

The Treatment of Patriarchy in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

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Abstract

While studies on the patriarchal order and the marginalization of women in male-authored African novels abound, not much has been done to examine together the works of female novelists of different generational and ideological orientations. This study therefore examines the treatment of patriarchy in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*. The study is grounded on feminist theory. Feminism is considered appropriate because it is aimed at empowering women in the society, and the novels under review expose how women are oppressed and marginalized in many African societies, and stress the need for the women to challenge the status quo with a view to liberating themselves from the oppressive African men. The research is essentially library-based and involves textual analysis. The study demonstrates how female African novelists have responded to the phallic nature of the African literature by empowering the female characters in their novels, and unabashedly exposing the patriarchal proclivity of the African men. The study shows how the two novelists give a fair representation of the historical backgrounds of their novels. One recurring feature of these novels is that the feminist zeal of the novelists sometimes beclouds their sense of judgement. The male characters in the novels are unfairly represented and bestialised. The import of this is that, given the proliferation of promising African female novelists in our present generation, there is the need for them to pursue their feminist goal vigorously but realistically.

Key words: Feminism; African literature; Patriarchy; Women oppression

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INTRODUCTION

Stephen Sanderson (2001, p.16) traces the origin or history of patriarchy to the 3rd century BCE when the renowned Greek philosopher and scholar, Aristotle, taught that the city-state developed out of the patriarchal family, although he thought the two were different in kind and in scale. According to him, "in this matter, Aristotle followed in the tradition of Socrates who thought being born a woman was divine punishment, since a woman is half way between a man and an animal." In his landmark work, *The Politics*, Aristotle (1885, p.17) argues for an origin of male rule. He categorically states in the chapter thirteen of the popular book that: "Men and women have different kinds of virtue".

It is instructive to note that not all the ancient societies contemporary with Aristotle share these views of women. John Temple Bristow (1991, p.41) reveals how the Egyptian women were greatly empowered, unlike the Athenian women, who were relegated to the background. He avers that:

Egyptian women attended market and were employed in trade. In ancient Egypt, a middle-class woman might sit on a local tribunal, engage in real estate transactions, and inherit or bequeath property. Women also secured loans, and witnessed legal documents.

Within feminist theory, on which this study is grounded, patriarchy refers to the structure of modern cultural and political systems, which are ruled by men. Such systems are said to be detrimental to the rights of women. Several organs have been employed in the propagation of the feminist movement. Among these

organs, the literary stands out. Feminist writers and critics have given various definitions of feminism. Toril Moi (1986, p.103) posits that "feminism is a bourgeoisie, egalitarian demand for women to obtain power in the present patriarchal system." Simone de Beauvoir (1949, p.6) defines feminists as women or even men too, who are fighting to change women's condition in association with the class struggle.

Feminist criticism, as a distinct approach to literature, starts around the late 1960s (Abrams, 2014, p.110). It probes into the social and cultural aspects of literary works, especially for what those works reveal about the role, position, and influence of women. Unlike feminism which dates back to a few centuries ago, feminist literary criticism is a recent development. Elaine Showalter (1990, p.179) observes that: "Although feminism as a political ideology can be traced back at least to the seventeenth century, feminist literary criticism is a very recent invention." Feminism is aimed at combating all the various shades of discrimination—personal, social, political, economic, legal, literary—which women suffer as a result of their sex. Monumental works such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Margaret Fuller's *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (1845), and John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* (1869) contributed immeasurably towards the formation of feminism. In a related development, Virginia Woolf's seminal work, *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Simon de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949), Mary Ellman's *Thinking About Women* (1968), and Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970) raised feminist perspectives in literary circles. The works, among several others, project the various tenets of feminist criticism.

This study examines patriarchy in the African novels, using Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* as a case study. Studies abound on patriarchy and marginalization of women in male-authored African novels. However, there is dearth of studies in which the works of female African novelists of different generations and ideological persuasions are examined together. The present study is an enterprise in filling this gap.

1. PATRIARCHY IN AFRICAN NOVELS

Abiola Irele (1976, p.12) defines the African novel as: "That body of fiction that relates to the history of and experiences of African people and society." Africa is male-dominated. African women are products of multiple subjugation. Particularly, tradition, colonialism, and gender imperialism all combine to act against the African woman's self-assertion. Invariably, the African literature has been labelled as being patriarchal, as the male characters overwhelm the female characters, who either play subservient, tangential roles, or are portrayed in negative light as prostitutes, sex objects, indolent,

pleasure-seekers, etc. Little wonder, C. O. Ogunyemi (1988, p.42) sees Nigerian literature as:

Phallic, dominated as it is by male writers and male critics who deal almost exclusively with male characters and male concerns, naturally aimed at a predominantly male audience.

Since Nigerian literature forms a major strand of African literature, it can be safely argued that Ogunyemi has made a veiled reference to African literature.

The way African male novelists portray female characters in the preponderance of their novels reflects the disdainful, indifferent manner in which African women are regarded. The female characters are often disparaged and denigrated by the men. The image of the African woman painted in the works of pioneer African writers, according to the literary critic, Julie Agbasiere (2006, p.72):

Is that of the subordinate, subservient and decorative, second-rate character dominated by society's patriarchy. Feminist writers are now giving women a voice and a locus standi to challenge the societal norms and values obnoxious to them.

Sweetman (1984), Acholonu (1989), Mojola (1989), Saadawi (1991), Akachi Ezeigbo (1997) and Grace Okereke (1998) exemplify the celebrated African novelists and critics who have decried the patriarchal nature of the African society and the marginalization of women in African male-authored novels. Grace Okereke (1998, p.114) denounces the:

Patriarchal literary world's phallogo-centric considerations of male concerns as valid subjects for literature while regarding female concerns over gender relations as trivial.

The treatment of patriarchy in the African novel was first amply demonstrated in the foremost Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe's phenomenally successful novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1958). The novel presents an ordered, male-dominated society with women playing secondary but cheerfully accepted roles. The protagonist, Okonkwo's wives meekly submit to his hot temper, and during planting seasons, to his unjust demand for their labour on his farm. The same trend of relegating women to the background runs through Achebe's early novels, notably *No Longer At Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964) and *A Man of the People* (1966). For this proclivity, he did not escape the critical sledge hammer of notable African feminist critics. The barrage of strident criticisms must have largely informed his empowerment of a female character, Beatrice, in his later novel, *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987).

Apart from Achebe, several other male African novelists have marginalized women, or portray women negatively, in their novels. The lead female characters in Cyprian Ekwensi's satirical novel, *Jagua Nana* (1961) are depicted as being morally loose, using their bodies as weapon to get what they want from the men who have enough money to spare. This is evinced in the character of the protagonist, Jagua Nana who is not only a professional

prostitute but also a rogue, as she sells items for Denis. She is obsessed with night clubs. In his popular novel, *Mine Boy* (1946), which is inspired by the obnoxious apartheid policy in South Africa, Peter Abraham also portrays women negatively as being morally loose and instruments of pleasure of men. The plot of the novel, which is set in a black ghetto called Malay Camp, revolves around the character of Xuma who arrives from the North in search of a job in the mines. The major centre of activity in Malay Camp takes place in Leah's house, where she runs an illegal but famous drinking saloon (shebeen) which she must operate in total secrecy or in the event of detection, face prosecution and imprisonment (as indeed she does at the end of the novel).

The negative portrayal of women in male-authored African novels is also evident in Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1969). The major characters in the novel include: "The Man", Teacher, and Koomson, a wealthy man with disturbingly poor moral credentials. The Man's wife, Oyo, and Oyo's aged mother are blind to the virtues which "The Man" and Teacher possess. These virtues such as natural intelligence, high moral principles, honesty and hard work do not impress Oyo and her mother so long as they do not bring in money to feed well and dress ostentatiously. Ayi Kwei Armah further expresses his notion of the inferiority of women in the novel, *Fragments* (1988). In this novel, women are portrayed as promoters and consumers of foreign products. Women like Christiana are delineated as those who acquire wealth and material things through dishonesty and prostitution. She goes into love affairs with Fifi William and Baako simply because of the men's opulence.

In Major I. N. C. Aniebo's novel, *The Anonymity of Sacrifice* (1976), Sergeant Cyril Agumo's wife, Maria is portrayed as a nagging, promiscuous wife who puts her husband under undue pressures. While her husband is away at the war front, she decides to commit an adultery to assuage her sexual urge. Unlike Aku in another Nigerian Civil War-inspired novel, Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty* (1976) whose act of adultery is propelled by necessity, Maria's act of adultery is entirely of her volition. She is portrayed as a libidinous woman, with a weak moral fibre.

Not unexpectedly, African female novelists have responded by writing novels in which the female characters are used to depict the burden faced by women in the patriarchal African society. Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and *Idu* (1976), Ifeoma Okoye's *Behind the Clouds* (1983), Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn* (1987), Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1980), Nawal El Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1983) and *She Has No Place in Paradise* (1972), Ama Ata Aidoo's *Our Sister, Kill Joy* (1977), and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2006) exemplify such novels.

2. PATRIARCHY IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S *THE JOYS OF MOTHERHOOD*

The Joys of Motherhood, arguably Buchi Emecheta's most popular and most successful novel, dwells on the socio-cultural and economic problems facing the Nigerian woman in the rural and urban settings. The main themes explored in the novel include childlessness, polygamy and its related problems, poverty and the tyranny of patriarchy. The work is a graphical representation of the ordeal of women and women-related issues, as it obtains in a patriarchal society. The novel centres on the myriad of problems besetting women in a male-dominated society. The story captures the pathetic and grim condition of a woman who, in spite of her struggles and determination to survive in life, ends up dying in ignominy. Her efforts, hopes and aspirations come to naught.

The heroine of the novel, Nnu Ego, is the product of the lone relationship between Chief Nwokocha Agbadi, a wealthy, influential local chief in Ibuza town, and Ona, the only surviving child of Obi Umunna. As a remarkably beautiful girl, Nnu Ego captures the interest of many men in Ibuza town while growing up. She is married off to Amatokwu in an elaborate wedding ceremony. Her inability to conceive ruins the short-lived marriage. She later marries Nnaife Owulum, a washerman with the European couple, Dr and Mrs Meers in Lagos.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta exposes how patriarchy has become ingrained in the African society. One of such culturally determined oppressions is the law which forbids Nnu Ego's mother, Ona, from getting married to her lover, Agbadi, simply because her father, Obi Umunna does not have a male child to carry on the family's name. Obi Umunna had decided that his exceptionally beautiful daughter, Ona, would not marry. However, she could stay in his house to have as many men as she would want in the hope that if she had a son, that son would bear his name and continue the family lineage. Chief Nwokocha Agbadi had reached an agreement with Ona, his mistress, to the effect that if Ona had a baby girl, she would be Agbadi's, but if a boy, he would belong to Obi Umunna. Ona's child turns out to be a baby girl, and is named Nnu Ego, meaning "for she is worth more than twenty bags of cowries."

Ona is to stay in her father's house and bear the male children for her father's name to be immortalized. She, like any other woman, yearns to have her own husband, but culture demands that she stays back and bears children for her father. She is torn between her lover and her father. She is traumatized, and thrown in a quagmire. She does not know what to do, or which of the two men to favour men, as they are always at loggerheads because of her. For instance, on the occasion of Nnu Ego's birth, Agbadi reminds Nnu Ego's father of their compromise:

“Did Ona tell you of our compromise? She agreed that if she bore a baby Girl, she would be mine, if a boy, he would be yours,” Agbadi said coolly.

Obi Umunna retorts on this:

That may be true, my friend. I am not a man who can take seriously talks lovers have on their love mat. She was your guest, and you were a sick man then. (*The Joys of Motherhood*, p.26)

The subject of the dispute, Ona quickly intervenes. In her speech, she reiterates the self-centredness of men, as the two men are only interested in the possession of the baby. The woman is seen as a mere breeding machine. How she feels after the childbirth is inconsequential. This claim is buttressed by Ifeyinwa Iweriebor (1996, p.176) on her examination of the ironies of the patrilineal system:

The child born of a woman despite the nine months spent in her womb was never hers by customary right of ownership, and remained her child only as long as the marriage between her and her husband was good.

Nnu Ego has her own share of the culturally determined oppression which flourishes in a patriarchal society in the role she plays as a senior wife in her two marriages. “Senior Wife” in Ibuza (the setting of the novel) and in some parts of the African society is seen by the people as an honourable title, and women pretend to be happy playing that role. Evidently, women are not particularly happy playing the role, but as usual, they cannot complain, as the patriarchal African society has practically muffled their voices. Emecheta explores the psychological trauma these so-called senior wives go through in silence, through the harrowing experiences of Agbadi’s senior wives, Agunwa and Nnu Ego. The novelist’s disenchantment with the widely-practised abuse of women through sexual neglect, public humiliation and disrespect is depicted in these two characters.

Agunwa’s discernible humility and high sense of maturity turn into humiliation and heart break as Agbadi abandons her for younger wives, and flaunts his sexual prowess before her. She allegedly dies of the illness which afflicts her on the night she watches her oppressive, inconsiderate husband giving pleasure to Ona in their courtyard:

Agbadi’s senior wife, Agunwa, became ill that very night. Some said later that sacrificed herself for her husband; but a few had noticed that it was bad for her morale to hear her husband giving pleasure to another woman in the same courtyard where she slept, and to such a woman who openly treated the man they all worshipped so badly. (p.21)

She was not happy playing the role of a senior wife, but she cannot complain, and she had to pay with her dear life. Marie Umeh (1996, p.114) makes an illuminating comment on this:

Her (Agunwa’s) world falls apart, to say the least. It is shocking to realize that you have been duped. It’s the knowledge that

she has been weeping in silence, deprived for years, the reality that she has been exploited that brings on an illness which culminates in her death and places a curse on the family...

In her first marriage to Amatokwu, Nnu Ego plays the senior wife’s role. While waiting frantically for the fruit of the womb, Amatokwu blames and discourages her, concluding that she is the one at fault over the childless marriage. At the farm, Nnu Ego reminds him:

Amatokwu, remember when I first came to your house? Remember how you used to want me here with only the sky for our shelter? What happened to us, Amatokwu? Is it my fault that I did not have a child for you? Do you think I don’t suffer too? (p.32)

Amatokwu’s response verges on callousness:

“What do you want me to do?” Amatokwu asked. “I am a busy man. I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile. I have to raise children for my line...” (p.32)

Amatokwu’s response above demonstrates the proclivity of men in patriarchal societies to heap all the blames on the women in childless marriages.

When she fails to give Amatokwu a child, Nnu Ego is relegated to the background. She moves into the inner hut which is for senior wives. The new wife, who later bears a son to Amatokwu, is showered with all the attention. According to Marie Umeh (1996, p.116):

...so traumatic is her experience of happiness as Amatokwu’s senior wife that when his people find him a second wife, her body rejects the lie and she experiences her first nervous breakdown. (p.116)

Nnu Ego has a more traumatic experience as a senior wife in her second husband, Nnaife Owulum’s house. In her previous marriage, the love making between Amatokwu and the new wife takes place in a separate hut. She only imagines it in her mind. However, in Nnaife’s case, the love making between Nnaife and Adaku is done in the one room apartment they all stay. Adaku is the woman Nnaife acquires from his late brother as the tradition in the patriarchal Ibuza society demands. Nnu Ego suffers in silence, like the other senior wives in the society. Inwardly, she is dying of envy and heartbreak, as the author narrates:

Nnu Ego fought back tears as she prepared her own bed for Nnaife and Adaku. It was a good thing that she was determined to play the role of the matured senior wife; she was not going to give herself any headache when the time came for Adaku to sleep on that bed. She must stuff her ears with cloth and make sure she also stuffed her nipple into the mouth of her younger son, Adim, when they all lay down to sleep. (p.123)

Nnaife, like most polygamous men, feels great because he succeeds in humiliating Nnu Ego and sowing the seed of discord between Nnu Ego and Adaku. This illustrates the plight of most women in polygamous marriages. The marriage of more than one wife is the norm in most patriarchal societies.

Remarkably, tradition demands absolute fidelity from the woman. She must not have an affair with any other man except her husband, no matter how he treats her. It is in fact a taboo to even contemplate on doing it. The freedom to have as many women as possible is the exclusive preserve of men. Catherine Acholonu (1989, p.104) gives an apposite comment on this:

The point which Emecheta makes is that traditional society with its permissiveness and liberality to the menfolk entrenches chauvinism and irresponsibility in men. Thus, a great majority of Emecheta's male characters are irresponsible, unfeeling and inhuman, especially in dealing with their women folk.

Patriarchy demands absolute chastity from the women even before marriage, but the men are free to lose their virginity at any time they desire. On the night Nnu Ego becomes Amatokwu's wife, everybody is anxious to know whether or not she is still a virgin. Remarkably, nobody cares about Amatokwu. As a man, he is free to do what he likes. Obi Umunna proudly informs his friend, Obi Idayi:

My daughter has been found an unspoiled virgin. Her husband's people are here to thank us...when a woman is virtuous, it is easy for her to conceive. (p.31)

In a patriarchal society, the woman is responsible for whatever goes wrong in her family. Nnu Ego's inability to bear children is not actually her fault, but the fault of her "chi" who denies her children.

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Emecheta protests against the humiliation and sexual denial of wives, mothers and barren women in the characters of Agunwa, Adaku, and Nnu Ego in her first marriage. Marie Umeh (1996, p.18) succinctly captures the experience of Igbo women in marriage:

The sexual codes by which the lives of Igbo women are governed are listed in order of importance; the glory of a woman is a man; a woman without a son is a failure; marriage is for the production of male heirs to continue the husband's lineage, and a complete woman is a mother of healthy sons.

Patriarchy builds on these sexual codes. African women are subjected to inner repression. The woman must not only bear children, but must also bear sons. She is seen as equally barren if she has only female children. For instance, Nnu Ego's co-wife in her second marriage, Adaku is labelled as being barren simply because she has only daughters. At a time, she reports her altercation with Nnu Ego, who is then blessed with three sons and four daughters, to the Ibuza elders in Lagos. The spokesman of the group, Nwakusor does not give her a fair hearing, but scolds her:

I know you have children, but they are girls, who in a few years' time will go and help build another man's immortality. The only woman who is immortalizing your husband, you make her unhappy with your fine clothes and lucrative business. If I were in your shoes, I would go home and consult my chi to find out why male offspring have been denied me. (p.166)

This is a blatant demonstration of patriarchy. Adaku, who later in the novel liberates herself from the stranglehold of her patriarchal marriage to Nnaife, feels guilty of a crime she never commits. According to medical experts and biologists, the sex of the child is principally determined by the man, and not the woman.

Notable critics of African literature have made telling comments on the feminist slant of the novel. In her autobiography, *Head Above Water* (1986), the author of the novel, Buchi Emecheta (1986, p.9) states that:

I created a woman, Nnu Ego, who gave all her energy, all her money and everything she had to raise her kids...she never reaped the fruits of her labour.

According to Uwachina (1993, p.6):

In her novel, women oppression is the subject of her writing. *The Joys of Motherhood* tells us about a displaced and neglected woman.

Mojola (1989, p.38) posits that:

Buchi Emecheta's works consistently reveal her commitment to the cause of women and her concern for their freedom from all practices and beliefs which impede their material and spiritual progress...Her works constitute a testimony of the indispensability of the woman in the social and economic life of Nigeria

In *The Joys of Motherhood*, Buchi Emecheta unabashedly exposes the tyranny of patriarchy in the traditional African society.

3. PATRIARCHY IN SEFI ATTA'S *EVERYTHING GOOD WILL COME*

Sefi Atta decries the oppression and subjugation of women in the pronouncedly patriarchal Nigerian society in her award-winning novel, *Everything Good Will Come*. She exposes the way patriarchy has relegated women to the background. Not only does patriarchy hinder women from making their meaningful contribution to the development of the society, it also results in a moral degradation of women. According to Susan Gardner (1998, p.161):

...a girl is not a failure. A woman needs not be to be defined by marriage and above all motherhood; the woman who supports herself depend on men less.

From time immemorial, marriage, an institution ordained by God, has been one of the major areas in which women are being oppressed and subjugated. This subjugation is manifestly present in the traditional and age-long polygamy, as well as the western and civilized monogamy. All the major female characters in the novel never enjoy their marriages and relationships with men, who are portrayed as selfish, heart-breakers, women-beaters, inconsiderate, and even bestial.

The plot of the novel revolves around the character of Enitan, the only surviving daughter of Bandele Sunday

Taiwo, popularly known as Sunny, and Arin, who is better known as Mama Enitan. The novel, which is written in the first person narrative technique, chronicles Enitan's life from when she is still an innocent little girl who lives by the Lagos lagoon with her parents, to the period when, in a bid to liberate herself from the clutches of oppression, she abandons her turbulent marriage with her oppressive husband, Niyi Franco.

Sunny in his marriage to Mama Enitan cuts the figure of a typical African husband who strongly believes in relegating his wife to the background, and always calling the shot. Their quarrels become so incessant that they later separate. The acrimonious separation culminates in Mama Enitan's development of hypertension:

My parents separated while I was in school in England...A squabble began between them, over ownership of property and over me. My mother vowed to have my father disbarred. Instead, she developed hypertension and said my father had caused it. (*Everything Good Will Come*, p.79)

Sefi Atta lays emphasis on the psychological trauma and the untold embarrassment Enitan experiences as a result of her parents' avoidable separation. On the day of her convocation in London University, she poses separately with her parents:

My graduation day ended in silence. I posed separately with either parent, and then vowed that they would never involve me in their arguments again. (p.92)

The same scenario unfolds during her traditional engagement ceremony with Niyi Franco. During the ceremony, her parents argue, and her mother stoutly refuses to sit beside her father. Mama Enitan later explains her reasons for falling out with her husband. These include his neglectful and uncaring attitude, making of malicious and spurious allegations against her, and colluding with family members to alienate her, there causing her much embarrassment and sorrow.

Everything Good Will Come dwells extensively on how many women endure bad marriages, and can go to any length to save their marriages from breaking down irretrievably, all in the bid to conform with the norms of their patriarchal society, and avoid the stigma that is attached to divorced women. Divorced women are stigmatized and blamed for the breaking up of their marriages. This tendency of women to weather the storm of turbulent marriages is captured in the novel:

Our mothers were wonderful, mostly. They shielded us from the truths about our fathers, remained in bad marriages to give us a chance. (Ibid.)

Several female characters such as Enitan's mother-in-law, Toro Franco, Enitan's childhood and bosom friend, Sheri Bakare, and Mother of Prison who makes striking comments on marriage in general, and her failed marriage in particular:

...we marry anybody for marry sake, love anyone for love sake and once we love them, we forsake ourselves, make the best

of it, till they die or till we do. Look at me. Everything in that house I bought, and I was sending money to my parents in the village, sending money to his parents.... Then like a fool, I was telling everybody that it was my husband who was providing, you know, to boost him up. (p.271)

This is a telling comment on the great extent an average African woman can go in order to save her marriage.

Enitan, who can be likened to a radical feminist during her teenage years, experiences a dramatic transformation in her marriage, and complains bitterly on how her husband treats her like a personal servant. He does things in the house haphazardly, much to Enitan's chagrin. Enitan's husband, Niyi Franco's attitude bears the hallmarks of a typical African man in his marriage. Mutual respect is absent in the so-called monogamous marriage. The woman is burdened with a series of domestic chores to battle with on a daily basis. Niyi Franco's attitude becomes so intolerable that Enitan decides to separate from him. A staunch advocate of women liberation, she makes up her mind to liberate herself from her oppressive husband's stranglehold. Strident criticisms greet her action, as revealed to her by her old neighbour from Sunrise Estate, Busola:

Everyone is talking about you. They say you left for no reason. He never beat you, never chased. I know he's moody, but he went to work for God's sake. What would you do married to a lazy bugger like mine? (p.323)

Sheri also corroborates Busola's claim by stating that Enitan's father would be absolutely furious with her when he is released from prison, for leaving her husband. Sheri and Busola's discussion with Enitan captures the mindset of an average African woman who, in view of the pervasive nature of patriarchy in the African society, learns to endure all the difficulties she encounters in her marriage.

In *Everything Good Will Come*, Sefi Atta gives a catalogue of instances of the oppression and subjugation of women by the male characters in the novel. The downward trajectory which Sheri's life takes is a result of her being raped by Damola Ajayi in a party. The raping results in an unwanted pregnancy which necessitates her dropping out of school. She later has a troubled marriage with Brigadier Hassan, an unrepentant polygamist and a chronic womanizer. Sheri's unscrupulous uncle, who helps himself to her father's inheritance, further compounds her woes. She describes the untold hardship the family experiences following her father's untimely death:

...when my father died, who remembered me? Chief Bakare done die, God bless his family. We didn't even know where our next meal was coming from, and no one cared. Not even my uncle, who took all his money. (p.104)

The men cheat on their wives and future partners with impunity. Ironically, they expect absolute faithfulness from the other party. This motif runs through Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*. Enitan's father, Sunny breaks his marital vows with his wife, Mama Enitan, by having

a love child, Debayo Taiwo, out of wedlock. He conceals this from his wife for many years, and reveals it to Enitan when he wants her to meet him. Enitan's first serious relationship is with a man named Mike. She loves him greatly, and strongly believe that the relationship is altar-bound. She feels terribly disappointed when she pays him a surprise visit one day, only to meet another lady named Obatala, who he has been having a clandestine love affair with. Following this singular incident, the relationship breaks down irretrievably, much to Enitan's chagrin. When her relationship with Mike is over, she later courts and marries Niyi Franco. The tempestuous marriage makes her miserable. The narrator captures succinctly how the patriarchal nature of the country, and, by extension, the African continent, discourages the women from protesting: "In my country, women are praised the more they surrender their right to protest." (p.177) This underlines how the patriarchal nature of the African society is ingrained in the women, who, invariably, hands this over to their daughters.

In *Everything Good Will Come*, Sefi Attah exposes the overtly patriarchal nature of the native laws which prevail in several parts of Africa. Unlike the European laws, the native laws in Africa are not favourably disposed towards women. Women are heavily short changed in the native laws in Africa, which go a long way in fanning the embers of the African men's patriarchal proclivities. Instances abound in the novel of how men readily invoke the law to achieve their selfish goals. For example, Sheri's uncle's callous actions of taking all Sheri's late father's property except the house is backed by law. He even later complains that the house is being used. Sheri's father, Alhaji Bakare marries as many wives as he wants. In a similar vein, Brigadier Hassan acquires new wives and keeps a string of mistresses while still expecting absolute faithfulness from his wives. He expects his wives to be silent and accommodate his excesses. When Sheri is vehemently opposed to his overbearing attitude, conflict erupts.

Evidently, Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* gives an adequate treatment of patriarchy.

CONCLUSION

Without mincing words, patriarchy is manifestly present in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*. Several instances of patriarchy in these two novels have been highlighted in this study. The two novelists have examined the position of women in a dominant patriarchal society. They can be described as liberal feminists who are concerned and disenchanted with gender oppression as it obtains in their cultural and religious societies. The writers portray men as irresponsible and callous, whether as fathers, uncles, husbands, lovers, friends, or even as sons.

Remarkably, while Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* focuses on the untold hardship Nnu Ego suffers, no thanks to the patriarchal nature of her society, Sefi Atta's adopts a discernibly different approach in *Everything Good Will Come*. She roams into the lives of several female characters such as Enitan, Sheri Bakare, Mama Enitan, Toro Franco, Busola, and Brigadier Hassan's wives. She vividly captures the various oppression and subjugation which these women are subjected to in the hands of the men.

Instructively, in their zest to condemn the pervasiveness of patriarchy in the societies in their novels, Buchi Emecheta and Sefi Atta bestialise the male characters. Catherine Acholonu (1989, p.10) feels that:

Emecheta oversteps her bounds in her portrayal of male characters in an exaggerated state of idiocy, irresponsibility and insensitivity which reduces the plausibility and reliability of her point of view.

Eustace Palmer (1983, p.40) makes a similar observation on *The Joys of Motherhood*:

It is possible to argue that there are elements of distortion and exaggeration in Emecheta's works especially in her presentation of males most of whom turn out to be a little better than monsters. Emecheta probably needs to exaggerate their brutality and unattractiveness to make her feminist points.

The height of Emecheta's negative portrayal of male characters is in the character of Nnu Ego's first surviving son, Oshiaju. Nnu Ego labours to make him become something in life, only for him to abandon her while in the USA, and to return to Ibuza town to give her a befitting burial. The novelist's presentation of his abandonment of his mother is not plausible, and is unjustifiable. Emecheta could have created a scenario in which Oshiaju quarrels with his mother prior to his relocation to the USA for further studies. This would have made his unconscionable neglect of Nnu Ego realistic, and less reprehensible.

Like Emecheta, Sefi Atta exaggerates in her negative portrayal of men in *Everything Good Will Come*. There is hardly any attractive male character in the voluminous novel. The male characters such as Damola Ajayi, Brigadier Hassan, Enitan's father and grandfather, Peter Mukoro, Niyi Franco, Mike, and Mother of Prison's estranged husband are all portrayed as oppressive, cheating, unfaithful, feckless, selfish, wife-beaters, etc.

In conclusion, there is a compelling need for the contemporary and the coming generations of female African novelists to give a fair representation of men in their novels while addressing the various issues affecting women.

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