THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ACTIVISM IN THE WORKS OF
SEMBENE OUSMANE, TANURE OJAIDE AND AKACHI ADIMORA-EZEIGBO

A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
(M.A) IN LITERATURE

BY

EZUGWU, CHINASA BLESSING
(PG/MA/08/49776)

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA

AUGUST 2012
THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ACTIVISM IN THE WORKS
OF SEMBENE OUSMANE, TANURE OJAIDE AND
AKACHI ADIMORA- EZEIGBO
I, Prof. D.U. Opata of the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, do approve this research work as having fulfilled the requirements for the award of Master of English and Literary Studies Department of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Supervisor
CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project is an independent study carried out by Ezugwu, Chinasa Blessing with the registration number PG/MA/08/49776 of the department of English and Literary Studies of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, and that this work has not been presented in part or full for the award of any diploma or degree in this or any university.

Prof. Damian U. Opata
Supervisor

Rev. Fr. Prof. A.N. Akwanya
Head of Department

Eternal Examiner
DEDICATION

To my lovely family:

Honey, Ify boy and Nne baby
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is delightful to acknowledge a good deed, for acknowledging good gestures is as good as making them. For this reason, I wish to express my gratitude to God almighty, whom by his grace, everything is possible, including the completion of this research work. To him indeed be the glory.

Big thanks to my eagle-eyed supervisor, Prof. Damian Ugwutikiri Opata, for his patience for me. His constructive criticism, suggestions and encouragement made this work what it is today. In his correction of the manuscripts, he could detect the smallest mistakes and errors. I also acknowledge the efforts of my wonderful lecturers at the Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, for their lectures and individual assistance which empowered me throughout the period of this program.

I will not forget to appreciate my husband, Dr. F.O. Abonyi for his financial and moral support. The completion of this program is his dream-come-through. I also say thank you to my friends and class mates: Tochi Okpaleze for her immense contribution to this research work. She read and corrected the manuscripts at my request. Then, Pastor Joel for making me understand and make use of the library like never before, and Mrs. Carol Nebolisa for her relentless persuasion.

Finally, I acknowledge the entire members of my family for their prayers and words of encouragement throughout this period of research.
ABSTRACT

Women activism historically is not new in Africa. It has existed since the colonial era and in literature, it emerged remarkably in some of the most famous post colonial works. This research looked at women activism as a viable tool for conflict resolution. This was done by giving an insight into the meaning and origin of the word ‘activism’. Activism was further studied as a concept with many theories of analysis, including feminism which serves as an umbrella theory and a working tool for this research work. The selected texts include; Sembene Ousmane’s *God’s Bits of Wood*, Tanure Ojaide’s *The Activist* and Akachi Ezeigbo’s *The Last of the Strong Ones*.

A brief history of women activism in Africa was given and this helped the researcher gain a better insight into the study of women activism in Africa literature. Women activism was studied in these three selected works by looking at the nature, goal and achievements of the women activists, with particular attention to the forms of their movements. The movement could be, violent or none violent, a combination of the two or taboo anchored movement.

An analysis of the key literary devices used by the selected authors in their portrayal of women activism was also carried out. The researcher settled that symbol was the predominant literary device used in the three works. This, the researcher concluded that; recurrent symbolism in the representation of women activism in these three works is as a result of the sacrificial nature of the women activists in the texts: the sacrifice which stands for justice and freedom.

At the end, the researcher arrived at the conclusion that women activism is a selfless movement to liberate human kind.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Page</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approval Page</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Certification</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER ONE

THE CONCEPT OF ACTIVISM

1.1: Introduction 1

1.2: Activism: Definitions and Origin 2

1.3: Background to the Study 4

1.4 Forms of Women Activism 6

1.4.1 Violent Demonstration 6

1.4.2 Taboo Anchored Demonstration 7

1.4.3 Peaceful Demonstration 7

1.5: Research Problem 7

1.6: Theoretical Framework 8

## CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW 10
CHAPTER THREE

3.0 THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ACTIVISM IN SELECTED TEXTS

3.1 Violent Demonstration 24
3.2 Taboo Anchored Activism 30
3.3 Non-Violent Demonstration 37
3.4 Non-Violent Demonstration to Violent Demonstration 52

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 LITERARY EVALUATION OF THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ACTIVISM IN THE SELECTED TEXTS

4.1. Diction 58
4.2. Metaphor 61
4.3. Symbol 64
4.4 Simile 65
4.5 Sarcasm 67
4.6 Irony 68

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION 71
WORK CITED
CHAPTER ONE

THE CONCEPT OF ACTIVISM

1.1: Introduction

Group women activism had not been a popular subject in contemporary African feminist studies. Feminist writers and critics had in the resent past concentrated more on identity issues like self-realisation, self-actualization, self-discovery, resistance against male domination and the likes, as seen in the works of such writers like Buchi Emecheta and Mariama Ba, Flora Nwapo, Zaynab Alkali, etc. Although, there are some critical attempts on the issues of women struggles, the interest was on individual struggles. Here the work intends to examine women struggle as a collective effort rather than individual and consequently the outcome of such acts in conflict resolution. This research is aimed at examining the concept of activism and how women in African literature used it as a medium to express their dissatisfaction and fight against oppression in different ways, paying particular attention to the following:

- The concept of activism
- The purpose of women activism
- The nature of women activism
- The consequences of women activism

The work will also discuss some literary elements, through which activism is presented in the following works: Sembene Ousmane’s God’s Bits of Wood, Tanure Ojaide’s The Activist and Akachi Adimora- Ezeigbo’s The Last of the Strong Ones. These literary elements include devices like metaphor, symbols, simile, sarcasm, irony, etc. which are of importance to the depiction of women activism.
1.2: Activism: Definitions And Origin

The word ‘activism’ is got from a German word – “aktivismus”, which was first used around the end of the First World War. During this period, there were lots of social and political upheavals all over the world, especially in Europe. These series of political unrest resulted to a rapid growth of social movements including individual and organizational activists advocating for social needs of the masses. These activists came up with a lot of social movements in Europe, which include the French Revolution and British abolitionists; according to J.A. Cuddon, which are the earliest social movements involved in activism. Activism further developed into a larger concept with many definitions and theories. Charles Tilly defines it as “displays and campaigns by which ordinary people made collective claims on others” (23). Sidney Tarrow opines that “It is a collective challenge to the authorities, other group or cultural codes by people with common purpose and solidarity” (21). Cuddon defines activism from its origin that “the word aktivismus means active political commitment or engagement among and by intellectuals” (17). Philosophically, he argues that activism is closely associated with expressionism and as far as literature is concerned, Cuddon believes activism is particularly associated with Kurl Hiller, who organized the Neuer Club for expressionist poets and with Tranz Ptempfert, who founded the magazine “Aktion” in 1911. According to wikipedia on answer.com, the word activism is used synonymously with protest or dissent, but activism can take a wide range of processes like writing letters, media announcements, campaigning, street matches and even strikes.

Theoretically, sociologists and philosophers have carried out researches and arrived at a good number of theories for discussing and analyzing this concept as a
weapon to achieve socio-political change. According to one philosopher, Philip Seal, a clear understanding of the concept of activism must be approached from the under-listed theories:

- Expressionism
  - Nationalism and
  - Revisionism

Then, Susan Eckstei in her “Approach to Popular Protests” adds more theories in understanding activism namely:

- Marxist theory
- Mass society theory
- Deprivation theory

Approached from these theories, activism will be studied and discussed herein. Specifically, activism can be seen from the perspective of nationalism, Marxist theory and Deprivation theory. These theories of activism will be studied under an umbrella theory – feminism. That is to say that the activism that will be studied in this research is carried out by women and feminism is the only theory that embraces these other theories in relation to women. This type of activism according to Philip Akpan in his essay “Activism: The Major Weapon has a direct link with all kinds of protests against racism, colonialism, ethnicity and then gender marginalization. According to Akpan, activism is not just in terms of ethnicity but basically in terms of socio-economic and political disadvantages against which the activists pitch their struggle.
Activists’ organization comes in form of pressure group, a socio-political organization, and any mobilized group of individuals who are mainly local. The goal of the group is also local and that is to bring change to a society or members of a society who are by any means marginalized, oppressed or denied of their rights. Therefore, activists do protest against racism, gender discrimination, ethnic marginalization, capitalism and colonialism. Accordingly, women activism in Africa literature is by the ongoing, a socio-political and economic protest. These protests historically had at one time or the other, come against colonialism, capitalism, gender discrimination and racism. In Literature, women activists are represented as agents of positive change in different African texts. They reveal the positivity of the women’s nature, the capability and strength of women and the intellectual ability and solidarity of the women in different struggles to save humanity.

Helen Chukwuma understands women struggle in African literature, as a struggle for recognition and partnership with the men, which will help turn the society around for the better. Deriving from Chukwuma’s opinion, a working definition is: women activism is a socio-political selfless and humanitarian protest against marginalization and oppression.

1.3: Background to the Study

From the beginning, women activism in Africa had never been selfish and radical movements, like what we have in the western world. According to Helen Chukwuma in an essay called “The Face of Eve: Feminist Writing in African Literature”, western women liberation movement fought for women’s suffrage which is expressed in marches,
protests and women right political conventions. African women movements differ from those of the western ones in the sense that African feminist did not have any articulated and written chapters as the western feminism. Example; “The Declaration of Sentiments” of the Seneca Falls Convention of July 19, 1848 in New York, *A Vindication of the Right of Women* (1792) by Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Room of One’s Own* (1929) by Virginia Woolf and the much acclaimed *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir (1908 – 1986), which serves as a base for the western modern theoretical framework for feminism. Mumford Patricia writes that, history of women activism in Africa, when compared to that of the western world is relatively new and different. Women protests had not been noted until colonialism came into Africa. (http://www.uk.activists.com) In support or this history, Gloria Chukwukere notes;

Yaa Asantewa, an Ashanti Queen mother in Ghana, was a powerful political activist, whose unique status enabled her control both men and women. She wielded a lot of authority and power that she is believed to have led her people against the British in the 1890 – 1901 Anglo-Ashanti war (3).

Chukwuma also documents that the Egba women’s march on the Alake of Egbaland led by Mrs. Odunmilalyo Ransome Kuti was political and national. The popular Aba Women Riot of 1929 which spread to Abak and environs was a protest against the unfair taxation of the men. This political movement which cost about twenty-nine women their lives was completely national in objective. Margret Ekpo was another woman activist who personally funded series of women activism in the colonial era. Ekpo
and Mrs. Kuti earlier mentioned funded and mobilized Nigerian women for political agitation in their various communities, such as the Abeokuta Women Union (AWU), Enugu Women Council and the Aba Women Association which led the Aba Women Riot of 1929.

According to Susan Ellons, series of women activism were led by Winnie Mandela and Miriam Makeba, especially during Nelson Mandela’s detention for the liberation of the black race in South Africa. Also in Kenya, Ellons writes that Micere Mugo was a profound woman activist who fought against colonialism through writing and political protests.

All these according to Chukwuma, gave rise to a little women empowerment through the International Decade for women 1975 – 1985 instituted by the United Nations. It also gave birth to the formation of women agencies and commissions throughout the continent. From this background we began to see a representation of women activism and self assertion in some African literary works.

### 1.4 Forms of Women Activism

Generally, women activism comes as movements of women with a sense of extreme solidarity aimed at achieving a common goal. This is carried out in form of:

#### 1.4.1 Violent Demonstration

This includes all manner of physical fighting which involves the carrying of sticks and pestles and throwing of stones and bottle by the protesters. These, in most cases, serve as retaliation to bullets and other police weapon.
1.4.2 Taboo Anchored Demonstration

This kind of demonstration is discussed separately from violent demonstration because it signifies more danger than the ordinary violent demonstration. It is traditionally oriented and can kill within days. In carrying out this type of demonstration, women who have passed child bearing age go on nude movement. This is done when every means to seek a redress had failed. A historical example is the popular Aba Women Riot.

1.4.3 Peaceful Demonstration

This can comes in form of street marches; where a large number of women march peacefully with their placards shouting or singing as an expression of their dissatisfaction.

1.5: Research Problem

This project is faced with the task to study the representation of women activism as an effective tool in conflict resolution in African Literature using Ousmane’s God’s Bits of Wood, Ojaide’s The Activist and Ezeigbo’s The Last of the Strong Ones. This is not to say that women activism is a new subject in African feminism studies. The point is that the representation of women activism has never been studied in these three selected works collectively. This representation going by the literature review, had been giving some critical attention, but there is an observation that attention had only been on those early works. This is to say that there is a gap in which the representation of women activism as a theme or sub-theme of some recent literary works has not been given
sufficient critical attention. This is the reason why the researcher tries to look at women activism in *God’s Bits of Wood* as an old masterpiece and in *The Activist and The Last of the Strong Ones* as new representations.

This kind of text selection will help fill the gap which exists in feminist studies of African literature.

1.6: Theoretical Framework

Women activism can also be called feminist activism. Therefore, in carrying out this type of research the focus will be on the exploration of that literary theory and ideology which is primarily concerned with women studies generally. Feminism as it is called is a modern literary theory inaugurated around 1960s according to Abrams M.H. There are many branches of feminism, from which a researcher in women studies can approach each feminist issue within the larger theoretical framework.

There are two major branches of feminism: Radical and Liberal feminism. For the purpose of this study, Liberal feminism is the tool. This is because African women activism is not in agreement with the radical western feminist suppositions but with the Liberal feminist stands. It is only in this type of feminism that those theories of activism earlier mentioned can find expression. Liberal feminism as advocated by African feminists is what Carol Davies in her essay titled “Some Notes on African Feminism” asserts that:

A genuine African feminism can therefore be summarized as follows. First, it recognizes a common struggle with African men for the removal of the yoke of foreign domination and European/ American exploitation. It
is not antagonistic to African men but it challenges them to be aware of certain salient aspect of women subjugation which differs from the generalized oppression of all African people (563).

In other words, Davies argues that “it is a hybrid of sorts, which seeks to combine African concern with feminist’s concern. This is the nature of the balancing which has to take place” (565). Alice Walker quoted by Kerz Okafor differentiates African feminism from the western type and she makes an important observation that “the black feminist is committed to the survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female”(131).

Meanwhile, the aim of this study is to ascertain how feminist activists in the selected works used their efforts to achieve freedom from tyrants - colonial masters, capitalist and oppressors for the entire people in their different societies, through some organized protests.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Great literatures have a believable link to reality or life. They are representations of reality in print or orality. Women activism in Africa, when traced historically, are few but very remarkable. This had been represented in literature, mainly by Ngugi Watigong O’ in his *Petals of Blood, A Grain of Wheat* and *A River Between*, Sembene Ousmane in *God’s Bits of Wood* and then in the later *The Cassava Ghost* by Ezenta Eze, etc.

A review of women activism like the one under study reveals an enormous literary gap, which writers and critics need to fill. It is observed that group activism of women despite its relevance in conflict resolution in different African texts still do not get deserved critical attention.

Despite the earliest representation in literature, Chioma Opara argues in her essay: “Transcending the Patriarchal Paradigm: Sembene’s Lionesses on the Path”, that there is a situation where the Marxist-feminist stance of some writers in African literature has hardly been investigated, knowing the fact that women activism cuts across the border between Marxism, post colonialism and feminism.

In the essay, Opara states that it is of supreme interest to discuss the Marxist feminist stance of Sembene Ousmane, in some of his works like *O! Pays Mon Beau Peuple, Les Bouts de Bois de Dieu, Le Docker Noir* and *Xala and Voltaïque*. In these works according to Opara, Ousmane projects his female characters as lionesses on the path. These lionesses are moving on a revolutionary path for liberation, against patriarchy, racism and colonization. In *God’s Bits of Wood*, Opara, argues that Sembene in his visionary perception illuminates the contribution of some underprivileged women
in character of Maimouns and Penda. Maimouna’s relentless march to Dakar while other women with eyes lag behind is intrinsically impressive. Penda, the prostitute is given a dynamic role as the leader of the women’s committee, leading the epic march to Dakar which is analogous to the epic march in *Petals of Blood*. Penda is made to die like a martyr. Penda becomes a female savior of the people. Opara however, loses no time in crowning Ousmane, the best African Marxist feminist as she says:

Sembene has more than any other West African male or female writer inundated his works with positive dynamic new women seeking their freedom. He is not only the precursor of Senegalese Marxist writings but also the avant-garde of feminist literature in Africa. Setting out to undermine every repressive social system in his works, Sembene replaces the old sexist retrogressive order with a progressive one. The author has patently blazed the trail to a feminist new world, making it possible for the lioness on the path to move from invisibility to autonomy (97).

Kerz Okafor pronounces women activists, agents of social change in her essay: “Ngugi’s Women: Positive Factor of Social Regeneration”. In this essay, Okafor tries to explore Nigeria’s idea of women who can be called activists and agents of social change. Drawing her examples from Ngugi’s female characters, Okafor confirms that Ngugi endows them with a willfulness and clarity of vision that seem to supers that of the men portrayed alongside them.

In *The River Between*, Okafor confirms that Muthoni’s rebellion against her father’s bigoted Christianity stems from a personal conviction that contradictions should not be admitted between the values of the people and the acceptance of the Christian
religion. This assertion by a woman seems to irritate the male leaders of the tribe, since the respective factions protect the new religion from the traditional. Muthoni’s action marks the beginning of awareness in Waijaki which brings about a desire in him to reconcile the conflicting factions of Christianity and Tradition. This rebellious action by a woman “sows the seeds that are later to give Waijaki a sense of purpose and dedication to his people” says Michael Rice according to Okafor.

In *A Grain of Wheat*, Okafor argues that the woman is more directly projected into the political affairs of her society in the character of Njeri. Njeri’s individuality and self-worth is acclaimed as she volunteers to fight alongside the men in the national struggle. There is an authorian statement according to Okafor which indicates that women activism yields more result than that of men. It says: “Wambui believed in the power of women to influence events especially where men failed to act or seemed indecisive” It is possible to say at this point that, women activism in most cases can be more effective in conflict resolution than that of men.

This woman called Njeri is presented as the instrument of political actions in the novel. According to Okafor; “The women’s decision highlights the fact that, they are well aware, that as women, they constitute an incontrovertible forum and can influence certain events where the men cannot (43).”

Okafor further states that Ngugi’s woman consciousness is further revealed in the numerous conglomerate roles he assigns to Mumbi: She is the rallying force who in her intelligence arouses other characters to a better knowledge of themselves. “Mumbi embodies the essential values of Kenyan independence. “Mumbi is the leverage of unity for her society” says Okafor.
Eldred Ibibiem Green’s article “Femi Osofisan’s Women in Morountodum and Other Plays”, reveals a number of female characters who in their sense of activism are ready to lay their lives for the cause of social regeneration. Instances of these characters are Titubi in *Morountodum* and Moremi in *Red is the Freedom Road*.

In these Marxist plays especially in *Morountodum*, Titubi is a young woman from the upper class. She holds unto a strong view of equality among all humans and being highly committed to the cause of this view, she humbles herself and comes down to the peasants. According to Ibibiem, Titubi joins the peasants in order to study the level of social repression and economic exploitation suffered by these people in the same society. With the same desire in *Moremi*, another female character, Ibibiem notes that “to a large extent in this play, is the characterization of women as people who are capable of changing circumstances to their advantage and to the advantages of the entire society” (28). He quotes Moremi’s statement to Niniola, which in itself carries a flame of social awareness and regeneration.

You talk of beauty and success and glamour! But what is all to me when one day in the midst of the most splendid rejoicing, with the choicest meat in my teeth, without warning at all, the Igbos can arrive suddenly, locusts in the air and eat everything up? . . . No, no! Nini, it is time for us to rise and square up our shoulders by our own courage and stop leaning on the gods (244).

Then, Titubi in the same vein laments the condition of the peasants saying:
… even servants feed their dogs, yet here, farmers cannot eat their own products for they need the money from the market. And when they return weary from the market, the tax man is waiting with his bill … It would not be just (245).

With the above quotations, Ibibiem points out that the women involve themselves in a struggle to change their society and this is an ultimate goal. They convince and mobilize other women in the play like Mama Kayode, Wura, Mosun and Ibidun who join in the struggle for change. It is in the achievement of success that Marshal, who is formerly skeptical of the women’s moves proclaims:

This is a movement of delight and I have chosen it to be among you all, in this place, where the journey of our ancestors ended. Titubi, I am going to dress you in a new name, so that from this moment, the whole world knows how precious you are to me … The new name is Morountodum (245)

The appraisal in the above quotation shows that these women are not just the centre of artistic discourse according to the writer, but are in forefront of danger, which Director celebrates saying:

There she goes my friends, bravely walking into danger. Stepping carelessly into the unknown, Ah, women! My friends the world is strange and women reign over it. Let us salute their courage. Their capacity for love, Moremi, I remember you and I celebrate you (243).
In conclusion, Ibibiem says that Osofisan’s women characters in these plays are representations of women as patriotic, courageous people who are capable of commitment to ideals and are able to change situations for the better.

Rahman’s essay: Reclaiming Heritage of Disinheritance Through Women of the Verb in Assia Djebar’ *Loin de Mdine*, presents women from Moslem North Africa – Algeria. It is an interesting piece of historic-literary reconstruction and reclamation of early Islamic female thought and activism, using Asia Djebaris, *Loin de Mdine*. Rahman insists that in *Loin de Mdine*, the rebelliousness of women assumes a variety of interconnected forms by real mystic women whom by their action and speech question the present reality of Islamic fundamentalism and ineffective nationalism that exclude and dispossesses women. According to Rahman, Djebar’s female characters move from silence to speech even when they are criticized for being political. Djebar responds and challenges the religion of the poetic discourse to a sacred plane, separate from politics. Djebar’s women activists move beyond politics and transcend even the metaphysical. Rahman maintains that the novel is a vital link in the heritage of female intellectual continuum. Providing a situation where Djebar’s “women of the verb” par excellence and women in movement for Ijtihad” view her novelistic adventure as the written sources of history as her very valid personal response to: first the rise of fundamentalism in Islamic public life and then to Islamic unsanctioned disempowerment of women. However, Rahman’s essay reveals women activism in the novel; “a nationalist struggle which rather than the expected rewards, brings nothing but a decreased autonomy for women after the struggles” (12).
Similarly, Mbar N’Gom, a francophone feminist presents an essay called “The Recovered Voice: Body and Writing in *La Princesse de Tiali* by Natissatou Niana Diallo”. This essay is a study of traditional women’s activities in both pre-colonial orature and postcolonial feminine writings. In this text according to N’Gom, Fari the female protagonist is a member of a despised cast system. She has all the obstacles stacked against her: she is under-class, and worst still, a Muslim woman. She has all the social restrictions around her, but through a judicious use of her feminine attractions – beauty and body, she makes an advantageous marriage as a fourth wife of a man she despised, Prince of Tiali Bocar Djiwan Malick. This marriage provides Fari a self security and social security, and also to her class and ethnic group. She also secures the unfettered practice of Islam and an equitable treatment of women throughout the kingdom. N’Gom finally notes that Fari is a kind of traditional woman, solely needed for her qualities of intrepid courage, resistance, functional selflessness which are qualities that combat and capture not just the subjugation of women but assure regard and respect for general mankind.

Mary Modupe Kolawole states in her essay tilted; “Feminine Preoccupations in African Literature: A Theoretical Appraisal”, that Ngugi Wa Thiong O’ stands out in the list of African male writers who portrayed more positive images of women in their works than female writers. Kolawole points out in this essay that Ngugi’s most intriguing portraiture of female characters is his *Petals of Blood* are as follows:

- He elicits a more definite and dynamic collective role for women.
- Wanja’s central role is an epitome of the maximum struggle by the women Amazons that has a parallel in Sembene Ousmane’s
women fighters in *God’s Bits of Wood*. Warringa’s tenacity and
boldness in refusing to be a victim of gender intimidation and
exploitation is almost unsurpassed even in African women’s
writing (119).

Kolawole continues and also states that Sembene Ousmane is another writer of whom his
portraiture of women and commitment to female self esteem is visible in most works.
Giving examples with Ousmane’s *Magna Opus* and *God’s Bits of Wood*, she notes that in
these works, women are at the vanguard of social struggle against racism,
impoverishment and colonial harassments. This positive action according to her is a
replica of the historical Dahomean women Amazon’s actions and Aba women’s riots and
similar mobilization of women. Kolawole argues that the women lead the way in
warding off police brutality in their ultimate revolt and marching to Dakar. She note that
Ousmane’s championship of the women’s cause is all the more remarkable in view of the
conservative status allocated to women in this Islamic society. At the end, Kolawole
concludes by saying “these male writers – Ngugi and Ousmane disprove African
women’s passivity and or invisibility (119).

Oladele Taiwo summarizes the role of African women in literature under four
subheadings – Economic contribution, Literary contribution, Home and Family life and
how they are represented in African literature using Cyprian Ekwensi’s *Jagua Nana*,
David Rubadiri’s *No Bride Price* and Onitsha Market Literature. He then gives an
dexample of what he calls a political and national role of women in African literature,
using Ousmane’s *God’s Bit of Wood* and Alex La Guma’s *Time of the Butcherbirds*. This
later representation is what he calls important exceptions of general and tradition women representation in African literature.

In Taiwo’s analysis, he finds that Ousmane highlights the important role played by women in the struggle for economic and social survival. As the railway workers on the Dakar-Niger line go on strike in order to obtain justice, the women take up the challenge to cater for the material needs of the members of their families. By this enormous responsibility according to Taiwo, Ousmane questions traditional male chauvinism and succeeds in enlarging the political and social base of his women characters. These women as described by Taiwo, resolutely challenge the forces of law and act independently to get the law enforcement agencies to see reasons. Considering the following quotation according to Taiwo, Ousmane accords his women a superb organization and qualities of bravery and endurance usually considered exclusive to men.

A few minutes later a murmur of excitement ripple across the crowd, as the women of Thies came in through the main entrance gate. Their long journey together had been an effective training school; they marched in well ordered ranks, ten abreast, and without any masculine escort now. They carried banners and pennants printed with slogans, some of them reading EVEN BULLETS COULD NOT STOP US, and others, WE DEMAND FAMILY ALLOWANCES (290)

In Alex La Guma’s *Time of the Butcherbird*, Taiwo argues that Mma-Tau the female protagonist is built into a monumental figure and made the symbol of black resistance to racial oppression in South African. She is the she lion, as ferocious as
ever… a terrifying women (46). Mma-Tua’s insistence and resistance at a time demoralizes her brother Hlangeni as he is deprived of his chieftaincy title. Taiwo examines this very female character and notes that: Her analysis of the situation in South Africa portrays her deep psychological insight into the problems of her people especially the heavy burden placed on them by the white (12).

Mma-Tau believes that the meaning of all kinds of falsehood played by the colonial employers of South Africa is thus:

That men are of two kinds, the poor who toil and create the riches of the earth; and the rich who do not toil but devour it… that the people demand their share of the fruits of the earth, and their rulers, of whom the white man is, refuse them a fair portion. And it is this that the people insist, and if they still resist, send their lackeys to shoot them down with guns (47).

Mma-Tau succeeds, according to Taiwo, at the end. She becomes the embodiment of collective justice and enjoys widespread support. Even those who are at first cynical about her prospect of success according to Taiwo, finally acknowledge that she is making significant contribution to the liberation of the black people in South Africa. In this instance says Taiwo, “a woman succeeds where a man has failed”(13).

Palmer Eustace in his analysis of Ngugi Wa Thiong O’s writing titled Petals of Blood describes Wanja as the most important character and the source of Munira’s disintegration. He stresses Wanja’s dynamism and potentiality in women activism represented in the text saying:
Wanja’s dynamism and vitality are suggested by her association with the fields and plains. She belongs to that remarkable bread of Ngugi’s women – Mwihiaki, Nyambura, Muthoni, Mumbi, Wambuku – all of them brave resilient, resourceful and determined. There is an element of masculinity in all of Ngugi’s major women…. But there is no denying that it is the more masculine aspects of Wanja’s character that are stressed (297).

Palmer admires Wanja in many ways: first he maintains that Wanja’s motive is never to enslave her men but the force throughout in the text is to preserve the nation’s independence. Again, the energy, drive, courage and resourcefulness that she uses to pursue her goal is what Palmer claims, it impresses the reader most. Palmer adores Wanja in this essay more than any other character in the work. In his appreciation of this nationalist achiever, Palmer states:

When she arrives at the village of Ilmorog she brings light and life to it and transforms it; and during the epic march to the city and its aftermath, she develops a sense of purpose and social responsibility. It is her energy, initiative and inventiveness that begin the revival of Ilmorog. Wanja is central to Ngugi’s development of his theme of social disintegration (298).

In another essay titled *Sembene Ousmane*, Palmer focuses more on the nature of women activism, this time in Ousmane’s *God’s Bits of Wood*. He illustrates that:

Without the slightest provocation, the security forces open fire, killing several people including the blind Maimouna’s helpless
baby. When the women at Dakar march on the police station to support the heroic Ramatoulaye, they turn fire hoses on them, breaking the neck of Houdia M’Baye, widowed mother of nine… At the gates of Dakar, the soldiers open fire on the marching column of harmless women, killing the legendary Penda and Samba N’Doulougou (189 – 190).

This is just to demonstrate that the nature of women activism is life sacrificing, says Palmer.

Ezenta Eze demonstrated in a play of three acts, called *The Cassava Ghost*, a symbolic women movement of revolt, which according to the blub of the text, such movement would have an unforeseen political consequences and would demonstrates the power of their resolution and their great value to the nationalist struggle in Africa. It is a replica of the Aba Women Riot in Literature.

Gloria Chukwukere questions the flat and didactic characterization of women in the works of early African writers like Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi and Wole Soyinka. She argues that if a true work of art is the mirror through which the society sees itself, the artist’s portraits of his characters, if they are humanistic enough should provide a basis for that society to reassess itself and its values and to promote progress. And that if a people must change, grow and become socially and politically aware, “everybody – men and women must participate in bringing about the new consciousness”(80). This she acknowledges that Sembene Ousmane, Ngugi Wa Thiong O’, Peter Abraham and others had successfully depicted, thereby challenging the rest of the other male writers mentioned earlier.
Chukwukere notes that despite the fact that these heroines are not always the main protagonists in the works; they possess great revolutionary potentials and constitute essential forces through which society aspire a new order of awareness. They are shown to transcend their traditional limiting roles to become politically and economically significant. If it is a war or revolution, they are often even seen to wield the ultimate power (80).

In Ousmane’s *God’s Bits of Wood*, the women according to Chukwukere engage in different action in their different areas which include; Bamako, Dakar and Thies. These different activities at different points according to Chukwukere build up into a collective unit and reach a climax in the women’s legendary march to Dakar.

Bound together by a share deprivation and need to sustain their respective families, the women battle successfully against the police and the spahies. Although many houses are burnt down, their courage must be seen as a significant index of their determination to challenge anti-humanist forces of government through group solidarity (86).

At Thies, Penda, the young prostitute, leads the women in series of protests; Chukwukere describes her as “the remarkable woman made manifest during the popular march to Dakar. The women’s march to Dakar, Chukwukere affirms is the singular act that finally brings the French imperialist to their knees. Penda dies a martyr of which her blood is the sacrifice that helps ensure success of the revolution. Houdia M’Baye also loses her life at the police station which Chukwukere also describes under the theme of sacrifice in women activism, for her death result to the victory of the protesting women. She writes:
Although Houdia M’ Baye loses her life at the police station, the collective action of the women has become successful and has vindicated the legitimacy of the mission. Ramatoulaye emerges from the police station unscratched. And Mame Sofi, backed by the women, challenges the forces of law and the fallacy of the Imam’s religious message (87).

In conclusion, Chukwukere is of the opinion that group women activism in Sembene’s work has helped create amazons out of social rejects like Penda and physical disabled like Moimouna and the rest of other women who are all illiterates and religious handicapped.

In A Wreath for Udoma by Abrahams according to Chukwukere;

An echo of women solidarity is intimated through Mhendi’s tragic bereavement. Mhendi’s wife and the other women have in their defiance become the victims of imperial callousness (91)

This is as a result of the women’s refusal to give up their homes and lands which have been theirs as far back as the history. The white colonists come to displace the people and the women led by Mhendi’s wife turn on the whites who have come to supervise their removal and embark on a stoning party. Consequently, the authorities open fire, killing eleven of them. Chukwukere comments on this effect, saying, the courage of the women activists who sacrifice their lives in the fight matches in intensity the activities of Selina who spearheads in Pan Africa, the fight for independence.
CHAPTER THREE

3.0 REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ACTIVISM IN SELECTED TEXTS

Women activism is discussed in this chapter under the following subheadings: violent demonstration, non-violent demonstration, taboo anchored demonstration and non-violent demonstration to violent demonstration, so as to create a continuity of the forms or types of activism as outlined in the previous chapter and not that violent activism is represented separately from non violent type in the selected texts. Women demonstrations come about as a process, which can be violent all through, non-violent or a combination of the two. It is for the comprehension of this work, that the movements are discussed separately for clarification purpose.

3.1 Violent Demonstration

In God’s Bits of Wood, women engage in series of protests for the sake of their men and the entire people of Dakar and Thies. Through violent demonstrations, the women are able to prove themselves courageous, fearless, strong and above all, lionesses as Opara would call them. The women struggle violently under the sun and the rain, with the police, the soldiers at gun point and many life affecting weapons until victory is assured. During each protest movement, the women appear to have a leader or some leaders. These leaders at different points include Penda the young prostitute, Maimouna the blind woman, and Dieynaba Penda’s foster mother at Thies. Ramatonlaye, Mame Sofi and Houdia M`Baye lead the fight at Dakar.

These female leaders are lionesses that lead the pack. They organize women and children at various points and they serve as instruments of struggle in the Dakar Niger Railway
and the general workers strike. These uneducated and uncivilized women despite all odds are able to understand the exploitation and marginalization their men are going through and when the men go on strike, the women carry on the protest even violently till the strike is over.

In the morning after the decision to embark on an indefinite strike is taken, some of the workers who feel that they should walk out to the market place to look around and see how their employers are doing without them converge and an argument arises among them. In the midst of this argument, the white employers out of anger attack them and start a fight. The men get so much afraid and a lot flee for their lives. This fight marks the beginning of women struggle in the text. According to the narrator: “Dieynaba had rallied the women of the marketplace, and like a band of Amazons they came to their rescue armed with clubs, with iron bars, and bottles” (39). The women throw anything that their hands can lay on at the soldiers who fire bullets at them. When the soldiers make more advances towards the people, Bachirou one of the black employees is caught fleeing for his dear life across Dieynaba and she asks “Where are you going?” (40) The narrator continues; “handing him a rock to throw: but he just stammered something and ran off again” (4). It is in the hit of this riot that Maimnoua the blind loses one of her twins in a stampede.

This is quite violent, because women see the nature of the riot, the strikers with empty hands cannot march the soldiers with guns. As activists, they prefer to lose their lives than let the innocent workers die alone. They move in violently, holding bottles, iron bars and stones too and in their large number, they are able to return some blows to the firing
soldiers. When the fight is over, the people have eight people dead and very many others wound. With this tension, the strike goes on quietly in Thies.

In Dakar, women also embark on violent demonstration, a very fierce one. It all starts with the killing of El Hadji Mabique’s ram called Vendredi by Ramantoulaye one of the leading women activists in Dakar. Rama as she is called is a sister to El’ Hadji Mabique but she is very much of the opinion that the brother who is a religious man and a wealthy one for that matter is a traitor and a saboteur to his people in the hands of foreigners who discriminate and exploit them in their land. Reading from page 96, one would see that Ramatoulaye comes back home to find that the only available rice for the household is being eaten by Vendredi the ram. The spectacle of the broken pots and plates and some few grains of rice all over the kitchen according to the narrator makes Rama choke with fury. She is very much annoyed and immediately, she decides to act violently before the children and the entire family die of hunger. The eating of rice by Vendredi is like an insult added to an injury. This is because Mabique in his uncanny relationship with the white is totally against his own people (workers) for going on a strike. He earlier on spoke to Rama over the situation at hand and tried every possible means to bring her to suggest and encourage their men to call off the strike. He calls the strike “none sense and stupid”. He believes his people are incapable of ruling themselves, so they should obey and appreciate whatever the white employers do. After all, he is rich and already one of the European associates. Vendredi his ram feeds fat on people’s food and looks very big indeed that nobody under normal circumstances would want to try a battle with ‘him’, as the rams is addressed with the masculine gender pronoun in the work. Rama does not understand why the ram should feed fat on the only available food
for the entire N’Dayene household, most annoyingly when it belongs to such a traitor. She embarks on a fierce battle with the ram believing in the following statement of hers: “No one in this house will go to bed hungry – if you don’t have ram’s meat to eat, there will at least be mine”(96). Rama by the above statement is ready to die or feed her family. With determination and selflessness, Rama fights the ram fiercely and cuts his neck open, not bordering about her nakedness or the wound she sustains during the fight. The purpose is achieved and that is to feed the family that night. By this single act of courage and fearlessness, the women of the district know no rest with the police till the arrival of the marchers.

Mabique reports the situation to the police who come and demand the arrest of Rama and the mutton. Rama surrenders herself to the police but tells them that for obvious reasons, Vendredi must be eaten. The police insist and in the midst of an argument serious fight breaks out in the street between the police and the women. Nobody knows how the battle begins but “the woman with a toothpick” says: “Well, if they want him, they will have to pay! We ’ll sell him dearly”(107). It is understood from the quotation above that the police cannot collect the mutton from the women unless the police pay, since everything in the area is now sold at cut-throat prices. These women do not fear gun and other police arms and insist on eating the ram and fighting the police with anything they lay hands on. “Even cat put out its claws and spat”(107). Fighting continues in page 156 as the police reinforce on horseback and demand for Rama alone this time. Before the arrival of the soldiers on horseback, Mame Sofi one of the women activists gathers all the women and an arrangement on how to tackle the horsemen is seriously made. She says:
Don’t worry, I have an idea. Horses are afraid of fire, aren’t they? All of you run and get some live coals and embers from your houses. Carry them in anything you can, but we will have to have them – there isn’t a match left here. We’ll need some straws too. Now hurry! (156 – 157).

Immediately, the women spread out through the entire district. Making further arrangement Mame Sofi orders them: “Now go out … and line up on both sides of the street. Don’t light any of the straw yet – wait until I give the signal.” (157)

When the police on horses back arrive in the street, they are startled and immediately, they force their horses to move at the sight of some endless pinkish glows along the two sides of the street. At this moment of confusion, the women simultaneously light their straw and in an instance, there was pandemonium.

Sheaves of flaming straw and pots of coals were flung at the horsemen from every corner of the darkness, while the women shouted at the top of their lungs and beat on tins trying to frighten the horses with the noise. The animals reared and plunged, whinnying frantically, and the men swore. The spahis were veterans of a thousand parades, but they could do nothing to control their horses now. (157).

At this point the women’s plan is working, the horses are terribly frightened and this makes it difficult for their men to control and direct them. The women now carry their fire even closer and “A fiery bundle of straw gets one of them full in the face and
chest and he screamed in terror, trying to tear off his heavy jacket, which had already begun to burn” (157).

This is quite a terror to the police and even the soldiers. At this point, some men of the district joint hands to deal with the police. The soldiers manage to draw their swords and flash them wickedly among the crowd but:

Mame Sofi and her group of women had pulled the leader of the platoon from his horse, and when they had him on the ground they dragged him by his boots to a little ditch where the people of the neighborhood relieve themselves at night and thrust his head in the accumulated filth (158).

It was approximately at this same moment that a frightened voice cries, Fire! Fire!

On realizing, it is the compound of the N’ Diayenes in ablaze. Efforts are made and miraculously, wind carries the fire away and spares the houses.

This women riot as it is described by the police chief continues till the final stage, which takes place at the police station the next day. The following morning, the police repeat their arrest and Rama pleads with the women not to start again. She feels bad for the trouble the women choose to go through for her sake. She goes with the police but yet the women in their insistence follow her to the station and demand her bail immediately.

At the station, the police use teargas and other forces to scar these women but to no avail. Now they invite the water hoses which give a merciless spray of water on the women. When the spray becomes unbearable Mame Sofi and Houdia M’Baye stand their ground until Houdia M’Baye pays the costly price. Immediately, the women rally round to begin another riot but the Imam arrives on time and admonishes them to go home. Considering
his religious position, the women obey and return to their homes and Rama also returns with them.

This is an obvious representation of violent activism. Deaths are recorded during fire and horsemen and also during water hoses and empty handed women. This approximately, bears the fact that violent activism can lead to loss of live(s).

3.2 Taboo Anchored Activism

In *The Activist*, Ojaide presents to his readers the greatest of all forms of women activism in Africa. The nude protest or demonstration as it is called is more dangerous than ordinary violent activism because the protesters do not have to go into any physical conflict with the oppressors in order to curse the oppressors. As earlier discussed in 1.2, nude protest is a taboo and whosoever attracts such kind of women demonstration automatically brings curse and evil and most times, death upon him or herself.

When the wickedness of the Bell Oil company and the Federal Military Government (FMG) becomes unbearable, the women gather and try very many things to bring the two parties to a realization of their activities against the Niger Delta people. Within a while, it is very obvious to these women that the white men who are the foreign oil drillers and the chief of the FMG are like Ogiso, a legendary tyrant of their land and such cannot be handled with a kid glove.

However, of all the activities of women in the selected works, this is the most planned. It is handled and arranged by some educated and civilized women – Mrs. Timi Taylor and Ebi Emasheyi are both lecturers at the state university. Mrs Taylor in any case, does not expect less from the oil lords and the chief of the FMG since she makes the
following statement while addressing Women of Delta Forum (WODEFOR) during their first meeting

Bell Oil Company and the Federal Military Government might be mountains, but the women know they had precedents in their customs of defeating tyrants. Let the oil bosses and the military chief not continue to take women for granted. They would be surprised at the power that women could wield when driven to the wall (224).

WODEFOR sends some delegates to represent them and narrate their plight at the United Nations’ Conference in the United States and these delegates are sent back from the airport humiliated. Before the women are through with the embarrassment caused by the insult from the airport, there is a fire blow out at Uto River which threatens lives of Ekakpamre people. It kills many people and displaces a lot others. The students’ union moves out in a protest against such callous act by the multinational oil companies. They want the oil companies to be careful and mindful of their method of installation in the area since such fire outbreak is capable of burning up or displacing an entire community. FMG gets information about a protest going on in the area and instantly sends in military troops to stop the students. The troop in the process of carrying out their duty, shoot aside and so many students are killed.

The women are now very much aware of the threat of oil fire to their lives and that of their husbands and children. Shortly before, it is also observed that the oil companies do by themselves break their old pipes or leave oil linkages to worsen the situation, so as to prove the local communities sabotage of oil installation before the
FMG. In turn the FMG does not want to hear from the local communities before taking decisions against them. They only listen to the foreigners and run to their aid whenever it is needed, because the government cannot afford to lose the millions of dollars made from oil. So, the local people can go to hell.

The women do not understand this love between the oil companies and the FMG that makes the government kill its own people. The narrator states; “To the women, the unending blaze could be one of the oil companies’ tactics to draw in the Federal Military Government to provide them free security rather than pay for it” (244).

The women leaders held a meeting and agreed to use their naked strength against the tyrants. They would do this in a most dramatic way by seizing a flow station and an oil-loading facility and then stripping there in protest. Only women who had reached their menopause would take part, according to the plan. This was in keeping with the traditional practice of cursing the oppressor. (244).

The level of the oppression the people pass through is compared to the tyranny of Ogiso the legendary tyrant of the land. According to the women; “the head of the FMG was also Ogiso” (245). “The women felt their people had endured enough of tyranny and now, they had to use their last means of power, a nude march, to defend themselves” (245). To them this case is no more exploitation or marginalization but pure genocide.

The planning of this protest is the most sophisticated so far: letters are written and sent out, meetings upon meetings are held and money is also raised to hire buses. Ebi and Mrs. Taylor know no rest until this demonstration is carried out. Ebi sends out the
circular that both she and Mrs. Taylor sign, describing the uncommon action they need to take to save the land. In detail, she describes those to be involved and how those not directly involved shall give them moral and logistic support.

We need to act now before it is too late. We have all seen how each day matters get worse. Our lives cannot be one long story of being victimized. We have to put a stop to being victimized in order for us to live happy and contented lives. It is a fight for survival. No matter what happens, we shall be victorious because our cause is just”, Ebi writes (245).

Mrs. Taylor travels all over the Niger Delta talking to women of different groups about the plan and in all the occasions, she is welcome with a handful of women volunteers. Ebi makes arrangement of buses to bring in the potential women protesters to a place where they will join boats to the venue of the proposed action. Serious arrangement is made to ensure the success of this strong protest.

When the oil lords get to hear about this protest in view, the foreigners invite some of their indigenous employees to explain the meaning of this whole mess by the women. Being very mindful of their job and what they stand to lose if the madness yields any effect, the oil company heads reason: “You never can foretell the consequence of their stupid action” (246). At the meeting one of the oil bosses demands: “What’s going on? What are the old women up to? (246). When the indigenous members of staff appear to be ignorant of the presence, one of the oil bosses barks. “Don’t tell me you’ve not heard what’s going on! Your old women are preparing to strip in front of television cameras, in protest at our installations” (246).
It must be a serious matter. Very serious,” said Mr. Peter Okadike.

For God’s sake explain!” shouted Mr. Pritchard.

Tell us the meaning of all these!”…

Women’s nude protest is the worst curse possible in the traditional society. It’s a curse invoked when all measures to seek redress or justice have failed. And those cursed always died within days,”

Peter Okadike explained (246).

First, the white men think it is a treat but later, they dismiss all that is said with a wave of hand and term it superstitions, voodoo beliefs and heathens- an old fashioned belief system which is far from Christianity and Islam. And for the oil lords, anything that is not Christianity or Islam is archaic and unbelievable. Meanwhile, the information is gotten.

When the chief of the FMG hears the news of the nude protest, he gets worried. As a highly superstitions person, he does not know what to do with these women old enough to be his mother. If they were men, he would have given orders to some military troops to shoot or arrest them all. Nevertheless, he sends message across to Bell Oil chief to take all necessary measures to prevent the women from stripping.

As earlier planned, the women arrive at their designated point to take off to the flow station and the oil – shipping terminal. The plan works successfully. Their boats land at both the flow station and the terminal. They are set for action. Native workers according to the narrator, who hear about the protest either do not show up for work or sneak away before the arrival of the women. These ones are not ready to commit an
abomination and bring curse upon themselves by beholding the nakedness of women who are old enough to be their mothers and grandmothers. The gatemen are so embarrassed that they cannot stand at the gate against a stream of elderly women pouring into the station from boats. The women with their age and number intimidate everybody out of their way and then completely take over the venues of their protest.

Before the final arrangement is made the oil companies send a delegate to negotiate with the women and stop their shameful act but when the delegates tell the women that they are ready to discuss their demands, the women shout after Mrs. Taylor; “No-oo!” (200). “Every place gets tensed up over what will happen next; the press, women and every other spectators, and just as the women start murmuring to themselves; it happened so fast simultaneously” (251).

At the same instance some mask-wearing navy personnel with the assistance of retired marines kept by Bell Oil Company in their own plan overwhelmed the scene with tear gas and other unknown gas which make people dizzy and unconscious. Every exposed person gets dazed and become drowsy and sleepy. The naval personnel load all the women and the press into boats and carry them back to Warri. In the boats the women gradually regain consciousness. They observe their money and jewelry are missing, their bags are being ransacked and the worst: few women are raped by these navy men in their drowsy state right there in the boats.

Days after, WODEFOR call a meeting and in the meeting it is observed that death is not recorded but still they have to lick their wounds as regards the rape and other material losses. Rape in this type of demonstration is not least expected. It is always a battle between the egg and the stone. This is the highest level of violent demonstration
according to the people’s tradition, and violent demonstration is all about self sacrificing movement that can even cost life. It is a do or die affair in which the activist chooses to die or change the situation that prompts the demonstration. Rape and killing to women are almost the same. A rapist is also a killer because he can kill in an effort to rape. The FMG and the oil companies who send these navy men to rape the old women are the devil incarnate; first they explore the land callously, they set fire and allow all sort of pollution in the area, they send in military troops to shoot the people and now they violate the sovereign body of mothers and grandmothers. The women call on the goddess of the land, the patron goddess of women Umalokun to avenge the rape and the brutalization of the women during the episode. Let the wicked be cursed! the women mean.

One week after the nude protest, the news of Mr. Van Hoort’s heart attack and death gets to everyone. As if this is not enough, in another one week, making two weeks from the nude protest, the chief of the FMG, General Mustapha Ali Dongo dies in weird circumstance. Therefore;

The women’s stripping protest that was thought aborted had worked. Is it not the religion of the oil lords, the people asked, that says that one can sin by action as well as by intent and thought? The women’s thoughtfully planned action was fulfilled cosmically, they brought down the tyrants that their men failed to remove. The two tyrants that tormented the Niger Delta people were gone!

(253).

By implication, the result of the nude protest reveals to readers, what men think of the women’s threat, what the whites also think of black tradition and where such
negligence can land them all. Had the company manager listened to his local employees, he would not had died, and the chief of the FMG would not had been a dead man had he listened too. Or could it be Ajīja according to Opata, that befell these men and hardened their hearts till the old women carry out their threat on them?

The only time in Ezeigbo’s *The Last of the Strong Ones* that violent activism occurs is when the women descend on Egwuagu for driving his wife away unjustly and throw her things out of the house. “Like swarm of bees with full intent, we stung sense into Egwuagu”(86).This is briefly revealed by Chieme in a session with the watchers.

### 3.3 Non-Violent Demonstration.

In Ousmane’s *God’s Bits of Wood* the women of Thies engage in a lot of non violent but very significant demonstrations. At a point during the ongoing conflict, Penda rallies and encourages some boys later known as the “Crew” to shatter every breakable in the Vatican (European Quarters) and steal whatever they can all in the name of “attack”. According to Ojaide, attack is a major principle of activism.

One day Isnard a white boss comes out of his car and sees these boys aiming their catapults at him not knowing that it is a lizard under his car that is the target and not him or his car. Immediately he dips his hand into his pocket and pulls out a revolver and shoots at the crew. Two drop dead instantly and the rest escape death.

The women of Thies rush out immediately and at once they go on a non violent demonstration over the killing of their children. The crowd continues to increase as they move towards the European quarters. Some of the women carry children along while other gather heavy pestles, iron bars and anything that can serve as weapon in case the
killers (white employers) decide to attack them. They swear and curse the killers of their children as they march on. At last the crowded arrives at the Vatican and this time they are led by Penda, Dieynaba and Mariame Sonko. As they pass before the houses of the European employees, their fury gets to a screaming peak: “fists were waved and a torrent of oaths and insults burst from their throats like water through a shattered dam” (222). When they arrive at the front of the residence of the District Administrator, they lay down the two corpses and stand there silently. “The narrator even confirms the weight of the silence as it is heavier than any violence whatsoever.

But the silence was heavier with meaning than the oaths or the clamour: it was a witness to the unlit fires, the empty cooking post, and the decaying mortars, and to the machines in the shops where the spiders were spinning their webs. For more than an hour they stood there, and the soldiers themselves remained silent before these silent people.

At last the cortege formed up again but the ceremony was repeated, and the bodies of the children laid out, four times again – in front of the station, in the suburbs of N’ Ginth and Randoulene, and in the market square in the heart of Thies. It was not until almost nightfall, … that the funeral procession ended and the remains of the two children returned at last to their homes (222).

Three days after, the directors of the company notify the strikers that their representatives would be received. This is one of the movements, among all the women movements in the text that does not involve violence of any kind but is quite significant and effective,
just three days after the demonstration, the employers notify the employees to come for a negotiation – the first since the beginning of the strike.

Another peaceful demonstration takes place towards the end of the work, in fact in the epilogue. When the strike is over, the whole stations are automatically handed over to the blacks, so that no white is in control any more. Lahbib happens to be the head of Thies station but as he resumes work, he finds that while Dejean is gone, Isnard is still not gone. In fact, Isnard is not ready to leave. Lahbib runs back immediately and stops all the workmen saying that the strike is not over yet. On hearing this, the women run to the station and Mariame Sonko demands: “What is happening men? (329). Lahbib explains things to the women and instantly they agree to go to the Vatican to “dislodge that red – eared rat” according to them. Seni, one of the women enthuses that: “When you can see the toes after you have buried the body, you have to throw on a little more sand” (329). And Aby laughs: “We ‘ll throw on some more sand!” (329). After this agreement, Lahbib admonishes the women not to be violent with their movement.

The long procession of women turned around and retraced the path that had brought them to the station. They had begun to sing the chant of the march from Thies to Dakar, and a large part of the crowd followed them.

When they arrived in the district of “the Vatican”, Boubacar and Bakary, who were walking at the head of the column, encountered a cordon of soldiers… (330).

These women continue to sing and beat drums at the entrance gate of the Vatican and according to the narrator, the singing and drumming “were almost some unbearable
stings to nerves already taut” (330). This is because, the Isnards who do not want to leave the station for the blacks are already so devastated by the final agreement between the employers and the employees. According to Isnard, the people are children who do not even know what they want. How can all the stations be left for them to control? The singing exercise continues while Isnard and his wife Beatrice together with two other Europeans go through a headlong debate inside their house over their leaving. It is in the midst of this disapproving plea of Edouard and Pierre to Isnard and his wife that Beatrice suddenly stops her endless pacing about and runs into the kitchen, grabs her maid by the hand and drags her to the sitting room where her husband and the other two are and shouts at her; go out there and tell them “that you liked us”. “Tell them that you liked Monsieus, say it; in the name of God, say it!” (332). When the trembling maid can’t say a word, she lets her go and before the rest can notice anything, she grabs one of the revolvers on the dining table and runs out to the garden. Two shots ring, followed by a cry, one of the soldiers at the gate runs to the garden. Isnard, Edouard and Pierre also run to the garden only to meet Beatrice’s motionless body on the ground. They pick it up into the house and bolt their door carefully. The intriguing aspect of this non-violent activism is that; “At the sound of the shots, an echoing silence had fallen on the crowed, as if they had written a brutal ending to a long, long story whose climax, until then, had been unknown. Even the drums were silent” (332). Therefore, this marks the end of suffering for the women and entire people.

Beatrice is dead and in a very calamitous way which is suicide. The outcome of this peaceful movement can be termed more significant, in the sense that, at the sound of two shots, there is a note of silence on the singing crowd even when nobody orders them to be
silent. There is a message which passes through the sounds of the gun shots to the women indicating that the battle is over, the evil is gone and change is here.

Ezeigbo’s *The Last of the Strong Ones* is a contemporary work which has a cultivated insight into the traditional life of a town called Umuga in eastern Nigeria. Umuada of this literary community are the custodians of the community’s culture and tradition. From the general Umuada, four Oluada are selected on merit of class and character. These four include: Ejimnaka, Chieme, Chibuka and Onyekaozulu. They are the representative of Umuda and the entire women of Umuga in the town’s union which runs the affairs of the town.

The conflict that calls for resolution in the novel is the intrusion of kosiri, the colonial administrator. Since the coming of the white man to the land of Umuga, things are no more the same. The white man enslaves the people and most annoyingly, uses every means to condemn the law of the land and enforce his strange law and religion on the people. Therefore, the situation which needs to be changed is this enforcement of strange culture on the people of Umuga, knowing the fact that before the coming of the white man, they are in a paradise of their own. Kosiri is not just alien to the people but also an oppressor and a violator of their culture and tradition. In short, he is like a thorn on the flesh of Umuga people. This situation disturbs virtually all the people but there is nothing anyone is doing to change it. This is until Umuada the custodians and the keeper of the people’s culture come together to deliberate on the present issue and decide what can be done to get the situation changed. Umuada in this work are the activists in the text. In their first meeting, they deliberate on the activities and the dangers of the existence of
Kosiri in the land of Umuga. Kosiri causes so much harm and damage to the culture and tradition of the land.

What did Kosiri and his servants not do to Agwazi; her sacred forest and the stream? First, they fetched water from the stream, using iron cups and metal pots. Then they caught the sacred fishes and cooked them with the firewood gathered from the forest. Even the sacred monkeys in the forest not spared …” (5).

Consequently, Agwazi, the stream goddess, is no longer at peace with the people. “Danger pervades the place and the life of anyone who goes there is threatened. Agwazi’s anger has remained unabated” (5). The people will not sit down and watch a stranger who violates and destroys the land for his own selfish interest. The women make up their mind to carry out some activities that can lead to a better tomorrow. In an emphases Chieme shrugs;

“Our people say that it is the traveler who must make the return journey and not the owner of the land. The power of the intruders is to be compared to the evening rays of the sun. Its intensity declines with the hour and soon passes away. Yes, Kosiri will depart one day. One day Kosiri will leave us in peace. (6).

In accordance with all that is said Chibuka turns to Chieme and snaps. “The guest who turns rude and aggressive will surely leave the host’s house with a bruised body…” (6). After all said and done, the four Oluada who are selected from the onset led by Ejimnaka sum up the matter as the leader speaks at last saying: “The matter that brought us together
is urgent and weighty. Let us not jump into the middle of it. Kosiri put an obstacle across the path of our life and we shall not rest until we clear it” (7).

Four of the Oluada are to represent the entire women of the land in the meeting of Obuofo. In the meeting, they shall let the men know the mind and the stand of Umuada over the present condition of things in their land and will also let the men see reasons with them. At the end, Oluada agree and stand as one. “We shall muster one voice. Oluada will stand together” (7). Oluada gives so many reasons why the people should not relent in their effort to get rid of Kosiri. Onyekozulu points out that “Kosiri tried to cram unfamiliar food into our mouths but we resisted and spat it out” (8). She reminds Oluada of the incidence of the warrant chiefs; how Kosiri has appointed dishonourable men as the people’s chiefs and the people refuse and sack them. The people refuse to take orders from them but always look on to Obuofo which take charge of Umuga affairs. So, what is left concerning the rejection of Kosiri in their land, she inquired. Ejimnaka explains things out to Onyekaozulu and the rest say that when Okwara prevails on Kosiri to withdraw the order restraining their people from cutting down palm trees, they were all happy and accepted him as a warrant chief to replace the four rejected ones: Dim, Ozigbo, Uzuegbo and Ongirioha, but now Obuofo is having some conflict with him. He is carrying out the orders of Kosiri: “to compel the people to engage in an unpaid labour. Our young men are taken away to construct roads, take care of Kosiri’s rest – houses, fetch water without payment. Okwara is assisting Kosiri to enslave our people…” (9), with these reasons:
Oluada resolved to support the removal of Okwara as warrant chief if he continued to obey Kosiri and disregard Obuofo and its reforms to improve Umuga as a whole. Oluada refused to cooperate with any power or anyone that planned to undermine the culture and the traditional judicial system and the economic well-being of Umuga.

Believing in their oneness as a major weapon, Oluada disperse. Solidarity is a necessity, as far as women activism is concerned. They exchange words of encouragement and good wishes as they leave for their different purposes.

In the evening of the next day, Obuofo meet at Obiatu’s compound. In the meeting, Oluada the representatives of Umuada and all the women at large are all present. The meeting begins and the representatives are acquainted with the activities of Kosiri who collaborates with the deposed warrant chiefs and Okwara to enforce the laws of these foreigners on the people. Okoroji, one of the youngest Obuofo asks in bewilderment:

“What has gone wrong with some of our elders?... Respected elders like Onyirioha and Uzuegbu and now Okwara, allowing Kosiri to use them and, above all, make a fool of them. What medicine did Kosiri use to cause these sons of Umuga become traitors to their father land?” (13-14).

In an answer to Okoroji’s bewildering question, Onyekozulu retorts, “A good thing, this medicine has caught no woman yet… Only men are reeling under its influence, like drunkards” (14). This statement stings Abazu like a bee and he shouts at Onyekozulu
who in turn is very much ready to retaliate but Ejimnaka intervenes on time. After some suggestions on how to get rid of Kosiri without arriving at any conclusion, Ejimnaka says. “So fear now rules every heart in this and other lands?” (17). Ejimnaka as a leader of Oluada Umuada speaks eloquently over the present matter, that by all indication, one will see her obvious wish and plan to chase the colonists away. She further urges the congress:

“For how long shall we allow fear to cripple us? Are we going to wait until Kosiri picks us all up like snails?” She looked from one face to another. She laughed, but there was no mirth in it. Her laughter was harsh and brittle” (17).

Chieme points out, the white man has powers that are greater that any one known to the people. Ejimnaka still in her optimism speaks in emphasis:

“Power? ‘His power feeds fat on people’s weakness and on our disunity. It is the men who are afraid, not the women. Why can’t all these towns come together to fight him? He practices divide and rule. That is his method” (17).

From the above quotation, one can observe that Ejimnaka had studied the white man’s method of colonization and had noticed that it is indirect rule system and this means, using the people against themselves. With this observation of hers, if the people can all reject the selfish offers of Kosiri and come together as one people with a sovereign culture and tradition, Kosiri’s effort can be frustrated. The problem is that the men are more gullible than the women and for this reason, they are already falling for
Kosiri’s offers and so sabotaging the people’s effort to stand against the strange laws. This is what Onyekozulu means when she replies to Okoroji’s bewilderment. Still in the meeting, Obiatu sounds confused and tired of these arguments that lead nowhere. Nothing seems to work, not even one suggestion and all of a sudden, Ejimnaka suggests: Obuofo listen to me,”… “Let us write a letter to Kosiri and tell him what our people want. We should tell the strangers that we want peace but not their meddling type of association Umuga wants to have with them and their agents. They are here to trade with us, but not to rule us and dictate to us (18)”.

This idea is very much welcome by all including male and female members of Obuofo. A letter writer is arranged for and four men and two women are chosen to see to the letter and bring back words to Obuofo as soon as possible.

Two days after a session with Ejimnaka, Umuada meet at the Eke market place to carry out a demonstration over some unlikable activities of Kosiri and his agents. This protest is carried out in a non violent way. The women march straight to the market place, singing and cursing these lappers (white men), who call themselves men of wisdom and knowledge and above all men of power and governance. At the Eke market place, Umuada rise in protest against the harassment of traders by sanitary inspectors. Two of them visit the market on the last Eke day and do some unimaginable things. They arrive to a part of the market where meat is sold. They confront the men and women who sell dead goats and sheep and by force, they carry away some heaps of carrion. Their attendants take them to the back of the market near Udo shrine and bury the meat in a pit there. The inspectors say it is bad to eat the meat of dead animals, which died of an
illness unknown, as it can be dangerous to human health. These women do not share such idea with Kosiri. They wonder: “But our people had always eaten goats and sheep and chicken that died of diarrhea. Did we ever hear that people died after eating such meat? (40). Besides, Kosiri and his servants burry these lumps of meat without any compensation to the owners. Umuada decide that when next these ‘men of death’ set their food in the market, they will take their protest to Awka.

Days after the letter writer is arranged for and hired, Obuofo’s delegates who bear the letter to the white man at Awka return and shortly after, Obuofo’s informant visits them with a very sad news. Obuofo is summoned immediately and the delegates narrate their encounter with the district officer at Awka. The summary is that Kosiri is not happy with Umuga people. He says the letter is foolish and will bring them more trouble than good. The content of the letter accuses the D.O. of interfering in Umuga affairs and if the D.O. doesn’t withdraw, that Obuofo is ready to go to war against him and his men. The informant concludes by warning Obuofo to stay away from such intentions as they are very futile.

More confusion engulfs the people. and Abazu picks at Onyekozulu, for suggesting such an evil minded letter writer to them. Onyekozulu relaliates this time, and in some very harsh words. Abazu and Onyekozulu continue in their verbal blows until Obuofo adjourn the meeting for the day as they are unable to arrive at any meaningful point.

Finally, Obuofo embark on war against Kosiri and his agents. During the war, the women do their part by cooking for the warriors and caring for the wounded. Sometimes, the women will cook and carry food to the warriors in the war front and come back to suture the wounds of the wounded and encourage others. The flutist also helps to convey
some goodwill messages of Oluada –Umuada to those in the warfront through the language of the flute. After months of losing lives and property, Umuga is forced to accept the conditions of Kosiri. Can the fate of Umuga in this war be attributed to the non violent nature of women activism since in the earlier chapter it is mentioned that non violent activism is not always as effective as the violent ones? Nonetheless, the fight of the women is more enduring and hopeful.

After the war the people of Umuga get so devastated and discouraged in any attempt to reject the ways and the teaching of the white. Umuada strategically shift their plan from a physical fight to a moral fight. They know that mental and psychological colonization is worse than economic and political enslavement. So, these women rally the people and preach to them on the need to preserve their tradition no matter what happens. The people should try and stick to the memory of their tradition no matter what happens. The people must stick to their traditional values despite the strange language and religion everywhere in the land. Chieme and Chibuka are the remaining Oluada after the death of Ejimnaka. These two do not fold their hands in despair as many elders do, since they are defeated. They gather the remnant of Umuada and encourage them to resume work, believing in the following statement. “The work of mending and binding broken minds and bodies has not ended, for those who desire to preserve a tradition and bring a people back to life. This is our task. That is our desire” (177). Therefore, the struggle continues as far as Umuada are concerned. Chineme and Chibuka are determined to carry on with the tradition of the land till the white man who is the visitor who owns the return journey leaves. The custom of Umuga shall not die, the women insist.
In Ojaide’s *The Activist*, WODEFOR do not intend to be violent in their protests against the prevailing situation. They only wish to reconcile the three tribes: Itsekiri, Izon and Urhobo that made up Warri town after their bloody conflict over the ownership of Warri town and then see how they can peacefully restore peace to their land and place a common understanding between their people and the oil companies. They also want to prove to the FMG that their people are not rebels as they think. These women come into this matter on noticing that violence and fighting will lead their people nowhere. They do not mean violence at all until the need arises. Their movements all start with a non violent gathering in Warri. Mrs. Taylor who is a university lecturer and a mother looks through all that happens in the area and decides to invite Ebi the wife of the protagonist known as the activist and other women representatives to a meeting in Warri. The gathering includes representatives of women farmers, fishers, traders, priestesses, chiefs, lawyers, lecturers, doctors and women of other occupations in the area.

Mrs. Taylor addresses the gathering by narrating and pointing out the shame and the loss their people experience as they kill themselves over common fishing nets that federal government gives them as compensation from the billions of dollar made from their land. She also says that, the gathering is also to discuss the very many issues that affect them as women, their husbands and children, since the exploration of oil in the land and then see what they can do as mothers to affect positive change in their society. She laments their plight and then she concludes using the following metaphorical expression: “The oil wealth is intoxicating the Federal Military Government and the oil companies and they are hurting the Niger Delta people in their lack of sobriety. But there is so much that we coastal people can do for permanent peace in our area” (218 – 219).
Amutor is the first to respond to Mrs. Taylor’s speech. Amutor is sixty – one years old but is still very young looking. She says that her own area of concern about the people of the Niger Delta is that, young women now find it difficult to conceive. Many other women contribute to this very fact and mark it one of the worst effects of environmental pollution in the area. Another woman observes that there are many cases of malformed babies these days than then. Matije is a woman who comes from Ekpan. She says:

What affects… our men also affects us women… Your husband may look well, but many of our men are now sick. Newly married young women complain openly about the weakness of their men; we older women see for ourselves what is happening. To be blunt about it, our husbands are losing their manhood at a very early age.

How can old men be stronger than younger men?” (220).

When the observation and narration of all the evil effects of oil and its pollution are over, the women calmly point out their need and map out plans on how their demands can be met by the oil explorers and government associates. Mrs. Taylor addresses them once more and states that Bell oil, the other oil companies and the FMG can make as much wealth as they want but they should be mindful of the fact that people live and will continue to live in these areas of oil installation. In their demands they state:

The communities of the oil – producing areas wanted to breathe fresh and clean air; they wanted to drink clean water; they also wanted to swim and fish in their streams and rivers. They did not want to eat fishes that harbored poison in them. They wanted to
farm their own crops to be self–reliant on food. They wanted to live a healthy life. And they wanted the damage already done to the environment to be treated seriously. Let the profiteers spend a fraction of their wealth to restore the environment, (223).

They set a coordinating committee to run and mobilize new members into the newly formed association. They appoint Mrs. Taylor their president and Ebi Emasheyi their secretary general and finally adopt WODEFOR as the acronym for the name of their new association known as Women of the Delta Forum.

In their plans; they will find a way to have a dialogue with the oil companies and persuade them to make amendments for pollution already caused on the land. They will equally address the military government about the situation in the area. This they know will be very difficult since the military do not have respect for anybody including women.

WODEFOR continue a peace processes until their delegates to the United Nation’s conference held in United States are sent back from the airport. They organize meetings and in dialogue they try their possible best to affect change. When the military government sends troops to shoot the students who are on peaceful demonstration over the negligence of the oil companies on the fire out break around the area, WODEFOR go into mourning and all the members wear black clothing and leave their hair unmade. This is a sign of non violent protest against the evil going on in the land. When all these are past, WODEFOR decide to take a catastrophic step against their oppressors.
3.4 Non-Violent Demonstration to Violent Demonstration

After the women’s non-violent demonstration over the killing of their children, in *God’s Bits of Woods*, the company’s white administrators call their black employees for a negotiation. Bakayoko shortly ends his account of the outcome of their meeting with the white employers and a small group of women led by Penda approaches the union’s delegates and immediately Bakayoko hears from them, he raises his hand calling for silence from the crowd in the union’s building saying: “Our gallant women have something to say to us”,… They have the right to be heard!” (254). Then Penda speaks:

I speak in the name of all the women, but I am just the voice they have chosen to tell you what they have decided to do . . . for women this strike still means the possibility of a better life tomorrow. We owe it to ourselves to hold up our heads and not to give in now. So we have decided that tomorrow we will March together to Dakar (254 – 255).

First, the crowd which is dominated by men, as usual murmur obviously in disapproval. Balla then expresses the opinion of many when he says: “I’m against letting the women go” (255). But Bakayoko interrupts the shout of disapproval and says on top of his voice:

We have no right to discourage anyone who wants to strike a blow for us… it may be just that blow that is needed. If the women have decided, all that is left for us to do is to help them. I move that the delegates from Dakar leave immediately to warn the local committee of their arrival (255 – 256).
The delegate from Dakar out rightly tells them that the journey from Thies to Dakar by foot is not what the women can try, considering the distance. Besides, the women of Dakar have been fighting both the police and military troops on the streets. For this, soldiers and militia are on patrol everywhere in Dakar. Therefore, “You would be sending those women straight into the jaws of a lion” (256). Bakayoko discards this advice and they go ahead with the plans to give the women necessary help when needed as they march on.

By two o’clock in the morning, all the women gather and Penda cries: “Now we are leaving … leaving … leaving” (257). Accompanied by echoes of hundred voices and the beating of drums, the multitude of women move out into the night. This movement is planned to be completed without a single violence. The women’s intention is just to move and let the world who watch them see for themselves what oppression and exploitation their men pass through in the hands of their employers and then judge for themselves. This march will continue peacefully until they get to Dakar, the capital city where the chief of the oppressors resides. There and then, they will lay their complaints before him. The women press on, singing and raising moral. As soon as one group allows the refrain to die, another picks it up and new songs are thrown up at intervals. Finally the day breaks and the sun comes behind them, beating ever hardly on their backs but they pay no attention to it. Penda, Mariama Sonko and Maimouna are at the head of this endless and scattered moving train of women. In the evening of their departure, they arrive at a small village. The inhabitants are bewildered at the sight of such multitude of women. They ask them questions and finally give them a cordial hospitality. They satisfy the thirsty and hungry women and their journey continues early the following morning. The second day
is just like the first one. A bus is moving from Thies to Dakar and some of the marchers as they are now referred to would perform some dance steps to the cheers of the commuters. This is to acknowledge the support of the travelers.

At about noon the third day, their fatigue begins to show. According to the narrator, “The sun upended its caldrons of live coals on the earth, and the movement of their knees and ankles became steadily more difficult and painful” (263). They trek for three days now without sufficient rest and feeding. The going gets tougher but they do not give up. The movement and singing and all the humour among the marchers, the narrator likens to “a river which having amassed all its strength to pass through a narrow gorge, spreads out and moves sluggishly when it has reached the plain, the troop of women straggled across the landscape” (263). A little group is reported to Penda that they can no longer go on. Penda assures the men who make the report that the group must move along. Penda gets back to the group which was reported they can no longer walk and urges them to get up and join the others. A certain woman called Awa tries to make a mess of Penda’s effort to lead them to Dakar but Penda applies force on her and makes her see reason. Awa later joins the rest and apologizes to Penda. The journey becomes very difficult for the women as most of them are now very tired from an endless walk. Penda continues to encourage them. Maimouna the blind woman is always at the head of the walk. She never complains even though she has her baby strapped across her back. Penda says to others “What a blind woman can do … the rest of you should be able to do!” (274).

Towards night fall, the women hear a joyful noise ahead of them: beating of drums and songs. The people of the nearby village are told of the arrival of the marchers
and the women of the village come out to meet them carrying water in pots, plates and jugs. The marchers finally enter the village and rams and sheep are slaughtered to welcome and celebrate the great women of valour, who take pains for the betterment of the whole people. In that village there is feast and merriment till dawn.

The next day the March continues, chattering and laughter return among the women. Towards the middle of the day, they see from a distance the island of Goree, the green expanse of the ocean and the remains of an American army camp. These are the signs of their approaching Dakar. Reaching the first buildings of Dakar suburbs, a little boy races on his bicycle and arrives at the little group at the head of the march. He says to them: “There are soldiers on the road at the entrance to the city. They say that, the women from Thies will not be allowed to pass” (276). Fear comes upon the crowd but Penda says to them:

The soldiers can’t eat us!... They can’t even kill us; there are too many of us! Don’t be afraid – our friends are waiting for us in Dakar! We’ll go on!

The long Multi–colored mass began to move forward again (276).

Shortly after, the women arrive the entrance gate of Dakar and here there is a confrontation; one that alters the trend of the movement. It is at this point that violence confronts the marchers but they are too many just as Penda earlier said, to be stopped by anybody. On getting to the guards on the entrance gate, the captain commanding the small troop of soldiers calls out to the marchers: “Go back to Thies, women: we cannot let you pass!” (277). But Penda sarcastically replies: “We will pass if we have to walk on the body of your mother!” (277).
And already the pressure of this human wall was forcing the soldiers to draw back. Reinforcements began to appear, from everywhere at once, but they were not for the men in uniform. A few rifle butts came up menacing and were beaten down by clubs and stones. The unnerved soldiers hesitated not knowing what to do, and then some shots rang out, and in the column two people fell – Penda and Samba N’ Doulougo.

But how could a handful of men in red tarbooshes prevent this great river from rolling onto the sea? (277).

So, Penda pays the utmost price. She dies a martyr. She dies in the struggle for the people’s freedom. The soldiers shoot at the women and they retaliate; throwing stones and tins which are no match to bullets in any sense. At this point, the peaceful march from Thies is combined with violence at the entrance gate of Dakar and it takes the life of Penda and Samba N’ Doulougo. So determined as the women are, they are not scared by this so they succeed and enter Dakar.

At Dakar people gather along the road to watch and others to welcome them. Among the spectators one asks. “Is it true they walked all that distance without food or water? The poor things – that’s more than the men could do” (287). Others wonder aloud what the women are coming to Dakar to do. Some say they are coming to the DC deputy to arrange with him about the strike. Others conclude the women are only playing politics and doing what is not their business. In fact they are all communists. But some others speak for the women saying: “But they aren’t doing anything except trying to help their husbands” (287). The women are finally welcomed in Dakar. An old woman who is
generally referred to as ‘Grandmother’ spreads a piece of cloth which she says is inherited from her own grandmother on the ground for the marchers to walk on. This is a most fascinating way of appreciating a visitor or an event. The marchers eat and drink to their satisfaction and finally they arrive at the N’ Dieyena compound where they are settled to rest.

Shortly after their arrival, they rest for some time and proceed to the field where there is going to be a meeting concerning the strike. This is a meeting of all the white employers and their black employees. A new deputy commissioner is posted to take over from the former and now he wishes to see to the matter at hand.

Going to the meeting, the women now join with those of Dakar, they march gallantly but non–violently carrying placards which read:

    EVEN BULLETS COULD NOT STOP US,… WE DEMAND FAMILY ALLOWANCES” (290).

As the meeting is going on, Bakayoko realizes, he may not be allowed to speak and knowing he is the only person who can speak the mind of the people, he instructs Alioune: “if they should try to stop me from speaking later on, round up some of the men – and especially the women – and tell them to shout like they have never shouted before!” (291). At last, he is allowed to and he speaks for the people and his speech gives birth to a general strike. The women go back to Thies, the following day.Ever since the great march which is now popularly known as the popular march, the women know no rest until victory is assured.
CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 LITERARY EVALUATION OF THE REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN ACTIVISM IN THE SELECTED TEXTS

Like other disciplines, Literature has its own elements known as literary devices. These devices must be considered in order to give a good account of any literary text. In literary appreciation, these elements are like the proverbial oil with which words are eaten. A good understanding of these devices enhances literary interpretation. This is to say that, a good understanding and interpretation of these elements in the selected texts enhances one’s comprehension of women activism as represented therein. Women activism is a sub-theme in these selected works and it can be analyzed under the following elements: Diction, Metaphor, symbolism, irony, simile and sarcasm.

4.1. Diction

Women activism is represented in the selected texts in the best choice of words and sentences. It is necessary to understand the themes and sub-themes of a literary work, but more necessary is the understanding of the diction of a text, since the themes and sub-themes are buried in the diction. A literary text is like an anecdote of which Opata states in his essay, “Towards a Theory of African Literature” that it has many layers of interpretation. It is the author’s choice of words that form the body of a literary text, while the arrangement of these words implies and suggests in most cases much more than is stated. This produces an ambiguity which opens the text for several interpretations. In short, diction represents the author’s imagination as well as guides the reader’s thought.
In Ousmane’s *God’s Bits of Wood*, the words are chosen within a literary setting, which is saturated in social discrimination and religious blatancy of which there is an oxymoron of humility and fearlessness resulting from the effect of Islamic religion and colonial grievances among the people. Human beings are referred to as the ‘god’s bits of wood’ in the following pages of the text; 62, 156 and 266. French, Islamic and vernacular languages are also combined in the text. This combination of languages helps the author to paint vividly the mind of the characters and bring his message closer to the reader.

Women activism is embarked on linguistic framework, which is worthy of understanding. Sounkare one of the women of Thies says that “…God loves to help him who strives to help himself (35): this statement has a religious connotation and of which the women believe and do practice by their several activities in the text. Some activities of the women are represented in carefully selected words that ordinarily would take more space to depict. For example: “in an instance there was pandemonium” (157). This is what happens when the women of Darka fight the police and the horsemen with fire. The activists are also described in wonderful adjectival statements like; “Our gallant women have something to say to us” (254)

Certainly, Ousmane’s diction is simple and comprehensive.

Ojaide is more spontaneous and direct in his choice of words. This is apparent in the representation of the all awaited nude protest. It is summed up in the following clause:

“It happened so fast, simultaneously” (251). There is also the use of Pidgin English in *The Activist*. This can be interpreted as the author’s stylistic method which is used in order to bring out the actuality in his characters. This is because the Niger Delta setting is
made up of three different tribes with different languages. The only common mode of communication is the Pidgin English. Ojaide’s diction is simple and direct. This makes the events and activities in the work so real and more like a historical documentation than a novel.

In *The Last of the Strong Ones*, Ezigbo chooses very simple words and sentences, simpler than those of Ojaide and Ousmane. It is more of transliteration than Standard English usage. In conveying her message, sometime she combines vernacular and English. In spite of the aesthetic value this kind of combination can give, it may pose some difficulty to a non Igbo reader who does not understand Igbo. Examples of such diction are: “Obiatu’s chi and Ejimnaka’s chi are good to them. They are wide awake, as our people say; one did not have to eat sand to enjoy the earth” (147).

Ezigbo also uses more of proverbs than Ousmane and Ojaide. Many of the proverbs in the novel help in building up the activities of the Umuada – Oluada, leaving them reasonably optimistic in the struggle. For example: “Our people say that it is the traveler who must make the return journey and not the owner of the land” (6). A toad does not run in the middle of the day without cause” (65). “It is said that, when a commoner wishes to criticize the king, he must wear the disguise of a masquerade” (67). “We must look for the black goat when it is still day light” (102).

Thus, the work is weave work full of transliteration and proverbs than the other two.
4.2. Metaphor

Certainly metaphor is one of the most intriguing elements of literature. This is because metaphor states as it implies but in most cases it implies but does not state. Whichever the case it appears, it is used for comparison. In order not to be worried about the confusing nature of metaphor, Abram M.H. advises: “the diverse accounts of metaphor need not be mutually exclusive, in that each is directed especially to a particular one of many kinds or function’s of metaphor”. (157). Metaphor like simile compares one thing to another, but differs from simile as it does not make use of ‘like and as’. It gives a situation where what is compared becomes what it is compared to.

Example (1) Obiatu is a lion. (2) Obiatu roars at his wives.

In *Gods Bits of Wood*, the women’s anger at some occasion is metaphorically described as such a furious situation which is capable of pushing one to commit murder or suicide, to this effect, the hatred in Ramatonlaye’s eyes after the killing of Vendredi “flames” (106). This means, the hatred is like fire. This level of hatred pushes Rama and the other women to fight the police not minding the bullets.

During the famous march to Dakar, the women do not find it easy considering the weather. On the third day of their departure, the sun descends on them and its density is metaphorically expressed as the following: “The sun upended its caldrons of live coals on the earth” (263). Under this heat of the sun, as hot as live coals, the women get weak and the journey terribly difficult. The sweat on their bodies is compared to a little river which “rolled down their faces and arms and necked thighs” (264). The multitude is compared to a great river of which a handful of men in red tarbooshes cannot prevent from rolling into the sea (277).
From the above, there is greatness in Ousmane’s use of metaphor and this does not just enrich the work but presents the activities of the women a scene to go through, over and over again.

In *The Activist*, Ojaide occasionally sounds metaphorical. During a visit to the Bell Oil Company by Chief Ishake the recalcitrant chief metaphorically refers to the other gullible chiefs as “… eating the leftovers from the company’s table” (163), and so were disgracing themselves. This statement implies that, other chiefs are like servants to the oil bosses and are eating the leftover from their bosses’ table. This statement is made in reference to the fact that these gullible chiefs refuse to join forces with their own people and fight for a more long lasting profit. Instead, they take any little amount given to them as bribe by these companies, and stand against their people. The bribe is the metaphoric ‘leftover’. The head of the FMG is also, metaphorically called a hyena for his wickedness and evil (211).

When the Women of Delta Forum (WODEFOR) gather for a solution to this problem in their land, the height of the wickedness of the oil companies and the FMG is summed in a metaphorical expression: “The oil wealth is intoxicating the Federal Military Government and the oil companies and they are hurting the Niger Delta people in their lack of sobriety” (218). This single statement kindles the fire in all the women present at this meeting. They all meditate and deliberate on this matter frantically and reach a conclusion. Conclusively, they decide, to take the bull by the horn.

In the analysis of women activism, metaphorical statements like the ones above have strong effects on the hearer just as motivational speeches. These metaphorical
expressions do not only motivate the women but also guide them in their struggle through a direct comparison of the enemy and the emerging situation.

Ezigbo, in *The Last of the Strong Ones* shows a high degree of metaphoric knowledge as metaphor proliferates from the beginning of the novel to the end. At the beginning of the work, metaphor is vigorously used in the description of the white man and his strange culture, his intrusion in Umuga affair, most importantly his dictatorship. Metaphor appears in strings in the praises of some characters and the ancestors. At the frequent gatherings of Umuada – Oluada, the Oluada are praised using some metaphorical expressions and these statements get the women elated and move the women to do more and prove themselves with such names as the tiger, the lioness, the eyes and the ears as they are often referred to in the work. In the first meeting of the Umuada, when twenty of them are selected to work with the men, the colonial masters are metaphorically compared to some unpleasant organism which infests the people of Umuga. “...before Kosiri infested us with their presence” (2). And because of this infestation, the people according to the narrator in the opening paragraph clamour to be left alone. In subsequent meetings of Oluada, there are always occasions when praise is showered upon a deserved activist, who happens to make a good suggestion concerning the struggle. Ejimnaka is praised by Chieme for making quite a reasonable point on how to eliminate Korisri. In her praises, Chieme address Ejimnaka as: “Lioness that leads the pack… the thundering tigress of Umuga (7). The above statements suggest that Ejimnaka is the leader of Umuada – Oluada and a very strong and fearless leader who is compared to a tigress and a lioness. Still as praise words, the narrator uses the following metaphorical: Dim Ezenduwisi, Eye that saw the shapes of spirit; Mgbeke Nwannediya,
Ears that heard the whispers of spirit, Ume Anunuebebe, Nose that knew the smell of spirits” (68). These statements are sharp comparative structures depicting some human qualities sensitive enough as that of the organs of the body.

4.3. Symbol

Symbol is anybody, object or action that represents beyond itself. In the earliest chapter of this work, nude protest is described to be capable of bringing calamity upon the oppressors of women. This implies that women are sacred beings in Africa. They are mothers and activists, they fight for their children.

In *The Activist*, women are symbols of the water goddess; in a riverine area like the Niger Delta, the water goddess is referred to as the goddess of the people, with big respect and honour. This is why the Activist who is the protagonist always refers to Ebi his wife as his Mamiwater (water goddess); the Activist is a man of high academic repute, and full of knowledge and civilization, but he adores Ebi his African woman more than his American lover. Ebi his Niger Delta woman is a symbol of the water goddess. She is dark caring and gentle. Above all, she is beautiful, just like maniwater. Ebi and all other women activists in the novel are symbols of the water goddess and not ordinary sex mates as the whites consider them.

The death of Mr. Van Hoort, the manager of Bell Oil and Gen. Mustapha Dango the head of the FMG symbolizes the end of tyranny in the Niger Delta. It symbolizes the end of oppression and marginalization of the people and also suggests a better future for the people of the Niger Delta. It is undoubtedly the calamity that results from the nude protest of the women as symbolic beings.
In *God’s Bits of Wood*, Beatrice’s death is quite symbolic according to the narrator. “At the sound of the shots, an echoing silence had fallen on the crowd, as if they had written a brutal ending to a long story whose climax, until then had been unknown. Even the drums were silent” (332). This short paragraph is a symbolic structure representing the end of a lasted war and also announcing the arrival of peace and freedom to the Senegalese workers. It is the calamitous result of the women’s several protests. Penda’s death is quite sacrificial and thus symbolizes savior of the people.

Ezeigbo symbolizes evil and trouble in Umuga, using climatic conditions:

“All was not well with the land. The sky was overcast with heavy clouds and the rumbles of thunder echo the chaos that threatened Umuga (1). In one of the Obuofo meetings, it is obvious that their efforts to get rid of Kosiri are not going to be fruitful. There is a quarrel between Abazu and Onyekozulu which leads to a sudden end of the meeting. This according to the narrator is, “dark clouds threatening the oneness of obuofo” (08). This incidence is symbolic in the sense that disunity and quarrel can tear the people apart and victory is not assured. The church building and the school are symbols of the white men in Umuga. This is why the burning of these two buildings is the worst crime committed by the stubborn Umuga people and so, it attracts the white man’s anger immediately.

4.4 Simile

The use of ‘like’ and ‘as’ is numerous in comparing the strength of the women and the nature of their activities at different occasions. In *God’s Bits of Wood*, Isnard fires at the crew, kills two of them and the women as the mothers of these dead children go on protest, swearing and cursing the killers of their children. The words of the women are
compared thus: “As they passed before the houses of the European employees, their fury reached a screaming peak… a torrent of oaths and insults bust from their throats like water through a shattered dam” (222). When Ramatoulaye attacks Vendredi, her speed is “like an avenging fury” says the narrator (96). The response of the women is “like so many echoes” when hundreds of them respond to Penda at the onset of their march to Darka (257). The marchers are compared to a sluggish moving river in the desert using “like” (263). The essence of this kind of comparison is to show the effort of the women, the degree and height of power pulled in cause of the struggle.

In Ezeigbo’s The Last of the Strong Ones, The colonial effect on the land of Umuga is compared to a ‘rain – bearing wind’ which sweeps through the land. This change in Umuga like rain bearing wind prompts Umuada into activism even though non violent.

During Umuga women action, Adanma and other women “Cry like termite to strong light” (73). “Like the ears of an elephant their breasts flap as they run”. (73) These comparisons give a vivid description of events represented in the text. In one of their meetings, the narrator who is also a member of Umuada admonishes Chieme to “Feed our gluttonous ears, that gobble tales as a tiger devours flesh” (74). This is using ‘as’ to compare the attention of these women in listening to the strength of a tiger devouring flesh. This is to say that the women pay utmost attention in order to get every bit of the information.
4.5 Sarcasm

Sarcasm is a literary device which is used to hurt the person addressed. Sarcasm is like irony but the difference is that sarcasm is more vulgar in the mockery it produces than irony. A sarcastic statement can annoy the addresser to an unforgivable point. Sarcasm aggravates one, it mocks one, it motivates one and it encourages or discourages one with the venom of its vulgarism. Sarcastic statements attract hatred upon the user since the addressee would hardly forgive the addresser.

In God’s Bits of Wood, the sarcastic nature of the following statement “Go and make yourself white and you can have ten minutes too” (204) according to the text, is difficult for the addressee Doudou to control his anger and yet the humiliation does not leave him. The white man who speaks to a black in this manner knows fully well that the black man can never make himself white. So, Doudon should stop longing for what is beyond his reach.

During the popular march to Darka, Penda the prostitute tells some of the women, “Some of you sluts go and piss!” (272). It is very vulgar of Penda to call married women sluts. Towards their arrival at Darka, the soldiers shout at the women to go back but Penda in her nature replies; “We will pass, if we have to walk on the body of your mother!” (277). On this note, it is interesting to know that, at the sound of few shots, Penda is one of the two that die. Penda’s reply is considered sarcastic because, first it is ironical that an ordinary woman could summon the courage to talk to soldiers on guard and then, her tune and the mentioning of the soldier’s mother in such an abusive context is quite enough to provoke these soldiers to a shooting point.
In Ojaide’s *The Activist*, An immigration officer who interrogates the Niger Delta delegates to United Nation’s Conference says to them: “Did your foreign sponsors not tell you what you needed to do” (235)? This is quite cynical and sarcastic because, the delegates do not have any foreign sponsors.

In *The Last of the Strong Ones*, there is no confrontation of the two parties, which can arouse anger which is the bearer of sarcastic expressions. The white man never came in contact with the people. He uses divide and rule, sends his delegates who then pass his message across to the people. So the battle all through is by implication among the blacks, who constitute the people and Kosiri’s representatives. This does not provide the room for Kosiri to at least get in return some verbal blows such as sarcasm for all his atrocities in the land. Peace and respect in the land remain until after the war. Colonization comes in properly and rudeness and vulgarism become the order of the day. For instance,

When Ejimnaka sees a boy stealing in the broad daylight, she demands from the boy what he is doing. The boy rudely replies: “You can see what am doing” (169). As if this is not enough, he sarcastically says “I am harvesting these pods” (169). This rudeness annoys Ejimnaka so much that she loses control of herself and in an effort to teach the boy a lesson, she falls from the tree and dies. This is an obvious representation of the effect of sarcasm: an uncontrollable fury that leads to a disastrous end.

### 4.6 Irony

The representation of women activism is a sub-theme in the selected texts and is quite ironic as it takes the centre stage in conflict resolution. In support of this, it is interesting to know that none of the women activists is presented as a protagonist or an
antagonist. The women are all minor characters. To this effect, women activism appears as a situational irony in all the texts, since situational irony violates the reader’s expectation. In literary criticism, it may be expected that major conflicts like the ones found in the selected texts should be tackled and resolved by the protagonist or any of the major characters in the work. This in most cases would agree with the reader’s expectation. But this agreement is violated as the texts are further explored.

In *God’s Bits of Wood*, Bakayoko is the protagonist and the main activist in the work, but the women are at the forefront of the battle. The women are more dedicated and determined to affect change themselves and not to use anybody. It is the women who fight with their blood and finally conquer the European employers. It is therefore ironic that Bakayoko depends and believes in the power of the women to win a war he and the other men started without consulting the women at first.

In this work, Bakayoko is the strength behind the people while Lahbib is the brain behind them (256). In the long run, their ‘strength’ and their ‘brain’ are not good enough to earn them victory until the women come in and through many activities bring positive change to the entire people.

In *The Activist*, the reader’s expectation is also violated: the men start the fight; the Activist, the chiefs, and the Egba boys with all their physical and spiritual powers are unable to get rid of the tyrants until the women come together and not only remove these wicked men but bring death upon them.

In all, the application of these literary elements enriches the textuality of these works and makes them quite interesting to study. It helps in the comprehension and interpretation of these texts and motivates a reader to go through some pages more than
once, as he or she tries to grasp their underlying meanings. Representation of women activism deserves vivid description of the activists, the nature and form of their activities and their achievements: to achieve such literary goal, literary devices must be paid adequate attention.

Ojaide applies situational irony in the same sense as Ousmane does. The Activist who is the Protagonist travels all the way from the United States to his home town for the purpose of saving his people and their land from the hands of oil explorers who pollute and damage the environment for their own profit. On arriving at the Niger Delta, he sees that the situation is already out of hand, and for this, he never summons courage to come face to face with these oil drillers, instead he hides his face and indulges in some unworthy and criminal acts in the name of “attack” which he says is a major principle of activism. The women take up the mantle of activism and within a short time; “The women’s thoughtful planned action was fulfilled cosmically – they brought down tyrants that their men failed to remove: the two tyrants that tormented the Niger Delta people were gone” (253)! From the above quotation, it is a situational irony that ‘Activist’ the protagonist cannot bring down the tyrants but the women. Therefore, the protagonist who goes by the name ‘Activist’ is not the real activist but the women, ironically. Generally, a good reading of these texts would reveal that women from the onset are not part of the conflict, nor are they consulted by their men while embarking on a disagreement with their oppressors.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This research has created a balance between the old retrogressive sexist and sarcastic representation of women and the later radicalism of feminine representation. Women activism in this research is not antagonistic to men. It is indeed a selfless, nationalist movement of both educated and none educated –cum- religious and traditional women of their different times and societies. Sembene’s women are of Islamic uneducated class but they are superb, courageous and great achievers. Ojaide’s are of both the educated and traditional classes and this makes them more intelligent and smart. Ezigbo’s Oluada-Umuada are all traditional. They are meek and steadfast in their struggle, so highly philosophical that Chieme one of the two surviving Oluada after the war notes that moral colonization is worse than economic and political ones. She rallies the other women and admonishes them to change their fighting strategy from physical one to a moral one. By so doing, the memory of their tradition will never depart from them. The women go on despite the surrender of their people to colonialism, and remind the people especially the youths that the visitor will definitely leave one day and their culture will remain. So they should not be robbed of their tradition and values, for a people who are robbed of their culture and traditional values are gone forever.

Through the thematic sub-headings of chapter three, the forms and the nature of women activism in African literature are revealed. Women activism could be violent, non-violent or taboo anchored. Through the analysis of the selected works, the researcher discovered that the nude protest is a traditionally oriented protest and she calls it ‘taboo anchored activism’. Of each of these forms of women activism, none could be deemed
more effective than the others since in *God's Bits of Wood*, the women only sing and beat drums and Beatrice commits suicide. In *The Activist* the women go on nude protest and two weeks after, the two tyrants die. It is only in *The Last of the Strong Ones* that we do not see an immediate result of women activism though it is observed that their struggle endures.

Literary devices used by the selected authors in their portrayal of women activism are also given some critical attention. These devices include diction, metaphor, symbol, irony, simile and sarcasm. Symbol is the most used of all the listed devices and the researcher believes that this may be as a result of the authors’ understanding of the representations under discourse. Women activism in *The Activist* symbolizes death, in *God’s Bits of Wood*, it symbolizes a brutal ending to a war which has lasted for so long. In *The Last of the Strong Ones*, Oluada- Umuada is the custodian of the people’s culture and their movements symbolize evil and unrest in the entire clan.

In conclusion, this is a purely liberal feminist work in which the marginalization and the oppression of the entire people becomes the progenitor of women activism: the struggle in which lives are laid for otheas. Panda and Houdia M’ Baye die in the struggle in *God’s Bits of Wood*, Ejimnaka and Onyekaozula also die in *The Last of the Strong Ones* while in *The Activist* many women experience rape which is even worse than death in the boat from the venue of the nude protest. Therefore, this type of activism actually embraces other literary theories like Marxism and post colonialism as major African concern,
WORK CITED


Ibibiem-Green, Eldred “Femi Osofisan’s Women in Morotodun and Other Plays”


Munford, patricia.uk activist: http//www.blog.activist.uk/the jungle.htm


“The Concept of Activism” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Activism. 22nd Dec., 2010