

Chapter - III

Delineation of Societal Expectations on Nigerian Women

'Because you are a girl' is never reason for anything. Ever.

- Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Nigeria, a culturally diverse nation located in West Africa, is known for its vibrant traditions, customs, and beliefs. Despite its rich cultural heritage, Nigerian women have long faced societal expectations and stereotypes that have limited their opportunities and autonomy. These expectations are deeply rooted in the country's history, religion, and cultural norms, and have persisted through generations, affecting women's lives in various ways.

In Nigerian society, women are often expected to conform to gender-specific roles and responsibilities, which are heavily influenced by cultural beliefs and patriarchal traditions. These expectations range from dress codes, behaviour, and attitudes to marriage, motherhood, and career choices. Women are expected to embody certain virtues such as obedience, modesty, and submissiveness, while simultaneously being strong and resilient in the face of adversity. These expectations can be limiting and challenging for women who aspire to be independent to pursue their dreams, as they often face cultural and societal pushback.

Womanism is characterised by five distinct qualities, as follows: "(1) it is antioppressionist, (2) it is vernacular, (3) it is nonideological, (4) it is communitarian, and (5) it is spiritualized" (Phillips xxiv). The term "antioppressionist" encompasses all labels that reference specific forms of oppression, such as those related to sexism, racism,

heterosexism, homophobia, and xenophobia, among others. It expands the scope of womanism to include forms of oppression that may not be related to clearly defined identities or even have a language to describe them. A womanist has a deep understanding of oppression and opposes it in all forms. She dedicates her life to fighting and dismantling oppression, both individually and as part of organised movements. The term “antioppressionist” implies that womanism is aligned with projects that seek to liberate all individuals from various levels of oppression. Womanism aims to empower people to rise above relations of oppression and discrimination entirely.

The womanist stance on sexuality is as multifaceted as the diversity of human sexuality. Despite this complexity, womanism remains steadfast in its opposition to oppression that stems from an individual’s sexuality. Though opinions on sexuality continue to evolve within the womanist community, constructive conversations are taking place on this topic.

Enitan Taiwo, the protagonist of *Everything Good Will Come*, begins the story with the admission that “From the beginning I believed whatever I was told, downright lies even” (7). Her father instilled in her a blind faith in men, similar to the community’s belief in costumed men as deities during the masquerade. Enitan’s role as a woman in Nigerian culture requires her to suspend disbelief regarding patriarchy and its embodiment in the form of men in her life. This suspension of disbelief is comparable to that of a community member and spectator in relation to a deity, like Egungun, embodied in a local man at a masquerade. Therefore, her body becomes marked by the societally enforced norms and expectations for women that are inscribed by patriarchal masqueraders.

Enitan, as a young girl, is eager to please the two dominant factors in her life - her father and the patriarchal norms and expectations imposed by Nigerian culture. While she seeks to comply with her father's wishes and conform to his ideals and worldview, her compliance is culturally dictated and shaped by societal norms. Her willingness to comply is akin to that of a community member at a masquerade who must believe in the cosmology associated with the deity and disregard the obvious humanity of the masquerader in deference to the deity. Enitan's transition from a compliant child to a questioning adult and, ultimately, to a rebellious woman activist, runs contrary to the role of a belief-driven, subservient spectator in Nigerian cultural events. Despite the pressure to conform, Enitan embarks on a journey of self-discovery that leads her to question and challenge patriarchal norms, thereby asserting her agency as a woman.

Cruz-Guzmán in her dissertation "Of Masquerading and Weaving Tales of Empowerment: Gender, Composite Consciousness, and Culture-Specificity in the Early Novels of Sefi Atta and Laila Lalam" employs the masquerade as a cultural metaphor to interpret the initial trajectory of Enitan Taiwo as that of a community member exposed to an advancing masquerader. She is taught to suspend judgment, just as a citizen would do before the incarnation of the deity at a masquerade. Enitan's father trains her to believe that men are committed gynophiles who endeavour to empower her by liberating women from the kitchen and making them equal to men. He wants her to transcend the fate of the oppressed women of the previous generation who were confined to cooking and household chores and taking care of the husband. Enitan's belief in her father as her benefactor removes the doubts raised by women's voices, such as that of her mother, who contradicts his grand statements with the simple retort "All women except your wife"

(EGWC 21). She is indoctrinated into the mindset that women's lives are devoted to serving the everyday patriarchal deities of father, husband, and son (46).

In addition to her belief in the benevolence of men, Enitan is also expected to hold the conviction that patriarchy is no longer a prevailing force and that men are actually working in favour of women - a notion known as enlightened sexism, as defined by Susan Douglas (Douglas). For instance, during a conversation in the kitchen with Enitan's mother who prepares a meal for him, her father skillfully shifts the appearance of patriarchal enforcement onto her mother while absolving himself of any wrongdoing. He then proceeds to position himself as a saviour-like figure for Enitan in regard to gender issues.

‘I see your mother is making you understudy her again.’

....

“It won't harm her to be in here,” she said.

....

“You should tell her young girls don't do this anymore,” he said.

“Who said?” my mother asked.

“And if she asks where you learned such nonsense, tell her from your father and he's for the liberation of women.”

He stood at attention and saluted. My father was not a serious man, I thought.

“All women except your wife,” my mother said. (EGWC 20-21)

Enitan's father, Sunny, embodying the privileged status of patriarchy, skillfully manages to cultivate his daughter's admiration for him while simultaneously denigrating her mother, who dares to call him out on his misogynistic behaviours. By portraying her

mother as unbalanced and almost crazy, he creates an illusion of his own superiority and power, thus getting his daughter's adoration for him.

Enitan's father expertly designs a plan that would shape her worldview to align with his own. Just like he has taught her to strategise in the game of ayo, he coaches her on how to approach boarding school. He advises her to avoid joining the girl guides and instead encourages her to participate in the debating society, warning her that the girl guides are merely women destined for the kitchen, fulfilling traditional gender roles. He then asks her if she aspires to become a lawyer, whereby he plants a seed in her mind about pursuing a career that would defy the gendered expectations placed upon her.

Enitan highlights the three significant milestones that define the life of a Nigerian woman: childbirth, wedding day, and graduation day, in that precise order. The implication is that her life course is predetermined to include domestic responsibilities of cooking for her husband and nurturing her children. However, her father diverts her attention towards the last of the three - graduation - and steers her towards his profession. He wants her to believe that patriarchal norms do not apply to her because she enjoys the same rights and opportunities as men. Ironically, this very notion of equality that her father imposes upon her is a reflection of the patriarchal order that he purports to challenge.

According to Bartky in her work, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" in *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, "the sense of oneself as a distinct and valuable individual is tied not only to the sense of how one is perceived, but also to what one knows, especially to what one knows how to do" (77). In the context of Nigerian society, cooking and bearing children are considered seminal

skills for women, but obtaining a professional degree is also seen as an emancipatory factor that can distract from the fact that women are still expected to perform traditional domestic duties even while pursuing their careers. As a result, women are burdened with fulfilling both traditional and modern expectations, and ultimately these expectations benefit the men they marry.

Enforced subjugation and compliance with male norms are not only demanded by men but also reinforced by other women, as Enitan's mother-in-law emphasises, "You, yourself, you must learn that a woman makes sacrifices in her life. It shouldn't take anything out of you to indulge your husband for the sake of peace in your house" (EGWC 302). These women serve as the invisible enforcers of patriarchal discipline that permeates society, pressuring women to submit to male authority.

The degrees that women attain are merely "dusty certificates" that offer superficial prestige but no true liberation, as Sunny's generation prefers to give with strings attached rather than empowering women to succeed independently or pay them a fair wage. Enitan's mother bitterly laments, "The man gave me nothing. Nothing, for all his education, he's as typical as they come" (EGWC 94), highlighting the reality of women's oppression and exploitation. Despite her mother's warnings, Enitan remains blind to the truth of her situation, leading her mother to declare, "If he's no good to me, he's no good to you. The day you realize it, I'll be here waiting for you. The damage has been done already. You're still too blind to know" (EGWC 93), emphasising the success of Sunny's manipulation in convincing his daughter of his own benevolence and her mother's acquiescence.

There is the indoctrination of blind faith in men under the patriarchy, where women are believed to possess equality already unless they consciously choose the role of a kitchen martyr. This, as defined by Susan Douglas is a form of enlightened sexism:

Enlightened sexism insists that women have made plenty of progress because of feminism – indeed, full equality has allegedly been achieved – so now it’s OK, even amusing, to resurrect sexist stereotypes of girls and women. After all, these images can’t undermine women at this late date, right? More to the point, enlightened sexism sells the line that it is precisely through women’s calculated deployment of their faces, bodies, attire and sexuality that they gain and enjoy true power, power that is fun, and power that men not only will not resent, but also will embrace. (Douglas)

Despite Enitan’s hopes of challenging the patriarchal norms that her father, boyfriend, and husband promote, her father would repeatedly criticise her for being “spoiled” and threaten to withhold his material support if she did not conform. He refuses to recognise the patriarchal system that he benefits from and plays a role in oppressing women, as demonstrated by the experiences of his ex-wife, daughter, and employees. With his social and economic power, he can easily silence his wife and daughter. Meanwhile, he continues to enjoy the support of his male friends and colleagues, who also uphold the oppressive status quo and perpetuate the subjugation of women.

As Enitan delves deeper into the root of her mother’s reliance on her father, she is struck by the parallels between her mother’s predicament and her own position as an employee of her father’s law firm. Despite her impressive academic credentials, Enitan receives meagre wages, while her father continues to reap the rewards of a successful

business without a second thought for his employees. This unequal power dynamic serves to perpetuate a dependence on him while simultaneously enforcing narrow, gendered expectations of what it means to be a “good” woman. Consequently, as Enitan’s eyes are opened to the harsh realities of her situation, she reflects on her newfound understanding:

I had always believed my mother chose to depend on my father. The evidence was there in her dusty certificates. Now I felt no different from her, driving the car he had bought. My father would give a car, but he would not pay me enough to buy myself one. If I were taking the car with me, I deserved it. If my mother took a house, two houses even, she deserved them. The power had always been in my father’s hands. (EGWC 152)

In her own familial environment, Enitan uncovers the traditional patriarchal structure that oppressed her grandmothers, left a psychological imprint on both her parents and is currently being reproduced in a contemporary form by supposedly enlightened professional men.

As Enitan enters adulthood, her father’s pressure to conform to traditional gender roles becomes more insistent. When she challenges him about the societal pressure to have children, he dismisses her concerns, causing her to feel diminished and objectified. In Nigerian society, Atta suggests, a woman’s self-worth is often measured by her ability to bear children and be a good wife. Enitan’s father reinforces these patriarchal norms, explicitly stating her expected roles in society. She feels, “I shrunk to the size of my womb” (EGWC 189) when her opinion does not matter when it comes to her father’s opinion of her and of women in general. However, Enitan is able to recognise the unjust nature of these expectations. When her father suggests that her husband is afraid “like a

woman” (EGWC 195) and questions why she is allowed to leave the house during pregnancy, he reveals his own deeply ingrained stereotypes and his expectation that Enitan should submit to her husband. The derogatory term “modern wives” reinforces the idea that women who fail conform to traditionally assigned gender roles are inferior. Through these interactions, Enitan comes to realise that her father’s seemingly generous behaviour is still rooted in patriarchal expectations and a desire for women to submit to men.

Niyi Franco, Enitan’s spouse, follows the patriarchal practices of his father-in-law because he, too, was taught to exercise male privilege by his own father. According to David Griffiths, in his book *The Masquerades of Nigeria and Touch*, it is a family legacy, he would say, like becoming lawyers or masqueraders (4). Niyi hails from a Brazilian family of lawyers spanning three generations, with all male heirs expected to follow the profession while the women are required to become stay-at-home mothers upon the birth of the first child, regardless of their own professional accomplishments.

Niyi, a self-proclaimed enlightened individual, voiced to his social circle gathered in his residence that he lacks the authority to restrict the actions of his spouse, affirming “I can’t stop her. She’s the boss in this house” (EGWC 199). Nonetheless, he imposes demands on Enitan, requiring her to prepare meals for his household and visitors, to submit to his commands, and to conform to his limitations on her mobility. In the meantime, Enitan feigns liberation from domestic responsibilities and gendered divisions of labour in public, thereby bolstering Niyi’s reputation as a modern, forward-thinking man, akin to her father.

The novel *Everything Good Will Come* delves into the dynamic between Enitan and the men in her life: her father, Bandele Sunday (Sunny) Taiwo, her former lover, Mike Obi, and her husband, Niyi Franco. Throughout the story, these men demand that Enitan remains oblivious to their true intentions, actions, and privilege in society. They also require her to believe that she is empowered, equal, and liberated, leading her to follow them into the heart of Lagos society as a daughter, girlfriend, and wife who naively believes in their lies, entitlement, and professional, moral, and ethical superiority over her.

Enitan's character assessment of women in Nigerian society reveals that she categorises them into three acceptable types: strong and silent, talkative yet optimistic, and weak but kindhearted. Any other type of woman falls into the category of "horrible women" (EGWC 200).

Enitan provides a striking illustration of how patriarchal norms can adversely impact not only women but also men in her account of her father-in-law's behaviour. Refusing to consume any dish prepared by anyone other than his wife, he supposedly expresses his unwavering devotion to her. However, this insistence is not a mere display of affection, but a means to exert power over his wife, manipulating her movements, labour, and even her mindset. As a result of this coercive dynamic, "Forty-five years later, he had bad arteries and her hands were as dry and shriveled as the meat she fried" (EGWC 183). This instance serves as a poignant reminder that patriarchal expectations harm not only women but also men, undermining their health and their commitment to justice.

When Enitan voices her reservations about the expectation of her submission, specifically regarding her obligation to cook for Niyi's brothers, he responds with impatience:

'Better watch what you're saying. Next thing they'll be calling me woman wrapper.' Wrapper was the cloth women tied around their waists. Woman wrapper was a weak man, controlled by his woman. I thought he was paranoid. I said it was too bad. He was the very person who had encouraged me to be strong at work. He was asking me to fly within specified perimeters. (EGWC 185)

Niyi regards assertiveness as a commendable trait because he takes great pride in having a wife who is accomplished and flourishing. Consequently, for him, Enitan's diligence in the workplace is not only acceptable but also serves as a source of honour and distinction.

Enitan is determined to instil in her daughter a holistic perspective and to guide her towards a life free from the constraints of masqueraders. She encourages her daughter to view them simply as men, who, both in traditional and modern contexts, masquerade as gods and derive their power from women who believe in their false claims. By teaching her daughter to have confidence in herself and to question and resist oppression, Enitan empowers her to wield all the resources, traditional and modern, at her disposal in order to resist the subjugation imposed by patriarchal figures. This proactive approach also informs Enitan's decision to leave her husband. She plans meticulously, avoids letting emotions cloud her judgment, and ensures that her child has access to her father. With her blend of tradition and modern education, she creates a community that centres on women's empowerment and nurtures her child's spirit. Enitan's victorious spirit is embodied in her captivating performance of the *palongo*, which symbolises the dance of

liberation against the oppressive forces of masquerading, in the novel *Everything Good Will Come*. Through this powerful act, she emerges as a bold and determined figure who refuses to succumb to patriarchal norms and expectations and instead chooses to celebrate her freedom and agency as a woman.

The analysis presented in this context places a strong emphasis on culture-specificity as the foundation for understanding the issues faced by women in various national contexts, and ultimately as a means of promoting international solidarity and support between different cultures and intellectual communities. This approach recognises the unique complexities of each national situation, allowing readers to acquire a comprehensive view of women's experiences of marginalisation and empowerment in specific settings, from Lagos, Nigeria to Casablanca, Morocco, while also forging connections with women's struggles across the globe (Jameson 94). Rather than relying on simplistic dichotomies of difference, this approach calls for a more concrete and reflective positioning that acknowledges the specificities of each national context. Ultimately, Marlene's argument sheds on the importance of situational awareness in understanding the broader trends of women's oppression at both the national and international levels, as explored in Atta's novels (De La Cruz-Guzman 9).

Sefi Atta's novel, *Swallow* (2008), is a masterful work that delves deep into the lives of two young working women, Tolani and Rose, and their journey towards self-discovery and empowerment. Atta's impeccable writing style and meticulous attention to detail bring to life the complex and often difficult realities of their personal and professional lives. Against the backdrop of Nigeria's deeply ingrained cultural expectations and norms, *Swallow* offers a nuanced and insightful portrayal of the

formidable challenges that women face in this context. Despite being afforded some opportunities for education, women in Nigeria are still largely confined to domestic duties, with their professional aspirations taking a back seat to household chores and responsibilities.

Tolani's initial position in *Swallow* is that of a community member who is expected to play a subservient role and passively observe the dominant forces around her. As the daughter of a renowned traditional drummer, Tolani is socialised to refrain from passing judgment on men, much like a citizen who is in the presence of a deity at a masquerade. Her upbringing ingrains in her the notion that her father's profession as a drummer is a divine calling to transmit messages from the gods. In addition, her father instils in Tolani the belief that men are essential, talented, and supportive of women.

Tolani's mother, Arike, serves as a paradigm of female strength and leadership in her life. As Tolani matures, she regards her mother as nearly equal to a man in power and influence within their village of Makoku. Arike's value is derived not from her ability to bear children, but from her wise mediation of community affairs as an elder. Tolani finds Arike's experiences and life trajectory to be deeply inspiring, shaping her own aspirations and sense of self.

Swallow underscores the importance of recognising the primacy of the national situation in understanding the intellectual and cultural relations with each other, as well as people's broader experiences of oppression. It is through concrete regional situations that people comprehend one another (Jameson 94). In the novel, this idea is demonstrated through the character of a Yoruba *adire* dyer who arrives in the Makoku marketplace from the east of Nigeria to trade. She speaks about the shared experiences of women

across Nigeria, particularly their lack of solidarity and support for each other. When local dyers begin to harass Arike about her high productivity, this dyer consoles her, “Don’t pay them any mind, Sister Arike. Let me tell you, I’ve traversed this country and it’s the same all over. We women, we sabotage each other instead of working together” and “We don’t come together. . . . We should. We can’t and then, when the time comes, we wonder why we’re lagging behind the men” (Swallow 209, 210). She points out the absence of solidarity among women and the exploitation they face across Nigeria. The regional situation of women is reflective of the Nigerian situation, and this needs to be rectified. The patriarchal society coerces women into enforcing male-dominated norms, resulting in competition rather than collaboration among women. Nevertheless, she acknowledges the possibility of change, as some women are carving out paths to independence and progress while still remaining within their cultural and social constraints.

Unfortunately, as is evident even in Arike’s life, the unwavering commitment to the notion that every woman must bear a child automatically prescribes her destiny to the confines of the kitchen, where her primary responsibility is to feed her husband and offspring. This means that to meet the expectations of the community, having a child is essential. Moreover, the house remains a male-dominated space, except in situations where an older widow takes on the role of ‘almost male.’ Therefore, a woman is expected to cook and cater to the needs of the male head of the household, serving as his support system. For women like Arike, who perceive motherhood as a prerequisite, “the sense of oneself as a distinct and valuable individual is tied not only to the sense of how one is perceived but also to what one knows, especially to what one knows how to do” (Bartky

77). In this case, cooking and bearing children are regarded as seminal, and they are always viewed as a form of service to men if the woman is married or has a partner.

Ariki was acutely aware of the burden placed on her as a girl child, brought about by the traditional expectation that only women take on undesirable tasks. She heard her own mother's lamentations - "if I hadn't been born a girl to save her, she would have lived a terrible life cooking on her own" (Swallow 45) - and knew that none of the boys in her family would be expected to help. The reality of marriage as an exploitative tool, one forced upon young girls who were not given any other choice, was all too clear to Ariki.

Upon hearing the drummer boy's proposal, Ariki was thrust into a paradigm in which her future held nothing but drudgery and toil without any recognition or reward. With his words "I'll marry you" and "Yes, I will. And you will cook for me all day long," (Swallow 44) she was abruptly introduced to a life of unending labour, similar to her mother's, with no reprieve. To make matters worse, the boy went on to emphasise that their union would be involuntary and that he would also subject her to the physical aspects of matrimony: "I'll marry you whether or not you like...and at night I'll lie on top of you and do what men do to women..." (Swallow 44). This added element of childbearing only served to compound further the dismal prospects that lay before her. Ariki, brimming with rage, violently pummeled him on the head until he finally fled. This ordeal made her acutely aware that in her culture, women were subject to brutal treatment and she was determined to confront it, even if at that tender age all she could do was lash out at a boy for merely mentioning it.

Arike's father's response to the Oba's imperious demand that she should be dispatched to his palace straightaway, without being allowed to voice her opinion on the subject of her nuptials, reflects the patriarchal notion of her obligation to obey, marry and bear offspring for the benefit of the community.

. . . . The palace wanted me to report as a wife the next day. I told my father "I will not go." He asked, "What? You disobey me twice? Taboo. Taboo. Taboo, you hear me? I've been telling you for a long time, don't cause me any embarrassment; otherwise you will see what I will do to you. You refused to marry the man I chose for you and now you refuse the palace? What kind of daughter is this? This one wants to stay in our compound until she becomes old. Too proud, this one, yet she is not even that beautiful or graceful." They all agreed I was too proud and not that beautiful or graceful. (Swallow 93)

Within Arike's society, her lack of the physical qualities deemed desirable - beauty, voluptuousness and elegance - results in her being disparaged and diminished as a woman by the entire community, due to her unmarried status.

Even Iya Alaro, Arike's more liberal aunt, asserted that it was their way: "This is the way of our people," she said. "A woman your age can no longer be in her father's house. She must move on to her husband's house" (Swallow 86). She further suggested that if Arike lacked suitable marriage prospects, she should engage in procreation with the young drummer she had been associating with to ensure that she did not miss her chance before it was too late. Even her most progressive aunt, Iya Alaro, who had embraced a liberated lifestyle, was still constrained by the patriarchal dictates of society as she insisted that her niece must have at least a few children.

The practice of arranged marriage is a contract which serves the purpose of strengthening inter-family and inter-village ties while providing financial recompense to the family of the bride in the form of a dowry. As Rose perceptively articulates in the novel asking, “And why do we follow such a foolish tradition? It’s unfair to women. You might as well sell somebody like a cow” (Swallow 12). Essentially, Rose highlights that there is no allowance for a woman to express her opinion, and her body appears to be treated like a mere object which can be bought and sold, rather than respected and owned by the woman herself. This patriarchal structure that governs dowry, matrimony, and childbirth gives rise to a more egalitarian concept of dowry in which women are not allowed the autonomy to select their own partners.

Arike was disheartened to find that Tolani’s father whom she had held in such high esteem was no different than anyone else; he had enough money to pursue his amorous interests, yet not enough to provide for each woman he desired. She held him liable for the common standard in her society: men may be allowed to engage in romantic pursuits; however, they must offer financial support and include their paramours within the household as a way of creating a prosperous home that reflects positively on the male.

No matter how successful a woman is in her business, professional endeavours, and even financially supporting the household, she is still at the mercy of the male head of the house. He simply commands her to cease riding a bike, and she has no choice but to comply. Even though her accomplishments are admirable, the community will not back her as they did not when her father wanted her to marry. Consequently, she must find alternate solutions rather than insisting on operating a Vespa while wearing trousers.

Despite achieving a measure of independence, Arike is still acutely aware of the societal pressures that women face, and she internalises them as a result. As she relates to her daughter while telling stories, she admits to self-policing, “I started my cloth dyeing business. I did my best to behave” (Swallow 88). Arike is aware that the townspeople are ever vigilant, prepared to enforce social norms and exact retribution for any perceived transgression. This awareness has resulted in her internalising the expectations of her community and self-policing her behaviour, an effect Foucault’s panopticon paradigm illustrates as Arike reflects, “I knew the townspeople were watching me and waiting for me to take a wrong step. People are funny that way. Someone in power does something wrong to you and everyone treats you as if you are at fault. You yourself begin to feel you’re at fault” (Swallow 88). Despite her deep-seated understanding that she is constantly being observed, she continues to adhere to the standards of conduct even when she is cognizant of the injustices that such expectations impose. She is compelled to accept this status quo in order to preserve her reputation and maintain her place as a female within her community. Unfortunately, should she attempt to challenge these conventions, she risks being branded as ‘the bad woman’ and has to face unfavourable consequences.

The expectations of the men in the compound are crystal clear and well-known; they are the sole decision-makers who cannot be questioned by their wives or any other woman in public. Moreover, the community at large bolsters this patriarchal power, allowing the men to suppress women and use it as a tool for control. Rose’s words aptly summarise this situation, “No woman can afford to be nice in this place. It’s a war between men and us. A war, you hear me?” (Swallow 10). Arike ultimately triumphed in

the war when she endured becoming an esteemed village elder, equipped with the capability to instruct young women and provide them with opportunities to express their femininity without abiding by patriarchal convictions of matrimony and womanliness. Widows possess the most eminent strength among females, yet they must survive marriage and childbirth, outlasting their husbands in order to access this mighty standing.

Arike posits that women should be free to make the decision for themselves as to whether they want to remain single or marry, maintaining that “It’s up to each woman to decide if she wants to be on her own or not. Marriage is optional for a woman; motherhood is not” (Swallow 243). This unshackles them from the archaic notion of needing a male partner in order to attain motherhood and grants them the autonomy of being able to become mothers without having to rely on anyone else, thus allowing them greater freedom and power. Like Arike’s model, childbearing remains an obligatory mandate in the community, one that does not allow women the option of making their own decision. This societal expectation is oppressive despite the progress made by Arike and those like her who are able to create meaningful transformation without compromising their culture.

Tolani gradually became aware of the deeply entrenched and heavily codified patriarchal system that pervades both Nigerian indigenous and postcolonial customs. It was only after his death that she was able to comprehend the truth behind the facade of a grand drummer, the messenger of the deities and grand provider - a weak man who refused to challenge a society which penalised infertility by blaming his wife, then forcing her to be inseminated by his own brother. He used his wife as a mere tool for

achieving the reputation of being a father and provider, yet never stood up for fairness towards women or infertile men.

Tolani's epiphany, upon realising the irrationality of her prior conviction in men as all-powerful deities, demonstrated that it is no longer possible to suspend one's disbelief. This new gynocentric paradigm allows women to recognise their own oppression, take charge of their lives and make their own choices. As Tolani experienced, she had the capacity to revive herself and pursue a different path instead. Consequently, this approach brings forth an opportunity for women to unmask those who have been oppressing them and regard them as nothing more than a "mini Idi-Amin" inhabiting the same space (Swallow 250). By doing so, they can then use both traditional and modern means to empower themselves and thrive within society.

Tolani is acutely aware of the shame and disgrace that comes from not only Mr. Salako's inappropriate conduct but also Franka's malicious "*fragrante delicto*" (Swallow 212) (committing a misdeed) that she is his mistress, creating a toxic atmosphere in which to work. When she attempts to speak up and defend herself, she is reminded of her humiliation at the tender age of thirteen when a young boy pulled up her skirt before feigning innocence and ignorance of his foul deed; even though he was reprimanded by the teacher, Tolani was met with an inquiry as to why she had put herself in such a precarious position.

The accomplishments and achievements of the women in their lives are mere embellishments, adding prestige to the males with whom they are associated but providing no liberation or autonomy to the female. The emphasis is always on the facade

of a man's provision for his wife and children, and society insists that it remain steadfastly intact.

For both girl children in Atta's novels - *Everything Good Will Come* and *Swallow* - their father, the masquerader, can offer them a momentary respite from the unappealing feminine duties of home life, such as cooking. Yet, this release from women's labour is only conceivable if each is prepared to accept the benevolence, advanced gender ideas, and impartial attitude of the father figure without question. Consequently, the father's patronage serves as the girls' source of consternation, as they strive to live up to his watchful eye and expectations. This is what leads them to accept their gendered limitations and internalise the oppression that comes with them. He is a personification of patriarchal standards and control, existing as an omnipresent figure in their lives; however, Enitan and Tolani remain unaware of this due to their faith in their father's benevolence. Additionally, these female individuals are subject to societal norms that are based upon a patriarchal structure, and they strive to adhere to them as "a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment (Bartky 72). In the beginning, both girls experience this gaze without fully comprehending it. It is only later that they come to recognise it as a form of double consciousness. As they mature, they begin to resist patriarchal conventions and value systems.

Atta's literary works paint a vivid picture of two young girls who begin their journey by wholeheartedly embracing their father's metaphorical embodiment of a powerful deity. However, as they come of age, their eyes are slowly opened to the reality of their patriarchal surroundings. With this newfound knowledge, they ultimately sever

their ties with patriarchal ideologies and embrace a liberated, woman-centric existence, one where personal autonomy and independence reign supreme. And in the end, they emerge victorious, embodying the spirit of Atta.

Atta's works offer a refreshing glimpse into the harsh realities of Nigerian women and their constant struggles in a society plagued with misogyny and corruption. Within this context, the female protagonists are empowered to see through the oppressive façade of male authority figures, be it their fathers, boyfriends, or husbands, who deluded themselves into believing that they held god-like power over the lives of women. In the end, through their bravery and defiance, these women ultimately reject these toxic beliefs and emerge victorious, proving that "nothing good will come" (EGWC 335) only to those who remain subservient to a corrupt and oppressive status quo.

Sefi Atta and Laila Lalami, two highly acclaimed contemporary writers, have masterfully crafted literary works that showcase the gradual evolution of a woman's composite consciousness as she navigates the treacherous waters of patriarchal oppression. Whether set in traditional or modern contexts, the novels skillfully illustrate the constraints that these women face in their daily lives, as they struggle to maintain their sense of agency within their respective communities. Be it their adherence to customs and beliefs or the pressures of European-influenced cultural norms, these restrictions serve as a constant reminder of the insidious nature of patriarchal structures that seek to suppress female autonomy. At the heart of these writers' work is a strong commitment to social development and the emancipation of women, as they seek to empower their characters to overcome the numerous obstacles that stand in their way,

ultimately allowing them to emerge as determined and accomplished individuals in Nigeria and Morocco (De La Cruz-Guzman 27).

One of the ways in which patriarchy maintains its dominance in the Nigerian society is through the portrayal of women in various media outlets. Women are often depicted as sex objects, subservient to men, or in need of male protection. This portrayal reinforces the idea that women are inferior and incapable of leading or making important decisions. It perpetuates the myth that women are emotional and irrational, and that they need men to guide and protect them. These harmful stereotypes limit women's opportunities and contribute to the prevailing violent culture and discrimination against women.

A Bit of Difference chimes in with its ardent narrative which exhibits the plight of the woman in Nigerian society. As a financial reviewer from the organisation LINK, she visits the United States for work purposes. The conversation between Deola and Anne, her colleague, reflects the status of women's portrayal in media: "I thought, this has got to be a joke. She woke up pregnant?" "the networks in general don't credit women with any intelligence," Anne says. "Mothers especially" (ABD 13).

In another incident, a Nigerian politician has been accused of engaging in an extramarital affair with his daughter-in-law. In the wake of these allegations, the woman in question has been subjected to disparaging remarks and derogatory language. Specifically, she has been referred to in a manner that is both degrading and insulting: ". . .she can't believe the manner in which the reports relay the details, showing the same photograph of the woman in question, with a hair weave and deep cleavage, and referring to her as 'the delectable thirty-four-year-old'" (ABD 113).

The wrong portrayal of women in the media has serious consequences for women's rights and gender equality. It also creates a toxic culture that encourages gender-based violence and perpetuates the cycle of patriarchy.

Society is constantly inundated with sexist remarks through the media. It is crucial to ensure that the portrayal of minorities in media is not only accurate but also reflective of their cultural ideals and practices. When a prominent singer, Dara, makes an ill-advised comment about Nigerian customs, it perpetuates a negative bias against Nigerians in the eyes of the world. Anne describes the incident in the following manner:

'He was specifically asked about AIDS in Africa and he said, and I quote, "Polygamy helps. When men have several wives, they don't sleep around."

Deola laughs. 'I don't know about that.'

'I thought, how sexist.'

'He must have been drunk or high.' (ABD 200)

In her work, Cannon employs an interdisciplinary approach that combines literary studies, history, ethics, and political economy to offer a thorough analysis of the intersection of race, class, and sex in the lives of Black women. Her central aim is to illustrate that the moral agency of Black women is distinct from that of White men due to the triple oppression they face.

Unlike dominant ethical frameworks, which presume the existence of freedom of choice, Cannon contends that individuals facing oppression have restricted options. Consequently, what might be perceived as an attractive norm in dominant ethics, like thriftiness, becomes a fundamental necessity for poor Black women. In her argument, Cannon differentiates between womanist ethics and dominant ethics, maintaining that

womanist ethics is better equipped to address the distinctive experiences of Black women and their struggles for liberation (Townes 165).

This notion of womanist ethics is exemplified in the novel *A Bit of Difference*, where the protagonist, Deola, encounters triple oppression from her fellow Black women. It is often the seemingly small actions and behaviours that can have a significant impact on gender equality. These actions, though seemingly trivial, contribute to the pervasive misogynistic attitudes that continue to dominate society. Deola experiences this firsthand while waiting for her flight back to London at the airport. Despite being a successful woman and a well-travelled professional, she is subjected to discrimination solely based on her gender and race by her fellow woman who belongs to her race.

What happens on her way to London is that she is again standing in line, this time to board her plane out of Atlanta, when a man cuts ahead of her. He is tanned with grey sideburns and is dressed in a navy jacket and striped shirt – executive-looking and clutching a John Grisham novel. She is three passengers from the flight attendant, a black American woman, who is checking boarding passes. When it is her turn, the flight attendant looks at her, looks at the man, who is still not in line, and takes his boarding pass first. . . . She is loath to say an incident so trivial amounted to discrimination – it wasn't that straightforward, was it? - but she thinks it anyway. (ABD 16-17)

This discrimination manifests in subtle ways, such as the airport staff ignoring her and prioritising male passengers. This trivialisation of her existence as a woman in a public space is emblematic of a larger societal issue of gender inequality, where women's voices are often silenced and their experiences are minimised. Such a manifestation of

misogyny and gender discrimination perpetuates the idea that women are inferior to men and do not deserve equal treatment and respect. This affects women not only in public spaces but also in their personal lives, where they are expected to conform to traditional gender roles and stereotypes.

The deeply ingrained gender bias against women permeates society, even within the female population itself. While peer support is crucial to promote gender equality, some women are known to be complicit in perpetuating patriarchal societal expectations and belittling the accomplishments of successful women. These women fail to acknowledge the personal and professional fulfilment that many women can experience without relying on a man in their lives. Instead, they perpetuate the societal expectation that a woman must be married to be considered “complete”. This disturbing trend is evident in the conversation between Deola and her neighbour Subu, who is constantly harassed by her mother about her marriage prospects.

‘My mother is well,’ Subu says. ‘Harrassing me as usual.’

‘Still?’

The pressure to marry is relentless. Being single is like trying to convince a heckling audience your act is worth seeing. Subu could be the chairman of her bank and her mother would say, ‘But she could be married with children.’ Subu could be the prime minister of England and her mother would still say, ‘But she could be married with children.’ (ABD 34)

This highlights the insidious nature of gender inequality, as it is not just men who perpetuate harmful stereotypes and expectations, but also women. It underscores the need for broader societal awareness and education to eradicate gender biases and promote

equal opportunities for all. It is essential to recognise that every individual, regardless of gender, should have the freedom to choose their path in life and be respected for their decisions. When women feel free to follow their own paths and achieve personal success on their own terms, it can lead to greater empowerment and ultimately, a more equitable society.

Throughout her journey, Deola demonstrates her ability to thrive independently without the presence of a male figure in her life. She has her own set of standards that define her success, yet elderly members of the Nigerian community, including her mother and friends, fail to acknowledge this. Instead, they view her as a woman who has yet to attain fulfilment since she remains unmarried as if her life is forever incomplete. In the eyes of older Nigerian women, marriage, motherhood, and the duties of a wife take precedence over everything else. One of Deola's friends, Ivie, reveals her mother's perspective, stating, "All this career, career will get you nowhere as a woman" (ABD 172). She further advises Deola to abandon her career aspirations and prioritise having a child.

The standard by which a woman's achievements are often evaluated includes her faithfulness to her husband, her ability to raise her children, and her aptitude for cooking. However, if a woman chooses to deviate from these roles and live life on her own terms, she is deemed a disgrace to her family. When Deola's sibling Jaiye refuses to conform to traditional customs, her mother-in-law expresses her disapproval of Jaiye's choices. Furthermore, she expects Jaiye to turn a blind eye to her husband Funsho's extramarital affair. Were the situation reversed, and it was Jaiye who had been unfaithful, the response would likely have been markedly different. Jaiye's married life is stated as:

The other wives in Funsho's family kneel and they consider Jaiye rude because she refuses to. They shun her in that well-brought-up-Yoruba-woman way. Jaiye says they are backward women who can't face up to their husbands. Funsho's mother meanwhile, is not impressed that Jaiye is a doctor if Jaiye won't cook for family functions, and she considers Funsho's infidelity a petty matter that Jaiye ought to be mature enough to ignore. (ABD 145)

The circumstances surrounding Jaiye's married life serve as a testament to the treatment that women often receive when they dare to challenge the patriarchal norms that govern their existence.

Despite being aware of Jaiye's discontentment with her marital situation and her husband's infidelity, she still insists that Jaiye continues to live with her in-laws and conform to the Nigerian tradition of communal living while respecting her in-laws at all times. She expresses concern that Deola has not committed to married life, and that Jaiye is exhibiting disrespect towards her in-laws, who are equally displeased with her behaviour.

The strict and inflexible societal norms are deeply ingrained in Nigerian culture and passed down to the next generation as they grow up in society. Young boys are taught from a young age that polygamy is an acceptable and even desirable way of life, while young girls are raised with the expectation that their ultimate role is to become obedient wives and mothers. The two genders are also taught to exhibit different mannerisms and behaviour, further perpetuating gender stereotypes and reinforcing patriarchal ideals. Atta describes this notion:

Nigerian boys carried on like little polygamists, juggling their serious girlfriends and chicks on the side. Well-brought-up Nigerian girls were essentially housewives-in-training. They dressed and behaved more mature than they were, cooked for their boyfriends and didn't party much. Useless girls slept around. A guy had to rape a girl before he was considered that useless and even then someone would still go out with him and attribute his reputation to rumour. There were rumours about cocaine habits, beating and experimental buggery. The guys eventually got married. (ABD 37)

In society, while boys are free to indulge in pleasures and lead their lives as they wish, girls are often labelled as "useless" and face societal judgment for engaging in the same activities. The unfair double standard is further perpetuated by the judgment and ostracization that girls face if they dare to defy societal expectations and seek enjoyment and fulfilment in the same way as boys. This clearly showcases the entrenched gender inequality that is perpetuated from a young age, leading to oppressed women who are expected to conform to societal expectations.

The household of Deola serves as a clear illustration of the challenges faced by Black women, as evidenced by her brother Lanre's ability to maintain two relationships at the same time without any interference from their mother, who even proudly announces the arrival of one of Lanre's girlfriends: "Lanre, one of your girlfriends is on the phone" (ABD 92). Deola also experiences derogatory remarks from her male friends, who suggest that she should remain silent: "You know, Deola, you'd be all right, if you'd only just learn to shut up" (92). Her male friends' mothers, who once patted her head as a child, later viewed her as a potential temptress. Whenever she attempts to call her male

friends, one of their mothers insists that she should never call their house again, while another inquires, “Why don’t you wait for him to call you?” (ABD 92).

In societies governed by patriarchy, individuals who challenge the status quo are often perceived as a threat. This is especially true for women who are viewed with animosity and contempt when they exhibit a rebellious streak. A case in point is Fatima, an individual whom Deola regards as a friend. Atta sheds light on how Fatima’s decision to conform to societal conventions is met with scorn, as she continues to engage in acts of subversion under the guise of conformity.

. . . . She started a law practice in Kaduna and became an advocate for underage Northern girls who were forced into arranged marriages. The girls she represented were in their early teens. Her NGO was Daughters of Islam, Women for Islam or some pro-feminist, pro-Islam name that didn’t quite add up. She started covering her hair, which may have been a ruse to continue her subversive activities, but people laughed at her and called her a born-again Muslim. (ABD 122)

This illustrates how women who question entrenched societal norms are often subjected to senseless hostility and ridicule, and how they may choose to wield the very norms that oppress them as tools of resistance. The story of Fatima, as recounted by Atta, serves as a powerful testament to the challenges that women face when they dare to defy the strictures of a patriarchal society.

Within the novel, there are certain characters such as Graham and Kate who demonstrate the presence of subtle racism and the entrenched mentality towards Black individuals. Deola brings up the suggestion of aiding Nigerian women through microfinancing, which could potentially empower them to stand on their own. However,

Kate refuses to acknowledge the merit of such an idea, as her biased thinking links Africa with poverty. Instead of supporting the empowerment of Black women, Kate and Graham limit their focus to funding for hunger relief. This narrow-minded perspective perpetuates the oppressive desire to view Black individuals as inferior. Kate also fails to support her fellow gender who are continuously oppressed based on their race and gender. This lack of sisterhood is aptly referred to as “sisterarchy”.

Oyewumi posits that the concept of sisterhood is flawed, as it is often manifested as ‘sisterarchy’, where women oppress their fellow women under the guise of sisterhood. Within this paradigm, western feminists believe themselves to be more informed about African women’s lives, needs, and aspirations than the African women themselves. This oppressive behaviour is also explored in Nkiru Uwechia Nzegwu’s poem “Sisterhood,” which highlights the destructive nature of sisterhood when it is utilised to perpetuate oppressive systems as: “white sister told me/ all women are one/ united in de face/ of chau’vism” while the same:

new found sister
 had ordered me to be
 on knees
 to scrub the floor clean
 for the pittance she paid me:
 on knees
 to scrub the floor clean
 for sisterarchy. (11-12)

In her essay “O Africa: Gender Imperialism in Academia,” Nzegwu delves deeper into the concept of sisterhood and uncovers the hidden oppression that it masks.

Similarly, Collins O. Airhihenbuwa, in his book *Healing Our Differences: The Crisis of Global Health and the Politics of Identity*, criticises the term sisterhood, stating that it often leads to a race and gender hierarchy that privileges white women, resulting in a “sisterarchy” (92). These critiques support Oyewumi’s claim that her argument raises important questions about the relevance and value of Western feminism in scholarship concerning Africans.

The Bead Collector offers a unique insight into the divergent perspectives of the West and Nigeria regarding various social and political issues. Through the engaging conversations between the central character Remi and the foreign expatriate Frances Cooke, the novel deftly navigates topics such as marriage, childbearing, the status of women in society, and politics.

The novel also delves into the apprehension and mistrust that Nigerians harbour towards foreign visitors, perceiving them as potential spies for the United States. This fear of foreigners visiting their homeland is palpable and pervasive, which is a testament to the deep-rooted suspicion that is entrenched in Nigerian culture.

Through the lens of the protagonist Remi, the novel presents a nuanced perspective on the role played by women in Nigerian society, highlighting the complex challenges they face, including societal expectations and gender biases. The novel presents a compelling commentary on the stark differences in the cultural norms and values of the West and Nigeria and underscores the need for greater cross-cultural understanding and empathy.

Upon arriving in Nigeria, Frances found that the locals had a different approach to initiating conversations with her. They would invariably begin by asking about her marital status and family situation. This cultural norm is intended to foster a sense of familiarity and ease between individuals, but for Frances, it initially feels quite strange and unfamiliar. In fact, she felt somewhat discomfited by the repeated nature of this inquiry. Their conversation proceeded as follows, “. . . so why does every woman I meet here ask if I’m married or have any children?” I didn’t apologize for doing that. In the absence of husbands and children, how else could women of our age begin a conversation? Perhaps, as an American, her views on marriage and motherhood were different from mine, but that was her concern (TBC 13). This exchange highlights the central role that marriage and family play in Nigerian culture and the expectations that exist for women in particular.

The issue of women’s representation and gender equality is of utmost importance in any society. Regrettably, even in developed nations such as the United States, there is a notable lack of women in politics, let alone in patriarchal societies like Nigeria.

During a conversation about their desired career choices, Remi and Frances come to the stark realisation that the Nigerian foreign services did not even consider the recruitment of women, let alone allow them to join any positions of authority. In response to this revelation, Remi expresses her frustration, stating:

“All right. I wouldn’t have minded being an ambassador.”

“A diplomat?”

“I considered the idea when the Nigeria foreign service started recruiting, but they weren’t recruiting women, so my best bet at the time would have been to marry one.”

“Hah!”

“It’s the Ministry of External Affairs now, and we still don’t have any women ambassadors.”

“We haven’t had many in the United States . You must enjoy what you do, though.” (TBC 20)

This sentiment underscores the pervasive gender inequality that exists in Nigeria, where women are consistently marginalised and denied equal access to opportunities for professional growth and development. The conversation between Remi and Frances highlights the need for societal change and a greater commitment to gender equity and inclusivity.

Despite the fact that both men and women often work to provide for their families, it is still widely expected that women will bear the primary responsibility for managing household tasks and caring for children. This gendered division of labour is particularly pronounced in patriarchal societies like Nigeria, where men are often not expected to contribute to domestic work or child-rearing.

Remi’s own frustrations with this dynamic are evident as she reflects on the early years of motherhood. Despite the demands of caring for two young children, Tunde, her husband, made no effort to assist with child-rearing or household chores, prioritising his own leisure activities above his responsibilities as a parent. Remi recounts this experience, stating:

Work had always seemed to clash with motherhood, though, and it wasn't as if I could always rely on Tunde's assistance. . . . I was nursing Rolari and having trouble putting Rotimi to sleep. He was showing the usual teething signs, pulling on his ear and crying. I didn't know what to do with him. I was hoping that Tunde might hold him, which he did for about ten minutes, before running off to Island Club to have a drink with his friends. . . . I left father and son in the house and drove to the Kuramo Hotel with Rolari. . . . I called home once, to make sure Tunde had not abandoned Rotimi to his nanny. (TBC 25)

Remi's experiences highlight the gendered expectations that continue to plague women in Nigeria and beyond and the urgent need for a more equitable distribution of domestic and childcare responsibilities. It is imperative that men and women work together to challenge these harmful social norms and promote true gender equality in all spheres of life.

The education of individuals does not necessarily guarantee their ability to overcome gender-based biases and prejudices. This is evidenced in situations where educated individuals, despite their level of learning, continue to perpetuate oppressive attitudes towards women. In contemporary society, both men and women engage in paid employment to provide for their families. Despite the acceptance of women in the workforce, they are often still expected to adhere to the opinions and decisions of men in their households. This societal expectation is exemplified in Remi's family dynamic. Her father is renowned for his selfless service to the underprivileged community, earning him the moniker of "The Priest of the Poor" (TBC 76). While he espouses compassion for the less fortunate, he fails to extend this same empathy towards his own wife.

Remi's mother, in contrast, is subject to her husband's control, even with regard to her clothing choices. Every item she purchases requires his permission and approval, which is a striking illustration of her lack of agency in the household. Remi recalls how her mother expressed her desire to marry a man who would allow her to make her own decisions, including the purchase of a new petticoat or slip. Despite the limitations imposed upon her, Remi's mother managed to maintain her grace and elegance in her traditional, handmade garments. She says:

She had to ask my father's permission for every item of clothing she bought. He would review and sanction her lists. One day she called me aside and said, "Remi, make sure you marry a man who allows you to buy a new petticoat when you want to." She meant a slip. She still managed to look ladylike in her handmade dresses and understated traditional wear. . . . He counseled them whenever they had marital problems, usually over money. They were vocal women, free to carry on their trades; whereas my mother, Edwardian Nigerian that she was, lived within my father's modest church income and always conceded to his views.

(TBC 76-77)

This sheds light on the disparity in power and autonomy between men and women, even in supposedly egalitarian societies. While men are celebrated for their contributions to the greater good, women are still subjected to the whims and desires of their male counterparts, highlighting the need for continued progress towards gender equality.

During a heart-to-heart conversation with her friend Frances, Remi reveals her deep-seated frustration with the lack of recognition for her tireless efforts in maintaining a comfortable and stable home for her family. Despite pouring an immense amount of

work and care into creating a warm and welcoming environment, her loved ones seem to take her contributions for granted.

Remi's exasperation sheds light on the underappreciated labour of women in the domestic sphere, a role that is often marginalised and undervalued in society. In her candid expression of emotion, Remi explains how she finds domestic tasks to be tedious and thankless, citing how she raises children and supports her husband without receiving the acknowledgement she deserves. While her family may love and thank her, they fail to grasp the sheer drudgery of the work she performs. She bemoans the cyclical nature of her duties, from putting food on the table to cleaning up after her family, only to have them make a mess all over again the next day.

Remi's candid remarks are a poignant reminder of the often-overlooked contributions of women in the home and the need for greater appreciation and recognition for their labour. They also bring to light the emotional toll that can result from the unacknowledged, repetitive work of domestic life, leading to feelings of frustration, exhaustion, and a sense of futility.

Sefi Atta's most recent novel, *The Bad Immigrant*, published in 2022, deals with the Nigerian family which emigrates to the United States in pursuit of better opportunities for their children. Lukmon Ahmed-Karim is the protagonist, a failed writer and professor who moves with his wife Moriam and their teenage children, Taslim and Bashira, to New Jersey in 1999.

The Ahmed-Karim family's journey to integrate into American society was not without its challenges. The children, Taslim and Bashira, quickly adapted to their new environment and learned to mimic American accents to fit in with their peers. Moriam,

the matriarch of the family, found work as a nurse, while Lukmon struggled to find employment that suited his qualifications. Despite his PhD in literature, Lukmon found himself working as a security guard before eventually becoming a househusband. It took a decade for Lukmon to secure a teaching position in Middlesex, Mississippi.

Lukmon, having immigrated to the United States with his family, observes the persistence of traditional Nigerian gender roles in their household. His reflections led him to draw comparisons between life in Nigeria and the United States, particularly regarding gender roles both at home and in society at large.

Lukmon's mother adhered to the traditional gender roles and believed that her primary duties revolved around the children – caring for them and imparting Koranic teachings. She tended to prioritise the education and future prospects of her son, Lukmon, over those of her daughters due to his gender, although there was no difference in the intellectual abilities of her children.

This upbringing highlights the prevalent gender expectations and roles that Lukmon's Nigerian household followed. It underscores the idea that sons were more valued than daughters and were often given priority in terms of education and future opportunities. Despite living in the United States, Lukmon's family held on to these traditional beliefs and practices, reflecting the deep-rooted nature of gender roles in their culture.

Lukmon's observations also reveal the presence of gender bias in the allocation of household activities within his family. His sister, Sherifat, is expected to cook, while Lukmon is not, despite being equally capable of performing the task. This discrepancy in

task distribution based on gender highlights the traditional gender roles prevalent in their household.

Lukmon notes that his sister resented this expectation and would often express her frustration to him. Sherifat, who was two years older than him, despised cooking and would drag her feet and complain whenever their mother called her to the kitchen. She once questioned why Lukmon did not know how to cook when he knew how to eat, effectively highlighting the double standard in their household.

Fausat, their sister, who did not mind cooking, explained that boys were not expected to learn how to cook because they would one day get married and their wives would take care of that responsibility. This explanation further reinforces the traditional gender roles prevalent in their household, where women are expected to fulfil domestic duties, while men are not.

Lukmon reveals that his father's patriarchal mindset was evident in the way he allowed him to socialise freely, but not his sisters. This indicates that the concept of socialising is restricted for girls in Nigerian households, whereas boys have more freedom. This inequality in social norms creates a significant discrepancy in the treatment of children based on their gender. He confesses, "My sisters didn't challenge my father until their late teens, when they wanted to go to parties. My father didn't let them out of the house at night. I was allowed once in a while and the most my sisters would say to my father about it was, 'That's unfair,' and he would look at them as if he had no obligation to explain himself" (TBI 140). The author portrays how such restrictions prevent girls from experiencing life outside the confines of their homes, leading to a limited perspective and lack of exposure to the world beyond their immediate surroundings.

In Nigerian society, as portrayed in the novel, women's concerns and rights are often neglected and restricted, even within educated circles. Atta critiques Nigerian writers for frequently focusing on themes such as preserving culture, sovereignty, and reclaiming language while failing to address women's issues.

The novel portrays the prevailing notion that female lecturers are often left to raise awareness about women's rights, while male writers overlook the oppression faced by women. Atta posits on the importance on the fact that women's concerns are often excluded from literary works produced by male Nigerian writers.

During a conversation between Moriam and Osaro, the topic of writing from the perspective of an African woman arises. Osaro is critical of the male writer Alexander McCall Smith's attempt to write from this viewpoint, stating "Even I would have a hard time writing from the point of view of an African woman" (TBI 170). Osaro also highlights the challenge faced by African women writers in getting published, despite the commercial success of such works by male writers. Although Osaro does not provide specific examples of these women writers, his point underscores the systemic challenges faced by women in the literary industry, particularly in African societies.

Atta's critique suggests that even within the educated circles of Nigerian society, women's issues are often marginalised and overlooked. The neglect of these concerns perpetuates not only the oppression of women but also a limited and narrow perspective on Nigerian society and culture in literary works.

The novel highlights the issue of murders occurring in minority communities, such as Nigerian immigrants in America, due to the stress and difficulties of living in a foreign land. Bisi, Moriam's coworker, notes "Oddly enough, they were all employed in

healthcare. A man crushed his wife's hand in a garbage disposal unit. His wife was a nurse. Another man beat his wife to death with a baseball bat. He was a pharmacist. Some other man shot his wife to death. She was a doctor and so was he" (TBI 76).

This observation emphasises that men are often the perpetrators of these heinous crimes and that women are the ones who suffer the consequences of their uncertain emotional state. The stress and challenges of adjusting to life in a foreign country, along with cultural differences and expectations, can create a breeding ground for such violent behaviours.

The fact that healthcare professionals, who are meant to care for and heal others, are among the perpetrators of these crimes adds an additional layer of complexity and tragedy to the issue. The novel draws attention to the impact of immigration and cultural displacement on mental health and relationships within the community, highlighting the urgent need for support and resources to prevent such tragic events from occurring.

Although education is expected to broaden minds and challenge traditional, patriarchal attitudes, in the Nigerian education system depicted in the novel, this is not always the case. Rather than promoting progressive and equitable ideas, the teaching faculty often reinforces patriarchal beliefs, perpetuating the same mindset in the next generation.

Lukmon's recollections of his college experience offer insight into the nature of Nigerian academia. The education system fails to provide students with a diverse range of perspectives and ideologies. Instead, it reinforces traditional gender roles and expectations, limiting the potential for personal growth and social progress. The fact that female students are subjected to harassment by their male lecturers underscores the need

for significant reform within the education system to ensure that all students, regardless of gender, feel safe and valued. He states:

. . . . We had always had male lecturers who sexually harassed female students and female students propositioned male lecturers. Some female students were renowned for going out with sugar daddies. They were called sugary girls. They flew to the capital on weekends to party with government officials. At one point, a group of male students got so resentful of them, they began to vandalize their sugar daddies' cars.

Whenever the male students acted out, they got involved in some form of violence. They assaulted female students and attacked rival cults. From one regime to next, all that type of behavior became commonplace on campus. (TBI 81)

This portrayal of Nigerian education system raises important queries regarding the role of academia in shaping societal attitudes and values. The novel highlights the need for educators to challenge and dismantle patriarchal beliefs and promote progressive ideas that support the empowerment of all individuals, regardless of gender.

The novel highlights the prevalence of patriarchy in Nigerian society, which is so deeply ingrained that it often leads to victim-blaming and support for abusers. For instance, when a girl reports being sexually harassed, the accused male can easily escape allegations by claiming that the girl provoked him with her revealing outfits.

When Osaro tells Lukmon about being reported for inappropriate behaviour by one of his students, Lukmon recalls a similar situation he witnessed on a Nigerian campus. This suggests that victim-blaming and dismissal of sexual harassment claims are

not limited to individual cases but are part of a broader cultural phenomenon. He thinks, “At the university, where we’d taught, a student once asked a lecturer to stop sexually harassing her and he returned around and accused her of tempting him with revealing outfits” (TBI 82). This attitude creates a culture where women are not taken seriously, and their experiences of abuse and harassment are not validated. Instead, they are often blamed for their own victimisation, further perpetuating the marginalising of women by the patriarchal system.

The novel depicts the challenges that women encounter in conforming to societal expectations, which restricts their ability to lead an autonomous life. Traditional African society imposes strict gender roles on women, preventing them from expressing themselves freely. Lukmon laments the fact that Nigerian society is intolerant of homosexuality, and women do not have the freedom to dress as they wish. The novel showcases the story of a female student who dressed like a man and wrote gender-unspecific poetry. However, she faced backlash from a group of born-again Christian students who called her an abomination and demanded that she grow her hair and wear dresses. Despite the support from some of the English faculty members, the female student was not allowed to express herself freely and was forced to conform to societal norms. Lukmon’s friend Osaro even suggests that she needs a man to “straighten her out” (TBI 96), emphasising the idea that women cannot live their lives without male intervention. This shows how patriarchal beliefs and societal norms limit women’s agency and self-expression.

For centuries, female circumcision (Clitoridectomy) has been a common practice in certain regions of Africa, as it is considered an important aspect of a rite of passage for

young girls entering womanhood and marriage. However, the procedure is typically performed without anaesthesia, often in unhygienic conditions, by individuals with limited medical knowledge. This dangerous practice can cause severe and permanent health problems, as well as excruciating pain and at times even death. Despite these risks, some practitioners view female circumcision as a vital component of their cultural as well as ethnic heritage and perceive it as a religious duty.

While some communities view female genital cutting as an essential part of their ethnic and cultural identity, critics of the practice strongly argue that it poses serious health risks as it is a form of violence against women and children. Detractors further argue that the practice violates human rights and that it reinforces patriarchal control over female sexuality and fertility. Societies that trace a person's lineage through fathers often view female circumcision as a means of reducing uncertainty surrounding paternity, as it discourages women from engaging in sexual activities outside of marriage (Althaus 130).

The prevalence of female genital mutilation (FGM) in Nigeria is highlighted in a conversation between Dr. Decker and Moriam in the novel. Dr. Decker expresses her concern over the continued existence of this harmful practice and inquires about its prevalence in Nigerian society. Her curiosity about why FGM is still practised in Nigeria reflects the need for greater understanding and awareness about this issue. The novel portrays the practice of FGM as firmly implanted in Nigerian culture, where it is viewed as a rite of passage and a means of preserving traditional gender roles and values.

“It’s about female circumcision,” Dr. Decker said.

.....

“We call it female genital mutilation over here,” Dr. Decker said. “Do people practice it in your country?”

“Yes,” Moriam said.

“Did you ever come across a case?” she asked.

Moriam said she’d seen several. That was the first I’d heard of that.

“Clitoridectomy?” Dr. Decker asked.

“A few.”

“Infibulation?”

“No.”

“Fistulas?”

“Not from infibulation, from obstructed labor.”

....

“How widespread is the practice?” Dr. Decker persisted.

“It depends on where you are,” Moriam said.

Dr. Decker shook her head. “Why do they do this to girls?”

“I don’t know,” Moriam said. (TBI 155-56)

A girl’s virginity is regarded as crucial for her family to arrange a suitable marriage and receive a bride price, which is considered an important aspect of family honour. In Somalia, for instance, the prospective groom’s family may demand to inspect the bride’s body before the wedding, and mothers routinely examine their infibulated daughters to confirm their virginity. This attitude stems from the belief that both infibulation and early marriage can guarantee that the girl remains “pure” and deserving of the bride price (Althaus 131).

Moriam's indomitable spirit in the face of racial discrimination is a testament to her unwavering determination to provide for her family. Despite the obstacles that racism presents, she refuses to be distracted from her work or her efforts to earn a livelihood. Lukmon, who observes her closely, recalls an instance where he asked her why she was not insulted by racist remarks. Her response was simple yet powerful, "Because I don't rate racists" (186). Her sincerity and confidence in her ability to control whether or not she feels offended by their words were awe-inspiring to Lukmon. Moriam's resilience and unyielding strength are truly remarkable, serving as a source of motivation for those around her for upcoming the triple oppression faced in the foreign land.

With the entry of Black women in the realm of academia, a wealth of diverse experiences and perspectives that have been formed by the pervasive and inescapable reality of triple oppression is also brought. Despite their various social backgrounds, all Black women have had to navigate and define themselves in response to this reality. However, Black women are not merely defined by this oppression. They also carry within them the intergenerationally transmitted cultural heritage of their ancient African origins, providing them with a unique metatheoretical framework and experiential knowledge. This multifaceted background allows Black women to bring a distinctive perspective to the academic discourse, enriching it with their unique thematic concerns and interpretive frameworks. Through their contributions, Black women not only humanise the academic sphere but also make it more accessible to a wider range of individuals, transcending boundaries of race and gender and creating a more inclusive and equitable environment for all (Phillips and Mccaskill 87-88).

It is crucial to acknowledge that the debate between womanism and black feminism largely takes place within the realm of privileged black women. In order to advance both perspectives, it becomes essential to consider the growing disparity between the concerns of privileged black women, particularly those within academia, and the issues that are significant to the vast number of African American women who do not have access to higher education. Even though these women may share physical similarities and occupy the same physical spaces, their experiences and perspectives can differ significantly. It is worth exploring the extent to which the ideas being put forward by black women within the academic sphere are truly representative of and relevant to the larger population of African American women who are still denied access to education and basic literacy.

In the novel, Ranti Shonubi is portrayed as a powerful and confident character through the eyes of Lukmon, who describes her as a feminist. However, Lukmon also comments on her clothing choices, noting that she often wears revealing outfits and seems to challenge anyone to call her a derogatory name. This observation highlights the societal stereotype that being a feminist requires one to dress modestly as if the two concepts are inherently at odds with each other.

The use of the word “yet” by Lukmon suggests that there is a perceived contradiction between being a feminist and dressing in a revealing manner. However, Ranti’s behaviour and attitude contradict this stereotype and demonstrate that being a feminist does not require adhering to societal norms and expectations. Instead, Ranti’s confidence and disregard for these stereotypes illustrate that being a feminist means empowering oneself and challenging traditional gender roles and expectations.

Ultimately, Ranti's character challenges the societal norms and stereotypes that are often imposed upon women, particularly those who identify as feminists. Her actions and attitude serve as a reminder that women should not have to conform to others' expectations of what is acceptable or "appropriate" behaviour or dress in order to be taken seriously as empowered individuals.

Ranti Shonubi shares her observations on the plight of women in society, including in developed countries like America. She expresses frustration with the belief that feminism is only relevant in the West, and argues that this is a limited and narrow-minded perspective. Ranti draws attention to the lack of women in positions of power and influence in America, such as female CEOs and managing directors. She also notes that despite the country's progress in other areas, it has yet to elect a female president.

Ranti goes on to critique the way in which women in Hollywood are treated, pointing out that they are often forced to retire at a young age and feel pressure to alter their physical appearance in order to remain relevant. These observations lead Ranti to conclude that America is a sexist and misogynistic country, despite its reputation as a global leader in human rights and gender equality.

Ranti's comments challenge the notion that Western societies are inherently more progressive or egalitarian than others and highlight the ongoing struggle for women's rights and equality around the world. Her observations also serve as a reminder that while progress has been made in some areas, there is still much work to be done in order to achieve gender equality and women empowerment in all aspects of society.

The discussion among Black women academics on centres and margins is thought-provoking, as they strive to break down and challenge the established notions of

Black female identity. However, it is essential to recognise that several Black women are still living in segregated neighbourhoods where the legacy of racial apartheid remains strong. The concept of centres and margins, and even the act of giving voice to these ideas, cannot be divorced from issues of power. Without addressing power dynamics, the majority of Black women who are engaged in low-paying jobs such as dry cleaning and fast food service will continue to go unnoticed, while their more privileged counterparts in academia write about theoretical treatises on Black women. It is necessary to acknowledge the disparities that exist within the Black community and to strive for a more inclusive and equitable approach to exploring these complex issues (Collins 66).

The second point to consider is to shift the focus from the oppression of black women towards the gender-specific ways that institutionalised racism operates. This change in emphasis can help to provide a better understanding of how oppression in the name of gender is intertwined with racial oppression for both black men and women. Through this shift, novel political options for African Americans may emerge. It is important to recognise that feminism is not exclusive to female bodies, and likewise, sexism does not solely reside with the males. Perhaps it is time to separate political ideologies such as black nationalism, feminism, and Afrocentrism from the socially constructed categories of individuals that were created by the historical relations of racism and sexism (Collins 66).

While black men may not fully understand or experience the oppression faced by black women, they can still be allies in the fight against racism and sexism. This can be achieved through advocating for anti-racist and anti-sexist beliefs in their intellectual and political pursuits. Recognising gender as a structural element of power that intersects

with race can create a space for productive conversations among black women, among black men, and between black women and men. By engaging in such dialogues, there is potential for greater understanding, collaboration, and progress in dismantling intersecting systems of oppression.

Building solidarity between women's movements across different cultures is essential for fighting oppression. Women from diverse backgrounds can work together to expose the various forms of oppression they experience, according to their own unique perspectives. This can be achieved through coalition politics, where women of colour can acknowledge their bodies as multiple sites of oppression that require collective action to combat the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination.

Chela Sandoval, in her book, *Methodology of the Oppressed* argues that women who are oppressed must seek out movements that allow them to acknowledge the complex ways in which they are marginalised, including categories such as racism, ecological exploitation, ageism, classism, sexual orientation, and spirituality. These intersecting systems of oppression require a fluid approach that can adapt to the ever-changing forms of discrimination that women face (44).

Womanism, as described in the passage, goes beyond simply addressing gender inequality and instead builds solidarity across various categories, including labour, civil rights, nationalist, and queer movements. This inclusive approach recognises the interconnectedness of different struggles and the need for women to support one another across cultural and geographical boundaries.

Ultimately, the importance of building alliances between women's movements across the world should be considered in order to fight against oppression in all its forms.

By recognising the complexities of different subjectivities and the various systems of discrimination that intersect in women's lives, one can work towards a more equitable and just society for all women.

The delineation of societal expectations imposed on women in the Nigerian society is a complex and pervasive phenomenon, one that has long been a source of struggle and strife for women in the region. Despite these challenges, however, women in Nigeria have demonstrated remarkable resilience and tenacity, refusing to be held back by the discriminatory attitudes and practices that seek to limit their potential. This resilience is fuelled by a deep desire to break free from the shackles of societal expectations and to acquire self-realisation with confidence and determination. Education and economic independence are two key factors that play a significant role in empowering women to realise their worth and claim their rightful place in society. Though Nigerian society often attempts to constrain women within rigid gender roles, Atta's women refuse to be held down, constantly striving towards empowerment and liberation.