

**Men's Domination of Women in Some
African and Nubian Novels from
the 1950s to the 1990s**

By

Ahmed Hussein Khalil
English Dept. Qena Faculty of Arts, South Valley Univ.

According to African and Nubian thinking, as I hope to show in this paper, early feminist movements in Europe, particularly France and England, came to desecrate the law of nature that dictates the male's biological superiority over the female, by striving for equality. That was a supreme end to which calling for the rights of education and suffrage was a mere means. ¹ Gradual but firm steps were taken on the long road to that end. In nineteenth-century England, for example, Gina Buijs finds that: "A woman could have power as a wife and mother, but only within a carefully delimited sphere. An ideal of domesticity masked the exclusion of women from political, economic and social power" (1993: 13; Vicinus 1985) But, later in the century, women succeeded in obtaining access not only to education but to employment and political representation. Like unbridled horses in a race, women kept running towards a finish line which would put them on an equal footing with men and, perhaps, make them superior. In America, within the late 1960s, a series of feminist campaigns exerted a diligent effort in trying to transform the culture and social concepts constituted for ages by the male, and replace them with feminine values. In other words, they wanted to reshape the world into their own image so as to secure their supremacy or, so to speak, "pull the rug" from under man's feet and put it under their own, and not, as they claimed with foolish pride, to develop the world (see Rowbotham 1992: 9; Baym 1995: 214-18).

On the other hand, men have never accepted women as their equals. The new social standing of women has perturbed and upset both the male gender, and modest women. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, an American reformer whose social concepts relied basically upon the utilitarian theory, professes that neither women's obtaining of rights, nor their obtaining privileges, will put them on the same track with men, for they are, by nature, unequal. It is a boundary which they should not trespass. The development

of women, which may have made them prosperous, has perversely turned out to blemish the most valuable things in their lives, their happiness and identity as mothers, the backbone of society. Nowadays, the solid familial and social fabrics have been weakened as a result of most women's immersion in gratifying personal interests, either by work or striving after political and social power, becoming largely indifferent to their role as mothers or the domestic chores imposed on them by nature (from Higginson 1882: 41, cited in Nye 1989: 19). In Africa, for example, Gina Buijs finds that women's economic independence has turned them into "heads of households" - a promotion for which they and the society have to pay heavily and devastatingly through the rise of "economic and emotional insecurity," and through marriage becoming "less stable as an institution" (1993: 16; see also Walker 1990: 8; Bonner 1990: 234). It is hardly shocking, after all, to perceive today's world, which gives more space than ever for women's engagement in public life, as grossly offensive in a moral sense. There is nothing more perilous than society's tolerance of sexual liaisons without marriage, which are sole reason behind such epidemic moral wrongs as bastardy, juvenile delinquency, drug addiction and homicide.

In its various forms, literature has always been there, reflecting all these radical changes in the social position of women. A great many writers have demonstrated a favorable disposition to woman's rights through the inclusion in their works of enlightened and powerful heroines. On the other hand, other writers have demonstrated, in one way or the other, unshaken faith in woman's traditional role as a modest mother or wife. The idealization of motherhood has, however, been more prominent in writings on conventional societies than in works portraying modern or liberal ones. It is surprising to detect that both advocates and opponents of woman's rights come together in expressing great trepidation with regard to the degenerate sexual force of women,

especially those involved in public works or politics.² Inasmuch as this discredits the advocates of women's freedom, it vindicates their opponents' claim that man's rule over woman is a necessary virtue. In one sense, the decline of "the old patriarchal authority" in the modern world has given free rein to a great many women's exercise of sexual power. Nina Baym adds that the contraction of man's physical strength has affected his reign over woman and given her ample opportunity to "enter history decisively and directly" (1995: 214).

It is this paper's chief claim that modern African and Nubian novelists (despite their geographical, cultural, religious, and linguistic boundaries) vindicate the male's "manus" over the female as a prerequisite for salvaging the human society from degeneration. Although they abhor women's oppression, they implicitly warn against the peril arising from women's wielding of sexual power. This presents a challenge to the many critics who have recklessly pronounced, with no convincing evidence, that these novelists negate the *patria potestas* (patriarchal authority) (Stratton 1994: 164-66).

It is worth mentioning, in the first place, that certain African and Nubian novelists seem, in many ways, comparable. Their works have been produced in relatively similar social circumstances. The Nubian writers examined in this study have devoted their narratives to mirroring the lifestyles their own people experienced in the period before and after their forced migration from the old homeland (Nubia) to Egypt in the 1960s. The African novels, written in English, also trace the social life of their writers' homelands in the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Another mark of affinity between these writers can be found in that their peoples are governed by ancestral social forces: rigid but morally superior traditions and customs. The colonization of their own lands by alien races left a marked influence upon conventional values, which were invaded, supplanted and

ultimately gave way to alien, materialistic and degenerate values. The patriarchal authority, always taken with an underlying sense of woman's subordination, has become mitigable and gradually shrinkable, with a greater degree of acceleration in colonized Africa than in New (or Egyptian) Nubia, when women started to make claims of freedom, to be on an equal footing with their white counterparts, whether British or Egyptian. An exposition of this social situation, which seems to be closely associated with women's position, is an integral part of the following critique of selected novels by African and Nubian writers.

Unlike their modern Western counterparts, Nubian and African writers generally seem to present, especially in their early novels, types of men who believe in the proverb "prevention is better than cure." That is, they compel their women to live in their grip: to practice certain rights within delimited, impassable boundaries to avoid straying from the right path, instead of allowing them do freely what they want and then attempting to undo the mischief they may cause to the family and society. Women are believed to have no control over their passions, they can easily tempt and be tempted by men. This view is an echo of Aristotle's: in order to reach the male's virtue or stay away from trouble, women "need external guidance and restraint..." (Clark 1993: 121; see also Horowitz 1979: 175-206; Gould 1990: 1-13). In a significantly metaphorical way, Gillian Clark draws our attention to the amount of damage that free women may bring about: "It is actually better for women to be kept under control, just as it is better for a horse to be reined in than to be free to plunge over a cliff" (1993: 126). This perspective may seem extremely odd or hard to credit, though it is not, for it has a deep root in religions; thus to discredit it is to destroy one's deeply-rooted faith in one's religion or, to be more accurate, to destroy oneself. In the Bible (Genesis 3), for example, it is prescribed that God created Eve to be under Adam's authority, so should all women be under

men's: "And as I entrusted rule over all things to the man, so I did to you" (125; see also Pagels 1988).

The Nubian M. K. Qassim's *Al-Shamandoura*³ and the African Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* seem, in their opening pages, similar in painting an identical picture of tribal communities dominated by brute male force. Amin, in the former narrative, and Okonkwo and Nwakibie, in the latter, are a striking instance of stern fathers who rule over their households with an iron hand. None of Amin's two wives dare, nor do Okonkwo's three wives or Nwakibie's nine wives, to work against their husbands' will or do anything without first taking permission from them; and if one dares, *albeit* seldom, there is no way to avoid her receiving terrible retribution. Hajouba, Amin's junior wife, along with many other women, sees all men "to be with hearts as adamantine as stones, have no mercy" (Qassim 1968:132). His cruelty sometimes reaches his children, if one should provoke his anger. Similarly, Okonkwo, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, known "as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages," makes his wives and children live "in perpetual fear of his fiery temper..." (1958: 7; 12). Not even any of the holy pagan rites, which he highly reveres, binds him from punishing anyone who behaves erroneously. During the "Week of Peace" (wherein people are forbidden to hurt each other, for fear of angering the gods and goddesses of the land) "his youngest wife [Ojiugo]... went to plait her hair at her friend's house and did not return early enough to cook the afternoon meal... And when she returned he beat her very heavily" (26-27).

It seems to be a rule of the clan, in both traditional Nubia and Africa, that one's manhood is defined in one's strength. To rephrase it, the weak or cowardly man loses pride and solemnity, essential traits of masculinity, and turns in the clan's eyes into a woman. Out of desire to hold on to the male authority throughout successive generations, both

Amin and Okonkwo are determined to train their young sons in being sufficiently awe-inspiring so as to be able to take over the responsibilities of their own households and preserve their honor among other families. The two keep their sons in their company most of the time to acquire the features of true manhood. Okonkwo is thrilled at hearing his son Nwoye "grumbling about women," for this is a predicted sign of his capacity to master his future household, "especially his women" (48). In this parenthetical remark of Okonkwo's lies a strong emphasis on the idea that controlling women often requires an unrelenting toughness. Amin also feels proud of his son Hamid who resembles him in everything, except in that his son is illiterate.

On the other hand, Nubian and African wives are depicted as weak and subordinate, even though they sometimes complain, *albeit* in a soliloquy, about men's denying them, to borrow Bolyston's phrase, "credit for having any real mentality..." (1999: 67). They seem very similar to the ideal female characters in Rousseau's novels: *Julie, ou la Nouvelle Héloïse* (1762) and *Emile* (1762). In that, in Campbell Orr's phrase, they "live only in the eyes of" their husbands and do not "lay claim to rational equality with men, let alone autonomy" (1996: 10).

Traditional Nubian and African women often engage themselves in doing domestic chores. But, since life in both communities depends basically upon agricultural production, these women feel bound to lend a helping hand to their perpetually toiling men on the farm by doing easy work that befits their own nature as the physically weaker sex. For instance, Okonkwo's women (mother, sisters, wives and daughters) are stressed to sow "women's crops, like cocoyams, beans and cassava," but the growing of "yam, the king of crops," which needs continuous hard work, is a man's job (Achebe 1958: 21). It is a boundary which no woman can go beyond. When Darrya Sakina and her daughter Sharifa, in

Al-Shamandoura, come to try to exchange roles with men, by venturing on reclaiming and tilling a small piece of land, suffering and failure are inevitable consequences (Qassim 1968: 175-77).

These women are also shown not to worry as much as their counterparts in recent Nubian and African novels about not being as intelligent and powerful as men. Accordingly, they do not interfere with their husbands or fathers in discussing any matter, nor do they do anything on their own initiative. Whoever dares interfere is immediately silenced and taught not to do it once again. Ngotho, in James Ngugi's novel *Weep Not, Child*, turns down the intrusion of his second wife, Nyokabi, upon his decision of taking part in a Kenyan strike against the white colonialists: "I shall do whatever I like. I have never taken orders from a woman" (1964: 60). Juliana, Jacobo's wife, reveals it to be a general state: "...a man will never heed the voice of a woman..." (63). It is recurrently, too, mentioned in *Al-Shamandoura* that women "are lacking both in intelligence and religious faith" (Qassim 1968: 77).

This discrimination between the two sexes had been substantiated in ancient times on biological bases. To Aristotle, the female's "weakness and coldness" make them unable "either to match the intellectual ability of the male or to have their reason fully in control of desire..." (Clark 1993: 121). It is central, however, to Aristotle's thesis that women's inequality with men does not mean at all that they are not *anthrops and homo* or *aner* and *vir* (Greek and Latin synonyms for human beings) (121-22). In only one sense, it denotes that women are created with definite defects which they should accept, as men accept theirs.

Rather than being criticized, African and Nubian men's brute force is implicitly encouraged, in the novels we have been considering so far, on the account that it works

successfully in preserving their women the way God created them to be, as submissive wives and virtuous mothers. Signs of their virtuousness can be traced in a variety of ways. More than anything else, the African women, in *Things Fall Apart* and *Weep Not, Child*, are concerned with charming their husbands, strongly believing that this a vital way of binding them together. A striking instance of this is the great interest of Okonkwo's wife, Ojiugo, in primping, which sometimes draws her away from properly completing the domestic duties assigned to her. On the contrary, most of the Nubian wives in *Al-Shamandoura* devote their time and effort to housework. The most rigid tribal values may have to do with this. Inasmuch as these values make women respectable and honorable, they, by contrast, render them naive. Virtuous men, of course, like such modest types of women, yet they turn away from them when they become indifferent, for any reason, to their real concerns. The prevalence of polygamy in Nubia,--as in Africa, is a knotty problem which seems to disturb women who are portrayed as being behind it. Amin has two wives and craves for a third. The problem becomes even knottier, as men, both young and old, come to break the tribal boundaries by marrying non-Nubian women. For example, Gamal, Darrya Sakina's son, who has been working in Egypt, marries a strikingly beautiful girl, Zanouba, a maid in the Pasha's place at New Cairo. The news of his marriage makes both mother and sister perform funeral rites, by scooping up handfuls of dust and throwing them over their heads, crying and wailing. Several women from around the village hurry to console them. The women who are well acquainted with the Egyptian lifestyles, due to their temporary residence with their husbands in Cairo or Alexandria, come to discuss the reasons behind their travelling men's attraction to Egyptian women. Someone, who has returned from Cairo after two years, works up enough courage to confront her friends with their ugly reality (that is, their lack of beauty or the ways with which to attract their men): "Our men should be thanked for keeping us.

They are surrounded by bright white faces” of women (Qassim 1968: 97). Nabawia, who has been to Alexandria and is well known for light-heartedness, gets to her feet to explain how Egyptian women charm their men into their web of love. She moves around, while pulling up the ends of her long garment to lay bare her legs, wriggling her hips, and popping her tongue as if chewing gum. When she gets close to Sa'diya, who has not married yet, she bends over and whispers in her ear: “You'd better learn how to do this. otherwise your husband will run away from you” (98).

Nonetheless, the African and Nubian woman share a common feature of virtuousness in sacrificing their passions, and sometimes their lives, for an upright motherhood. They cling on to their very nature as agents of reproduction. Though having children is painful and risky in terms of pregnancy and childbirth, each one's heart is thrilled at having children. It is a stigma, therefore, for a married woman to have no children. Much more significantly, they give their children every possible care, attention and love. To watch them growing slowly into virtuous men and women is a supreme noble goal in life for all these mothers. Such is a heavy burden put on their frail shoulders, but they bear it with great joy. Nyokabi, Juliana and Suzanna in *Weep Not, Child* seem to compete in bringing up their children on ethical principles. Here Juliana claims that “all children should be brought up as she did hers” (Ngugi1964: 21). Suzanna, Mr. Howlands's wife, prefers to look after her son and daughter by herself, leaving domestic tasks for her servants to do. Admittedly, “Her pride was in watching them grow together loving each other. They in their way loved her” (34). Ekwefi, in *Things Fall Apart*, also deserves to be mentioned here as an unrivalled example of the sacrifice that a mother can offer her children. Her losing of nine individual babies has sometimes made her look upon the children's birth, which is a “crowning glory for any woman,” as “mere physical agony devoid of promise” (Achebe 1958: 70). But

she has never lost hope. Finally, she has begot Ezinma, a weak girl. She has "determined to nurse her child, and she put all her being into it" (72). Ezinma's survival gives her mother's life a great "kind of meaning" (72). Ezinma grows up to be a charming girl, for her parents as well as for everybody in the village; even Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, loves her as if she were her own daughter. The priestess Chielo comes one night to fetch Ezinma, for Agbala wants to see her in the caves located far away from the village. Fearing Agbala's wrath, Okonkwo and Ekwefi hand Ezinma to the priestess. But Ekwefi cannot let her daughter go out of her sight for a moment, hence she rushes out after the priestess without fear for her own safety in the heart of darkness. She stumbles and falls, finally reaching the opening of Agbala's cave. While looking out tentatively, "tears gushed from her eyes, and she swore within her that if she heard Ezinma cry she would rush into the cave to defend her" not just against Agbala but "all the gods in the world" (98). The two were spiritually yoked together, hence if something bad happened to the daughter, the mother "would die with her"(98). Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of the Seasons' End* also presents a much more interesting example of ideal motherhood, which knows no colour or racial discrimination. Beatie Adams, a black nanny, gives every care to a white family's children, whom she is sure are going to belittle her people when they grow up, as their parents do. Yet she cheerfully admits: "Oh, I like looking after children" (1972: 11).

Nubian women also reveal an equally great concern with having children for whom they sacrifice their own lives. In *Al-Shamandoura*, Hajouba suffers from inexpressible physical agonies during pregnancy, and from an overwhelming fear of dying when delivering the child. She keeps moaning and crying, then suddenly stops to blame her husband in a humorous way: "He is behind all what I am in now... He is relaxing... and I am dying" (Qassim 1968: 132).

As an experienced woman who knows well the very nature of the female, the midwife responds: "Stop fooling us. You charmed him to fill up the marsupium [impregnate you] and now come to put it all rudely on him" (132). Hajouba's gladness, after delivery, leads her to leave behind not only the pains but also hostility to her step-daughter, Batta. All Amin's family get together and celebrate the occasion joyously in a peculiar Nubian manner.

Even the most recent Nubian novel *Donqola* (by Idris Ali, published in 1993) ⁴ works elaborately on this same point. Hushiya sacrifices her passion and life by refusing to marry again after being separated from Shallali, for the sake of bringing up her only child, Awad (the novel's hero), into a principled man. As one of the activists against the Egyptian regime in relation to the Nubians' compulsory migration and resettlement as well as indemnification, he has caused her much trouble and humiliation in the police stations; she has also lost her sight over weeping incessantly for his long disappearance in an unknown country.

It is also an identifying characteristic of both African and Nubian parents to nurse their daughters on virtuousness. Okonkwo's daughters (Obiageli, Ezinma and Nkechi) are observed in *Things Fall Apart* to undergo stern training in how to be good women, faithful and obedient to their parents and future husbands. Everyone in her turn serves the father in complete submission, bowing to his masterful position as head of the household. In an interesting scene, each carries a dish of food from her own mother's hut and puts it in front of the father, who has his own hut, and waits till he finishes eating. Glimpsing Ezinma not sitting in the way as has been taught, Okonkwo shouts at her: "Sit like a woman!" (Achebe 1958: 40). Instantly, she "brought her two legs together and stretched them in front of her" (40). Though this may seem a gruff manner of dealing with children, it never upsets them, for all are convinced that parents always act for their good.

Sometimes, parents beat their children to teach them good behaviour, as is the case of Batta in *Al-Shamandoura*. Her eldest sister, Gamila, is also advised on her wedding day by an old woman: "Your husband is everything to you: a father, mother and brother, as he is your honor" (Qassim 1968: 218). Much more important, she is given a long lecture on how to be an ideal housewife.

Beneath such rough subjugation of women may lie a dreadful fear of their giving way to free sexuality, repeatedly delineated, in both Nubian and African novels, as a zone of great danger for humankind. A vindication of this, which is in itself a vindication of the thesis's premise, can be held in the sharp contradiction between the types of women bridled by men and those who are not. It has been indicated so far that the women who are living in the grip of their men are modest and chaste. On the contrary, the ones who are not turn out to be licentious in conduct, as will be shown.

In *Things Fall Apart*, the reader's attention may be deliberately drawn to Ekwefi's earlier life. She was first married to Anene, not as hard-handed as Okonkwo, and whom she did not love as much as she loved Okonkwo. The latter loved her as well, but he did not have the money to marry her when Anene proposed. After two years of marriage, Ekwefi "could bear it no longer and she ran away to Okonkwo" (Achebe 1958: 99). Finding the most beautiful woman in the village knocking on his door, Okonkwo could not resist letting her in and making love to her: "He just carried her into his bed and in the darkness began to feel around her waist for the loose end of her cloth" (99). She never returned to Anene, as she became one of the most admired three wives of Okonkwo. Uzowulu's wife, too, was betrayed before the heads of the clan, after nine years of marriage, to have "miscarried after she had gone to sleep with her lover" (83). It is also noted in La Guma's *In the Fog of the Seasons' End*, which focuses on the colonization

period in South Africa, that black and white women are not 'different' in possessing a greedy lust which they satisfy with men other than their husbands, who are not strict, and in selling their bodies for little money. This is applicable even to the girls who are not watched carefully by their parents. Beukes, as a young man, shows himself able to resist the temptations of a beautiful girl with whom he has a conversation in a café. He learns from her that she has gone out with many boys. It is this liberal way of living which prompts her to discredit the bond of marriage. In reply to Beukes' interrogation about the identifying features of the man she aspires to marry, she ironically says: "Maybe somebody who'll beat me all the time" (1972: 44).

Within its last chapters, mirroring the post-emigration era in Nubian life, *Al-Shamandoura* presents similar exponents of corruptible, lewd women who are not curbed by men. Sharifa, who lives with her widowed mother after her brother Gamal migrated to Cairo for work, is described to be so beautiful that all male eyes in the village are fixed on her: "a brown-skinned girl, with a charming face, large eyes, dangling black locks, as brisk as butterflies" (Qassim 1968: 65). Hassan Al-Missri, a fugitive Upper Egyptian who works as a mason in New Nubia, is madly fond of her. When he glimpses her walking alone on the road to the Nile to fill up a pot with water, he charms her into a cornfield and makes love to her (Qassim 1968: 64-65). Her mother is also rumored to have had an affair with him, as he is always seen slipping into her house after midnight. No less seductive than Sharifa is Sa'diya, who has no children and lives with her mother after both husband and father left to Cairo for work. On the repeated plea of her writing a letter to her husband, Al-Basstawi, one day Sa'diya drags Hamid, a youth and the hero of the novel, into her house. There, he is captured by her alluring body: "the glamour in her eyes, the golden sunlight reflected on her face and penetrated the mantilla onto the hair, the blowing air that thrusts the dress against

her body, tautening the chest and thighs, and the new organ that picks up in me, all harness me with an odd hot feeling and attraction to her" (446). In an attempt to avoid her determination for sex, he asks whether her mother is in the house. But she assures him that she is asleep, and even if she is not, he does not have to worry, for she herself wants to write a *letter* to her husband. The letter is used here connotatively, to denote a strong craving for sexual gratification. The two embrace, fling their bodies on the bed and plunge into a world of dreams. Feeling that he has cooled her burning passion, Sa'diya says with pleasure: "Oh, Hamid, you've become a real man... as vigorous as him [her husband]" (447).

On a larger scale, the reader is referred in this novel to the collapse of many Nubian families, behind which stand the '*filles de joie*' in Egypt. Several Nubian men are mentioned to have abandoned their familial responsibilities in Nubia on the sole account of their being tracked down by lascivious women, who, as a cluster of Nubian women mention, have no families or men to curb them. All the aforementioned examples are quite enough to verify that the female body is, to quote Roberts, "dangerous or anomalous unless defined by a man or a child..." (1994: 193; see also Herzog 1983: 200). This notion seems to depend upon Aristotle's philosophy (in "*de Generation Animalium*. 747 A") that woman's body is naturally made "more porous than man's" (Cameron and Kuhrt (eds.) 1993: 11). Via the biological attributes of both man and woman, Aristotle recommended the lawful bond, through marriage, between the two, with the regard, as Okin puts it, that "the woman [should be] the beneficiary, and the man the benefactor of their relationship," particularly in terms of procreation (1992: 78).

The latest Nubian and African novels hit on the same point. More attention in them, however, is paid to the great

change in woman's position. Such change looms as more inexorable than accidental, part of the drastic change in the strictly conservative or tribal societies of Nubia and Africa. Owing to the resettlement of Nubians in different parts of Egypt and the colonization of Africa by British people, both men and women in the two countries have been forced to give way to the practice of foreign customs and traditions, mostly conceived of as more 'civilized' than their own ancestral ones. In Africa, in particular, women have largely engaged themselves in public life, via qualifying themselves educationally and holding important offices in the government, as a progressive step on the road to enfranchisement and equality with men. To mention but one example, Clara, in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*, is portrayed as a highly educated nurse who can live independently after Obi Okonkwo has turned down his impending marriage to her, though she is pregnant, because of her being an "osu" - or an outcast who is "like leprosy in the minds of" Nigerian families (1960: 133). Also, in Achebe's *A Man of the People*, Eunice, Max's fiancée, is a very brave lawyer who is greatly concerned with defending common people against the wicked politicians in her country. She avenges her fiancé's murder by political bodyguards on Chief Koko, whom she kills with "two bullets into [the] chest" (1967: 135).

But the progress of women, as predicted long ago by Rousseau and Wollstonecraft as well as Stael, makes them "more susceptible to transgressive behavior" (Orr 1996: 11; see also McAuslan and Walcot (eds.) 1995: 91-100). They turn into immodest women, one can fairly say. The Nubian woman has come to rebel overtly against the masculine hegemony, and covertly through satiating her fierce lust in secret and in a way that violates moral norms, with no heed to even divine retribution. In both cases, of Nubian and African women, corruption and humiliation as well as loss of identity are inevitable consequences. This also finds its echo

in Locke and Hulme's disapprobation of the female's vulnerability to illicit sexual actions. To Hulme, for instance, woman is naturally "the fair sex with female virtues," such as "modesty" and "chastity" (Nye 1989: 7). Most shameful thus becomes the woman who "invites adultery or even to allow herself to be touched" outside the marital relationship (7). The following brief scrutinization of such types of women in some of the recent Nubian and African novels may put into view how horribly aggressive they are. More precisely, to borrow Cameron and Kuhrt's words, they are images standing out for "the carnivorousness in the female sexuality," which are not different from the Athenian whores described in many classical works as "the lioness[es]" or "the panther[s]" (1993: 4).

Ngugi's *Devil on the Cross* (1982) and Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) include types of women who are the antithesis of the women in the earlier novels. The 'mechanical engineer,' the 'government official,' the 'revolutionary leader' or the 'writer' are leading female figures who no longer walk in the shade or live in the eyes of their men, as the ones in the earlier novels do, but who rather assume autonomy. This discrepancy does not mark, as some critics may think, the two writers' renouncement of their earlier ideals of womanhood, but rather underlines their strong clinging to them. These writers denounce women's oppression by men, as they do women's deviation from their mostly attractive nature as the delicate sex. As these new types of women insist on crossing the boundaries with which nature has circumscribed them, they are made, in the novels, prone to the destruction of self and the other. A great irony of the writers towards such women is shown in their portraying them as foolish characters inasmuch as they believe that they can easily exchange roles or claim an equitable status with men. They are shown to pay heavily, in that, at best, they turn into objects for trade or *filles de joie*.

The heroines of Ngugi and Achebe are a case in point. Wariinga, in *Devil on the Cross*, is shown from the start to be, like any woman, too weak to withstand Rich Old Man's treatment and temptation. Her work as a secretary makes her an object of sexual gratification for the boss. She never becomes aware of her worthlessness in the eyes of men, until later in the novel. In a metaphorical way, she compares herself to "a mere flower" bought by a man and put in a vase on a table, a window or an office, and when its splendor goes, it is flung into a garbage can full of many withered ones (Ngugi 1982: 216). A dreadful feeling, as such, stimulates her to decisively try to change her being treated so cheaply. But, unfortunately, even when she becomes a prominent 'engineer' and 'motor mechanic,' who takes on many of the masculine qualities not only in holding a "man-defined" job but also in turning into a very aggressive shooter and karate practitioner, she fails to counteract men's persistent looking upon her as what Florence Stratton calls a "sexual object" (1994: 160; 62). Men's eyes are always drawn to her extremely beautiful body everywhere she goes, and even when wearing the mechanic's overall at work.

In Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, Beatrice seems, in certain ways, identical to Wariinga. All her contacts with men (Ikem, Chris or Sam) are first and foremost for sexual favors. A way for such illicit relations must be paved through her work as a government official. In response to Ikem's kiss, Beatrice says: "Everything inside me was dissolving, my knees were giving way under me; I was trembling violently and I seemed to be struggling for air" (1987: 92). In another scene, she is shown making love to Chris with insane passion, without circumspection (see p. 104). Admittedly, she lacks the power of fully controlling her passion. Much more importantly, she is also stressed to lack the perceptual as well as conceptual faculties as a writer. Like Wariinga, too, she does not succeed, in a series of debates, against male characters, like Ikem, in proving the

female's equality to the male: The male characters in the two novels try to justify their oppression of women through the use of some biblical allusions in the respect. For instance, Ikem writes a "strange love-letter" based on the Book of Genesis and comes to read to Beatrice: "The original oppression of Woman was based on crude denigration. She caused Man to fall. So she became a scapegoat. No, not a scapegoat which might be blameless but a culprit richly deserving of whatever suffering Man chose thereafter to heap on her" (89).

As sexual objects, women in these two novels are incarnated as carnivorous animals. Chris's repeated violent sexual couplings with Beatrice make him anxious about the depletion of his energy. Incarnated into "Idemili" (a mythical goddess of water who is called "Daughter of Almighty"), she is felt by Chris to "conceal deep overpowering eddies of passion that [have] always almost sucked him into fatal depths" (96). Feeling afraid of imminent collapse, Chris wonders: "would he be found worthy? Would he survive?" (104). As he becomes empty, she, Stratton believes, sends him to death, which is the law of mythical priestesses for dealing with men in the human world (1994: 169). Chris dies in an attempt to protect a schoolgirl from being raped by a policeman.

A similar integrated vision of women's fragile but pernicious nature is evident in recent Nubian novels. H. Hassan Adoul's *Al-Kushar* (a Nubian word for the "Key" or "Solution"), gives a representative example of such female types through the figure of Halima. She appears as a "coquette," with a "plump and soft body," who procures many young men for her sexual satisfaction since "her husband left for the North [Egypt] two floods ago" (1992: 15;16). Fattim is afraid that she will destroy her son Sama Sib, a tall and handsome sixteen-year-old boy, so she clashes with her more than once to make her stop following him. In

Idris Ali's *Donqola*, a female character, who is also called Halima, is shown as a newly married woman who is made to live with her mother-in-law, after her husband Awad (the novel's hero) leaves for Europe. The maxims and habits of the Nubian tribal community compel her unrelentingly to run the gauntlet of men's temptations in public life. But, like any weak woman, she cannot hold out any longer. She relies in the first place upon her father as the last anchor, but he finds no way out other than beating her in public and forcing her back into the absent husband's house. She then seduces Ma'doul, an Upper Egyptian laborer, to make love to her, and on her husband's bed. Much more awful, she strangles her mother-in-law to keep her secret and tries to pin the murder on her lover, who eventually runs away from Nubia (1993: 136-40). No less brutal is the Egyptian woman Rawhiya who charms with her beauty Awad's father, while staying for work in Cairo, and eventually makes him marry her. Resembling, in certain ways, Beatrice in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, she robs him of all the money and strength he has, turns to other stronger men, and then poisons him (20-21).

Beatrice's reaction to Ikem's support for the masculine dominance in Africa underlines how destructive women are going to be: "Then, as the world crashes around Man's ears, Woman in her supremacy will descend and sweep the shards together" (Achebe 1986: 89). The heroine Banoura, in the Nubian novel *Candake* (1995),⁵ may look similar to Beatrice in devoting her education and life to changing woman's social position. As a young teaching assistant at the Sociology Department of Cairo University, she rebels against tradition, which she regards as unreasonable and retrogressive, by leading a series of debates on woman's oppression and arranging campaigns for female rights. Moreover, she shows no regret for leaving her parents, nor does she mind society's view of her as a crazy outcast. Therefore, she may deserve the title of *Candake* (an

ancient Nubian queen). These two heroines are considered by their societies as an example of the degenerate women whose power comes to full flowering in a more liberal world.

From the discussion so far, it can be inferred that both African and Nubian women are bound up with the values of their traditional cultures, which may seem hardly surprising for, as Mutiso admits, "Tradition is sacred. Custom is above all. To question tradition is sacrilege... It is the Earth on which we live and the air which we breathe" (1974: 83). The traditional society, mostly bridled by male maxims, is characterized by embracing women far more virtuous than modern liberal ones. This is expounded perspicuously in the sharp contrast between the types of female characters presented in earlier and later Nubian and African novels. The breach of alien customs and habits through the meshes of the traditional society has helped many women in Nubia and Africa to cut themselves loose from the familial and social bonds. And in consequence of the decline of patriarchal authority, there is a rise in women's obnoxious animal side, evidenced in their carnivorous and ruinous sexuality. Though the Nubian and African novelists may exhibit strong disapproval of women's repression by men, they are nevertheless quite alert to the great perils inherent in the flux of their emancipation. Inasmuch as they realize that this emancipation will sweep away every valuable feature of humanity, these novelists thus have much more devotion to their own native social forms and traditional communal lifestyles, with respect to the moderate change of woman's traditional social position. Many readers may regard such styles as primitive or retrograde, still the Africans cannot deny that the past societies were far more ethical, communal and secure than today's civilized ones. This conclusion not only rationalizes the premise of this thesis, but also draws attention to the shortcomings of modern European civilization imposed on African countries, which have

undoubtedly left their great influence on deep-rooted cultural values through encouraging women's liberation - a liberation which has incited them to scramble to reshape the world into their own, mostly degenerate, image, without the slightest regard for their religious creeds or social and cultural norms. It also reveals that both African and Nubian writers have made remarkable progress in relation to the theme and technique of their narrative works by dedicating space to seriously discussing the development of women, an issue which preoccupies the present world, with all its merits and demerits. Much more interesting is that they do not confine their works to literally recording the particular reality of Africa and Nubia, but they adroitly interweave it with rare kinds of myth and idealism.

Notes

- (1)The following critical works elaborate on how much women developed by holding various, unprecedented offices in Western societies, starting from joining schools of higher education through sharing in the parliament and to writing literature and criticism. See Mickey Pearlman (ed.), *American Women Writing Fiction: Memory, Identity, Family, Space* (USA: The University Press of Kentucky), 1989, 4; Elizabeth Janeway, "Prioritizing the World," in *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Dec. 17, 1986); Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (New York: Oxford University Press), 1985; Mary F. Robertson, "Medusa Points and Contact Points," in Catherine Rainwaters & William J. Scheick (eds.) *Contemporary American Women Writers* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky). 1985, 136; Peggy W. Prenshaw, "Introduction," in Peggy W. Prenshaw (ed.) *Women Writers of the Contemporary South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi), 1984. viii; Kathleen Wheeler, *A Critical Guide to Twentieth-Century Women Novelists* (Malden Massachusetts, USA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.). 1997; Guy Reynolds, *Twentieth-Century American Women's Fiction: A Critical Introduction* (London: Macmillan Press LTD). 1999.
- (2)Andrea Nye, Op.Cit.. 7; David Hume, *Treatise on Human Nature*, Book III, Part II, Sec. XII, ed. Selbi-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1965); Clarissa Campbell Orr (ed.), *Wollstonecraft's Daughters, Womanhood in England and France 1780-1920* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1996), 10-11; Gayle Austin, "The Exchange of Women and Male Homosocial Desire in Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman* and Lillian Hellman's *Another Part of the Forest*," in *Feminist Readings of the Modern American Drama*, ed. June Schlueter (London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1989), 63, where it is stressed that women, who are involved in public life can tempt the sons away from their

father or vice versa. The whores Forsythe and Letta in *Death of a Salesman* are evidence of women to be a property of a dangerous sort.

- (3) 'Shamandoura' is the Nubian name for a floating red sign fixed with an iron chain to the Nile's bottom for fathoming the water's depth at the shore.
- (4) "Donqola" is a city in the Sudan State, which was the capital of Old Nubia before the forced migration of Nubians to Egypt in the 1960s.
- (5) "Candake" was a great historical Nubian "lady known in Meroitic times as Candake [or] Kandace." She was strong enough to fight against all invaders of Old Nubia and bring victory and independence to her country. See J. D. Fage (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Africa From 500 B. C. to A. D. 1050*, Vol. 2 (New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 581; Walter Budge, *The History of Nubia and Ethiopia* (London: Oxford University Press, 1908).

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