



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***REINTERPRETING FEMALE IDENTITY IN SELECTED AFRICAN MALE  
WRITERS THROUGH ECOFEMINISM***

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**REINTERPRETING FEMALE IDENTITY IN SELECTED AFRICAN MALE  
WRITERS THROUGH ECOFEMINISM**

By

**NASIRU UMAR MUHAMMAD**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfillments of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**May 2017**

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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my dear loving parents Mallam Umaru Muhammad Gezawa (Mallam) and Habiba Ibrahim (Goggo). May almighty Allah bless them with more years in good health and prosperity.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

## **REINTERPRETING FEMALE IDENTITY IN SELECTED AFRICAN MALE WRITERS THROUGH ECOFEMINISM**

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**May 2017**

**Chairman : Rosli Talif, PhD**  
**Faculty : Modern Languages and Communication**

The study explores the pattern of female portrayal in selected male African writings through the lens of ecofeminism with a view to analyzing a transformation in the pattern which gives rise to a new identity for the African woman. The study into the African female identity provides a key to the understanding of special qualities in contemporary writings by African male writers in relation to the plight of women. The study is set to debunk the generalization that male African writers are predominantly patriarchal in their writings. It is argued that there are male African writers that have been writing with women on their agenda. Fundamentally, the study proposes that female identity has been reinterpreted through a conscious effort in male – authored novels from the African continent. The researcher, therefore, utilizes ecofeminism as a theory that shows the interconnectedness between the exploitation of women and the degradation of natural environment as an analytical tool. This aims at studying the socio-economic conditions of the rural African women and how their lives are affected by the rupture of their natural environment upon which they rely for their sustenance. Using six novels by three African writers, two novel for each writer, (Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood*, and *Wizard of the Crow*; Chinua Achebe's *Girls at War*, and *Anthills of the Savannah*, and Abubakar Gimba's *Witnesses to Tears* and *Sacred Apples*), the study concludes that the neo-colonial misadventure in the continent have exposed both the environment and women to excessive exploitation. The study finally suggests the need for new environmental policies to save both the environment and the African women. This will in turn give women socio-economic independence and a new identity.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PENCIPTAAN SEMULA IDENTITI WANITA MELALUI EKOFEMINISME  
DALAM PENULISAN PENULIS LELAKI AFRIKA TERPILIH**

Oleh

**NASIRU UMAR MUHAMMAD**

**Mei 2017**

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Kajian ini meneliti pola pemaparan wanita dalam penulisan penulis lelaki Afrika terpilih melalui kaca mata ekofeminisme dengan pandangan untuk menganalisis transformasi dalam pola yang memberikan identiti baharu bagi wanita Afrika. Kajian mengenai identiti wanita Afrika memberikan penunjuk bagi pemahaman yang lebih mengenai kualiti khusus dalam penulisan kontemporari oleh penulis lelaki Afrika dan kaitannya dengan penderitaan wanita. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk memaparkan bahawa generalisasi yang menyatakan bahawa penulis lelaki Afrika dikatakan lebih bersifat patriakal dalam penulisan mereka. Terdapat perbalahan yang menyatakan bahawa terdapat penulis lelaki Afrika yang menulis mengenai wanita sebagai agenda mereka. Pada asasnya, kajian ini mencadangkan bahawa identiti wanita harus diciptakan semula melalui usaha secara sengaja dalam novel berpenulisan lelaki dari kontinen Afrika. Penyelidik, oleh sebab itu, mengutilisasikan ekofeminisme sebagai teori yang memperlihatkan ketersalingkaitan antara eksploitasi wanita dengan degradasi persekitaran semula jadi sebagai alat analitikal. Tujuannya adalah untuk mengkaji keadaan sosioekonomi wanita luar bandar Afrika dan bagaimana kehidupan mereka terjejas akibat kerosakan persekitaran semula jadi yang menjadi tempat mereka bergantung hidup. Dengan menggunakan enam novel oleh tiga penulis Afrika, dua novel bagi setiap penulis, (*Petals of Blood*, dan *Wizard of the Crow* oleh Ngugi wa Thiong'o; *Girls at War*, dan *Anthills of the Savannah* oleh Chinua Achebe, dan *Witnesses to Tears* dan *Sacred Apples* oleh Abubakar Gimba), kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa peristiwa malang zaman neokolonial di kontinen Afrika telah menyebabkan kedua-duanya, iaitu persekitaran dan wanita kepada eksploitasi yang keterlaluan. Kajian ini akhirnya mencadangkan keperluan untuk polisi persekitaran yang baharu bagi menyelamatkan kedua-dua, iaitu persekitaran dan wanita Afrika. Perkara ini seterusnya akan memberikan wanita kebebasan sosioekonomi dan identiti baharu.

Penyelidik, oleh sebab itu, mengutilisasikan ekofeminisme sebagai teori yang memperlihatkan ketersalingkaitan antara eksploitasi wanita dengan degradasi persekitaran semula jadi sebagai alat analitikal. Tujuannya adalah untuk mengkaji keadaan sosioekonomi wanita luar bandar Afrika dan bagaimana kehidupan mereka terjejas akibat kerosakan persekitaran semula jadi yang menjadi tempat mereka bergantung hidup. Dengan menggunakan enam novel oleh tiga penulis Afrika, dua novel bagi setiap penulis, (*Petals of Blood*, dan *Wizard of the Crow* oleh Ngugi wa Thiong'o' ; *Girls at War*, dan *Anthills of the Savannah* oleh Chinua Achebe, dan *Witnesses to Tears* dan *Sacred Apples* oleh Abubakar Gimba), kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa peristiwa malang zaman neokolonial di kontinen Afrika telah menyebabkan kedua-duanya, iaitu persekitaran dan wanita kepada eksploitasi yang keterlaluan . Kajian ini akhirnya mencadangkan keperluan untuk polisi persekitaran yang baharu bagi menyelamatkan kedua-dua, iaitu persekitaran dan wanita Afrika. Perkara ini seterusnya akan memberikan wanita kebebasan sosioekonomi dan identiti baharu.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background

The identity and destiny of women and nature are merged. Accordingly, feminist values and principles that are directed towards ending the oppression of women are inextricably linked to ecological values and principles directed towards ending the oppression of nature. It is ultimately the affirmation of our kinship with nature, of our common life with her, which will prove the sources of our mutual well-being. Seager (1993)

In most African male writings, the dominant culture has been the patriarchal culture - that culture which privileges men through promoting traditional gender roles (which portray women as emotional, irrational, submissive and weak while men are seen as strong, decisive, rational and protective). This order pervades the African male literary tradition from Senghor to Soyinka (Mohanty, 1988). These traditional roles always relegate women to the second position in all spheres of life because of a history of negative portrayal of women in literature traceable to the very early European literature which has roots in the long history of the Greco-Roman literature (Killam, 1974). These negative images led to an identity for women which remain contestable by several feminist movements (Kitchener, 1986). According to Henn (1984), therefore, the female Identity and the status of African Women have been ignored in the development of African Novel from the pre-colonial to (in some instances), post-colonial literary developments of the continent. This pattern of portrayal follows the mythology in Greco – Roman literature where one finds patriarchal interpretations of the biblical Eve (as the origin of sin). This is supported by the Western traditional philosophy's portrayal of woman as emotional and therefore irrational. This ultimately, gives rise to a *Phallogocentric* thinking (a male oriented mode of thinking) in all spheres of life like legal, business, educational and political institutions. A large body of European literature including the canon and the earlier Western literary developments were a product of this patriarchal ideology. This gave rise to conventional view of a 'white middle – class universal subject' in European Literature, and it essentially guides the male writings in African literary tradition. (Akosu 36-7; Akpuda 151).

This study, however, questions this established order by examining the emergence and development of a new pattern of portrayal in African male authored texts leading to a reinterpretation of the female identity contrary to the previous assumptions using six novels by three selected male African writers in post-colonial Africa. According to Florence Stratton, in her book, *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, (1994) 'The influence of colonialism and race on the development of African literature has dominated the subject of a number of studies but the effect of patriarchy

and gender, and indeed the contribution of male writers in coming to terms with the patriarchal situation in both its indigenous and colonial or foreign dimensions is ignored'. This according to Jan Mohammed (1990), led to a situation where the African male writers and critics are simply labeled as masculinists and anti feminists.

Identity, in this research, is seen as the individual characteristics by which a person or thing is identified whether in isolation or as a group. In defining women identity, Chinweizu E.A., states that:

It is widely held that while one's sex is determined by anatomy, the prevailing concepts of *gender* – of the traits that are conceived to constitute what is masculine and what is feminine in *identity* and behavior – are largely, if not entirely, cultural constructs that were generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of our civilization. As Simone de Beauvoir put it 'one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature which is described as feminine'. By this cultural process, the masculine in our culture has come to be widely identified as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, and creative. The feminine, by systematic opposition for such traits, has come to be identified as passive, acquiescent, timid, emotional, and conventional. (p.89)

A study into the African female identity provides a key to understanding the special qualities of contemporary writing by African male writers. Since the concept of identity includes a number of variables, it can explain the diverse ways in which writing by African male novelists portrayed women in a new light contrary to the similar assumptions and generalizations raised and discussed by Chinweizu above. The word identity is paradoxical in itself, meaning both sameness and distinctiveness, and its contradictions proliferate when it is applied to women. Carolyn Heilbrun in her book, *Reinventing womanhood* (2006), inadvertently illustrates that fictional women are worse off than real ones especially from the male narrations: "women's search for identity has been even less successful within the world of male fiction than outside it" (106). In this study, the representation of characters' mental processes and in the narrative process itself, women are dragged into the full range of human experience which enable them to acquire a voice of their own.

While all contemporary societies can be classified as patriarchal, in that each operates a social system characterized by male dominance, they are differently patriarchal for each constructs gender differently. There is also evidence in African literary studies to indicate that some societies are more flexible than others in their construction of gender. In this regard, African society in both pre and post-colonial times is not an exception. In a male dominated society, being a man means not being like a woman. As a result, the behavior considered appropriate to each gender becomes severely restricted and stereotyped. In exploring women's relationships to their bodies, to home, to nation, to language, the writers tried to point moments of resistance and reinterpretation in terms of "the play of metaphoric invention and imagination" (Obbo, 2005).

The argument, principally, here is that in characterizing African literature, gender as a social and analytic category has not been treated fairly and openly by both writers and critics within and outside Africa. In some few cases where it is considered, the female literary tradition has been pointed as the only source where such issues are given consideration in contemporary African literature. The study is set to prove that there are many male writers from Africa that have 'reinventing the female identity' as their major concern in their literary creations. On the cultural outcome of the changes that have occurred in political structures, Molar Ogundipe Leslie (2013) makes the following observations:

Women are 'naturally' excluded from public affairs, they are viewed as unable to hold positions of responsibility, rule men or even be visible when serious matters of state and society are being discussed. Women are viewed to need tutelage before they can be politically active politics is considered the absolute realm of men, women are not considered fit for political positions in modern African nation-states, though their enthusiasm and campaign works are exploited by their various political parties. (130)

Principally, the concern in this work is to debunk such assumptions of marginality, male dominance, and female subservience, wrapped in centre –periphery; self and other relations. The study is largely concerned with unmasking the cultural artifacts and social symbolic acts which tend to relegate women roles in African male writings as secondary. There is an effort in the study to transcend the Manichean allegory of gender through marking a new moment in African literature, one that looks forward to the re-emergence of more sexually egalitarian society.

The selection of the writers is informed by the need to cover reasonably the male writings from Africa with representation from both old established writers and new emerging voices from African fictional narratives. Thus Achebe and Ngugi represent the older generation of African established writers while Abubakar Gimba comes from the new breed of African writers. Also to give the study a broader coverage, a writer from East Africa, Kenya, is added to the list. While Ngugi is from Kenya, Achebe, and Gimba are from Nigeria, West Africa. To further broaden the scope and cultural diversity within Nigeria, Achebe comes from South Eastern part of Nigeria, while Gimba is from the Northern part of the country.

Ngugi's indubitable intellectual standing in the contemporary literary field is incorrigible when one book calls him 'the most celebrated of Africa's novelists'. He, perhaps more than any other major contemporary writer, is consistently concerned with historical, cultural, and political issues in his works. This ability, coupled with consistency and steadiness with historical and political issues enable him to deal with gender issues in Africa with meticulousness in his two novels chosen for this study. Ngugi, in an interview with M. Pozo, in 2004, says:

Like all artists, I am interested in human relationships and their quality. This is what I explore in my work. Human relationships do not occur in a vacuum. They develop in the context of ecology, economics, politics, culture, and psyche. All these aspects of our society affect those relationships profoundly. These aspects are inseparable. They are connected with the most earthly. As an artist, you examine the particulars to explore the interconnection of phenomena to open a window into the human soul. The material of life opens out into the spirituality of human life. (Ngugi, 2004)

A close scrutiny of these two novels; *Petals of Blood* and *Wizard Of The Crow*, reveals that from the perspective of gender, there is considerable continuity in the manner of presentation and various roles assigned to women to give them chance to avow their hitherto concealed identity, abilities and above all a strong voice to reverberate to the world their status and yearning for change not to themselves as women but the society at large. The novels are a representation of a significant shift in the trend of body of works from African male writers with conscious departure from patriarchy to gender sensitive realizations in African literary discourse. The writers understudy, resist the tendency to subsume and foreclose women's activities within patriarchal views of dominance and aggression.

As part of the new identity envisaged by this research, women's productive and creative abilities which have hitherto been suppressed by patriarchal Ideology, will be restored. Women are empowered through united resistance to the forces that exploit them sexually, socio-economically, politically and through religious dogma. In the socio-economic exploitation in relation to the degradation of nature, social-ecofeminism comes into play because of its concern with the economic empowerment of women. In freeing women from the bondage of religious dogma, spiritual ecofeminism is applied on the texts to show the roles of religion in the suppression of women and nature. The irresponsible predatory sexism of the male dominated society is exposed and the women were found equipped to deal with the situation and in all the novels convert it to their advantage and re-assert their feminine status and emerge triumphant with a new identity. Classical examples of such re-assertions are to be found in the role played by war in the destruction of the environment and the subsequent attempt by women in both *Girls at War* and *Anthills of the Savannah* to actively engage the male excesses by engaging in war so as to salvage themselves and the environment. Ensuring a sustainable environment means women have to take arms and fight the patriarchal forces that dominate them and destroy the natural environment. The African woman thus becomes the custodian and protector of the natural environment.

This study seeks to view male African writing from the perspective of Ecofeminism tradition. The fundamental thinking of Ecofeminism lies in a belief in equating the exploitation of women to the degradation of environment by men. This theory holds that established patriarchal structures have dominated and exploited both nature and women. This is what informed the choice of the theory as an analytical tool in this research. Across the pages of the six texts under study, the writers, tried to present the



women characters as individuals with independent reasoning and ability to make realistic judgments in their respective heroic attempts to assert themselves in the male dominated world they inhabit and openly tried to counter patriarchal attempts of confiscating or degrading the land through modern systems of taxation and in some cases mechanized farming to the detriment of the rural women. Traditional Western systems (just like in the contemporary African society), from politics and education to economies, are 'premised' on the belief that humans are separate and superior to the natural world'. (Culliman, 2008). The patriarchal system of the West makes decisions based on this premise, and uses them to exploit natural resources for human benefit. Even though, such a belief is widespread, humans are in fact obviously dependent on earth. We need it for food, air, shelter, clothing, water and are subservient to it. As humans, we are only one small aspect of earth.

In Ecofeminism, environmental issues are not just the survival of trees or extinct animals (flora and fauna), but involves economics, Politics, social justice and law as they relate to women and their roles in the society. Ecofeminism disagrees with prominent literary artists that favor humanity over nature. Such artists include the early Greek Philosopher Protagoras (5<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.), who makes a statement which has come to be famous 'Man is the Measure of all things'. This statement places man above nature and hence justifies its exploitation. Principally, the study will utilize social and spiritual ecofeminism which both question patriarchal dominance over women and nature.

In Ngugi's pattern of characterization in the two novels that forms part of the study, the women are assigned roles that are exigent and sometimes perilous under male dominated regimes with brutal security operatives. How those tasks are accomplished leading to the women's acquisition of unique voice in their struggle and with what results on ecological development, form the focal point of this research. The study is focused on the analysis of the features of an emerging depiction in the female character portrayal in male writings from Africa with a view to establishing how the female identity is reinvented with particular reference to the six novels under study.

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, born in kimirithu, kiambu district, north of Nairobi, Kenya, in the year. 1938, is an Essayist, Dramatist, and a world class Novelist. Achebe, born November 16, 1938, in Ogidi, South-Eastern Nigeria, has written many novels, poems and essays. His novels range in subject matter from the first contact of an African Village with the white man to the educated African's attempt to create a firm moral order out of the changing values in modern Nigeria. Gimba, born at Nassarawa, Lapai of Niger State in Northern Nigeria, is a committed writer, has more than eight novels to his credit. He was at one time the president of the Association for Nigerian Authors (ANA) and has contributed immensely to the growth and development of African literature in the post- colonial Nigeria and by extension African literature in general.

## 1.2 Statement of Problem

In male African writings, a tradition has been established which neglects the status of women by portraying her in a negative form which has roots in colonial literature - a condition termed as 'the voicelessness of the black woman' (see Busia, 1989). This unfortunate condition can be traced from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* through colonial texts like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* to African representations of the colonial encounter such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The creation of this condition pervades the African Male literary tradition from Senghor to Soyinka (Bryan, 1987). This, according to Stratton (1994), confirms the patriarchal nature of both European imperialism and African nationalism, 'a coincidence of interests and complicity between two groups of men who share a will to power' (see Stratton, 172).

From the earlier literary studies, several researches have studied the works of Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Abubakar Gimba. In African literature, Achebe is considered a father and as such his works have received critical attention both within and outside Africa. Ngugi also defines a literary movement in East African literature and has therefore been given serious critical attention in contemporary literary discussions. Gimba's works have also been studied extensively from different perspectives. However there are very rare works on Female identity on the three writers selected. None also exist that combines the six texts by the three writers under study.

Similarly, many scholars have studied the six texts in isolation covering range of issues like feminism, war, Marxism, cultural and political concerns. Writers and critics in academic journals have explored Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* and Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* from both political and postcolonial perspectives. Also, all the other four texts have been studied separately by scholars and their findings have led to further discussions and have revealed gaps which the researcher seeks to explore in this study by combining the six literary texts and looking at the representation of women with a view to finding a new identity for the African women in African male writings. A pattern of portrayal is sought after by the researcher so as to establish a commitment by the male writers towards reinventing the African female identity.

Therefore, in exploring the gap, ecofeminism is used as a theory to be applied on the selected texts. African women are closer to nature than their male counterparts. They fetch water; look for fire wood in the forest, rear animals and till the earth to get food to feed their children. This means the effects of any damage done to the natural environment is first felt by women. when water is polluted, they have to travel far to get portable drinking water; when there is deforestation, they need to travel even further to get fire wood, to rear their animals and when land becomes barren, they harvest less. Since ecofeminism looks at the interconnectedness between the exploitation of women and the degradation of environment, the theory becomes relevant in filling the gap that exists in the portrayal of women in male authored contemporary African texts. The researcher, in filling the gap, intends to use

ecofeminism as a tool to prove that there are male African writers that are preoccupied with the agenda of reinventing the female identity by giving her a voice and a new socio-economic status.

The researcher will further establish the existence of a female voice in African male writings from across the continent and their overall effect on literary production in relation to the status of women, patriarchy and ecological concerns in contemporary African literary production. The African woman therefore irrespective of her status and or affiliation to any tribal religion, the forces of exploitation remain the same. In order to achieve this new status, two broad sub-divisions of ecofeminism – social and spiritual are to be utilized. Social ecofeminism is to be used for the analysis of *Anthills of the Savannah*, *Girls at War*, *Petals of Blood* and *Wizard of the Crow* by Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong'o respectively. While spiritual ecofeminism is to be used by the researcher in the analysis of the last two books – *witnesses to Tears* and *Sacred Apples* by Abubakar Gimba.

### **1.3 Objectives of The Study**

Environmental issues, history and gender are variables that consciously or unconsciously influence the works of most literary artists. In this particular study, the environmental, historical and gender perspectives of a people are set to be studied within the frame work of the Ecofeminist criticism. In this context therefore, this study has the following objectives:

- i. To analyze female characterization in the selected novels within the context of the general environment of the African society.
- ii. To identify and examine the role played by social ecofeminism in establishing the connection between the selected male writers' works and the transformation and liberation of women from patriarchy.
- iii. To explore and examine the processes leading to the transformation of women from that of objects to that of subjects using spiritual ecofeminism as an analytical tool.

### **1.4 Study Questions**

- i. In what ways do the selected male authored texts establish a pattern of female characterization within the context of the African society?
- ii. What role does social ecofeminism played in establishing a connection between the themes of the selected texts and the liberation of women from patriarchy?
- iii. How does spiritual ecofeminism manifest as a tool in the transformation of women from the subject to object status?

## 1.5 Scope and Limitations of The Study

The study covers a total of six books from three major authors from across Africa. Two texts are selected from the novels of each of the three authors. The novels are: Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* and *Wizard of The Crow*; Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of The Savannah* and *Girls At War*; Abubakar Gimba's *Sacred Apples* and *Witnesses To Tears*. The study attempts to critically analyze the six novels using Eco-Feminist Theory as an analytical tool. The six literary texts are to be studied within the continuum of African novels of the post-colonial era in the development of literature in African continent. The study will focus mainly on the authors' handling of female characters in relation to their respective roles in both economic and political emancipation of the rural women in line with the principles of social and spiritual ecofeminism as portrayed in each of the six novels where they are seen to play high-flying roles. The study will equally seek to argue that patriarchal thought patterns are deeply entrenched in most of African male writing and that the degradation of environment is synonymous with the exploitation of women in Africa. The study will also try to establish a pattern in the six writers female characterization in the six selected texts. The study will further explore the Ecofeminism Theory with a view to effectively use it as a tool in the textual analysis and also establish its relevance to females search for identity and the exploitation of both women and environment.

It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss other female African writers or other works by the three writers apart from the six novels selected. The work is limited to the six texts set in post-colonial African society. Other literary theories, especially Marxism, which Ngugi if not the other two, is identified with, are beyond the scope of this study. Other male African writers with feminist outlook, in their writings, will also not be considered in this study. Within the broad umbrella term of ecofeminism also, only social and spiritual types will be used in the study.

## 1.6 Theoretical Framework

Theory – the seeing of patterns, showing the forest as well as the trees  
– theory can be a dew that rises from the earth and collects in the rain cloud and returns to earth over and over. But it doesn't smell of the earth, it isn't good for the earth.

ADRIENNE RICH

“Notes Toward a Politics of Location”

Principally, in this study, the theory to be used is Ecofeminism as propounded by Françoise Eubonne in 1974. Within the broad concept of Ecofeminism, Social and spiritual types are to be utilized in the analysis of the texts under study.



## 1.7 Justification for Texts Selection

The African novels selected for this study are six written by three writers at different times in their literary career with a similar thematic fascination. The novels are:

1. *Petals of Blood* (1977) and 2. *Wizard Of the Crow* (2007), (which was voted Time Magazine's Europe Edition best third book of 2006).
3. *Girls At War* (1972) 4. *Anthills of The Savannah* (1987) 5. *Sacred Apples* (1989) 6. *Witness to Tears* (2008)

The choice of these texts is informed by the fact that they represent a chronology and development in the authors' thematic preoccupation in the manner they handle the depiction of female characters vis-a-vis their roles in post-colonial African society. The novels also have gender inequality as the swivel upon which they revolve by showing the predicament of women in contemporary African patriarchal society. They also equally and interestingly have that richness of ecological concerns in a feminine environment which make them more relevant in this study. The texts selected are a generation apart but they both consistently explore this history of the development of female Identity in African fiction. The works place these struggles in different historical context and create stable, active female characters that question the allegation of passivity, marginality and degradation in the representation of female characters by African male writers. The writers in an attempt to drive their point home create a battle ground of meaning in which the very norms that marginalize and oppress women are undermined within the society. This strategy in turn, gives the women a new identity.

The texts under study equally provide a fertile ground for intellectual sojourn in the field of ecofeminism criticism which is the analytical tool for the study. Further divisions are made into the branches of ecofeminism to suit the textual analyses. For this purpose, social and spiritual ecofeminisms are further incorporated as analytical tools. The novels also owing to their coverage of a reasonable time-span, serve as a representation of the critical stages in the development of African male writers experimentation with gender issues in the contemporary African fictional world. Nigeria, West Africa and Kenya, East Africa are deliberately selected out of the other regions in Africa. This is principally so because, the two other regions, South and North Africa have peculiar colonial experiences which situate their literary production in a special category. South Africa owing to apartheid and North Africa because of the influence of Arabic language which makes most of their works to be in form of translation. Writers like Wole Soyinka were equally not selected from Nigeria because the focus of the research is on Prose while most of his writings are either Drama or Poetry.

## 1.8 Significance of The Study

The starting point of the study stems from the general concern in ecofeminism that the establishment of a 'connection between women and nature' is for the convenience of patriarchal dominance and further subjugation of women and degradation of the natural environment. Along the line of this argument, the ecofeminists seek to liberate both women and nature from patriarchy. This study therefore, utilizes this vision to further 'defamiliarize the familiar' by reinterpreting the identity of women using male writings from Africa. Since the position of African male writers have over the years been established as patriarchal, (Okome 2014) the study becomes significant because it introduces a new way of looking at male writings. This helps significantly in looking at the selected male writings from a new perspective contrary to the old familiar one. Since the texts selected are from two different countries covering both old established prominent writers and a new emerging one, the study helps in establishing a pattern of characterization in male authored texts which ultimately leads to a new identity for African Women.

To achieve the above, two brands of ecofeminism are employed – social and spiritual ecofeminism. These two sub-divisions of ecofeminism are applied on the six selected texts for this study. This further helps to show that the new emerging identity sought for women by the selected male writers is ecology conscious and looks for a way of empowering women economically. Socio-economic empowerment of women is the primary concern of social ecofeminism. This economic empowerment helps in giving the African woman a voice. This voice raised their status by enabling them to question some negative stereotyping in the contemporary patriarchal society. Spiritual ecofeminism on the other hand, questions men's use of religions as an excuse and a tool for the exploitation of women and the degradation of the environment. This study helps in proving the existence of this exploitation by mixing religious practices with some religious teachings so as to justify the exploitation of women and nature as shown in Abubakar Gimba's *Witnesses to Tears* and *Sacred Apples* the last two novels analyzed in this research.

Literature and literary criticism cannot be exclusively autonomous activities since the problem of aesthetic value cannot be separated from socio-economic questions as they affect Africans. The criticism of literature is interconnected to the criticism of socio-economic developments and growth of societies (which are the cardinal points of social ecofeminism). Questioning the misuse of religion by men also empower women and make them feel safe in a free society devoid of religious exploitation. In this regard, the study's attempt to identify the female voice is tantamount to ending discrimination, marginalization and the act of 'Othering' the African female voices.

The study is also a harbinger of a new dawn for African women's portrayal through a new positive perspective in the various roles assigned to them as agents of change in the male dominated African society through dismantling the patriarchal structure which is deeply rooted in many African male writings. The study has therefore

succeeded in justifying that the plight of women and nature are not an exclusive reserve for female writers. It has also shown that the old assumptions that only female writers can advance women's positions in literature, does not hold water any more. The six novels studied showed clearly that the woman's identity is reinvented and she is no longer weak, irrational or other, but strong, rational being at the centre of events in African male authored texts. Finally, since more men ever than before are relentlessly succeeding in publishing their novels in Africa with gender on their agenda, the trend of this reinvention seem unstoppable (see, Arndt [2002] taxonomy of African feminist writings).

## **1.9 Definition of Key Terms**

Feminism can be seen as a political movement and ideology or any social movement with the common goal and direction in order to establish economic, cultural, and personal rights for women. it fights against stepping on the rights of women by patriarchal forces.

## **1.10 Ecocriticism**

According to Slovic (2015), ecocriticism is 'the study of literary texts with reference to the interaction between human activity and the vast range of 'natural' or non-human phenomena which bears upon human experience encompassing (amongst many things) issues concerning fauna, flora, landscape, environment and whether'. It is a response to the modern industrial crisis with deep roots in the Greek's 'human centric' mode of reasoning which preaches 'Man Apart'. This human Centrism gives humankind preference over the physical environment in which all other species subsists. Ecocriticism emerged in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when due to excessive exploitation of natural resources, many non-renewable natural resources were at the verge of exhaustion.

Generally speaking, ecocriticism is the study of texts that explicitly deal with environmental issues. The study of the ecological implications of most of human activities on nature and environment from a literary perspective defines ecocriticism. The employment of literary analyses and interpretation into the affairs of nature with deep concerns on man's (mis) adventure towards nature is in the domain of ecocriticism. It analyses and promotes works of art that intrinsically and thematically dwells on human interaction with nature. According to Peter Barry, in *Beginning Theory*,

Ecocriticism as it now exists in the USA, takes its literary bearings from three major nineteenth-century American writers whose work celebrates nature, the life force, and the wilderness as manifested in America, these being Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803 – 1882), Margaret Fuller (1810 -1850), and Henry David Thoreau (1817 – 1862). All

these were members of the group of New England Writers, essayists, and philosophers known collectively as the *Transcendentalists*. (p211)

Ecocritics seek for literary texts with nature on their agenda, and further subject them to analysis for the consumption of the society. This includes the canons like the British Romantics, the American Transcendentalists, the works of Thomas Hardy, the poetry of John Clare, and the Georgian poets of the very early twentieth century. They also subject major literary works to a re-reading from an ecocentric perspective thus instilling eco – consciousness in them.

### **1.11 Ecofeminism**

The term ecofeminism was first coined by Francoise D'Eabonne in 1974; she is a French female environmental activist. It is an academic movement which sees the interconnectedness between the exploitation of women and the domination of nature. As a movement, it grew during the 1970s. the process of suppression and the subordination of women and equating women with nature with the sole aim of exploiting them both is questioned by ecofeminists. It emerged in the mid 1970s together with green movement and second wave feminism. War, nuclear annihilation and global warming, are seen as having direct effect on women in the movement.

### **1.12 Social ecofeminism**

This is a branch of feminism with the development of the socioeconomic status of women through ensuring a sustainable environment as its cardinal principle. It strongly opposes hierarchical dualism which constantly relegates women and nature to a second inferior position. It goes against the inferiorization and equalization of women with nature.

### **1.13 Spiritual ecofeminism**

This brand of ecofeminism seeks to question the religious doctrines' empowerment of men and degrading women and nature by promoting patriarchy. It is closely related to feminist theology which reconsiders the religious practices of some religions towards women. Religious ecofeminism tries to separate the cultural practices of a society from the religious ones through empowering women to take spiritual roles among the clergy, religious authorities and promoting matriarchal religions. God is seen by the spiritual ecofeminists as Father-Mother; Male-Female figure. The earth is constructed as a sacred entity.

### **1.14 Identity**

This is generally defined as sense of self and develops as the child differentiates from parents and family and takes his place in the society. Identity refers to the sense that somebody has of who he is- the question of self. Identities are fluid – they are constantly being negotiated in the interaction between individual and society. It is a central concept in the contemporary cultural and literary criticism. Paradoxically, the word identity means ‘sameness and distinctiveness’.

### **1.15 Conclusion**

This chapter provides the background to the study where a broad introduction into the concept of male African writers is given by tracing the history of male writers and their major concerns. The issue of identity as it affects female portrayals by male is also raised and discussed in the chapter. The major argument of the research is also presented in the chapter. The general belief that most male African writers do not give women a considerable and or favorable space in their writings and the intention of the researcher to prove otherwise is also extensively discussed in the background. The chapter then covers the statement of the problem, objectives of the study, research questions, the theoretical framework, scope and limitations of the study.



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## LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

- Nasiru Umar Muhammad, Rosli Talif, Hardev Kaur and Ida Baizura "Ecofeminism and the Question of Development in African Male writings" IJHCS Online Journal Volume 2 (4) pp.809-815
- Nasiru Umar Muhammad, Rosli Talif, Hardev Kaur and Ida Baizura "The New Female Identity in Male African Writing" IJHCS Online journal Volume 3(5) pp.66-71.
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- Nasiru Umar Muhammad, Rosli Talif, Hardev Kaur and Ida Baizura "Ecofeminism and the Female Identity in Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* PJSRR in Press.
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