

**INTERROGATING GENDER INEQUALITY IN AFRICAN FICTION: An Analysis of Sefi Atta's
*EVERYTHING GOOD WILL COME***

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ABSTRACT

This research was conducted for the purpose of investigating the problem of gender inequality in the African society, and proffering solutions to the problem, through the thematic analysis of Everything good will come by Sefi Atta. The text is the primary data, while commentaries by several other researchers were sourced from internet and libraries, for a detailed explanation of the topic. Womanism, a type of feminist theory is adopted for the analyses of the text, as it is very relevant to the subject matter, which is the plight of African women in a strongly patriarchal African society. Through this analysis, it could be seen that the problem of inequality has eaten deep into society, upheld by both patriarchal men and women, with women at the receiving end. This makes the study very relevant to society as it creates more awareness about the problem, which is a big issue in society.

INTRODUCTION

Equality according to the Cambridge dictionary refers to the rights of different groups of people to have a similar social position and receive the same treatment, in every situation. It is a social system where everyone is treated fairly, with equal access to the same opportunities without any discrimination. Equality is expected to exist in society at different levels such as economy, race, gender, politics, business and more. This research examines the notion of equality in society, specifically as it relates to gender in the African society.

Gender according to the World Health Organization refers to the socially constructed characteristics of women and men – such as norms, roles and relationships of and between groups of women and men. Gender varies from society to society and can change. As a social construct, gender formulates norms, behaviors, and beliefs, which are taught and enforced upon each sex, and are seen as the appropriate and proper conduct for every male and female in the society. These include how they should relate with others of the same or opposite sex, and the roles they are meant to play in families, and the society at large. These rules which guide the sexes in the society have been created through Patriarchy; a social system where men primarily hold power. Power here is used to refer to male dominance, through this system socially, economically, and politically. They have access to more resources, and benefits, while women have little or no benefits, opportunities or participation in society. Due to this dominance, their female counterparts become their subordinates, and are expected to be submissive to them.

Patriarchy prescribes the gender roles played in society to the sexes. Women are given the domestic and submissive roles, while the men, who are viewed as natural leaders have the liberty to explore several options at different levels of society. These supposed roles have been established based on the physical differences between men and women. Men, through this judgment gain the upper hand in society, as they are considered stronger than women, while women, viewed through the lens of a patriarchal society are perceived to be weak and as a result have been made subordinate to the male gender.

Interestingly, this for such a long time remained the code of conduct for males and females, accepted by all, almost never challenged. In a patriarchal society, men are expected to be greater than their fathers, while women are instructed by their mothers to be submissive in every way to men and more importantly, their husbands. Due to the fact this has been the norm for ages, many women have shown very little resistance to this system, because they themselves have become patriarchal. As a result, at the slightest appearance of an opposition, males as well as females would rise up to make sure that 'order' is maintained, and disruption averted. When individuals or groups do not follow the established gender norms, they often face stigma, discriminatory practices or social exclusion. Roles prescribed are to a large extent subjective and also to the disadvantage of the female gender, favoring their male counterparts. Such roles posit, that the man should always be the head, in family, government and other organizations. These roles also suggest that women have no say in crucial matters of family, nor do they have any business contributing in the affairs of the government.

These roles, which put men on a high pedestal compared to women pave the way for subjective stereotypes such as 'men are better leaders than women', or 'women are utterly weak', 'A woman will eventually end up in the kitchen' These stereotypes lead to a social imbalance that sees to an unfair treatment of women. This situation is known as gender inequality.

Gender Inequality

Gender inequality, or in other words, gender discrimination refers to unfair rights between male and female based on different gender roles which leads to unequal treatment in life. The concept: gender inequality has been widely known in human history but not until the beginning the 20th century has the transformation of gender relations become "one of the most rapid, profound social changes" (Wright & Rogers 2009).

Patriarchy, which to a very large extent dominates most societies in the world today has for ages been the pillar behind the traditional roles played by men and women, starting from the basic social unit family, Patriarchy is upheld through the different features inherent in men and women, in which those in the latter are considered superior. In this social system, men are considered the stronger sex because of their physical strength, and are expected not to show any form of weakness. Weakness here refers to showing emotions. Men are required to provide for their families, protect them and are also expected to be greater than their fathers. Considered natural leaders, they are expected to be foremost in social, economic and political affairs. Patriarchy however leaves little to women, as their supposed duties include the domestic affairs of taking care of children, cleaning the home and cooking for their families, while remaining ever submissive, and subordinate to the males in their families; fathers, husbands and even their male relatives. These are further supported by religion, known to be a very strong force in many societies, especially the African society, because it guides the beliefs of people, as to what is right or wrong, righteous or evil. Since most religions support the institution of Patriarchy, it has been left, for a long time, unchallenged.

There are however, issues that arise as a result of Patriarchy. Because of the nature of the system, there is a kind of competition present among men. Their pride is in what they do, how effectively they provide and protect for their families, and how much property they own. It is through these that they gain their relevance in the society in the eyes of both men and women, such that any man who cannot perform these roles is not considered a 'real man'. In this competition, women are excluded as they gain their relevance only through their domestic roles, and also by having a man in their lives through marriage. This has led to them being treated like second class humans by their male counterparts with little or no rights of their own; not even to their own bodies. This has led to their marginalization, and discrimination in society as they are told what they can or cannot do, being women.

Viewed as property, through patriarchy by men, women have for a long time faced discrimination and oppression in different dimensions. Already viewed as inferior, they have limited opportunities in academics, and face marginalization in their various workplaces, due to the fact male dominance is already prevalent. Religions and traditions also support the marriage of several women to one man and this only strengthens the idea that women are the property of men, in addition to how they are already sexually objectified by a lot of men, who believe they have every right to their bodies

Furthermore, Women continue to face discriminatory practices such as rape, emotional and domestic abuse at the hands of men. These issues which are actually very serious rarely receive the require attention as they are usually blamed by society; men and women alike. This is a result of the deeply rooted cultural attitude enacted by patriarchy, which ignores the relevance of women in the society. It is therefore right to say that the issue of gender inequality in the society is because of the practice of patriarchy.

Across decades, controversies and conflicts have emerged from gender relations, regarding the issue of equality. Owing to economic and political factors that have influenced a social change overtime in the world today, there has been a growing awareness among women in different parts of the world, including Africa that makes them feel that patriarchy as a social system confines them to traditional gender roles, which keeps them exploited, oppressed and dominated by men.

This has made women begin to utilize better their naturally endowed, unexplored abilities. This change which is however not compatible with the traditional roles prescribed by the patriarchal sstem has made most men, who have over time been programmed to think they are superior to women uncomfortable, because a new generation of independent women who would no longer be 'submissive' to men, continues to emerge. To tackle this issue, the concept of Feminism; a movement which advocates for the rights of women on the grounds that every human is equal has been employed by many women, giving them a voice in society, and the courage to fight for a society where none of the sexes are treated unequally. Matters however have begun to arise from this development, as they are deeply opposed by a strongly patriarchal society supported by men and even women. This has led to what could be called a revolt by men because of the occurrence of a lot of conflicts in marriages, relationships, work places as it would seem that the male gender is being challenged by the female gender, over what has always appeared to be their position of power.As a result, already existing cases of sexual abuse, domestic abuse, emotional abuse and other cases of oppression of women by men have escalated, confirming the definition of patriarchy as a 'system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women' (Walby 1990).

As the issue of gender disparity is starting to gain a great deal of attention, numerous literary works about the oppression of women as well as the fight for justice and the freedom of women have been published by authors all over the world. Prominent works include Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

Therefore, there is an increasing need to further explore the issue of inequality between men and women, and bring to light cases where there is indeed inequality, increase its awareness. We can thus figure out how men and women can cohabit without the problems of inequality and sexism happening at all, as it is clear that the newcomer feminism and patriarchy, which has been in practice for so long are very much in conflict. To this end, one must turn to literary works to investigate these social issues critically. To carry this out, Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* will be applied.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A clear distinction has been made between sex and gender. Sex therefore refers to a person's biological differences by which they could be labelled, ordinarily 'male' or 'female.' Gender, on the other hand, refers to the attributes that society or culture identifies as male or female. It therefore decides what it means to be a man or a woman in society. Sociologically, a 'gender role' refers to the attributes and attitudes that the different cultures assign to the sexes. What it means to be a 'real man' in any culture requires the male sex, plus the different requirements that our cultures define as male characteristics and behaviors. In the same vein, to be a 'real woman' includes the identity of a woman and the social and cultural characteristics of a woman. Donna Haraway (19:) claims that the modern feminist sense of gender is embedded in Simone de Beauvoir's view that 'one is not born but rather becomes a woman.' Sex, explains Haraway, is a term that has been built to 'contest the naturalization of sexual differences in multiple contexts of struggle.' To Allan Johnson (2001:94), females and males are two halves of the human species, and their existence obviously represents their fundamental

differences. Connell (2001:117) sees gender as the characteristic of a person and thus needs a considerable amount of wrench to think about gender on the vast scale of society, but wishes to recognize the existence of a system of gender order. Julia Penelope (2001:301) speaks about 'naming ourselves'. Taking note of this, it is culture that calls one male or female, but personally, if one takes De Beauvoir to heart, one is permitted to be who he or she wants to be without lethal methods of repression. Most modern feminists have been able to distinguish between 'sex' and 'gender.' Sex is understood as the biological masculinity or femininity of a person, while gender refers to the non-physiological aspects of sex, a group of characteristics and behaviors, shaped by society and culture, which are defined as appropriate for male or female sex. This therefore reinforces De Beauvoir's claim, in the sense that gender is not given at birth; only real biological sex is given at birth. Gender identity then emerges through the creation of an individual's self-conception and understanding of whether he or she is a male or a female.

This is further explained in Lorber's (2003) view, that gender has become so prevalent as we now think it is part of our genes. Many people find it difficult to believe that gender dimensions are continually being produced and re-created by society. It can therefore be assumed that one's image, actions and speech are all factors that help to shape representation and gender identity. Postmodern gender theories (prominent in this regard is the work of Judith Butler) see the concept of 'gender' as a human construction enforced by a vast replication of social performance. The biological distinction between man and woman eventually came under the guidance of psychologists who came to a similar conclusion that sex distinctions are cultural objects and help to create social reality rather than simply reflect it.

For many years now, the concept of gender has dominated, characterized and guided much of the feminist discourse. De Beauvoir's (1973:301) theory, which notes that 'one is not born but rather becomes a woman,' gives us insight into the ambiguity that gender brings to society. To De Beauvoir, as cited by Akujobi (2004), gender is an element of identity that is slowly acquired. She argues that there is no such thing as being born with a particular gender, but rather that one becomes the gender that one chooses. In other words, one can choose without being required to become a specific gender. Butler (1986:36) as pointed out by Akujobi (2004) appears to concur with De Beauvoir's argument by revealing what might be responsible for this act of 'becoming.' She says gender is actually a 'cultural representation of bodies. So, if one's culture interprets them to be male, or female, so be it. Also in agreement with De Beauvoir, Zimmerman (1991:13-15) has by Akujobi (2004) states that it is how one personally interprets gender decides the gender to which they belong. Therefore, if someone decides to act and do things that are usually related to the male gender, even if the person is a woman, then that person should be seen as a man by society.

What can be deduced from all these claims is that De Beauvoir's act of 'becoming' is an active process of appropriating, describing and reinterpreting the cultural resources that have been gained concerning sex and gender. Through Butler's definition (1986:40), Gender can now no longer be viewed as a natural phenomenon, because as she contends, gender is now 'a contemporary way of organizing past and future cultural norms; it is now a way of situating oneself with respect to these norms; an active style of living body' This explains why homosexuals and lesbians exist in our society because according to Butler, they only 'live their bodies.' It's what their bodies say, that they assume or become. As a result, for De Beauvoir and Butler, gender is a matter of 'becoming', which means that one can choose their gender, and therefore does not need to conform to their physical appearances or social dictates

Gender Inequality in Africa

The issue of gender of inequality is one which is a well-known phenomenon, which has continued to resonate in various societies across decades. To effectively look into this issue, there is a need to discover the root of the problem, and also to understand the sociological factors that caused gender imbalances, which offer more importance to men than women, and discriminate against women in many ways in terms of getting the same benefits, support, salaries and job opportunities as

their male counterparts. The modern society has traditionally been largely shaped by men who have been policy makers. Based on this, it is however safe to say that the gender biases that exist in our society today are the product of male domination. In religion, there are certain misconceptions of religious conceptions by various African societies, and the world at large, that further reinforce gender inequality. In the Bible, the holy book used in Christianity contains descriptions of a family setting, in which the man is described as the head of the woman (1 Corinthians 11:3). This has been singularly erroneously used as a means of oppression in many cases, whereby the woman is controlled like a puppet. Also, there are instances in the Bible that reflect the misogynic society in existence at the time. In the story of the adulterous woman brought before Jesus (John 8:1-11), A questionable aspect is the fact that she was the only one brought to him, to be stoned to death and without the man with whom she was caught. One is left to wonder if the sin of adultery is committed only by a woman. This is in contrast with the Mosaic law in the Bible that adulterers caught in the act should both be condemned (Deuteronomy 22:22-25). Furthermore, the same Bible has in it the belief that there is neither male nor female (Galatians 3:28-29) in christianity. This then debunks the idea that the woman is inferior, in any way to the man as she is his complete equal. Nicholson (1990) points out that the position of women in Nigerian culture is characterized by dependence on men hence a common address to women as *oriaku*, the consumer of wealth. This is to say that women do not play an important part in the production of wealth in the family. They depend on their husbands for their economic welfare, and this explains why as against feeding themselves, most women place more value on the resources provided to them by men. The laws on inheritance are discriminatory and land ownership schemes are discriminatory. In most cases, women's economic activity is underestimated and underpaid. This corresponds with Sibani's (2013) claim that poverty is not a resource shortage as a violation of human right, but in fact, a democracy shortage. Andrew (2013) states that average professional women's weekly income is \$419, compared to a weekly average male professional income \$581. The gap between women and men in the less prestigious occupation is often greater. In comparison, women are most likely to be found in such occupations. It is clear that men and women, as regards to income, prestige and power, are not equal. Tomoko (2005) reported that close to 2/3 women in 12 occupational classes are employed under 'the 5C's'; caring, cashiering, catering, cleaning and clerical occupation as well as healthcare workers (including nursing workers) and functional managers (including finance managers, marketing and sales managers and staff managers). The higher the position, the lower the percentage of women. Women endure a number of disadvantages in wage work; they tend to be paid lower than men; they tend to be part-time, concentrate on the lower reaches of the job they work in and generally do specific types of work with a low status. Nmah (2003) points out that the land ownership schemes are legally discriminatory. The economic activities of women are undervalued and are in most cases underpaid, leading women to poverty. There has been no appreciation of women's important role and participation in the development process, so nothing has been done to unlock women's capacity in Nigeria's pursuit of economic development.

In Africa at large, cultural constraints on equality between men and women also exist, and a number of them emerge from primitive cultural practices. An example of this is Female genital mutilation, an intercultural rite often used to mark the transition of a girl to adulthood. Young girls are urged by culture and family to believe that female genital mutilation is part of proper upbringing; an essential part of becoming a woman. It is associated with what is regarded as the right sexual conduct, virginity and fidelity, intended for adulthood and marriage. Female genital mutilation is also taught to make them "clean and beautiful" by ridding them of traces remains of "maleness" which are considered "unclean" (Kiragu, 1995). Girls are taught to feel like adults through female genital mutilation and therefore have no hesitation to have sexual relationships, and the community sees them as mature and ready for marriage. In countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Mali, Upper Volta, Ivory Coast, Mozambique, and Sudan where female genital mutilation is practiced, there are higher rates of teenage pregnancy and school drop outs. The empowerment of women and girls requires education. Quality education offers the instruments of self-sufficiency to escape poverty and exploitation. This is especially important for the situation of girls, many of whom work without accessible, free and high-level education systems, that can be dangerous and abusive at a premature

age. Child labor poses a great threat to educational institutions, because children are forced to work or split their time between work and school rather than school, which greatly influences their learning ability. Worldwide, 246 million girls and boys work rather than go to school and have a childhood (International Labor Office, 2002). In particular, girls are systematically deprived of their right to education as a result of family expectations, the norms of society or the mere lack of attention paid to their specific needs. In Eritrea, collecting fire-wood, fetching water from a long distance and grinding mills are some of the unavoidable tasks of the girl, especially in the rural areas. Child labor may be considered a big threat to education systems because children are forced to work, rather than school or split their time between their work and school, which has a significant effect on their performance. Girls bear more of the burden of child labor as compared with boys, which often takes away their right to education. Parents are often reluctant to send girls to school because these girls are used as substitutes in the absence of their mothers, to work. Since girls are expected to do more domestic work than boys, the boys compared are more likely to be sent to school by their parents (Bendera and Mboya 1999). In Kenya's North Eastern region, for example, admission of girls into schools continues to lag behind because the nomadic and semi-nomadic lifestyle favors only boys to be in school. Parents in this area force boys to go to school and the girls are required to stay home and look after the animals. They (parents) leave the boys under the care of relatives who ensure they go to school, while girls move around with their parents from place to place in search of pasture for their livestock (Mulama, 2010). Girls who happen to go to school are overburdened with work resulting in their poor academic performance.

Controversies over gender equality have grown beyond the polemics of patriarchal and feminist philosophies as there are also strategic, institutional and political encumbrances present in the fight for gender equality, which has routinely taken place in international and national conventions. Josephine Anenih, Minister of Women Affairs in Nigeria, states in an article quoted by Fatima Musami (June 2010) that 'Gender inequality could be tantamount to infringements of certain rights or privileges of individuals on the grounds of sex.' It also describes gender inequality as 'the capacity to refuse or deprive another person of the essence of fair judgment, infringement of the concept of sagacity on the basis of arbitrary concessions to the other sex, with a view to promoting gender equality. Issues of inequality faced by women in all spheres of human endeavor are the reason why Akujobi (2007) argues that the call for equality can be a waste of time and energy. When our world is not right in so many respects, there may be no possibility of equality. Josephine Anenih, Minister of Women Affairs in Nigeria, in an article quoted by Fatima Musami (June 2010) states that;

In the agricultural sector, it is widely known that contribution of women in the sector is monumental, although it is neither recognized nor evaluated in national counting. Agricultural policies have unfortunately continued to demonstrate gender blindness and insensitivity in its planning and eventual execution, irrespective of the reality of women constituting the backbone of our unmechanized agriculture. Our policy makers have continued to ignore them, their dreams, while raising production to an appreciable level has remained a myth rather than a reality.

In the sphere of education according to Akujobi (2008);

Women today, whether in the rural or urban areas aspire to 'get there'. They wish to reach their horizon; they too want to touch the stars if the touching the stars is the ultimate and so any attempt to hinder them from these goals is viewed as victimization. And disparity in education between men and women is considered victimization, and where there is disparity, the woman is crippled, she is devalued and reduced to 'half'. Before now, when a woman acquires western education, she is labelled 'western' and 'immoral'. When she tries to improve herself, she is said to be invading male domain and this has helped in creating difference and so the gap between men and women keeps widening by the day.

Akujobi (2008) proposes that the solution to the marginalized state of women is the 're-education of women' She further explained that;

Education is the word in the sense that she is already educated in the ways of the land through the eyes of her mother so re-education is what the woman needs no to surmount oppression and victimization. The woman education that liberates, education that will conscientize her, that will make her see that her problems stem a larger social structure.

Literary works about gender inequality

There have been several created across the world about gender inequality. *The Color Purple*, a novel by Alice Walker is a well-known one. *The Color Purple* documents the traumas and gradual triumph of Celie, an African American woman as she comes to resist the paralyzing self-concept forced on her by a male dominated society. She goes through a lot abuse at the hands of her abusive father, Alphonso, who repeatedly rapes her. She is also forced into an abuse marriage by her father. Celie subsequently begins to build relationships with other black women, especially those engaging forcefully with oppression, and this helps her greatly, as she is able to draw strength from them. Of note is the defiant Sofia, who resists her husband's attempt to control her. *The Color Purple* speaks not just to the African American society but also the world at large as it mirrors the injustice committed against women, and also motivates them to stand firm in the face of oppression.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* also highlights the issue of inequality in the society. It chronicles the extent of women's struggles to overcome marginalisation in a sexist and patriarchal society. Love, war, conflict and the persistent inequality between men and women are among the dominant themes in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. The story is told through fifteen years old Kambili Achike who together with her mother and her brother are the victims of domestic violence of the patriarch in the family, Eugene (Papa). Kambili, her mother Beatrice, and her brother Jaja, live in fear of Eugene's wrath as he controls almost every aspect of their lives. His extreme belief makes him control his family according to the way he wants which leaves the members of the household keeping mute most of the time. Through the main characters, the negative effects the physical, psychological and mental abuse can have on the well-being of women is seen in how Eugene, a major male character treats his wife. He severely beats her on several occasions, causing her to lose pregnancies. It is also seen how he beats up his own daughter Kambili to the point of hospitalization. At the end of the story, Eugene is murdered by his wife Beatrice as she sees this as the only way to break free from oppression. Astrick (2018) states that "In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie identifies domestic violence, religion, tradition and family life as responsible for oppression of women and she challenges women to have a voice as to fight their oppressor"

Although *Everything Good Will Come* is undeniably a novel that projects its protagonists as victims and survivors of traumatic pain, it goes beyond the thematization of trauma to show that the suffering of women serves as a trigger that destabilizes cultural structures that make the suffering first of all (Ogunfolabi 2018). Akung (2012) states that Atta adopts the narrative technique of *Bildungsroman* in revealing the growth of the heroine in this novel. This technique according to Abrams (2005) deals with "the development of the protagonist's mind and character in the passage from childhood through varied experiences... into maturity, which usually involves recognition of one's identity and role in the world" (p.200-1) Through this technique, Atta encourages the heroine to respond to its surrounding events and experiences. As the heroine ages, she becomes ever more aware of herself and begins to make changes. He further opines that;

At the end of the novel Enitan is no longer the little girl who sits at the lagoon fishing with a fishing rod made from a tree branch and hook made from a wine cork. (*Everything*. 11) She is now fully matured and makes decisions that affect her, not minding the consequences of such decisions.

He also claims that in the story, silence is used as a tool for lampooning women who have stayed silent in the face of rising injustice. He explains this through Enitan, the protagonist of the story whose father keeps silent when his family threatens to get him another wife if the wife fails to get him a male child; he could not stand up to defend the wife. The wife uses silence as revenge when he is arrested.

Orabueze (2010) states that as seen in the main character Enitan in *Everything good will come*, Silence among women towards oppression is no longer the solution. She argues that only an individual's voice raised in revolt against disgusting native laws and traditional and authoritarian leadership will bring meaningful change to society. Akung (2012) further notes that the novel incorporates the stylistic influence of stereotype reversal. In this book, he says the women are brave, courageous, assertive, and economically powerful. Keyinde and Mbipom (2011) claim the novel reveals an unbroken cycle of development before Enitan becomes a self-conscious and assertive woman of her generation. Enitan's development cycle comes with self-realization that causes greater awareness and response to the things that go on around her. Such mechanisms provide inspiration for her identity and individuality. According to Akung (2012); The different forms of development help shape the novel's heroine and other females. From the easy, ignorant and naive child, Enitan grows into a voice that speaks to the voiceless. She would be able to take actions that would concern her. Via education and relationship with other women, Sheri, Grace Ameh and her in-law parents, she is solidified. She did not allow her husband in marriage to rule her as a herdsman for the cattle. In the final analysis she is not bothered, although it took her time to get pregnant, but she eventually gave birth to a baby girl. Sheri walks out of the room that restrains her dream and ambition, Enitan moves out of her father and husband's overbearing control. He states that Enitan is a voice that encourages that if she moves out of any space that restricts her ambition, the woman will achieve her dreams.. Umarani and Kumaran (2019) believe that Atta is accusing men of maintaining their sexist attitude towards physically weaker sex. She also condemns Nigerian elite men who seem patriotic and are fighting for their country's liberation from the military regime, but who are actually oppressing women at home. Hence, following the argument of Judith Butler in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, this essay suggests that Sefi Atta's *Everything Good will Come* shows that healing traumatic pain sometimes requires a willing entry into the precariousness of the victims' domain. (Ogunfolabi 2018)

Feminist Theory

The feminist theory is an application of feminism to historical, literary, or metaphysical debate. It is intended to understand the nature of inequality between the sexes. It examines the social roles, experiences, interests, chores and feminist politics of women and men across a variety of fields, one of which is literature. The goal of feminism movements is to promote and bring about equality for women and men. Feminists act, speak, write and fight for women's problems and freedoms on behalf of women and recognize gender inequality in the social status quo. Feminists are people who believe in gender equity in culture, politics and the economy. Gender inequality is a subject of feminist theory. It includes a range of ideas that oppose traditional philosophy with new ways of addressing humanity-affected issues, calling for the replacement of the presiding patriarchal order with a system that emphasizes equal rights, justice and fairness.

Feminist theory encompasses a variety of ideas, all from certain convictions that; 'Society is patriarchal, organized by and favored by men; common ways of thought promote women's subordination, and the lack or trivialization of problems that concern women in particular; this patriarchal order should be overthrown and replaced by a system which emphasizes equality for both genders; feminist theory affects all institutions; for example, medical, legal, academic, and social – and can be used to illuminate all human-affected issues. According to Lois Tyson (2006); All feminists share several important views, which might be summarized as follows. Women are culturally, financially, socially, and mentally abused by patriarchy. The patriarchal system is the predominant way by which they are held so. In every sphere where patriarchy reigns, women are labelled as 'other': they are objectified and marginalized, identified only by their divergence from male expectations and ideals, identified by what they (allegedly) lack and what men (allegedly) possess. While biology determines our sex (male or female), our gender (male or feminine) is determined by culture, or society.

All feminist activity, including feminist theory in literary criticism, has as its ultimate goal the promotion of women's equality to change the world. Thus, all feminist activity can be seen as a form of 'activism'. However, this word is typically applied to feminist activity which actively promotes social change through political action such as mass protests, boycotts, voter education and registration, providing hotlines for victims of rape, and shelters for abused women, and so on. Gender issues play a role in all aspects of human

production and experience, including literature production and experience, whether we are consciously aware of those issues or not. Feminism is influenced by a number of ideologies. Feminism according to Marxism recognizes that women are oppressed, and attributes the oppression to the capitalist/private property system, and therefore holds the belief that the only way to end the oppression of women is to overthrow the capitalist system. Socialist feminism, a result of Marxism meeting radical feminism. Echols offers a description of socialist feminism as a marriage between Marxism and radical feminism, with Marxism the dominant partner. Marxists and socialists often call themselves "radical," but they use the term to refer to a completely different "root" of society: the economic system. Liberal feminism works within the structure of mainstream society to integrate women into that structure. Its roots stretch back to the social contract theory of government instituted by the American Revolution. It operated in the days of the suffragist movement and again with the emergence of the radical feminists. Radical feminism provides an important foundation for other kinds types of feminism. Radical feminism is actually the breeding ground for many of the ideas arising from feminism; ideas which get shaped and pounded out in various ways by other branches of feminism. Eco-Feminism holds the view that a patriarchal society will exploit its resources without regard to long term consequences as a direct result of the attitudes fostered in a patriarchal/hierarchical society. Parallels are often drawn between society's treatment of the environment, animals, or resources and its treatment of women. In resisting patriarchal culture, eco-feminists feel that they are also resisting plundering and destroying the Earth.

Womanism

Womanism is a form of feminism based on the everyday experiences of women of colour, especially black women. While diverse, it holds at its core that both femininity and culture are equally important to the woman's existence, and therefore captures the African woman's experiences and struggles in a patriarchal society. The shared recognition of the female experiences let Black women to "see the need to value Black womanhood" (Collins 113). Womanism recognizes the beauty and strength of embodied black womanhood and seeks connections and solidarity with black men. Womanism identifies and criticizes sexism in the African American community and racism in the feminist community. African American writer Alice Walker introduced the word "womanist" into feminist parlance in her book "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose." (1983). In the book, she cites the phrase "acting womanish," which was said to a child who acted serious, courageous and grown-up rather than girlish.

The womanist theory will be used in analyzing the two selected texts for this research; *Everything good will come* by Sefi Atta and *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* by Lola Shoneyin and highlighting the major concerns of the theory in the texts.

Female Solidarity in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good will Come*.

The author discusses in *Everything Good Will Come* the true spirit of women's solidarity which paves the way for female characters in the book to identify their individuality. The principal thrust of the novel is the relationship between the girls Enitan and Sheri. In times of crisis, they undergo similar experiences, understand each other and help one another. Only after her relationship with her neighbor Sheri Bakare does Enitan's view of life and views on the world become sharpened and matured. Enitan's friendship with Sheri helps them resolve the numerous patriarchal obstacles and political upheavals in their lives. Their friendship produces moral and emotional support for them both. Enitan and Sheri never allow their differences in faith and ethnicity to affect their friendship. Rather they reinforce it beyond differences. This helps them to grasp the world outside the domestic sphere, and to explore their own identities as well. Enitan is the one who genuinely supports Sheri as Damola and his Iyoki Park mates rape her. Initially she is very naive and assumes that the misfortune is the fault of Sheri's near association with the boys. However, it is far later in her life that Enitan understands that there is no excuse for sexual harassment at any cost. This incident does, however, teach two friends to be careful in dealing with men. The strong will and determination of Enitan frees Sheri from her relationship with the Brigadier and helps her achieve economic freedom. To the old Brigadier, Sheri is the sugary girl. He views Sheri as a sexual being at his disposal. Sheri spends the rest of her time cooking for the old Brigadier in the kitchen. Enitan says to her: "You are not his cook" (Atta 103).

As Enitan has discovered Sheri's secret potential, she encourages her to set up a business by herself to free herself from patriarchal shackles. Therefore, Enitan encourages her to start the catering company. Enitan therefore knows Sheri's plight and has sympathy for her. She rescues her friend from life being violent. When Enitan discovers that her father has a son outside the wedlock, she feels sad. The painful incident prompts her to leave his house. She goes to Sheri's house where she takes care of her and nurtures her like her mother. Sheri's care helps her heal from her mental breakdown. Therefore, these two women support one another during their hard times. Umarani and Kumaran (2019) state that Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* also explores how women's solidarity plays a major role in bringing women together and empowering them to battle for other people's welfare inside a politically unstable country. Enitan's relationship with the journalist Grace Ameh brings forth major changes in her life. Grace supports Enitan and helps her to fight for the release of her father. Enitan thus enters the cause of human rights and becomes an activist. She works hard to get all the prisoners released including her father. Enitan's and Grace Ameh's experiences in prison help them develop a tight relationship with the fellow inmates. Enitan's experiences in prison plant the seeds for her participation in the political movement protesting during the military dictatorship for the release of the detainees. Enitan and Grace realize that they are powerless and unable to do anything to get women prisoners in prison. They learn that women are also detained daily during the military rule along with men, and suffer unbearable misery and pain. They all have similar experiences, and agree that they are because of their gender. Collins (113) argues that The shared awareness of women's experiences has helped Black women to "see the need to value Black womanhood". To counter the subjugation and subordination of women, the Sefi Atta shows through the story and characters that female unity is the only option that is likely to rebel against all these constraints.

Textual Analysis of *Everything Good Will Come*

In Atta's *Everything good will come*, it is a strong subject that greatly affects the lives of two major characters, Enitan and Sheri. Although Sheri is the victim of a sexual assault, Enitan, who witnessed the incident is significantly scarred. The two girls who are best friends go out together to a party at the beach on a fateful day. Enitan is reluctant attend the event at all but is persuaded by Sheri to go. At the event, where everything seems to be going well, Enitan begins to have a bad feeling about it all, and wants to return home right away. Sheri who is already in a merry mood refuses to go home, drinks more alcohol and dances with several boys at the party including Damola Ajayi, Enitan's crush, much to her annoyance. Things get worse as Enitan's period abruptly begins when she is totally unprepared. To avoid any form of embarrassment she stays fixed on a spot and refuses to leave the place as she is already stained. While waiting for Sheri, Enitan's patience runs out and she marches toward her friend with the intent of dragging her away from the boys she has been hanging with so they can both go home. Enitan is terrified at what she sees;

As I came closer, I spotted the head of the boy with a cap bent over by the window. I edged toward the side door. Sheri was lying on the seat. Her knees were spread apart. The boy in the cap was pinning her arms down. The portly boy was on top of her. His hands were clamped over her mouth. Damola was leaning against the door, in a daze. It was a silent moment. A funny moment, too. I didn't know why, except my mouth stretched into the semblance of a laugh before my hands came up, then tears filled my eyes.' (Atta, 62)

Upon Enitan's arrival, the boys quickly let go of Sheri and flee. This incident takes its toll on both girls. They try to pretend that none of it happened at all, but they soon realize that it is all in vain. While Enitan continues to have nightmares about this experience, Sheri soon discovers that the rape has resulted in a pregnancy. In an attempt to abort it, she makes use of a hanger and unfortunately ends up damaging her womb.

From this, one would see that the issue of rape has serious negative impacts on the victim beyond the physical. As Sheri is unable to come to terms with fact that she has fallen pregnant by the boy who raped her, she decides that she would get rid of the pregnancy, rather than give birth to the child. This shows capability of rape having serious psychological effects damage on the victim.

It could have been assumed that Enitan, who witnessed this inhuman act against Sheri would not have been affected at all, but the case is the opposite. This experience completely strips Enitan of whatever ounce of innocence is left in her as she now becomes more aware of how evil the world is. Upon discovering Sheri's pregnancy, she laments, asking;

Sheri had gotten pregnant from the rape. Didn't a womb know which baby to reject? (Atta, 70).

The girls grow apart when Enitan moves to London to study law, and even there, the trauma of this incident from her teenage years haunts her for a long time. This shows in her relationship with her first boyfriend, who she is unable to bond with. And even when she tries to open up to him about what is truly bothering her, she finds herself unable to. She recounts;

But each time I opened my mouth to tell him, about Sheri and me that awful summer,
I thought my voice would blast my ribs apart, flatten him, flatten the bed, toss my
sheets around like the wind, so I said nothing. (Atta, 73)

This demonstrates the great harm that rape poses to the feminine psyche. It shows that the physical and mental pain experienced by the victim Sheri, drives her to attempt the abortion of her pregnancy causing her to damage her own womb. Also, it has made Enitan less trustful of men, the whole experience has shaped how she views them.

Sexism

Sexism refers to any expression (act, word, image, gesture) based on the idea that some persons, most often women, are inferior because of their sex. Feminist author Bell Hooks defines sexism as a system of oppression that results in disadvantages for women. There is no doubt that more than men, women face discriminatory acts against them. Throughout this story, most of the women, if not all are treated with a condescending, and nonchalant attitude by the male characters. They are undermined and treated like they are less human compared to their male counterparts. Sunny Taiwo tenaciously holds on to the patriarchal belief that a woman must seal her lips at all times. That was why he considers Clara Mukoro a disgrace because she reported to the media about her husband Peter Mukoro's Infidelity. He says that "She has nothing to do, going to the papers with this nonsense" (Atta 139) Also, when examining his daughter's demeanor in relating with her boyfriend Mike Obi, He opines that, "A woman should have more...comportment." (Atta 128). To Sunny Taiwo, women should rather be silent at all times than outspoken. Francis Abiola Franco, Enitan's father-in-law also holds this same view and this is revealed when he stops speaking to Enitan because she challenges him on a point of law.

Niyi Franco also seeks to control his wife. He encourages Enitan to speak up and stand firm against those who seek to intimidate her at work. But at home, or whenever they are together, he wants her to speak less. In Enitan's words, he asks her to 'fly within specified perimeters. He also wants his wife to do as he says always, and when she does not, he keeps malice with her in retaliation or in a bid to make sure she obeys him. This is seen when he asks her to get something for his brothers to eat. She defies him, telling him "You have hands". When queried her over behavior, she confronts him and asks him why he cannot just go to kitchen for once. In response, Niyi does not speak to her for two weeks. Sheri's man-friend, Brigadier Hassan also has this sexist nature. Envious of Sheri's success in her catering business, he tries stop the business, and would have her possess nothing, except what he gives. Another aspect of the chauvinistic nature of the men in the story is the way the women are sexualized. An instance of this is when Enitan and Sheri, bothering no one are catcalled by a taxi driver; "Pupa! Yellow!.....Yes, you with the big *yansh*," he shouted.' (Atta,135). He also picks on Enitan, asking a derogatory question, 'Where is your own *yansh* hiding?'. The attitude of sexism is more glaring in Enitan's father, Sunny Taiwo, her husband Niyi Franco and Ibrahim, the Brigadier with whom Sheri is involved.

Furthermore, it is evident in this story that there is a cultural segregation of the female gender. This is portrayed through the lives of most of the female characters in the text. Early into the novel, the death of Enitan's younger brother who dies from sickle cell anemia is mentioned. This loss greatly affects her mother Arinola who eventually finds refuge in religion. At a young age, it appears to Enitan that her mother is being unnecessarily harsh towards her, and for no reason at all. She witnesses quarrel upon between her father and mother and soon concludes that her mother only likes to overreact. It is not until much later that an adult

Enitan gets to understand why her mother put up such a behavior, after learning of her father's infidelity, having another child- a male child outside his marriage. It is at this point that Enitan gets to know what her mother was actually going through. Through Arinola's experience, it is revealed that society places a high level of prestige on the male child. After Enitan is born, Sunny Taiwo is not satisfied with having a female as the first child. He pressures her into having another child, with the hopes of having a male child. Arinola recounts;

Her reference to Sunny's mother indicates that she must have gone through a similar patriarchal experience, Arinola goes on to talk about her Sunny Taiwo liked her reserved nature, as he "...always felt he had to be above others" (Atta,173). She tells Enitan about how her lifestyle had to change because her son who was falling sick all the time. During this period, Sunny does little to help her emotionally, except complain, she had now become angry. The child's constant illness causes Arinola to be a frequent church-goer, looking for a solution beyond hospitals. When the boy dies, he blames her for it, even though he was not present to help her concerning the boy's health. Through this, it can also be seen that the responsibility of childbirth, as well as is placed on the woman. They are compulsorily made to be "solution providers", because as it is seen in the African culture, a marriage devoid of a male is seen as a failure. Arinola is a pressured to conceive and give birth to a male child by her husband's relatives, as if it is in her power to conjure up children. Even when she finally gives birth to a male child, her husband is not satisfied, and he goes on to have a son outside wedlock.

Enitan experiences the same thing in her marriage to Niyi Franco. After having two miscarriages, Enitan remains hopeful that she would eventually conceive. Her husband's family begins to raise eyebrows, as well as her own parents;

Niyi's family relations began to press, 'Is everything all right?' They looked at my stomach before looking at my face. Some scolded me outright. 'What are you waiting for?' My mother invited me to her vigils; my father offered to send me overseas to see other doctors. (Atta, 188)

One can easily see from all these that the African society determines a woman's worth by ability to bear children and when a couple has not conceived, the pressure is always on the woman, even in cases where she is actually not the one with the problem. It is simply a must that a woman gives birth to a child. The female gender is also brought up to see childbirth and marriage as the ultimate goal of their lives. Enitan talks about how this has been taught to her and Sheri;

Enitan protests against this during her wait for a child, when she is being pressured to find a solution so she can conceive and longs for everyone to see that the value of women goes beyond childbirth; 'We were greater than our wombs, greater than the sum of our body parts' (Atta 188).

Also, in cases as serious as rape, where a woman is the victim, she is culturally blamed and shamed for being raped, with little or no persecution at all for the man who raped her. This is normalized in society as it is taught to the young ones too. When Sheri is raped, Enitan blames her for it because this is all she has come to know;

Yes. I blamed her. If she hadn't smoked hemp it would never have happened. If she hadn't stayed as long as she did at the party, it would certainly not have happened. Bad girls got raped. We all knew. Loose girls, forward girls, raw, advanced girls, laughing with the boys, following them around, thinking she was one of them. Now I could smell their semen on her, and it was making me sick. It was her fault. (Atta 65)

When Enitan is detained, she meets with a number female of prisoners, and listen to one of them, Mother of Prisons tell her story. Her account gives an understanding that in a marriage, the man is expected to be the provider. In a case where he is not doing this and his wife is, she would be expected to say he is the one providing, because society does not expect this of a woman. Mother of Prisons talks about how she did this to protect her husband's ego;

Everything, 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 everyone that it was my husband who was providing, you know to boost him up (Atta 277)

Her husband is happy with this arrangement and goes around telling everyone that he is the provider when in actual fact he is bringing nothing to the table, only more mouths for his wife to feed. At his demise his wife is forced to endure harsh and unnecessary treatment. Her husband's family shaves her head and forces her stay alone in a room, away from her children, naked. They also attempt to make her drink the water used to bath her husband's corpse just to prove she did not kill him. She refuses to do this and they then conclude that she killed her husband. To make matters worse, she is sent out of her own house, with nothing. If this were to be a man, the case will be totally different as no one would confront him over the death of his wife. Sheri's family also goes through a similar experience; This shows that to a large extent, the female gender is placed under a lot of scrutiny, discriminated against and blamed for a lot of things which are not their fault. The experiences of Arinola, Enitan and Mother of Prisons' show that the female gender is considered less important, compared to male gender and this deeply rooted in the African culture, upheld by both men and women.

Sheri and her family are also not spared in this. When her father dies, her uncle emerges to take away all of her father's possessions. Sheri and her family are unable confront uncle, because they are largely a family of women. Enitan's knowledge about this as a lawyer reveals that both civil and native laws are not on the side of women, and speaks not only to Sheri's situation, but to that of the female characters in the book; This shows that there is a system set up in society which keeps women limited, and dominated by the men. These laws have allowed the men to get away with anything, while making it seem like being a woman is a complete disadvantage.

Female Solidarity

Unity among women is a notable theme in this story. In a highly patriarchal society, it is their ability and willingness to rely on one another the true spirit that paves the way for female characters in the book to break free from patriarchy, identify their individuality and forge their own path. This can be identified in the close relationship between Enitan and Sheri, which also is a significant aspect of the story. Enitan's view of life is enhanced and refined only after her meeting with her neighbor Sheri Bakare. The two women from when they are young have similar experiences, and draw strength from each other for moral support. Their relationship helps them overcome the many patriarchal challenges in their lives. Enitan and Sheri never allow their differences in faith to affect their friendship and this helps them to grasp the world outside the domestic sphere, and to explore their individuality as well. Enitan is the one who genuinely supports after she is raped. She's very naive at first and blames Sheri outright for the incident because of the demeanor of Sheri around the boys. It is not until far later in her life that she acknowledges that there is no reason for sexual assault against anyone. However, this event teaches two women to be cautious when dealing with men. Sheri sets the pace for Enitan's social and moral education as Enitan before getting to know her is at first naive and ignorant. When Akanbi has sex with Bisi, Enitan's house- help, Sheri is quick to notice and says, "He's doing her!" (Atta 32). But Enitan does not understand and Sheri explained further, "Banana into her tomato. Don't you know about it"?(Atta 32). Enitan learns about her sexuality from Sheri and begins to grow from this point. Sheri's awareness about her society also helps Enitan to further grasp harsh patriarchal realities

Summary of the study

The purpose of this study was to identify the themes that embody the problem of inequality in, identify the characters most affected, relate the themes to real life situations and proffer solutions to the problem of inequality. After a well conducted research, it could be seen that this study is very relevant to society as inequality among the sexes exists strongly. This is also seen in how other researchers have discussed and argued about this issue.

Through the selected texts, *Everything good will come* by Sefi Atta themes that show inequality are identified in the text. Inequality is easily identified in their life experiences, which can easily be related to several real life situations. This again proves that inequality is big societal problem. Also, through themes and characters discussed, Womanism- the type of feminism which speaks relevant to the troubles of the African woman proves to be promising solution. The struggles of the African woman with patriarchy are identified are well

identified through womanism, and it can also be seen that inequality can be resolved between the sexes through the education of women, and women supporting each other.

Conclusion

This research is very relevant to society as it further brings to light the issue of gender inequality in the African society, and the world at large. It is valid to say that women are very much oppressed and dominated in a largely patriarchal society. It highlights the different ways this happens and makes one acknowledge that it is indeed a big problem. It shows that girls need to be educated so that they grow into women who can support each other, with one assertive voice to fight against sexism. The men also need to be enlightened so that they stop feeling entitled to women, both within and outside the marriage setting, and begin to see that women are their equals, to be protected, and respected. It can also be seen that womanism really captures the plight of African women in a patriarchal society, and can be used as a tool for empowering women.

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