Aboriginalism to Womanism: X-Raying Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* and Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *Echoes of A New Dawn*

Ngozi Chuma-Udeh
Department of English, Anambra State University, P.M.B. 02 Uli, Anambra State, Nigeria
E-mail: ngozichumaudeh@yahoo.com

Abstract

The astounding talents of African feminist writers depict the struggles women have faced over the years in the contemporary African communities. Ordinarily, the intricacies of the doctrine of Womanism have been the major themes in t he works of these authors who passionately fight against the oppression of women from the contemporary African patriarchal pressures. Womanism as a doctrine has become an inescapable theme in their works where it has come to be for them, a plea for life, f or recognition of women as human beings not as separate or in opposition to their male counterparts, but as partners who work together from the location of shared community and the collective experiences to foster peace and progress in their local communities, a plea for the right of the women to participate effectively in their contemporary society, and a fervent plea for equity, fair play and justice. This paper looks at the dynamics of Womanism as a movement in the African literary terrain where it intends to explore the nuanced, often controversial portrayals of Womanism by African feminist writers who were bold enough to speak their minds not considering the outcome. This will be done by capturing Womanism through the lenses of an East African writer, Nuruddin Farah in „From a Crooked Rib" (1970) and a Nigerian writer, Ngozi Chuma-Udeh in „Echoes of a New Dawn" (2008).

Key Words: Aboriginalism, Womanism, Patriarchal, Feminist, Writers

Introduction

In 1979, the United Nations held a world summit of stake holders to discuss the affairs of women which was tagged *The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women* of 1979 (CEDAW). The Article 1 of this convention summarily defined discrimination against women as "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field (Office of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights, Status of Ratifications of the Principal Human Rights Treaties as of 26 November 2001). Within the next two decades, so many countries, all over the world endorsed the tenets of CEDAW. At least, forty six African Nations were among the countries that adopted the outcome of this summit on women affairs.

The stipulations of CEDAW came to accentuate the conviction of African feminist writers in their great efforts to negotiate a life for the African women. Apart from CEDAW, so many other machineries have been put in place to check discrimination against women by international bodies. The United Nations Covenants of 1966 provides protection against discrimination on the grounds of gender (Art. 2, 1 Civil & Political Covenant; Art. 2, 2 Economic, Social and Cultural Rights).

Again, the 1956 Supplementary Convention on the abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Practices Similar to Slavery stressed on the importance of woman‘s consent to marriage and advocated the elimination of customs such as bride wealth and funeral rites in which women are objects of inheritance after the death of their spouse (Art 1). The 1962 Convention on Consent to Marriage, Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriages as quoted in Welch, Claude E. & Meltzer, Ronald, Eds. (1984:45), considers some customs and traditions relating to marriage and the family "inconsistent with...the Universal Declaration of Human Rights." Inequity against women continues to exist in African societies despite the intervention of international, regional and domestic protections. These inequities became the focus of feminist writers in Africa. This paper looks at the journey of the African woman from Aboriginalism to Womanism as captured in the African literary context from the point of view of a male feminist writer and a female writer‘s point of view.

The Journey from Aboriginalism to Womanism: A Rat Race

The African feminist writer's agitation is sustained in the belief that sums up discrimination as any circumstances where prototypical acts of inequality are upheld in form of tradition, system, convention, custom and modus operandi that maintains an inferior placement of women in all fields of life. In most African societies, inequity against women is an established order. This ranges from the subjugation of considering women as beasts of burden by subjecting them to so many humiliating conditions like marrying them off without their consent, and at a price, mandating them to undergo severe funeral rites and gruesome rituals at the death of their spouses and enforcing them into inheritance by other men after the death of their spouses.

This goes to say that the most humiliating act meted to women in Africa is forced marriage or wife barter. This is exemplified in situation whereby a girl is forcibly given out in marriage and without due consultations with her and a situation where a widow is bartered into another marriage as an act of inheritance by a relation of her husband. In some cases women barter was likened to sales of horses, cattle or even goats; young girls were treated like capital assets or commodities and bartered off for the worth of domestic animals like cattle and camel. It is convenient to say that the girls are 'sold', because the form of the transaction is basically the same as those in which other goods are exchanged or sold. This unwritten brutal, patriarchal, and feudalistic code makes women chattels in their contemporary societies in Africa.

In 1955, Robert F. Gray (Gray, 2012) carried out a research in northern Tanganyika, in the Masai district on the wife right of the Sonjo and asserted that, the Sonjo transfer "[w]ives—that is to say, wife rights. ~~A~~According to him, among this tribe of people, there exists "a lively system of economic exchange that encompasses the sale and purchase of rights in women, who in their economic aspects are dealt with much like other commodities (p. 37)." According to Gray (2012)

> [w]hen a husband dies, his wife rights are inherited by his eldest surviving brother. In this respect wives are dealt with in a different manner from other forms of property.... A brother may take the widow as his wife.... A brother may also sell the wife rights in the widow to another man, but in order to understand this transaction we must consider a mystical aspect of Sonjo marriage. It is believed that when a married person dies he will ultimately be reunited with his spouse in the spirit world. This belief is expressed in a myth: In former times the dead sometimes returned to earth to help their relatives here, but the last spirit to so materialize on earth was insulted and vowed that

> thereafter the dead would remain forever in the spirit world; she explained before departing that the spirits of dead husband and wives waited in the spirit world for their spouses to die, and were then reunited with them there. This belief has a practical bearing on bride-price transactions. Thus when a husband dies, the brother who inherits the widow may sell his rights in her to another man for the fixed price of thirty goats. This relatively small sum of less than half the woman's normal bride-price is explained by the belief in spirit marriage, for the new husband only acquires full wife rights in the woman in this world; after she dies she will rejoin her original husband in the spirit world. A second husband loses possession of her ghost. This reduced bride-price for a widow cannot be explained as resulting from deterioration in her value as a wife (p. 38-41).

Based on the above, the writers under study in this paper believe that African societies are the bastion of intransigent and retrogressive practices that marginalize women. They however lay the blame at the corridors of nebulous traditional beliefs inherited from artefacts of a distant and brutal past. This is reminiscent in the stories captured in Nurrudin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* and Ngozi Chuma-Udeh's *Echoes of a New Dawn.*

The Somali society Nuruddin Farah described in his novel was a purely patriarchal Muslim society where indigenous women were regarded as mere shadows of men. The popular Somali saying at the beginning of the novel, *—God created Woman from a crooked rib; and anyone who trieth to straighten it, breaketh it,"* capped up the totality of these society's belief of their women folk. This proverb obviously took its root from the story of Adam and Hawa - the Islamic version of Adam and Eve. To Farah, this proverb seems to predetermine the fate of indigenous women within Somali society where women were held as articles of trade, to be bartered to the highest bidder in exchange for other domestic animals like cows and cattle.

Likewise Chuma-Udeh's *Echoes of a New Dawn* is a portrayal of the harsh realities of womanhood in the traditional Igbo society where women were equally treated with so much inhumane drudgery, perceived as inferiors and ascribed derogatory names in and outside marriage according to the whims and caprices of tradition. The widow in this society is referred to as the one *_sitting in ashes"* and is summarily passed on to the eldest member of her husband's family. The barren woman is referred to as *_aga"* meaning, the woman with a worthless life.

The major characters of these books, Ebla in Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* and Lucia in Chuma-Udeh's *Echoes of a New Dawn* represent the indigenous woman

striving to have a life like their male counterparts. They believe that woman could carve out a niche for themselves in their contemporary society and live a life of fulfilment. While Ebla stood against the subjugating, tenets of her tradition in her efforts to transform from an aboriginal, rural girl to a fulfilled city woman, Lucia fought to maintain her love for Africa by standing against the practices of institutionalized religious dehumanizing rites of widowhood. They were both driven by the instinct for survival against inhumane and treacherous traditional societies.

Ebla struggled against the status quo of a society that regarded their women as ordinary merchandise, to be bought and sold, by their male counterparts, like cattle or donkey at the open market. At the tender age of eighteen, she found herself left with just one option; to flee from the dreary life of a forced bride. It was painful for her to realize that she was worth just a few camels to her grandfather, who had no single thought for her well being before selling her off in marriage to Giumaleh, a forty eight years old man in their settlement in exchange for some camels.

Her running away from her people to the township was therefore a race for her life, a race from the lifeless conditions of Aboriginalism to the vibrancy of Womanism. She took her life into her own hands by abandoning her grandfather and their subjugating traditions. She ran away in search for freedom, in search for life. Ebla saw the caravan to Belet Wene as the only means to freedom. She would want to stand side by side her male counterparts. Her dream was for a utopian society where women are allowed ownership of things, especially their own bodies. She represents the average Somali woman struggling to rise above the surf of patriarchal subjugation.

At Belet Wene, she sought refuge in the home of Gheddi, her cousin, and his pregnant wife, Aowralla. Even in her cousin's house, Ebla discovered that freedom was still an elusive factor. She became a house slave, running the household chores as well as droving and milking the cows in the yard. She also acted as a midwife when Aowralla went into labour despite her innocence.

She discovered as well that it was almost a universal notion that a woman was a little less than a chattel as Gheddi's turned her into a smuggling vessel. She found a guide and confidant in a character known only as the widow. Her friendship with the widow was her only succour. Her only moments of happiness were the few occasions

she visited the widow. The widow was an independent woman and Ebla found herself drawing inspirations from the air of freedom around this woman.

Farah uses humour to point out the harsh realities of the subjugating patriarchy in African communities. He made fun of the absurd tradition that mandated a woman to dress like a _ghost.‘ This became about the most serious reality in the Muslim society. The sight of human being covered from head to toe was deemed as frightening and absurd. Ebla‘s reaction at the sight of the Arab woman in a *niqab* as she was leaving the widow‘s house is synonymous to the indigenous woman‘s aversion to the dictates of the patriarchal tradition. Her taking to her heels with the notion that she had seen a *jinn* or ghost symbolises the flight from the fearful shackles of tradition. She was always on the run for her life; to escape the claws of her traditional society.

Ebla was portrayed as a spirited woman and the emblem of progressivism. She placed her hands on the plough for freedom by running away and she never looked back. Though, in her private moments, she nursed some nostalgic feelings for her home and her grandfather, she had no regrets leaving her *jes*. She abhorred her people‘s tendency to constrain and deny her freedom of thought and self-determination. The author examined his character‘s thought:

> From experience she knew that girls were materials, just like objects, or items on the shelf of a shop. They were sold and bought as shepherds sold their goats at market-places, or shop-owners sold the goods to their customers. To a shop-keeper what was the difference between a girl and his goods? Nothing, absolutely nothing.
> What agony, what a revolting situation! Naturally women are born in nine months (unless the case is abnormal) just like men. What makes a woman so inferior to men? (p. 84).

Even when she was co-opted into smuggling by her cousin Gheddi who sought to transform her into a smuggling pot, she still maintained her pride. In her inexperience, she foiled a smuggling attempt by mishandling a package given to her by her cousin to take home. This unsuccessful outing led to the capture of her cousin and his cohort in crime. Ebla was blamed by her cousin for his colleagues' imprisonment. Gheddi branded her a jinxed _thing‘ and believed totally that that her presence at the smuggling business was the cause of their ill-luck. His hostility and resentment did not make Ebla cower. It rather made her look for other sources of freedom, the freedom she found by spending more time with the widow who was her only associate and friend.

Ebla once more found her freedom compromised by a male character – this time her cousin, whose wife and child she has been nursing wholeheartedly. Gheddi mortgaged her freedom in order to free himself from the jaws of the police. He used her as collateral to borrow money from his friend, a broker. He promised the broker Ebla's hand in marriage as exchange for the money he borrowed from him. The widow informed Ebla that Gheddi promised her hand in marriage to his broker Dirir who has Tuberculosis. She was moved by Ebla‘s plight and bemoaned the fate of womanhood:

> But that is what we women are – just like cattle, proper-ties of someone or other, either your parents or your husband…We are human beings...But our people don‘t realize it. What is the difference between a cow and yourself now? Your hand has been sold to a broker (p. 80).

Once more, fate tried to trap Ebla in the vicious circle of patriarchal tradition where the lot of women was to be slaves in their society. Relief came again as the widow introduced Ebla to her nephew, Awill who was an employee of the Italian colonial service and gave her the idea of eloping with him. In her haste to escape another forced marriage, Ebla left Belet Amin with the widow‘s nephew for Mogadiscio. She agreed to marry Awill because she felt that education must have remodelled him from the impish traditional rationality that made men look at women as mere chattels. She however found herself stepping deeper into the tick puddles of male subjugation as Awill turned her into a punching bag at their first night.

She wanted to rebuff his advances because they were not properly wed but Awill manhandled and forcibly disvirgined her. During this unfortunate incident, the character of the Somali woman in the face of oppression was revealed by the author; she does not fight back, but allows him to beat and rape her mercilessly. This is because in her conception, the woman was a slave. And she was willing to be what she had been reduced to; she was not raising a finger to stop it (83). The author narrates the harrowing ordeal:

> Ebla wanted to get out of bed and run away…She also forgot that Awill was in her way…but a woman never fought with a man, she should be submissive and never return his blows…Awill stood up straight and showered hard blows upon Ebla – in the mouth, at her head, on her belly. He gave her a kick or two on the belly and she tried to bite him. Ebla did not cry, she wanted to, but she knew she should not. Awill grasped her by the plaited hair and pulled her down. Now he jumped over her and sat upon her belly, her body heaving underneath his. _You are my wife.‘ He unknotted her dress and she raised no

> objections: she only moaned. He touched her head again. _Did I hit you hard?‘ (p. 96-97).

By wading into Ebla‘s consciousness, Farah was able to air the pain women underwent in the patriarchal society. Ebla examined her predicaments and how to get out of it. She examined herself to see where she had gone wrong and also contemplates on her position in the society. Ebla explained the pitiable condition of women in the Somali society who did not have much liberty to air their views since they were considered inferior in a monologue:

> _Woman?‘ she asked in a grunting male voice, _Are you a cheat?‘ _Sometimes.‘
> _But why?‘
> _Because men cheat me.‘
> _But why?‘
> _I take my revenge upon them.‘
> _Yes, but why?‘
> _I don‘t know. I am innocent. I don‘t know what to do. I just don‘t know what I do sometimes. I do things, just do them without really getting myself involved. I put my faith in my man, but once I lose it, then it is hard to regain it. It is jealousy and insecurity that causes most misunderstandings (p. 166).

The above monologue typifies this character‘s insistent bids to escape from the subjugate condition the society has placed her. Her freedom was paramount to her even as she sought to extricate herself from the shackles of traditional societal injunction.

Likewise in *Echoes of a New Dawn*, Chuma-Udeh‘s portraiture of women opened new outlook for their gender. She presented women characters that refused to be tossed about by ugly tradition. She seemed to be of the firm opinion that the society cannot truly progress in the midst of gender discrimination and exploitation. She therefore took the inventiveness of setting the pace by suggesting sesame for throwing the prison doors of mulish tradition open, so that senses of right and wrong could prevail in the society, and lives restored to normalcy irrespective of gender.

Lucia stood tall in her quest to destroy an age long tradition that had caged and shattered the souls of countless women through the annals of history. She unshakeably questioned the infallibility of the tradition that negates women. She fought for an equitable societal order free of all forms of traditional contradictions. This character stood and fought for what she believed in. She fought for an end to the discrimination against women and stood astutely for radical re-definition of the content of the societal

traditions dehumanizing women. She stood for a holistic orientation which recognizes the core essence of womanhood in their contemporary society.

The heroine of *Echoes of a New Dawn* was born an African American but she grew up loving Africa. Her father was devoted to the remote continent of his ancestry and impacted same into her:

> She was so much enthralled by her father's strong and unshakeable beliefs about Mother Africa that the passion to be a part of the continent grew so deep within her young soul – burning like a furnace. She read up every available literature about Africa, chose African literature as a higher degree course and eventually became one of the topmost scholars of African literature. She was simply in love with the black race. Her deep love for Africa was made manifest in her numerous literary contributions to the African literary scene. She researched into the culture, norms, traditions and relationships in contemporary African society. Her creativity knew no bound. She went headlong into the orientation and propagation of _Art for the Society', which eventually landed her at the Literature department of the University of Zambia, where she all but hero-worshipped the Zambian President, Kenneth Kaunda (p. 10).

This deep love for African literature culminated in her marriage to her dream husband, Nez. She was lured willingly into the embrace of Africa by her unwavering devotion for this continent. The author saw her love for Africa as a symbol of hope and faith. Chuma-Udeh held Lucia's deep devotion as indicative of the process of engineering transformation. She avers:

> This passion for Africa eventually affected her love life too. No man was man enough except he was a black African. She even rejected the love advances of fellow black American males. She wanted more than just the black skin. Her passion, her life dream was to go back to Africa as a daughter coming home. Her utmost desire was to make her home in Africa, to nestle in that beloved ebony bosom, to revel forever in that smooth, blissful darkness of Nuite de Sine. When she eventually met Professor Chris Nezianya, she saw her dream romance come true and like every other besotted maiden, she plunged without looking back into the cocoon of Africa. Nez was Africa personified and she could not ask for more (p. 11).

It was this deep affection and belief in Africa that sustained her twenty three years later when she found herself on the clutches of a weird and bizarre tradition; the rites of widowhood. At the death of her husband, Lucia discovered that Africa had some hidden claws which her years of research as a Professor of African Literature did not unveil. She found herself surrounded by a paganistic tradition and rituals that threatened to shake her faith in Africa:

> As it were, she grew more and more jumpy with each harrowing experience. Harrowing seemed to be a more exact word for the horror she had found herself in within the past two weeks. Each rite seemed to be more horrifying than the preceding ones. Yet, with both ease and absurdity reminiscent of dream and fantasy, she found her soul being drawn more and more into the pagan rituals of this community of people. The most frightening angle was that there seemed to be no room for escape from this horrid predicament. She was not given an inch to react or even express herself. There was no need for that. She must not talk, she must not be heard, for she has no opinion to express, she is a woman sitting in ashes!
>
> The rainy breeze whizzed up the ashes on the floor of the hut and they settled on her entire body, forming thicker deposits on top of the fine layer of ashen powder that had already accumulated on her skin. She looked at her skin, which had already taken up the colour of the ashes and shuddered. The ashes had been her companions for the past two weeks. She had been made to sit on a mound of ashes covered with a thin hand woven mat. At the slightest movement, the ashes blew up and got into her nostrils causing her to start sneezing pitifully (p. 2-3).

Lucia found herself contending with rituals shrouded by the mists of retrogressive history. The discriminatory burdens placed on women in this community were a bizarre to her. She was of the belief that whatever the nauseating tradition stood for it had consequences which did not augur well for social and economic development. The author wades into the consciousness of her character to describe what lay therein:

> Lucia wondered for the nth time why a society should indulge in such uncivilized, barbaric and cannibalistic rituals in these modern times when the world is almost becoming a global village. So many questions crowded her already dazed brain. Why should someone, a human person with a right to life and liberty be subjected to such inhuman treatment? How and why had the women of this society over the years accepted such fate as this? How do they manage to survive through it all? Why should a group of people scorn their women to the extent of reducing them to something lesser than animals? Lucia put out her hand to drive away flies, which swarm around her in their hordes. These ants and flies seemed to have arrogated to themselves the sole liberty of inhabiting her body and they crawl all over her with reckless abandon. It was as if her body had become a mound of dung – a garbage dump. These were things she used to have great phobia for - ants, flies, roaches and rodents. They have however become sole tenants and co habitats of her body. Her phobia for these crawling things, her arachnophobia had been submerged by the enormity of the widowhood rites. Incidentally, these crawling things were the only true company she had and they went a long way to remind her that she was still human after all (p. 4).

Tradition, rituals and servitude, were portrayed in direct confrontation with the fight for right to life, equity and freedom as Lucia's faith in Africa was challenged to positive action. She refused to run away: she stayed and fought:

Ebla and Lucia represent the visibly mutated women, from submissiveness to unwavering actions that broke the traditional jinx of the reprehensible tradition of subjugating women to nothing. The change they brought about in their respective societies was fuelled by a deep-seated urge for self-actualisation. The authors brilliantly portrayed them as women who exhibited unwavering strength when they contended with abusive traditions and their strength was their shield as they struggled to raise above subjugation in their contemporary societies as ―outsiders within― negotiating their safety and maintaining their dignity. Lucia's inner strength was string holding her mental balance in the face of the dehumanizing rites of widowhood.

The propositions of the two authors are unsullied and indeed mark a clear revolutionary departure from these traditions that negate womanhood. In these two works, women are the prime movers, negotiating actions to free themselves from societal shackles. Their attitude towards male assumptions is critical, at times even uncompromising. Ebla was poised against the tradition that reduced a woman to a mere commodity, sold to the highest bidder. Lucia faced squarely the tradition that reduced a woman to a living dead because she was unfortunate enough to lose her husband. They positioned their works against the prevailing ideological context of their societies the patriarchal system of the Somali and Igbo culture. The two characters were portrayed as individuals gifted with greater sense of purpose and determination and critical judgement in whatever they did.

Besides, they knew and pursued what they felt was good for their own well-being. Ebla took to her heels whenever her freedom was in jeopardy. It would have been customary for her to remain in her settlement and submit herself to be battered for some domestic animals, but she rebelled against the demeaning tradition by running away in search of a peaceable, harmonious and fulfilled life. She was not the kind to sacrifice her well-being on the altar of any tradition.

Even when she discovered that Awill was cheating on her, she did not curl up in disillusionment. She got aggressive as she found the web of oppressive presence of masculinity enveloping her once more. She defiantly sought for a solution in her own

way. Ebla got furious with the lot of womanhood when Jama showed her the letter from Awill as well as a photograph of him with an almost naked White woman, who wears" nothing on except a swimming suit, her belly showing and Awill's hand resting on her breast," (p. 122). In protest, Asha advocated for a love affair between Ebla and a man called Tiffo so as to get back at Awill. Ebla went into this secret, second marriage with Tiffo just to pacify her tormented soul. Tiffo was already married and had two daughters who were almost the same age as her. When Tiffo wanted to take advantage of Ebla in the usual egoistic manner, she was bold enough to tell him that she was married before. Ebla declared without restraints, ―you have another wife and I have another husband. We are even: you are a man and I am a woman, so we are equal. You need me and I need you. We are equal‖ (p. 145).

Likewise, Lucia sought the right way to destroy the nauseating rites of widowhood once and for all; not just for her own sake, but for the sake of posterity. She stood against an age long status quo and succeeded in bringing down the chief priest and the obnoxious *Ikwa Ajadu* rites. Her success was the message of hope and human dignity to all women.

Ebla refused to be subsumed by the dehumanising belief of her people that reduced her to something more like a piece of ware, or a horse, or some form of property that is there to be bartered. She moved for a change in accordance with the tenets of progressivism. The two characters stood by the precept of social evolution which established the fact that human societies shed their rigidity as they progress into cultural enlightenment. Lucia refused to comply with the patriarchal superintendence that suffocates the women out of any meaningful existence. She equally refused to run away from it all. She stood her ground in her bid to bring sanity to an erroneous order. When another female character advised her to take her children and run away from Africa, she avers:

> I am sorry Anita, but your decision may not work for me. I came to Africa in search of my roots. I found them all right and I will not allow any goddamn tradition to send me away. If the root is faulty, then it should be mended, renurtured and redirected. I am of the opinion that when these villagers come to realize the retrogressive nature of their traditions, they must change for the better (p. 196).

The two characters Ebla and Lucia together stood for the compelling image of women in action in times and places not very much given to recognising and promoting

female strengths. They fought for their lives in situations where attempts at self-expression by women are checked by the overriding forces of tradition. They both moved for a utopian society in which women are compelled to conform to the stiff, subjugating dictates of tradition. They dared to step outside the humiliating societal path traced for them by tradition and emerged triumphant.

Ebla‘s migration represents the quest of the average Somali woman in search of emancipation. Ebla defies tradition and seeks emancipation as she migrates from the patriarchal tyranny of her family to the city. Her escape is indicative of the march for freedom from Aboriginalism to Womanism, a march for a progressive, new life. " To escape. To be free. To be free. To be free. To escape. These were inter-related." (Farah, 1970, p. 14).

Farah‘s and Chuma-Udeh‘s protagonist Ebla and Lucia, represent the average Somali and Igbo women respectively. Their predicaments are used as a yard stick to portray the debased status of women in Somali and Igbo; not just in these two societies, but in other parts of Africa. They are cast as women caught in the intricate web of traditional manipulations. Their crises are synonymous with that of women in the whole continent. The two fictional situations reveal absolute and unyielding iconoclastic women with the revolutionary temperament that shook the status quo in their societies to the very roots.

Ebla's journey towards emancipation brings her in contact with two other women from the urban setting with different ideologies about life. The widow at Belet Wene is a moderate and free going woman, who did not confine herself to the dictates of tradition. Through the widow, Ebla comes to know so many things about the white man's world and other things that are peculiar to the city.

At Mogadisco Ebla also meets an urbanized woman who instructs her in the ways of womanhood in the city. She taught her the necessary survival instincts in the absence of her husband, Awill. Asha, unlike the widow is a more urbanized and cunning woman, who survives by her wit. She was instrumental to Ebla's decisions to avenge the infidelity of her husband. Through her, Ebla's realized that man and woman are two indispensable parts. Here, Farah emphasizes the importance of both the male and female members of a society working hand in hand for optimal success. He deemed it natural for men and women to cohere together for the betterment of the society. Ebla (Farah,

1970) summed up the situation as she thought about the dynamisms of life...'surely a woman is indispensible to man, but do men realise it? A man needs a woman. A woman needs a man (p.12).'

Dependence of man and woman was proved by the author through the character of Asha who was a landlady. Her ability to manage her house and her tenants marks her out as a shrewd and successful member of her society. Asha imbued in Ebla the conception that she was an important part of a man's life and a fully fledged member of the society. Asha resolutely told Ebla that, since a man has the right to have more than one wife then the woman also has the right to have more than one husband. She was seen to have a firmer stand against marginalization of women, and did not retain the slightest believe that woman are inferior to men. Ebla saw this in her and was encouraged in her personal struggle against subjugation.

> "Ebla, little by little, learnt the background of Asha, who she deemed the most interesting character she had met since she left the country. Ebla could not help being fond of Asha, because she was the first person who had ever considered her equal: she made Ebla aware of what she was (p. 121).

Chuma-Udeh's heroine, Lucia definitely has a good sense of judgement and an unrivalled dogged determination to survive. The author used this character to expose the absurdities in the traditional rules and cultural regulations that oppress and marginalize widows in the Eastern part of Nigeria. These absurdities were summed up in the reason for the mortification of widows as narrated to Lucia by another character:

> *"*And what are these other reasons why women must be denigrated to the level of an animal?‖
> ―There are so many schools of thoughts. Some say the essence is to instil the sense of fear and reverence for the concept of manhood; a case of asserting the superiority of the male gender over the female. The community therefore maintains the strong opinion that a woman should forever be concerned with keeping her husband alive and healthy as his death will spell doom to her. This invariably gave rise to the tradition that a woman should not bury a man, because she is supposed to die first. If it happens the other way round, the woman must prove herself ‗not guilty' of her husband's death by taking a bath or drinking the water used in cleansing the corpse of her husband.
> Did you say drink?‖ Lucia asked in utter disgust.
> ―Yes, some communities force their women to drink this water; others make the woman carry the coffin containing the corpse on her bare shaven head. She will be made to walk right round the village and if the spirit of the husband did not strike her dead by the end of her terrible walk, she will be adjudged as innocent of his death, and then cannons will be fired to declare her innocence. Still others lock up the woman overnight with the dead body

and if by morning the woman is still alive, then she is said to be innocent (p. 159).

In all, the two authors ascribed the victory to these women who were imbued with clear purpose, taste, and will; to fight for their emancipation and extol the power of individual determination by moving progressively from Aboriginalism to Womanism.

Conclusion

According to this paper, there is a dogged movement from Aboriginalism to Womanism in the two works under study. The heroines of the two novels strove to rise above the surf of aboriginal humiliation of their societal patriarchal tradition to the independence and sense of purpose of Womanism. Nurrudin Farah stands out as one of the male African writers whose works manifested critical awareness of women‘s struggle to overturn patriarchy. Such portraiture was all the more striking because it came from a man living in a society that looked down on women as insignificant figures in the daily politics of their societal life. Farah‘s feminist novelistic stance marked him out as a man willing to give women a chance to live out their lives as fulfilled members of their contemporary society. He had implicit confidence in women as forces of stability and progress. He was willing to give women their due place as partners in progress in shaping the society with their positive thinking. He moved for the recognition of their importance and need for the bilateral growth of the society.

In general, Womanism is a doctrine associated with enlightenment and exposure. Farah‘s stand on the issue of gender discrimination is clear. Although he is not a woman, he looks through the lenses of a woman‘s eyes to observe the problems women pass through in the African traditional societies. He felt for his character, Ebla. He understood her yearning to be free, to "Escape! to get free from all restraints, from being the wife of Giumaleh. To get away from unpleasantries. To break the ropes society has wrapped around her and to be free and be herself" (Farah, 1970, p. 12).

They advocate for the lifting of the bans placed on the existence and full participation of women in their contemporary societies. They also emphasized on the fact that there should be a systematic orientation of the society towards accepting the vital role of women in development as well as their integration into all developmental processes alongside their male counterparts.

Chuma-Udeh's *Echoes of a New Dawn* frowned at the fact that this superciliousness against women continued to manifest itself with ferocious actuality, the inroads made by globalising modernism notwithstanding. One of her female character asserted of the widowhood rites (Chuma-Udeh, 2008):

> Our people have refused to move with the trends of civilization. When a custom becomes outdated, retrogressive and useless, it should be systematically done away with. Barbaric customs like the widowhood rites should be scrapped off for a better progressive, modern and civilized way of life (p. 68).

References

Chuma-Udeh, Ngozi. (2008). *Echoes of a New Dawn*. Onitsha: Malchjay African Fiction.

Farah Nuruddin (1970) *From Crooked Rib*. *From a Crooked Rib.* London: Heinemann.

Gray, Robert F. (2012). *Sonjo Bride-Price and the Question of African "Wife Purchase,"* in *American Anthropologist*, New ser., vol. 62, no. 1 (February, 1960), as accessed June 9.

Okome, Mojbol Olfnk. "Domestic, Regional, And International Protection of Nigerian Women Against Discrimination: Constraints And Possibilities." *African Studies Quarterly 6, no. 3.* [online] URL: http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v6/v6i3a2.htm .Web.

The United Nations Covenants of 1966 Against Discrimination on the grounds of Gender (Art. 2, 1 Civil & Political Covenant; Art. 2, 2 Economic, Social and Cultural Rights).

Thompson, Edward Palmer (1993). *Customs in Common.* NewYork: New Press, 1st American ed.

United Nations High Commission for Human Rights. *Status of Ratifications of the Principal Human Rights Treaties as of 26 November 2001*. www.unhchr.ch/pdf/report.pdf.

Welch, Claude E. & Meltzer, Ronald, Eds. (1984). *Human Rights and Development in Africa*. Albany, New York: State University of New York Press.