furniture in this wealthy man's house, but as long as she stays put and follows the rules, she will always have food and shelter. This woman's lack of moral courage results in the deaths of two of her children and destroys the family's future chances, despite the fact that she knows better and even attempts to smuggle some assistance to her displaced teenage daughter who is now a mother. Until, thankfully, Igana Mago enters the scene.

Mehret exhibits this compliant attitude in *Silence is My Mother Tongue* as well. This woman lets Rahwa speak to her in a very patronizing and condescending way out of a sense of smug subservience. The awful midwife chastises Saba for her continued transgression of sharing a blanket with Hagos despite the fact that the family had to evacuate the conflict zone with only a few household items: "I know you are illiterate… However, raising children is not the same as caring for sheep. Whatever I say passes in one ear and out the other, and that's your problem (Addonia, 84). Like a student caught in mischief by a schoolmistress she greatly respects, Mehret lowers her eyes and blinks away tears in response to this insulting insult in her own environment, directly in front of her children. In other places, Saba says that her mother's self-deprecating demeanor exemplified "the invisibility that a woman ought to inhabit" (Ibid, 58). Mehret does not possess her intellect, in contrast to her own mother or daughter. Her individuality, initiative, and purposefulness are completely absent. Instead, this woman only wants to maintain her good standing with society, having judged herself by the standard of second-class citizenship that society assigns her and her sort.   
  
**Objectified and Narcissistic Selves**

Realizing one's own value as a decent human being requires a logical intellect. In certain situations, this deformity may manifest as women objectifying themselves when their ability to think rationally is compromised by extended exposure to the oppressive authority that comes with one group's supremacy over another. Female humans are able to view their bodies in this situation as "an ever-imperfect but always perfectible spectacle; a project that must always be worked upon, that is always in the process of becoming what it should be" (Malson, 139). The fruitless attempts to conform to its always shifting criteria frequently involve altering the female body from its original state because beauty is an elusive and difficult-to-achieve concept (Saltzberg and Chrisler, 310). The overuse of cosmetics and plastic beauty then turn into a dullness from which the debased selves are hard to escape.

One example is Samhiya from Silence is My Mother Tongue, who is so self-centered that she can't even think beyond constructing a doll out of her body in the stark surroundings of a refugee camp. This narcissistic teenager can afford the luxury of filing and painting her nails, putting her hair in rollers, and dressing in matching slacks and brassier despite the widespread concern for basic necessities like water and hygiene. Insecure, this simple girl of Saba's age does little except fantasize about being taken to bed by a man. She even goes so far as to sway her hips as she walks in order to attract a man's attention. This girl, who is just out of childhood, seems to have already come to terms with the fact that her body is the only thing that defines her. Her behavior, such as repeatedly lowering her skirt to allow the athlete to caress her ass on the unkempt field, just serves to highlight how content she is with her low appraisal of her own value. Here, Agan Limbe's lavishly painted and decorated receptionist with a phony American accent is not alone. In the meantime, more sensible girls her age, such as Zahra and Saba, are out worrying about school and sowing orange seeds to give the camp some hope for the future.

Women who engage in activities that convert their bodies into commodities that can be beaten for free or sold and traded on the open market are also exhibiting self-objectification. Azyeb, the bartender in Silence is My Mother Tongue, converts her hut in the eastern part of the refugee camp into a bar where she serves fermented beer, or suwa. She allows customers to smoke and converse long into the night, possibly to make her establishment more appealing. If the situation calls for it, she also provides after-sale services, such as the night Saba sees her come out of her hut "behind a short man, buttoning up her blouse …the praise poet" (Addonia, 102).

Additionally, Nasnet, the sex worker, puts up her hut at the camp as a bartering point where interested customers, such as the heartless Tedros, can come and consume her fleshly commodities. The two women agree to cooperate with the male critics in a humiliating deed that deprives them of their human dignity since their mindsets have been so distorted by dominance relationships. By comparing themselves to the money they get paid, the women drastically diminish their value while the males come to enjoy themselves and pay for it. However, in exchange, Nasnet has to deal with a wounded body and a bruised psyche, since the glossy surface of a thick mattress and stilettos cannot conceal the gaping void left by a squandered human dignity

**Agentive Female Characters**

Activism is to oppressive regimes what agency is to dominating couples. To put it another way, the framework of male hegemony gives special significance to female agency. Intentionality, reason, and power are the three components that enable agency. The goal-oriented agent is more likely to behave with well-considered intents and action plans that she commits to pursuing when she possesses the intentionality component. The next element that enables agentic people to use their God-given intellectual capacity to direct their behavior and forecast the results of those acts is rationality. Last but not least, agentic power refers to an actor's ability to take action, such as possessing an environment that is conducive to action and equipped with the required resources. Therefore, a significant number of these characteristics are present in the female characters that this study identifies as agentic.

Furthermore, a truly agentic person is not associated with narcissistic, vainglorous, or daredevil endeavors; rather, their characteristic independence of mind, which is almost always displayed in such situations, is always tempered with a vivacious rationality that refuses to sit back or rest easy in the face of a discomfiting individual or collective situation (Baker 448; Hewson 15). History is full of examples of such individuals who have lived in real places and overcome tangible obstacles, such as Joan of Arc, who boldly took up arms at the command of defeated (all male) Dauphin troops in order to reclaim the territorial integrity of beloved Motherland.

Imagine the brave Anne Askew calmly accepting the terrible stake in defense of her beloved faith when it is attacked by apostates. Imagine the elderly Yaa Asantewaa uniting a dejected and overburdened village to fend off a larger-than-life intruder. Closer to home, celebrate Wangari Maathai's self-sacrificing actions as she takes on the brutal authorities head-on in order to protect public and forest lands for coming generations. As Martin Luther King so eloquently put it in his June 23, 1963, speech in Detroit: "...some things are so eternally true that they're worth dying for and if a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for he ain't fit to live" (Dickson-Carr, 126; King, film), agency is, in fact, characterized by a steely high resolve that drives one to make intentional decisions with an unapologetic intentionality.

The literary works chosen for this study depict a group of African women who fight for empowerment and freedom from the constraints of misogyny, either individually or in groups (Baker 448). The existence of three distinct ways to exercise agency individual, proxy, and communal agency is supported by this situation (Hewson, 14). In fact, women's resistance has a similar level of complexity because dominance authority is structured and functions through interlocking oppressions. Additionally, as we address in the paragraphs that follow, Black women's activism takes place in two main ways in relation to the intersections of gender, race, and class that make up the banalities of their lives (Collins, 2000: 204).

**Struggle for Self-Preservation and Group Survival**

Sometimes reason avoids a direct confrontation with the prevailing powers because of the marginalized position of women in society. In these situations, deliberate and logical agents decide to behave in a way that challenges the oppressive systems by weakening them from within. In this sense, Enitan Taiwo in *Everything Good Will Come* chooses to marry Niyi Franco despite her roiling reservations about the justice women receive in heterosexual partnerships. After settling into her married house, this young lady chooses to follow her own norms rather than complying with the constitutional laws that have governed social life for years. For example, she challenges the morality of the tradition that excuses men from doing household chores. In a very practical sense, Enitan demands that reciprocity and equity be the dominant values in their home in place of this skewed normative labor allocation where males profit from the suffering of women.

Similar to this, Amor Lore in *Place of Destiny* chooses to get married despite having early life experiences that make her acutely aware of the harsh realities of male chauvinism. But in the household she creates, conversation is valued more highly than patriarchal decrees. Early on in a relationship, Amor bargains for a chance to be heard, carve out her own space, and forge her own distinct identity. In addition, Amor makes sure her husband helps out around the house by hiring paid labor to complete the household chores. This forward-thinking woman is changing the rules in her own backyard with these accomplishments and more. She leaves a legacy of curiosity about the reasons behind things and a dedication to upholding moral principles at all costs to herself and her children, which ultimately destroys the prospects for long-standing male prejudice.

At face value, Saba in Silence is My Mother Tongue gives in to her mother Mehret's and Rahwa the midwife's demand to wed the wealthy businessman Eyob. She tells her friend Zahra, "I'm not being defeated by my mother, tradition, or anyone, I'm being practical," and agrees to participate in the rites she finds objectionable as a tactical move. (Addonia, 194). As the dialogue below demonstrates, Saba, who was once a bride in her new hut, alludes to a scenario that is more complicated than it first appears:

*She [Saba] joined Zahra again, pulling her stool closer to the plate. Tearing a piece of injera, she added extra chilli and dipped it in the sauce.*

*Be careful, you will soon be pregnant, Zahra said. Saba chuckled. Do you really think I will?*

*That’s what happens after one marries, said Zahra. And in a camp, it is the only thing that happens fast.*

*Nothing in this compound is what it seems, Saba said. We do our love differently here. (ibid, 196, emphasis supplied)*

In fact, the midwife certifies to the court that Saba is still a virgin two months after her fictitious marriage. It indicates that she never consummated her marriage. Saba gets married, but once she's in the marriage, she follows her own norms, which disturbs the long-standing unspoken rule of physical closeness in these kinds of relationships. Major Lemlem is another example in the same text. The clandestine fight for survival is personified by this woman. "My fight is not only about freeing my country, it is also about freeing me from the chains of my own people," she explains, despite enlisting in a physical battle against territorial invaders of her fatherland (Addonia, 193). The ideological release of her people from the shackles of sexist misconceptions is her greater and dearer concern, which far outweighs her desire for political independence. She explains that enlisting in the war is merely a ruse: "I will not return to a country I helped free if my people are not free from their prejudice." I would rather be free in this wilderness than be subjected to oppression in the country that I and my allies helped to liberate (Ibid). From the perspective of the disenfranchised, the contradiction of tyranny and freedom coexisting may seem ludicrous to those who enjoy luxury, but it is the reality of daily existence. Even many laws are unsympathetic to the predicament of women, as Enitan explains to her lawyer of a father who has been blinded by racism for a long time. She notes that "Human rights were never an issue until the rights of men were threatened" and that "there is nothing in our constitution for kindness at home [for women]" (Atta, 196). Therefore, it is possible to read Major Lemlem's activism which she demonstrated by fighting alongside her male countrymen in the trenches as a last-ditch attempt to demonstrate to a sexist society the humanity of women as a group, to the point where they are treated with dignity in social and societal affairs.

In Silence is My Mother Tongue as well, Saba is well aware that she has little hope of defeating the awful but strong midwife and her submissive mother Mehret while she is at the camp. This girl withdraws into a non-confrontational silence, finding the ideal collaborator in her silent older brother, Hagos, from which she may continue to follow her beliefs without fear. Saba avoids more attacks from the two ladies she must continue to deal intimately with due to circumstances by using silence as a potent defensive tool. Saba is able to outsmart these self-proclaimed cultural police women by skillfully using silence as her mother tongue thanks to this type of moral agency.

Lenoi Sompesha, who works as an administrative assistant at Amor Innovative Skills Consultants in place of Destiny, also refuses to acknowledge that she was sexually and professionally mistreated by her prior male boss out of self-defense. She was deemed "after all only a woman" by the considerably older guy, who was most likely her father's age, able to "fetch and carry for him" and "accommodate his penchant for young flesh" (Ogola, 35/36). Lenoi leaves her work after just three months in "a towering rage of righteous indignation," citing the uncertainty of a crowded labor market in her developing nation (Ibid, 36). This young woman chooses to hunger rather than "let some sick old man paw [her] around" (ibid, 36), committing an act close to financial suicide in order to maintain her human dignity and self-respect. This bold act of protest would undoubtedly shake the narrow bigotry out of this lustful boss's brain and make him reconsider how he would treat women in the future.

In order to protect themselves and their loved ones, women may also participate in sexual activism by demonstrating independence and self-reliance. This independence can manifest itself in a variety of ways. "At what age was a woman content to be celibate?" asks Enitan in *Everything Good Will Come*. (Atta, 290). "You'll be lucky if I ever have sex with you after all the sex I've had to make this baby," she even tells Niyi, her husband, at one point (Ibid, 204). She ultimately chooses to leave and live alone with her daughter Yimika at her now-deceased mother's home in an attempt to achieve the independence that eludes her while living under the same roof as Niyi. This sexual independence is expressed in a different way by Sabina in Silence is My Mother Tongue. Instead of letting a guy between her legs, she will consent to any form of perverse sex, whether it be anal or oral. The unwritten language of the hidden curriculum taught her that the sexual act is all about male ownership, and that the man "could shove the length of his manhood inside her, break her spine n replace it with his own, so that she stood and fell at his behest" (Addonia, 191). She learned this from her marginal social location.

This is the reason she says, "You can't have my vagina," to Hajj Ali, the disgusting nomad who demands sex in exchange for giving her a way out of the camp. For I will never allow a man I don't love to feel that way inside of me (Ibid, 198). In this case, Hajj Ali exploits Saba's desperate need to leave the camp, and this local uses her sexuality as an excuse to demonstrate her subservience to him as a man and as a host nation citizen. However, Saba uses her sexuality to reject his objectification of her by reclaiming some of her damaged self-respect by reserving the right to choose which portion of her body she will allow him to touch. One needs a free and reasonable mind in order to engage in the kind of activism that subtly undermines repressive structures. Amor Lore creates two female spheres of influence in Place of Destiny, safe havens where she can flourish in the values of justice she so desperately desired as a child and live free from chauvinist expectations. She is able to accomplish this through her family and her business, Amor Innovative Skills Consultants.

Amor creates her business from the ground up, and the financial independence it provides her gives her a remarkable sense of agentic power. She has the ability to favorably influence her employees' lives in her role as Managing Director. She turns into a mentor and advisor to them, helping Lanoi Sompesha pursue a master's degree in business administration, and when it becomes clear that she will soon pass away, she gives the signal to marry Ithoth Kella, the deputy director of the company. She eventually entrusts the care of her business to these two dependable workers until her son Pala reaches adulthood. Returning to her family, she works with her husband, Professor Mwaghera Mrema, to establish a mutually satisfying existence and an atmosphere conducive to personal development. "Everyone is allowed and encouraged to reach the sky wherever they imagine that sky to be" (Ogola, 43) at their family, in contrast to the oppressive environment in which she was raised. It should come as no surprise that both adults are modestly satisfied in their respective careers and that their children do exceptionally well in school. Amor, in fact, is a prime example of the Black feminist view that feminist women are not always misandry. As multiple additional examples in these literary texts show, the humanist objective of feminism strongly advocates and demands complementarity between the male and female genders.

Enitan also exhibits a great deal of moral agency in *Everything Good Will Come*. During her nine years as a law student and subsequent legal practice in London, Enitan develops a keen awareness of social justice issues, particularly as a result of her intimate relationships with Irish girl Robin. Her life will now be guided by her determination to preserve rather than undermine the inherent dignity of human beings. This is seen on a personal level when she dumps infidelity-prone partners like Mike Obi and "Stringfellow" due to their dishonest behavior. She affirms, "My limit was always infidelity" (Atta, 255). At the interpersonal level, she becomes more sympathetic, such as when she lets go of her mindset that "bad girls got raped," which was specific to Sheri's experience at Ikoyi Park years ago. Her righteous outrage is particularly sparked by the political unrest and economic downturn that plagued her fatherland due to several military regimes in succession. She has the courage to confront the ugly past of her nation's dark history and come to terms with it, as she narrates:

*In University, I finally acknowledged the holocaust that was Biafra, through memoirs and history books, and pictures of limbless people; children with their stomachs bloated from kwashiorkor and their rib cages as thin as leaf veins. Their parents were mostly dead. Executed. Macheted. Blown up. Beheaded. There were accounts of blood-drinking, flesh-eating, atrocities of the human spirit that only a civil war could generate, while in Lagos we had carried on as though it were happening in a different country. Our head of State got married even. (Ibid, 86).*

Additionally, Enitan's marriage to Niyi Franco makes her agentic nature in the sake of self-preservation glaringly obvious. It just so happens that the ladies in the Franco family who came before her had to physically lose their sanity or swallow their voices. But Enitan stands her ground against the threatening patrilineal legacy. She is considered the outsider-insider not only because she married into the family but also because she moved in with her husband's family in accordance with custom. Enitan resists when Niyi and his four brothers start to "Enitancanyou" her, believing they have the right to tell her to run this and that errand (Atta, 308). Even though she may be the stranger inside, she has an epistemic advantage because of her disadvantaged position. With lioness-like boldness, she asserts herself and her rights. Her own mother's recent death and burial, primarily from marital discord, and her mother-in-law's current state as a zombie-like machine with no brains left for her own use, provide sufficient proof. They describe a culturally exploitative raw deal in which women are asked to give up their skin and bones for nothing at all. Therefore, she chooses to opt out before it's too late out of self-preservation as opposed to becoming one of those who "draw their last breaths when they open their mouths to speak because they learned to talk on their death beds" or "babies who are already dead at birth" due to spending too much time in their mothers' wombs (Ibid, 328).

Finally, when confronted with personal challenges, women can also demonstrate moral agency. At the age of 49, Amor receives a diagnosis of liver cancer in its advanced stages. She eventually concedes that "people die every day and... I too am 'people'" because of her composed acceptance of this death sentence, which demonstrates a great fortitude of spirit in the face of such an abrupt disaster (Ogola, 32). She reiterates with strong silence the facts of life's transience, death as a part of life, and death as a highly personal event that each person must fundamentally face alone.

Thus, rather than fighting death “to the last miserable minute” (Ibid, 50) or wallowing in her own misery, she uses what little strength she has left before she passes out to organize her life and her family, including the office. She assigns, for example, seasoned and reliable staff to run the Amor Innovative Skills consultancy until her son Pala reaches adulthood, and she drafts a will that outlines an equitable distribution of her substantial fortune among her children.

Despite her immense pain and suffering, she makes sure that her loved ones mostly continue with their regular activities of work and school during the fifteen and a half weeks that separate the discovery of her illness and her peaceful death because "the whole world should not stop just because one's turn to be sick and die has finally come" (Ibid, 75). By pushing her husband, Professor Mwaghera Mrema, to get married again shortly after they bury her, she even broaches the topic of her own replacement! Therefore, having the strong desire to live a full, unencumbered life and the willingness to let go when circumstances beyond one's control so require are both indicators of personal agency.

## **Struggles for Institutional Transformation**

In the case of Everyday Good Will Come, we find a situation where several legal outfits intersect to ensure a continuation, against all efforts of progressiveness, of women's oppression and male dominance. The learned eyes of Enitan unravel a deliberate kind of pact between the legal and customary laws to maintain status quo by all means. Women's activism can also take the form of efforts to change discriminatory policies or procedures of public institutions, in which case individual or groups of individual women engage in actions that challenge the legal or customary rules governing the subordination of the female gender:

*At law school I’d learned those indigenous set of codes collectively called native law and custom… A man could marry only one wife under civil law, but he could bring another woman into his home under native law. It was polygamy, not bigamy. If he pleased, he could beat up his wife, throw her out, with or without her children and leave her with nothing… widows inherited according to how many children they had, and sons could have double the rights of daughters… The courts determined how to share a man’s estate. In reality, his relations could come into his house, “drive his wife comot” and sit on her front porch threatening to put a hex on her if she dared to challenge them. (Atta, 137).*

Two incidents in the text demonstrate the extent of the misery caused by these legal institutions' collusion to undermine women's freedom and rights: the first is when Chief Bakare's widowed wives lose their property to the deceased man's brother, who literally throws them out and takes everything in broad daylight while the authorities are watching. The two women must work to support their numerous dispossessed children, which speaks to the incapacity of the law to protect the weak or control the powerful. The second instance is Mother of Prisons and her fellow women rotting away behind bars for years without ever being found guilty of any crimes. Again, we see here a crawling law that delays and so denies justice to the oppressed. When she gets aware of it, Enitan donates her expertise as an advocate to promote their cases in a court of law so that justice is served. When it comes to giving women their legal rights, law enforcement agencies' pervasive laxity and deliberate myopia will be eradicated by Enitan's act of agency by proxy.

Notably, the agentic female characters that are trying to influence systemic changes almost never take action by themselves. A type of intentionality that is based on the primary intentionality of individuals and focuses on collective actions and attitudes that enable social groups to operate as purposeful organizations is known as shared or collective intentionality (Lerch and others, 39; Brouwer, Ferrario and Porello, 2; Jankovic and Ludwig, 404). Collective intentionality is thus expressed when a group of people behave cooperatively and show consciously shared attitudes, such as shared beliefs, goals, and desires (Searle, 85). For example, Sheri can rely on Enitan's moral and professional assistance as she works to establish a children's home for Lagos's street urchins. This lifelong buddy promises, "We will set up the paperwork for you at the office" (Atta, 307). Imani, on the other hand, can exchange notes and raise money with her sister Malaika and her doctor husband. The journalist Grace Ameh is there to encourage Enitan as she takes tentative moves ahead. Its lesson may be that without the support of allies, women's attempts to change institutions are rarely successful (Collins 2000, 193).

Women’s activism for institutional change can also take a political stance when regular people, either individually or collectively, engage in activities that are primarily focused on influencing decisions and outcomes at any level of the political system (Nygård and others, 234). For instance, Grace Ameh and Enitan join the journalists and covert activists who plan the readings at the small hall with the goal of putting pressure on the government to be politically tolerant and to stop harassing its citizens who disagree with those in positions of power. Another example is the Lagos women who write letters to the president requesting that their loved ones be released from custody. This also includes lobbyists like Peter Mukoro who use campaigns to try and sway governmental choices. Engaging in civil rights organizations, labor unions, feminism groups, boycotts, and uprisings all aim to inspire the political establishment to take up a neglected public mandate. In order to remove invaders and colonists from their borders using force of arms, some women, such as Major Lemlem (Zahra's mother) and later Saba, may also engage in actual physical warfare during the independence war in the trenches against the dergue. "We can't let men do the fighting for us…We must be ready to die… for our dreams" (Addonia, 143). However, the war women join is much larger and more expansive than some local conflict over a patch of bare land. "Full of determination…I fire my gun…to bring back my country, where my daughter will have the same rights as someone's son," affirms Zahra's mother in a taped speech reminiscent of Martin Luther King Jr.'s well-known "I Have a Dream" speech (Ibid, 51).

Sheri, a longtime friend, is one example. In order to continue living as Brigadier Hassan Ibrahim's mistress (in a lavish apartment that he owns and manages), she must give up all chances for self-improvement and initiative because the polygamous man, who is the age of her father and has multiple mistresses, wants her to stay indoors forever. The brigadier forbids Sheri from leaving the apartment without his consent, saying, "Drop him…[y]ou don't need him," which initially sounds like a bad joke (Ibid, 136). Sheri now understands. The brigadier had intended for her to have nothing except what he provided in order to keep her dependent. His power over her has come from her helplessness. She was free to choose her own path in life now that it was shattered. She had been "tailgated for miles, driving her off course," just like her friend Enitan. Now, however, she was making her way home "small by small," managing her family's catering business with a unique and fruitful ability, and starting charitable projects to spread hope to forlorn and homeless youngsters on the streets (Ibid, 334). According to Enitan's argument for the ideal constitutive norm that should regulate gender relations is that men can thrive without women shrinking in any way. This type of self-deprecation is a pointless exercise that does no good. The more women breathe, the less is left for males because, after all, the sexes are "not vying for the same cylinder of air" (Ibid, 331). Thus, let the ladies to fully express themselves and regain the space that has been taken from them for so long.

Therefore, the non-agentive and agentive female characters in the chosen texts were identified and described in this chapter. We concluded that the non-agentic characters have a cognitive defect that prevents them from fully understanding the hegemonic influences that control the various segments of society, and as a result, they willingly participate in the promotion of male superiority and female subjugation. On the other hand, the agentic female characters used their rational faculties to pursue goals of social justice and self-preservation for themselves and for everyone in society, doing so through struggles for institutional transformation as well as for group survival.

**FINDINGS**

The study found that all women, as legitimate members of the human family, are capable of acting on their surroundings in a way that serves their own interests because they are naturally rational and moral. In addition, because they are members of the female sex of humanity, all women are subject to discrimination because of the devalued status of their gender; however, because of differing perspectives resulting from different life experiences, not all women react to hegemonic influences in their environment in the same way. For this reason, we distinguished two main types of female characters: non- agentic and agentic women.

The reason this group of women engages in such a self-defeatist, even unnatural, endeavor is because they have been bitten by a rationality-eating bug that infests domination domains, known as reification. Because of this, the mental faculty becomes incapable of seeing through the unequal power relations that are the foundation of the routineized (misogynist) social norms. We found that the non-agentic female characters use their rational capacities to undermine pro-womankind projects while simultaneously promoting ideological and/or material culture that emphasize male superiority. They give their full support to the latter and lend their hand wherever possible. This opportunity presents itself in multiple ways. First, as important socialization facilitators in their societies, Bloodmothers and Othermothers teach and set an example of skewed normative norms for children. In turn, the children absorb and imitate stereotyped claims and dominating images, therefore sustaining sexist beliefs for the following generation. Second, when other women and girls exhibit signs of independent thought, women of rank use the authority and influence that the system has given them to intimidate and force them into compliance. The third variation among victims of dominance relationships is pathetic compliance. Being utterly lacking in purposiveness, personal volition and autonomy, these particular ladies display an attitude of complacent subservience and a passive acceptance of matters, resulting in blind acquiescence. The penultimate indication of a paucity of non-reified thought is narcissism and self-objectification. This group of women can be characterized as cheap and completely lacking in self-respect, or as conceited, frivolous, and trivial.

The three elements of intentionality, rationality, and power are what give agentic female characters the unique motivation to outsmart the powerful forces of domination politics in society. The agentic drive primarily serves the purpose of empowerment and self-preservation, either for the individual, their significant others, or the group to which they belong. It manifests in two main ways: in the first, struggles for self-preservation and group survival involve non-combative actions that undermine the oppressive structures from within. The first example is sexual activism in heterosexual relationships, where women establish boundaries for how involved, if at all, they are in their sexual encounters with men; the second is the creation of safe spaces by agentic women to serve as a haven of refuge for the oppressed within the very confines of male-dominated social structures, such as the workplace and the family; and the third is moral agency, which is the other peaceful way women do get involved in their efforts to ensure group survival and self-preservation. Moral projects include standing their ground against inappropriate sexual and ideological intrusions from exploitative entities, demanding a fair deal and reciprocity from partners in everyday interactions, protecting the welfare of others, and advocating for the cause of the less fortunate in society.

Psychological compliance is the variety among dominance relationship victims. These women exhibit a mindset of complacent subservience and a passive acceptance of situations, leading to mindless compliance, since they are completely devoid of purpose, personal volition, and autonomy. Self-objectification and narcissism are the penultimate signs of a lack of non-reified thought. This type of women can be described as egotistical, frivolous, and petty, or as cheap and totally lacking in self-respect.

Finally, demonstrating a spirit of fortitude and endurance in the face of one's own tragedies and crises is another facet of moral agency. In these situations, agency is concerned with coming up with a coping strategy to endure brutal social reality. Battles for institutional change include the second aspect of agency. Here, coalitions are formed and strategies are developed by individual actors who are unified by a shared aim to change discriminatory policies or practices of public institutions. Through political agency aimed toward political institutions, female actors can actively participate in campaigns, activism, lobbying, and political boycotts, among other actions, with the goal of achieving social justice for women and the community as a whole. Attacks on regressive legal and economic systems that contribute to social injustice and oppression are another way that this type of agency manifests itself. Last but not least, agentive characters can ensure a more level playing field for the marginalized and so promote women's empowerment through a social type of agency that seeks to alter the foundational laws of social institutions.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The study concludes that agency is a crucial capacity of human development, the possession of which empowers individuals to make appropriate choices and take appropriate action(s) that uphold personal, relational, and group well-being. The research findings presented above served as the basis for several conclusions for the study, particularly when considering the fact that literary texts are a window through which candid glimpses of the social world can be taken, rather than merely evoking distant resemblances of actuality.

Second, the study concludes that the development of an agentic spirit that encourages social consciousness and activism in the pursuit of social justice projects is a laborious process that necessitates individual effort and volition tempered with individual commitment on the part of the actors. Finally, the study concludes that the individual, embodied self is a crucial place to start the fight to redefine women's traditionally devalued selfhood because it gives each woman a window of opportunity to enact a situated kind of agency.

## **RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

During the course of this study, however, the researcher realized that the following closely related area requires further research: The evidence is stark of the foundational role of a close, personal engagement in the struggle for and accomplishment of women's empowerment. This study examined the extent to which selfhood influences the development of agency in the female characters of selected African literary texts.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

Option 1:

Author(s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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