

## THE ROLE OF LITERARY ARTIST IN CURBING GENDER DISCRIMINATION IN AFRICAN LEADERSHIP

**Nonyelum Joy Moghalu, PhD**

Department of Igbo, African & Asian Studies  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.  
Email: nonyemobi06@yahoo.com

&

**Chinelo Chizoba Anachunam**

Department of Igbo, African & Asian Studies  
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.  
Email: cc.anachunam@unizik.edu.ng

### **Abstract**

This work sets out to examine the fact that over the years, women have suffered stringent oppression from both traditional and modern African societies due to the unsatisfactory appreciation of the significance of women in life. There have been gender discrimination and oppression which aimed at the subordination of African women in general and Igbo women in particular. There is a continuing lack of women leaders to determine the political, economic and social progress of humanity. It is the male subjugation of women folk borne out of various oppressive cultural practices and patriarchal structures that brought about feminist agitations. This has over the years led to various feminist writings. This therefore motivated the researcher into finding out the part the literary artists will play to create necessary awareness with regards to the importance of women in African leadership. Relevant literary texts and some other literatures relevant to the study were critically studied; thus adequate information was collected and analysed. The literary approach adopted for the study is Alice Walker womanism. This literary approach is relevant to the study because it advocates that people have to co-exist peacefully in the family as well as in the society. It is hoped that this work will help people generally to change their negative attitude to gender issues especially as it affects African leadership.

### **Introduction**

Despite the agitations and various feminist writings towards the recognition of women's political, economic and social equality with men during the twentieth century, there is a continuing lack of women leaders to determine the political economic and social progress of humanity. Many African males have failed to appreciate the powerful roles which women play in order to

sustain the race and the nation. The status of women are very compelling because women are yet to attain their full potentials. There are gender inequalities and discriminations due to existing African oppressive cultural practices and patriarchal structures. Women's struggle and agitation have given rise to series of serious feminist discourses. These struggles and agitations should be understood in terms of women's inability to make demands on the government and also their inability to actively participate in policy making and leadership due to gender discrimination.

According to Omonubi-McDonnell (2003:4), the consequence of the unequal status between men and women is a high level of economic and political powerlessness among women. Powerlessness in turn retards development at any level politically, economically and socially. Thus the African women are confronted by two distinct yet, related problems, the economic mode of capitalism, the ideological mode of patriarchy and oppressive cultural practices. Due to their subjugation by the African socio-cultural and political system, women have been relegated to the lowest rung of the political and economic ladder.

Obviously, women generally have been frowning at their subjugating position. Lucas (2009:131) in Uto-Ezeajugh (2013:2) notes:

That time has come for the dismantling of old concepts and values, old mentality and principles and replaces them with pragmatic ones based on fairness and justice. If it happens in the creative arts world, then it is just a matter of time before it occurs in the real world.

In the words of Ezeigbo (2001:400); there is the need to adopt a more democratic and pluralist approach to gender issues in Nigeria, taking into consideration people's religious, ethnic, culture and other identities. It is imperative that functional strategies should be adopted to satisfy the aspirations of both genders through the establishment of a healthy environment that could foster relationships and equity between men and women. Ezeigbo further posits that;

To reduce the wrong suffered by women worldwide, the United Nation (UN) declared 1975 through 1985 as a decade for women. In addition, the (UN) organized four world conferences on women in Mexico city (1977), Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995) in order to focus on women and issues relating to their development.

Evidently, many women activists in Nigeria, among the Igbo as well as other parts of Africa believe that only very little have changed in the unhealthy condition of women in the country in spite of the Nigeria's participation in these international conferences.

Obviously the unhealthy condition of women is consequent on various forms of oppressive cultural practices and unbridled patriarchal authority in Africa which precludes the right of women to participate in decision-making on issues affecting them. Epuchie (2013:1) notes that for one to understand the position of African women, one needs to know what their culture is all about.

In Nigeria, just as in other countries of Africa, women are more disadvantaged than men. In terms of wealth, women are poorer; they do most of the menial jobs in the labor market, and also work hard at home in order to cater for their families. In politics, women are terribly marginalized and disorganized. In political leadership, they are not allowed to take up important offices. For instance, in Nigeria, it is difficult for the women to pay for and collect nomination forms for just governorship elections. It is only per chance that Dame Virginia Etiaba once became the first woman governor in Anambra State in spite of the fact that women are powerful agents of change. Women still continue to be vastly underrepresented in political leadership, in decision-making, in businesses and communities.

As it were, the researcher is advocating that it is high time that women will be allowed to participate actively in African leadership. The paper is of the contention that literary artists will play vital role in sensitizing the people on the importance of women as agents of change and the need to actively involve them in African leadership so as to overcome the crises of leadership and governance in Africa.

Alice Walker's womanism is the theory adopted for this study. This literary approach is very relevant to the work because it advocates for the eradication of inequality for all people. In other words, the theory advocates freedom for men, women and children.

It encourages gender equity and peaceful co-existence between men and women in the family and society. The work therefore contends that those aspects of African culture and patriarchal structures that do not encourage gender equity and peaceful co-existence between men and women and their peaceful co-existence and participation in African Leadership should be identified and be dropped or be re-adjusted to be in line with core womanist ideals.

This paper is structured into parts with introduction as part one ,two dwells on attempting a definition of leadership, three focuses on theoretical framework, the fourth part deals with leadership in Africa, the fifth part is the literary artist while African leadership and gender discrimination constitute the sixth part, the seventh part is the power of women leaders, the eighth part is the literary artist and gender discrimination in African leadership, the nine part is summary and conclusion and lastly is recommendation.

### **Leadership Defined**

Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth. As a result many authors avoid attempting its definition. As such, in this study, we will take it step by step.

In the first place, a leader can simply be said to be the person who goes first, a guide, a commander; the director of any organization or a group. He is the inspiration or head of a movement, such as a political party, a nation, a person whose example is followed by the others. Then leadership means the act of leading; the ability to be a leader. Webster (2004:725) notes that leadership is the office or position of a leader; the act or right preceding or the state of being precedent.

As it were, it is actually difficult to attempt a definition of leadership or what makes people to be qualified to be a leader. Various authors and researchers have different views as to what leadership can say to be. Some define it based on personality and physical traits, while others see it as what depended on kind of character. As a result of this individualistic opinions there were many definitions of leadership. It is as a result of these diverse definitions that Ubegbe (1999:282) notes that:

Leadership is the process of creating the subordinates identification with the group's mission and creating their desires to achieve the group's goal.

Afegbua and Adejuwon (2012:144) observe that following these so many definitions of leadership (Hackman2006) classified the various definitions into four primary themes; these include:

- i. Leadership is about what you are: thesedefinitional theme focuses on leader's traits and attributes and is one of the oldest ways of conceptualizing leadership. This one place emphasis on identifying the characteristics that define natural or born leaders.
- ii. Leadership is about how one act. From this perspective leadership is defined as the exercise of influence or power. To identify leaders, we need to determine who is influencing who. This assertion arises from

one of the definitions of leadership as “any attempt to influence the behavior of another individual or group”.

- iii. Leadership is about what you do: this definition focuses on the role that leaders play.
- iv. Leadership is about how you work with others. This definitional theme emphasizes collaboration. Leaders and followers establish mutual purposes and work together as partners to reach their goals (Poulin, et al 2007: 302).

As it were, from the foregoing, one observes that it not easy to give a generally acceptable definition of leadership. The study reveals that various authors and researchers tend to define leadership as it affects them and as they see it.

In that regard, the working definition of leadership in the context of this paper is “guiding and directing others on the course and as serving as a channel”. Leadership has to do with someone who is responsible, who has commanding authority or influence within a group; a political party, a nation etc.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The study adopted a womanist theory approach. Alice Walker coined the womanist theory in 1983. She first applied it to her work *In Search of Our Mother's Garden Womanist Prose*. She explained that the term womanist is derived from the southern folk expression “acting womanish”. The womanish girl, as she opines, exhibits willful courageous, and outrageous behavior that is considered to be beyond the scope of societal norms.

Womanism by its nature advocates freedom from race and class based oppression, dialogue, consensus and plurality of view-tenets that are indispensable in achieving social justice and harmony in any system or relationship. A womanist is committed to the survival of both males and females and desires a world where men and women can co-exist while maintaining their cultural distinctiveness. Thus the inclusion of men provides black women with an opportunity to address gender oppression, suppression and discrimination without directly attacking men as was the case in feminism. Womanism as a concept; advocates gender complementarily, which would ensure the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female. Therefore womanism is centered around the natural order of life, family and a complimentary relationship between men and women. Hence, it is very relevant and suitable for the present study.

### **African Leadership**

Obviously, it is instructive to note that no nation has achieved meaningful development socially, economically, politically, educationally religiously as

well as culturally without the input of effective leadership. The numerous problems which have been plaguing African states vis-à-vis ethnic and communal clashes, increasing crime wave, drug trafficking, kidnapping, and other forms of high level fraudulent practices have been blamed on ineffective leadership. As a matter of fact, there have been seemingly leadership and governance crises in Africa but there has been struggle for many years to engender effective leadership in Africa.

In addressing this issue of leadership, Ugwueye and Umeanolue (2012: 287) posit that:

Leadership is one of the greatest challenges of mankind, and in recent times in Nigeria, issues that pertain to leadership have vociferously brought to the fore in our national discourse several other vexing topical issues in our great country.

As it were, it has been observed that chief, among the several debates that characterized our sad and sorry plight as a nation, is the question of leadership or apparent lack of leadership. The problem that troubles Africans most is the failure of political leadership. Failures abound in other domains, but these are traceable in the consciousness to political leadership deficiencies in Africa. For instance in Nigeria there were many of such leadership deficiencies. Typical examples include frequent leadership change, lack of ideology, policy, several and weak institutional patterns, wrong leadership selection pattern.

Kamuntu (1993:103) notes that:

Most African leaders assumed their role with limited experience and training in the art and science of directing and effectively managing the affairs of a modern state. The challenge of African leaders is thus to develop the capacity that would enable us to strike a balance between the values of African societies and the governance that our nations must follow.

Often times, due to wrong leadership selection process in African and in Nigeria in particular, irresponsible people with inadequate experience have emerged in leadership position. And when a person of such caliber is selected as a leader, “things must definitely fall apart”. Most African leaders; especially Nigerian leaders have frequently come from these category of people with inadequate experience. The result of this wrong leadership selection is moral decadency, indiscipline, break down of law and order. In

Africa and in Nigeria in particular, most often people that are not qualified in any way to go to leadership position can use money and influence to get it.

By the time such person became the leader, his paramount interest first and fore-most will be to make-up the money he spent to get that leadership position. So the earlier we tell ourselves truth and stop making money by all means even to the detriment of African continent and our nation, Nigeria, thing will be better for us.

This is why the contention of this paper is to maintain gender equity that will enable both men and women to have equal right to contest for every leadership position. The yard-stick for selecting a leader will be who is the most qualified? It is not all about sex-male or female. This is very crucial because one of the problems of leadership in Africa and in Nigeria is selection of their leader according to their political party. What a senseless and irresponsible act? The obvious question is can a political party lead people? That is a serious error that must be corrected for us to move forward and stop deceiving ourselves. I seriously maintain that we vote people and not political party for God's sake. We must learn to stop being sentimental in vital issues such as leadership. It is time we all learn to face realities in issues of African leadership. During the last Nigerian presidential election, I was surprised to hear from many that Professor Kingsley Chinedu Moghalu of Young Progressive Party (YPP) then, is the most qualified presidential but that his problem is his party. That is to say that he belong to the "wrong party". But common sense will help us to understand that party is irrelevant in the issue of good leadership.

### **The Literary Artist**

A literary artist is a writer that is artistic in nature, who operates in written work that has the characteristics of literature that is concerned with men and women and their lives on this earth. He is a person with some measure of creativity. He has the ability to manipulate language to create artistic beauty. A literary artist is a person that versed in or devoted to literature.

Ikeokwu (2002:67) quoting Ezejideaku's definition of poet notes that a literary artist is a man of many parts. He posits that he is at one and the same time a visionary, a reformer, a political or socio-cultural watch dog, a satirist, a praise singer, a chronicler of events, a teacher and the people's spokesman". He further asserts that literary artist is often considered eccentric primarily because his personal perception of society and reality is usually different from that of other members of his society. In other words, the literary artist uses his third eyes to see what eluded the sight of other members of the society or what they are yet to see.

According to Obi (2010:491) the literary artist sees it as his responsibility to sensitize the member of his society to socio-cultural and political issues and warn them of the impending danger through his literary works which can be in the form of prose fiction, drama and poetry.

Ikeokwu (2002) observes that the literary artist creates or recreates, formulates or reformulates society's socio-cultural and political issues through his spokesman ship. If the artist fail to get his audience react according to the issues he raised in his literary work, it then means that his aim is defeated, as he ends up on talking to himself.

As it were, to be able to fulfill his functional role effectively, the literary artist employs certain devices of visioning and mirroring the society to build it up. He warns of the impending danger, he reflects, bring to view his points, ridicule, or satirize, caricature, or applauding good virtues and thereby overhauling a part of human system. The literary artist strives to see that his literary work creates the necessary impact it is intended to create or else it will be a failure. Hence he adopts various measures to achieve this. That is why it is the contention of the researcher that the works of the literary artist will play vital role in the issue of gender discrimination and African leadership.

### **African Leadership and Gender Discrimination**

Over the years women have suffered stringent oppression from both traditional and modern African societies due to the unsatisfactory appreciation of the significance of women in life. There has been gender discrimination due to oppressive cultural practices and patriarchal structures which aimed at the subordination of African women in general and Nigerian women in particular. It is this male subjugation of women folk borne out of various oppressive cultural practices and patriarchy that brought about feminist agitations and wittings.

Various reports on economic development in Africa show that women are very active as economic agents. According to UNESCO (2017:10) women perform the majority of agricultural activities, own a third of all firms and are key to the welfare of their families and the life prospect of their children. Ironically, they still face an array of barriers to achieving their full potential from restrictive cultural practices to discriminatory laws and highly segmented labor markets.

It could then be said that gender oppression and inequality which African women and Nigeria women in particular grapple with and agitate for is inherited. The socio-cultural realities of African societies to a large extent have entrenched male dominance over their female counter parts. That is why



the issue of gender inequality has come to stay because it is culturally rooted. In this wise, Epuchie notes:

Since culture is marked by continuity, what African men are perpetuating is the culture that they have inherited from their ancestors. Hence most African societies were organized by gender and tasks were divided and standards set according to patriarchal values. It is this situation that African women in general and Igbo women in particular have aggressively attacked.

Obviously, culture is marked with continuity because it is transferable from one generation to another. For the African men, the primary role of women in the past is procreation. Obi (2015:8) notes that gender roles are the expected behaviour, attitude, obligation and privileges that a society assign to each sex. She observes that the gender roles established by African men were based on a set of gender stereotypes that have been challenged by both social science and the women's movement. The truth is that many aspects of African culture seem to be oppressive on women and also encourage gender discrimination and oppression.

In the words of Omonubi-McDonnell (2003:4) as already noted: the consequence of the unequal status between men and women is a higher level of economic and political powerlessness among women. Powerlessness in turn retards development at any socially. Thus the Nigerian women are confronted by two distinct yet, related system of power; the economic mode of capitalism and the ideological mode of patriarchy and oppressive cultural practice.

Due to their subjugation women have been relegated to the lowest rung of the political and economic ladder. This has created persistence obstacles to full realization of women's potential. Despite the growing evidence of the benefits of women's leadership, women are underrepresented in decision- making positions across all sectors. Cultural, structural and educational barriers continue to challenge women participation and inclusion, limiting their ability to ascend to leadership positions in Africa and in Nigeria in particular.

Therefore, the contention of the researcher in this study, which is in line with what the womanist theory adopted for this study advocates is that gender equality is a necessary condition for socio-political justice and peace in

African leadership. The womanist is committed to the survival of both males and females and desires a world where men and women rule their world together.

### **The Power of Women Leaders**

Women are powerful agents of change, and the far-reaching benefits of diversity and genderparity in leadership and decision-making are increasingly recognized in all spheres of African society. In spite of this, women continue to be under represented in decision-making in politics as well as in African leadership; Policy Brief (2018:1-2) notes that:

Women as leaders and decision-makers at all levels are critical to advancing gender justice and gender equality-and to furthering economic, social and political progress for all. When women are meaningfully represented and engaged in leadership bodies-such as legislatures, courts, executive boards and community councils-laws, rulings, and decisions are more likely to be inclusive, representative, and take diverse views into account.

Even at the level of household, women's leadership including their decision-making over vital family domestic issues like household income, access to education and health care of their families improves. Series of researches reveal that countries with a greater proportion of women as top decision-makers in legislatures have lower levels of income inequality. Policy Brief (2018) also observes that women's leadership is also intrinsically lined to achieving Development and the Sustainable Development Goals.

As it were in dealing with the issues of gender inequality, the African established gender norms that perpetuate unequal power relations between men and women that can limit women's leadership has to be dismantled. Policies and practices that reflect these norms like uneven distribution of unpaid work, unequal pay, discriminatory tax provisions have to be addressed. Also stereotypes that diminish the value of women and perpetuate gender discrimination must be seriously adjusted. Moreover, media coverage that portrays girls and women in traditional gender roles, such as focusing on their marital status, diminishes women's potential and their perceived abilities and trivializes their chances of advancing to and succeeding in leadership positions have to be addressed. This will enable women realize their position in the issues of leadership in Africa and in Nigeria in particular.

## **The Literary Artists and Curbing Gender Discrimination in Africa Leadership**

The research shows that no nation will achieve meaningful development and also sustain it without the input of effective leadership. The research also reveals that there is gender inequality in African Leadership. One also observes that established gender norms in Africa perpetuate unequal power relations between men and women and that limit women's leadership as there has been persistence obstacles to full realization of their potential. In this paper, we are going to examine the part the literary artist will play to create necessary awareness with regards to the importance of women in African leadership.

The literary artist regards himself as duty bound to sensitize his people to burning or socio-political issues in the society. He uses his author's vision of life through which he, as a teacher, educates the society by letting people see through his own mirror of experience. Nwadike (1992:12) quoting Alan Casty notes that:

The writer's subjects are for him, important because they represent something beyond themselves. With them he examines his life and ours, criticizes, sympathizes, evaluates and explores the meaning of being alive.

So we observe that literary artists usually write through their experiences in life. Such experiences the writer draws from the socio-cultural settings which in turn influence and patterns people's actions and reactions alike. For the purpose of this study, the experiences will be drawn from the political settings and various ugly experiences in Africa and in Nigeria in particular due to wrong selection of leaders and bad leadership. This will in turn influence and pattern people's actions and reactions alike. The artist will also raise the fact that women are powerful agents of change and therefore need to be allowed to take active part in the issues of African leadership.

The literary artist will sensitize the people of the numerous works women do in their household for its wellbeing. For example, they struggle to take care of the children and also manage their homes. The artist also create the awareness of the fact that if women are giving chance to participate actively in decision-making and as leaders, that things will be good for everybody in Africa. That the problems of food crisis and insecurity, poverty, corruption, kidnapping, collapse of social infrastructure, all forms of socio-economic and political crisis and careless killings of people will stop. The artist will call the attention of the people to the fact that most women that can fully comprehend their responsibilities, duties and obligation at their homes can make good leadership.

The above issues raised are typical situation where literary artist play his vital role of sensitizing his people of the issues at stake that need to be addressed through his spokespersonship. Due to the fact that the literary artist want his people to react immediately to these burning issues, he employs instruments of visioning and mirroring to build, warn of the impending danger, reflect, bring to view his points, ridicule and satirize, caricature or applauding good virtues and overhauling a part of human system. These will in turn influence and pattern people's actions and reactions alike.

The literary artist can use any of the three major genres of literature namely prose, drama and poetry as veritable tools for portraying the society, creating necessary awareness to make the citizens of the nation or continent understand the importance of women in African Leadership. Now let us site typical examples in the area of prose and dramabwhere two different literary artists use their literary work to show that women are powerful agents of change and very useful both in their household and in the society.

In *Nwadike's Adaeze* (2003) the artist praised Adaeze the major character. The artist portrayed her as a very decent and intelligent girl. She performed excellently in her education to the extent that she was given scholarship for his University education. She was equally dedicated in the things of God that she eventually became a reverend sister. She bought so many things for the mother and to cap it call, she build a story building for her parent. She also did many numerous works for her village.

Also, in the area of drama, in Obidiebube's *Nwaanyi Bu Ihe Ukwu* (2015), Nwanyibuihe is the major character. She was portrayed as a very intelligent girl as well. She perform well in both her primary and secondary education. She was also given a scholarship for her University education. She later got married and shortly her husband died, (p.145) and she was able to take care of the family. She was so affluent that she built a magnificent story building in her father's house. She also built hospital and also provided water for her village people (p.162). Thus the literary artist portray Nwaanyibuihe positively to show that some women are intelligent and powerful agent of change. Such women as these cited examples can perform well as decision – makers and as well as leaders. Hence the paper is advocating for gender equity in African leadership where both men and women will have equal opportunity in the issues of decision-making and leadership and this is the contention of womanism theory adopted for this study. The focus of womanism theory is the survival of both male and female and desires a world where men and women can co-exist, while maintaining their cultural distinctiveness

### Summary and Conclusion

We observe that due to established cultural norms and patriarchy in Africa, there has been gender inequality which has been creating persistence obstacles to full realization of women's potential. Despite the growing evidence of the benefits of women's leadership, women are underrepresented in decision-making and leadership in Africa and in Nigeria in particular due to cultural structures. We study leadership in Africa and observed that most often people with limited experience are wrongly selected as decision-makers and leaders. And this led to all from of problems, mismanagement and breakdown of order. We also observe that without the input of effective leadership there will be no meaningful and sustainable development. We also dwell on how the literary artist can sensitize the people and create necessary awareness with regards to the need to actively involve women in decision-making and leadership in Africa since they are important agents of change.

In conclusion therefore, since gender inequality has been creating persistence obstacles to women's involvement in Africa leadership, strategies for achieving gender equality have to be worked out to enable women be fully involved in African Leadership.

### Recommendations

The literary artists have to write in line with the need of the present time. They will choose themes that will take care of the need of the time to avoid making wrong selection in leadership. They will write their literary works in a way that it will actually sensitize the people. Their works need to create awareness to the fact that women are powerful agents of change and therefore useful in leadership unlike before when women just care of the kitchen and other domestic household cares.

In addition, most of these literary works apart from the original language in which they originally come out will be translated to other languages to enable many people benefit from them. For instance *Ojaadili* in Igbo language by Odunke Artists has been translated to English version. Also *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe in English language has been translated to Igbo presently. This will help people from other ethnic groups to benefit from these educative literary works.

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