

## The aesthetics of 'waithood' in selected African novels.

---

**Abiodun Olofinsao**

Department of English Elizade University  
Ilara-Mokinondo State  
Nigeria

### Abstract

*'Waithood' is derived from "waiting for adulthood". It is expressed as delayed adulthood, a situation that has resulted in youth frustration across African nations. Governments fail to provide sufficient employment opportunities and the educational systems do not adequately prepare the youths for the few jobs that exist in this technologically driven job markets. Youths' prolonged dependence on parents leads to involvement in criminal activities. While waiting, they are passionately hustling for a better life, and for a family of their own. This paper examines the effects of 'waithood' on the youths and African nations as means of youthful growth and national development in contemporary African society. Alternative Femininity and Masculinity form the theoretical framework. The analysis of Mafo's Wazobia Revolution; Mwangi's Kill me Quick and Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions among others situates the position of Africa in the global restructuring and suggests the way forward out of waithood.*

**Keywords:** *Waithood, Gender-Activism, Masculinity, Alternative Femininity, Restructuring, contemporary period*

### Introduction

Africans must define and situate their position in the on-going global restructuring in this contemporary period. Failure to come along and fit into the revolution will definitely spell doom for Africa as a continent. Any nation that wants to make it economically, technologically and equally conquer the space must be adequately ready to lavishly invest in the development of the youths and in the industrialization of its economy. If things



are done in the same old way, definitely, the results remain unchanged, and that will not take the black continent to a reasonable place in the global market. All must come together to sustain the call for global revival expected in the restructuring of African economy. There should no provision be made for idleness and excuses. Readiness to persevere, hustle and work diligently for the betterment of the society must be established. The government should be proactive in creating gainful employment, conducive environment and fair level playing ground for the teeming youths released from higher institutions on a yearly basis. In defining the position of Africa in the global restructuring in this contemporary period, literature is a vital tool in that area. Literature is used by scholars to reveal the situation of Africa as a continent and her attendant problems or challenges.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the aesthetics of waithood in African literature, establishing their effects on the African youths and nations. The paper also portrays some female activists, who are not just ordinary women, but are contributing positively to the development of Africa in the area of gender equality. Some literary texts are analyzed briefly to establish the presence of waithood and gender activism in African literature. Mafo's *Wazobia Revolution*; Mwangi's *Kill me Quick* are selected to represent West and East Africa since they have similar political and colonial histories and Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* stands for South Africa since the author is from Zimbabwe. However, some of these texts were published some years ago but the messages are still very relevant in this age and the way they treat waithood and gender activism is still relevant in contemporary African literary space. Some examples are equally drawn from other African plays and poems to explain further on these key issues under discussion.

The paper concludes by calling on the youths to make positive use of their waithood period, never to engage in criminality but in creativity that will move Africa forward in the global industrial revolution, and gender activism has a lot to contribute to the actualization of this vision. For Africa to move forward, there must be gender balance, alternative femininity and positive utilization of waithood. The female gender must realize their noble position in the revolution of African economic development. Waithood and gender activism have not received

adequate attention in African Novel, a gap this paper intends to fill.

### Waithood in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

'Waithood' is derived from two separate words. 'Wait' is coined from 'waiting' while 'hood' is an offshoot of 'adulthood'. The full statement is "Waiting for Adulthood". This is a period in the life of an individual where he/she has to pause and plan on how he/she will metamorphose into adulthood and begin to accomplish what adults are expected to achieve. Waithood, in another sense, is a period of stagnation in the lives of young unemployed college graduates in various industrializing and developing nations or regions, primarily in the Middle East, Africa and India, where their expertise is still not widely needed or applicable. <sup>1</sup>"Waithood" is described by Inhorn as "a kind of prolonged adolescence and the bewildering time in which large proportions of youth spend their best years waiting".<sup>2</sup> It is a phase in which the difficulties youth face in each of these interrelated spheres of life result in a debilitating state of helplessness and dependency. It is a fact that waithood is understood by examining outcomes and linkages across different sectors: education, employment, housing, credit, marriage and so on.

The term "waithood" was firstly used in the work of Diane Singerman,<sup>3</sup> who has written extensively on education and marriage in the Middle East. Singerman uses waithood to refer to a pattern of widespread delay in marriage and since marriage is culturally linked to social adulthood. Singerman argues that in

---

<sup>1</sup>Marcia.Inhorn. *Waithood; Gender, Education, and Global Delays in Marriage*. A Conference Paper at Yale University, September 27-30, 2018, 3.

<sup>2</sup> Inhorn, Marcia. *Waithood; Gender, Education, and Global Delays in Marriage*. A Conference Paper at Yale University, September 27-30, 2018. Retrieved from [www.marciainhorn.com/conference/waithood-gender-marriage/](http://www.marciainhorn.com/conference/waithood-gender-marriage/) (06 August, 2019)

<sup>3</sup> Singerman, Diane. "Thirty and Single, Coping with Delayed Marriage", *The Middle East Youth Initiative* (13 February 2008) Retrieved from [www.meyi.org/bio-diane-singerman.html](http://www.meyi.org/bio-diane-singerman.html), 2018.

countries like Iran, Syria, Morocco, and Egypt, young people are obtaining higher levels of education than ever before, but that education is not leading to employment. The focus of her research was on youth in general. However, she gives primary emphasis to the experiences of young men, so as to highlight the role of governments in failing to supply sufficient remunerative employment opportunities and the failure of educational systems to adequately prepare young men for the jobs that exist. This situation has increased the high rate of criminality among the youths.<sup>4</sup> Inhorn describes the situation as a period where “high marriage and housing costs and a cultural pattern, whereby young people live at home until they marry, have equally led to a situation of prolonged dependence on parents, as young people are forced to wait – for a job, for housing, and for marriage and for a family of their own.”<sup>5</sup>

To dialogue on the position of the black race in the global industrial revolution ravaging the continent like a bush fire in this twenty first century without talking about the youths will be an inconclusive deliberation because the youths are instruments of societal transformation. The youths, as people say, are the leaders of tomorrow, and they are at the centre of this industrial revolution. That is why I find this notion of ‘waithood’ to be very helpful in capturing young people’s feeling of being blocked in a stage of prolonged or permanent youth. Waithood also evidences the multifaceted realities of young Africans’ difficult transition to adulthood, which goes beyond securing a job and extends to aspects of their social and political life. While Singerman’s usage of waithood suggests a sense of passivity,<sup>6</sup> Honwana “indicates that young people are not merely waiting, and hoping that their situation will change of its own accord. On the contrary, they are proactively engaged in serious efforts to create new forms of

---

<sup>4</sup>Marcia.Inhorn. *Waithood; Gender, Education, and Global Delays in Marriage*. A Conference Paper at Yale University, September 27-30, 2018, 3.

<sup>5</sup>Inhorn, Marcia. *Waithood; Gender, Education, and Global Delays in Marriage*. A Conference Paper at Yale University, September 27-30, 2018. Retrieved from [www.marciainhorn.com/conference/waithood-gender-marriage/](http://www.marciainhorn.com/conference/waithood-gender-marriage/) (06 August, 2019)

<sup>6</sup>Alcinda.Honwana. "*Waithood*": *Youth Transitions and Social Change*. 2014, 26.

being and interacting with society.<sup>7</sup> Waithood involves a long process of negotiating personal identity and financial independence; it represents the contradictions of a modernity, in which young people's expectations are simultaneously raised by the new technologies of information and communication that connect them to global cultures, and constrained by the limited prospects and opportunities in their daily lives."

We can rightly submit that the severity of the impact of waithood on the lives of young Africans depends on each individual's character, abilities, and life skills. However, it is also, largely, a function of their family background, level of education and access to resources. Those from the middle class who are well connected are better placed to secure jobs and have a smoother trajectory towards adulthood as portrayed in Ola Mafo's *Wazobian Revolution* and *Echoes of the Waves*. From the perspective of gender or femininity, waithood looks at how men face the pressures of getting a steady job, finding a home, and covering the costs of marriage and family building. According to<sup>8</sup> Calvís et al. (2007:83)

Although women are becoming better educated and have always engaged in productive labour alongside household chores, marriage and motherhood are still the most important markers of adulthood. While giving birth may provide girls an entry into adulthood, their ability to attain full adult status often depends on men moving beyond waithood

We must realize that the security of the citizenry and the giving of human face should be the uppermost concern on any policy

---

<sup>7</sup> Honwana, Alcinda. "Waithood": Youth Transitions and Social Change. In D. Foeken, T. Dietz, L. de Haan, and L. Johnson (eds.) *Development and Equity: An Interdisciplinary Exploration by ten Scholars From Africa, Asia, and Latin America*. Leiden: Brill. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004269729\\_004](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004269729_004) (08 October, 2019)

<sup>8</sup> Calvís, Anne-Emmanuèle, Jean-François Kobiane, and Edith Martel. 2007. Change Transitions to Adulthood in Urban Burkina Faso. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 38(2): 2007, 83.

the government tries to promulgate. The leaders then must try to put cash and food on the pockets and tables of individuals and families. In Africa, fewer percentages of citizens are financially secured. Money and food seem to have developed unknown phobia for the ordinary fellow citizens as they suddenly grew wings and flew away, they become unreached easily to ordinary citizens. Whether a policy is prescribed or proscribed, implemented or left untouched on the office table, there are certain groups that practically bear the brunt of the proactiveness or incompetence of government- the youths. These young minds are always at the receiving ends. Juxtaposing these interesting facts and that longing to break out of the shell of parents and guidance protection, plus the restlessness of these youths in the area of advanced technology, waithood is the term that captures this phase in the journey of life for these teeming youths. Waithood is an aspect that we must pay attention to in order for Africa to be properly placed in this contemporary industrial revolution.

The period that requires a long wait for development, maturity and global exposure between when these youths leave school and when they become acclaimed adults, that long period is best known and described as waithood. Regrettably, the realities of waithood begin to dawn on young graduates immediately they graduate from the higher institution. It becomes moments of sober reflections, annoying moments of waking up daily and not having any meaningful thing to engage with, moments to embrace the fact that millions have left school and are roaming the streets without jobs. To these upcoming youths, there is high probability they might join them in that waithood period. It turns out to be a nightmare and taunting moments where these youths are afraid to meet their fellow counterparts, family members and past friends for the fear of been asked some crucial questions. It is pathetic that most of the victims of waithood could only wish time would rewind itself and drop them at the junction of teenagers. Where they can wash plates again, clean the house, study mathematics, be under the grips of parents and guidance because, at least, they are sure of daily food and supplies, never to think of working to provide for themselves.

Examples of this waithood can be located in some African literary texts. Either from old generation of African writers or from the

contemporary writers, the story is the same. The problem started many years ago but unattended to by past African leaders until the problem blossomed to bigger one where the current leaders are finding it difficult to solve because the problem has really eaten deep into our fabrics and system due to geometrical increment in African population for some decades now. Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People* expresses this disillusionment among the youths and that is exactly the experience of Meja and Mina in Mega Mwangi's *Kill me Quick*. Meja and Mina leave the village and relocate to the city with the hope of getting better jobs and live conveniently, get money and settle down to raise families of their own. Not only that, they also wish to get enough money from the city that they can send back home to take proper care of their family members in the village. But they are disappointed as they could not get decent jobs in the city despite their diploma certificates. In a bid to survive in the city, they get involved in crimes as they are always in and out of prison. Though they obtained good grades in their School Certificate Examination, there is no job for them anywhere or, rather, nobody is willing to employ them for even the meanest kind of jobs. Meanwhile they have to live in refuse bins in the backstreets amidst the unbearable <sup>9</sup>"stench of the gutters" and "the foul smell of rotten vegetables".<sup>10</sup> To get food, they have to scavenge for discarded and decaying foodstuffs in the refuse dumps and in this regard they have to compete with the city mongrels. When they get employed in a white settler's farm, they are exploited and so have to devise means of coping with the situation. When they are sacked for a theft they had not committed, they return to the backstreets in the city. Soon, circumstances drive them into crime - a thing they have dreaded all along and tried to avoid.

Their hopes of making a fortune and helping the parents who suffered to keep them in school are completely frustrated and they would rather stay in the city and suffer than go back to their homes:

More than twelve years in school with fees to pay and then I go back home and just hang around: no not me, Meja. Imagine how my

---

<sup>9</sup> Meja, Mwangi. *Kill me Quick*. Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books. 1973, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 10

friends who never went to school and always stayed at home will laugh! I believe that I have aright to something better if only for the effort I put into these examination weeks. And what about the fees I had to pay at school? I could have become a farmer without having to pay all that highly, you know.<sup>11</sup>

Being unemployed means they are without any means of processing food and shelter. As a result, they resort to living at a subhuman level. They sleep in refuse bins like city rats and have to abandon them early in the morning before the city cleaners would come and cart them away to the central refuse dump. They feed from the leftovers in the refuse dump and these are described thus:

There were various kinds of fruit in various stages of decay. There were also slices of stale, smelly bread and a few pieces of dusty chocolate. Some rock hard cakes glared stonily back at them. Meja sat looking from one type of food to the other. The oranges were no longer orange and beautiful but a deathly grey with mould. The cakes were no longer cakes but fragments of rock and the chocolate looked like discarded shoe polish. (p.1)<sup>12</sup>

Though initially, the two friends refuse to join others in crime. According to Mina, he says:

all my friends became thieves and robbers. I would have done the same too but ... I could never trust my speed for getting away with purse snatching. Some of my friends went into the main streets and snatched purses and they are almost of them in prison now, for one

---

<sup>11</sup>Meja, Mwangi. *Kill me Quick*. Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books. 1973, 3

<sup>12</sup> Ibid; 1.



reason or another. Me, I turned into the backstreets and thrived.<sup>13</sup>

Despite their initial resistance, things do not turn out the way they expected, and they become victims of the ugly circumstances, they have, in effect been reduced to the level of beasts. Though we could say that the two friends fail to make proper and positive use of their waitness period because they could not hold their stand not to join crime for too long, they could not beat the society, so, they have to join the corrupt society. The author is saying that this has to be discouraged in the sense that joblessness should not drive the Africa youths into crime.

In like manner is the example of Feye in Chris Anyokwu's *Stolen Future*, where, Feye, the main character is made to wait for many years without a decent job because he has become <sup>14</sup>'overage' due to staying at home for many years after graduation and he is not ready to join the bad wagon. He posits further that:

I'm frustrated to death. The whole thing bores me. For seven years now. Nothing to show for my two-two. And now the age barrier. I have been to virtually all major and minor establishments in town. Same story. Either the lady receptionist who is painting her nails and is on the phone talking with her boyfriend ignores me hours on end or I'm flatly told the Boss is not available. He is attending a top-level meeting and won't be through till doomsday.... Sometimes, I just don't stand a chance because I speak a different tongue. But often, it is that I'm overage. I am dead tired Uncle.<sup>15</sup>

This waitness scenario is equally captured in Oswald Mtshali's Poem *Boy on a Swing*, where the frustrated boy asks:

---

<sup>13</sup>Meja, Mwangi. *Kill me Quick*. Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books. 1973, 3

<sup>14</sup> Chris, Amyokwu, *Stolen Future*. Lagos: LearnRite Publishers Services. 2006, 4.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid; 4-5.

Mother! Where did I come from?  
When will I wear long trousers?  
Why was my father jailed?

This same question is asked by the unemployed youths today, 'when will they begin to wear trousers and grow up to maturity as expected in the face of the biting unemployment?' Just as the boy's question remains unanswered, the waithood period remains unending, because nobody can tell when the waiting period will actually end for African youths. Alcho laments in Frank Ogbecbe's *Harvest of Corruption* "Could you believe that since my Service I have not been able to get any job for myself? I have tried everything everywhere but no way. My dear, I am finished."<sup>16</sup> Just like Meja and Mina, Alcho could not stand faithful until the end, she gives her body for sexual relationship with the Minister for External Affairs in order for her to secure job. She gets the job but later lured to cocaine business and she eventually dies during childbirth after series of attempted abortions. For Alcho, it is a failed waithood.

Africa as a whole is equally at a waithood period as Africa is at the corridor of plunging itself into the realm of technology and advancement in scholarly researches. But it is unfortunate that instead of looking for means to comply with the latest trend in the advanced world, we get involved in crimes, terrorism and fraudulent activities. Africa is currently experiencing waithood, waiting for a moment of technological advancement and positive revolution in our political, industrial and economic sectors. The African leaders who are saddled with the responsibility of making the transition to progress, they rather use the power within their disposal to oppress the masses. Soyinka (1984) calls it an abuse of power, which has limited and hampered the growth of Africa in the twenty first industrial revolution.<sup>17</sup>Soyinka (1984: vii) posits further that:

---

<sup>16</sup> Frank, Ogbecbe, *Harvest of Corruption*. Abuja: Almaz Books Ltd. 2014, 4.

<sup>17</sup> Wole, Soyinka. *A Play of Giants*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited. 1984, vii.

Power, we have suggested, calls to power, and vicarious power (that is, the sort enjoyed by the politically impotent intelligentsia) responds obsequiously to the real thing. ... there is also a professed love... which is perverse, being also identical with the 'love' of the slave-girl for her master.

Maturity is synonymous to adulthood. And if that adulthood means cutting yourself off the chain of parents support and contributing to the welfare of the younger ones, parents and the community; if it means starting life with a furnished room apartment; if it means nursing plans on how to be a parent and building your own home, then late 'teenhood' should be the time to prepare for the herculean task and waithood would be the transition period.

To a balanced expectation, waithood is supposed to be transient for fresh graduates. It should be a period to learn to settle down, not a time to scramble for a living. It should be a moment to begin mulling over humble investments rather than struggling to make ends meet.

Fatefully in many African nations, there is a long and tumultuous drive on the road of waithood; inundated with potholes, sharp corners and no U-turn. Often the road seems dark and overwhelmed by haze during daylight. Millions of Africans have been stuck on this road even before our democracy and many have been assured by the dwindling economy of the continent that they will join the bandwagon.<sup>18</sup>

The need for collective responsibility and to shun any act that could be a hindrance in the transformation of the industrial section in Africa is vividly portrayed in Mafo's *Wazobian Revolution* where the three returnees from the Gold Coast to Wazobia are faced with challenges in the country such as unjust killing, corruption, oppression, embezzlement of public funds and criminality. They do not want to become just ordinary citizens of the nation who will allow the challenges of the nation to rub on them. They want the masculinity in them to prevail over the

---

<sup>18</sup>Pascal, Egens. *Waithood in Nigeria*. 2016, 1

decadence in the society. These young men, Bayo, Emeka and Mohammed, with strong determination decide not to fall for criminality but how to make the society better. With that resolution, according to the author, they;

realized that only strong determination, selfless and united leaders from various groups could work together and build the necessary bridges that would produce the required unity in diversity for the beloved nation. They resolved to dedicate themselves to this struggle and to work with other Wazobians who shared these lofty objectives.<sup>19</sup>

After that, these young men decide to expose the corrupt military officers at the border, condemn the corrupt public officers who are demanding for bribe before they attend to the files they are supposed to treat. Not only that, they decide to look away from the wealth of their parents, but decide to engage in decent jobs for their daily sustenance. They are not religiously, politically or culturally bias as they are from different cultural backgrounds. They co-habit together perfectly and that also reflect in their marriages, they all get involved in inter-tribal marriages. Unless we begin to tolerate ourselves, forget our cultural, political or religious affiliations, things cannot move forward for the African citizens. Contemporary Africa needs the spirit of these 'Wazobian' young men to progress in this 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **The concept of gender activism in contemporary affairs**

Gender is seen as the socially constructed characteristics of women and men such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. It varies from society and can be changed. While most people are born either male or female and they taught appropriate norms, ethics and behaviours which also include how to interact with other people of the same and opposite sex in their various homes, communities and other social context. The concept of gender also includes the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes and even

---

<sup>19</sup>Ola, Mafo. *Wazobian Revolution*. Akure; M. O. J. Investments Limited. 2016, 29.

the behaviours of both women and men in the society. Ogun-dipe-Leslie is of the opinion that “gender is the division of women and men determined by the social requirement of heterosexuality which reinforces male sexual dominance and female sexual submission”.<sup>20</sup> Based on the above definition, gender deals with the various differences and projections of men and women physically, socially and culturally in the society. How the two sexes are viewed and the roles they play individually and collectively.

Sociologically, there is a distinction between sex and gender. Sex can be portrayed as biological traits that societies use to assign people into the category of either male or female, whether it be through a focus on chromosomes, genitalia or some other physical ascription. When people talk about the differences between men and women they are often drawing on sex on rigid ideas of biology rather than gender, which is an understanding of how society shapes our understanding of those biological categories. Gender is more fluid, it may or may not depend upon biological traits. More specifically, it is a concept that describes how societies determine and manage sex categories; the cultural meanings attached to men and women’s roles; and how individuals understand their identities including, but not limited to, being a man, woman, transgender, intersex, gender queer and other gender positions. Gender involves social norms, attitudes and activities that society deems more appropriate for one sex over another. Gender is also determined by what an individual feels and does. The sociology of gender examines how society influences our understanding and perception of differences between masculinity (what society deems appropriate behaviour for a “man”) and femininity (what society deems appropriate behaviour for a “woman”). We examine how this, in turn, influences identity and social practices in the area of waithood and activism in Africa literature and Africa society as a whole in this paper.

Activism, in the other hand, is the doctrine or practice of vigorous action or involvement as a means of achieving political, social, cultural, marital, or other goals, personal or collectively,

---

<sup>20</sup> Omolara, Ogun-dipe-Leslie. *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformation*. Trenton: African World Press. 1994, 26.

sometimes by physical demonstration, public protest, or through social media and so on. It consists of effort to promote, impede, direct, or intervene in social, political, economic, or environmental reforms with the desire to make changes in the society. Activism is action on behalf of a cause, action that goes beyond what is conventional or routine. The action might be door-to-door canvassing, alternative radio, public meetings, rallies, or fasting. The cause might be women's rights, opposition to a factory, or world peace. Activism has played a major role in ending slavery, challenging dictatorships, protecting workers from exploitation, protecting the environment, promoting equality for women, opposing racism, and many other important issues. It can also be used for aims such as attacking minorities or promoting war.

Activism has been present throughout history, in every sort of political system. Yet it has never received the same sort of attention from historians as conventional politics, with its attention to rulers, wars, elections, and empires. Activists are typically challengers to policies and practices, trying to achieve a social goal, not to obtain power themselves. Much activism operates behind the scenes. Activism is not necessarily a good thing or a bad thing. It all depends on the cause and the actions, and a person's judgment of what is worthwhile. One person might say that a protest is a valuable defense of freedom and another person might say that it is a dangerous attack on human rights.

Gender activism has played an important role in the society today. It is not a new phenomenon in Africa and has existed since the colonial era especially in the aspect of literature. It emerged remarkably in some of the most famous post-colonial works of writers. It has been used as a visible tool for conflict resolution, gender violence and inequality. Activism is not just in terms of ethnicity but basically in terms of socio-economic and political disadvantages against which the activists pitch their struggles and motives. Gender activism examines the fight and struggle of people as a collective work rather than individual and consequently the outcome of such acts in conflict resolution in the society.

There are numerous examples of African women who are active activists and are committed to the course of female gender in African society. Few of them are Wadi Ben-Hirki who founded the Wadi Ben-Hirki Foundation when she was 17 years old. The foundation seeks to impact marginalized and disadvantaged communities through humanitarianism and activism. The charity organization runs many campaigns, mostly in Northern Nigeria. She serves on the African Leadership Institute Youth Advisory Board and was the Special Guest from Africa at the 2018 Y20 Summit.

Paraphrasing Eagles she submits that Melene Rossouw is another figure who became an Attorney in the High Court of South Africa in 2009.<sup>21</sup> In 2017, she founded the Women Lead Movement to educate, empower, and inspire women. They lead social change in their communities through human rights and leadership training. The movement also shows women how to publicly campaign and hold the government accountable for the promises they make to their citizens. Regush says that in March 2011, AWDF recognized Professor Abena Busia as one of 50 inspirational African feminists.<sup>22</sup> She is a co-director and co-editor of the groundbreaking Women Writing Africa Project, a multi-volume anthology published by the Feminist Press at the City University of New York. Abena has been widely published on black women's literature, colonial discourse, and postcolonial studies. Her bibliographical list includes two volumes of poetry "Testimonies Exile" and "Traces of life" and such edited works as "Theorizing Black Feminisms: The Visionary Pragmatism of Black Women", "Beyond Survival: African literature and the search for new life".<sup>23</sup>

Other women activists are Fridah Githuku, the Executive Director of GROOTS Kenya, a national grassroots movement led by women. The movement gives grassroots women visibility and decision-making power in their communities. They have invested in nearly 3,500 women-led groups across Kenya, sparking local,

---

<sup>21</sup> Jane, Eagles. *These Powerful Activists are at the Frontlines of Gender Equality*. 2019, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Anna, Regush. *10 Powerful African Feminists Who Fight For Women Rights*. 2017, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.,1

human-led change. As an Equal Measures 2030 partner, Fridah is passionate about the role of land rights in achieving gender equality, AyaChebbi is an award-winning Pan-African feminist and activist. She is the founder of the Youth Programme of Holistic Empowerment Mentoring, coaching the next generation of positive change agents. She is also the founder of the Afrika Youth Movement, one of Africa's largest Pan-African youth-led movements. She is the first African Union Youth Envoy and the youngest diplomat at the African Union Commission Chairperson's Cabinet.

Lola Omolola, the founder of FIN, a private Facebook group that connects nearly 1.7 million women from across the world is another example. She began the group in 2014, searching to create a virtual support network with other Nigerians after Boko Haram kidnappings. The group quickly grew into a hub for women's issues, offering its members a safe outlet to discuss the struggles they face and connect with other women who share those experiences. Chmba Ellen Chilemba is the Founder and Executive Director at Tiwale, a youth-led organization supporting Malawian girls and women. She started Tiwale at 17 to end the vicious cycle of child marriage through economic and educational opportunities. Tiwale has supported over 250 women so far.<sup>24</sup>Eagles, Jane (2019:1). In the field of literature, we have great writers and activists like Zulu Sofola, Buchi Emecheta, Oswald Mtshali, Ahdaf Soueif, Aminatta Forna, Chibundu Onuzo, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Helen Oyeyemi, Imbolo Mbue, Jennifer Nansubuga Makumbi, Kopano Matlwa etc.

Activism is of different colours and shades which may be performed on a day-to-day basis in a wide variety of ways, including through the creation of art (activism), computer hacking (hacktivism), or simply in how one chooses to spend their money (economic activism). For example, the refusal to buy clothes or other merchandise from a company as a protest against the exploitation of workers by that company could be considered an expression of activism. However, the most highly visible and impactful activism often comes in the form of collective action, in which numerous individuals

---

<sup>24</sup>Jane, Eagles. These Powerful Activists are at the Frontlines of Gender Equality. 2019, 1.



coordinate an act of protest together in order to make a bigger impact. Collective action that is purposeful, organized, and sustained over a period becomes known as a social movement. Historically, activists have used literature, including pamphlets, tracts, and books to disseminate their grievances, messages and attempt to persuade their readers of the justification of their cause. Research has now begun to explore how contemporary activist's groups use social media to facilitate civic engagement and collective action combining politics and literature with technology.

The role of activism in African is an important aspect which must not be examined parochially. The activities of the male counterpart must be investigated *vis-a-vis* the females, especially those citizens who have promoted the socio-economic and cultural way of their lives by voicing out their problems and creating a platform for conflict resolution and equal opportunity. The movements have been influenced by international feminism and external donors. Increasingly, it is African women who are shaping the global struggle for women's rights. Bringing together other authors who themselves are important part of the activist groups.

Activism is equally needed in every aspects of Africa in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Every gender, as we can see from the foregoing, is important in the transformation, development, and revolution in the economic standard of the nations in Africa. There is no need for male counterparts to look down on their female counterparts as if they cannot contribute meaningfully in the revolution vanguard in Africa, the same applies to the females. Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* is a perfect literary example that shows and establishes the fact on how female characters are capable of transforming the society. Though, as said earlier, this book was published many years ago, but the relevance of its message cannot be thrown into the background in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Many women activists today got their inspirations and visions from books like *Nervous Conditions*. This issue of gender activism is revealed in the behaviours of Sisi Tambu. The situation in the novel is that of male dominated, the age long tradition in Africa which cannot take us to anywhere where women are oppressed and suppressed. Dangarembga promotes alternative femininity and equally shows to us in the novel the

need to challenge the existing tradition of female subjugation which should be replaced with an egalitarian society of equal opportunities for both sexes to contribute their quota to the development of Africa. Tambu expresses this oppression in a situation where females are not encouraged to go to school. She says:

The needs and sensibilities of the women in my family were not considered a priority, or even legitimate. That was why I was in Standard Three in the year that Nhamo died, instead of in Standard Five, as I should have been by that age. In those days I felt the injustice of my situation every time I thought about it, which I could not help... feeling the injustice of it, this is how I came to dislike my brother... my father, my mother- in fact everybody.<sup>25</sup>

Tambu's father tells her the fact that schooling is not for females when she becomes obsessed about going to school saying<sup>26</sup>"I shall go to school again" The father tells her:

Is that anything to worry about? Ha-a-a, it's nothing... Can you cook books and feed them to your husband? Stay at home with your mother. Learn to cook and clean. Grow vegetables.<sup>27</sup>

Nhamo, her brother, also expresses that masculinity by looking down on his sister and towing the same lane of oppression. He mocks Tambu in this dialogue between them:

'Who says? I should know. I go to school. You go nowhere.' 'But I want to go to school.' 'Wanting won't help.' 'Why not?' He hesitated, then shrugged. 'It's the same everywhere. Because you are a girl' It was out. 'That's what Baba said, remember?'<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>25</sup> Tsitsi, Dangarembga. *Nervous Conditions*. California: The Women's Press.1988, 12.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid; 16.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid; 15.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid; 18.

Gender activism requires women fighting for their rights and privileges to contribute meaningfully to the development of the society. Even if other female counterparts are not supportive, just like Tambu's mother at initial stage, the author believes that such female activist must press ahead to challenge the existing norms that will not promote positive revolution in this dispensation in Africa. Tambu declares:

My mother... began to prepare me for disappointment long before I would have been forced to face up to it. ...'And do you think you are so different, so much better than the rest of us? Accept your lot and enjoy what you can of it. There is nothing else to be done.'<sup>29</sup>

In gender activism, confrontations, perseverance and commitment are ingredients that will make the revolution we so much desire in Africa to become achievable. For instance, she says:

'And why should I tell her such things?' My mother asked.' The girl must have a chance to do something for herself, to fail for herself. Do you think I have not told her efforts will come to nothing? You know your daughter. She is willful and headstrong. She won't listen to me....<sup>30</sup>

This is the first time Tambu's mother will summon all the courage in her to confront her husband and the confrontation finally yields results. The picture of a female activist is equally seen in the character of Ogeyi in Ogbecbe's *Harvest of Corruption* when she determines to fight for justice for her friend who died prematurely during childbirth, a situation she finds herself due to the societal corruption in a male dominated society. She says:

As if I know this was going to happen when I went to the Assistant Commissioner of Police. Justice must be done. She must be avenged. Yes!

---

<sup>29</sup>Tsitsi, Dangarembga. *Nervous Conditions*. California: The Women's Press. 1988, 20.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid; 24.

I will make sure of that, even if that is the last thing, I do so long as her soul is appeased.<sup>31</sup>

This is the spirit of an activist needed by everyone to confront the oppression and the corrupt people in the society who will not make African society to progress in this contemporary time. The authors reveal to us here the need for everyone to come together and confront the challenges befalling us in Africa. Revolution flows with confrontation. If we expect positive and progressive revolution in our society, the people should be ready to challenge the challenges limiting the progress of the black race.

### Conclusion

This paper has examined the position of Africa in the revolution campaign of this 21<sup>st</sup> century using the yardsticks of waithood, and gender activism from the perspective of literature through the analysis of some selected African novels: *Mafo's Wazobia Revolution*; *Mwangi's Kill me Quick*; and *Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions* and other literary texts. The submission of this paper is that Africa as a continent still has a long way to go in climbing to the pinnacle of recognizable development. Most of our leaders are corrupt, selfish and lack the vision for the technological advancement in the economy, industrial, social and political segments in Africa. Women's oppression and subjugation are still rampant in our society as female gender is being discriminated against at home, in the labour market, in the school and even in religious houses. Many of the young minds are leaving the schools without adequate provision of job opportunities for them. They go into labour market without backups.

Most of the companies and industries are folding up because they are yet to be aligned with the technologically driven market. These youths are forced to stay at waithood period longer than necessary. Any nation that fails to make adequate provision for the youths is planning to fail, digging its own grave. The force in the transformation of African is not the aged but the youth. In addition, we must encourage hard work, hustling and diligence among the citizens. It is a fact that some are lazy bones, not

---

<sup>31</sup>Frank, Ogbeche, *Harvest of Corruption*. Abuja: Almaz Books Ltd. 2014, 92.

willing to work, they believe in getting everything for free. Such people have forgotten the old saying that “there is nothing free again in Freetown.” Literature has a lot to contribute to the development of Africa’s revolution, for through it, the challenges and way out are revealed. For Africa to move ahead, Africans, through ‘gender activism’, must hustle. This will make ‘the *Wazobians*’, to reduce the period of ‘waithood’ and never allow the need for revolution to be *Out of Our Mind* in order not to create a *Nervous Condition* so that Africa position and vision for better industrialization and societal transformation will not become *Kill me Quick*.

### References

- Adebowale, Bayo. *Out of His Mind*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 2017.
- Amyokwu, Chris. *Stolen Future*. Lagos: LearnRite Publishers Services, 2006.
- Calví's, Anne-Emmanuí'le, Jean-Franí§oisKobiane, and Edith Martel. Change Transitions to Adulthood in Urban Burkina Faso. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 38(2): 265-83, 2007.
- Dangarembga, Tsitsi. *Nervous Conditions*. California: The Women's Press, 1988.
- Egens, Pascal. *Waithood in Nigeria*. Retrieved from [www.nairaland.com/2990254/waithood-nigeria](http://www.nairaland.com/2990254/waithood-nigeria) (18 July, 2019)
- Eagles, Jane. *These Powerful Activists are at the Frontlines of Gender Equality*. Retrieved from <https://www.one.org/international/blog/open-letter-cosigner-activists-2019/> (30 March, 2020)
- Honwana, Alcinda. "Waithood": Youth Transitions and Social Change. In D. Foeken, T. Dietz, L. de Haan, sand L. Johnson (eds.) *Development and Equity: An Interdisciplinary Exploration by ten Scholars From*

- Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Leiden: Brill.  
[http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004269729\\_004](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/9789004269729_004) (08 October, 2019)
- Youth, Waithood, and Protest Movements in Africa.  
Retrieved from  
[www.africanarguments.org/2013/08/12/](http://www.africanarguments.org/2013/08/12/) (08 October, 2019).
- Tawfik, Hussein. Retrieved from <https://medium.com/tools-for-entrepreneurs/what-it-means-to-hustle-in-the-world-of-business-c0dcbad988e8>(19 September, 2019)
- Inhorn, Marcia. Waithood; Gender, Education, and Global Delays in Marriage. A Conference Paper at Yale University, September 27-30, 2018. Retrieved from [www.marciainhorn.com/conference/waithood-gender-marriage/](http://www.marciainhorn.com/conference/waithood-gender-marriage/) (06 August, 2019)
- Mafo, Joseph Ola. *Echoes of the Waves*. Akure; M.O.J Investments Limited. 2016.
- ..... *Wazobian Revolution*. Akure; M. O. J. Investments Limited, 2016.
- Mwangi. Meja. *Kill me Quick*. Nairobi: Heinemann Educational Books. 1973.
- Ogbeche, Frank Ogodo. *Harvest of Corruption*. Abuja: Almaz Books Ltd, 2014.
- Ogundipe-Leslie, Omolara. *Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformation*. Trenton: African World Press. 1994.
- Regush, Anna. 10 Powerful African Feminists Who Fight For Women Rights. Retrieved from <http://yonah.org/channel/african-feminists> on 30th March, 2020.
- Singerman, Diane. "Thirty and Single, Coping with Delayed Marriage", *The Middle East Youth Initiative* (13 February 2008) Retrieved from [www.meyi.org/bio-diane-singerman.html](http://www.meyi.org/bio-diane-singerman.html), 2018.
- Soyinka, Wole. *A Play of Giants*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1984.