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THE 'GENERALIZED OTHER': GOOD WOMAN IN AFRICAN FICTION

Ibiene Evelyn Iboroma Ph.D.

Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *A considerable number of works have examined the image of the African woman in literary texts especially from the feminist perspective. This paper approaches this theme from a different perspective. It extends George Herbert Mead's theory of The 'Generalized Other' which is most often used in the field of sociology and the social sciences to explore the 'good' woman in selected works of African fiction. The aim is to underscore the fact that the stereotypic image of the 'good' woman is created to serve the enterprise of patriarchy. This study demonstrates that the African woman's inability to assert her self-identity earns her the title 'good' woman. The paper therefore calls for a deconstruction of the phallocentric structures that make it impossible for the woman to arrive at self-reclamation. The paper concludes that it is only when this is done that 'goodness' can be appreciated as a virtue of African womanhood.*

KEYWORDS: The Generalized Other, Good Woman, African fiction

INTRODUCTION

The image of the African woman in African fiction especially in male-authored works has been of significant interest to researchers and scholars in postcolonial Africa. Helen Chukwuma (1994) for instance avers that the female character in male-written works "…is a facile lack-lustre human being, the quiet member of a household…she was not part of the decision making both as a daughter, wife and mother even when the decisions affected her directly. Docility and complete subsumation of will was demanded and enacted from her" (215). Toeing this line of argument, Chinaka Constantine Mgbojirike and Odimma Ifeyinwa Constance (2015) posit that "the African male, who was the first to grace the literary space, … recreated a gory and damaged image of the black woman" (1387-1388). The patriarchal society which she belongs to informs the construction of this stereotypic image and patriarchy is a social order which sanctions the rule of man over woman both in the private and public spheres of life. Mgbojirikwe and Odimma affirm that "social institutions and interactions are conditioned by patriarchal constructs that dichotomise the man and the woman along binary opposites such as superior/inferior, master/servant, public/domestic, vocal/silence…" (1388). Marriage institution is one of such structures that supervises this dichotomy. Marriage therefore provides the platform on which the image of the 'good' woman will be explored.

The image of the African woman has been examined from a variety of perspectives especially from the feminist perspective. This paper will approach this theme from a different perspective. It makes an attempt to extend Mead's theory of the 'Generalized Other' which is most often used in the field of sociology and the social sciences to explore the image of the good woman in selected works of African fiction which has scarcely been done. This will be carried out in conjunction with Onyemaechi Udumukwu's concept of the 'good' woman. Thus, Mead's theory of the 'Generalized Other' and Udumukwu's concept of the good woman provide an integrated framework on which to explore the image of the good woman in selected works of

African fiction. The aim is to underscore the fact that the stereotypic image of the good woman is created to serve the enterprise of patriarchy. It is also to demonstrate the extent to which the African woman endures suffering and oppression in order to remain 'good'. In addition, this study wishes to emphasize the need for a drastic change in the delineation of this conventional image of the African woman in literary texts so that it does not serve as a role-model to the female readership especially the younger generation**.**

Theoretical Framework

George Herbert Mead's theory of the 'Generalized Other' explains the social origin of self. He defines the 'Generalized Other' as "a composite internalized figure who represents the values and norms of one's community" (qtd in Godrej 113). *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (2007) defines the 'Generalized Other' as "the collection of roles and attitudes that people use as reference point for figuring out how to behave in a given situation". To Agnes E. Dodds, Jeanette A. Lawrence, and Jaan Valsiner (1997), Mead's concept of "…the Generalized Other is a special case of role-taking in which the individual responds to social gestures, and takes up and adjusts common attitudes" (483). They add that the Generalized Other "… describes how perspectives, attitudes and roles of a group are incorporated into the individual's own thinking…" (495). They argue further that by assuming the role of the Generalized Other, "the person becomes the common person in interpreting the common attitude" (499). Taken together, Meads theory of the 'Generalized Other' explains how through observation and socialization, norms and values of a community or group are internalized by individual members leading to the construction of a common identity. In other words, the 'self' that is attained by an individual is a copy derived from the adaptation to the social custom of the community or group. Udumukwu posits that "the 'good' woman in sub-Saharan Africa happens to be that woman who suffers the effects of oppression, and neglect; and who must maintain a silence and passivity in order to remain good. Silence and passivity are two principal features of the good woman. She is also the embodiment of culture and tradition…In other words, she is good because she naturally fits into the mold shaped for her by patriarchy (2007:3).

Analysis of Texts

The paper identifies three categories of the 'good' woman. The first group consists of those who though they feel oppressed by patriarchy, remain passive and silent in order to remain good. The second consists of those whose attitude towards patriarchal oppression is ambivalent while the third consists of those who gladly affirm the identity construction offered to them by patriarchy.

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The woman feels the weight of oppression but avoids an open confrontation with patriarchy in order to remain good**.** Her "internal interlocutors" to use Farah Godrej's words are most often "engaged in confirming self-constructing narratives of humiliation, powerlessness, weakness, and diminished status" (2011:114). Godrej defines internal interlocutors as "a part of the self, usually one among the multiplicity of voices that constitute its complex narrative structure, but often taking turns in dominating a particular set of identity-constructing dialogues" (115). Women characters that fall under this category include Ma'Shingayi in TsiTsi Dangaremgba's *Nervous Conditions*, Adja Awa in Ousmane Sembène's *Xala*, *Lolli* in Aminata Sow Fall's *La*

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Grève des Battus, Sylvie in Henri Lopes' *Sans Tam Tam* and Miriamu in Ngugi wa Thiong'O's *The River Between*.

Ma' Shingayi marries Jeremiah at a tender age. Married to a lazy man, she is subjected to a life of suffering and poverty. She tills the ground to provide for the family while Jeremiah burns his life away drinking beer. Lucia, Ma' Shingayi's sister's remark is to the point: "this man, this Jeremiah… he has a roving eye and a lazy hand. This man who has given her nothing but misery since the age of fifteen" (147). Ma' Shingayi does not find her condition pleasurable at all but she silently carries her burden of womanhood with pains. Her daughter, Tambu, says this of her: "my mother, lips pressed tight …would continue silently at her labours…" (7). Katrin Berndt (2005) submits that "…Tambudzai considers the life of her mother to be chronically passive endurance of degrading circumstances" (92). When Babamukuru, her husband's brother, suggests a wedding between husband and wife after the death of their son, Nhamo, Ma' Shingayi is tongue-tied even though it vexes her spirit. She ignores the stirring of her internal interlocutors to reject the offer but cowardly laments to Lucia: "To wear a veil, at my age, to wear a veil! Just imagine – to wear a veil. If I were a witch, I would enfeeble his mind, truly I would do it, and then we would see, how his education and his money helped him" (184). Her repetition of the phrase "to wear a veil" shows the degree of her displeasure but she silently bears her sorrow to remain a good wife. Again, when Lucia tries to talk her into quitting the marriage or rejecting the wedding that is being imposed on her, she says with self-pity: "Lucia… why do you keep bothering me with this question? Does it matter what I want? Since when has it mattered what I want. So why should it matter now? Do you think I wanted to be impregnated by that old dog? So what difference does it make whether I have a wedding or whether I go? It is all the same. What I have endured for nineteen years I can endure for another nineteen, and nineteen more if need be" (153).

The series of question she asks confirm Tambu's remark that "…for most of her life my mother's mind belonging first to her father and then to her husband, had not been hers to make up, she was finding it difficult to come to a decision" 153). Charles Sugnet (1997) comments that "Tambu's mother, trapped in the role of Jeremiah's wife…reaches a point of paralysis" (39). Trapped in the image of the 'Generalized Other', she makes no attempt to negotiate her self-definition. To Berndt, she "represents the disillusioned and submissive wife and mother, who has become (or always has been?) indifferent towards her own fate" (89).

Ma'Shingayi also plays the role of an agent of patriarchy. She tries to initiate Tambu into the burden of womanhood. When Tambu relates to her that Jeremiah's reason for withdrawing her from school is to make her "learn to be a good wife" (16), Ma' Shingayi says "father was right" (16). She explains: "this business of womanhood is a heavy burden…when there are sacrifices to be made, you are the one who has to make them… and these things are not easy, you have to start learning them early, from an early age. The earlier the better so that it is easy later on…What will help you my child, is to learn to carry your burdens with strength" (16). Ma'Shingayi wants her daughter to follow her lead. What Frederika Cronje (1997) says about masculinity holds true for patriarchy. It is "like a message passed back and forth…" (3). Berndt asserts that Ma'Shingayi "is a woman who sticks to the narrow space that was intended for her. She never questions her ways and actions but tries to live according to the Shona customs familiar to her" (94).

Adja Awa's life is laced with silence and passivity. Her husband, El Hadji, says of her: "cette femme était si tacitune, si indifférente aux choses de la vie qu'il serait possible de I' enterer vivante sans entendre un gémissement" (127). (this woman is so silent, so indifferent to the

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affairs of life that she could be buried alive without a cry.) She accepts her husband's second and third marriages without a fuss. Even when her daughter, Rama**,** persuades her to oppose her father's third marriage, she simply says "Tu es encore jeune, un jour viendra ... tu comprendras" (26). (You're still young, with time you'll understand.) Again, when Rama urges her to divorce her father she refuses saying "Facile à dire de divorcer ... où irais–je à mon âge? Où trouverais–je un mari ? Un homme de mon âge encore célibataire" (26). (Easier to say divorce…where do I go to at my age? Where do I find another husband? A man of my age who is yet a bachelor.) She refuses to walk out of the marriage even though her heart is torn with anguish: "Elle se sentit légérèment souffrante" (38) (She was in a great pain.) Her inability to rise above her situation gives credence to Godfrej's argument that "the oppression of a patriarchal system is effective precisely because the stories dominant Others tell about us so easily and so often become the stories *we* tell about ourselves… Silent assent is the method by which these stories take root allowing the voices of the external Others to echo within and giving epistemic authority to the stories they tell, leading to distressed (often unacknowledged) perception of self as inferior" (2011:114).

In spite of the encouraging voice of Rama, Adja Awa's internal interlocutors "continue to speak in the voice of dominant patriarchy" (Godrej 129)**.** Adja Awa is "so crippled by fear in the recesses of her being that she is unable to move forward" (Godrej, 2011:129). Her attitude corroborates Gloria Chukukere's assertion that "in spite of hardships, individual self-assertion and progress depend more upon the victim's will than they do upon external factors" (1995:168). She does not want to entertain any alternative because she believes that she cannot achieve fulfillment outside marriage. Accordingly, she concedes her space of existence to her husband so that she will remain a good wife**.** Her passivity also finds credence in Sembène's Bakayoko's remark that: "ce ne sont pas ceux qui sont pris par force, echainés et vendus comme esclaves qui sont les vrais esclaves. Ce sont ceux qui acceptent moralement et physiquement de l'étre " (*Les bouts de bois de dieu,*1976 : 45) (It is not those who are taken by force, chained and sold as slaves who are the real slaves. It is those who accept morally and physically to be slaves.)

Lolli's husband for twenty years wakes her up one night to inform her "on me donne une femme demain" (40). (I'm going to be given a wife tomorrow.) Hearing this, Lolli "a senti un courant glacial courir à travers son cœur ; elle a senti ses machoires s'entrochoquer et une épaisse couche de brouillard assombrir sa vue" (40). (felt an icy shiver run through her whole body; she felt her teeth chatter and a thick mist beclouded her eyes.) This is too painful for her but socialized for dependency on man economically and otherwise, Lolli is unable to transcend this strangle-hold. Her daughter, Raabi, like Sembène's Rama (*Xala*), encourages her to quit the marriage but she refuses saying: "Raabi ma fille…. Réfléchis bien ma fille, sans travail, toute seule, que ferai-je ?" (47). (Raabi my daughter…Consider my daughter, without work, all alone, what do I do…?) Lolli's father rubs this in when he says to her: "Mour est ton mari. Il est libre. Il ne t'appartient pas…" (46). (Mour is your husband. He is free. He does not belong to you.) This, no doubt, is the voice of patriarchy. Lolli's father's remarks are in consonance with Godrej's argument that "… identity construction depends in part on an ongoing discursive relationship between the many external Others who disseminate and perpetuate the narrative of inferior status and the interior of one's consciousness" (113). Bearing her sorrows in silence, Lolli enters into competition with Sine, a sixteen-year-old girl, for her husband's favor.

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Gatsé is the husband of Sylvie, a well-educated woman. Though childless, both live a happy and harmonious life until she travels abroad for further studies. Her husband takes advantage of her absence and flirts with Marie–Thérèse who later becomes pregnant for him. He marries her as a result thereby forcing Sylvie into a polygamous marriage. Sylvie feels oppressed by it but instead of reclaiming her autonomy by moving forward, she begins to adjust herself to the situation: "elle finit per accepter cette petite forme de vie sociale…" (52). (she ends up accepting this little form of social life.) This recalls Godrej's assertion that "social power or dominance is an intrinsic feature of dialogical self-construction, as patterns of culturally established and institutionally congealed power constrain our internal dialogues" (2011:114). Unlike Nwapa's Amaka *(One is Enough,* 1984), Sylvie's internal interlocutors are not able to expel from within this injustice. They become receptors rather than creators of self-identity. She therefore remains Gatsé's first wife. Svlvie in spite of her high level of education is unable to rise above her expected role. Her attitude confirms Taiwo Ajala's assertion that "no matter how highly educated a woman may be, she does not rise above the traditional beliefs and customary practices which subordinate women to men…" (2016: 6).

Miriamu is described as one who "has learnt the value of submission" (34). Living in a society where female subordination is enshrined, she does not only submit to her husband, Joshua, but lives in awe of him. He takes advantage of this and orders her around at will. For instance, when their daughter, Muthoni, escapes from home, he commands her to go out and look for her. She obeys even though she feels that "Joshua was being unreasonable but did not know how to tell him…" (35). Miriamu fits into May Okolie's description of the stereotypical image of the African woman: "trapped in this male awe, she meekly moved in any direction in which she was pushed; applauded when asked to, out of habit, and cultural seemliness rather than out of conviction and clout" (2012:484*)*. More so, in traditional patriarchy, being a mother means bearing on one's shoulders all the sins and misdeeds of children. This recalls Sembène's Adja Awa's case in *Xala* where her husband, El Hadji, accuses her of not properly bringing up their daughter, Rama, when she confronts him on the issue of his third marriage. He says to her: "si tu avais bien élevé cette fille! ... " (27). (If you had properly brought up this girl…) Miriamu's helplessness is also captured in her inability to challenge Joshua when he indirectly accuses her of infidelity. He disowns one of his daughters, Nyambura, saying "You are not my daughter" (136). Though tormented, Miriamu swallows down the bitter pills in silence to remain a good wife.

Adja Awa, Lolli, Ma'Shingayi, Sylvie and Miriamu are unable to reject the stories of the identity construction that have been fashioned for them by patriarchy. They are like robots "helplessly bowing to the forces of social determinism to which they are condemned" (Uwah, 1993:128).

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Women characters that fall under this category are those whose attitude towards patriarchal subordination is ambivalent. Their internal interlocutors fight against patriarchal oppression but they quickly revert to assume their conformist status in order to remain good. Examples include Ousmane Sembène's Ouhigoué in *L'Harmattan* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Beatrice in *Purple Hibiscus*.

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In Ouhigoué's patriarchal world, women have been indoctrinated to believe that they will never be equal to men. Thus, she declares: "Nous les femmes nous n'égalerons jamais les hommes" (235). (We, the women, we would never be equal to men.) Not only that, the female has been socialized to see wife-battering as a natural phenomenon. Hear Ouhigoué: "Nous les femmes, c'est notre lot d'être battues. Aucune femme ne peut se venter de n'être jamais battue par son père ou par son mari'' (235). (We the women, it is our lot to be beaten. There is no woman who would boast of having never been beaten either by her father or husband.) Accordingly, Ouhigoué endures constant battering from her husband, Joseph Koégbogi, without complaining. Sometimes, she feels like confronting him but cannot bring herself to it. Rather, "…elle baissa ses yeux tremblante… elle se taisait…elle garda sa posture viancue…" (162–163). (…she looked down trembling…she kept quiet…she retained her defeated posture.) However, her internal interlocutors respond radically when her husband in the process of beating their daughter, Tioumbé, calls her "esclave" (slave.) This is too bitter a pill for Ouhigoué to swallow. She breaks through the walls of silence and passivity and confronts her husband openly: "Tu n'a pas de coeur! Tu es un homme et tu te conduit bestialement ...'' (247). (You have no heart. You are a man but you behave like an animal…) Engaging in a physical combat with him, she says "C'est toi qui est esclave …" (247). (It is you who are a slave.) However, Ouhigoué's metamorphosis from passivity to self-reclamation is short-lived. Her internal interlocutors revert in no time to adjust themselves to the voice of the external Others. She regrets her non-conformist behavior saying "elle n'avait de sa vie transgressé un ordre de son homme" (249). (she has never in her life transgressed her husband's order.) In this state of self-condemnation, Ouhigoué refuses to release Tioumbé being tethered by her father, when she passionately pleads with her to do so. She explains: "J'ai resisté ton père… j' ai même élevé la voix…je veux bien te délier. Mais j'ai peur" (249). (I have challenged your father. I have even raised my voice. I would have loved to release you but I am afraid.) Her radical confrontation with her husband's patriarchal given authority is too unwomanly for her. She finds it difficult to admit that she has the capacity to challenge and overthrow patriarchy. Frightened, Ouhigoué takes back the image of the legendary 'good' woman.

Beatrice (Mama) is subjected to perennial assaults by her husband, Eugene, resulting sometimes to miscarriages and at other times to emotional distress. On one occasion, Eugene slings pregnant Mama "over his shoulder like the jute sacks of rice his factory workers brought in bulk at the Seme border" (41). She is hospitalized after this incidence. She returns home after the loss of the baby depressed with her "eyes vacant like the eyes of those mad people who wandered around the roadside garbage dumps in town, pulling grimy, torn canvas bags with their life fragments inside" (43). Despite Eugene's irrational acts of torture, Beatrice remains a good wife who must be silent and passive in the face of tyranny. She holds her husband in high esteem especially "for not choosing to have more sons with another woman, of course, for not choosing to take a second wife" (28). To her, this is a great honor which should be reciprocated by keeping silent in the face of death. Even when her husband's sister, Ifeoma, urges her to quit the marriage, she says "where would I go if I leave Eugene's house? Tell me, where would I go?" (225). This is reminiscent of Sembène's Adja Awa's response to Rama when she urges her to quit the marriage: "Facile à dire de divorcer ... où irais–je à mon âge? Où trouverais–je un mari? Un homme de mon âge encore célibataire" (*Xala*, 26). (Easier to say divorce…where do I go to at my age? Where do I find another husband? A man of my age who is yet a bachelor.) The response to patriarchal oppression by Adja Awa and Beatrice who are from different linguistic and geographical regions of Africa corroborates Ander Bergara, Josetxu Riviere & Ritxar Bacete's submission that "the gender based process of socialization achieves a high degree of homogeneity in terms of behavior, concerns, feelings,

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ways of relating with others or expectations for the future. All this conspires to create a fabric of social expectations and images of what "ought to be' which is the reference system …" (2010:22).

However, there is a limit to which a woman can endure suffering in silence. Beatrice eventually chooses to act. With the corporation of her cook, Sisi, she poisons her husband to death. She confesses to the children: "I started putting the poison in his tea before I came to Nsukka. Sisi got it for me; her uncle is a powerful witch doctor" (294). In this way Mama takes her leave from the status of the legendary good woman but her metamorphosis is short-lived like that of Sembène's Ouhigoué. She comes down with nervous breakdown soon after she takes up arm against her husband's tyranny. This paper posits that her state of nervous breakdown is an offshoot of guilt. She regrets her radical deviance from her expected role of remaining inactive in the face of tyranny. Her internal interlocutors find it difficult to adjust to the New Beatrice; hence the breakdown. Ouhigoué and Beatrice are so entangled in this patriarchal web that they regret their actions and fall back to the status quo. This is because they do not desire to have more than one identity layer to use Berndt's words.

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Here, female characters have no conflict at all between their internal interlocutors and the patriarchal culture. In short, their internal interlocutors are receptors whose primary role is to quietly confirm the meanings and roles of wifehood and motherhood that are thrust upon them. They are the embodiment of the culture and tradition of their milieu. Examples include Ma Blackie in Buchi Emecheta's *The bride price,* Assitan and Rokhaya in Sembène's *Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu* and *O pays mon beau peuple* respectively.

Ma Blackie is a woman fashioned by the voice of the external Others. After the death of her husband, she becomes a victim of levirate marriage. She gets married to Okonkwo, her late husband's brother as is the custom. She is at peace with this arrangement because as her daughter, Aku-nna explains, "women are supposed to be boneless" (28). Accordingly**,** she goes into competition with Okonkwo's other wives, struggling to have a male child. Again, she collaborates with the external Others to force her daughter into an arranged marriage for economic reasons. She contributes towards Aku-nna's education because Aku-nna "was going to marry a rich man and raise the entire Odia family from poverty to wealth" (77).

Assitan is a traditional woman who accepts her subordinated position with equanimity. She is "docile, soumise, travailleuse ; elle ne disait jamais un mot plus haut que I'autre." (170). (docile submissive, hardworking and quiet.). She is precluded from the decision making process of choosing a husband which she calmly accepts. When her first husband dies, she is again subjected to levirate marriage like Emecheta's Ma Blackie (*The Bride Price*). Bakayoko, her husband's brother takes her as his wife. Again, she is passive about it: "Assistan continua d'obeir" (120). (Assitan continued to obey.) Not only that**,** she longs for a polygamous marriage. In a conversation with Tiémoko, she says: "Je ne demanderais pas mieux que d'avoir une "rivale", je pourrais au moins me reposer ... chaque fois qu'il part, je fais des vœux pour qu'il ramène une deuxième femme plus jeune." (171. (I would not ask for anything better than having a co-wife, I would at least have some rest. Any time he travels, I pray he brings a second wife younger than I am.) Evidently, self-abnegation has been built into the very structure of Assitan's existence. Assitan and Ma Blackie's uncritical compliance to forced marriage stand

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in opposition to Ahmadou Korouma's Salimata (*Les Soleils des Indépendences* ,1971), who refuses to have sexual relations with Baffi, her first arranged husband and refuses to marry Baffi's brother after his death. In the vein of Assitan, Rokhaya does not only cherish polygamy but longs for it. She says: "Quand la deuxième épouse fut introduit dans le ménage, elle y trouva un soulargement."(26).). (When the second wife would start housekeeping, she would have some relief.) She believes that her son, Oumar, "était perdu" (is lost) because he refuses to marry a second wife.

Ma Blackie**,** Assitan and Rokhaya are enslaved by what 'ought to be', the norms and values of their people. They have no defined sense of themselves as persons. They quietly confirm "the meanings and roles that are thrust upon the self and integrate them into its self-construction" (Godrej 113). They "have cheerfully accepted their subjugation" (Chukukere, 1994:186). Their silence and passivity confirm Iniobong Uko's assertion that at "adulthood and in marriage, the woman is assumed to have been properly grounded in servitude, muteness, invisibility and dependence, with a natural acceptance of a corresponding male superiority and dominance" (2004:130). It also finds credence in Amina Bashir's view that "women themselves are taught in the process of being socialized to internalize the reigning patriarchal ideology so that they tend to be conditioned to derogate their sex and co-operate in their subordination" (2004:67).

CONCLUSION

Women characters delineated in this study are unapologetically submerged into the repressive patriarchal social order. They find no other road to fulfillment than that offered by patriarchy. Their inability to negotiate self-definition with the patriarchal web earns them the title of 'good' women. They accept this image which insists they are not persons of their own right but mere 'women'. Betty Friedan's argument about the image of the modern American women bears relevance to this study. She posits that this stereotypic image which "shapes women's lives today and mirrors their dreams" (1984:34) is not natural. It is "created by the women's magazines, by advertisements, television, movies, novels, columns and books by experts on marriage and the family…" (34). Friedan's position is reminiscent of Lauretta Ngcobo's argument that the attitudes of African men which "are enfeebling to our women are perpetrated by our writers of literature" (2011: 540). Thus far, even African women novelists cannot be exonerated from this stereotypic portrayal of the African woman because some of the characters delineated in this study such as Ma'Shingayi, Lolli, Beatrice and Ma Blackie are examples from female-authored works. This recalls Charles Nnolim's observation about two Nigerian female novelists, Flora Nwapa and Buchi Emecheta. He asserts that "the same trap which binds Nwapa's heroines to man, to tradition, equally binds Emecheta's protagonists" (1994:255). There is therefore a call on African writers and other artists both male and female to use this same medium to deconstruct this conventional image of the 'good' woman by portraying women characters that make rational choices to arrive at self-definition and self-determination. African writers should also make their women characters committed to the choices they make, the consequences notwithstanding. The issue of resoluteness in making choices becomes necessary because of the likes of Sembène's Ouhigoué and Adichie's Beatrice who having made attempts to fight against patriarchal oppression quickly revert to the status quo not desiring to have any other identity layer other than that of 'good' woman. They do not play a role-model function. Their failure to retain their self-liberation recalls Emecheta's Nnu Ego's anguished cry in *The Joys of Motherhood*: "God when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody's appendage" (186). Again,

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Wollstonecraft as summarized by Valerie Bryson "argued forcefully that a woman taught only passive obedience to her husband could never be fit to bring up children" (1992:23). This portends great danger for the future generation. The paper therefore calls for a deconstruction and subversion of the phallocentric structures that supervise this stereotypic image of the woman; an image that makes her voiceless under severe oppression and suffering. For it is only when the patriarchal social order makes allowances for the African woman to have a voice in human development; to make rational choices to arrive at self-expression and self-definition that 'goodness' can be appreciated as a virtue of African womanhood.

Further, Ngcobo (2011) commenting on how women are defined by their relationship to men opines that "so great is the power of tradition that no single woman in Africa, in spite of her awareness, is able to shift the power of tradition" (540). Ngcobo's position is evident in the texts under study which cut across linguistic and geographical boundaries. The issues around passivity and silence as the virtue of the African woman are closely analogous across the African continent as this study has demonstrated. Both those who are lettered like Lopes' Sylvie in *Sans Tam Tam* and the unlettered like Emecheta's Ma Blackie in *The Bride Price* are not able to shift from the power of tradition. Again, examples of the 'good' woman are drawn from both male and female novelists of the Anglophone and Francophone areas of Africa. Dangaremgba and Emecheta are Anglophone female novelists while Sow Fall is a Francophone. Ngugi is an Anglophone while Sembène and Lopes are Francophones. This underscores the universality of the plight of the African woman which should be promptly and properly addressed for the good of humanity.

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