WOMANISM IN AFRICANWOMEN'SAUTOBIOGRAPHY: A STUDY OF PHEBEANAJIBOLAOGUNDIPE'S*UP-COUNTRY GIRL* AND HILDA OGBE'S*THECRUMBS OFF THE WIFE'S TABLE*

BY

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BEING A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES,FACULTY OF ARTS AND ISLAMIC STUDIES,BAYERO UNIVERSITY, KANO, IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT FOR THE AWARD OF MASTER OF ARTS DEGREE IN ENGLISH (LITERATURE)

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is written by me and that it is a record of my own research work. It has not been submitted to any institution for the same purpose or submitted in any previous application for a higher degree. All quotations are indicated and all sourses of information are suitably acknowledged by means of reference.

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CERTIFICATION

I, Saadatu Salihu Adamu, student registration number SPS/14/MEN/00032, hereby certify that this dissertation titled, "Womanism in African Women's Autobiography: A Study of Phebean Ajibola Ogundipe's*Up-Country Girl* and Hilda Ogbe's *The Crumbs Off The Wife's Table"*is my own original work, and has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university, and have fully acknowledged the sources that I used with complete references. This dissertation is submitted in fulfilment of the award of the Master of Arts Degree in Enlgish (Literature) to the Department of English and Literary Studies, Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies, Bayero University, Kano.

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DEDICATION

This research study is especially dedicated to my beloved husband and our lovely children.

Thank you very much for being there for me all through the period of this study.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

The status of the African woman has been a topical issue of debate in recent times. The previous depiction of African women have been incapacitating; the dominant discourses had in the past often depicted African women in negative stereotypes as being oppressed, voiceless, passive and uneducated;totally dependent on the man. A few African women critics, such as Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Clenora Hudson-Weems, Molara Ogundipe Leslie, and Mary E. Modupe Kolawole have clarified that the African woman is contrary to these depictions. Since the autobiography, as a historical record of facts and as a literary form, serves as claim to truth and as a counter-discursive, the study examines two autobiographies: Up-Country girl by Phebean Ajibola Ogundipe and The Crumbs Off The Wife's Table by Hilda Ogbe, to re-inscribe the negative narratives of the African woman. To achieve this, the study uses the womanist theory as its framework. The relevance of the theory to this study is informed by its demonstration of women's categorisation not as a monolithic entity, and its ideals are rooted in African cultural values. The study demonstrates through the set autobiographical texts, that African women are contrary to the past disjointed discourses about her.The African woman's status is, in fact, strong, assertive and dynamic and not disempowered.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

African women's status has been a critical topic of debate in recent times in dominant discourses. There have been many stereotypical assumptions about her; her personhood and how she is treated by the African society in general. The African woman has been stereotyped as weak, uneducated and oppressed. These stereotypical imagings have been depicted and interpreted through the lens of some male African writers and Western dominant discourse. Her condition has often times been quoted out of its social cultural context.This dissertation's aim is to question how these stereotypical assumptions about the African woman are shaped, to deconstruct and attempt a re-inscription of the real image of the African woman, using the womanist theory as its framework. It also aims to show that African women, in particular Nigerian women, understand and interpret their reality through their own lens in accordance with their social and cultural imperatives.This dissertation uses the autobiographies of Phebean Ajibola Ogundipe and Hilda Ogbe (both Nigerians) to elucidate how these two women, as insiders, perceive themselves and expose the reality of their existence through their subjective self-construction; and, by extension, that of African women within the African context. The choice of the two autobiographical works is purposeful and informed by the fact that autobiography, unlike life-writing, biography and faction, the truth lies in the power of the narrator as witness.

The autobiography has been used as a form of counter-discourse to the dominant discourses. In contemporary Africa, autobiographies are used to record facts by autobiographers. The autobiography therefore, functions not just as a record of the individual autobiographer but as a record of their various communities to assert their truth. However, despite its popularity in Africa, it has not attracted much attention from literary critics.Even when it attracts some

attention, it is usually to the male autobiographies or from other continent or country.Ignatus Adetayo Alabi's thesis, "Continuities and Divergence in Black Autobiographies of Africa and the Diaspora" (1998), E. Kwadwo Opoku-Agyemang's dissertation, "The Wisdom of the Eye: A Theory of African Autobiography", (1986)and Florence Ebila's "A Proper Woman in the African Tradition: The Construction of Gender and Nationalism in Wangari Maathai's Autobiography *Unbowed"* (2015), are some studies in African autobobraphy, which by their titles announce the limits of their scope.

Adetayo Alabi's study is a comparative study of Black autobiographies from Africa and its diaspora. His work is a comparative analysis of Wole Soyinka's *Ake: The Years of Childhood,* Sistren's *Lionheart Gal*, George Seremba's *Come Good Rain,* Oluadah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, Derek Walcott's *Another Life,* Mary Prince's *History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* and Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. His focusis on the interconnectedness of the autobiographies and argues that autobiographers combined race and gender to mediate their subjectivity. Opoku-Agyemang's research study is of autobiographical African literature. His texts for study are Oluadah Equiano's *The Interesting Narrative of Oluadah Equiano, or Gustavus Vasa, the Africa. Written by Himself,* Wole Soyinka's *Ake: The Years of Childhood,* Haile Selassie's *My life and Ethiopia's Progress,* Charity Waciuma's *Daughter of Mumbi and* Bloke Modisane's *Blame Me on History,* which he approaches structurally and argues that since the individual autobiographies show a unique African vision, they are useful for studying African cultures. Ebila's is a study of Wangai's political life experiences, not much is dwelt on about her personal life. She argues that the construction of the African woman's subjectivity in the political terrain is shaped by the socio-cultural and patriarchal ideologies that construct the ideal African woman as the passive, that is, one who must be seen and not heard.

The studies provide a gap in their approaches to the women autobiographical text in their dissertations. For one, going by their titles, the researches announce the limitation of their scope. Secondly, the frameworks upon which their analyses are carried out are different from the womanist theory which this study adopts.As such, this research is a potential contribution to the body of critical studies on gender discourses of African women.It sets out not just to research how the African woman is stereotyped but to deconstruct these stereotypical assumptions. The study pays particular attention to how the autobiographers construct their subjectivity in relation to the African cultural imperatives. To foreground the argument, the research adopts the womanist theory as the framework. Womanist theory as an area of study includes race, gender, and class in critically assessing the historical, cultural, socio-political, intellectual and spiritual consciousness of women of African descent. Its focal point is to holistically understand African women; their history, culture, and their everyday lived experiences. The term, womanist, first coined by the novelist and poet Alice Walker refers to a woman of colour. The theory is based on the premise that in spite of age, gender, class, marital status, ethnicity, or regionality, women of African descent share a common culture and common experiences.

This commonality of experiences such as a history of struggle against racism, sexism, classism, other "isms" and female subjugation shape their world view. In a bid to break the yoke of these oppressive "isms", arose the consciousness and the need to define their own realities. The womanist worldview of an "optimal conceptual system" (Myers in Layli Phillips, 2006:218), allows for interpolated perspectives. This conceptual system posits that people view the world based on their own particular belief system. As such, the conceptual system to which a person belongs, determines to a large extent, how the individual perceives, think, feel and experiences the world. It is, therefore, within this context that the African woman perceives and interprets her reality and not as she is perceived by external others.

The autobiographical texts will be analysed from five interrelated womanist poetics: (1) gender reciprocity;(2) communal agency; (3) dialogue; (4) self-affirmation and (5) female bonding, which are identified in both texts. The study will also analyse the use of photographic technique as claim of truth in autobiography in both texts. Both autobiographies depict images of women, who impact positively in their various communities. They are presented as strong and self-assertive in their own right. The choice of the autobiographical texts for the study is because it is concerned with the power of the narrator as witness to the facts as presented in the narratives. Although, the question of reliability and partiality are probable in autobiography; the possibility of conflating facts with fiction and the likelihood of manipulating truth to serve particular purposes are issues arising. Nonetheless, autobiography still serve as reliable record of account of the autobiographer's experiences and by extension, that of her or his immediate community. However, the set autobiographical texts are necessary for this study in that the narratives are actual recorded accounts of the autobiographers which serve as counter-discursive to dominant discourses about the African woman's status.

1.2 Research Questions

i. How are the scripted narratives about the African woman's status constructed in dominant discourses?

ii. What is the actual status of the African woman?

iii. Do the set autobiographical texts serve as counter-discursive to the negative depictions of the African woman?

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The overall aim of this study is to use Mary Kolawole's (1997), strand of the womanist theory as framework to explore gender reciprocity, communal mothering/women's agency, self-affirmation, female bonding and dialogue with close reference to Ogundipe's *Up-*

Country Girl and Ogbe's *The Crumbs Off The Wife's Table.*The womanist poetics manifestations in both autobiographies provide insightful themes for exploration and a window view into the actual status of the African woman.

i. To examine how the scripted narratives about the African woman are constructed in dominant discourses.

ii. To profer an alternative way of viewing the African woman.

iii. To present a credible account-disclosure of the actual status of the African woman through the set autobiographical texts, framed within the premise of womanism.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

The problematiclies in the fact that the status of the African woman has been a topical issue of debate in recent times. The depictions of African women have been incapacitating and had undermined her invisibility. The narratives had in the past often depicted African women in negative stereotypes as being oppressed, voiceless, passive, uneducatedandappendages to the man by dominant discourses, both in African fictional works by African male authors and in the West. Much of the narratives had emerged from a lack of cultural contextualisation and a certain blindness in humans, which leads to negative notions about others. Hence, this study raises significant questions about the African woman's status which it attempts to research by analysing two African women's autobiographies --- autobiography is often an effective way of representing claim to truth ---- and to show through their reconstructive narratives, how they depict their identities within the African cultural imperatives and by extension, that of the African woman.

1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This research is limited to two primary autobiographical texts; Ogundipe's*Up-Country girl*(2005)and Ogbe's. *The Crumbs OffThe Wife's Table* (2001), criticaljournals and other relevant materials on both authors and the texts. The choice of the two texts was informed by their pertinence to the research topic: Womanism in Women's Autobiography: A Study ofPhebean Ajibola Ogundipe's*Up-Country girl* and Hilda Ogbe's*The Crumbs OffThe Wife's Table,* as they both exemplify the tenets of womanism; which foregrounds intergrative collective consciousness of African women. The research will carry out an in depth study, keeping in bounds on how both texts cohere with the specific tenets of womanism as the theoretical framework. The methodology is essentially a textual analysis.

1.6 Significance of the Study

The previous polemics about African women are being deconstructed. Such African women critics as Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Carol Boyce Davies, and Mary E. Modupe Kolawole, have variously challenged the negative and stereotypical notions about the African woman and have advanced the quest through fictional naratives that the African woman re-writes her own narratives away from the previous imperialistic and jaundiced depictions about her.So, this study is an attemptto align the work with gender discourses by focusing on autobiography within the framework of womanism as a literary theory and to make a potential contribution to the extant body of criticism that avails on African women's autobiographywith the hope that it will contribute to broadening the frontiers of knowledge.

1.6.1 The Authors

PhebeanAjibolaOgundipe (nee Itayemi), was born on May 16th, 1927 to John Folami Itayemi and Rachel Ilori in Esa Oke, Osun state. She started her primary education in a church hall in Esa Oke, had her secondary education in Queens College, Lagos and obtained a MA (Honours) in English in 1952 from the St. Andrews University, Scotland. Subsequently, she

joined the Nigerian Federal Civil Service and retired after a meritorious service to her country, spanning over two decades.Described as a seasoned educationist and an accomplished "wordsmith," she is a creative writer of award-winning short-stories and essays including *Nothing So Sweet(1947).*She authored the *Brighter Grammar (1983)* series and co-authored *New Practical English* with Philip SillinceTregidgo(1972), which are widely used in schools in Nigeria, Ghana and Sierra Leone. Ogundipe currently lives in the United States of America with her family.

On her own part,Hilda Gerson was born to Jewish parents, on July 31st, 1921 in Germany. She escaped from her war torn country along with her mother and brother, at the age of 18 in 1939 to England, where she trained as an engineering fitter. She met and married her Nigerian husband, Prince Tommy A. Ogbe Esq. from Warri on July 5, 1952.She established the first ever Ogbe Craft Limited, which specialised in making silver jewellery in1963 and headed the then Midwest Craft Shop in 1968 in Benin City. An astrologer and a specialist in treating sickle cell anaemia using local herbs, Ogbenaturalised as a Nigerian in 1967 and now lives in Benin City.Even though Ogbe is German by birth, the choice to include her autobiography as one of the set texts is predicated upon the fact that, having been married to a Nigerianand resided in the country makes her a Nigerian, constitutionally. Besides, for Ogbe, "Nigeria is home" (p.277).Thus, having lived the most part of her life in Nigeria, the autobiographical narrative provides a first hand evidence of the African woman's reality within the African imperatives.

1.6.2 The Primary Texts

Up-Country Girl (2005) is a bildungsroman autobiographical narrative of the progressive development of Ogundipe as a young girl, from childhood through to adulthood; and details her educational and professional achievements and emotional growth. The autobiography is a lucid representation of the humble beginnings of a village girl, who through dint of hard work

and determination, succeeds in life. It depicts the communal life and gender complementarity in the traditional African setting.Ogundipe, through her narratives, proves that a woman can succeed both in her professional and private lives, if both genders support each other. In the text, she prioritises her family over her career, by choosing to resign from her job and declining a promotion, so as to keep her family together, because "I did not want a weekend father for my children" (p.236).The narrative discourse highlights the pervasive "aso-ebi" phenomenon and also critiques the covert corrupt practices in the Nigerian Civil Service, placing the blame on ethnic loyalty as "the major obstacles to true nationhood till today" (p.274).

The Crumbs Off The Wife'sTable(2001), is an autobiographical rendition of Ogbe's horrific war experiences and her marriage to Tommy, a Nigerian. Written in twelve chapters, Ogbe begins her narrative from when she was an eighteen year old young woman, who had escaped from the war in her country, Germany, to England in 1939; her marriage; and her coming to Nigeria in 1956.The autobiography renders an account of her horrendous experiences of the war; how she and many others were condemned to live each day of their lives as if it was their last, in order to survive the war. Ironically, Hilda experiences another war from 1967 – 1970; the Nigerian Civil War. Through the narrative, she provides an insight into her marriage, where she experiences some happy and sad moments. She also explains the births of her two children, her establishment of Nigeria's first silver company and Tommy's philandering; which he does not even make an effort to be discreet about. Rather, he expects her to be patient because "there comes a time in a man's life when we stop all these woman-nonsense" (p.212 – 13). However, after thirty-two years of marriage and several disappointments, she decides to leave not just "the crumbs nor the slice, but the whole chunk" of her marriage for his *Olorunsogo* woman, whose only concern is the depth of his pocket.

The narrative discourse depicts a strong and committed Hilda, who finds freedom from pains and fulfillment as a sickle cell counsellor.

1.6.3 The Autobiography as a Literary Form

The autobiography, also referred to as non-fiction, is one of the popular forms of literature which is an aspect of life writing, used to recount past experiences of the "self". It deals with the narrative of real people, written by themselves. The term, autobiography is derived from the Greek words, *Autos* (self), *Bios* (life) and *Graphien* (writing), meaning self-life-writing. "The autobiography is a particular practice of life narrative that emerged in the Enlightenment age", (Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, 2005:1) and until recently, it was not regarded as a literary form but a form of writing that was mainly a documented account of a person's life written by that person. Unlike fictional writing, the autobiography has received little attention as a literary form.Perhaps, in part because of some of its features that are not present in fictional writings. For instance, in autobiography, photography, as a medium of visual narrative and self-expression plays a vital role. Photographic self-construction adds an important and significant source of meaning to illustrated narratives. The photographic images and the written texts merge to actively participate in the creation of the autobiographical self-construction. Photography as a mode of self-expression within the space of a written text presents a candid and subjective view of the autobiographical narrative. Symbolic representations of reality are inextricably intertwined with the written text. The matrix between the written text and the visual images form a coherent narrative. While written text provides the necessary information about the photographic images, the photographs illustrate and reflect the narrative events in the autobiographical text. However, in fictional writing, this is not tenable because the writer of fiction is not bound by autobiographical truth.

Autobiographical criticism was critique purely from the structuralist perspective which looked at the autobiographical text based on the accuracy of fact; its historical context, the author, the language at the exclusion of literariness and form. The rise of formalism paid attention to the study of literariness and form of the autobiographical text. Roman Jakobson **(**1921**:**11) argues that, "the subject of literary scholarship, is not literature in its totality but [its] literariness". Emphasising the place of literariness in formalism, Erlich, in *journal of the History of Ideas*(1972:43), states that, "it is the way that the poet uses his medium that Jakobson, along with the balk of the Formalist theoreticians, saw the situs of literariness". In other words, literariness refers to the manipulation of language, artistic craftsmanship and aesthetic values such as literary tropes, and figurative expressions employed in fictional writing. By this, the autobiography is deemed as a literary form as it also claims similar craftsmanship.Furthermore, fiction makes an attempt to recreate events that are not factual; non-fiction recreates events by recounting them through memory selection. However, both use language to mediate the narrative process and the language is embellished with flowery words to create aesthetic appreciation.

Critics of autobiography have argued that "the autobiography could be read for the same reasons that one reads fiction: it had a quality of literariness and a phenomelogical approach to the recovery of the self that could be appreciated in its best examples, and then found in other examples of the genre [and what] makes these texts autobiographical is the reflexivity of the authors, and the *literariness* of the texts", Julie Rak (2005:308). The autobiography shares some verisimilitude features ascribed to fictional writing; plot, dialogue, setting and characterisation. According to Philips Lejeune in the "Autobiographical Pact", the relationship between the autobiographer and the reader in autobiographical writing is a contract. "What defines autobiography for one who is reading is above all a contract of identity that is sealed by the proper name. And this is true for the one who is reading the

text", in (Smith and Watson, 2001: 8). Hence, the convergence of authorial signature and the autobiographer narrator, distinguishes the autobiography from the fictional writing. Temporal distinction is a feature that differentiates the autobiography from fiction. The fictional writing is not bound by time; the narrative events can be situated in the past, present, future, and even in an imaginary time period. However, in autobiographical narrative, the autobiographer does not need to recount events from a chronological order, but can begin from the past; a past that is even before his or her birth with narratives that may be retrospectively created through imagination of their cultural past and "they may offer an imaginative journey into the future" (Smith and Watson, 2001:9).

Unlike fictional writing, autobiographical narratives are anchored on the temporal, geographical, historical and cultural milieux of the autobiographer and the narrator's lived experiences comprised in part of the cultural myths that were in the past. In much like the fictional narratives that are Imaginative, the autobiographical narrative is not concrete as well; the autobiographer recount events from the past, a past frozen in time through memory. The autobiographer may have lived and felt these experiences which are now in the past. While the fictional writer is bound by the reader's expectation of internal consistencies in the world of verisimilitude created within the text, the autobiographer is bound by rules of evidence that links the world of the narratives with a historical and cultural world outside the narrative. Though, the autobiographer's focus is on issues pertaining to facts, accuracy of historical records. The narrative is, however, embellished with artistic aesthetics that foreground literariness in fictional writing. The autobiography like the fictional writing also deploys literary tropes. The "self" is artistically presented while not losing focus on the accuracy of verifiable facts in the narrative.As Geoges Gusdorfin "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography"(43), points, "autobiography is not just a recapitulation of the past; it is also

the attempt and the drama of a man struggling to reassemble himself in his own likeness at a certain moment of history".

In reassembling the self, the autobiographer uses creative imagination and memory to achieve this in as much in the same way the character is presented in fiction. Characters can be analysed using the same parameters as that of the fictional writing. The boundary between the autobiography and fiction is fluid; the sharing of verisimilitude features or the suspension of disbelief in fiction is also tenable in autobiographical writing. For instance, in autobiographical writing, the narrative is not really accurate as one would like to believe, because certain techniques are employed. The very act of writing the autobiography itself is a mediated process that is dependent on the use of memory to recount "a retrospective narrative of the past and to situate the present within that experiential history" (Smith and Watson, 2005:16). This process of mediation to recapitulate the past self requires certain techniques that make the narrative not exactly as it had happened, no matter how accurate the narrator autobiographer tries to be, every event or experience cannot be detailed in exactly the way it happened in the past.Furthermore, in recent times, with an increasingly critical scholarship in the genre, critics have observed that it has the capacity to appropriate different medium as dictated by the autobiographer's impulsion at the time of writing the autobiography. In other words, autobiographical self-representation can be enacted through various media, in short feature and documentary films; theatre pieces; installations; the painted or sculpted self-portrait and photography. This re-enactment of the self isembedded with some elements of fictional devices and this gives it some colouration of fiction. Thus, the whole process of mediating the past experiences bring in the fictionality of fiction in non-fiction, thereby making the autobiography a literary form.

1.7 Womanism as Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is womanism; however, a review of some Western feminists discourse will help to show the need to embark on the womanist study of the set autobiographical texts. The emergence of feminist literary theory and criticism in the late 1880s, rooted from centuries-old women's movement struggle to secure social and political rights, is marked by such pioneering works as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Sara M Grimkle's*Letter on Equality of Sexes and the Condition of Women* (1833), Margaret Fuller's *Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1845) and John Stuart Miller's *The Subjection of Women* (1869). Also, Virginia Wolf, the author of *A Room of One's Own* (1829) and other essays on women authors and the cultural, economic and educational marginalisation of women by the patriarchal culture; as well as Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), which critiques the cultural assignment of women as merely insignificant or "other" to the man, who was considered the dominant or superior subject. However, the organisedwomen's movement also referred to as the suffrage movement, which spanned three crucial epochs, had contributed immensely to the advancement of different feminist literary theories. (AllkemperAllo and Otto Eke 2004:72) posit that:

> To this day...the feminist literature puts to use different philosophical and literary theoretical positions, so that one cannot speak of the feminist literary criticism; since each direction will differ not only among themselves but also vehemently criticize one another.

Feminist literary theory is considered as being interdisciplinary, because of its ability to branch into other theories, such as Marxism, Psychoanalysis and Deconstruction.The late 1960s heralded the need to develop an alternative paradigm for women's literature and to critique the representation of the female characters in literary works. In *Thinking AboutWomen* (1968), Mary Ellman contends that literature by male authorsin the past had

portrayed derogatory stereotypes of women, as well as subversive representations of women by women writers. Feminist literary theory and criticism are now concerned with altering the way a woman reads the literary texts of the past, so as to make her not an acquiescent to her own oppression, (Abrams M.H., 2005:95), but the "resisting reader" (Judith Fetterly, 1978). The purpose is, to make the female reader resist the author's intentions and design by deconstructing the covert gender biases in the literary work.Feminist literary critics infer that patriarchy has subtly exacted forces that affect the woman's psyche; thus, undermining her self-confidence and self-assertiveness. Kate Millet in her *Sexual Politics* (1968) asserts that politics signify the dynamics and mechanisms that express and enforce societal power relations. Equally criticised were the "distorted images" of the past and the demonisation of women in literary works via binary opposites, such as "Madonna", "Angel of the House", "Eve" and "Pandora"; the consequences of which has triggered a backlash of criticism of the patriarchate by feminist literary critics. According to William Westerman (1993:85):

> Feminist literary critics have opposed such beliefs to the male biases, which, they argue have pervaded both literature and criticism. In the latter part of our century, feminist critics have built up a body of criticism that focuses on women as characters in literature, and writers of literature.

In addition, feminist criticism also focuses on not just the woman as a reader, but on what Elaine Showalter calls "gynocriticism"--- a criticism that concerns itself with developing the female model for analysing all literary works written by women from the female perspective, in all spheres of their production, motivation and interpretation; as well as remain opposed to phallocentrism. According to Showalter (1977:190):

> Gynocriticism constructs a female framework for the analysis of women in literature to develop new models based on the study of female experience, rather than to adopt male model and theories. In line with the above position, gynocriticism uses a female viewpoint to evaluate images, integrates female intelligence and experiences and reject limitations that female characters were usually subjected to in literary texts. Gynocentric literature reflects a conscious effort

> by women to place women's experiences at the centre as opposed to the male work view.

Gynocriticism affords women the liberty to express themselves as women; and to also project the woman in totality in literary criticism.Following in the introspective footsteps of de Beauvoir (1949), the trio of French feminists, Helene Cixous (1975), Luce Irigaray (1985) and Julia Kristeva (1980), drew from the psychoanalytic premise of Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida (in Tyson Lois, 2006:29) and exhort women to have "a feminine writing that would issue from the unconscious, the body, from a radically reconceived subjectivity, so as to circumvent what they held to be phallocentric discourse".Cixous advanced the feminist discourse by theorizing *ecriture feminine* (feminine writing). In her "*Le RivedelaMeduse*" ("The Laugh of the Medusa") (1975), using the metaphor of the Medusa, she charges women to claim their place in the writing world; "write yourself, your body must be heard". "Writing is for you, you are for you; your body is yours… Write, let no one hold you back, let nothing stop you: not man, not the imbecilic capitalist machinery and not yourself" (246-247). For Cixous, the only means of obtaining female legitimacy is through the power of textual expression; she urges that:

> It is by writing, from and toward women, and by taking up the challenge of speech which has been governed by the phallus, that women will confirm women in a place other than that which is reserved in and by the symbolic, that is, in a place other than silence. They shouldn't be conned into accepting a domain which is the margin or the harem (p.251).

Similarly, Irigaray (1985) avers that, the bulk of women's subjugation takes place in the form of psychological repression, enacted via the medium of language in a male-dominated world. She notes that Sigmond Freud's theory, although ground-breaking, nonetheless, projected the masculine fear of castration onto women by hypothesising that they suffer from phallus envy. She desired that women should define themselves and forge a place of their own outside the patriarchal culture. Theorising the notion of womanspeak, that is, a woman's language, which only women understand, Irigaray (1985), further posits that language is the means through

which women are programmed within patriarchy; hence, it should be the vehicle to get beyond it.Kristeva (1980) concurs with Irigaray, that language is used as a control mechanism against women; hence, she theorises the semiotic dimension of language – not the semiotic field of language - as a way of getting beyond patriarchy by both women and men.The asserted goal of feminist literary criticism is to deconstruct the age-old representation of women characters in literary works and elevate the status of female authors. However, feminist theory has not fully achieved this;perhaps, partly because of its attempt to, recentre itself as the only vehicle through which women's justice issues can be resolved. This tendency makes it difficult for diverse expressions;a fact often well articulated by Third World women critics, who argue that women are not a monolithic entity hence, Western feminism cannot suffice.

In the argument between Third World Women and the Western feminists, "One perspective lays blame on Western Feminist theorists for silencing the African woman in the very speech intended to liberate her from oppression," Lyons (2004:4) charges. This perspective posits that Western feminism is not cognisant of the complex realities of the Third World Women. African women critics, such asChikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1985),Carol Boyce Davies (1986), Chandra TilpadeMohanty (1991), Clenora Hudson-Weems (1993), Gwendolyn Mikell (2003), MolaraOgundipe Leslie (1994) ObiomaNnaemeka (1994) and Mary E. ModupeKolawole (1997) have questioned the homogeneity of Western feminism. They posit that the pluralism, fluidity and dynamism of the different cultural matrix and issues bordering on race, class and cultural distinctiveness, coupled with the confrontational attitude towards the other half of humanity,renders the idea of "universalising" feminist discourse a problematic. The resultant consequences of all these have emerged, leading to the fragmentations of feminism into different "isms": post-colonial feminism, Chicana feminism,

Third World feminism, African feminism, Africana womanism, Womanism, Stiwanism and Motherism, (Kolawole, 1997).

1.8 Western Feminist Discourse

There are a multiplicity of reasons at the heart of the rejection of Western feminism by both African and the Third World women. In Africa, Western feminism has proved inadequate in addressing the myriad of problems besetting the African woman. The inescapable post-colonial tinctures of the ever present hand of the World Bank, neo-imperialism, the "internationalisation of racism" and the subtle "feminisation of poverty", (Kolawole, 1997:12) are often more real to the African woman's suffering than gender binaries. Many African countries today are still grappling with frequent political instability, famine and poverty. In all these, women and children are the most affected, (Kolawole, 1997:12).At this juncture, a cursory look at the core doctrines of some Western feminist's theory becomes imperative. Liberal feminism advocates gender justice in the society. Its proponents insist on equal opportunities irrespective of the several gender differences, and also emphasise the enactment of legal structures that would address all forms of oppression and discrimination against women. Liberal feminists, also believe in the centrality of the family, but, ironically see the woman's role as normal and necessary in maintaining family stability. Marxist feminists, however, regard class stratification as the source of inequality, and, therefore, blame capitalism for women's oppression. They believe there is an intricate relationship between gender and the economy and the oppression of women as being beneficial to the capitalist society. However, Marxist feminists ignore the fact that women's oppression goes beyond the question of gender. Economically powerful women can oppress less economically stable women.

The core tenets of Western radical feminism, underscores the issue of cultural relevance and biological reproduction, which, it argues, dis-empowers the women. Dominant in their

feminists discourse is the argument that patriarchy undermines women's sexuality. Many Western radical feminists have proposed "very overt demonstrations of sexuality and sexual freedom" (Kolawole, 1997:13). They often question conventional concepts of biological and reproductive roles. Shalsa Smith Firestone (1970) in Kolawole(1997:13), in fact,proposes a neutralisation of reproductive roles, in line with the lesbian calls for "*in vacuo*" reproduction; while for Marge Peirson(in Kolawole, 1997:13), an ideal utopian world is that in which both genders have the options of "engendered" reproduction. Radical feminism symbolises the rage of feminist women against patriarchaldomination. This idea by these Western feministspresents the basis for feminist lesbians, but ignores other women's cultures, which for instance, excludes the needs of African women, who revere motherhood in a culture where childbirth is regarded as the ultimate sign of womanhood. Furthermore, Judith Butler, a gender theorist, has equally questioned the biological differences in both sexes. She theorises in her book,*Gender Trouble* (1990) that:

> The discomfort of the sexes, assume that heterosexuality is a cultural construct. So women are terrorised by the men and forced to be feminine and should behave so; thus, gender does not follow from sex but sex from gender. Sex is not a natural fact but an effect of performative acts and this must be constantly restaged especially on clothing and behaviour.

This proposed delineation of the natural biological differences by these feminists is, as far as many African and Third World women are concerned, inappropriate, unpleasant and alien to their world conception.Butter's is not a lone voice in the call for an effacement of the natural biological differences in both genders. Furthermore, some radical feminists have advocated for the subversion of patriarchy and its paraphernalia, as they ape masculinity, male symbols and their affiliations. Nonetheless, many African women are not unmindful of how patriarchy is used as a manipulative tool of subjugation and oppression against them. They, in fact, struggle to resist these oppressions, while at "the same time, they recognise the need to unite with their men in concerted effort to reject racist and imperialist subjugation" (Kolawole

1997:13). Another fundamental predicament posed by Western feminists is their extraneous and provocative definitions of feminism. In Jill Johnson's opinion, a working definition of feminism is that which liberates women and effaces all men:

> We don't have to have anything to do with men at all. They've taken care of themselves. Feminism at heart is a massive compliant, lesbianism is the solution…until all women are lesbians there will be no true political revolution (1985:158).

In Peggy Kornegger's view (in Kolawole, 1997:15), feminism is a "many-headed monster which cannot be destroyed by singular decapitation".So, it is not surprising, that the majority of non Western women find this egregious attitude of these Western feminists problematic. For many African women, lesbianism is an aberration of self-expression that is completely alien to their world-view; hence, it is not even an option worth givin a thought therefore, it absolutely cannot be a solution to African women's problems.The condescending attitude and white solipsism towards women of African descent and their Third World female sisters are some of the many reasons for the rejection of Western feminism. Bell Hooks, an African-American author of the*Feminist Theory From Margin To Center* (1984:11) states thus:

> The condescension they (European Feminists) directed at black women was one of the means they employed to remind us that the women's movement was theirsthat we were able to participate because they allowed it, even encouraged it; after all, we were needed to legitimise the process. They did not see us as equal. They did not treat us as equal.

Once the feminist victory had been won, the white feminists thought it expedient to malign non-European women activists through various discriminatory means; and were subtly reminded that they were only a means to an end, the resultant effect of which made them (the European and non-European feminists) thick friends. TrihnMihn ha (1991) in Kolawole (1997:16), an articulate critic of otherness, also reiterates the condescending gender imperialistic solipsism:

> …a group of mighty men attribute to itself a central, dominating position vis a vis other groups, over hauled its particularities and achievements, adopted a protective attitude towards those it classified among the out-groups and wrapped itself up in its own thinking, interpreting the out-group through the in-group mode of reasoning while claiming to speak the minds of both the in-group and the out-group.

African reality and, especially that of African women has been mediated and interpreted by external eye-view for too long. In the light of these, the need for self-re-inscription and self-redefinition through an ideology that is compromising and which addresses the peculiar specificities of non-Western women becomes imperative. Hooks and Andriene Rich(in Kolawole 1997:17), also affirm that women's writing entails a revision and looking back in search of new perspectives. Hooks (1989:182) further stresses that:

> Black women need to construct a model of feminism theorising and scholarship that is inclusive, that widens our options, that enhances our understanding of black experience and gender.

The advocacy for ethnocentric values is "not to heighten binaries in feminism but to decentre it and deconstruct the existing bias so as to reconstruct new ideologies that can bridge existing chasms across imperial divide", (Kolawole 1997:18). Thus, many African and Third World women reject trite stereotypical theories, but seek alternative theories, such that willrecognise their basic humanity first and foremost and erase the previous chasms, without glossing over their cultural peculiarities. Evelyn Brooks (in Kolawole, 1997:18) contends that:

> …women's studies for so long rested upon the unstated premise of racial (i.e. white) homogeneity and with this presumption proceeded to universalise "women's culture" and oppression, while failing to see white's own investment and complicity in the oppression of other groups of men and women.

Many African women are averse to foreign "isms"; they resist any imperialistic attempt to coax them into accepting a foreign ideology that is completely at odds with their cultural specificity. The globalisation of womanhood, therefore, becomes a problematic for the

African women. Hence, new perspectives are emerging to address the African women's collective self-consciousness, as Western feminism is being questioned for posing to be universal, while in reality it is culture specific and construed in racism. According to Kolawole (1997:18):

> African women are at an important intersection in their awareness of the problems of speaking back. Questions are being raised to establish their peculiar cannons of womanhood. The long standing record of African women's mobilisation on the continent are still largely ignored as the impression of her passivity and invisibility becomes even more dominant in western academia.

In view of the above, Daphne Williams-Ntiri, in her introduction to Clenora Hudson-Weems' Aficana Womanism (1993:1), succinctly captures the necessary quest for a different paradigm that would adequately address the peculiar specificity of African women:

> For years African women have found themselves in a serious ideological predicament. In the absence of viable organized women's groups they have been invited to embrace feminism as an instrument of emancipation and status-building. Unfortunately, the majority of Africana women on public platforms have rejected feminism for a multiplicity of reasons. First, there is unquestionable need to reclaim Africana women; second, they are perplexed over the racist origins of the feminist movement; third, they have found little solace in the doctrines and mission of the feminist movement, the realities, struggles and expectations of the two groups remain on different planes. The privileges and advantages still belong to the dominant groups.

For the majority of African women, the quest for a viable ideology is one that underscores varied, but relevant, approaches to women's self-definitionand self-emancipation irrespective of status, class, and ethnic origins. They are more interested in an ideology that can adequately address their complex cultural realities; hence, the emergence of alternate theories, such as Stawanism, Motherism, African feminism, and Womanism.

1.8.1 Stiwanism

Stressing the need for a valid African paradigm, African feminist and critic, MolaraOgundipe Leslie (1994:549), advances STIWANISM (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa) as a viable alternative to western feminism, "to bypass the combative discourses that ensue whenever one raises the issue of feminism in Africa".

1.8.2 Motherism

Catherine Acholonu (1995:110), evolves what she calls "Motherism", an ideology which is "Africa's alternative to Western feminism and denotes motherhood, nature and nurture, … it is a multidimensional theory, which involves the dynamics of ordering, reordering, creating structures, building, rebuilding in cooperation with Mother Nature at all levels of human endeavour".

1.8.3 African feminism

ObiomaNnaemeka, in her Introduction to *Sisterhood, Feminism and Power: From Africa to Diaspora (1998),* articulates African feminism asfeminism that is not reactive; it is proactive; it has a life of its own that is rooted in the African environment, based on "power-sharing, complimentarity, accommodation, compromise, negotiation and inclusiveness".ChiomaOpara in John Yeseibo (2015:610), in accordance with Nnaemeka's argument, considers African feminism as an ideology that is "committed to the quest for total freedom of the colonised African men and women [and also] recognises the fact that the freedom of the African woman is hinged on that of her man".Filomena Steady, in her article, "African Feminism: A Worldwide Perspective" (1996), explicates African feminism as an ideology that "fosters parallel autonomy, communalism, and cooperation for the preservation of life, rather than the framework of dichotomy, individualism, competition and opposition identifiable with

Western feminism" (p.7). Steady further emphasises the thrust of the complementarity of African strands of feminism in Nnaemeka (1998:12), thus:

> For women, the male is not "the other" but part of the human same. Each gender constitutes the critical half that makes the human whole. Neither sex is totally complete in itself to constitute a unit by itself. Each has and needs a complement, despite the possession of unique features of its own.

According to Mikell (2003:109-110), African feminism is not fixated on the female "body"; it does not advocate woman's autonomy from the "victimiser"; nor does it question the value of marriage or motherhood; rather, it is intensely pro-democratic and supportive of a sort of rapprochement between the pure market economics and justice economics". To this end, African feminism also includes economic emancipation for the African woman.For Davies (1986), African feminist criticism is defined within the cultural imperatives in which it operates; and it has engaged in some critical activities, which are categorised as follows: 1) Developing the canon of African women writers; 2) Examining stereotypical images of women in African literature; 3) Studying African women writers and the development of an African female aesthetic; and 4) Examining women in oral traditional literature (p.567). Nonetheless, Hudson-Weems(1993:19) views, the term "African feminism" connotes an alignment with Western feminism; "the name itself, African feminism, is problematic, as it naturally suggests an alignment with feminism, a concept that has been alien to the plight of Africana women from its inception". She further stresses that "mainstream feminism is women co-opting themselves into mainstream patriarchal values" (p.187). Many African women see Western feminism as imperialistic and, as such, regard Western feminists with suspicion, as those who are not interested in fighting injustice against women, but rather, desire power for themselves.

1.8.4 Womanism

The nomenclature of"womanism", as a literary, theory was thrust into public consciousness by Alice Walker in her classical book, *In Search Of OurMother's Garden* (1983), when she used it to denote the changes that occur in mature womanhood, when the woman becomes "dedicated to the survival and completeness of a whole people, male and female". ChikwenyoOkonjoOgunyemi also used the word, womanism in her article, "Womanism: the Dynamics of Contemporary Black Female Novel in English" (1985). However, the socio-political consciousness that informed womanism precedes its naming and it is neitherahistorical nor recent.Similarly,the socio-political consciousness of African women that gave rise to womanism is not recent. The concept of female self-empowerment is not new to African women, nor is it a Western import. Women in Africa have been known to be self-assertive and self-conscious of their reality.

Western feminists' emancipation, according to historical accounts, began in the1800's, (Orjinta Ikechukwu,2013:54) with the suffragettes' movement, but African women's mobilisation hadbegun long before the Western feminist's movement. Unfortunately, their achievements were not often acknowledged; nonetheless, the African women were known to have mobilised to resist colonial incursion; and were a formidable threat to the colonialists. Kolawole (1997:43) argues that:

> African women's mobilisation and struggle is older than many scholars acknowledge. History, sociology, anthropology, oral testimony, and oral literature confirm the longstanding nature of these people's rejection of subjugation and dynamic self-assertion and empowerment that have remained largely unnoticed in modern academia.

There is a catalogue of African women rulers and leaders who had charted their people's histories in a remarkable way, while the marks left by collective group actions remain indelible (David Sweetman, 1984; Bolanle Awe, 1993 in Kolawole, 1997: 43). This is in

spite of the one-sided documentations of stereotypes by European scholars, historians and ethnographers. The notion that self-empowerment is a Western import is a misnomer. There are documented records of great women of strength in Africa and Nigeria in particular, since the first century that reveals prototypes of self-assertion, both in the social and political domains. According to Sa'adAbubakar(in Kolawole, 1997: 45):

> Women have been quite active socially and politically, in the affairs of their community in Nigeria. The northern part of the country is full of many examples. In Borno, women officials such as the Magira (Queen Mother), the Gumsu and the Magaram, the official elder sister of the Mai (Ruler), wielded tremendous power and influence right from the time of the establishment of the Sefuwa dynasty.

Significantly, African women were very visible prior to the 19th century and they had influenced their society positively through individual and collective mobilisation. Many examples of such women still abound in local folk stories, including, from Nigeria, Queen Amina of Zazzau; Queen Daurama of Daura; Queen Idia of Benin. However, they lost some of their influence during colonial incursion. From these, it is imperative that African woman have always exhibited the womanist consciousness. The assumption and perception of docility, passivity and invisibility of the African woman necessitates a self-inscription and self-re-definition.

Womanism is understood as the philosophical thought of women of African descent, which seeks to correct centuries-old patriarchal and imperialist injustice against women. Womanism is ethnically and culturally rooted. It does not seek to negate differences; rather, it seeks to harmonise and coordinate the differences, so that they do not become irreconcilable and degenerate into violence**.**The womanist, therefore, is one who strives for self-assertion and self-commitment, justice and fairness for herself and all oppressed people; and also appreciates her difference with others as well. According to Walker (1983: XII) the womanist is one who strives for survival and wholeness of her people; she is:

> A Black feminist or feminist of colour… who loves other women, sexually and/or asexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture…sometimes loves individual men sexually and/or non-sexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people male and female. Womanist is to feminism as purple is to lavender.

This definition of womanism, much like some definitions of feminism, subscribes to lesbianism. The likening of the womanist to feminism clearly affirms Walker's womanism's affinity to feminism. Ogunyemi (In Layli, 2006:23) sees womanism as an all-embracing self-healing global philosophy that celebrates the Black ideal:

> Black womanism is a philosophy that celebrates black roots, the ideals of black life, while giving a balanced presentation of black womandom. It concerns itself as much with the black sexual power tussle as with the world power structure that subjugates blacks. Its ideal is for black unity where every black person has a modicum of power.

Ogunyemi further stresses the dynamic wholeness and self-healing, as well as balanced presentation, of the black woman's realities in diverse positive ways. In this vein, womanism, thus, refers to all efforts of black women activists, scholars and their male counterparts to correct the past injustices against women. Hudson-Weems (1993) expounds the womanist theory in her book,*AfricanaWomanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*. Her womanist thrust underscores a closer affinity among all women of African descent. She emphasises gender reciprocity and complimentarity and the centrality of the family, as well as the need for proper self-naming for the African Woman:

> Africana Womanism emerged from the acknowledgement of a long-standing authentic agenda for that group of women of African descent who needed only to be properly named and officially defined according to their own unique historical and cultural matrix, one that would reflect the co-existence of men and women in a concerted struggle for the survival of their entire family/community (2004:1).

Africana womanism basically defines itself as African women, together in concert with their men, working together to develop their own theory to assess the oppression of colonialism

and neo-imperialism from Western forces, such as feminist hegemony, which she finds inherently racist and neo-patriarchal.Hudson-Weems' emphasis on the need for proper self-naming and the importance of the centrality of the family, affirms the revered status they both occupy in the African belief system. African women do not regard the family as a bane to their self-fulfillment, nor do they, according toZilla Einstein (in Kolawole, 1997:32), see it as "a tool for entrenching capitalist oppression and individualism." Rather, they regard the family as the cornerstone of social growth and moral sustenance.For Kolawole (1997:27), womanism refers to the totality of feminine self-expression, self-assertion and self-retrieval from all forms of subjugation. It is:

> The totality of self-expression and self-realisation in diverse positive ways. This involves eliciting women's positive qualities, ability, self-enhancement, self-esteem, and freedom within African cultural context.

Therefore, being a woman does not entail the erosion of feminine qualities; and it, definitely does not involve the rejection of the male. The womanist is a strong, independent minded, mature, self-assertive, self-conscious, resourceful,creative,dynamic, invincible,resilient,flexible and nurturing woman who is not weak, passive or docile. However, this is not to suggest that gentleness, sensuality, female-physical adornments and other traditionally feminine accepted notion of womanhood are not equally important to her. The womanist does not regard as a compliment if she is treated as an art collection in a gallery, or a subject of eroticisism. However, she would accept it as an aspect of her feminine privileges, if the man offers to do the strenuous work for her. The womanist is not confrontational in her quest for self-assertion. On the contrary, she prefers female/male reciprocity and dialogue, as a means to achieve this.In contrast with Western feminism, womanism in terms of gender conflict can through dialogue, negotiate reconciliation. Dialogue permits negotiation in a conflict situation and helps to settle differences; and to establish both connection and individuality. Since problem solving is multi-faceted, the

negotiating skills of both genders and their willingness to make concession are equally necessary in a dialogue situation. Kolawole (1997:35-36) further emphasises the importance of dialogue, thus:

> A dialogic perspective is more wholesome and valid to the African woman…much within African belief systems is predicated on this philosophy of life as negotiating of values, as a continuum, an intersection between the past, the present and the future. The world is conceived as a negotiation of diverse convictions and so heteroglossia is more valid to any African thoughts as opposed to monovocality…this underscores the plurality of perspective as a logical sequence from the African nego-theory. The valences of conceptualisation of human values are therefore multiple and sometimes assume a metaphysical importance. African womanist ideology derives from this dialogic outlook. This approach as bearing some relevance to the solution. It is not based on tension or argument but on a recognition that diverse approaches can exist side by side.

Mainstream feminists, however, disagree with the womanist dialogic stance. They consider it a sign of weakness and the undermining of authentic feminism. This claim reflects lack of genuine appreciation for the proliferation of the different perspectives. Such attitude subtly implies that feminism is a much superior ideological perspective and, as such, all women should be feminists. It is, therefore, contradictory as some feminists have unequivocally stated that feminism is not designed to include the black woman. Catherine Clinton, a white feminist, for instance, posits that, "feminism primarily appealed to educated and middle-class White women, rather than Black and White working-class women" (in Hudson-Weems, 2004:49). Thus,the coordinates of race and class strike home the elements of essentialism dominant in western feminism. Mohanty, in her article titled, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse" (1984), criticises Western feminism as being ethnocentric and characterised by "internal racism, classism and homophobia". According to her, the western feminist theory projects itself as a universal phenomenon, such that, its profoundly Western biases are disguised.

With the above arguments put forth by these African women critics, womanism is clearly not an extension of Western feminism; it cannot be conflated with white mainstream feminism, aithough, they both advocate for a better condition of women.Womanism is essentially a social change perspective rooted in the African women's collective consciousness that has existed "beneath the radar"(Layli Phillips, 2006: xxi), from dominant consciousness. To the womanist, understanding the total package of sexism and racism, as a holistic and comprehensive programme is imperative. The womanist believes that sexism and racism are both sides of the same coin and are mutually exclusive; in each case, it has to do with colour and sex; and in both cases, it borders on discrimination. While the womanist understands the common nexus that runs between racism and sexism, the feminist on the other hand, has the tendency to exhibit both racism and sexism, rather unselfconsciously. Hence, the African womanist's conviction that Western feminism has its antecedents construed in racism, as such they regard it with suspicion.

Unlike Western feminism, womanism does not accord privilege to racism and sexism. In the womanist view, issues of racism and sexism are not a privilege; rather, all sites of oppression are highlighted. Womanism abhors oppression in all its ramifications and accepts harmonisation, fairness and justice, and respects multiple perspectives. As stated earlier, the dialogic perspective is the means by which womanism mediates through differences and conflicts, so as to establish a relationship. Womanism's dynamic, fluid and enriched interpolated perspectives allow for what Chela, Sandoval (2000) in Phillips (2006: xxvii) called "differential consciousness" that is, the proliferation of divergent self-expression (religious, cultural, ideology etc), as opposed to the dogmatic and rigid posture of Western feminism.Womanism is not about erecting walls of demarcation, rather, it is about building networks of inclusiveness and positive interrelationships among all women of African descent and their male counterparts.Womanism's values do not advocate the effacement of

natural biological differences; it endorses motherhood and respects the sanctity of the family. The womanist is not a male hater and, as such, does not advocate the effacement of gender binaries like her Western feminist sisters; hence, sherecognises gender complimentarity in the re-construction of the society.The womanist however, perceives herself as the companion of her male counterpart, with whom she struggles in concerted effort to eliminate the externalised colonial oppression**.** The womanist, therefore, is "any African woman who has the consciousness to situate the struggle within African cultural realities by working for a total and robust self-retrieval of the African woman" (Kolawole, 1997:34).

Furthermore, womanism does have its own limitation as no theories are perfect; all theories have their own limitations. The womanist literary theory may, thus, equally have its limitation. For instance, since womanism's historical antecedent is rooted in black ideals; this makes it open to criticism. It may be viewed as being equally construed in race sentiments by non-Africans; and, as such, they could regard it as one of those "Black things", thereby creating a racialised suspicion. Critics of the theory have argued that racialised connotations will further increase the race sentiments. However, in failing to recognise differences, that is, sex, race and gender, one fails to see the diverse uniqueness in people. Womanism is not cast in stone with set rules; it acknowledges that one's ethnic and cultural roots be embraced; hence, it abhors racism, but appreciates ethnicity and cultural heritage. Moreover, womanism is a globalised philosophy that is embedded in all cultures; it just needs to be discovered.Wonanism's dialogic credo is another limitation pointed out by Western feminist critics,who argue that it is not confrontational in approach. Radical feminists see this as a soft-pedal approach in resolving the differences between both genders. Womanism also emphasises mutual reciprocity and gender complementarity. This has often created a backlash against it, especially by the Western feminists, who view it as a sell-out to the feminist cause. In their own defence, proponents of the philosophy argue back

thatWomanism does not claim to have all the keys to solving the injustices against women, but emphasises, differences so that they can be understood and accepted.

This study, therefore, is informed by the African womanist concerns about the experiences and reality of the African woman. The theoretical framework is the womanist literary theory and the application of this theory is located within Kolawole's (1997) concept of womanist poetics so identified: (1) gender reciprocity; (2) communal agency; (3)self-affirmation; (4) female bonding anddialogue (5).Therefore, the autobiographies will be analysed from these five interrelated womanist poetics**.**The study will also analyse the use of photographic technique as claim of truth in autobiography in both texts.Gender reciprocity entails both the male and female work together as equal for the upliftment of the society while engaging in role-sharing. The patriarchal notion of the man to rule and dominate the female is abhorred in womanist aesthetics. The womannist is not a hater of the other half of humanity; hence both genders compliment each other without undermining their individual personhood. In so doing, they build bridges of inclusiveness and not walls of demarcation.Also, Womanism's collective consciousness manifests itself in communal mothering, which can be both physical and biological and the resulting caretaker roles communal mothering often engenders, as well as promotes the cultural mothering that emboldens individual, familial and communal identity formulation and nurturing. Self-affirmation refers to the expression of the self through the power of speech. This entails that the womanist thoughts and emotions be used to create positive speech to affirm and assert herself. Ogundipe, at several instances in her narrative used words to affirm her identity and to assert her self worth. The womanist gender reciprocity,womanist communal agency and self-affirmation are exemplified in Ogundipe's autobiographical narrative.

Womanist poetics also embodies the ideals of dialogue, female bonding which "consists of bringing out and enhancing common and positive African values" (Kolawole, 1994:197) and

ethics of caring that emphasise individual uniqueness, personal expressiveness, empathy for other human beings. All these womanist qualities profile Ogbe. She is emotional, caring, empathetic and family-oriented and also prefers dialogue to open confrontation. Womanism, therefore, becomes a viable frame for analysing the set autobiographical texts: *Up-Country Girl* and the *Crumbs Off The Wife's Table* by PhebeanAjibolaOgundipe and Hilda Ogbe, respectively. The underlying ethics of the womanist literary theory underscores varied, but relevant, approaches to women's self-definition and, as such, is important to this study, as it facilitates an awareness of the status and contributions of African women to their society.

1.9 Oganisation of the Study

This dissertation consists of an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter, which is the introduction, establishes the topic and maps out the whole body of the work. It defines the scope of the dessertation and spells out the justification for the study. The chapter also outlines the statement of the problem and the theoretical framework as well. Chapter Two is the review of related literature in this field of study. The chapter attempts to examine some critical analysis on women's autobiography in general and the African (Nigerian) women's autobiography in particular.

Chapter Three is an analysis of Ogundipe's *Up-Country Girl,*which was firstpublished in 2005. It analyses how Ogundipe constructs her subjectivity as a strong and assertive African woman, both within her community, Esa Oke, and overseas, as well as her photographic self-constructionand the various ways in which the women in her autobiographical narrative mediate their agency within their local community. The analysis highlights the practice of communal nurturing of children in the community. Ogundipe's retrospective narrative demonstrates that, indeed, the African woman's reality is contrary to her perceived invisibility and docility.The fourth chapter analyses Ogbe's *The Crumbs Off The Wife's Table (2001).* Ogbe, although Jewish by birth, is a Nigerian by naturalisation, constructs her

identity as an African womanist who is strong, assertive and able to survive against all odds. The focus of the analysis is on how she mediates her subjectivity and self-assertion in the face of marrital hostility, thereby countering the depiction of the African woman as being oppressed by the patriarchal structure.

1.10 Conclusion

This introductory chapterlays the outline of the background of thestudy; it has discussed the evolution of autobiography from the Western perspective and the emergence of feminism. It also highlights some feminist thoughts, such as the radical Western feminists' uncompromising view that regards the other half of humanity as an enemy, with whom they are at war. This poses a problematic; and, as such, does not suffice as a viable theory. Rather,it underscores the need for an all-embracing theoretical paradigm that can address the women's cultural specificity, which justifies the adoption of the African womanist theory, as dileanated by Kolawole (1997). The womanist theory seeks to uphold the African woman's self-pride and dignity and resists the depiction of the African woman as being disempowered. Womanism promotes harmonised relationship and gender complementarity, as opposed to the radical Western feminism that proposes the effacement of the men from the face of the earth.

This chapter also isthe statement of the problem, which basically is about the negative depictions of the African woman in thedominant discourses. It expresses the assumptions of the study; namely, that the African woman's reality is contrary to these perceived notions; and, as such, she is better placed to define her own reality. The chapter also outlines the research questions that guide the study and its objectives as well. The justification, significance and the scope of the work are equally articulated; mainly arguing thatscholarship studies inthe field of African (Nigerian) women's autobiographical writings are intangible in comparison to that of the increasing number of women's autobiography in the Western

world. The chapter has also described the method for the research and the organisation of the study. In this regard, the next chapter shall review related literature that pertains to women's autobiography in general and the African and Nigerian women's autobiography in particular

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATUREREVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews the literature relevant to the understanding of women's autobiography in general and the African and Nigeria women in particular. It presents a critique on the emergence of women's autobiography and an overview of the development of Nigerian women autobiographical canon as well.The autobiographical genre is an aspect of life writing, which deals with the narrative of real people, written by themselves. Autobiography is derived from the Greek words, *Autos* (self), *Bios* (life) and *Graphien* (writing), meaning self-life-writing. It is assumed to be the simplest of all writing performances, with no set requirements needed other than for the prospective autobiographer to reflect back upon the past and deploy the necessary experiences into a narrative discourse.However, as easy as this may seem, such an undertaking is tantamount to rushing into where even the angels fear to tread, (James Olney, 1980:3), as it entails the admission of the public into an individual's private world.

Although, it is the simplest of all the literary genres, autobiography is, however, the most difficult to define. Critics have proffered diverse views on its definition. Phillip Lejuene, inTsiga Isma'il .A. (2010:17), defines autobiography as "a retrospective prose narrative produced by a real person concerning his own existence, focusing on his individual life, in particular on the development of his personality". This definition embodies all the attributes of autobiography, which must be in prose narrative and about real persons, living or dead and concerning the existence and experiences of the autobiographer.Roy Pascal (1960), another critic, defines autobiography as "a conscious genre, which serves the purpose of self discovery and reconciliation of the self" (p.51). To this end, self-discovery and self-

reconciliation are achieved through a retrospective narrative of the self; the autobiographer makes a conscious effort to detach, the past self from the present self, looks at the past self and selects a convenient point to start the narrative. Similarly, Jerome Buckley endorses this autobiographical self-discovery in his *The Turning Key* (1984:14):

> The ideal autobiography… describes a voyage of self-discovery, a life-journey confused by frequent misdirection's and even crises of identity but reaching at last a sense of perspective and integration. It traces through the alert awakened memory continuity from early childhood to maturity or over old age… And as a work of literature it achieves a satisfying wholeness.

The thrust of the archetypal autobiographical narratives, such as the *Confessions* of Jacques Rousseau (1789) and Saint Augustine's *Confessions (1852),* asserts a linear and chronological journey of the authors' lives from a state of confusion and chaos, through to a climatic stability. Thus, the traditional male autobiography is envisioned as a coherent whole.

Historically, Western paradigms and practices of autobiography have set the parametres by which subsequent autobiographies are gauged. These have partly arisen from the literary and critical works of European privileged males; the resultant outcome is that writings, which are different from the traditional paradigm, are subsequently marginalised, and regarded as inferior and less important. Helen Buss (1994:4) contends that "women's autobiographical writing does not conform to traditional norms, whether the norms are defined by humanist or post-structuralist theory".The humanist theories of autobiography, as delineated by Gusdorf (1956),for instance, emphasise the concept of the isolate individual, arguing that autobiographers thrive only in environments, which promote self-accomplishment and reflection. Gusdorf, in "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" however, asserts a particularly informative and interesting discourse on the understanding of the autobiographical "self". The "isolated being" is the "finite unit" in autobiography which

involves “the complex and agonising sense of the encounter of a man with his image” and also “the mirror in which the individual reflects his own image” (p.32).

As Jelinek (1980) argues, women’s traditional roles do not fit well with the concept of the “isolate selfhood’’ or a cohesive life metaphor. However, neither stance satisfactorily addresses women’s autobiographical works. According to Buss(1994:5**)**, “both versions exclude women’s experience by their assumptions of a history and cultural experience that is made and, by implication, a subjectivity that is gendered male”.The post-structuralist view, as postulated by Paul de Man (1979), posits that autobiography creates order from the chaos of existence, through each autobiographer’s unique metaphor; the desired coherence of the narrative depends on the internal coherence, with which the author perceives himself.

For Olney (1972: 23), autobiography provides an opportunity to know “what man has been, what forms have proved possible to humanity, which is a knowledge that one seeks with the intention more particularly of knowing what man is”. This Gusdorfian theory of the male autobiographical “self” asserts a biased paradigm against the other half of humanity and maligns the knowledge particularly of knowing what the woman is.The history of autobiography in the West is, rather, a projection of male history written by men in the public domain, who occupy enviable positions in society. For centuries, this tradition marginalised women’s autobiography as such, feminist critics have engaged in the “recovery” of women’s autobiographical texts that had hitherto been rendered, “invisible” by the hegemonic patriarchal social order. Women’s autobiographical writings were previously relegated to the margins and regarded as autobiographical fiction and a “biographical information and salty citations (that are) too windy and unreliable” (Smith and Watson, 1998: 4). Stanton (1984:*vii*) in *The Female Autography,* avers that:

> The subject... female autobiographies, memoirs, letters and diaries – represents one of those cases of maddening neglect that have

> motivated feminist scholarship since 1970. This body of writing about the self has remained invisible, systematically ignored in the studies on autobiography that have proliferated in the past fifteen years.

The history of the traditional autobiography reveals that the genre emerged as a cultural discourse that secured the male-centred conception of selfhood and the definition of woman as 'the other' in the patriarchal economy (Smith and Watson, 1992: 39). The fear of eroding the patriarchal tradition either precluded women autobiographers from the genre or compelled them to appropriate the male-self narratives. Thus, effacing their true voices, women autobiographers had to mediate through the patriarchal narrative which, was the only available cultural discourse of autobiography (Smith and Watson, 1992: 19)

Women, for centuries have written and published their autobiographies (Smith and Watson 1998). Smith (1987:50), argues that, "in an androcentric tradition, autobiographical authorisation was unavailable to most women"; and were,"historically absent from both the public sphere and the modes of written narratives, women were compelled to tell their stories differently, and had done so, at least since medieval autobiographer Margery Kempe". However, not until the 1980s were their autobiographical writings acknowledged as worthy of study. As the critic Carolyn Heilbrun (1988:60) notes, "Only in the last third of the twentieth century have women broken through to the realisation of the narratives that have been controlling their lives".Shirley Neuman (1995:221) posits that under traditional "autobiographical structures, exists the notion that the successful autobiography is the one that re-presents a fully autonomous individuated self", which is deemed the norm for men's autobiography. This criterion is often inapplicable as regarding the autobiographies of marginalised people, African women inclusive.

2.2 Women's Autobiography

Mapping the historical continuum of women's autobiography is essential to define the specific features of the autobiographical genre. Traditional theories of autobiography have tended to be subjective and to marginalise women's autobiographical writing; while the male constructed autobiographical paradigm by male critics is upheld as the standard universal that defines the social arrangement and literary space; thus, denying women access to the autobiographical enterprise. Women's autobiographies were previously regarded as not being complex enough for study; hence, they were excluded from the literary canon. The non-inclusion of the women's autobiography, however, was deliberate, as it enabled the male critics to assert their non-existence and render them invisible. The generic/male experience typified as knowledge, culture and history elevates the male, thereby putting the women at a disadvantage; thus, suppressing their works. In this regard, Smith (1987:59) notes that "already elided, woman now confronts the impossibility of ever finding a space in which to assert her own agency".

Gusdorf in a chapter in Olney (1980),(ed.)*Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*, theorises a paradigm of individualism, in which he asserts that "autobiography is not possible in a cultural landscape where consciousness of self does not, properly speaking, exist". For Gusdorf, the prerequisite for autobiography is the concept of an "isolated being", a conscious awareness of "the singularity of each individual life"; that is, a self-consciousness that is the late product of a specific civilisation", by which he means the Western male civilisation. Gusdorf's concern of the possibility of autobiography in a cultural landscape, as Shari Benstock (1988:15), notes:

> Would seem that autobiography is not to be found outside our cultural area… it expresses a concern peculiar to Western man, a concern that has been of good use in his systematic conquest of the universe and that he has communicated to men of other cultures;

> but these men will thereby have been annexed by a sort of intellectual colonising to a mentality that was not their own.

This peculiar concern for the Western male is, according to Benstock (1988) "psychically healthy" by its complete unfragmented state. The individualistic model premised on the "Isolated being" by Gusdorf is also advanced by other male autobiographical critics, such as Olney (1980), George Misch (1950), William Spengemann (1980) and Wayne Shumaker (1954), who, in his history of autobiography in England states that women's autobiography has some "feminine" qualities that marginalised their contributions to the advancement of the autobiographical genre. It does appear that all these critics restricted their focus to the lives of such "great men" as Benjamin Franklin, Jacques Roseau and Saint Augustine, because they could find no matching figures among the women.The autobiographer, as Olney (1972:22-23) explains, is "surrounded and isolated by his own consciousness, an awareness grown out of a unique heredity and unique experience…separate selfhood is the very motive of creation". One also learns from Olney "what man has been, what forms have proved possible to humanity, which is the knowledge that one seeks with the intention more particularly of knowing what man is" (p.23). This gendered discourse encapsulates the entrenched hold that masculinity had on the critical assessment of the autobiographical genre for a long time.

Gusdorf and Olney's contributions to the advancement of the autobiographical genre are undeniable; however, their individualistic model of the autobiographical self constitutes a problematic. The self-construction and self-consciousness are marginally different for the women;the notion of the "Isolated being," premised on the "self" as an arbiter, is endemically projected as being male and Western.Ranjana Harish, in her seminal article, "In the Cultural Hall of Mirrors: Issues of Gender, Genre Incompatibility of Women's Autobiography" (1998), notes that these male critics have greatly advanced the understanding of autobiography, however, their insistence on the individualistic concept of the self has obscured the significance of women's autobiography in the genre.

The 1980s marked the emergence of an alternative theory for the criticism of women's autobiography. Feminist autobiographical theorists, such as Patricia Meyer Spacks, Estelle Jelinek, Shari Benstock, Nancy Chodorow, Sheila Robowtham, Susan Stanford Friedman, Sidonie Smith and Mary G. Mason, have challenged the traditional theories of the "Isolate Selfhood," arguing against its applicability to women's autobiography. They contend that self-construction is different for the women since, like Friedman posits, the emphasis on individualism and separateness does not take cognisance of the importance of group identity for women and the differences in socialisation in the construction of the male and female gender identity. According to her (1998:79):

> Individualistic paradigms do not take into account the central role collective consciousness of self plays in the lives of women and minorities. They do not recognise the significance of interpersonal relationships and community in women's self-definition.

Men's autobiographical self-construction is dominated by individual consciousness, because, for the men, individuation is "dissociation," separate from all others; while for women, "association" is central to their individuation. The "I" in men's autobiography, according to Benstock (1988:20), is always at the centre of every narrative, while the women's "I" does not stand at the centre but rather, goes into the periphery or margins, as a dotted "I":

> The self that would reside at the centre of the text is decentred and often is absent altogether in women's autobiographical texts. The very requirements of genre are put into question by the limits of gender- which is to say because these two terms are etymologically linked, genre itself raises questions about gender.

Mason, in her essay "The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers" (1980:210), highlights the "poetics of difference" in women and men's autobiographies. She argues that "nowhere in women's autobiographies do we find the patterns established by the two prototypical male autobiographers, Augustine and Rosseau; and conversely, male writers never take up the archetypal models of Julian, Margery Kemp, Margaret Cavendish and Anne

Bradstreet". Emphasising her argument, Mason states that the constant element in women's writing "is the sort of evolution and delineation of an identity by way of alterity" (p.231). Using an enssentialised "woman" to contrast the egoistic self-staging of "the drama of the self" in Rousseau's *Confessions*, with the self-relational construction of these – great originals – women writing "radically the story of a woman" (p.235), Mason posits that, for women to discover their identities, they need to recognise another consciousness, by the grounding of identity through relation to the chosen 'other' …to enable women to write openly about themselves" (p.210). Women's autobiography, she notes, does not merely reflect the individual; rather, it reflects a body collective by way of alterity.Although Mason's assertion of the feminine "self-in-relation to the other" rightly critiques the "androcentric quality" of traditional autobiographical paradigm, it, however, obscures as much as it reveals, because it creates an illusory self that does not transcend social and cultural conditions. Watson (1998:71) notes, thus, that, women's positions "with respect to ethnicity and class and their modes of self-identification are not only divergent but organised within a structure of power relations and cultural interplay".

Jelinek, in her *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism (1980:10),* emphasises the importance of the "narrative form" and the "fragmentation of the self" in female and male autobiographies. She posits that differences manifest in content and style in female and male autobiographies. Contrasting the autobiographies of women and men, Jelinek states that men, at the level of content, dissociate themselves from "success stories and histories of their era," while they focus on their personal lives. Women's autobiographical narratives, on the other hand, tend to focus on personal and domestic details and describe their connections to other people.Men, however, as Jelinek further observes, "aggrandise themselves in autobiographies that idealise their lives or cast them into heroic moulds to project their universal import" (p.14-15). The chauvinistic male view of history infers that a good autobiography not only

centres on its author, but also reveals his connectedness to the rest of history, which mirrors his era. Thus, male autobiographers concentrate on chronicling the progress of their public life; the professional and intellectual aspects, which are, for the most part, success stories. Augustines's*Confessions* (1582), is essentially a philosophical documentation of his time. The narrative traces the progressive vicissitudes of his spiritual journey through to his successful conversion. Similarly, Rousseau's *Confessions* (1789) and OlusegunObasanjo's*My Watch* (2015), also project a constructed self-image of confidence, gallantry and accomplishment.

Men, at the level of temporality, Jelinek notes, shape the events of their lives into coherent whole, characterised by linearity, harmony, and orderliness; while the women's texts are characterised by irregularity, which has a "disconnected, fragmentary… pattern of diffusion and diversity" in discontinuous forms, because "the multidimensionality of women's socially conditioned roles seems to have established a pattern of diffusion and diversity when they write" (p.16-17). Women's autobiographies are a complex interplay of social connectedness and private narratives, which rarely mirror their professional lives and the histories of their era. Their narratives are, rather, about personal and domestic details of their lives and that of their families; not because they do not have professional stories to narrate about their lives, but because they would rather play down those aspects of their lives. Their narratives reflect the quality of their everyday lives – which are analogous to the fragmentary, interrupted, and formless nature of their lives (Benstock, 1988:19); nonetheless, women's autobiographies are marked by consistent discontinuity.

Kempe, one of the "great originals" in *The Book of Margery Kempe*(in Smith and Watson, 2001:36) prioritises both the hostile and friendly people she encounters on her pilgrimage over her religious progress. Although Jelinek's argument about women's fragmentary and discontinuous narratives assert a model of coherence for men's autobiography, it,

nonetheless, asserts an image of private strength and passivity of self-construction that reveals self-consciousness and collective identity, which, according to Robowtham (1975:46), could be a source for a "new consciousness" of self.Benstock provides an explanation for the fragmentation in women's autobiography, arguing that traditional male autobiography denies its fragmentation for the sole purpose of appearing whole, which may have been driven by the "values" of Structuralism that demand unity and organisation. Benstock (1988:20) queries: "On what authority can we ascribe certain forms of discontinuity to the female, rather than to the male, assigning them as functions of gender rather than of social class, race, or sexual preference?" Evidently, the male tradition of autobiography projects an "untruthful" unity, so this fragmentation of self cannot be attributed to women autobiography only.

Stanton in her "autogynography: is the subject Different?" (1984:137), points out the binary oppositions, such as "private/public, inner/outer dichotomies that mark generic differences in our symbolic system", asserting that these dichotomies, associate the female with personal and intimate concerns, while the male is associated with professional achievement.She also notes that some autobiographical feminist critics define intimacy in women's autobiography as the main emphasis on relation of self to others. However, according to her, this "relatedness was traced to the dependence imposed on women by the patriarchal system, or then it was upheld as a fundamental female quality" (p.138). Stanton further argues that, the patriarchate, which defines the woman as an object or the "other", writing "autogynography", thus, becomes therapeutic; and also provides an opportunity "to constitute a female subject..., by creating the subject, an autogynography gives the female "I" substance, through the inscription of an interior and an anterior" (p.139). Furthermore, stereotypical cultural mores make the construction of "self" difficult for the female; hence, she mediates her autobiographical narrative in complex subjectivities. In contrast with the "teleological aims"

of traditional male autobiographies, the act of writing autobiography for them is typically synonymous with identity and subjectivity, Heilbrun (1988:21), contends:

> Women do not look back to recreate themselves in keeping with some finally perceived ideal; rather, they look back towards the moment at which they found the courage to move forward into as yet un-narrated and unexplored ways of living.

This discovery of a voice then becomes exhilarating for the woman, as writing her narratives celebrates her as a writer through the transcendence of a biased defined condition of being "woman", as Nancy K. Miller (1988) explains.Robowtham, in *Woman's Consciousness, Man's World* (1975:40), argues that the woman experiences herself as an entirely unique entity, because she is always aware of how she is defined by the patriarchal culture. Like Jacques Lacan, Robowtham uses the metaphorical mirror to describe the development of women's consciousness. However, her mirror, unlike Gusdorf's "mirror image of life, its double more clearly drawn – in a sense of the diagram of a destiny", reflects only a surface of the cultural representation into which the woman stares to form her identity. Robowthan (1975:27), posits that:

> The prevailing social order stands as a great and resplendent hall of mirrors. It owns and occupies the world as it is seen and the world as it is seen and heard.

Stretching the argument of the mirror metaphor, Friedman (1988:39) concurs that "the mirror does not reflect back a unique, individual identity to each living woman; rather it projects an image of WOMAN, a category that defines the living woman's identity".On the autobiographical continuum, this specula mirror has been a constant problematic for women, symbolising the cultural cloning and standard prescriptions for women's values. Bella Brodzki and Celeste Schenck (1988:7), remark that "the archetypal female prop of the mirror, has been used variously in relation to women, and almost always against her and she has been consistently framed by the male gaze". Virginia Wolf(1977:41) neatly encapsulates this

assertion as she contends that,"men use women as mirrors to reflect them at twice their natural size".The female autobiographer, thus, trapped in the cultural hall of mirrors like Medusa, is split into two; she oscillates between public and private worlds; and finds it difficult to inhabit either worlds. Thus, she experiences a hiatus between the façade of forced cultural norms and the self projected in the mirror, which is at variance with her authentic self.As Jelinek (1980) notes, women's autobiographical texts, more or less, mirror the unspoken, invisible margins of societal thought which defines and renders them invisible. Constantly conscious of how they are defined culturally, women according to Friedman (1988:39):

> Not recognising ourselves in the reflections of cultural representation, women develop a dual consciousness – the self as culturally defined and the self as different from cultural prescription.

However, in an attempt to have a genuine sense of self, women no longer become "selves in hiding";rather, they write themselves autobiographically as a mechanism to "talk back"; to embody subjectivity; and to, inhabit and inflect a range of subjective "I"s (Smith and Watson, 1998:16). Inso doing, they shatter distorting cultural identities and replace them with a more authentic image of the constructed self; leaving "the sign" of their "presence" in the autobiographical writings. According to Josette Feral (1981:59), these shattering effects of the mirror are fundamental, as they propagate such a:

> Concave, deforming, exploding mirror where man, no longer able to recognise himself seeks in vain the image of this lost unit, which defines him an whose entity he had always wanted to preserve at the price of his own repression and that of the other….

Nonetheless, this historical repression has not suppressed the women's consciousness of self. Since 2000, there has emerged out of the powerful transformations taking place in nations around the world, an increasing number of women's narratives, which engage the relationship of modernity and women's citizenship in the 21st century (Smith & Watson,

2009:24). Women have begun to "writ their own life" and reimaging gender relations. The personal has become public; women's autobiographical narratives now tell complex stories of gender, family and their rise to public prominence as well. Women, Smith writes, "have been producing narratives of their 'rise' to public office and have also been writing their own versions of their rise to public prominence… through the performativity of self-narrating the progressive goal of their advancement in the public sphere" (Smith and Watson, 2009:25).

2.3 Women's Autobiography in Africa and Nigeria

Women autobiography critics have had problems with the Gusdofian theories on autobiography which privileged the Western white male and excludes women writers. The pre-condition according to Gusdorf, for autobiography is the "isolate being". This poses a problematic for women in general and African women in particular. The emphasis on the "sovereign self," ignores the importance of "relational self-hood." By implication, autobiography becomes a "difficult business" asZaynab Alkali admits, (Tsiga,2012:80).

Western autobiographical theories imply acts of self justification, in which the autobiographer projects the self as typically representative of its culture and social values of its society**.** As Bruner Jerome (2001:29) explains, autobiography is an "act of entrenchment", in which the autobiographer presents himself/herself to others and themselves as "culture confirming". In this sense, it becomes a "rhetorical act" in which the autobiographer seeks self-definition in relation to himself/herself and the community. Thus, the African woman's subjective narrative is characteristically entrenched within her community; therebyher subjectivity becomes complicated by the intricate connection between the writing self and that of the communal self. The narrating self is not monolithic, but polyvalent, as it also gets submergewithin the communal self in the autobiographical narratives.

The art of writing autobiography by African women is recent. The earliest recorded female autobiographical representation in Nigeria is believed to have emerged in the 19th century, by Nana Asma'uDanfodiyo, an "outstanding intellectual" (Tsiga, 2012:73), who mediated her subjectivity in lengthy and emotional elegies through casting the personal and public values of others (Tsiga, 2012: 74). this technique has been described by Miller (1997:10), as a style of writing in which "writing about others and otherness becomes a kind of self-writing, as the narrator examines similarities, differences, connections and gaps, and situates herself in relationship to them", (Tsiga, 2012:74).In spite of the growing appeal in the autobiography discourse, the mode of subjectivity by Nana Asma'u has not blossomed into any notable autobiographical tradition (Tsiga, 2012:74). Only a handful of Nigerian women have "dared to tread where the angels fear to tread", as Olney(1980:3) describes it. A critical study of the construction of the African society and culture might reveal some of the reasons responsible for this. Cultural mores, social conventions and an "abiding sense of religious self-censorship" (Abdullahi in Tsiga, 2012:78), perhaps, account for why many African women still find it difficult to openly express their subjectivity in the form of autobiography.

The culture of silence socialises the women to be seen but not heard. This is evident in Wangari, Maathai's autobiography,*Unbowed* (2007), where the leader of her country, President ArapMoi, "Singled me out for opposing the complex. Moi also suggested, that if, I was to be a proper woman in 'The African Tradition' --- I should respect men and be quiet" (p.196).The expectations of the "proper" African woman, is to keep silent, as silence constitutes virtue in the African culture, which requires that one's personal "secrets" remain intact privacy, buried within the individual's soul. Making one's private life public is usually frowned upon in the African societies. Since women's autobiography is a complex interplay of social connectedness, where the private self merges with the communal self, writing the autobiography becomes a daunting task. While Western women autobiographers can afford

the luxury of writing their subjectivity "openly", the African female autobiographer struggles through the maze of inscribing her personal self and the collective self as well. Thus, writing "openly" is tantamount to what Alkali describes as "a striptease… [Where] the ugly parts and bitter parts are often either omitted or dressed up"(Tsiga, 2012:80). The African society has always been a communal one, which submerges the individual self into the collective self and each individual becomes a part of the communal whole.

Despite these constraints on African women's self-reflexive autobiographical narratives in the past, there has emerged an increase in the number of autobiographies written by women toward the end of the 19th century. Several facts are attributable to this, beginning with the expansion of the Western style of education, which gave an impetus to the development of women's pursuits. This, along with the acceptance of Western civilisation and the presence of a flourishing print culture, as well as the need to mediate the literary space, to tell their stories in the society from the woman's perspective, opened up to the African women the possibility of self-referential narratives

In a somewhat similar vein, not only were women's autobiography dileanated from the autobiographical canon, other forms of autobiographical self-representation were as well. Historically, the traditional autobiography was thought of "as an extended narrative in written form" (Smith and Watson, 2001:74), but in recent times, with an increasingly critical scholarship in the genre, critics have observed that it has the capacity to appropriate different medium as dictated by the autobiographer's impulsion at the time of writing the autobiography. Thus, autobiographical self-representation can be enacted through various media, "in short feature and documentary films; theatre pieces; installations; the painted or sculpted self-portrait; ... photography". As photographs "seem to memorialise identity, they [also] often accompany written life narratives". They "may be alluded to, but absent; or stand in the place of an absent, but suggested narrative" (Smith and Watson, 2001:76). The use of

photographs to construct identity in autobiography is not a recent development either. Athough Roland Barthes is often acknowleged by critics as the precursor of contemporary autobiographical narratives that emerged in the 1970s, because of his use of photographs in his autobiography, *par Roland Barthes* (1975), there are, however, autobiographers that have used photographs to enact their subjectivity, prior to his publication, but are not often mentioned. For instance, "photographs can be found in the autobiographical works of Mark Twain and August Strindberg" (Smith and Watson, 2001:76).

In the shifting conventions of autobiographical writing, photography, as a medium of visual narrative and self-expression in autobiography, plays a vital role. Photographic self-construction adds an important and significant source of meaning to illustrated narratives. The photographic images and the written texts merge to actively participate in the creation of the autobiographical self-construction. Photography as a mode of self-expression within the space of a written text presents a candid and subjective view of the autobiographical narrative. Symbolic representations of reality are inextricably intertwined with the written text. The matrix between the written text and the visual images form a coherent narrative. While written text provides the necessary information about the photographic images, the photographs illustrate and reflect the narrative events in the autobiographical text. In the self-reflective narratives of Ogundipe (2005) and Ogbe (2001), for instance, photographs serve as a visual support element for the personal memories of both autobiographers, to their narratives. They both use photographic images to construct their identities and as a claim of truth in their narratives.

2.4 Stereotypical Imagingof the African Woman

African women's status in recent times has been a critical issue of debate, both in the African literary space by the male writers and in the Western dominant discource. There have been many mistaken stereotypical assumptions and perceptions about how African women are

treated by their male counterparts and their society. They have also been portrayed by as being uneducated, weak, voiceless and oppressed. The African women's reality has been depicted and interpreted through external lens for too long; and has been quoted out of its social, cultural and historical contexts.Kolawole (1997:10) posits that, "for too long, the African woman's reality has been inscribed from the West or by men"; mediated by extraneous dominant narratives about her cultural situation that depict her as being in bondage, oppressed, invisible, tradition-bound and family-oriented. Mohanty states that Western feminists perceive third World women as "…ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented and victimised" (1991:56).

Female characters have been depicted in African fiction as docile, subservient, incapable of logical reasoning; a devoted wife whose place in "the society is behind the burning firewood and cooking pots, and ultimately the bedroom" Edward Oluwayomi(2012:150). A look at some of Chinua Achebe's novels like *Things Fall Apart* and Cyprian Ekwensi's *Jagua Nana,*such stereotypical imaging abound. This arises because the early African literary space was dominated by "phallic" male writers who were not objective in their depiction of women characters.Nawal El Saadawi, contends that women are stereotyped negatively by male writers, either as "a capricious vamp or a beautiful slave". In her paper entitled "The Heroine in Arab Literature" (in Tejumola, Olaniyan and Ato, Quason, 2009:520), she observers that:

> Among the male authors I have read, both in the West and in Arab world, irrespective of the language in which they have written, or of the region from which they have come, not one has been able to free himself from this age-old image of woman as handed down to us from an ancient past...

This stereotypical imaging of the African is equally perpetuated by the Western media. They homogenise African women and present them as being oppressed, especially by polygamy but present Western women in polygamous settings as librated. A case in point is the

Western media presentation of the eight wives of Alex Joseph, an American. The interviewers, Ross Laver and Paula Kaihla (1995), described them as “well adjusted”. On the contrary, the African woman is not accorded the same opportunity as Joseph’s wives; rather she is spoken for, about and against. Nnaemeka in her paper “Bringing African Women into the Classroom” (in Olaniyan and Quason, 2007:578),observes that it is common in most classrooms in the West to studythe African woman rather than the study of African women. This is usually the image of the African womancarrying “a heavy load on her head and a baby strapped on her back, and holds two kids, with about four more in tow [and] of course ... lives in a village”.

The dominant discourse about the African woman’s current reality is hinged on the private and public dichotomy in her life. The notion of the African woman as being voiceless, invisible, docile and confined to domestic duties distorts the criteria of judgment of women’s empowerment. These narratives also claim that the African woman does not have a mind of her own; she is literally a slave owned by the men in her life; starting with her father through to her brother(s), then her husband. According to April.A. Gordon (1996:56), “middle class women in the third World (African women inclusive), are false symbols of progress, because they are trained to be housewives, who are isolated in the home and victims of the patriarchal domination”.Gordon’s claim invariably means that African women are dependent on their men economically, physically, mentally; confined to their homes as wives waiting on their men.

This assertion also suggests that these women have only one job; that is to be housewives who procreate, clean up the house, be all doled up in make-up, wait on the master (husband) and generally satisfy all his whims and caprices. This harsh depiction of the African woman completely distorts her reality.Moreover, these stereotypical assumptions about the African woman fail to acknowledge the fact that Victorian women were confined to their homes and

were also reduced to domestic duties, such as knitting, cooking, baking, cleaning of the home and fully made up faces, while they awaited the arrival of their husbands, who went out to take on the world. In fact, as recently as the 19th century, Victorian women were encouraged to wear the corset, which was a type of inner garment that supported her waistline, hips and burst, but made it difficult for her to breathe properly – so that she looked fragile and in need of a man always to rescue her. It is a well-documented fact that the Victorian English woman, like other 19th Century European women, was largely invisible in the public sphere(Kolawole, 1997:67).

The emergence of African female writers such as Flora Nwapa, Zaynab Alkali, Ama Ata Aidoo, Tess Onwueme and Omobolanle Sotunsa heralded the re-imaging of the African woman in literary works.Sotunsa (2008:83-84) notes that, "the unfavourable portrayal of women by African male writers ignited a literary outburst which culminated in female writers attempt to counter the impaired picture of African womanhood by reversing the roles of women in African fiction written by men". In like manner, many scholars of the African woman have decried the distorted assertions about her, explainig that the African woman is not invisible; rather, Western critics and scholars have often failed to search for her voice in the right places. Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) reiterates that African women are neither voiceless nor invisible; one only needs to search and listen to their voices in the right places. She asks rhetorically:

> Are African women voiceless or do we fail to look for their voices where we may find them, in site and forms in which these voices and uttered?...We must look for African women's voices in women's spaces and modes such as ceremonies and work songs…(1994:11).

In Maya Angelou's words, "image making is very important for every human being." It is even more so for the African female autobiographer, who has to write the woman's self, so as to "confront multiple levels of otherness… racial, cultural, regional, religious, third world,

and post-colonial" (Kolawole, 1997:169) and validate their reality. In this regard, Smith and Watson (2001: 10) posit that:

> When life narrators write to chronicle an event, to explore a certain time period, or to enshrine a community, they are making 'history' in a sense. But they are also performing several rhetorical acts: justifying their own perceptions, upholding their reputations, disputing the accounts of others, settling scores, conveying cultural information, and inventing desirable futures among others.

African women's autobiographies reveal not only their personal lives, but also record their countries' social, cultural and political history. They write the autobiography in order to assert their own agency and dispel the stereotypical images, which often depict them as being weak, passive and oppressed by the patriarchal culture. Thus, the autobiography of African women, provide a special window view into their own reality and experience under both patriarchy and post-colonialism. This will be argued within the scope of this study, using the selected autobiographical texts.The autobiographies present the individual stories of two strong, dynamic, assertive and successful women, whose narratives explain the reality, of women's lives in contemporary Africa.Given the urgent need for self-reconstruction and gender re-definition, African women have begun to produce narratives about their lives, in order to deconstruct the traditional Western imperialistic assumptions and assertions about them. They use their narratives to subvert the dominant construction of their selfhood, to re-inscribe and to authenticate their proper life script. In Nigeria, in particular, the women now produce subjective narratives to explain themselves and their lives such as the autobiographies of Mable Segun's*My Father's Daughter:Autobiographical Readers for Children*(1963);BuchiEmecheta's*Head Above Water:An Autobiography* (1986); Irene E.B. Ighodaro's*A Life of Service* (1994); Jane Ejueitchie's*Reminiscences of a Teacher* (1996); as well as PhebeanAjibola Ogundipe's*Up-Country Girl* (2005) and Hilda Ogbe's*The Crumbs Off The Wife's Table (*2001).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has offered a literature review related to this study, it discussed the emergence of women's autobiography. It also highlighted the differences between women's and men's autobiographies. These include the fact that men's autobiographical narratives are usually unfragmented and dominated by individual consciousness, while those of women are fragmented and ensconced within the collective consciousness. The chapter also discussed the challenges of the African woman's inability to write "openly", her subjectivity like her Western sister, attributing this to a number of factors. Critiques on the stereotypical imaging of the African woman as uneducated, docile, oppressed and domestic bound were reviewed as well. The previous dominant narratives by both early African writers and Western discourses depicted the African woman's reality different from its actuality; that of being strong, self-assertive and not totally dependent on the man. With reference to the two autobiographies under study, the African woman defines her reality in accordance with the African cultural imperatives, not as she is defined through external lens.

All these provide the background to the coming chapters, beginning with Ogundipe's *Up-Country Girl* (2005), which will be analysed in order to show how she constructs her identity within the African cultural imperatives; including her use of photographs to construct her identity as well. In addition, the analysis will also illustrate some contextual issues of literary craftsmanship and African social living, including the communality of the Esa Oke community, communal mothering and how the women mediate their agency in community.

CHAPTER THREE

PHEBEAN OGUNDIPE'S *UP–COUNTRY GIRL*

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is an analysis of Ogundipe's *Up-Country Girl*(2005).The thrust of the analysis, as previously argued, is to deconstruct the image of the African woman in the dominant discourse, as being invisible, docile, domesticated and dominated by the patriarchate.African women have been depicted and stereotyped as voiceless and mere appendages to their men, by those who only perceived them from a distance and knew little about their reality. This study, therefore, sets out to investigate the socio-economic, political and cultural conditions of the African woman's reality within the African contexrt as projected by the autobiographer in her autobiographical narrative.

3.2 Self-Affirmationin *Up-Country Girl*

The narrative projects Ogundipe, who, in spite of her being an up-country girl from the remote village of Esa Oke, Western Nigeria, proves to be a strong, assertive, confident and

self-actualised woman. She begins her autobiography on a strong note, as though to assert her position: "I did not own a pair of shoes until I was a secondary pupil and nearly thirteen years old" (p.1). it was not as a result of being poor, but because they were not an essential necessity in the Esa Oke rural farming community. This depicts her humble beginning and the ascetic ambience of her childhood. Although a farmer's daughter, Ogundipe reiterates that she is not from a poor home. Both of her parents were well-off in their community: herfather, John Falomi Itayemi, was a "prosperous" farmer who had "acres of cocoa farm" and did his best to cater for his family; and her mother, Rachel Ilori Itayemi, was a tailor who had her own "Singer sewing machine" (p.75-76).

Ogundipe, quite early in the autobiography reveals her strength of character, a high level of self-consciousness and self-assertion. At a tender age, when the requirement for admission into schools was for the would be pupils to do the "ear-touching test," that is, to put their right hand over their head to touch the tip of their left ear, the young,restless girl was full of dreams and hope that she would make it. She was eager to get started too, "once my older sister, nearly four years my senior, started to attend school" (p.34). She had began to pester her parents, who initially refused her request, but her continued persistence eventually paid off, when the "neighbours or relative intervened" (p.34). However, the parents had only accepted her to go to school based on the conviction that the school authority would reject her for being underage; an assumption that failed.

> So at last, I was allowed to go with my sister to the school, the tiniest, youngest child they had seen. And no one objected! I suppose my keenness to come was so obvious…(p.35).

This depicts her strong personality and firm self-assertion;and also reveals her womanist consciousness. Her admission into the school at an early age was to mark the beginning of her long educational journey to self-actualisation. For instance, during lessons in the class, the teacher initially ignored her and acted as though she was not present, going "about his

business of teaching his pupils" (p.35). This, however, did not bother her; rather, she asserted herself further by being attentive to the lesson; and being "on my best behaviour, I listened to the teacher teaching and obviously started to follow and to understand what he taught" (p.35). Each timethe teacher asked a question,during the lesson and Ogundipe tried to give an answer, the teacher ignored her, but she did not get discouraged. "This continues for some time until finally, "perhaps to test me out, the teacher called on me" (p.35) to answer the question. She gave the correct answer and this eventually led to her acceptance "as a member of the class". And "before long, it had become obvious that I was a bright pupil, because I gained my first and only double promotion during my infant class years" (p.35).

Ogundipe affirms the joy and happiness she felt during her primary school days in Esa Oke as "being such happy times" (p.58). She further recounts her school years' experience as she got to "Standard 4 and moved to another neighbouring school in Imesi Oke, "later to be known as Imesi Ille" (p.58), a distance of about two miles from Oyile, which shared a boundary with Esa Oke. Indeed, the young Ogundipe perceives her admission into the school as being particularly symbolic in marking her progress in life.

The society in which she grew up was fraught with disparity in gender education, where some parents, even though, acknowledged the benefits of education, would rather educate their malebecause of the erroneous belief that the gains of the educated son would remain in the family, while that of the educated daughter would go to the family she got married into. Ogundipe considers herself lucky to have been born into "my particular family" and to have parents that were "enlightened enough" to know the advantages of education. Both parents were"enlightened folks" (p.1). They had a smattering of the English language and were also versed in the Bible and hymn books in the Yoruba language. The parents had ensured that all their children got educated, depicting her father in particular as being a progressive who did not prioritise the education of his male child over that of his female child:

> My father sent us to all school, girls and boys, starting with my elder sister, then me, right down to the youngest of us (p.33).

This shows a loving father who knew the advantages of education; hence, he sent all his children to school. Sadly, he did not live long enough to see the success of his efforts, as he died in 1945, when Ogundipe was still studying for her HSC English and Senior Cambridge Latin (p.194).Towards the end of her primary education in "Standard 6," she got another opportunity to further her education. This came throughher headmaster, who took a keen observation of her performance in school and ensured that she did not go **to** waste academically. He urged her to take the Common Entrance Examination for admissioninto the secondary school:

> It was he who called me one day and told me that I would have to go to Ibadan in the near future, to take an entrance examination in a government secondary school for girls and this must have been the first I knew of higher education in the form of secondary school (p.72).

The headmaster actually arranged for her personally to take the examination, an encounter that foreshadows her educational odyssey in Nigeria and overseas. That was how, Ogundipe, who obviously did not know much about formal education beyond the primary level, got the chance to further her education. When the time came for the examination, the young girl made her "first long journey by lorry" (p.74) all by herself to Ibadan. Travelling alone as a young girl for the first time, from the village to the big city of Ibadan in the early 1940s, shows clearly that she was a determined, self-confident girl, who had parents that were progressive and also appreciated the obvious benefits of education. The narrative further highlights the salient points about gender relations in the traditional African society that clearly demonstrate that the women were normally given the opportunity for self-realisation and self-actualisation.

Ogundipe passes the entrance examination and is given admission into the Queen's College, Lagos on merit, with a full scholarship that "covered both tuition and boarding" (p.75). She

further recognised the importance of education in developing her consciousness, so that, while in school, she studied hard and became fervently committed to developing herself intellectually. She read virtually whatever books she got in the school library. She narrates that her life is Queen's college was truly "the best of times" (p.107), because she learnt new things, made new friends and also enjoyed all the subjects she the studied in school. She studied hard all through the four years she was in the school, although she also engaged in other interesting activities, recounting that, "…the most crucial first year of my four years in Queen's College… was followed by three happy years, during which I discovered various interests ---reading, swimming, knitting and other handicraft" (p.129). Once again, she proved to be a "brilliant pupil", as she passed her Grade One Cambridge School Certificate Examinations with distinction in all the subjects (p.vii). Interestingly, she got another government scholarship to study overseas, an opportunitywhich "was a fantastic piece of good fortune" (p.136).This "good fortune" may be attributed to luck, perhaps, but her self-determination and dedication to her studies was largely responsible for it. She was able to prove that when it came to education, as handed down to Africans in the tradition of the white man, the African woman was as intelligent as her Western sister.

While in school, Ogundipe focused on her studies. She was able to sustain the African values instilled into her without the presence of parental authority, or the watchful eyes of the Esa Oke community. Her up-bringing had inculcatedinto her the essence of decent behaviour. This was quite unlike the whitestudents she encountered during her teaching practice in a "Secondary Modern School in Lavender Hill". These white students, in spite of being surrounded by parental watchful eyes, had no "interest in achieving excellence in spoken English" (p.160);instead they were:

> Eagerly looking forward to their sixteenth birthday, when they would no longer be forced by the law to remain in formal education, but could go out and start life, earning a living, having

> boyfriends and indulging in adult things like lipstick and nail polish and other make up (p.160).

This vividly depicts the moral laxitude in the culture that was individualistic and lacking in communal nurturing. It was also ironical, for a culture that perceived the African woman as uneducated.When Ogundipe arrivedLondon, she discovered a completely different world from the one she had grown up in, but was able to adapt quickly. She learnt new things and also made new contacts from her school, some of whom had remainedlife-long friends with her, like Comfort Komolafe, a Nigerian who had been in St Andrews a year ahead of her; and who also helped her settle down to a comfortable academic life. Others were Michele Mawas, her "bejantine" – a new female student-- in St Andrews and Olu Jolaoso (p.139). Ogunidpe recalls, that her experiences during her "diploma years" were quite memorable, especiallythe "teaching practice" which she did each term.

She soon realised that being black made her something of interest, "something of a nine-days' wonder" in the school and "possibly, the first black teacher and female at that, they had had" (p.161). In addition to this, she further experienced the cruel ignorance of the whites and racial prejudice, when the headmistress suggested she should teach geography to her students, so that they could "learn something about strange countries like the one I had come from" (p.161). This was problematic, as the word "strange" connoted to her something abnormal or odd and, by implication, that Ogundipe was not a normal human being, because she was black and from a "strange country"; Africa. She refuted this and revealed a womanist consciousness, by asserting her identity: "I put my foot in it almost with my firstsentence that I was a Nigerian, of the Yoruba tribe" (p.161). Ogundipe's admittance of being a member of a tribe also came as a shock to her students, as "one rounded eyed" girl asked "Tribe Miss?" (161), perhaps wondering that the "well-clad" teacher was after all, a savage. The word tribe, from the Western stereotypical perception, connoted savagery or cannibalism; as in "savage tribes" or "cannibal tribes" who swung from tree to tree in the jungle, like Tarzan --- never

minding the fact that Tarzan was shot in the Florida Everglades and Tarzan was a privileged white male who was raised by baboons and not humans (Africans). This brings to mindChinua Achebe's assertion (1975:45), that, "Africa, with all its imperfections, was not one long night of savagery from which the firstEuropeans acting on God's behalf delivered them."Her actions by naming her tribe unabashedly is in tandem with the womanist poetics of self-naming. Nonetheless, Ogundipe madea conscious effort to change the convictions of the white students:

> I made the necessary explanation to correct their prejudices... in convincing the pupils that blacks are humans too … and (also) made sure from that time, not only to teach as good and as interesting lessons as I could device, but also always to be well dressed and generally well turned-out (p.161).

This demonstrates her determination not to obliterate her identity as an African. In much the same way she asserted herself later, before the man who made gender-biased comments against her for driving a car; something that was regarded as the exclusive privilege of men at the time. Ogundipe recalls that she usually ignored such comments from people; however,

> On one occasion, when a man, possibly in a passing taxi, or in a lorry, very rudely commented loudly, 'imagine a mere woman, sitting on her private parts, driving a car' I could not help retorting, 'And you men who do not sit on your private parts, do you use them, instead of your two-hands, during driving?' (p.168).

By replying the man, she demonstrated her self-assertion and self-retrieval from stereotypical notions about the African woman.The narrative also records the significance of names in the African cosmology. Names have positive or negative meanings, according to their connotation and roles, (Kolawole, 1997:156). A name is the root of a person's soul; it is one's identity and an important aspect of a person's cultural identity. Thus, Ogundipe's maiden name, Itayemi, symbolises strength and bravery. This corroborates the attributes of her

restless and assertive personality to re-inscribe herself against the stereotypical notions of the African woman. Her adoption of her husband's name, Ogundipe, also depicts strength and not weakness. It demonstrates that the African woman does not regard her male-counterpart as an enemy, but a vital partner, with whom she is in alliance and against whom she is not in competition.

Chapter Fifteen of *Up-Country Girl* introduces Ogundipe back home from overseas, the return of "a been-to", having spent "five years away from home" (p.163). She recounts that her return home to her people in Esa Oke was "a most rambunctious homecoming" (p.163).

> They had organissed a group who would lead me, with songs and drums and dancing, right from the outskirts, into the town and down to our house in Ibodi! The whole town was waiting to give me a hero's welcome…It was as if everybody in Esa Oke had to come and see their long-absent daughter, the first townsperson to have gone overseas to study (p.163).

The ceremonial welcoming is a reflection of the communality in Esa Oke; how they cared about one another. This communality also foregrounds the African collectivism, as opposed to the Western individualism. Being the first person, and a female at that, to go overseas for further studies raises salient questions about the stereotypical assumptions about the African woman's reality.However, as a patriotic citizen, who was willing to serve her country, the first action Ogundipe did upon her arrival was to report to the Education Office for her deployment."My first duty was to report to the Education Office that their scholar had returned, and would be ready to accept a job to serve the country, as soon as they wanted me to" (p.163). She got assigned as the "first government inspector" (p.165), in Ibadan, which entailed her visiting "schools in the province" (p.165). She was later posted to the Queen's School, Ede, as a teacher. There she met Bayo, a colleague, who later became her husband. In the narrative she does not give much details about how she met him, except that he was

"one teacher, posted to Queen's School to teach two difficult subjects, Physics and Maths, to the girls, (who) turned out to be not the female teacher Miss Hobson had hoped for, but Mr. Adebayo Ogundipe. The rest, as they say, is history" (p.202). This information obscures, as much as it reveals, the circumstances of life at this stage, lending credence to the assertion that "neither women nor men are likely to explore or reveal…intimate memories in their autobiographies", (Jenelik, 1980:10). In this case, it is perhaps, due to the African culture of silence in exposing too much of oneself or her up-bringing that frowned at divulging intimate information about oneself.

3.3 Gender Reciprocityin *Up-Country Girl*

Traditionally, the Nigerian patriarchal structure had excluded men from participating in domestic tasks. They were considered virile, powerful, courageous, self-confident and as having the strength and ability to face the outside world head-on. As such, they should devote themselves to wars, farming and other outside chores, but not to be concerned or bothered with certain pedantic issues. Women, were, thus, saddled with the burden of domestic duties. They were expected to be good homemakers; even when they were engaged in paid jobs outside the home, they were still expected to fulfill these cultural assignments without the man assisting. However, in recent times, there has been a remarkable shift in these expectations about women, as sex roles and orientation about them are changing and becoming less traditional, in the sense of being hinged on less rigid sex-specific definitions.The traditional situation in which the man was expected to be the head of his household, to rule and dominate, was contrary to the practice of the Ogundipes. Rather, gender reciprocity manifested in their home. Hudson Weem's states that, "the African woman has never been restricted to the home and household chores; her male counterpart had more often than not shared the role as a homemaker" (2004:64). Although Bayo did not engage in

physical household chores, like doing the dishes, he, nonetheless, reciprocates by supporting Ogundipe in her career as a civil servant. Her job entails travelling and being away from home sometimes. At such times, Bayo would support her and take charge of their four sons. She recalls that:

> In 1952, as an Education officer in Ibadan… I was granted a two week local leave. I used this short holiday to travel in my car all the way across Eastern Nigeria to Mamfe in the Cameroons, which was still part of Nigeria at the time (p. 229).

This certainly refutes the Eurocentric notions of the African woman's invisibility, docility and male dominance. Bayo not only encouraged and supported his wife, he also engaged in raising their four sons. With his support she, was able to manage both her private and public lives such that, neither suffered.Furthermore, Ogundipe demonstrates that being married does not hinder a woman from self-actualisation. She is able to balance her home and her career with the support of her husband. She reveals that, as being contrary to the external narratives by Western critics, especially the Western radical feminists, that the African woman is oppressed by patriarchal dominance in the home; the reverse is actually the case with the Ogundipes. Ultimately, she demonstrates that mutual respect is a crucial factor for gender balance and reciprocity in every home, whether African or not.

In the chapter, "Career Progress", Ogundipe narrates, retrospectively, how being a wife, mother and a career woman was quite easy for her. She recounts that, "life as a working married woman was far easier…house-help was one major advantage" (p.216). One of the problems often raised by Western radical feminist is that the family and, especially the children, are an impediment to the woman's self-actualisation. Ogundipe demonstrates in her autobiography that the African woman is neither dormant nor docile; she in fact can have it all: marriage, children and career. This confirms that both the private and public life can also be successful and fulfilled as well. She was able to achieve this with the love and support of

her family, house-helps and nannies. She states that living literarily within a stone throw from her place of work made being a working mother very easy.

> Breast feeding the children was no problem; I could feed the baby at seven, go to work, be back for the 11 o'clock feed, go back to work, finish the school's day at 1:30 and be back to eat lunch before the next feed at 3pm (p.216-217).

This underlines her selflessness and the strong, dynamic character of the African woman. She is able to balance her work and family quite effectively; althoughWestern radical feminists are wont to argue that the burden of juggling work and family is the ultimate in the oppression and subjugation of the African woman. In Zilla Einstein's view, "the family is a tool for entrenching capitalist oppression and individualism" (in Kolawole, 1997:32).However, Ogundipe demonstrates in her narrative that the African woman does not regard it as such. In fact, shenegates the facile notion that the family is a hindrance to women's self-actualisation and a manipulative tool for perpetuating her capitalist. Indeed, it would appear that the self-centeredness and individualistic stance being emphasised by the Western radical feminists about the family, is problematic for the African woman. Many Africans, especially the women, regard the centrality of the family as a very important focus for their lives. For the woman, the African family set-up fosters the spirit of collective consciousness, mutual gender reciprocity and role-sharing. It, therefore, prevents the collapse of the communal system and the plague of individualism that bedevils the modern Western civilisation.

The African womanist acknowledges the gender order that accords "male privilege" to the African man as the head of the family; she, however, does not view her status as a mother and a wife as being opposed to her own personal happiness and freedom or self-actualisation. In fact, from the womanist's perspective, it is a form of self-empowerment. As a nurturer and a homemaker, she provides the stable home that the man and the community can use to

advance socially. In this regard the assumptions about the African woman, as being oppressed by the family, is both unfair and unrealistic. For the African woman, the family constitutes stability and spiritual well-being. In its ideal form it is a safe haven and a refuge system that supports the woman emotionally, financially, socially and, sometimes, politically as well.

Indeed, for Ogundipe, her family is sacrosanct. She demonstrates throughout the autobiography that, when it comes to choosing between her family and her career, the latter would have to go. For instance, she recounts how she and Bayo, on both being made "Senior Education Officers", were "promoted to duty post [that] had started to create problems for our little family" (p.231 – 232). The situation was that, because of the limited number of duty posts in the region, with each town having not more than one government institution (p. 231), it would become necessary that her family would live separately if they both accepted their promotion. However, in Ogundipe's view, living apart would be detrimental to the overall family's well-being. So, in order to keep her family together, she gave up her own promotion: "I did not want a weekend father for my children" (p. 236). She believed that:

> Living apart for any length of time is not good for a marriage… (it) is even more inimical to the life of the children (and) in the case of marriage, separate living tends to promote the kind of independence that is harmful to the cooperative adjustment one needs to live happily with another human being… (p: 232 – 235).

Moreover, this did not affect her career, as she rose to the position of Acting Director, Chief Federal Adviser on Education, (DCFAE), in the Federal Service. After working for "nearly twenty five years" she retired from active service on the 24th December 1996 (p.305), but, continued to hold various political appointments in the country (p. 319). This narrative, certainly, negates the claim that the family is antithetical to the African woman's self-actualisation. The African woman can, in fact, succeed in her professional career, while also running a very happy home. As Kolawole contends,"many African womanists are happily married without any overt hindrance to their career or occupation" (p.32).

3.4 Communal Mothering/Women'sAgency in *Up-Country Girl*

In contrasting womanism with feminism, Kolawole cites its richness in encompassing communal collectivity, as opposed to individualism. Womanism, "rather than enhance individualism, cultivates the spirit of collective consciousness, mutual reciprocity and role-sharing" (p.197). Womanism's collective consciousness manifests itself in communal mothering, which can be both physical and biological and the resulting caretaker roles communal mothering often engenders, as well as promotes the cultural mothering that emboldens individual, familial and communal identity formulation and nurturing. The mix of individual, familial and communal nurturing is exemplified in Ogundipe's autobiographical narrative, which illustrates the traditions of the Esa Oke people; and their system of child up-bringing, child disciplining, women's agency and role-sharing. The Esa Oke community also allows the direct influence of neighbours to bear on the up-bringing of their children.

Much of Ogundipe's narrative deals with reminisce of her growing up years. She narrates how neighbours look after one another and engage in the communal up-bringing of the child in the Esa Oke community. Communal mothering manifests in the way the women also show concern for their neighbours' affairs. If it is about to rain, the neighbour next door helps her fellow neighbour to remove her clothes from the line. This, therefore, enables the other

woman to go about other necessary business without any worries. “Even more important was the way people cared for neighbuors’ children in the absence of the parents” (p.16). Through retrospective narrative episodes, Ogundipe describes how the communal up-bringing of the child in Esa Oke is regarded as paramount. Women show concern when a fellow “neighbour’s ‘matter’ was about to spoil” (p.16); thus take care of their fellow women’s affairs in their absence. She recounts how, when a mother went on a necessary errand, the child was taken care of by her neighbour, in the same way she would take care of the child herself. When it was meal time and the child’s mother was not yet to back home, her neighbour was sure to feed the child.

In the same way, the discipline of a child was not the responsibility of its parents alone in the Esa Oke community; rather, it was a communal responsibility. Therefore, when a young one misbehaved in the presence of a neighbour, that neighbour had the moral obligation to discipline that child. That ensured that the child did not take advantage of the absence of its parents to misbehave. Ogundipe explainsthat in Esa Oke, neighbours had the statutory authority to correct a child for doing something wrong even in the absence of its mother. Hence, communal mothering was considered the way of life, such that, when a child did something reprehensible in the presence of a neighbour, that neighbour could not just turn a blind eye to it or pretend to be unmindful or unconcerned, but must act to enforce discipline.In most cases, such a child would promise to be of good behaviour and pleadwith the neighbour to keep it secret, as he or she would receive another punishment, if the mother got to know about it:

> The child would earnestly beg her not to increase her punishment by so doing. The offender would promise never again to somisbehave in future…but please, please, don’t tell my mother! (p.17).

The neighbour would always be thanked by the mother for being such a good parent to discipline her child. “Your mother was sure to thank her and tell her that she had acted as a good neighbour should”(p.17).Ogundipe recalls how as a child she was “whipped” by a good neighbour for misbehaving. In her young mind, she had thought she would get her mother’s sympathy for being disciplined by a neighbour, so she refused to stop crying until her mother returned home. Instead, the mother scolded her and she almost gave her another punishment for calling the neighbour by her first name:

> ‘Why are you crying?’ She asked.
>
> ‘I’m crying because Onibu beat me’. I sobbed louder.
>
> ‘And why did she beat you?’ She asked with a calmness that should have warned me.
>
> I told her what the neighbour had beaten me for.
>
> ‘And is that why you have forgotten your manners so as to call her by name as if you are equal? You don’t know that common courtesy demands that you should refer to as her Ayo’s mother? What must she think of me? That I encourage my children to be rude to their elders? I’m going to show you that you have doubled your trouble today. I’m going to her to thank her for showing her love for me by caring for the upbringing of my child while I was and we are going together, you and I, to thank her’.
>
> And with that, she took a whip from the thatch of the kitchen where she usually stored it and dragged me along to the neighbour’s, intending to beat me in the neighours presence as a bonus punishment, to assure the neighbour that she had done the right thing in chastising me (p.18)

Ogundipe did not get scolded by her mother for misbehaving, but rather, for calling the neighbour – who was old enough to be her own mother -- by her name. In the Yoruba traditional culture, this was frowned at, as elders were not called by their names. This tradition also extended to a woman’s husband’s family members and the wife was expected not to call them by their names, even if they were younger than her. This was so because in “Old Yoruba Culture, this newest member (wife) of the family, albeit an adult, was considered younger than all the existing members of her husband’s family, no matter their

age. “She must not call them by name” (p.19). So she had to give them “praise names”, such as ‘Opelenge’, meaning, “beautifully slim and slender person” or “Adumaadan”, meaning, “Someone shining in all the glory of beautifully dark skin” (p.19).

For Ogundipe, such cultural practices practically make no sense. They might have served a purpose in the past, but do not make meaning in today’s world. In this regard, her self-assertion as a womanist comes out bare. In spite of her up-bringing to respect her elders, she does not subscribe to archaic African traditions that regard the woman as a child before her in-laws. She questions such a tradition that expects the wife not to call the name of even a baby that is born a day before she becomes a member of the family by marriage. She uses instances like this to show that archaic and reductionist traditions that erode the woman’s self-worth are not the hallmark of the African womanist. As Kolawole states, “African women cannot remain the same within traditions that undermine them” (p.204).

Like Ogundipe, her mother too does not subscribe to traditions that undermine her personhood. A major example is in the Yoruba tradition and many other African societies, when a man dies, the wife is “inherited” by a male relative of her late husband, who in turn takes on the paternal responsibilities of the woman’s children “in addition to his own children by his own wife or wives, and any new children the inherited wife may have for him” (p.204). All, this is in the name of keeping the tradition alive, without regard for how she feels; thus, giving the impression that the woman is a piece of property that could just be inherited. When Ogundipe’s father dies, her mother refuses a leviratic marriage to her late husband’s nephew, Latunji, “someone she had looked after as an adolescent living with her and my father” (p. 204). Ogundipe’s mother’s rejection of a leviratic marriage is significant in upholding her self-assertion, self-retrieval and independence of mind from the archaic traditions. Her mother, having rejected the levirate union with Latunji, continued to work

hard and took care of herself and "after our interests, after my father died" (p.204), until her death (p.347).

Another aspect of communal mothering is the collective inculcation of manners in children. In the Esa Oke community, it was considered a sign of good manners and proper up-bringing that children should greet their elders whenever and wherever they came across them. Ogundipe notes that "on home training (the up-bringing of the child in the home), my people made it very clear that it was the essential duty of the parents to teach a child how important it is to act courteously to elders in the community, starting with politeness to elders and going down the scale to show consideration for people of your own age and even younger" (p.21). In fact, the importance attached to the proper up-bringing of the child was so revered that a child that went against this value was criticised with such derogatory terms as "a-mu-ni-bu-ni" (one who makes [you] abuse a third party (the parents of the offending child). In other words, the child was not well brought up by the parents.

The extended family system also played a significant role in the up-bringing of the child. Ogundipe narrates nostalgically how the extended family system was quite effective in raising the child. She and other children in the Esa Oke community had enjoyed the love and care from the extended family system:

> In my childhood, the term extended described a wide range of relatives regarded as part of one family. Even cousins to the nineth degree were all around me in Esa Oke and could take part in my communal upbringing. (p.23)

Ogundipe notes with sadness that the extended family system in the child's up-bringing is no longer as effective as it used to be in her childhood days. She expresses dissatisfaction about the fact that the system is ebbing away. Although the extended family system still functions, to a certain extent, in the up-bringing of the African child, however, it "cannot be as effective in the communal training of the child as it was it the olden days" (p.23).The reason for this is

not far-fetched. The moral decadence or depravity in the society is, perhaps, due to the imposition of foreign cultural norms and values, which are alien to the African culture; the culture of individualism, for instance, as opposed to communal collectivism. A culture where everyone's business is nobody's business could be attributable to the breakdown of the old system of child up-bringing. Respect for cultural values and norms are fast declining and the task of disciplining the child is getting more and more difficult.

Ogundipe links this to the "urbanisation and the resulting isolation of the nuclear family unit, [which] has limited children's up-bringing to a pair of parents with jobs, and, therefore, less time to devote to the family and home" (p.23). The African woman "believe(s) that the breakdown of the family system and its replacement with other 'politically correct' and acceptable set-ups is responsible for the rates of crimes, drug use, alcoholism, suicide and many perversions that are the hall mark of the modernised societies today"(Kolawole, 1997:197).

The communal women's agency in Ogundipe's autobiography lends credence to Ogundipe – Leslie's assertion. African women have never been confined to their homes as Gordon claims; they have, in fact, always been visible as depicted in Ogundipe's autobiographical narrative. Indeed, the narrative provides alternative constructions about the African woman, charting different orders of the African woman's reality away from the dominant discourse. For instance, in Esa Oke, a "community that is almost self-sufficient" (p.6), women engage in various forms of trade, such as selling fresh farm vegetables or "some cooked food stuffs" to other women in the community, so as to ease the burden of preparing these foodstuffs and also make some cash for other family necessities:

> It was convenient for the average house-wife, that things like breakfast foods in the form of *eko* (corn jelly) and *moi-moi* (bean pudding) should be prepared in bulk by one particular person, who

> sold in smaller quantities to housewives who had other jobs to do with their time (p.6).

This illustration counters the notion that the African woman is domesticated and restricted to the home. The women of Esa Oke in the narrative embolden a strong sense of self, strength and the womanist values of collectivism.Ogundipe's narrative also highlights the essence of polygamy in Esa Oke, as women's communal agency. Polygamy has been condemned by Western feminists as one of the worst symbols of African women's enslavement, without acknowledging its obvious advantages: multiple mothering, economic independence, emotional support, sisterhood and companionship. They contend that polygamy diminishes the African woman's self-worth. Granted, polygamy does have its own demerits, but not as it is being demonised by these Western feminists. In Buchi Emcheta's words, "polygamy in many cases can be liberating to the woman, rather than inhibiting her (it) also encourages her to value herself as a person and look outside the family for friends. It gives her freedom from having to worry about her husband most of the time" (in Olaniyan and Quayson: 555). Ogundipe recalls that, polygamy in Esa Oke liberates the woman and also affords her the opportunity to engage herself in other activities, such as tending to her private commercial business. In this way, she will not be completely dependent on her husband and reduces on him the burden of being the sole provider for his family as well. Moreover, "the average Yoruba woman considers it a matter of self-respect and self-pride" (p.32), not to beeconomically dependent completely on the man.

> If a man had, say, five wives, they would arrange it so that each took it in turn to entertain the husband, cooking for him, and he spending the allotted day with her and the night in her room. This meant that the remaining four days, until it was her turn to look after him again, she could go about her own business, and spend her time on her own affairs without let or hindrance. She could even go away from home, if she was a trader who travelled out of their hometown, and the husband would not, could not, stop her,… (and) the other wife or wives would be expected to look after any matter of hers, such as washing left out to dry, when rain suddenly

> started to fall, or looking after her children, when they needed the care of an adult and she was not nearby (p.197).

This depicts the self-liberation of the African woman from the burden of having to wait on him or depend on him economically for her private needs. However, Western feminists would rather argue that this is an oppression of the African woman, tending to be evasive about the phenomenon of polygyny in their Western societies. The word polygyny comes from the Greek words poly (many) and gyne (woman or wife), meaning "many wives" or "many women." The difference between polygyny as practiced by the Western men and polygamy, as practiced by the African man, is that, while the Western man is married to one wife, but keeps one or more mistresses, the African man, legitimises his relationships by marrying more than one wife. In addition, for the African woman, in contrast to her Western sister, knows who she shares her husband with, while her Western sister lives under the illusion that she does not share her husband with another woman.

In addition, Ogundipe further highlights the culture of communal labour and role-sharing in Esa Oke. She illustrates how work is done with ease through communal participation. The provision of shelter for members of the community and the construction of roads in the village is easily done, either by small or large groups, with ready assistance from friends and neighbours, who help to build a wall or roof of the house. The small group usually consists of "friends banding together" (p.2) "to put up the clay walls, cut the wooden poles for framing the roof for the house and fetch palm fronds or *gbodogi* leaves, with which to thatch the roof" (p.28). The large group, which consists of some men from a part of the village or all the men in the entire Esa Oke community come together when there is the need to embark on a "big job" of "improving the roads of the village, or building a house for the chief" (p.2). To ensure the work is done faster and easily, the division of labour is enhanced. In fact, even while the different groups men engage in the actual physical work, a few would beat the drum-song in a rhythmic pattern, so as "to get the workers to work to a rhythm which coordinated their

physical movements and also made everyone work as a team, with no one slacking behind the others" (p.2). The drums also added speed to the rate of the work.The essence of this communality is to foster collective bonding; where everyone sees themselves not as a separate entity, but as a part of a whole in the community.

Ogundipe's autobiographical narrative is community-based. She contextualises her narrative within her context of the whole society and also constructs herself in relation to the community. In doing so, she succeeds in claiming her personal subjectivity within the framework of the collective self. This also allows her to assert her collective subjectivity, in contrast to the Western individualistic self-subjectivity. Thus, writing in this communal tradition -- what Mary Louise Pratt (in Smith and Watson, 2001:183) calls autoethnography --- enables her to situate her autobiography within a specific community --- Esa Oke. The effect of this is that her autobiography functions as a counter-discursive to dominant scripted discourses. This becomes even more apparent when due account is taken of the views often expressed by the Western feminists.

3.5 Photographic Technique Self-Construction in *Up-Country Girl*

Ogundidpe uses details and an emphasis on memory as rhetorical strategies in her autobiographical narrative. She supplies a lot of information about events in her narratives, particularly those of her growing up years, to illustrate how important and effective the concept of African communality is. She also uses the same strategy in relation to the people she encounters, during her educational journey throughout the text. She does not just narrate the circumstances of her meeting these people, but also gives some biographical details and photographic details about them. In *Up-Country-Girl,* the photographs serve as a visual support element to the narratives, presenting a candid, subjective and,at the same time, objective view of the writer's attempt to reinforce meaning and facts to the narrative.

The symbolic representation of the photographs and the written text both embody spaces that enable Ogundipe's self-construction to be visualised by the reader. The images also serve as a social document of her self-construction through which issues of recognition, authorship and truth could be gleaned. These photographs provide certain insights into her life and also set the stage for the articulation of her self-construction. They depict her at various stages of maturity: as a daughter, a student, a friend, a wife, a mother, a mother-in-law, a grandmother, a colleague and diplomat. The different people in the photographs are all connected to Ogundipe either by blood or social relationships.

The photographs of her mother, captioned "Rachel llori Itayemi, my mother"; and that of "My maternal grandmother (carrying our son, Femi), who had come with my grandfather from Ijebu Ode", depict Ogundipe as a wife, daughter and a granddaughter. They also confirm her blood connection to the individuals featured in the images. They also depict an atmosphere of communality. The photographs of Ogundipe and her fellow students, "Jane Spain, a mechanical student, later mayor of Freetown", "Femi Johnson, Comfort Komolafe and two other Nigerian students" and "visiting Europe with Kama's parents" all depict her as a student and a friend. They project a shift in her identity construction fromthat of a student to a wife, a mother, a mother-in-law and a grandmother. Similarly, the photographs showing her marriage to Bayo in Oshogbo, with the caption, "With small group of family and friends at our wedding at Oshogbo," support the textual narrative that presents her as a wife. Similarly, the family photographs wtith her husband and sons, captioned, "Majority of five-Bayo and our four sons in Ikoyi", and other photographs with the captions, "In Charlotte, N.C., with son Femi, his wife and son, Makinde," "On new York visit with our 'new Jersey family,' daughter-in-law Vicky and grandsons Wale and Tunji (in center)"; and "Grandma with Kikelomo Amelie, Kola's daughter" all work to support the textual narratives that depict the writer as a happy mother of four sons, a mother-in-law and a grandmother as well.

Indeed, these photographic images capturing various events with different individuals serve as social documents for her self-construction. They provide evidence of her warm social relationship and extensive social network. For instance, in the photographs with the captions, "At a function for Brigadier Ogundipe and wife with Awolowo in the centre; in Ibadan," "With Justice Adedipe and wife at the Christening of their daughter, Gbemi" and"With Lagos State Gov. Bola Tinubu and Cousin-in-law Justice Atinuke Ige," provide evidence of her membership in this social circle, which further depicts her link their social status and how she identifies herself within this social relationship.

The photographs captioned "In India with the committee on Establishment of a National Printing and Publishing Body", "With President Siaka Steven in Freetown on a Conference on review of Sierra Leonian education", "At 1969 inaugural meeting of National Committee on Evils of Apartheid", "At NIIA, with Dr. Lawrence Fabummi of NIIA fame", "With Moroccan Minister, in Tangier, when attending conference organised by CAFRAD", and "As delegate secretary at 1968 UNESCO biennial conference", and "In Moscow for conference on children's literature, with Irina Tokmakova, Russian writer of children's books," all have rhetorical functions, which lay claim and serve as evidence to her narratives of her membership of the committees that handled various national assignments. The photographs also depict her self-transformation and change from the little girl in Esa Oke to a successful adult career woman.Altogether, these photographs reveal both her personal and cultural norms within the communal context; and Ogundipe uses them in the autobiography to re-inscribe herself as an African woman.

3.6 Conclusion

So far, this chapter has attempted to establish that the African woman is not voiceless nor is she a stooge to her male-counterpart; rather, she is his equal against whom she is not at war. Ogundipe's narrative lays bare the African woman's reality, a fact she demonstrates using

herEsa Oke community. The analysis also highlighted the use of photography as a means of autobiographical truth. The next chapter will further address these assumptions about the African woman, in Ogbe's *The Crumbs Off The Wife's Table.* Thefocus shall all the while be on how she negotiates her subjectivity through female bonding and dialogue and how sheasserts and retrievs herself as well, from her past.

CHAPTER FOUR

HILDA OGBE'S *THE CRUMBS OFF THE WIFE'S TABLE*

4.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter analysed self-construction in Ogundipe's *Up-Country Girl.*It also considered women's communal agency in the Esa Oke community; communal mothering and how the women negotiate their agency within the society. This chapter assesses female bonding and dialogue in Ogbe's The *Crumbs off the Wife's Table.*It also explores how she constructs her subjectivity as an African womanist.Womanism, as stated earlier, is embedded in all cultures, which only needs to be discovered. According to Phillips, womanism is a perspective that is open to all humanity; it abhors race, but embraces ethnicity and cultural origins,"because the concept of race is rooted in the relations of domination and oppression, while ethnicity and culture are store-houses of human knowledge such as history, memory, traditions… and language" (Phillips, 2006: xxxvi). In other words, womanism, is not the sole prerogative of the women of African descent. Therefore, the womanist is anyone "who has the consciousness to situate the struggle within African cultural realities by working for a total and robust self-retrieval" (Kolawole, 1997:34). The womanist is also a humanist, who embodies the ideals of dialogue, ethics of caring that emphasise individual uniqueness, personal expressiveness, empathy for other human beings; she is also family-oriented. These qualities profile Ogbe. She is emotional, caring, empathetic and family-oriented; she also prefers dialogue to open confrontation.

4.2 Female Bonding in *The Crumbs Off The Wife's Table*

Although Ogbe is German by birth, she, nonetheless, embodies the womanist consciousness, indeed,she constructs her subjectivity as an African woman in her autobiography, *The Crumbs Off The Wife's Table.* Her self-construction depicts a determined young woman with a survivalist instinct. From a young age, she experienced the brutal horrors of war in her

countryof birth, Germany. She begins the autobiography with the retrospective reconstruction of how sheand her family members, with the exception of her father --- who regrettably, "died in a concentration camp in the year 1942" (p.57) --- escaped from "Hitler's oppression" (p.4) in Germany to Britain, on her eighteenth birthday. "I was embarking on a journey from my home-town of Hamburg" (P.1), a journey that was to define the rest of her life. Prior to her escape, her brother "John, sixteen years old, had already been sent to England one month earlier" (p.1). She recalls that, she and other Jews were persecuted and treated, "as second-class citizens" (p.1) in their own country.

On her arrival in England, she got employed as a domestic staff in the home of Dunn and Dunkin in Reigate, through the Jewish committee, in Surrey (Reigate), along with her mother; in spite of her being "once [the] mistress of our elegant home in Hamburg" (p.2).However, Ogbe and her mother "did not mind any hardship, [They]were so glad to be free, so glad to be together" (p.6). Despite being from a relatively comfortable background, Ogbe's major concern was her "safety and survival" (p.2). In order to survive, Ogbe learnt how to scrub and polish floors and staircase (p.5), a task which she did while kneeling on both knees; as well as other chores, such as preparing meals and heating the house; these tasks caused her great hardship as she was not used to them, back in Germany. Not long after her employment as a domestic staff, she got a second job as a cleaner in a hospital, called "Croft Home," because "Britain is now at war with Germany" (p.8). Again, her job assignment entailed scrubbing and polishing" (p.9) the floors:

> Most of my duties in the Croft Home consisted of scrubbing and polishing, and if you have ever seen the length of hospital corridors and hospital stairs, you'll have an idea of what this occupation meant (p.9).

Ogbe, however, did not remain long in this job, because, "After a few weeks of this work,I was seized with severe back pains and was actually hospitalised in this same hospital, unable

to continue the work" (p.9). Her back pain, thus, rendered her incapacitated and unfit to continue in the job.Soon after, Ogbe, her mother and brother were moved to Lincoln Road, where her relations in Dorking, got jobs for her mother and brother in a factory that manufactured military uniforms. Her mother was employed as a seamstress who hand-sewed and stitched the lapels of officers uniforms, while her brother was also employed as "an errand-boy carrying bales of cloths and braids and any other equipment that was needed for the work" (p.11). Since Ogbe's back injury made it difficult for her to work as a domestic, she became a "freelance manicurist" (p.11), in the interim, so as to be able to augment her mother and brother's earnings.

As a freelance manicurist, she did not make much income, due to the almost non-existent customers, that needed manicuring in Dorking. The money she made hardly covered her expenditure, so she decided to quit the job. Once she was out of work, "I kept house for my mother and brother but money was very scarce" (p.12). Unable to contribute to the family's upkeep, Ogbe became unhappy; however, not one to remain idle, she went to the cinema to while away time whenever she could afford to. On one of such occasion, she came across an advertisement in the newspaper, the *Daily Mirror,* requesting the public to send in jokes for a prize. She sent in a joke, about a French man, which turned out to be the best joke of the week:

> I sent this joke to the *Daily Mirror,* and could not believe my eyes when aftera few days, I received a postal order for five pounds, the prize for the best joke of the week (p.13).

With this money, Ogbe was able to contribute to their house-upkeep as well, "now I did not need to feel guilty anymore. I could contribute equally to the household as my mother and brother did" (p.13).As the war raged on, Ogbe, her family and other war refugees were moved from Lincoln Road, to a camp in Port Erin, in the Isle of Man (p.18). There, she made the most of the situation so as to survive. The Isle of Man was not the typical refugee camp; it

was a safe haven in which they had a sense of belonging and camaraderie with one another. Ogbe narrates that "the village (camp) is surrounded by barbed wire… We had a stay of freedom, companionship, sunshine and beach, fresh air, and apart from missing the relations left behind… we had nothing really to complain about" (p.17). Thus, being in a relatively safe environment, away from Hitler's war, with time on their hands, the refugees forged ahead, to live life as happily and as peacefully as they could. They devised several ways to engage themselves, one of which was a "service exchange" (p.17), which was more like a labour exchange, where each member offered to teach whatever skill they had to other members of the camp:

> It was like a labour exchange where you could go and offer any skills you had and for those skills you were paid in cardboard tokens because money, real money, was not in circulation. There were teachers, and dressmakers, headdresses and artists, doctors and nurses who all offered their services (p.17).

On her part, Ogbe details that she offered to teach French and English, partly because she loved French, and had the skill to teach the rudimentary aspect, and her aversion to the heavy German accent that interfered, when the Germans speak the English language. "I hated the German accent when spoken in English and made it my mission to correct the mal-pronunciation of the 'th', 'u' and 'r'" (p.17). She further narrates that her class was always "full of elderly ladies" (p.18), who had no inhibitions about improving their spoken English. Her French class equally attracted a large number of refugees in the camp; and it was such a success that she was commended:

> I have to this day a typewritten testimonial from the camp Commandant who said upon my release that I was a trained teacher of languages, that I had taught large classes of English and French, which had been among the most popular in the camp (p.19).

This depicts Ogbe, as a selfless human being, who believed in making a difference in people's lives wherever possible. This narrative also highlights the dynamics of female

bonding and the collective actions among the refugees in the camp.Even though it was war time, the refugees were unbroken by their apparent bleak situation. They also found happiness in simple pleasures, such as acting, singing, knitting and teaching,so as to take their minds off their horrendous experience. Through the sharing of common lived experiences, these refugees created different ways to specifically address their reality. Although, it can be argued that they are Jews and not Africans, nonetheless, they shared a close affinity with the Africans, "because the Jewish race stems from Africa and the customs of the Orthodox Jews and the Africans of today are in some way similar" (p.43).

Consequently, Ogbe had another responsibility thrust upon her, at the camp; that of finding a solution to complaints of agonising snoring disturbances, "when people began to complain that their roommates were snoring and that they could not sleep properly" (p.19). Ogbe, being empathetic and a resourceful person, decided to do something to end the nightmare, especially, when a "young brilliant gifted pianist" (p.19), had "plasticine" --- a type of ear plug used to shut out the snores --- stuck in her ears. The maxim of necessity being the mother of invention rings true here. Ogbe, who "felt something needed to be done" (p.20), was able to invent, what she called "Nosound" ear plugs, after several trials from "bees wax, paraffin wax and other ingredients, which she sold at the rate of six pence a pair" (p.20) to the refugees, as they were now allowed to have or receive money from outside the camp (p.17). As the war escalated, with "fire bombs" (p.25) raining on the city of London, it became imperative to have all hands on deck in order to support "the war effort" (p.39). So, in this regard, Ogbe and the other refugees were released from internment on the Isle of Man; perhaps due to the conviction on the part of the British government that they did not pose any threat.First, she worked in a grocery store owned by an elderly spinster, called Miss Marshall in Dorking. After working there for a year, she became anxious and wanted to explore other terrains:

> After one year with the delightful Miss Marshall, I became restive. I said to my mother, "We can't go on like this. I have to learn something. I have to improve myself. There is no time and no facility in Dorking to do this. I must go to London to find a home for all of us and to see if I can find a job and some opportunity to learn a skill" (p.30).

This was how the daring and determined Ogbe went to London by train, at a time when bombs were falling from the sky in torrents. When she got to London, she was able to get a blasted "large upstairs flat in Willesden Green" (p.33) on rent for herself and family; her mother, her brother, John and Lizzie, a fellow intern, who was her mother's friend. While in London, she tried her hands on different trades because, "I like using my hand" (p.39). She also acquired the skill of dressmaking, "shoulder bags, book covers, ration-book holders, tea-cosies, napkin rings and belts, all edged in different colours" made from raffia (p.70). As she waited to be called up to serve in the women's army for the "war effort" (p.38), she also worked as a replacement dental nurse. All these depict her as a determined young woman, who was not afraid to express herself positively in many diverse ways.Ogbe, who had hitherto been refused recruitment into the women's army, thus, enlisted in the engineering section as a fitter so as to contribute, "SOMETHING" to help end the war. She worked as an engineering fitter along "with nine other boys and girls [in the] Industrial Training Centre Acton, London, in May 1943. A vast ground-floor factory, perhaps 100ft x 200ft. partitioned along each side into cages by expanded metal." (p.39). it was an experience, as she affirms in the autobiography, that she enjoyed immensely:

> I was fascinated. Not only did I like using my hands, I liked the smell of oil and metal, I liked the camaraderie among the students. I was uplifted by the feeling that I would contribute SOMETHING towards the war effort, but best of all I liked the variety of people with whom I now came into contact. I loved people, and still do. Particularly people from far away exotic countries… I was particularly drawn to Africans. (p.39).

It was that while she was working as a fitter, she met Tommy who had come to Britain to study from a "far away" country, Nigeria. She was instantly "bowled" over by this self-confident Nigerian, who spoke "good English" uninhibitedly with a "booming voice" (p.42). She became curious and intrigued at the same time; and wanted to know more about him. Ogbe narrates that she had the opportunity to know more about him, "when we, the fitter trainees, assembled in the classroom for mathematics. I found myself sitting next to the Nigerian. We exchanged names. His name was Tommy". "Not short for Thomas, you know" he explained. "It's Thompson. Thompson Ajemijereye. (T.A). My friends just call me that. T.A." (p.42).In his "frank" manner, he also informed her that he was a married man with two children back home in Nigeria.However, after this encounter with him, their relationship progressed quickly.By July 5, 1952, they were married at the Registry of Willesdon, with their close friends and the few family members "Tommy had in England at the time" (p.78) in attendance. They had their first child together, a boy, whom they named Monubarami, Monu for short, on the 24th of March, 1955. Ogbe recalled that he had a charming personality that endeared him to those around him. He was also an experienced shopper with amazing culinary skills, which he used to get through to her heart. "I enjoyed every mouthful of Tommy's creative concoction and who's to say that the way to only a man's heart is his stomach?" (p.45). Ironically, her encounter with Tommy is later to become a paradox in her life; both memorable and painful experiences, although, she did not know it at the beginning.

The chapter titled "Arrival and Early Life in Nigeria" introduces the Ogbes as they arrived back home from London, after Tommy had qualified as a lawyer. They arrived home to meet "a tight group of relations and friends" (p.91), who welcomed them. Ogbe recalls that their arrival was a "happy home-coming" (p.92). She recounts that they were taken to the family shrine where they were given a piece of kolanut and gin after a prayer to their ancestors said by Tommy's old uncle:

> My husband's… grandfather's father had been a prince, and it was to his shrine that we were now taken to give thanks to the great ancestor… At times he touched the floor with his fingertips, then touched his chest, then pointed upwards to the sky in thanks. He bit off a piece of kolanut and passed the rest to the company for each to take a bite. I took a small one… And then the cork of a gin bottle popped. Uncle Merogun filled his glass, but before he put it to his lips, he dashed some gin from it to the ground, three times. This was the ancestor's share. He downed the rest himself and again passed it round for everyone to take a sip (p.96).

Her participation in the ceremony without questioning is a reflection of her independence of mind and her commitment to the marriage with a disposition that seemed to say, anywhere you lead, I would follow.Ogbe, who narrates earlier that she loved meeting people, especially those from exotic countries, like Africa, instantly, became fascinated by her husband's culture; the people's ways of greeting, their types of dressing and kinds of food. For instance, she learnt that their ways of greeting was quite different from the European way of saying "hello" at any time. Rather, it was "good morning", "good afternoon" and "good evening" (p.102), depending on the time of day. She also learnt to dress in the Itsekiri way -- that is, the '*wrappas'* (wrappers) "which were worn in two layers" with a blouse on top (p.103); as well as gender associations.

> It was just not done for a man to be seen talking to another man's wife. So when we met, the men would greet me, ask "how are the children?" and walk past me in a hurry (p.101).

Ogbe assimilated all these and tried as best as she could to be a supportive wife and caring mother to her children; hers and that of Tommy, from his previous marriage. Soon after, she made a concerted effort to find her feet economically, as she was not one to depend on her husband financially for her personal needs:

> I had always thought that money came between husband and wife and resolved from a very early age that I would be self-sufficient and never ask my husband for anything (p.173).

Thus, with a good instinct for business opportunities, she identified a "business opportunity going to waste" in Warri; the ice cream business, which was not available "for hundreds of miles!" (p.117), and then cashed in on it. She wrote to her mother in the United States to help her procure an ice cream-making machine. Thus, she started the HILLY'S ICE CREAM business, which she supplied to "Kingsway Stores, Sapele and Chellaram's Warri" (p.118). This contradicts the claim, that the African woman is solely dependent, economically, on her man. However, upon their transfer to Port Harcourt, she sold the ice cream machine and bought her first car; "a second-hand small car, a Fiat 600." which gave her "such great pleasure and such a feeling of freedom" (p.150). However, her husband put a damper on this "exhilarating" feeling, when he said, "I don't want to have to defend you if you have an accident" (p.110). Undeterred by this, she pleaded with him to teach her to drive, but he did not have the patience to teach her; thus, "his effort to teach me to drive ended disastrously" (p.110). He even threatened to leave her standing in the middle of the road, because she did not remember to clutch when she changed gear:

> "If you don't remember to clutch when you change gear, --- I leave you standing in the road. Here and now! Get out of the car," he shouted. He was so irate that I had to decide whether to continue driving, or save my marriage. The latter won (p.110).

Undaunted, she nonetheless, asserted herself and learnt to drive, thereby proving to Tommy that she could do anything she set her mind on.In addition, she also put to good use her dressmaking skills. She sewed "blouses to order", and, later, "ready-made" (p.115) ones. Subsequently, she also taught her husband's cousin, Ethel, how to bake "Viema Rolls in different shapes" (p.203), with glossy finishing, which she supplied to Kingsway Stores. In addition, she taught his daughter Ching-ching, who worked as "a caterer in a new hotel,"

different "recipes of Chinese cooking" (p.203). This embodies the womanist ideal of her commitment to the upliftment of other women.

Ogbe also delved into the silver jewellery business by chance, when her mother gave her a birthday gift of "five pounds" in 1962. She narrates retrospectively that the money was not enough to buy herself gold; hence, she opted for silver instead; since she "had wanted a pair of silver earrings anyway" (p.154). So she sketched the pattern she wanted on a piece of paper and took it to the goldsmith, who made them according to her own specification. They became an instant hit, "as soon as other European ladies saw me," they wanted to know where she got them from. She explained that she had a goldsmith to make them for her and this resulted in "an immediate clamour from the women to order the same for them or something smaller or could she make a silver bracelet or a chain or ring?" Thus, began her journey into the silver jewellery business. As her "reputation for the silver grew" (p.168) she earned recognition from different people, among whom was the then Governor of the Mid-West State, Nigeria, Lt. Col. Samuel Ogbemudia. Impressed by her contributions to the small-scale industries, the Midwest Craftshop was opened on 5th July, 1968 (p.192), to promote locally made crafts. This also came along with a job specification that entailed her travelling within and outside the country; to places like Lagos and London, in order to display their crafts and also participate in arts festivals and tourisms. All through these, she had the total support from Tommy. He did not interfere in her work. Ogbe recounts that, "My husband never objected to any travelling I did. For one thing, he could trust me to the end of the earth" (p.203). She recalls that when people sometimes asked him questions about her silver business, his response was thus:

> People ...even asked Tommy about this phenomenon of the silver industry which was springing up from nowhere. I used to hear him say: "Oh I don't know what my wife is doing. I never interfere in her activities. You must ask her." (p.172).

This counters the dominant discourse of the radical Western feminists' that the African woman is oppressed by patriarchy and is, thus, home-bound and domesticated.However, if these feminists had bothered to review African women's experience objectively and not through their own scripted lens, they would have realised that being "home-bound" and "domesticated", is, for the majority of African women, a matter of choice and not by compulsion. Moreover, it does not negate the economic viability of the African women. Some of them do engage in various forms of business from their homes, as exemplified by Ogbe, whose ice-cream making, fashion designing and silver jewellery businesses were carried out from her own home, prior to her involvement with the Midwest Craftshop.

4.3 Dialogue in *The Crumbs Off The Wife's Table*

Womanism in terms of gender conflict can through dialogue, negotiate reconciliation. Dialogue permits negotiation in a conflict situation and helps to settle differences; and to establish both connection and individuality. Since problem solving is multi-faceted, the negotiating skills of both genders and their willingness to make concession are equally necessary in a dialogue situation which can result in positive and healthy relationships. As stated earlier, Ogbe is a womanist, who embodies the ideals of dialogue, is family-oriented and also prefers dialogue to open confrontation.Although Ogbe had the support of her husband, she realised soon after their return to Nigeria that his habit of "endless tirades over small matters" (p.106), which she ascribed to his perplexity of adapting to life in England, had exacerbated. She narrates that, he now easily got irritated over small issues:

> Even in our fourteen years in England, I had always been amazed at his reaction to, in my mind, small incidents or mishaps. I at first put his rantings down to the difficulty of adjusting to life in Europe – then to the stress of war – later to the anxiety about exams, some of which he had to resit, and finally to financial problems; … although our finances were not that desperate (p.113).

She had hitherto thought that he would overcome his "overreaction" to trivial issues, realised much to her chagrin, that he got even more infuriated when she or any of her children made little mistakes. She recounts an instance when Tommy upbraided her, because he felt she was being wasteful.

> On one occasion, I poured salt from the container into my hand to season the soup I was cooking. I had poured too much and as it could not be returned through the spout into the container, I brushed it off my hand into the sink. Tommy saw me and shouted "Look at you! You are wasting my money! Have you no sense? You should know how much salt you need for the soup …" on and on he went (p.113).

Ogbe, who had "vowed … to make this man happy, to support him in his goals and cushion him from hurt"; and was also "a poor match" for his diatribe; always opted for peace, instead of violence (p.113). She "tried to soothe him and to undo his knot of anger"; and also allowed her "love prevail" (p.113), despite the fact that she was the aggrieved one. By this, the autobiographer constructs her subjectivity as a womanist who embodies of tolerance.Furthermore, she recounts that Tommy equally vented his frustrations violently on their children; he beat them over the slightest provocation. Whenever she tried to stop him from beating them, he would say to her:

> It was no easy task when his irritation turned upon his children, Ching-ching and Freedom and his niece Lily. He beat them mercilessly for any small misdemeanour which I could not cover up. If I intervened and begged for mercy for them he shouted: "If you interfere, I'll beat them all the harder" (p.113).

Thus, she was caught in a quandary. She could not stand the torture he inflicted on the children, yet she was forced to bear the anguish all through it and not intervene, as her intervention would further aggravate him.Ogbe, who had a "painful sensitivity" (p.112) towards violence, fainted as she could not bear the agonising cries of the children. However, this did not deter him; rather, he rationalised his action based on the ridiculous belief that it was a way of inculcating the virtue of responsibility in them:

> I have told you before, when I was a little boy, my uncle gave me six lashes of the cane every morning, to make me a good boy for the rest of the day (p.113).

In another instance, Ogbe recounts that, Tommy gave Monu, "then six years old, six vicious strokes of the cane for not cleaning the bath properly" (p.140). This was the height of his cruelty;and it became intolerable to the wife, even though she was enraged, shecould not stop him. Nonetheless, after this, she did not feel the same about him anymore: "after this incident I felt Ihad lost a large chip of my love and respect for my husband ... I hated my husband" (p.140). While it was possible for her to challenge him, she however, remained calm and tried to maintain peace in their home. This depicts strength of characterand not weakness in resolving disagreement. This is not to suggest that the African womanist condones violence in whatever form. Moreover, aside from Tommy's verbal and physical abuse, Ogbe equally fell victim of emotional and psychological anguish by his philandering.He had begun to exhibit the trait while they were in England, as she recalls that, "he had found a simple, 'nice' girl who lived by herself in a small house a few miles away from us" (p. 121). She had thought then that it was a short phase; something he would outgrow, because she had believed him, when he told her that:

> We Nigerians always have a girl-friend in the corner somewhere. These girls come and go. They don't know what love is. They come for the money, they attach themselves to important men for their protection, and they try to have children for them to have some claim on the men. But they only get the crumbs that fall from the wife' table (p.48).

This claim by Tommy was a foretaste of his philandering, in later years to come. However, Ogbe, who was ignorant of "the customs and traditions of Nigeria" (p.43), believed and trusted him implicitly.

In the chapter, The Crumbs, The Slice and the Whole Cake, she recalls retrospectively, that his philandering with his *Olorunsogo* woman, "the equivalent of trophy wives," whose

mission "it is to get the wife off the chair of her marriage and become the madam" (Ogundipe, 2000:200), caused her so much emotional anguish. Tommy, who never hid the fact that he loved women, brazenly flaunted his affair with his secretary, whom he referred to as his "permanent secretary" (p.226), in public glare unabashedly. He went out every night to be with her; he even took her along with him to public functions. In fact, "she was taken to luncheons and dinner" (p.226), not minding the fact that his and Hilda's friends would equally be in attendance at such places. When she complained about it, he placated her thus:

> Poppie, [for that was his pet name for her] don't be jealous. When wives are jealous they simply give chance to the other woman 'to conquer', to come into the house. There comes a time in a man's life when we stop all this woman-nonsense (p.212-213).

Hence, she bore her ordeal and remained the good wife, who was expected to adhere to the cardinal virtues of good womanhood, like patience, tolerance and submissiveness.Every morning, when he came back home she, "welcomes him with a smile in the morning, so glad to have him back" (p.121). By this, she became a mere function of his conception of her identity, while she unwittingly encouraged his philandering.

However, Tommy did not stop his "woman-nonsense", rather, he moved her into one of their bungalows, next door:

> He blightly explained to me that, as I did not want him to spend the nights outside in the town, it was better for him to just cross into the next compound so that I would know where he was in case I needed him (p.220-221).

On one of Ogbe's work trips, Tommy, the once "doting father" (p.207), behaved irresponsibly. He left Temi, their "nine-year-old daughter, totally alone in our big storey building" (p.207), throughout the night, while he was at his "secretary's." When he was confronted, he gave the inane excuse that:

> He had to make sure that his girl in the corner, for whom he carried all expenses and responsibilities, would not admit some nincompoop into her bed in his absence (p.207).

This outrightly shows his insensitivity and lack of commitment to his family. He put his need above his daughter's security and wellbeing. For Ogbe, it was a downright betrayal and once again, "another big piece of my sore heart cracked" (p.207). This became the final straw; she could no longer repress her feeling and decided that it was imperative she did something about their prevailing circumstance. Rather than being confrontation, she thought it best to dialogue with him:

> "I want to talk about us".
>
> "Well, what about us?" he asked.
>
> "You have hurt me very badly by breaking faith with me", I said.
>
> "Well, what do you want me to do? I can leave this house for you. I can move out, if you don't like my lifestyle. In any case what are you bell-aching about?" (p.212).

Tommy's attitude, smacks of betrayal and callous insensitivity, which further heightened her sense of defeat and unhappiness. After this, she became reticent towards him, depressed, and, "emotionally drained.""I was at the end of my tether" (p.213).Altogether, this attempt to resolve their differences by dialoguing reflects Ogbe's womanism.

In a desperate bid to find a solution to her predicament, she sought the help of a psychiatrist, 'who listened to me patiently, prescribed tranquilisers and sleeping tablets and said ... "you know, what you are suffering from we call "the second wife syndrome. It happens frequently" (p.214). The psychiatrist also advised that she should take a "holiday" (p.215), as the therapy for her depression. However, this did not alleviate her anguish, for, as soon as they got back from the holiday, it was "back to misery." "On arrival back in Benin City, Tommy ... went out immediately .... (to check) on his girl" (p.218). Every night, he went out "smelling sweetly of shaving lotion ... in his car going in the direction of the secretary's area" (p.219). This further

plunged Ogbe into further depression.However, she realised that she could not continue like this and had to act to "save my sanity" (p.229), from his systemic abuse of her personhood.

Her depression, thus, became a crucial element that necessitated her decision to retrieve herself from the evasive abuse in her marital relationship. Her first act of self-retrieval was to move out of their marital bedroom, as there was no sense in sharing the same bedroom, since he was away every night:

> I moved out of our marital bedroom into the now empty children's room. I had to make a statement somehow. "What was the point of sharing my husband's bedroom? I had no one to reach for in the empty bed beside me. I might as well be alone in my own room" (p.221).

Ogbe's moving out depicts a form of meeky and passive self-empowerment and commitment to her self-retrieval, self-healing and self-assertion from Tommy's oppression.

Soon after she moved into their children's room, Tommy became very ill with meningitis and "went into a coma" (p.221). Left with no choice, she once again found herself playing the role of the caring, dutiful wife; she cared and nursed him back to good health. On one occasion, during his convalescence, he derisively accused her of being happy about his ill health, "I suppose you are quite glad to have me ill and weak so that I cannot pursue my usual activities" (p.222). In short, this was a reflection of his egotistical posturing and lack of understanding, of his wife's devotion to him. Understandably, Ogbe was further disappointed that after "thirty years" (p.213) together he still could not understand her "devotion to him" (p.222). Nonetheless, after his recovery, he did not show sincere gratitude; instead, he behaved in a rather incredible way. As soon as he was discharged from the hospital, he went straight to his girl in the corner, who was conveniently absent while he was ill. Ogbe, however, could not help but pray silently for divine intervention; "dear Lord lift this black

cloud from my life. Tell me where to go" (p.219).Eventually, things came to a head, shortly after the Christmas of 1978, when she asked him what his plans for the New Year were:

> It was the last week of 1978. Just after Christmas I asked my husband "what have you planned for New Year's eve? Where are we going to celebrate?"
>
> He turned angrily at me. "You have had Christmas Day, you can't have New Year's eve as well". That clinched it for me. The girl in the corner now had the whole cake (p.233).

How typical of the *olorunsogo* woman, who does not even want a "slice" of the "cake," but would rather shove the wife "off of the chair of her marriage so **[**she can] sit comfortably" (Ogundipe, 2005:200), eat the whole "cake" and disappear once it has been eaten: Surely, she eventually disappeared, having eaten the whole cake: "Two years further on, the girl in the corner who had caused us so much misery left him. She had become tired" (p.261-262). Ogbe, who had hitherto been planning "to move into my own house and live alone" (p.233), got the impetus to leave her matrimonial home,as Tommy's angry response became the prompt she needed to act. Sadly, Tommy remained indignant about his behaviour, he did not make any concerted effort to apologise; rather, he arrogantly asked:

> "Well", he said "haven't you had enough?" "Enoughof what?" "Enough of playing house?". "I am not playing house. I came to live here". "I see. Well, that's alright then", and he drove off (p.256).

Even though, the womanist is family-oriented, she is not obliged to remain in an unhappy marriage, just in order to keep up appearances. Ogbe's unhappiness did not stem from the fact about Tommy's affair with another woman, nor was it as a result of being jealous. Rather, it was from his callous, disrespectful and nonchalant attitude toward her feelings. He completely disregarded her feelings; each time she tried to tell him how she felt, he would laugh it off her face. The womanist is not averse to sharing her man with another woman --- as, in some ways, it librates and gives her the freedom to engage in her own personal interest.

Rather, she desires self-respect, self-fulfillment and self-dignity alongside her male-counterpart in a mutual and beneficial atmosphere. This much Ogbe deserves from him and it was the height of matrimonial irresponsibility for him not to respond.

So it was, as Ogbe narratesin the chapter, "Freedom from Pain" how, "after thirty-five years of marriage" (p.256), she eventually moved into her personal house, in the last week of 1978, shortly after the Christmas celebrations. However, she remained friends with Tommy, until his death, "on the 23rd of June, 1999" (p.273). Once she had settled in, she occupied herself with her silver business, which was good and flourishing: "the Kingsway Stores and also the U.T.C. Stores (United Trading Company) were selling our silver, and I put up frequent exhibitions in hotels and other exposed places in Lagos" (p.234). Apart from engaging herself in her business activities, she also pursued other interests. She narrates that, she "joined the Field Society and met many people"; and got "invited to various parties" (p.236). She also made new friends as well, like "B.D.B., a young blonde Englishman", (p.236), who was her neighbour and his Indian friend, Dave. Ogbe, who had always a fascination for the Asian Continent, got the chance to learn how to prepare exotic Indian cuisine from Dave. "From him I learned much about cooking tasty vegetables like spiced courgettes or curried beans or highly spiced cauliflower and potatoes" (p.237). In her narrative, Ogbe recounts that she equally took "long exciting trip(s)" (p.251) to India and Singapore on holiday, along with D.B.D., on the invitation of Dave. As a member of the Nigerian Field Society, she also got interested in medicinal herbs and learnt the various uses of plants. She recalls that, she was particularly interested in "some small plants" (p.257), which was used to treat sickle cell disorder. She was able to confirm the efficacy of this plant, which she turned into powdered form and used on D.B.D's driver's new born baby boy, her first patient and a listless "twelve year old boy, the size of an eight year old" (p.259), with an amazing result:

> My gardener brought me my second patient on his bicycle. A twelve year old boy,the size of an eight year old. The boy shuffled into my house, listless, weak, thin with jaundiced whites of the eyes. He also had a mildly enlarged spleen and was in poor shape. He went away with enough of the herb-powder and instructions and I told him to see me again in a month's time.
>
> I hardly recognised him when, at the appointed time, he strode briskly into my house, his eyes clear and a big smile on his face. "I can now play table-tennis" he announced and made a sharp movement with his right hand holding an imaginary bat (p. 258-259).

Thus, began her journey as a sickle cell counsellor. Ogbe narrates that, as word spread about her remedy for the sickle cell disorder, the number of her patients increased, such that she had to open "a regular 'clinic' in my house every weekday from 6-7 in the evenings. I also began to keep records: attendance and patients' medical records, albeit in layman's fashion" (p.259-260). Similarly, despite her busy schedule, she also had time to indulge in her interest in astrology, which she recalls, "dates back to almost thirty years" (p. 278). Thus, her separation from her husband transcended a physical separation, as it also became for her a journey of self-retrieval, self- assertion and self-discovery from pain; the pain she passed through in his hands years back.

Although the Western feminists' facile construction of the African woman depicts her as "usually poor and powerless" (Nnaemeka in Oloniyan and Quayson, 2009:573), oppressed by the patriarchate, Ogbe's oppression by her husband had no direct bearing with patriarchy. His behaviour was not a reflection of how African (Nigerian) men normally treated their women; rather, he was the exception, not the norm. However, this is not to claim that the African woman does not suffer from male dominance. Nonetheless, Ogbe's matrimonial encounters demonstrate resilience, strength of character and self-assertion until she moved out of the matrimonial home.Through the narrative, Ogbe is able to construct herself as a strong and assertive woman and demonstrates that, just as the African womanist can have fulfillment

within the confines of her marriage, she can also lead a fulfilled life outside a bad marriage; thereby, negating the usual claims about her docility, invisibility and oppression.

4.4 PhotographicTechnique Self-Representation in *The Crumbs Off The Wife's Table*

In *The Crumbs Off The Wife's Table,* photography, as a medium of visual narrative and self-construction in autobiography, constitutes an important element. The writer uses the written text and photographic images interactively to construct her subjectivity and also serve as referents to time and history; hence, they add an important and significant source of meaning to her narrative. The photographs are accompanied by captions that are intended to orient the reader's interpretation of the written text.

The images depicting her in different stages of maturity underscores the concept of alterity, which the narrative constructs. Her photograph as a young girl captioned, "Hilda age fifteen, 1936," depicts her with a happy smile on her face. It also reveals the ambience of innocence, a time of peace, since the timeline of the photograph suggests it was taken three years prior to her escape to England. Another photograph of "Hilda and Mother as domestics in England, 1939," depicts them smiling proudly into the camera, in spite of their situation.The photograph captioned "Testimonial from the Internment Camp, 1941," that details her effort in assisting her fellow internees, serves as a referenciality to a history; the history of the German war in particular.Earlier on in the narrative, Ogbe recounts that fashion designing was one of the skills she had first acquired upon her arrival in London from Dorking.Her photograph with other participants in a "teenage fashion talk at girls' club in London. Hilda on extreme right, 1951", confirms her stint in the fashion world in London.

The photograph on the front pageof the autobiography, serves as a pre-text of her self-construction as a married woman. The image also depicts her as a happy bride alongside her husband, Tommy. Similarly, the group photograph captioned, "London. Marriage of Hilda to

'Tommy', Left of Tommy, his friend and best man J.O.B. Omotosho, 5th July, 1952.The balance of the description is definitive: it supports Ogbe's narrative of being married to Tommy, with few friends and relatives present at the ceremony. Next to Hilda: Marlene, her guru. Next to Marlene: cousin, Mrs Favour Egbe. Behind Marlene: Miss Doris Prest. Behind Mr. Omotosho: Hilda's cousin Luara, child and husband. On left of male cousin: late Chucks Adophy. Back row: L-R: Philip Lewin, Dr Lasserson Webber and Egbe Esq."

Since "each photo tells a separate story [that] may support, or be in tension with, or contradict the claims of the verbal text" (Smith and Watson, 2001:74), the photographs thus, provide evidence to the textual narrative concerning Ogbe's mother and brother's almost total absence in the story of her marriage. She narrates that, even though they (her mother and brother) "loved England ... [they had] left for the United States in 1947" (p. 62). The absence of the father in the photograph further supports her narrative claim of his death, in a concentration camp, in Germany, as well. Photographic images do tell many stories; thus, another story that the photograph tells is that of Marlene's. Early in the narrative Ogbe narrates that:

> Into Marlene's willing ears I poured all my love and admiration for Tommy, all my hopes and fears for our future, and always she would regard me with her keenly penetrating looks and sometimes ask: "Are you sure you can cope with all these?" (p. 48).

A closer scrutiny of Marlene in the picture, reveals a face that is neither smiling nor frowning, more in resignation, which seems to say, "it is what she (Ogbe) wants, so I have no option but to support and wish her the best". Perhaps, this could be a reflection of her inner thoughts and misgivings about Ogbe's relationship with Tommy, given the fact that she is privy to some of Ogbe's fears; especially the fact about him being previously "married with two children". And his claim that, Nigerian men "always have a girl-friend in the corner somewhere ... (who) only get the crumbs that fall from the wife's table" (p.48). Ogbe equally includes her family photographs among those she captions in the autobiography, which tell different stories about

her subjectivity at different times. The family photograph is a store house of some sorts, in which visual memories are preserved for posterity. It is also a family's heritage, through which lived experiences are frozen in time and passed on from one generation to another. The family photographic images captioned, "New York. L-R: Hilda, her mother and brother John, 1st March, 1950", captures her visit to her mother's and brother in New York and supports her claim of having one sibling. Other photographs upholds different aspects of the narrative pieces in the autobiography: "Family of Tommy Ogbe: Father, Mother, Son Monu and daughter Temi, 1973", and "Hilda with daughter Temi making the 'kweke' for the second burial of an Ogbe Chief. Hilda in all gold, Temi in all silver, 1970,"depicts the Ogbes as one happy family; it also constructs Ogbe as a wife and a mother as well. By participating in the 'kweke' and dressed in the local attire, Ogbe, thus, constructs her subjectivity as having the independence of mind to immerse herself in her husband's homeculture.

The photographs captioned, "L-R: Col. Mobalaji Johnson, Lt. Col. S.O. Ogbemudia and Hilda at the Midwest Crafts exhibition, Lagos, 1968" and "Hilda at a jewellery exhibition in Enugu, Friday, August 7, 1964" attest to the narrative of how the Midwest Craft Shop was born, with the support of the then Midwest Military Governor, Lt. Col. Samuel Ogbemudia. The photographic images are also a referential confirmation of her social relationship with the Governor and the claim that her job in the Midwest Crafts Shop entailed travelling and attending exhibitions in different places.As discussed earlier, theautobiographical narrative, records how Ogbe started the Silver Jewellery business. Thus, her photographs captioned, "Hilda Ogbe: Nigeria's first silver jeweller", "Some of Hilda's designs of Silver Jewellery, 1969", and "Hilda (centre) with some Silversmiths and their apprentices at Ubulu-uku, 1973," lend credence to her narrative as being the pioneer Silver jeweller in Nigeria. The images of the silver depict her personal and historical contributions to the industry. The photographs also provide a kaleidoscope of meaning to the autobiographical narrative. They serve as a

reconstitution of history from her remembered past; and also perform the process through which the past is consciously re-collected, re-examined, and re-lived.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter has argued that even though Ogbe is a Nigerian by naturalisation, nevertheless,she is an African by orientation; thus, she constructs herself as a womanist, who abhors violence and is peaceful. The analysis has explained how she left a marriage that was characterised by an oppressive chauvinism; and how she re-inscribed her self-assertion through self-healing, self-discovery and self-fulfillment. Through that she lays claim to the truth that the African woman is not domesticated and oppressed by the patriarchal structure, as claimed by some external observers. Furthermore, the chapter has also looked at how the author of the autobiography used photographic images to construct her identity as a strong, dynamic and self-fulfilled woman. The next chapter is the conclusion of the study. It seeks to summarise and provide answers to the research questions in the introductory chapter of the dissertation.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that the autobiography is a literary form like other forms of fiction as it has the plenitude of literary tropes. Critics of autobiography have argued that the autobiographical text can be deemed as a literary form as it also lay claims to literary craftsmanship. The autobiography, just like fiction has such literary elements like temporal and spacial setting, language, and characters, and similarly, both the autobiographer narrator and the fictional author can manipulate linguistic element artistically for aesthetic purposes. In fictional and autobiographical writing forms, border lines between 'art' and 'artlessness' are blurred by the ambiguous status of writing that are both creative and historical, which is imbued in both disciplines of non-fiction and those of fiction.Consequently, in recent times, with an increasingly critical scholarship in the genre, critics have observed that it has the capacity to appropriate different medium as dictated by the autobiographer's impulsion at the time of writing the autobiography. In other words, autobiographical self-representation can be enacted through various media, in short feature and documentary films; theatre pieces; installations; the painted or sculpted self-portrait and photography. For the purpose of

scholarship studies in literature discourse, critical analysis of these forms, require detailed attention to the features and creative elements that make them artistic, aesthetic and literary. As such, the set autobiographical texts serve as a window view to illuminatethe actual status of the African woman.

In light of this, the study set out to explore how African (Nigerian) women conceive and construct their identities, using the autobiographies of Ogundipe (2005) and Ogbe (2001) as case studies. The objective was to deconstruct the dominant discourse about the stock image of the African woman as being invisible, docile and oppressed. These assumptions are not often presented from a singular perspective, nonetheless, their argument about the reality of the African woman are often based on mere conjecture and are, thus, subject to contestation. The narratives analysed in this study are, therefore, engaged in a seriouscontestation, struggling to deconstruct the distorted images of the African woman's reality. However, contrary to these perceived notions, as this study demonstrates, the African woman's status is not subordinate to that of the man; rather, she is strong, and assertive; and has a personality that is distinct, even as she makes valuable contributions to her home and community.

The status of the African woman has been a critical issue of debate in critical discourses. As stated earlier, the aim of this study is to re-inscribe the negative narratives about the African woman. The study examined African women's status through analysing two African women's autobiographies. These texts are chosen from two different geographical locations in Nigeria, West Africa to give a good sample of African women status contrary to perceive notions. This study undertook the task of analising the stereotypical narratives of the African woman in dominant discourses. In unique ways, both autobiographers testify to the ways in which the African woman's self formation is mediated by cultural fusion within her cultural milieux. The autobiographers each vindicate the negative clichés about the African woman and suggest that her status is contrary to how she is perceived to be. This study has examined

dialectics of gender reciprocity, communal mothering, self-affirmation, dialogue and female bonding within scholarly theoretical debates and two autobiographical texts: *Up-Country Girl* and *The Crumbs Off The Wife's Table.* The two autobiographies analysed in this dissertation explored issues that border on the personal, cultural, social and national aspects of their lives; and, by extension, that of the African woman. Although African women are not a monolithic unit, they, nonetheless, share similarities in their experiences, struggles and suffering; the same cultural, social, economical and political factors also often impede their progress. Similarly, the two authors, in this study present the African woman as strong, assertive and dynamic, which is contrary to the distorted narrative claims about her. Ogundipe and Ogbe's narratives depict them as insiders, who can to be considered as representatives of the African woman's status.

Both autobiographers share similar patterns in the construction of their identities. From a young age, they had both learnt to survive against all odds, albeit in different ways. Ogundipe, a farmer's daughter from the remote village of Esa Oke, exhibited a strong personality trait from a very tender age. She realised the benefits of education and strove hard to acquire it; and upon her graduation worked her way through to one of the top positions in the Nigerian Civil Service by shear dint of hard work and determination. Like Ogundipe, Ogbe had also exhibited a survivalist personality, when she escaped her war-torn country of birth, Germany, to England. From the outset, she had projected an optimistic determination to survive the war and make something of her life. Thus, she acquired different skills and also contributed to the war effort. As womanists, both Ogundipe and Ogbe demonstrate the importance of the family in the African woman's life; the former, emphases this when she declined a promotion, which would have been to the detriment of her family. This act makes her a strong self-assertive woman who knows what is best for her. For Ogbe, the family is also sacrosanct; she dared to embark on a journey with her Nigerian husband to Africa. However, even though she loved

Tommy, she refused to remain in an oppressive marriage because of the family. Leaving her matrimonial home after she had shared over three decades of her life with Tommy signifies the strength of character in that, perhaps, some other women would rather remain in the marriage and condone the abuse.

Similarly, the autobiographers also use photographic technique as claims to autobiographical truth in their narratives.Photography, as a medium of visual narrative and self-construction in autobiography, constitutes an important element. Both writers use the written text and photographic images interactively and an emphasis on memory as rhetorical strategies to construct their subjectivity and also to serve as referents to time and history; hence, they add an important and significant source of meaning to their narratives. The photographs are accompanied by captions that are intended to orient the reader's interpretation of the written text.The autobiographers provide a lot of information about events in their narratives, particularly those of their growing up years, to illustrate how important and effective the concept of African communality is. They also use the same strategy in relation to the people they encountered, in their live journey throughout the text. They did not just narrate the circumstances of their meeting these people, but also give some biographical details alongside the photographic stills.These photographs serve as visual support element to the narratives, presenting a candid, subjective and,at the same time, objective view of the writers' attempt to reinforce meaning and facts to their narratives.

The study is framed within the womanist theory, as it calls for a better understanding of African women based on their peculiar experiences; social, cultural, historical, political and economic backgrounds. Womanists such as Kolawole, Phillips work to bridge the gaps between Western feminism and womanism to reclaim the autonomy of African women's action in positive light.Applying a womanist approach, the study has shown that African women's autobiographical texts can be employed to inform scholarly discourse of the

African woman's cultural negotiations in accordance with the African values. Furthermore, the discourses on womanism as a framework are highlighted to be useful in challenging feminist paradigms for understanding African women's consciousness. In addition, the theory lends itself to re-visionary dialectics whose objective is inclusive theorising of women's subjectivity beyond essentialised ideals. The theory also centralises the importance of inclusivity in the quest for women's affirmation. Finally, it is the hope that the application of Kolawole's theories of womanism representing African women's self-construction within this study provides a useful model for future studies on this subject.

Reading the set autobiographical texts, it becomes quite apparent that the depiction of the African woman as being ignorant, uneducated, and subjugated, as projected in dominant discourses, is contrary to her actual reality. Apparently, these notions about her had been popularised in the past partly by invented myth of the African woman and the suppression of difference by dominamt narratives. Myth often influences and shapes human imagination, since it operates without conscious knowledge. Myth in this way becomes a tool of manipulation for perpetuating certain dominant values in the society; as such, it becomes difficult to redirect this unconscious socialisation about the invented African woman.

Suffice to say that this myth of the African woman's invisibility is being deconstructed. African women are gradually resisting these myths, narratives and other theories that debased their self-worth and undermined their ability to assert their own voices and act for themselves, as agents of their cultural reality. For the African woman, the process of herself re-inscription and self-re-presentation starts from within and has to be within her historical and cultural context. The African women have spoken and are beginning to break the yoke of their previous voicelessness and defining their reality, explaining their own personal narrative as they know themselves to be; and not as the external observers choose to perceive them. They are now deconstructing stereotypical narratives which negate the process of self-

inscription, self-retrieval, and self-healing. They are also making a conscious effort to re-construct their identity, away from the scripted narratives often written about them. Such African women critics as Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Carol Boyce Davies, Chandra Tilpade Mohanty, Clenora Hudson-Weems, Gwendolyn Mikell, Molara Ogundipe Leslie, Obioma Nnaemeka and Mary E. Modupe Kolawole, have variously challenged the negative and stereotypical notions about the African woman and advanced the quest for the retrieval of the African woman from the previous imperialistic and jaundiced depictions about her. They have beamed the searchlight on the ideologies that have impacted negatively on the African woman's reality, which subtly erode her self-assertion, as well as emphasise the need to re-claim and re-inscribe herself by voicing her own story through her cultural imperatives.The narratives attempt to re-inscribe a credible "account-disclosure" of the actual status of the African woman's reality and also serve, as a way of writing back to the scripted narratives about her reality. The narratives also invite an alternative way of viewing the African woman, as well as offer evidence to the claim of truth and also consolidate a sense of emerging identity of the African woman.

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