

## PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

### Surviving Adversity: Resilience of African Women in Selected Short Stories

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**Ruthie Liza R. Lapinig, Gemarie E. Baquiller: Surviving Adversity: Resilience of African Women in Selected Short Stories -- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 17(9). ISSN 1567-214x**

**Keywords: African women, facing adversity, resilient women, empowering and inspiring women**

#### ABSTRACT

African women have gone through a lot of adversities but despite their sad history, they have become the epitome of resilience. This study examined how women in selected African short stories showed resilience in spite their various struggles. The African short stories that were analyzed in the study are: *Girls at War* by Chinua Achebe, *Minutes of Glory* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o, *The Lovers* by Bessie Head, *The Rain Came* by Grace A. Ogot, and *Heavy Moments* by Ama Ata Aidoo. Textual analysis of the stories yielded the following results: majority of the female characters in the stories had experienced monetary crisis, female characters' other sources of physical and mental stress were traditions, gender inequality, and identity crisis, and most of them showed negativity as their initial reaction when faced with their problems, but in the end, they bounced back and accepted their situation. Thus, most of these women though plagued with money woes and stressed by too many traditional rituals and inequalities still relied on their own strength and embraced the situation they were in. They had the courage to pursue their decisions, letting go of fear, practicing patience, and using their own adversity to help them become stronger. The empowering stories of these African women can inspire women who are facing adversity anywhere in the world. In using short stories of women who are also experiencing misfortune in other countries, this study will contribute to future research on related topics.

#### 1. Introduction

African women are among those who have been through a lot of hardships and struggles. An online news headline "From dawn to dusk, the daily struggle of Africa's women" reports that "Women work two-thirds of Africa's working hours, and produce 70 percent of its food, yet earn only 10 percent of its income, and own less 1 percent of its property. They work three hours a day longer than the average British woman does on professional and domestic work combined." (Vallely, 2006) Inasmuch as these women are underpaid and suffer

from financial problems, the issue of racism is also another struggle that these women have to bear.

Souza (1990) as cited in Prestes (2013) describes what a colored woman has to go through, “To know oneself as a black woman is to live through experience of having been massacred in your identity, confused in your views, submitted to demands and forced to adopt alien expectations. But it is also, and above all, the experiences of committing yourself to reclaiming your history and recreating yourself in your potential.”

Alice Walker (1994), in her essay “In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens”, mentioned the poet Jean Toomer who saw how African women suffered: “They lay vacant and fallow as autumn fields, with harvest time never in sight: and he saw them enter loveless marriages, without joy; and become prostitutes, without resistance; and become mothers of children, without fulfilment.”

Survival stories of women inspire, bring positivity and help bring hope to readers. These stories make others see what they have not seen. These stories help others understand more about life and the things that make life worth living. According to Aptheker (1989) women’s stories are very important because these stories “locate women’s culture, women’s ways of seeing; they designate meaning, make women’s consciousness visible to us.” Stories transform our experiences into ways of knowing – about ourselves as women and about ourselves as women looking at the world. Moreover, Cultural Feminism suggests that women’s ways should be highlighted and celebrated because their ways are better than men’s. Moreover, it points out that men and women have personality and biological differences and that women are “gentler” and “kinder” compared to men (Dobbie, 2014).

Specifically, the study is aimed to answer the following questions: (1) What are the struggles encountered by the female protagonists? What are the ways and means done by the female protagonists in facing their struggles? Through the ways done for the protagonist to survive, what attitude is displayed? (2) What gender issues are present in each story?

The five (5) selected African Short Stories that were textually analyzed in this study were:

- (1) “*Girls at War*” by Chinua Achebe
- (2) “*Minutes of Glory*” by Ngugi wa Thiong’o,
- (3) “*The Lovers*” by Bessie Head
- (4) “*The Rain Came*” by Grace A. Ogot
- (5) “*Heavy Moments*” by Ama Ata Aidoo

### **Girls at War**

“Girls at War” is a short story written by Chinua Achebe (1973), one of Africa’s most famous writer, who uses stories and experiences of a character to illustrate problems in the society. In this short story, Achebe presented the ravages and effects of the Nigerian Civil war (also referred to as the Biafran war). In this story, Ogede (2011) points out that Achebe captures how the elites can gain profit when there is war that they don’t even want it to end. Also, the story characterizes women who are “at war” literally and figuratively. Because

of death and starvation, some women in the story let their bodies be used by men in exchange of food and money that the drunken Red Cross man in the story made a very offending comment about the women in the village – “Even these girls who come here all dolled up and smiling, what are they worth? Don’t I know? A head of stock-fish, that’s all, or one American dollar and they are ready to tumble into bed.” Though the comment is rude and offensive but what he said is actually the “bitter truth” according to Reginald Nwankwo (a Biafran officer of the Ministry of Justice) and a friend. “War sickness” is indeed present during those awful days of war – girls become “simply too easy.”

One of these women who are at war is the major character of the story, Gladys. It is interesting to note that in the story, her African name is not mentioned (or she might not have any African name). She doesn’t have a family name. Although her name is very plain yet personality speaks of the opposite. She is described by Nwankwo’s point of view as “a beautiful girl in a breasty blue jersey”, “a beauty queen”, and “had such a beautiful faith in the struggle...” Moreover, she fits the cliché “not just a pretty face.” When Reginald said “I broke my rule today to give you a lift” she made a very brave and a well-thought-of reply – “Thank you for breaking your rule for me” instead of apologizing. Reginald also observes Gladys’ “way of conveying with few words or even a single word which has whole layers of meaning” – only a girl who has wit can do such.

The writer characterizes Gladys as a dynamic character. Her change of character is rapid. Nwankwo thinks that Gladys change “was a terrible transformation in the short period of less than two years!” Gladys who was once a simple girl in khaki jeans “who searched without mercy at the checkpoint, no wig, and no earrings” has become “very attractive”– “she now wore a high-tinted wig and very expensive skirt and low-cut blouse, her shoes must have cost a fortune” which Nwankwo hints that it was a sure sign that “she had to be in the keep of some well-placed gentleman, one of those piling up money out of the war.” Her complete transformation was driven by the fact that “time done pass.... everybody wants survival.” Gladys portrays humanity’s weakness – no matter how strong a person is, when everyday she hears her stomach groan because of hunger and smells the stench of death, she should give in or else she will die. She became the woman who does what men want her to do in order to survive. She learned to dance with the music in a place devastated by war where “girls became girls once more and boys boys.”

Gladys was a “mirror reflecting a society that had gone completely rotten and maggoty at the center.” But Reginald Nwankwo, who was attracted to Gladys believes that all she needed “was a clean duster” – since the mirror is still intact but only a “lot of smudge is there.” He feels that he has a duty to help her be that clean mirror again. He believes that Gladys is still different from other girls and that she was just under circumstances that she cannot control that is why she transformed. He believes that one day, she will be restored. She represents the women during the Nigerian civil war. The problems and challenges that Gladys encounters in the story are the same with what women

encounters during the civil war. The story gives every reader an insight of how difficult life was during the war that women has to compromise between what is moral and what is not just to survive.

Judging Gladys based on her transformation would be very unfair. Although she made the wrong decision in her life – using her body in order to survive, in the end she became a hero. She risked her own life just to save another being. She might have been an immoral woman, but she did not neglect her moral obligation in helping the soldier who cried for help “Please come and open for me!” Gladys is an epitome of an individual in a society whom others see as immoral unknowingly that deep down inside is a big heart who feels for others. The story has a tragic end. The soldier that Gladys helped died also. Nwankwo “saw the remains of his car smoking and the entangled remains of the girl and the soldier.” Here Achebe ended the story with few lines...”and he let out a piercing cry and fell down.” Nwankwo’s spirit was broken when he saw that Gladys died. His vision of helping Gladys restore back to be that clean mirror again has come to an end. She died being the mirror “who needs a clean duster.” She didn’t get the chance to go back to that “beautiful girl in a breasty blue jersey, khaki jeans and canvas shoes” the girl who is not “owned” by anyone and who stood for what is right.

Gladys died a hero. She might be an unsung hero for Nwankwo and his driver might not talk about her heroism to others yet the soldier that she helped died thinking of her as one. Her bravery will always be remembered by Nwankwo and his driver.

### **Minutes of Glory**

“Minutes of Glory” is written by the African novelist, essayist, playwright, journalist, editor, academic and social activist, Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1985). The story lets the readers see the happenings during the transition period from colonialism to post-colonialism.

This short story is mainly about Beatrice’s life who is always at war with herself. She works in a beer hall. The beginning of the story tells the readers that Wanjiru is her name “but she liked better her Christian one, Beatrice. Her name which “sounded more pure and more beautiful, doesn’t complement with her outside appearance – “not that she was ugly; but she could not be called beautiful either”, also, she does not possess a gorgeous body. Her unattractive personality became one of the factors why she became “a wounded bird in flight” – she became jobless, hopping from one bar to another. She lives her life in discontentment. She becomes unhappy of her existence.

Readers may find Beatrice as somewhat a flawed character because of her dissatisfaction in life, her sullen attitude to other bar girls, and most of all her lack of self-identity; however, Beatrice is just a lonely character who wished to have a decent job, to be recognized, to be respected, to be loved, and, in the end, she became brave and learned to embrace the reality.

Beatrice’s dissatisfaction in life is a major aspect of her character which persists throughout the story. She left home because “she had led a life with a different rhythm from that of her parents.” Her parents were poor and so she

was not able to go to school. Life back in their hometown is difficult. She was so desperate to find a job which leads her to the decision to go to the city with the man in dark suit and sunglasses who promised her a better life in the city. She sleeps with him and in the morning, the man was gone along with his promises. She ended up working as a bar girl. It seems that she is dissatisfied with everything including her skin color that is why she decided to apply a skin-lightening cream, Ambi. She applied it “with a vengeance.” She thinks that she gets noticed if her skin becomes white. The middle part of the story tells the readers of Beatrice’s wanting to go back to her hometown. Her life becomes miserable that her relationship to other bar girls has not been good. She decided to “adopt a sullen attitude” since “she saw in every girl a rival” especially Nyaguthii. Her sullenness was the result of her envy to other girls who “had more than a fair share of admirers.” “She was always a hard-up customer’s last resort.” She is invisible to almost everyone. How people treated Beatrice adds up to her problem of self-identity. Beatrice’s world as seen in her point of view is a world full of negativities. She doesn’t have a full view of the optimistic lens of life since she is “a wounded bird in flight: a forced landing now and then but nevertheless wobbling from one place to another.” She was not able to soar high in everything she does. She is always treated as nobody. Beatrice struggled to find a decent job since she was not able to get a degree. Every time she applies for a job, she was denied due to the fact that she does not know how to type or take a shorthand. The very reason why she landed in the city becoming a bar girl is her desperation to have a decent job. If only she has the money, she can buy the things that she wants. “She longed for a bar-kingdom where she would be at least one of the rulers, where petitioners would bring their gifts of beer, frustrated smiles and often curses that hid more lust and love than hate.”

Just like a typical woman, Beatrice longs for respect, recognition, and love. “But none cared for her as she would have liked, none really wanted her enough to fight over her.” “She wanted love; she wanted life” – the very reason why she did not submit herself to the owner of the bar she worked for. “She had a horror of soliciting lovers or directly bartering her body for hard cash.”

Although Beatrice tends to have wrong choices, she learns to become self-reflective. She found answers to the questions that she frequently asks herself “What is it that they have that I don’t have?” “She took that need for a man, for a home and for a child with her to bed and it was this genuine need that scared off men who wanted other things from barmaids.” Beatrice’s poor choices could be the result from her life’s series of unfortunate events. All throughout the story, she never had a wonderful experience. She doesn’t get a positive comment except when the owner of the bar wants to sleep with her. She was never given a word of sincere appreciation. She was like a plant which was not watered. She was thirsty of being appreciated. Her “fifteen minutes of glory” quenched her thirst.

Perhaps, readers of the story will say that Beatrice is an unusual protagonist since her life is full of mistakes. Because of her bad decisions, she encounters lots of problems. She stole the money of the man who drives a lorry just to

satisfy her thirst of becoming the girl that she wants to be. Everything in her seems to be a mistake and why should she be the protagonist?

Beatrice in the end became a hero. It was because of those fifteen minutes of glory that the man who drives a lorry was accepted for the first time. People listened to him attentively when he related to him the whole story of how Beatrice stole his money. Her mistake became a blessing to this man who was accepted for the first time.

The ending is unlikely for a protagonist, “The policeman went and handcuffed her. She did not resist. Only at the door she turned her head and spat. Then she went out and followed by the policeman.” Her action clearly speaks of her disgust to the people’s idea of beauty (she spat). She knows what she did is wrong, but she knows that those people and she are just the same. Those ladies pretending to be beautiful are deep inside a bunch of Beatrices who are also lonely. They are lucky enough they get to have their job so they could put on their make-up and pretend to be beautiful just like what Beatrice did when she got her fifteen minutes of glory. The last part might not be called a happy one, but it is in the end that Beatrice stood up for what she believes the last thing she needs to do in order for her to truly accept her identity. She might not be “in glory” all the time but she knows that the glory that every girl in the bar receives is superficial. After all, what men want from these girls is just their bodies and these ladies want money in return. Beatrice doesn’t want that. She wants true affection and she knows that she cannot get that in that kind of place. That is why she decided to break herself free from false hopes while working in the bar. She chose to be imprisoned and leave the bar world full of pretentious and corrupt people.

Beatrice, despite the negative things that happened to her, she did not choose to curl up and die. She stands up and sees what she can do to make her life better. And in doing such, she used her fifteen minutes of glory to define herself and put an end to her illusions. She learns to accept her identity; she finally embraces her true self.

### **The Lovers**

African traditions in the past such as arranged marriage has left scars in the hearts of African people. Women and men alike suffer from unwanted marriages; piercing the hearts of those who love another but are under tradition should marry the one who is arranged for them, such as the case in the story *The Lovers* by Bessie Head (2011). “My father would never have married her had he had his choice” were the words of Keaja expressing how the tradition of arranged marriage has left his father no choice but to follow. Keaja’s mother has not been happy with his father that she also made his life miserable when they were newly married. Considering the strong patriarchal society, women are the ones who suffer most and to add up their custom of monogamy, men gets to have many wives while women learn to accept that they are not the only ones who will have the love and attention of their husband and would therefore practice the culture of silence. Running away from the tradition is punishable and is considered a curse – death, sickness and misfortune. The whole village

will suffer from the curse. Bessie Head's main character in *The Lovers* is Tselana who is under the bondage of arranged marriage.

Tselane cannot help but admire the young man who helped her get the thorn which was stuck on her foot while she gathers firewood in the mountains. It is during that time when she gets to have a closer look at him although it was prohibited in their culture for men and women to get close especially the young and unmarried ones. She feels a sense of security when she was with him. It was during that time when she first senses that the young man is special to her. As the story continues, Tselane and Keaja fell in love with each other but they keep it a secret since it is against their tradition to choose the one that they should love. But their secret was not at all a secret when Tselane got pregnant. Keaja wants to marry Tselane but both were not arranged to marriage. It was such a shame to their household that Tselane is pregnant. Keaja and Tselane have not seen each other for a time while both their families were still talking about the problem they have gotten into. "It is no light matter to break custom." According to the mother of Tselane, once you break the custom, you must pay it with your own life. As the days passed by, both parents of Tselane and Keaja have come up to a solution. The lovers should remove themselves temporarily from the community and would come back when the anger of the community people will die down. Through all those suffering that Tselane has undergone, the pain of not seeing Keaja for a couple of days, her silence, and all the anger she felt around her did not break her down. She obeyed all the things said by her parents and waited for the day when she and Keaja will be reunited once again. That day came when they were scheduled to temporarily leave and so they were reunited. They walked far away from their community and they did not return.

Tselane chooses to break their custom and live up to what she believes should be – the right to be married to the one she loves. She was able to undergo emotional hardships throughout the days that she keeps her relationship with Keaja a secret. When she gets pregnant, she doesn't have someone to talk to aside from Keaja, but she stands strong believing deep in her heart that Keaja would fulfil what he promised to her "I am not planning for death when we are so happy. I want it that we should live." She believes in his plan. Although physically she feels weak because of her pregnancy, this did not stop her from choosing life and love. Despite the "week of raging storms and wild irrational deliberations which was first a family affair then turned out to be public affair which would bring ruin and disaster upon the community and public anger was high," Tselane learned to dance in the rain. Despite the pain she felt and the outrage of the whole family and community, she was able to stand up and choose the one she loves.

Another African short story character who encounters challenges in the face of tradition is Oganda in Grace A. Ogot's *The Rain Came*. The story shows the tradition of Luo people before the European introduced their ways.

One of the traditions of Luo people in Africa is the practice of human sacrifice. In the story, Oganda is the only daughter of the village chief who is destined to be offered to the lake monster in order for their village to have rain. It was

Nditi, the medicine man who pronounced to the village what they should do in order for them to have rain. “A young woman who has not known a man must die so that the country may have rain.”

### **The Rain Came**

The tradition of human sacrifice is very popular even at present. Human sacrifice has been practiced for those who still believe in the tradition and are in search of wealth, children and other personal reasons. They believe that the spirits to whom they will offer the human heart or blood will give their request. In like manner, in “The Rain Came” by Grace Ogot (2005), the tribe of Oganda believes that the spirits of their ancestors will appear to the medicine-man and will give him the direction of how they will be able to get what they want. They should obey what the ancestor has said or else the whole village will suffer or worst, they will die.

In Oganda’s village, being chosen as the tribute or the sacrifice is an honor. When the village people knew that Oganda is the sacrifice, they congratulate her and bring her gifts. Questions after questions came to Oganda’s mind. “If they really loved her as they had always professed, why were they not sympathetic? Why were they not making any attempt to save her? Did her people really understand what it felt like to die young?” Oganda feels she doesn’t belong to their village. She felt deprived of her youth. She envies the young girls who danced during her farewell celebration for they will soon be married and have their own children. Despite the questions that run on her mind, she blindly obeyed what was asked by the village for her to do. Her route going to the lake where she will offer herself in exchange of rain is quite far. Along the way, she felt afraid because of the noises she heard. She also tried to imagine the lake monster who would soon devour her. She cannot help but draw in her mind its size and shape. There was an eerie feeling that Oganda felt. But she has to offer herself to save the whole tribe. She did not mind her fear. She did not mind the noise. Although she felt that something is following her and it might be the lake monster, she was still determined to offer herself. At this point, Oganda tried to be strong because “she remembered that she had to fulfill the wish of her people.”

Oganda’s ability to face her death just to save the whole tribe shows her resilience to such difficult situation. Although being resilient doesn’t mean to say the absence of fear. It is the ability to stand despite the difficult situation even death. Oganda shows her resilience by becoming the tribute of their tribe to the lake monster. She was able to adapt to the situation instead of running away from it. Although in the end Osinda rescues Oganda and convinced her to “run away from the wrath of the ancestors and the retaliation of the monster,” her act of willingly submitting herself to the lake monster by going to the lake displays resilience. Oganda might think that she is not a hero because she was not able to give herself to the lake monster, but the village people will fully believe that Oganda is a hero since their wish came true – the rain came.



### Heavy Moments

Opposite to African women characters in short stories who are given little opportunity, *Heavy Moments* by Ama Ata Aidoo (2002) is a story of a woman who learns how to fly an airplane. Aidoo dedicates this story to the women who “first dared to join the Ghana Air Force.”

*Heavy Moments* is an inspiring story of Akuba Baidoo, the main character, who grows up to be a strong woman despite her family and financial problems. She made her way to the Air Force Academy. She “had been born flying except that in her environment, no one had known that except herself.” She worked hard for her to be there in the Academy. It was in those times when it was very unlikely for a woman to be trained as a pilot or even for a woman to wear pants. Akuba was so driven to get an education and to fly planes.

Akuba’s family life was not a happy one. His real father died while she was still in her mother’s womb. His father was not allowed to get married to her mother because her mother’s relatives did not like him that was why his father was so frustrated, he drank himself to death. Akuba’s mother met someone and married him. Her mother’s marriage separated Akuba from her mother because her step dad didn’t like her around the house. That was why she was sent to her aunt, Mam’ Panyin (Mampa), and uncle, Man’Panyin. She is often ridiculed for not having real parents. When she is in her village, she is often laughed at because of her “funny town ways” and when she is in town, she will be laughed at for being a “bush” or a “villager”. She feels she does not belong to the ground. “Skies had to be better.”

Her childhood days have never been easy. Growing up without parents is very discouraging. She could have been among those children who were not able to go to school. Her determination brought her to her dreams. Her mother who is also a believer in education was the one who influenced her to get an education.

There has been a gender issue in Akuba’s chosen profession. According to Akuba’s aunt, if the people will know that the former is going to learn to drive a lorry, a taxi or a bus, “they would think it is strange, but brave enough for a woman but driving a plane wouldn’t make people believe.” The captains in the Academy could not also believe that Akuba and her female classmate made it to the Academy. They tried making them feel as if they never exist in school.

The captains were astounded when they knew that among the best student are Akuba and her female classmate. They have their respect when they knew that they were among the top. During her test flight, Akuba is very nervous but she tries to calm herself – “She bit her lips. Her hands were shaking, and she soon began to sweat. She told herself not to be silly.” In her mind she needs to give her very best since the opportunity given to her might not be given again if she fails. Flying a plane is a risky task. “You took such chances only with the best of the cadets, since you had to be able to guarantee success on about 90% probability.”

The obstacles that came to Akuba’s life did not pull her down; she strives hard for her dreams to come true. Despite the crisis in her life, she did her best to be accepted in the Academy and be one of the first women who fly planes. Her

aunt was there when she did her first test flight. When she was done with her task, she was admired by everyone. Everybody clapped their hands. It was a sweet success for Acuba especially her Mampa was there to celebrate it with her.

## 2. Problems encountered by the female protagonist

In this study, the five short stories were chosen as the specific texts. Through textual analysis, the problems encountered by the female protagonists were identified and categorized as following: financial problems, relationship problems, identity problems, harmful cultural practices and gender inequality.

**Table 1. Textual Analysis on the Problems Encountered by the Female Protagonists**

Female Protagonist	Problems
1. Gladys (Girls at War)	financial problem brought about by war
2. Beatrice (Minutes of Glory)	financial & identity problems
3. Tselane (The Lovers)	relationship problems due to tradition
4. Oganda (The Rain Came)	Harmful practices (tradition)
5. Akuba (Heavy Moments)	financial problems, gender inequality

### 1.1. Financial Problem

Among the five female protagonists of the selected short stories, three (3) are identified with having financial problems. These female protagonists are Gladys, Beatrice, and Akuba.

Gladys and other characters in the story “Girls at War” face the ravages of war. It was during those days that money problem is everyone’s problem. Women are seldomly employed in high paying jobs. Most of the women landed on bars where they entertained men. Most of the women sell their bodies in exchange of money. This situation is what the story called as “war sickness”. At first, Gladys joined in the militia but later decided to be just like everybody to sustain her needs.

Beatrice in “Minutes of Glory” also faces the same dilemma of financial woes. She worked in a bar to sustain her needs. In fact, she went away from their home to improve her life since her parents were very poor. She thought that moving to the city will make her life more convenient, only to find out that it wasn’t what she thought would be.

Akuba in “Heavy Moments” faced financial problems since childhood. When her father died, her mother married someone who is financially stable. Her stepfather didn’t like him around and wanted to get rid of her. Her mother was not able to do something to convince her stepfather to make her stay. From then on, Akuba lived with her aunt and uncle. They helped her with her financial needs although they were not very rich.

### 1.2. Gender inequality

Akuba in “Heavy Moments” experienced humiliation and degradation by his male student pilot classmates. She and her female classmates were not given much welcome in their school since during those times, it is uncommon for a woman to learn how to drive a plane.

### 1.3. Identity Problem

Beatrice in “Fifteen Minutes of Glory” felt it difficult to accept who she is. She regarded herself as unattractive that is why no man chooses her in the bar. She tried applying skin care products that could make her skin white. It was during those times when colonial mentality of having white skin was also present.

### 1.4. Relationship Problem

Tselane in “The Lovers” is against arranged marriage. She wanted to marry the man she loves but their tradition of arranged marriage made it impossible for her to do that. She met someone whom she loved dearly but was arranged to marry somebody else.

### 1.5. Harmful Practices

Oganda, in “The Rain Came” feared that her life will be over because of the prophecy announced in their village. She will be offered to the lake monster so that there will be rain. This announcement tore the heart of Oganda who was just starting to love the life she lived as a daughter of the village chief.

## 3. Surviving Adversity

**Table 2. How the Characters Survive**

Character	Means of Surviving Adversity	Displayed Attitude
1. Gladys (Girls at War)	Her complete transformation was driven by the fact that “time done pass.... everybody wants survival.”	Adaptability
2. Beatrice (Minutes of Glory)	She used her fifteen minutes of glory to define herself and put an end to her illusions. She learns to accept her identity; she finally embraces her true self.	Acceptance
3. Tselane (The Lovers)	Tselane chooses to break their custom and live up to what she believes should be – the right to be married to the one she loves.	Determination
4. Oganda (The Rain Came)	She was able to adapt to the situation instead of running away from it. Accepted the advice of the person she loves.	Adaptability/A cceptance

5. Akuba (Heavy Moments)	The obstacles that came to Akuba's life did not pull her down; she strives hard in order for her dreams to come true. Despite the crisis in her life, she did her best to be accepted in the Academy and be one of the first women who fly planes.	Determination /Adaptability
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In "Girls at War", the protagonist, Gladys, teaches herself to survive by adapting to the situations around her. It was on those days that money is very scarce and the only way to keep herself alive is to be able to change her perspective in life. Her weapon in surviving the war is by learning to make use of the resources she has.

Beatrice, the protagonist in "Minutes of Glory" accepted who she is in the end. She finally accepted everything about her. The few minutes of attention she gets opened her eyes to the reality that she cannot fool herself by being someone she is not. By accepting who she is, she becomes a winner.

Tselane in "The Lovers" chooses to break their custom and live up to what she believes should be – the right to be married to the one she loves. Her determination makes her resilient. Despite the "week of raging storms and wild irrational deliberations which was first a family affair then turned out to be public affair which would bring ruin and disaster upon the community and public anger was high," Tselane learned to dance in the rain. Despite the pain she felt and the outrage of the whole family and community, she was able to stand up and choose the one she loves.

The female protagonist, Oganda, in "The Rain Came" battles with their tradition. She was chosen to be offered as a sacrifice to the lake monster in order to have rain. At first, she questioned this decision but later on learned to accept her destiny. Her acceptance despite her fear helps her find the courage to go on.

Akuba in "Heavy Moments" breaks the barrier of gender stereotyping that a woman should not fly planes. Her determination and adaptability were her key to overcome the trials that came her way and made her successful. Her aunt and uncle who served as her parents were also her inspiration.

All of the stories show that the most common traits that the female protagonist have in surviving adversity are adaptability, determination and acceptance.

#### 4. Gender Issues in the Short Stories

**Table 3.**

<b>Short Story</b>	<b>Gender Issues</b>
1. "Girls at War" by Chinua Achebe	women are second class citizens; women serve and entertain men; lesser women join the militia; more women are seen in the bars; men earn through decent jobs; Reginald, a male character, dictates Gladys what to do (patriarchy)
2. "Minutes of Glory" by Ngugi Wa Thiong'o	women has to be gentle, soft-spoken, and attractive; women cheers men but not the other way around; men talk while women listens
3. "The Lovers" by Bessie Head	polygamy is practiced; wives should serve their husbands; women's place is in the kitchen; women should be tender and obedient
4. "The Rain Came" by Grace Ogot	men hold the key positions in the village; women are confined in the house; the voice of the father should prevail
5. "Heavy Moments" by Ama Ata Aidoo	female pilot students are laughed at and ridiculed; women are expected to be doing household chores; men are expected to be schooled; women are expected to be quiet

In "Girls at War," women are secondary citizens and are expected to entertain men. When Reginal first saw Gladys who was very formal and straightforward, an attitude which are not commonly seen among women in their place. He was doubly surprised knowing that this lady joined the militia, a role that is usually taken by men. On their second meeting, when Gladys transformed herself to this "attractive woman", Reginald thought that she must have a very rich boyfriend to buy her things. Moreover, Reginald thought that Gladys is just like the other girls now. He was not surprised. Women are expected to act that way especially when they need money. They sell their bodies to make money.

Reginald represent patriarchy in the story. He dictates what Gladys needs to do. He assigns things to her although they barely know each other. He holds power over her which is what patriarchy is all about.

In this "Minutes of Glory", gender roles are seen all throughout the story. The main character, Beatrice, has the impression that women must look pleasant in order to be accepted. This social construct affected the main character so much that her self-esteem was very low. Their community looks at women as someone who cheers up men but not the other way around. Women are expected to serve men. Men are expected to pay to be "comforted". Patriarchy is seen through the men characters in the story. They are the ones who always do the talking. Women are the listeners. The story shows that there is gender disparity.

Through the gender lens, patriarchy and gender roles are again seen in “The Lovers”. Polygamy is practiced in the community. Husbands are served while wives do the household chores. The father has the last words. The culture of silence is practiced among women. The female protagonist, Tselane, gets to see what it’s like to live in a house where her mother is not the only wife of her father.

In “The Rain Came”, gender roles as gender issue is obviously seen. Men are the ones who hold the key positions in the community of Oganda while women’s place are confined within the house. Women take care of the children. It is interesting to note that it is a woman who should be sacrificed instead of a man. Oganda, who is a virgin and the only daughter of the village chief was the one chosen. Still, the story projects woman as second-class citizens and are portrayed weaker than men. In fact, Osinda, the love of Oganda, was the one who pursued her “run away from the wrath of the ancestors”. It takes a man like Oganda to encourage her to escape.

In “Heavy Moments”, the female protagonist, Akuba, was able to break down the gender barrier in the world of aviation. It is seen all throughout the story that women students, like Akuba, are being laughed at and ridiculed in their school. Men thought that women have no place in schools especially in flying planes. But the women characters in the story proved that women can also do what men can.

## 5. Findings

Through textual analysis, the following were found out: (1) majority of the female characters in the stories had experienced monetary crisis, (2) female characters’ other sources of physical and mental stress were traditions, gender inequality, and identity crisis, (3) most of them showed negativity as their initial reaction when faced with their problems, but in the end, they bounced back and accepted their situation, (4) adaptability, determination, and acceptance are the character traits displayed by the female protagonist in surviving the adversity they are facing, and (5) gender roles and patriarchy are commonly seen as the gender issues among the short stories.

## 6. Conclusion:

Most of these women though plagued with money woes and stressed by too many traditional rituals and inequalities still relied on their own strength and embraced the situation they were in. They had the courage to pursue their decisions, letting go of fear, practicing patience, and using their own adversity to help them become stronger.

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