

## **abubakar gimba's fight for social balance between men and women in *witnesses to tears*.**

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### **Abstract:**

*The literary productions of the renowned Northern Nigerian novelist, Abubakar Gimba, have received significant critical attention from both men and women throughout the world. However, though Gimba's focus, in his literary productions, is on women and that his protagonists are women, many have ignored to identify him as a true defender of women's rights. Implicit in this line of analysis is the assumption that for many, only women can defend women's right. The above stated line of argument, by radical feminists, is not false if one only reads Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* or Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*. Yet, the line of argument is much restrictive if it does not render tribute to male writers such as Abubakar Gimba, in his constant fight for gender equality. The aim of the research is to prove that not all men are anti women. Abubakar Gimba, for instance, is able to observe, to analyze and to write a female centered novel with a female protagonist to voice the plights of women. As a result, the outcome of the current research supports that the insistence that the struggle for gender equality is an only women concern and the refusal or the reticence to acknowledge the efforts of writers such as Gimba would inevitably contribute to slow down the fight for gender equality. By applying African Feminist theory to the research, we acknowledge the efforts by men to encourage bonding with women to raise consciousness.*

**Keywords:** gender equality, african feminism, *witnesses to tears*, commitment

## Résumé :

*Les œuvres littéraires du célèbre romancier du nord Nigéria, Abubakar Gimba, ont bénéficié d'une attention critique considérable, tant de la part des hommes que des femmes du monde entier. Cependant, bien que Gimba se concentre sur les femmes et que ses protagonistes soient des femmes, beaucoup ont négligé de le reconnaître comme un véritable défenseur des droits des femmes. Cette analyse repose implicitement sur l'hypothèse selon laquelle, pour beaucoup, seules les femmes peuvent défendre les droits des femmes. L'argumentation présentée ci-dessus, défendue par des féministes radicales, n'est pas fausse si l'on se contente de lire Things Fall Apart de Chinua Achebe ou The Concubine d'Elechi Amadi. Cependant, elle est bien plus restrictive si elle ne rend pas hommage aux écrivains masculins comme Abubakar Gimba, dans son combat constant pour l'équilibre sociale. L'objectif de cette recherche est de démontrer que tous les hommes ne sont pas contre les femmes. Abubakar Gimba, par exemple, a pu observer, analyser et écrire un roman centré sur les femmes, avec une protagoniste pour exprimer la détresse des femmes. Par conséquent, les résultats de la présente recherche confirment que l'insistance sur le fait que la lutte pour l'équilibre sociale est l'affaire exclusive des femmes et le refus ou la réticence de reconnaître les efforts d'auteurs tel que Gimba contribuerait inévitablement à ralentir la lutte pour l'équilibre sociale entre hommes et femmes. En appliquant la théorie féministe africaine à cette recherche, nous reconnaîsons les efforts des hommes pour renforcer les liens avec les femmes afin de sensibiliser les consciences.*

**Mots-clés :** équilibre sociale, féminisme africain, witnesses to tears, engagement

## 1. Introduction

In the book of genesis and the Holy Qur'an, both men and women are known to have been created by a single creator, to live peacefully and reproduce siblings in accordance with certain socio-cultural rules and regulations; but the relationship between men and women is very often problematic. Each individual seeks the root or roots of his or her problems on the other. As far

as the system of governance is concerned, some women think that their freedom is not possible until patriarchy is transformed.

In the process of transforming patriarchy, radical feminists think that all men are against women and as a result, men cannot achieve anything that is favorable to women. For example, they can never help women achieve their aims for gender equality. Hooks (2015:34) brings into focus that: "Fundamentally, they [radical feminists] argued that all men are the enemies of all women and proposed as solutions to this problem a utopian woman nation, separatist communities, and even the subjugation or extermination of all men." To point out that men are sexist, many researchers, basically radical feminists, often use Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (...) to prove that women are not given due consideration within the African society. Abubakar and Razinat (2017:202) are also quick "to fault the assumption that only earlier male writers are guilty of stereotyping women." The crux of the matter is that radical feminists focus on Achebe's novel as a permanent discourse rather than the author's attitude that can change through time and circumstances.

Accordingly, the Viennese novelist, Robert (1980:3) writes that: "The time was on the move... But in those days no one knew what it was moving toward. Nor could anyone quite distinguish between what was above and what was below, between what was moving forward and what backwards". Rightly, Ouarodima (2018:111), states that: "This new relationship to time, certainly, pervades Achebe's writing at the turn of the twentieth century."

The current research investigates that to consider all men as against women is very restrictive as there are men, around the world, who have openly written that women should be given equal consideration. To name but a few: Abubakar Gimba in *Witnesses To Tears* (...), Chinua Achebe in *Anthills of the Savannah*, Femi Osofisan in *Morontodun* (...), Ngugi Wathingo in *Matigari*, Bode Sowande in *Farewell to Babylon* (...), and

Fred Agbeyegbe in *The King must Dance Naked* (...) are not only able to give positive portrayal of women in literature, but also and mainly they have given credence to the efforts of earlier female writers by batching the patriarchal bias that characterize the earlier African male writers.

To shift to our subject matter, such men like Abubakar Gimba have devoted their time and energy to write and defend women. That is what Hooks (2015) calls moving them “from margin to center”. What is more, as no condition is permanent, it is good to recall that even Achebe, earlier mentioned as sexist in this paper, has shifted his position from depicting marginal female characters to depicting them as brave, intelligent and dynamic women. This is much explicit in *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988).

Ouarodima (2018:116) notices that: “There is a discernible change in the depiction of Achebe’s female portraiture. In *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988), Beatrice is, most often, referred to as a very intelligent, assertive and philanthropic woman; images that Achebe hardly accords his previous female characters.” This is enough, if ever evidence is needed that not all men are anti women and that some men have done their best and are still doing by using knowledge and creativity to change situations that affect women negatively.

In an attempt to end sexist ideology, Fanon Frantz, towards the end of *Black Skin, White Masks*, writes: “Every time a man has contributed to the victory of the dignity of the spirit, every time a man has said no to an attempt to subjugate his fellows, I have felt solidarity with his act” (Fanon, 2008:176). For example, there is no doubt that in the process of achieving gender equality, the efforts of both men and women are needed. The quote from Fanon recalls the African proverb, which stipulates that: “if you want to go faster, go alone but if you want to go farther go together.” Going together, according to the proverb, can “transform relationship so that the alienation, competition, and dehumanization that characterize human

interaction can be replaced with feelings of intimacy, mutuality and camaraderie” (Hooks, 2015:35).

In the conclusion to “Shifting the Canon: An Analysis of Achebe’s Women in *Things Fall Apart* and *Anthills of the Savannah*”, Ouarodima (2018:118) rightly puts that the required effort “aims at educating and mobilizing both men and women to look for a better future through better consideration of one another. In other words, it is another effort at educating and soliciting the collaboration of the global community in the fight against discrimination.”

## **2. An Overview on Women’s Approaches to Gender Equality**

Different feminist approaches/theories have been used to explain and address gender inequalities in societies. These include among others: Liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, Radical feminism, African feminism... The above-named theories generally agree that there is oppression of women and inequality based on gender. They only differ on the approaches they advocate to create a more suitable society without discrimination. What is more, each perspective has made important contributions to improving women's status, but some of the perspectives have limitations concerning the situation of women within the African context. Not only because the means by which male supremacy is enforced vary considerably from one society to another; but, also and mainly, because denying men's effort in the process of fighting discrimination is nothing else but a serious mistake. Then, what follows is a tentative discussion of some theories addressing gender inequality:

### **2.1. *Liberal Feminism*:**

Theoretically, liberal feminism, often called conservative feminism, claims that gender differences are socially

constructed rather than based in biology. Liberal feminists argue that society holds the false belief that women are, by nature, intellectually less capable than men; thus, society tends to discriminate against women in the academy. Giddens (2001:692) defines liberal theory as a “feminist theory that believes gender inequality is produced by reduced access for women and girls to civil rights and allocation of social resources such as education and employment.” Liberal feminists strive for gradual change in the political, economic, and social systems since their goals are moderate and do not drastically alter the status quo (Haralambos and Holborn, 2008).

Liberal feminism does not fundamentally challenge capitalism (as does Marxist Feminism); nor does it recommend separatism (as does Radical Feminism). Rather, it seeks to grant women the full spectrum of liberties found in a liberal democratic society, denouncing policies that fail to provide equal legal protection and regulations that, in effect, discriminate against women.

However, the position of liberal feminists is known to be traditional (Nnolim, 2009). When the movement becomes wide spread, women claim for gender equality but without taking aggressive actions against men. However moderate, they have played a major role in achieving certain established facts such as equal working pay, between men and women, for work of equal value; as well as more considerations. Ayayi (2005:349) observes that the movement has motivated “the United Nations Decade for women, which came up between 1975 and 1985, and the World Women’s Conference.” They are also responsible in granting women with maternity leave to recover their strength after delivery. However, for some women scholars the achievements of liberal feminism are not enough; so, they coined a stronger movement.

## ***2.2. Marxist Feminism***

Marx's critique of capitalism's social structure is meant to be applicable to individuals from any social group. Members of the capitalist class are those who own the means of production, whereas members of the proletariat are those who sell labor for a price. In capitalist nations, married women were prohibited from owning property in their own names until the end of the 19th century. Their husbands own their earnings and any profits they made from any enterprises they operated (Barrett, 1988).

According to Karl Marx, Frederich Engels and V.I Lenin (in Dora, 1991:49): "the appearance of private property in human society caused a woman's dependence on her husband or father and her enslavement too, by the exploiting classes. Women were as a result deprived of economic and political rights, spiritually enslaved and isolated from society while their activities were reduced to household duties."

Both men and women should have equal rights and opportunities, according to Marxist feminism. Marxist feminism is responsible for integrating housewives into the capitalist system. According to this perspective, housewives play a crucial role in capitalism and any industrial economy since their unpaid labor at home helps males become even more powerful. According to Barrett (1988), they contend that women's economic reliance on their husbands is the root cause of their tyranny.

For Ayayi (2005:345): "the predominance of men [over women] is simply a consequence of their economic power and their ownership of the means of production." Marxist feminists are of the idea that both men and women should be given equal chance. For them, it is the division of labor, between men and women, which favored discrimination (Ayayi,2005). As a result, the solution is full-time jobs for women, with the state providing paid maternity leave and child-care. For them, women should go

through all kinds of works; including the ones which were, previously, considered as masculine works such as driving public cars, taxi drivers, military services, civil engineering, football players...

However, Marxist feminism puts too much emphasis on the economic factor in explaining social development and change. Yet, some women scholars, most often American women feminists, find that Marxism is not the cause of women's subordination but men themselves. Thus, they have come out with a more radical movement.

### ***2.3. Radical Feminism***

Radical Feminism appears as a reaction to Liberal Feminism inasmuch it stands for radical change to achieve genuine equality between men and women. The movement began in the early 1960s and the pioneers are the highly educated women from the USA who were aware of the limited responsibilities assigned to women by Liberal Feminists (Wale, 2006). This is the case, for example, with such women as Shulamith Firestone and Jo Freeman, who founded an early radical feminist organization.

Radical feminists believe that as the society is extremely patriarchal, women cannot improve their socio-political conditions until patriarchy is transformed at all levels. What is more, they believe that men and women need to maintain separate institution and relationships (Jones, 1987).

Radical feminists do not only think that love, marriage, courtship, child bearing, sexuality... are political issues which suggest patriarchal domination; but they also and mainly believe that to stop oppression of women by men, the total withdrawal is needed from the world of men (Ayayi, 2005). Some radical feminists have gone far to project the image of men as enemy of women and thus impossible to undertake any serious relationship or partnership with men.

The primary distinction between radical feminism and other subsets of feminism is that the former strives to eradicate patriarchy by altering society as a whole, rather than concentrating on achieving power parity. More precisely, they believe that oppression stems from the biological distinctions between men and women, and they wish to eradicate these roles by promoting revolutionary ways to combat it. However, this type of feminism undoubtedly undermines the goal of "equality" by disparaging the other sex.

In fact, Radical feminists suggest that men are the victimizers and women the victims. However, it is a known fact that not all women are victims and not all men are victimizers and as such, Radical feminist may be "doing unto others that which they do not want done unto themselves and other oppressed groups" (Tong, 1988: 88).

Alkali (1995:19) is of the view that radical feminism is "politically alert, fiercely autonomous, highly aggressive and often man-hating." The above quotation by Alkali can find illustration in the analysis of the view of Firestone (1971), an American radical feminist. In the view of Firestone, the source of the oppression of women is in marriage and procreation and as a result, she proposes an 'in vitro' child bearing. For her, until the yoke of marriage and procreation are broken, women cannot achieve greater freedom. Frank (in Jones, 1987:15) states that Lesbianism becomes, therefore, a good option for radical feminists' life style.

As it is the environment that dictates what one says or writes, African women, in general, and African women scholars, in particular, have analyzed that the above theoretical framework does not match their socio-cultural milieu. Khaterine (in Jones, 1987:14) states that: "with its peculiarly Western orientation towards individualism and self fulfilment and its simultaneous exploration of patriarchal oppression and the female struggle for freedom, one might gather that this[radical]

feminist scenario would hold little relevance for the African novel.” As a result, they come out with an alternative African women centered movement.

#### ***2.4. African Feminism***

When African women’s writing emerges in the 1970s, in both writings and actions, it mainly sets out to break up mal-representations of African womanhood that dominated African literature at the time (Ernest, 2006; Henrietta, 1989; Jones, 1987; Sandra Greene, 2000). The two essential components of African feminism, in my opinion, are the creation of a theoretical tradition by women that generates knowledge based on the lives, struggles, and celebrations of women across social, political, and cultural divides; and the application of feminist theory to praxis that changes advocacy, activism, and policymaking in addition to the ways in which women conduct their private lives. However, in handling our arguments, as Afam Ebeogu (in Darah, 2008:136) points it out: we do not “lose sight of the fact that what we are discussing is literature, that the medium of the women’s feminism is literary.”

For Ayayi (2005:349), African feminism is “feminism from the African woman’s perspective.” For Sougou (2002:25), African Feminism “challenges patriarchal tradition and enhances the notion of family. It seeks egalitarian partnership between male and female.” It is crucial to remember that African feminism does not oppose males; rather, it challenges them to recognize the ways in which women’s subjection differs from the oppression of all Africans as a whole (Davies, 1986).

In fact, to shift the focus on the one that is pertinent to our perspective, it is really at this time that African feminism, as a body of ideas that underline the need for a positive transformation of society such that not all men are anti women, establishes a perspective that involve men in the fight against discrimination. Yet, despite the rejection of feminism (in its

western form) by African female writers, not many, as said earlier in the abstract section, have recognized the efforts of men of good will such as Abubakar Gimba who is at the forefront of using knowledge and creativity to change situations that affect women negatively.

It is good to recall that many researchers, in examining or analyzing the situation of African women, use mainly and only novels by African women. Thus, in addition to promoting gender equality inside African contexts, the research aims at raising awareness of the particular struggles and history faced by African women on a worldwide scale and point out, as well, the efforts by men of good will to tackle the challenge. There is no doubt that beyond universalized feminist viewpoints, African feminism offers a framework that recognizes the distinct historical, cultural, and social circumstances of the continent, making it extremely pertinent to the study of African women. Then, the state of affairs does not only attract our attention; but raises a need for the current research.

### **3. Abubakar Gimba's Social and Authorial Background**

Ogbu Jonathan in his M.A Thesis: “Marxist Tendencies in the Poetry of Abubakar Gimba: *Inner Rumblings* and *This Land of Ours*” recalls that “Abdullahi Samaila in his book on Abubakar Gimba, quotes a very remarkable stand on the writer. Abubakar Gimba as an individual can be accessed from three discernable perspectives, which are his private life; his public life; and his life as a writer.” (Ogbu, 2017:34).

Thus, Abubakar Gimba who was known as Alhaji Abubakar Gimba and often Mallam Abubakar Gimba was born on the 10 of March, 1952 in Nasarawa, Niger State (Nigeria). Gimba, as some used to call him shortly, attended Government College, Keffi from 1965 to 1969), then the prestigious, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, from 1970 to 1974 until he obtained his B.Sc.

Economics. Two years later, he registered at the University of Cincinnati, Ohio, U.S.A. and earned a Master of Arts (M.A.) degree in Economics in 1977 (Murtala Sani and al; 2018: 43-44).

After years of service in the public service, he was elevated to the position of Permanent Secretary in the Niger State's Economics Planning Department between 1981 and 1983. He served as Executive Director of United Bank for Africa and the Union Bank of Nigeria from 1988 until 1993. In 1997, he was the first writer of Northern Nigeria origin to head the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA)<sup>1</sup>

It is good to recall that Gimba, from the best of his experiences, participated in the political reconstruction and social formation of Nigeria during and after the civil war. However, what launched Gimba to global fame was neither his exploits as economist nor his reconstruction efforts during and after the Civil War, but his incredibly sublime skills of writing, even though the experiences highly influenced the subject matter of his novels. His body of literary productions established him as a prominent contemporary English language novelist from Northern Nigeria. Gimba's works generally revolve around a sense of morality that encodes sympathy for the innocent individuals who are usually persecuted and unfairly treated by the patriarchal system; while the outcome is to establish a more egalitarian society.

Consequently, Gimba is able to write novels with female protagonists to help convey his message. Gimba, in the course of his literary career, authored the following: *Trail of Sacrifice* (Novel, 1985), *Witnesses To Tears* (Novel, 1986), *Innocent Victims* (Novel, 1988), *Sunset For a Mandarin* (Novel, 1991), *Sacred Apples* (Novel, 1996), *Footprints* (Novel, 1998), *Inner Rumblings* (Poetry, 2000), *This Land of Ours* (Poetry, 2000), *A Toast in the Cemetery* (Short Story, 2003), *Once Upon a Reed*

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<sup>1</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abubakar\\_Gimba](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abubakar_Gimba)

(1999), *Letter To My Children* (2007), *Letter to the Muslim Fundamentalist* (2004), *Why Am I Doing This?* (Collection of his essays published in the Nigerian Tribune, 2007), *Thoughts of Yesterday* (2012), *Letter to Unborn Child* (2012), *A Matter of Faith* (2012); and *A Haunting Spirit*. (Ogbu, 2017:36-37).

There is no doubt; the above books established Gimba as a formidable Nigerian writer. The Hon. Usman Idris Gwarjiko points out that Gimba “wrote not to impress but to influence, not for gain but to guide, not to be cheered but to change, not to be praised but to preach. Like an evangelist, his writings are calling man’s attention to those things that are detested by the Almighty Allah. Such things as injustice, bribery and corruption, deprivation, nepotism, racism, greed, hypocrisy, wickedness, selfishness, envy and lust according to Gimba, are vices militating against national development and they must be wiped out of our consciousness”<sup>2</sup> For Gimba, the injustice includes the discrimination against women which he openly fought by putting his pen to paper.

Finally, Hon. Usman Idris Gwarjiko reported that: “Sometimes ago, Gimba was asked whether he would write his autobiography or would commission someone else to do a biography. His response was that he would not want praises, especially while he was still alive”<sup>2</sup>. As he passed away on February 25<sup>th</sup>, 2015 in Minna, Niger State, Gimba’s writing heritage is the one most likely to be given attention. This is not only because he was the very first writer from Northern Nigeria to preside the prestigious Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), and to contribute to the worldwide literary productions ranging from novels, poetry and short stories, essays...despite his scientific orientation, but also and mainly because Gimba

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<sup>2</sup><https://thealumnusmagazine.wordpress.com/2016/07/03/remembering-the-late-alhaji-abubakar-gimba/>

was able to write books of women concern at times when many more men were not able to accord women a place they deserve within the African society, socially, economically and politically.

In fact, in *Witnesses to Tears*, Gimba preoccupied himself with social injustice that affects women daily. The work reflects the wanton destruction of humanity and the predatory nature of man in his pursuit of wealth, with women and children as the victims. To cut a long story short, as the next section looks into it deeply, the current research is an attempt to render tribute to Abubakar Gimba, as a writer of great caliber, and point out as well that Gimba's novels of women's concern, basically the one under study is worth to be acknowledged as a fight for gender equality.

#### **4. Gimba and the Struggle to Move Women to the Center in *Witnesses to Tears***

It is worth pointing out that the world is changing fast. To quote the Viennese novelist, Robert (1980:3): "The time was on the move... But in those days, no one knew what it was moving toward. Nor could anyone quite distinguish between what was above and what was below, between what was moving forward and what backwards". This very relationship to time is certainly known to Gimba who takes time to explore that change results in the lure for wealth and positions in society. What is still true is that in the process of the change, men struggle to get hold of the tune. For instance, Hussaina, a character in *Witness to Tears*, speaking of the nature of man in general and her husband in particular has this to say: "You men are capable of anything—well, almost anything. Matters of the unexpected. To believe in you and take you on your face value is the greatest self-deceit a woman can commit" (Gimba, 1994:83).

For Gimba, if women do not take hold of the change, they will be the victims. Such stand gives credence to the African proverbs that says: “when the beating of the drum changes, dancers change their style.” Hussaina, the protagonist of *Witnesses to tears*, knows this when she speaks to Serah in the following terms when the latter asks her to follow the tune of the time:

You may be right, Hussaina would concede [speaking to Serah] but I don't know whether it's the world that needs changing or I. As of now, however, I'm contented the way I am. The turbulence of the world does violence to my nature. I agree with you that to exist and be non-existent at the same time is like a tragic waste. But such turbulence, such fastness that has so fitfully taken hold of the world, leads to an even greater tragedy. I may be wrong [certainly not to follow the tune of the time] (Gimba, 1994:16).

There is no doubt that the plight of women is central to Gimba. Among others, the novel *Witnesses to Tears* is dedicated to Hussaina and the women of the house, namely Hawa and Aisha K. This is an open indication that the problems of women are central to Gimba. Not only the protagonist of the novel is a woman, Hussaina, but also and mainly the whole story reverberates around the beautiful but yet ill-fated Hussaina.

The novel opens with a sudden coma of a woman, later known as Hussaina Lahab, who was brought to hospital as a result of a serious beating. The crux of the matter is that there is nobody around to report to the nurse the identity of the occupant of bed No 8. The concern of Gimba is the plight of the innocent ones, especially women, who suffer over crimes committed by men. From the opening of the novel to the end, the writer drives

the attention of his readers to the matter of fact with tears. Tears by definition and according to *Longman Dictionary* is a “the drops of salty liquid that come out of one's eyes usually because one is unhappy, hurt or in pains.” Fears and tears, dominate women's life, I contend.

For Gimba, no gender equality could be achieved as long as women are brutalized and intimidated into tears. Through Serah Bello, a character in the novel, Gimba, implicitly, wants to convey such a message. That is despite some women have struggled hard to study and involve themselves in professions such as medicine, which was and is still the traditional reserve of men, they are still intimidated rather than encouraged. In the novel, Serah, who was the nurse on duty when Hussaina was taken to the hospital, in coma, was shortly killed just because it happens that she knows both Hussaina and the man doctor who brought the latter; certainly, in an attempt to hide the identity of the man doctor.

Despite the intimidation, brutalization and even crime, women should not bend down and accept in silence the socio-economic problems that assault them; rather, they should take up their courage and fight the inconvenient. Through the conversation between Serah and Hussaina, Gimba, aesthetically, conveys such a message: “This is a turbulent world, fast moving world, she [that is Serah speaking] would tell Hussaina. And one needs to be in constant motion to keep up. One needs to be like the world to force the fact of one's existence on the people. To do otherwise would amount to conceding one's non-existence” (Gimba, 1994:16).

In fact, in many of African's literary productions, both by men and women writers, a girl child has not a positive look within the family. While some writers expose the position of women as normal, others like women writers and some men of good will, expose it, as a criticism, to raise consciousness. For instance, in *Efuru*, Flora Nwapa points out that children are very

important to the Igbo society; particularly male children. Commenting on the barrenness of Efuru, the protagonist of the novel *Efuru*, and the newly born baby, a distant relative to Efuru, once says: "...then our gods and the ancestors opened your womb and you had a baby girl. We all rejoiced for you. A girl is something, though we would have preferred a boy" (Nwapa, 1966:72). However, rather than simply criticizing the matter of fact, Gimba is able to provide solution to the matter of fact by creating a true love, mutual understanding and pacific coexistence between a father and a daughter. In *Witnesses to Tears*, Mr Anas not only "...more than loved her [her stands for Hussaina, his daughter], he adored her" (Gimba, 1994:24). Gimba's message is that such is a relationship that should characterize a father and a daughter or even better a husband and a wife.

In fact, while, for instance, Li, the protagonist of *The Stillborn* (1984), complains and compares her father's compound to a prison; Hussaina, the protagonist of *Witnesses to Tears*, judges her father's compound as a worth place to live in. In the novel, it is said that "Hussaina was overwhelmed: first by the joy of being married, and then by the sadness of having to move out of her father's house, a home she had known for years...it was like moving out of oneself, a soul leaving the body, as in death" (Gimba, 1994:55).

As far as marriage is concerned, in Africa, in general, it is not only a highly regarded social institution; but also, and mainly that it is not a private affair. Dora (1991:12), upon analyzing girl-father relationship in terms of marriage raises that the girl is "supposed to do what her parents, especially her father, tells her. She marries when the parents think she is old enough to marry and often to the man they have chosen/or approved for her." To marry "the man they have chosen/or approved for her" implies that the father should agree with the husband upon checking the latter's socio-cultural background.

However, in *Witnesses to Tears*, Gimba creates a context where a father does not only agree with her daughter's choice in marriage but as well as agrees with the date chosen by her. In the novel, Anas says to his daughter Hussaina: "...seriously speaking, you may choose the date most convenient to both of you. You have my full permission and support (Gimba, 1994:54). What is more, Anas dare not even check the background of his in law, simply because her daughter loves the man and this is what certainly matters in marital relationship. That is why, "...surprisingly, little he knew about his prospective son in law" (Gimba, 1994:54).

The message is that Gimba does seem to say that a conventional marriage, such as decided by parents, is not a guarantee for a success in marriage. A successful marriage should be based on love and mutual understanding. Gimba's attempt is to redirect the minds of both men and women towards a positive change of attitudes.

Also, as opposed to the tradition of naming a newborn, most often in Africa, it is the father who decides on the name to be given; however, Lahab asks Hussaina to decide over the name: "what do you want us to call him?" he had asked Hussaina five days after she left the hospital. Not that he cares much what the boy was to be called. He only felt that he ought to give her that concession, as an expression of gratitude to her." (Gimba, 1994: 114). The esthetic message that Gimba conveys, to his readers and community at large, is that women should be given due consideration and be consulted on all matters that need mutual understanding. What is more, women often transcend above men on righteousness and good morality. Gimba has proved this in *Witnesses to Tears*. For instance, when Lahab attempts by whatever means, including asking the service of Dr. Sahir, the soothsayer, to hold the position of School vice principal, he refuses to tell his wife Hussaina, simply because he knows she does not consent to any suspicious action. That is why for him:

“Hussaina must be kept in complete darkness though” (Gimba, 1994:98). Even when Lahab becomes rich, owner of luxurious building, he hides the reality to his wife due to the woman’s moral quality to object to his easy earning.

Gimba has proven more than once that there is a great necessity for gender equality. For Gimba, both a man and a woman have their own peculiar qualities that could be shared in mutual understanding within and outside the family circle. Failure to abide by such societal rules would bring nothing but evil. For instance, the death of Mr Anas’s wife, Hussaina’s mother, leaving him with the little child, later made Hussaina victims to a hurried marriage to a near stranger. That is though Lahab has tried all his best, playing the roles of both father and mother, he certainly lacks the tricks of the mother to ensure moral discipline and clairvoyance that would guide her to properly choose her way in life. For Gimba, both men and women should be given equal consideration because building a nation requires the contribution of both men and women.

## 5. Conclusion

As a result of a confluence of institutional inequities and cultural norms, African women are disadvantaged in a variety of socio-cultural domains. This marginalization manifests as a lack of resources, decision-making power, and growth opportunities. The fight to correct this social injustice is multifaceted. This is known to Gimba who decides to write women-oriented novels to play his part.

Gimba has written so many novels of women centered issues but *Witnesses To Tears* fights best for gender equality. Refusal to acknowledge such a tremendous effort by writers such as Abubakar Gimba would inevitably contribute to slow down the fight for gender equality. In *Witnesses to tears* the female characters reveal not only that there are still several mountains

that block women; but also, there are innocent victims. For Gimba, such an attitude in society should disappear to enable gender equality for a better and prosperous nation.

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