

Women's Roles and Conditions in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*

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Abstract

This paper examines the portrayal of women in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*. The objective is to show *how* women are considered and treated. This study is exerted within a literary frame, thus, in order to analyze the issue of women roles and conditions, and to establish a better understanding of the topic, the research methodologies applied include the analytical and the descriptive paradigms; the sociological approach and gender theory are suitable for this study. The analysis results in men's belief in their superiority over women. This fact dominates the public sphere, and makes sex a principle in defining gender roles. The novels selected deal with African women who endure all forms of subjugation, persecution, and humiliation. The authors assign powerful roles to women and make them stand against male chauvinism to exemplify the concept of new women. They fight against any behaviour and traditions that existed in the past and oppressed women.

Key words: Women conditions, men, domination, fight, past, gender roles.

Introduction

In the context of the gloomy atmosphere that hunts African governments in the neo-colonial period, Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* set an agenda to inaugurate the role and condition of African women and their struggle against male chauvinism especially in the political sphere. *Everything Good Will Come* follows Enitan as she grows up in postcolonial Nigeria and England. In the fraught, newly independent state, Enitan endures heartbreak, abuse, and rape, while trying to build a better future for herself. *Anthills of the Savannah* is a novel set in "a backward West African state called Kangan," and concerns three English-educated friends who, after a military coup, abruptly find themselves in the roles of president-for-life abandoning democratic ideals, commissioner of information. The novel focuses on the last days in the lives of the newly installed military dictator, Sam, and his two friends: Chris, who becomes a member of the cabinet, and Ikem, an outspoken journalist. The novel flashes back in time slightly to introduce us to the women in these men's lives. Ikem's pregnant girlfriend, Elewa, is from the working classes. Uneducated, she works in a store. Chris's fiancée is the well-educated Beatrice, a woman who was childhood friends with Ikem and works as a state administrator for Sam. Because she has connections to the government, the educated media classes, and also the common people, Beatrice sees the situation from a much clearer vantage point than either Chris or Ikem. She tells them that their reactions to Sam are not productive.

Considerably, the novels and the condition call for recognition of African women. There is an absolved course of feminism in the novel as the authors address the responses of African women towards their situation. In this sense, C. Fonchingong (2006: p. 145) supposes, "Achebe makes amends for feminist criticisms of his treatment of women in his earlier action by offering them a professional woman operating on the same stage as the most powerful men in the land". However, Achebe does not limit his critical sense to women roles only, but strikes a reasonable deal of irony towards male chauvinism and especially towards the young political leaders. The situation of the fictitious state of Kangan after the Western colonial powers left Africa is dejected. People live under the oppression of the ruling class, which consists mainly of depraved male politicians who promote corruption, greed, and selfishness perpetuating bad governance and the denial of rights. *Anthills of*

the Savannah opens with a political scene in which a number of characters, including Chris and Sam (Excellency), discussing the miserable situation of Kangan residents. What draws the reader's attention at the beginning of the first chapter is the fact that the board members are all men. It might occur to one's mind that the reason why women are left out in the beginning of the novel is a mere stylistic matter that Achebe uses to make his point.

Nonetheless, the irony of the scene is that the head of the state, His Excellency, is despising men as well. This represents a different kind of oppression; the authoritarian repression: 'Beautiful. Just beautiful. Now can anyone here tell me anything about that crowd screaming out there?' He looks at each of us in turn. No one stirs or opens his mouth. 'That's what I mean when I say that I have no Executive Council. Can you see what I mean now, all of you? Take your seats, gentlemen, and stay there!' He rushes out again (Achebe, 1987: p. 9).

Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* gives the reader a unique demonstration of how women defy the challenges of the patriarchal institution and the diversity in the city. It also highlights the differences between generation, faith, tradition, the realisation of a female from childhood to adulthood, and the impact of wars and colonialism. These elements make Sefi's work one of the prominent novels in the African literature.

Literary works like Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* and *Anthills of the Savannah* opposed all fixed ideas that limited the role of women, and this has led us to carry out this research, which aims at analyzing the treatment of feminism by these writers. Besides, this work gives a portrayal of how the female writer, Sefi Atta, and Chinua Achebe depict the image of women through their novels. Using these novels as a framework, this paper sheds light on significant themes that are intertwined in each story such as selfrealization, religion, friendship, polygamy, prejudice and examines the impact of patriarchy on women's relationships.

The objective of this study is to examine the impact of feminism on African female writer Sefi Atta, and male writer, Chinua Achebe, to view the African women struggles, positions and conditions, by observing how they are portrayed in these two novels *Everything Good Will Come* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. In addition, this study attempts to give another perception, which might remove the old negative views of women in Africa. It tries through the characters of the above mentioned novels to demonstrate how women defy patriarchy and their ordeal, and how they struggle to create an independent identity, fight to protect their rights and to overcome male hegemony. This topic opens the door to the following central question: to what extent do Chinua Achebe and Sefi Atta succeed in portraying women characters that struggle to emancipate themselves from their patriarchal society? The hypotheses are that, patriarchy and male character's perspectives on women's roles might provoke these writers to enjoy women's quest for freedom. Women's growth and self-discovery, education, social awareness could be the keys to success with women liberate themselves from ignorance, underdevelopment, and male chauvinism.

The research methodologies applied include the analytical and the descriptive paradigms; the sociological approach and gender theory are suitable for this study. Descriptive research focuses on investigating and mapping (describing) problems, processes, relationships (especially causal relationships), or other existing phenomena (Lauren F. Wollman, "Research Paradigms",

https://www.chds.us/coursefiles/research/lectures/research_paradigms/script.pdf (June, 9th 2023). The sociological approach defines social relationships. It sociological approach is interested in understanding the social milieu and the extent to which, and manner in which the artist responds to it (Wilber Scott, 1974: p. 23). Gender theory, in general sense, is understood as psychological, social and cultural differences between males and females, it is mostly about masculinity and femininity, it is not directly about biological sex (Giddens, 2009).

Thereby, the work is divided into three parts. The first section is about patriarchy the novel and its role in provoking female African writers to write-back. The second section is devoted to the treatment of patriarchy and feminism dimension in the novels *Everything Good Will* and *Anthills of the Savannah*. The last section illuminates the treatment of feminism, the role and responsibilities of women. Furthermore, it emphasizes the impact of education and colonialism on women.

1-Patriarchy and Male Character's Perspectives on Women's Roles

The Nigerian writer Sefi Atta in her first novel *Everything Good Will Come* depicts the realities and events that marked the Nigerian history. The story denounces the persecution and repression of women in the patriarchal Nigerian society. Sefi Atta discloses the unfair treatment, old beliefs, and traditions that reduce the

role of women to nothing than just a house wife and prevent them from putting their imprint in the society. The first thing that captures attention is that all the major female characters in the novel were downcast in their marriage and relationships with men. This divine institution (marriage) has oppressed and segregated women from the real world. It contributes to make women as a tool in the hands of men who are portrayed as egocentric, heartbreakers, and barbaric creatures, who view women as an object created just to fulfil their sexual desires. Men believed that women's role is in the kitchen and they cannot do anything else outside of it. In this position, Susan Gardner says that, "A girl is not a failure. A woman needs not be defined by marriage and above all motherhood; the woman who supports herself depend(s) on men less" (Atta, 2016: p. 161).

The novel centres on the character Enitan, the only daughter of Bandele Sunday Taiwo, and Arin "Mama Enitan". The novel is written in the first person narrative technique. It is a narration of the realization of a growing child who recognized the marginalization of women. It records the protagonist's life from childhood to the time when she becomes fully aware of the problems that occur in her society and impede her freedom. Her attempt to release herself from persecution ends by abandoning her marriage with Niyi Franco. Sefi Atta emphasizes that many women endure bad marriages just to comply with the old norms and traditions of the patriarchal society. They save their marriage to whatever extent it costs them in order to avoid the stereotype made about divorced women. Several characters in the novel suffer from their marriage such as Toro Franco, Enitan's mother in law, Sheri Bakare, Enitan's childhood and close friend, and Mother of Prison who makes a prominent statement about marriage that: We marry anybody for marrying sake, love anyone for love sake, and once we love them, we forsake ourselves; make the best of it, till they die or till we do. Look at me. Everything in that house I bought, and I was sending money to my parents in the village, sending money to his parents.... Then like a fool, I was telling everybody that it was my husband who was providing, you know, to boost him up (Atta, 2016: p. 271).

The protagonist also found herself in a frustrating marriage with Niyi Franco. He represents the typical example of an African man who believes that women are servants of men, and a man marries a woman just to take care of him and to satisfy his sexual desires without any arguments or complaints. Husbands in Africa expect women "to conform to the most limiting definitions of wifhood" (Newell, 2006: p. 137). Unlike men in the past, men in the contemporary African societies accept women's work outside the home, but the old belief that house chores are limited only for women is remaining in the minds of people. In fact, many women start working to support men in financing the family because they are aware of the increasing financial requirements in modern societies. On the other hand, men fail to aid women in the simplest tasks of home. They enjoy the virtual kingdom they had created in their imagination, while women are still suffering in dwellings, works, and from the old norms that prevent women from saying "No" to the selfish demands of men. This is similar to what Sefi Atta highlights in her novel, Enitan's husband Niyi Franco does not care about house chores because he thinks that there is someone who looks after him and cleans up his mess. He makes "things in the house haphazardly, much to Enitan's chagrin" (Oso 6). Therefore, Enitan abandons her marriage and liberates herself, not caring about the sharp criticisms of her society. Her old neighbour Busola tells her that, "Everyone is talking about you. They say you left for no reason. He never beat you, never chased. I know he's moody, but he went to work for God's sake. What would you do married to a lazy bugger like mine?" (Atta, 2016: p. 320).

Her friend Sheri also says to her, "You wait. You just wait. Your father will ask when he is out, "Why did you leave your husband?" (Atta, 2016: p. 320). Sheri and Busola's comments on Enitan's decision exemplify the thinking of a category of women, which seems stuck in the patriarchal mindset. This mindset induced women to do everything they could to save their marriage from collapse. In *Everything Good Will Come*, Sefi exposes how stereotype and male practices aggrieved women. Sheri is one of the rape victims; this ordeal brings her melancholy at a very young age. The male character Damola Ajayi in the novel did not just abuse her sexually, but he also humiliated her. The outcome of this atrocity was unwanted pregnancy, which leads Sheri to drop out of school. After that, Sheri committed a failed suicide. Her reaction was an attempt to release herself from the ignominious views of her society.

The Nigerian society blames women if they were raped; they believe that women are the one who provoked men to abuse them. This is similar to what Enitan believed "bad girls got raped. We all knew" (Atta, 2016: p. 62). The Nigerian law also is not equitable for women in the cases of rape. In Sheri's case, no one from her

family had taken her case to court. The divine justice came when Damola entered a mental institution for drug addicts. Therefore, Sheri and many other women like her choose silence because they were afraid to speak out. They know that everything around them accuses them wrongfully. This silence later becomes a burden that suffocates these women. Consequently, they try to cut off the line that links them with life to end their torment. In *Everything Good Will Come*, both Sheri and Enitan are victims of the tenets of their patriarchal society. Enitan condemned her friend for being raped.

This view is a result of the wicked unfair beliefs transformed from generation to generation and handed from mothers to daughters. Sheri's society considers her actions as the primary cause for the ravishment she faced, but she was too young to be blamed. She, like many other girls of her age, wanted to be noticed mainly from the other sex. In this regard, Atta opens the doors to another crucial dilemma. She highlights one of the motives that lead to sexual harassments. The absence of parents affected Sheri's life and actions. She lacks parental instructions because her mother is dead, later she discovers that it was just a lie by her father, and that her father was busy with his wives. She was in need of family attention, thus, she searched for it outside her family. Sefi Atta in her novel attributes Sheri's tragic accident to the parents' mistakes because they shirk duties. The impact of stereotypes is highly significant in oppressing women. Sefi shows how Nigerian people believe firmly in stereotypes especially those made about women. The scene when Enitan and Sheri were discussing their future jobs is very indicative. Sheri said that she wants to be an actress, while Enitan declared that she wants to be like a president. Sheri interrupted her by saying that, "women aren't presidents [...] and our men wont stand for it" (Atta, 2016: p. 29). Sheri's repetition of this idea emphasizes how deep she believes in this mistaken notion. Sefi reveals how the Nigerian patriarchal society has limited the aspiration of women. It makes them believe that the only mission created for them is to be a wife who cooks for her husband. She also noticed how her patriarchal society robs women of their rights; it discourages them from protesting. "In my country, women are praised the more they surrender their right to protest" (Atta, 2016: p. 177).

The treatment of law towards women is also exposed in the novel. Sefi Atta gives examples of how the Nigerian law is oppressive to women. Sheri's ruthless uncle took all her father's heritage after his death. Sheri describes the awful experience she faces with her family after her father's demise stating that, "when my father died, who remembered me? Chief Bakare done die, God bless his family. We didn't even know where our next meal was coming from, and no one cared. Not even my uncle, who took all his money" (Atta, 2016: p. 104). The uncle's action is justified by the law. Sefi through the novel condemns the patriarchal nature of the Nigerian law, which contributes in repressing women. The male characters' actions in the novel are not questioned or stigmatized in the society. They have the right to betray their wives and marry as they want. However, they wait for an ultimate fidelity and commitment from women. They believe that women should be tolerant and accommodate their mistakes. Moreover, the male characters portrayed in this literary work have as Ayo Kehinde and Joy Ebong Mbipon state: One moral flaw or the other and an imbalanced gender perspective which accounts for their insensitive treatment and denigration of the "other" sex. Even though a man like Barrister Sunny claims that he is for the liberation of women, his treatment of Arinola (his wife) speaks volumes of his genuine position as the story unfolds (Atta, 2016: p. 72). Sefi gives a description of men by the protagonist Enitan who sees them as "Beaters, cheaters, lazy buggers." (Atta, 2016: p. 224). According to Sefi Atta, men seek to subordinate women and make them unable to live without them; therefore, she portrays a woman who challenges males' beliefs and proves herself without the need of a man. The above illustrations and examples manifestly show how Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* offers an absorbing treatment of patriarchy.

Throughout the novel, Sefi Atta succeeded in presenting the dimensions of feminism by including some sensitive themes related to African women. These dimensions include: growth and self-discovery, education and social awareness, and women's social activity.

Furthermore, Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* mainly revolves around three male characters who are involved in each other's lives in a way or another. Chris Oriko, the first witness in the novel, is a commissioner for information in Kangan's council. The second witness is Ikem Osodi, the most celebrated journalist of Kangan, he and Chris stand against their old friend, Sam, and his regime. Intertwined in their story are two prominent women, Beatrice and Elwa. Through these two female characters, Achebe represents every aspect of women's life and holds out the changing status of the role of women in contemporary Africa. For that purpose, Achebe engages male characters in a feminist discourse in which he explicitly denotes his

new perspective towards women and their roles. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, we see the male interpretation of female characters through Chrisan Ikem's eyes. The first impression of women we encounter is in Chris's description of the chief secretary; she is a helpless and dependent woman: The chief secretary, whose presence of mind is only inhibited by the presence of His Excellency moves over to the sill, unhooks a latch and pushes back a glass window and the world surges in to the alien climate of the council chamber on a violent wave of heat and the sounds of a chanting multitude. (Achebe, 1987: p. 8). The passage demonstrates how the patriarchal mind characterizes women as inferior, submissive, and rendered to men's existence. Chris's chauvinism is demonstrated in few occasions in the novel. For instance, when Beatrice was invited to a party hosted by His Excellency (Sam), he warns her saying that she should keep all 'options open' when she is dealing with His Excellency. Beatrice gets mad and uncomfortable for what these words carry of sexual connotation. However, subsequently one may deduce that Chris's opinion on women is not as broad as it may seem in the beginning of the novel. Unlike Ikem, Chris shows no attention to women or their roles and seems to be detached from the feminist course of the story.

Many critics briefly talk about Chris's influence in the novel since his presence serves the thematic concern of politics and power not that of women. Chris is a typical man who, like any other man around him, is so attracted to the sexual symbolization of women. His presence within the novel is pertained to either his political relations or to describe his sexual relation with Beatrice. In a scene where Chris describes the first time he made love to Beatrice, he writes in his diary, "Her passion begins like the mild ripples of some tropical river approaching the turbulence of a waterfall in slow, peaceful, immense orbits" (Achebe, 1987: p. 64). His relationship with Beatrice, although complicated, is bonded by respect from both parties. Beatrice knows very well what Chris wants in their relationship. Chris's attitude regarding her sexuality reveals that, while Beatrice seems to have a different mind-set, Chris chooses to let her act that way because it pleases him to feel that he is with someone so modern. He shows great concern in her as he idealizes her, "Beatrice is a perfect embodiment of my ideal woman, beautiful without being glamorous. Peaceful but very strong" (Achebe, 1987: p. 59), but then he reminds the reader that he considers her incredible because "her demands were never such as to break a man's back" (Achebe, 1987: p. 62). However, for Beatrice he is a very understanding man whom she feels "like two people living inside one skin, not two hostile tenants but two rather friendly people, two people different enough to be interesting to each other without being incompatible" (Achebe, 1987: p. 84-85). This accordance between Chris and Beatrice makes it hard for the reader to see the vulnerabilities of chauvinism and oppression in their relationship. The next interpretation we get of women is through Ikem Osodi, the second witness in the novel. The first impression we are given about Ikem's relationship with women is highly unfavourable. We learn about Ikem from Chris and through his conversation with him on the phone in the third chapter of the novel. Ikem seems to be a tempered person especially when he interacts with Chris's secretary as she shouts on the phone calling her a "liar". Afterwards, Chris apologizes for his friend's behaviour towards her. Immediately after the conversation, Ikem appears in another scene where he proves his negative behaviour towards women "sending home his working-class lover, Elewa, under the pretense of not wanting her to stay the night in the government compound and so appear as a loose 'woman'" (Szeman, 129). The second female character to consider in reading Ikem's attitude towards women is his love Elewa. Elewa is very aware of men's oppression as she is more affected by it than any female character in the novel. Being a barely educated salesgirl makes her diffident about expressing herself in front of men and especially with Ikem. She takes the insult from Ikem who treats her more like a sex tool than a woman. With his "breathless succession of girlfriends" (Achebe, 1987: p. 86), Ikem likes making love with Elewa till late at night however refuses to spend the whole night with her on one bed. He finds that sleeping at a man's house is unacceptable especially if Elewa is concerned. In the course of the novel, Beatrice frequently blames Ikem for having "no clear role for women in his political thinking". In the beginning of chapter four, which is devoted to Ikem's voice, a gradual change in Ikem's behaviour occurs. He unveils the harsh condition of women giving the example of his neighbour, Mr. So Therefore, who abuses and beats his wife. Because of hearing the screams of his neighbour's wife continuously, Ikem starts to get nightmares about the situation. Ikem states, "He crawled through the third door. Perhaps he will beat his beautiful wife tonight; he hasn't done it now in months" (Achebe, 1987: p. 31). Ikem feels pity for Mr So Therefore's wife and for all women living the same situation.

Eventually, with Beatrice's guidance, Ikem comes to apprehend that women are "the biggest single group of oppressed people in the world and. . . the very oldest" (Achebe, 1987: p. 93), who should be given recognition

in the society as against the roles traditional institutions offered. Even though he had discrepancies with Beatrice concerning women roles, he concedes through a so-called love-letter he reads out to her that: The original oppression of women was based on crude denigration. She caused Man to fall. So she became a scapegoat. No, not a scapegoat which might be blameless but a culprit richly deserving of whatever suffering Man chose thereafter to heap on her. . . Well, that kind of candid chauvinism might be for the rugged state of the Old Testament. The New Testament required a more enlightened, more refined, more loving even, strategy – ostensibly, that is. (Achebe, 1987: p. 92) Ikem is, remarkably, the most outstanding male character in the novel. It is in his strong speeches and writings that we read Achebe's messages on the role of women. If Chris sets the political stage for women and for Beatrice in particular, then Ikem is the voice of women. At the end of the novel after Ikem's death, Beatrice's thoughts are revealed as being inspired by Ikem's voice and through his writings and messages. Beatrice recalls Ikem's last visits to her house and his letter of professing by saying, "Ikem! . . . He was, had to be, at the root of these unusual musings!" (Achebe, 1987: p. 176). His voice comes to her head reminding her, "It is now up to [women] to tell us what has to be done". Nevertheless, the irony of this statement and almost every statement made about women in the story is that they (women) rarely get a chance to "tell what to do". This prompts the reader to question Achebe's credibility and confidence in his representation of women in *Anthills of the Savannah*.

2-Growth and Self-Discovery

What is unique about *Everything Good Will Come* is that Sefi Atta gives the readers a story that records all the stages of a woman's life, from childhood until she becomes a young woman. The story starts from 1971 Nigeria, with a seven-year-old Enitan. Like other children at that age, Enitan is an innocent, naive, unaware child. During her journey to self-discovery and realization, she encounters many incidents and experiences. From the very beginning, Enitan accepts whatever she was told, yet as she said: "I had my own inclinations" (Atta, 2016: p. 8). She lives with a father who shows her his endless love and a restrict mother. The relationship between Enitan and her mother is distant as Enitan says, "My mother never had a conversation with me; she talked and knew that I was listening. I always was. The mere sound of her footsteps made me breathe faster" (Atta, 2016: p. 19). Although Enitan was a young child, she was aware of the issues occurring in adults' world. She knew that there was a serious problem in her parents' relationship. Sefi Atta opens the door here to another critical issue that occurs among families. She shows how a child can be affected by the problems of his/her family. Enitan in describing how she handles the fighting of her parents says that, "Walls could not save me from the shouting. A pillow, if I stuffed my head under it, could not save me. My hands could not, if I clamped them over my ears and stuffed my head under a pillow" (Atta, 2016: p. 8).

Therefore, children search for another place to hide and protect themselves from adults' world. For Enitan, she fled to the jetty to be protected where she could build her world without her parents' yelling and problems. "So, there it was, the jetty, my protectorate, until the day my mother decided it was to be demolished" (Atta, 2016: p. 8). It was also on the jetty where she met Sheri who has influenced her life. The novel is divided into four phases ranging between the years 1971, 1975, 1985, 1995. Each period chronicles the protagonist's experiences. In the first stage, Enitan was introduced to the sexual life. Firstly, she gained sex education from her mother. She reports, "Sex was a filthy act, she said, and I must always wash myself afterwards" (Atta, 2016: p. 22). She was frightened by this idea. She saw marriage as something bad and "The prospect of dying young seemed better now" (Atta, 2016: p. 23). Later, she also gained some knowledge about her sexuality from her friend Sheri who seems to know more than her, as when she states, "I wondered if she knew more than me" (Atta, 2016: p. 31). Enitan also raised disapproval towards her mother's attitude. She kept saying "in my mother's church." This is interpreted as she does not feel that she belongs there. She scorned the superstitious beliefs of her mother's church. Sefi re-questions, the religious activities practised by the Nigerians through Enitan's character. Enitan describes her mother saying, "In her church gowns I always thought my mother resembled a column" (Atta, 2016: p. 18). It seems that the writer through her heroine "lays bare her ideology concerning religious matters" (Kehinde and Mbipom 70). This stage ends by Enitan entering the secondary school, a new life and new experience. The secondary school "Royal College" marks a turning point in Enitan's life. It shapes her identity and changes her perspectives. Enitan meets girls of different cultural backgrounds. When she came across this diversity among the Nigerian girls, the flashback of what her uncle Alex said about this reality came to her minds, "Uncle Alex had always said our country was not meant to be one. The British had drawn a circle on the map of West Africa and called it a country. Now I understood what he meant. The girls I met at Royal College were so different" (Atta, 2016: p. 43).

Sefi Atta sheds light on one of the leading causes that hinder Nigeria from building one nation. She condemns the British colonialism in neglecting the differences and ethnicities among the Nigerian people. The first conformation Enitan faces, is to grow up in a country plagued by political chaos and insecurity. Although Nigeria got its independence from Britain in 1960, which meant the official end of colonialism, it does not enjoy the true meaning of freedom. Nigerians face another form of military imperialism, which caused political instability by their interference in political issues. Nigeria has witnessed many military coups; the first one occurred in 1966, a six-year after independence, a time when the nation had to be built. These coups had dramatic consequences and marked a dark period in the history of Nigeria. They threatened the lives of individuals and led to anarchy and corruption. However, these political issues were not the primary concern of Enitan as she said, "There was bribery and corruption, but none of it concerned me" (Atta, 2016: p. 44). It is also in this phase when she tries to engage in a relationship with the other sex, Damola was the one who stirred her feminine feelings toward love. She explains, "I thought of Damola. Once or twice, I crossed out the common letters in my name and his to find out what we would be: friends, lovers, enemies, married. We were lovers" (Atta, 2016: p. 51). She was the first who wanted to engage in this relation. Sefi objects the traditional Nigerian belief that is only the men that could express their feelings toward women. The woman could go for the man of her choice and make the relationship work. This stage ends with a tragic event that affected both of Enitan and Sheri's life. Sheri got raped and committed abortion. Enitan, on the other hand, learns about the truculence of the other sex. Her dreams about Damola have vanished away the same as Sheri's happiness. By these incidents, the heroine gets "some assurance that our world was uniformly terrible" (Atta, 2016: p. 66). The third phase begins by 1985. After the ordeal of Sheri, Enitan chooses to travel to London to continue her study. Conformity was the first challenge that Enitan faced. She had to conform to this new society. Enitan's settler in London offers Sefi the opportunity to show how Nigerian emigrants endure racism due to colour discrimination. Furthermore, she reports that, "Black denigration which stems from lingering colonial perspective of white-black relations" (Kehinde and Mbipom 71). However, the separation of her parents with the unimproved news from home makes her return to home impossible, as she declares, "I never wanted to go back" (Atta, 2016: p. 73). Through this literary work, Atta refers to the unbearable situation in Nigeria including, the lack of opportunities, corrupted system, and inequality between sexes, and how these factors compel Nigerians to the Diaspora.

Moreover, we observe the self-alienation of a person when s/he feels that home is no longer home. Enitan was forced to stay in England. Her dislocation from her home was the result of being unable to adapt to the new situation of her home. In recounting her distress, she says that: A squabble began between them, over ownership of property and me. My mother vowed to have my father debarred. Instead, she developed hypertension...soon I began to spend vacation in London, working as a shop assistant in departmental stores to supplement my allowance to avoid staying with either of them. (Atta, 2016: p. 75) Later on, she changes her opinion and returns home by the summer of 1984, when she realizes that home is the place where a person really belongs, it is in home where the person could really feel the warmth. As she says, "At least, at least I would be warm" (Atta, 2016: p. 77). Enitan's decision to return home exhibits a conscious awakening, even in the Diaspora, to her conscience and duties towards her nation. Sefi's novel, thus, expresses the female commitment and responsibilities. The terminal station in the novel is in 1995 when Enitan discovers herself and becomes an assertive, independent, and a courageous woman. She also gives more consideration to women's quest for freedom. She liberates herself from the shackles of a disappointed marriage. Enitan says that: I couldn't remain as I was before. Otherwise, my memory of her [my mother] would have been in vain, and my survival would certainly be pointless. Anyone who experienced such trauma would understand... One life had gone, and I could either mourn it or begin the next... This was the option I chose (Atta, 2016: p. 77). Sefi Atta through the novel opens the doors to another essential reality, not only in Nigeria but also in the entire African continent. She condemns the national elite that competes for power and authority. She also elucidates its weaknesses and inability to guide its people to prosperity. Instead, they "hasten to make their own fortunes and to set up a national system of exploitation, do their utmost to put obstacles in the path of this "Utopia."" (Fanon, 2004: 163). Sefi blames those who destroy the dream of building a nation because of their interests and greed.

Moreover, she exhibits the failure of the decolonised African societies in building a nation and portraying another type of colonialism. Enitan, the protagonist of the story, exemplifies the awareness of women about political affairs in the society. Unlike women in the past, women start having an analytical view of what is

happening around them, from a young age until they become assertive. Enitan observes, “I knew that our first Prime Minister was killed by a Major General that the Major General was soon killed, and that we had another Major General heading our country. For a while, the palaver had stopped, and now it seemed the Biafrans were trying to split our country in two” (Atta, 2016: p. 9) However, her views changed when she became more mindful as she says that: How did we live comfortably under dictatorship? The truth was that, we [...] if we never spoke out, were free as we could possibly be, complaining about our rubbish rotten country, and crazily armed robbers, and inflation. The authorities said hush and we hushed; they came with their sirens, and we cleared off the streets; they beat someone, and we looked the other way; they detained a relation, and we hoped for the best (Atta, 2016: p. 216). Enitan views toward what is going on in life have changed. This change was the outcome of the harsh reality and experiences that helped in shaping her personality. Atta confirms the notion that the identity we carry is refined by life experiences. Nevertheless, through this piece, Sefi Atta demonstrates how women infer that “freedom was never intended to be sweet. It was responsibility from the onset, for a people, a person, to fight for, and hold unto” (Atta, 2016: p. 207). This attitude and alteration come as a result of specific factors such as colonialism, Biafran war, and political instability that contribute to the shaping of African women and their identities.

3-Education, Social Awareness and Women against Male chauvinism

All great civilizations across the world have revolved around knowledge and education because they are the key to success with which people liberate themselves from ignorance and underdevelopment. Similarly, Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come* emphasizes the impacts of education in forming one’s identity, be it formal or informal. Enitan armed herself by the knowledge she acquired from the different stages of her life. She learnt about her sexuality from her mother and Sheri. The education at Royal College changed her perspectives and made her enlightened and experienced. She learnt about the varied ethnicities in her country. This stage also equipped her with an analytical view to annotate on the things and events going on in her nation. She explains that, “Outside our school walls, oil leaked from the drilling fields of the Niger Delta into people’s Swiss bank accounts. There were bribery and corruption, but none of it concerned me” (Atta, 2016: p. 50). In this stance, Kehinde and Mbipom emphasize that, “Secondary education in the boarding house at the Royal College marks another step in Enitan’s social, moral and intellectual education. She is exposed to the reality of the multicultural nature of her nation, the myths and cultural practices that characterize these different ethnic groups” (Atta, 2016: p. 70). In London, Enitan learnt about her sexuality. She says that, “The first person to tell me my virginity belonged to me was the boy who took it. Before this, I’d thought my virginity belonged to Jesus Christ, my mother, society at large. Anyone but me” (Atta, 2016: p. 69). Atta scorns men’s belief that women’s virginity or body should be given to them. Sefi’s message here is that a woman’s body belongs to her. She is the one who could decide to whom she would give her love and affection. If women are aware of this, they will transcend themselves from any limitations. Enitan at London also discovers that she was mistaken by judging her friend. She learnt from Robin that, “nothing a woman does justifies rape” (Atta, 2016: p. 70). Her decision to study law involves her in world politics. She was a member of the Nigerian Student Community.

This opens the door for her to comment on the political and economic chaos in her country as she says, “Politics in our country was a scuffle between the military and politicians” (Atta, 2016: p. 81). When she returned home, she was equipped to risk life, make choices, and accept the consequences. She engages in some failed relationships until she marries Niyi, which proved later to be a big mistake. The experience of prison also influences her thoughts where she met other women with different stories. Enitan gained an informal education also from the journalist and human right activist Grace Ameh. She inspires her with the limitations imposed on women by her society. He encourages her to use her voice, defend her rights and to forget about what the society says. She says to her, “Yes, yes, but you have a voice, which is what I always try to tell people. Use your voice to bring about change” (Atta, 2016: p. 248). All the harsh experiences and the bitter realities that Enitan encounters through her journey to self-realization affected her in a way or another. She realized later that she should sympathize with her mother not her father. She remembered her mother’s words when she advised her, “never make sacrifices for a man” (Atta, 2016: p. 173). She understands her mother’s escape to church. It was because of her failed marriage, because of the time she gave from her life to a man who failed to appreciate her sacrifices.

In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe, despite of Achebe’s attempt to give women different roles than they claimed in his previous narrations, the effectiveness and mobility of the feminist elements within the story

remain limited and utterly subjected to male characters. There are whole chapters devoted to Beatrice, where she articulates her position regarding Sam's governance and about men in general. However, the issue seems to be that Achebe tends to remain the preserve of men. Evidently, the few occasions where men talk about women in the novel are centred on matters of sexuality. Beatrice and Elewa are two female characters who strongly stand against male chauvinism, differently, but for the same purpose; to end women suffering in the patriarchal world. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe depicts Male characters in positions of power and authority and gives each of them a call to show their eagerness. The political history of Kangan in *Anthills of the Savannah* is the history of Chris, Ikem and Sam, three western-educated men who, as portrayed, attain a level above most of the wretched and suffering population. Sam happens to be the new dictatorial president of Kangan. He rules the country with a looting policy and a corrupt government. On the other hand, the other two friends are against His Excellency's (Sam's) ruling and unremittingly attempt to generate their own patterns of reigning. Evidently, they are doomed to fail due to their insistence on attempting to run the country according their own regulations. In this "manly" conflict, Beatrice stands out to play different roles, mainly, reconciliation roles. In the beginning of the novel, Beatrice attempts to get Chris and Ikem patch up with Samastherage started to prevail in Kangan's populace.

However, she fails because women's perspectives are not taken into consideration in political positions. Clearly, this restricts women's ability to influence political and social spheres and sabotages the prospect for democracy and good governance. Beatrice does not consent the role of intervention and conciliation since she believes those are traditional roles. "Forher, it is not enough today to give women the same role that traditional society gave them, of intervening only when everything else has failed", of a brigade after the house has caught fire and been virtually consumed" (Jaggi, Intro: 13). There are several reasons Beatrice denies the traditional roles of women but significantly because of growing up in a rigid patriarchal society where females are considered secondary and seen worthy only when performing their traditional roles in their household. The patriarchal society has imposed many restrictions on African women as taking parts in building the nation or calling for democracy and good governance. It is true that women in African societies have always been rebellious and played leading roles. However, when the colonial rulers and Christian missionaries dispersed patriarchal thoughts, the rebellious acts of women started to languish. It is in the colonial period that men developed a different mind-set towards the roles of women. Men had access to western education and blended with white men's style of life and beliefs. Most of black men transferred their religions to Christianity and adopted the ideology of supremacy. Hence, women were complied to abide by this new "gendered social order". They were subjected to follow their husbands and fathers' orders. New thoughts about women roles diffused into society and consequently caused a number of insecurities among women. Thoughts such as the fact that marital status brought domination to women: They panic and get stampeded by the thought that time is passing themby. That's when you hear all kinds of nonsense talk from girls:

Better to marry a rascal than grow a moustache in your father's compound; better and unhappy marriage than an unhappy spinsterhood; better marry Mr. Wrong in this world than wait for Mr. Right in heaven; all marriage is how-for-do; all men are the same (Achebe, 1987: p. 83).

In this passage, Beatrice ironically criticizes the ideology of common women and refuses to sacrifice her life and career for a man. She, like many other people in Kangan, has been exposed to the Western culture and religion. She was baptized in the church, educated in English schools and experienced Western culture during her university years in England. However, her convictions on the role of women in the African society have not been affected. She believes that women have potential to bring change to society independently without getting married or letting men decide their roles and destiny. Gender relations in *Anthills of the savannah* are issued mainly through memories and flashbacks, especially those of Beatrice. In the beginning of chapter seven, Beatrice narrates some incidents from her childhood about her father's oppression of her mother. Beatrice's family members are passive characters and are brought up only in course of a monologue where she presents herself to the reader. She begins by describing herself as "a little girl completely wrapped up in her own little world--a world contained, like Russian dolls" (Achebe, 1987: p. 80). As a kid Beatrice did not care about what being a female means as she had her own little world, where the only thing she was taught is that men run everything. The memories she has of her father are not pleasant, he was a very stern man" who beats her and her sister. Beatrice witnessed all kind of male chauvinism and women oppression in her father's house as well as the small village where she lived: "There was enough male chauvinism in my father's house

to last me seven reincarnations” (Achebe, 1987: p. 84). She did not know that patriarchy runs at schools and churches; “As I grew older I got to know that his whip [father] was famous not only in our house and in the schoolhouse next door but throughout the diocese” (Achebe, 1987: p. 80). In the schoolhouse, even the house where teachers live is divided based on gender. Beatrice describes, “... a full room or even two rooms. Male teachers, that is. The female teachers lived in the smallest building of all...” (Achebe, 1987: p. 80). It is only through Beatrice that the patriarchal images are demonstrated. By sharing memories of her past, Beatrice introduces us to a vision of her reality as an African woman. Even if she is an example of a liberated and educated woman, there will always be a story about how awful patriarchy can be.

There is no doubt that African literature praised many heroic male characters and always put them in the forefront. However, the emergence of recent female oriented novels presented a new image of women as powerful and self-conscious. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, Achebe depicts the problems brought by colonization and reconsiders his views on women roles in Africa through confronting a new type of female characters capable of making decisions, modern, and well educated. He raises African women’s roles as a crucial theme of the postcolonial nation. This implies that Achebe is challenging the traditional definition of women’s roles and blames the patriarchal society for the marginalization and oppression of African women. Achebe reconstructs the place of women in the novel through his main female character Beatrice. It is agreed that Beatrice is a shift from Achebe’s earlier women such as Ezinma in *Things Fall Apart* and Hannah Okonkwo in *No Longer at Ease*. Many critics contend that these female characters are portrayed as flat, dependent, domestic, sympathized, and passive. Obstinate, Beatrice is a dynamic and round character whose presence in the novel is efficacious. She is an independent woman, well educated, unmarried, and politically active. Achebe sees in his Beatrice a new hope for the future of the African woman, in a lecture he delivered at Umeå University in 1988 he states: The subject of women is something which I have thought about for some time, it is also something which features strongly in my latest novel [*Anthills of the Savannah*]. The most important character in that novel is a woman, and at the end of the story this woman is the centre of hope for the future (Granqvist, 11). Achebe believes that the empowerment of female figures in literature is something African writers should have cogitated long time ago. Thus, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, he engages women in new roles and in a different context, which is politics in postcolonial Africa.

In the midst of all tension and conflict, Beatrice emerges as the spirit and lifeblood of the novel. She embodies a preserving and effective woman who is able to observe the status of Kangan, a place that does not allow women to be more prominent than men. We first are introduced to the innocent, modern, an educated Beatrice through a group talk that takes place in the fifth chapter where old friends reunite. MadMedico, Kangan’s hospital administrator and a friend of Beatrice, reveals that Beatrice “took a walloping honours degree in English from London University” (Achebe, 1987: p. 58). The first picture we get of Beatrice is impressive which confirms Achebe’s purpose in presenting a model of educated and civilized women. In the same chapter, Achebe continues to mollify this picture through Chris who shows special esteem for Beatrice’s “conservative style”. His description of her is close to that of a goddess, she is “a good and tastefully produced book, easy on the eye. No pretentious distractions. Absolutely sound” (Achebe, 1987: p. 59). Chris refuses to compare Beatrice to any woman not even to his British ex-wife. In the following chapter, Beatrice decides to stand up to his Excellency’s abuse and ill-treatment of women as she refuses to be his bedmate. This is the first rebellious act we encounter from Beatrice and it reflects her attachment to her values and intellectual convictions as a relinquished and powerful modern woman. The way Beatrice chooses to control her body and her relations with men around her, even with Chris, entails what democracy is and should be all about.

Women in traditional African society have long been subjected to sexual harassment by men, especially by political leaders, who “are always polygamists” (Achebe, 1987: p. 74) in their relations with women. However, we see a radical change in these bilateral relations between strong political men and educated women. This applies to the character of Beatrice who becomes the epitome of rebellion through her desire to make place for women in the patriarchal society of Africa. Beatrice does not remain in the mould of the oppressive patriarchal society and develops a different mind than that of the other Igbo girls. She believes that every girl should have good education and a good job. However, some choose “to be dazzled into forgetfulness” or panic as time passes them by without being married. Beatrice represents a woman who is determined and chooses to put her career first rather than have care in beauty, marriage and children: I was determined from the very beginning to put my career first and, if need be, last. That every woman wants a man to complete her

is a piece of male chauvinist bullshit I had completely rejected before I knew there was anything like Women's Lib (Achebe, 1987: p. 83-84). For Beatrice, it is very humiliating to see women in a devalued state. She hates to believe that her mother fell into that category of women who got impelled into male chauvinism. Her mother was bearing all kinds of abuse and humiliation from her father and could do anything just to keep her marital situation. Beatrice is the fifth daughter in a row and her father despised the fact that he could not have a boy. However, He names her "Nwanyibuife" meaning "a woman is also something" which is a pre-indication from Achebe that the future of women must be different.

Moreover, Beatrice is a political woman who is not only concerned by the issue of women but also oppressed members of society in general. In the novel, Achebe draws attention to the political situation of Kangan and manages to propagate women's reputation despite all the oppression and isolation they are exposed to in the political sphere. Beatrice believes that the only way to approach politics as a woman is through addressing chauvinism itself. She insists that the problema in Kangan's politics is not the system itself after all, but the way people regard politics like Sam who sees politics as a game of power. Good governance for her starts with good values as "the issue... may not be systems after all but a basic human failing that may only be alleviated by a good spread of general political experience" (Achebe, 1987: p. 133). For Beatrice, if the new women are given the voice in the political sphere, then they would create a place that allows everyone to be a part of the solution so that if it fails it would not be a masculine failure. Further in the narrative, Beatrice is depicted as a dauntless girl who does not hesitate to put her opinions and arguments out to the public and interposes in politics even if women are not taken seriously. The text presents Beatrice in many occasions where she impressively wins over people with her witty comments and arguments over the roles of women in society: In the last couple of years we have argued a lot about what I have called the chink in his [Ikem's] armoury of brilliant and original ideas. I tell him he has no clear role for women in his political thinking; and he doesn't seem to be able to understand it. Or didn't until near the end... the role which traditional society gave them of intervening only when everything else has failed is not enough, you know, like the women in the Sembene film who pick up the spears abandoned by their defeated menfolk. It is not enough that women should be the court of last resort because the last resort is a damn sight too far and too late! (Achebe, 1987: p. 86-87). Beatrice strongly pleads for the rights and liberation of African women that male chauvinism deprived them of. What is more, she is courageous enough to infract customs and rituals and continues to criticize traditional beliefs all through the novel. She even refuses to organize a traditional ceremony for Elewa's baby-girl and only names her "Amaechina" meaning: may the path never close. She refers to the path of Ikem, that of rebellion and strong desire. In the traditional customs, only men have the privilege to name a newborn baby.

However, Beatrice finds this faulty and asks Elewa to do it since Ikem is gone. At the very end of the novel, Beatrice resumes with her last captious call up on tradition saying: In our traditional society... the father named the child. But the man who should have done it today is absent... So I think our tradition is faulty there. It is really safest to ask the mother what her child is or means or should be called. So Elewa should really be holding Ama and telling us what she is (Achebe, 1987: p. 213). Through this speech, Beatrice tries to make people of her community, especially men, come to the sense that women are strong enough to make their own decisions, and do not need men to act out for them. Hence, Beatrice's adaption of the moral responsibility and spiritual leadership illustrates Achebe's clear vision on the future of women. However, this vision did not stop at empowering women by giving them positive roles, but went beyond time limit to reconstruct the African mythological heritage in the image of "Idemili", goddess of water.

Conclusion

I fairly conclude that Chinua Achebe and Sefi Atta through their novels want to put an end to the oppressive system to women. After the independence of almost all the African countries, writers and thinkers carried the onus of responsibility to rebuild their nations, by exposing the problems and harsh realities existing in their communities. They tried to elucidate the consequences of these issues for the government and people, so that they may attempt to resolve parlous issues such as the discrimination against women. For a long time, African women endured all forms of subjugation, persecution, and humiliation. This inhuman treatment surpasses the real world and overwhelms the literary world. In *Everything Good Will Come* and *Anthills of the Savannah* we find a unique demonstration of how women defy the challenges of the patriarchal institution and the various attempts exerted to subdue them. Sefi Atta and Chinua Achebe depict African women's awful situation. They break the silence that existed for a long time. *Everything Good Will Come* portrays Enitan as a woman who

becomes aware of her identity. It would be a biased argument if only female writers gave their fellow women effective and positive roles. Therefore, Achebe decides to take the initiative and be one of the few African male writers who assign powerful roles to women and make them stand against male chauvinism to exemplify the concept of new women. The main purpose of this paper was to prove the merit of women in performing their roles of which they are deprived because of male chauvinism. On the other hand, I tried to show how the voice and actions of women as portrayed in *Anthills of the Savannah* can transcend all the contradictions of the patriarchal society. The image of new women can go beyond the realm of fiction to be realizable in real life. However, it is not possible to clarify the situation of women in society without evoking men's acts as well. First, through Sam who represents the realms of bad governance and oppressive power in his awry political regime. Second, through Beatrice's father who sets an example for patriarchy with his ill-treatment of women, especially his wife and daughters. Beatrice perforates the sexual barrier between man and woman and proves herself in many scenes. She represents a woman who can reconcile between tradition and innovation. Moreover, she engages in politics, stands against the oppressive regime of Sam, and leads her country to a new age of democracy. The last act of rebellion from Beatrice is seen in the final scene at the ceremony of naming Ikem and Elewa's child. She refuses to let Elewa's uncle do the honors of naming the child and gives a boy's name to the girl, Amaechina. Gender relations will significantly ameliorate to such an extent that sexual barriers and the superficial vision of gender roles will disappear. This study, however, has a set of limitations including the number of unites and chapters of analysis in comparison to the scope of the study. Not enough prior research studies were conducted on the topic. It is true that literary reviews of the work are available, however, only few address the issue of gender roles as a single theme. Therefore, further contribution to the field is needed in order to achieve possible and effective solutions to the situation of women in the African society. The question about the failure of women in emancipating themselves opens the doors to another psychological research.

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