

Flyist or Feminist: The Remaining Spaces for Women's Struggle in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

ETHEL NGOZI OKEKE

Abstract

Gender issues remain some of the preoccupations of female writers in twenty-first century Nigerian prose fiction. Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* very clearly demonstrates the fact that literature, as a form of discourse, functions as an important tool for not only upholding and projecting the dominating perspective of patriarchal ideology, but also for countering them. This paper posits that Atta utilizes the platform of fiction to probe socio-cultural practices that biologically categorize the male and the female in a hierarchical form. Atta goes all out to launch an assault against sexism, tearing down notions of hierarchy that privilege the male gender. Based on perceived injustices arising from gender differences, Atta pointedly transposes the realities of women into literature with a view towards amelioration and positive changes. The discussion will be explored from the framework of a "flyist-feminist" paradigm, a feminist theoretical viewpoint that is presented in the novel. Thus, the text's meaning is underpinned in the "flyist-feminist" paradigm, which claims voice as a potent weapon in defence of women, with a resolve to live and a refusal to be "swiped" at like a mere fly. The essay then concludes that Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* envisions a society with lingering sexist issues remaining to be surmounted in the struggle against conditions that are limiting, constricting or inimical to women.

Key words: Gender, hierarchy, sexist, women's struggle, feminist

Introduction

Great achievements have been recorded in history through women's struggles. Kathleen M. Fallon's *Democracy and the Rise of Women's Movements in Sub-Saharan Africa*, for instance, provides us an interesting insight into women's role in contemporary African politics. Against the background of patriarchy, some changes have taken place in the woman's life. An example can be found in the area of formal education. During the colonial period in Africa, there were disparities in the education for boys and girls, in terms of numbers sent to school and the quality of education offered. This was not merely a colonial import as it was supported by the

African people based on their ideology of man and woman. Women were trained in ways that reinforced their traditional roles as wives, mothers and domestic hands, while men were trained for careers in the public sphere, in line with the traditional notions of masculinity. The late arrival of women on the literary scene (as was also the case in the Western world) is implicated in the historical processes of the education of males and females. As a result, the field of imaginative literature was initially dominated by males who were accused of presenting "their cultural reality as the cultural reality" (Gloria Chukwukere 6). Ama Ata Aidoo in her essay, "To Be an African Woman Writer - an Overview and a Detail", had complained about the neglect of women writers and their works.

As an index of change and achievements from women's struggle, there has been an increase in the number of women empowered by education, to the extent that in the contemporary literary scene in Nigeria, women seem to be gaining the upper hand. Hence, Kanchana Ugbabe observes that "women writers win literary prizes alongside the men and have surpassed them in some cases". Indeed, their remarkable presence has further fanned the embers of the struggle, using the medium of literature to advance their cause. They are boldly laying claims to feminism, unlike some of the earlier writers - with the notable example of Buchi Emecheta, who, despite evidence to the contrary, became apologetic in the face of ridicule, aggression and backlash that put feminism in a bad light as Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie shows ("The Female Writer," 11). The new millennium writers, such as Chimamanda Adichie and Sefi Atta, perceive women as "still reeling under the heavy yoke of dictatorial men, which they parallel with state dictators that brutalize and impoverish the nation and its people" (Florence Orabueze, 86-87). In their concern for women, these writers also fulfil the stipulation for a feminist perception, as Ama Ata Aidoo outlines, by committing their "energies actively to exposing the sexist tragedy of women's history, protesting the on-going degradation of women, celebrating their physical and intellectual capabilities, and above all, unfolding a revolutionary vision of role" ("Unwelcome Pals and Decorative Slaves," 16).

The contemporary stage has witnessed changes in the circumstances of women, with a remarkable evidence of social transformation and mobility for more women. Western education has provided this opportunity. Nigeria of the 21st century has seen increased female literacy and a flourish of literary creativity by women. This has, indeed, overtaken the description of African literature as a "male-created, male-oriented, chauvinistic art" (Femi Ojo-Ade 158). In the evolving socio-political and cultural contexts, therefore, the lot of women has improved greatly compared to what it had been. Women are evidently emerging out of their underprivileged status. Some

ground, no doubt, has been gained. Nevertheless, all is not yet accomplished. Adichie, an authoritative voice of this generation of writers, avers that "gender as it functions today is a great injustice and should provoke our anger which has had a history of bringing about changes" (*We All Should Be Feminists*). Consequently, lingering issues of the sexist condition of women demand that the struggle continue until the desired changes in ways that can make the society more just and equitable are achieved. Definitely, there are still remaining spaces for women's struggle, as shall become evident from our exploration of Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (henceforth to be shortened as *Everything*).

Indeed, J.O.J Nwachukwu-Agbada identifies two themes in contemporary Nigerian writings as "More Space for the Woman Being" and "Growing up a Female in a Modern Patriarchy". There are indicators to the fact of reinforced impulses by African writers on the path to "recreate credible African women's image by creating characters that are preferably in male dominated professions ... women who are not only economically independent but psychologically strong and as ambitious as the men"(Alkali 16). This is a fact that is unmistakable in Atta's feminist temper in *Everything*.

Theoretical Framing

The theoretical framework of this paper is drawn from a brand of feminism inherent in Atta's *Everything*, which suggests that a woman's destiny is not fixed; rather, a woman should take her destiny in her hands and negotiate a resistance to realities that are unpalatable to her. This perspective posits that a woman should fight against her annihilation and should not watch in helplessness to be destroyed by her enemy. The enemy in the text's context is the accepted traditions of patriarchal domination. This vision is fully realized in the characterization of the protagonist, through whom Atta reveals her brand of feminism. In the novel, therefore, Atta's aggressive feminism is keyed in when against accusations of being a feminist, the narrative voice of the protagonist declares that she is not satisfied with the fixed notions about women and will, therefore, give her voice to tearing all such notions down to shreds until she is heard. Thus, she goes on:

Sometimes it felt like I was fighting annihilation. But surely it was in the interest of self-preservation to fight what felt like annihilation? If a person swiped a fly and the fly flew higher, would the fly become a flyist? (204)

In the blurb commentary of the novel, Adichie mostly admires Atta's "courage in choosing to look at her fictional world through fiercely feminist lenses". Protest

forms the undercurrents of Atta's vision. It is a protest against the injustices of patriarchy and the interrogation of sexuality based on power structures that support male hegemony in male-female relationship.

In the light of Atta's "flyist-feminist" framing, this paper explores the issue of sexism and the assault on notions of hierarchy that privilege the male gender. The word "struggle" conjures other synonyms like: contention, fight, resistance, protest. In Atta's *Everything*, there is an overt, unapologetic resolve to address the discontentment of women and engage in a struggle against conditions that are constricting, limiting or inimical to the well-being or actualization of women. It is a struggle to see things from the perspectives of the minority, for in the grand narrative of patriarchal ideology in Africa, man is associated with the majority, while woman is seen as the minority, a minority not in terms of numbers but "in the sense of Dominated, Disadvantaged, Exploited, Excluded" as Femi Ojo-Ade (158-159) underlines. Thus, Atta's feminism claims voice as a potent weapon in defence of women, likening it to a resolve to live and a refusal to be "swiped" at, just like a mere fly. The "flyist-feminist" paradigm underlies a critical analysis of conventional, intellectual and cultural assumptions about the male and female genders. In the novel, Atta probes the socio-cultural practices that biologically categorize the male and the female in a hierarchical form, inferiorizing the female as the "other". The grand narrative of gender that categorizes the male and the female in a hierarchical order is called to question, leading to a critical deconstruction of traditional assumptions about the gender. As a form of discourse, literature has been an important tool through which the dominating perspective of patriarchal ideology, with its sexist order, is not only projected and upheld, but also countered. This is the point Oluwatoyin Jegede makes about the capacity of sexist discourses to produce counter sexist discourses which "expose the foibles of sexist ideology and its false claims to the 'truth' about gender order" (210).

Sexuality and Women

Life is sexualized and lived through established codes for males and females. A woman, for instance, is not merely an embodiment of body parts such as the breasts and vagina, but is also revealed by social conduct, dressing, speaking, vocation, by what she does or does not do. The same applies to a man. Sexuality is vast and complex and cannot be exhaustively defined. In very simple terms, it relates to how our sexual biological organs affect us. This underlines the diverse ways that sexuality affects human lives; and, ultimately, they involve relations of power. Through the lenses of feminism, we can see how anatomy affects the living reality of women

within their social, political and cultural environments represented in the fictional world of the novel under examination.

Sexuality raises notions of erotic pleasure and also evokes sources of violence and oppression. The social life of humans in societies is guided by codes of conduct in matters of sexual activities. In line with this, sexuality reveals itself in body as well as in actions, behaviours or attitudes which society and culture expect of the genders in heterosexual interactions. Thus, in sexual activity, social conventions continue where biology stops. The questions then are: What does the society expect of the gendered bodies in sexual practices? What are the cultural attitudes towards sex and the expectations from the genders?

The male-female binary in human society is played out in the sex ethos. We find an instance of this in the idea of the active-passive binary in the sex act, or even in the double standard of morality present in expectations of female purity, chastity, virtue - in contrast with male freedom. The implication of such a binary is that when a woman has sex, she is shadowed with shame, unlike the male for whom sex connotes positive masculinity, manliness, adventure, bravado and strength. Thus, while sex is something positive for the man, it is negative for the woman. Sex leaves the woman with a sense of shame, of being used, spoilt, rotten and dirty. Based on the established conventions of sexuality, many readers of contemporary Nigerian fiction have expressed their shock that female characters make demands of sexual kind, thereby breaking the restraint, reserve, passivity and shame towards sex, which is traditionally associated with women. As Iniobong Uko points out in "Female Sexuality," prior to the new Nigerian writings, sexuality had been steeped in "customary beliefs and practices that sought to make women ashamed of their sexuality."

Sexuality entails sex, which has different implications for women and men. Prostitution or sex commodification, for instance, is propelled by a male-centred pleasure principle. While sex may be driven by economic necessity for the woman, it is motivated by pleasure for the man. Women become instruments for meeting the pleasure needs of men who can afford it. Therefore, a woman gives her body for a man's enjoyment in return for material reward, and not necessarily for the joy of sex. Brigadier Ibrahim Hassan, in Atta's *Everything*, is described as the one who collects "polo ponies and women as young as his daughters" (104). Hassan engages young girls as objects of sexual ravishment. In this case, sexuality evokes a sense of use: in a sex act, a woman is "used". A man uses a woman, as becomes obvious in the language of the prostitutes: "Aman was uselesing me" (*Everything* 92). This idea of the "used" and the "user" underlies prostituting acts, sex trade and commodification

of sex, all of which require man (the user) to pay woman (the used) for her body, the object used. Good women, after all, do not find pleasure in sex, which is a fact that mainly underlines the traditional idea of female circumcision. Moreover, traditional expectation creates the notion that sexual enjoyment is only for women of low virtue. In other words, women who enjoy or are enthusiastic about sex must be cheap and bad. When it comes to women, sex is something to be enjoyed only by sluts and prostitutes, hence, in the logic of this morality Enitan's mother, in Atta's *Everything*, spurns Enitan's friendship with Sheri on the grounds that the latter is "omoita" (meaning a street girl), who could pass off her immorality on her daughter. She goes on to mystify her daughter about sex, giving her a distasteful, negative view of sex as something filthy that requires cleansing afterward (27). Such a negative attitude to sex, consequently, affects Enitan so much that she grows to become almost frigid. It takes her years of growth and exposure abroad to be freed from her aversion for sex. Her boyfriend, Stringfellow, complains about her sexual passivity, about her being like other Nigerian women in bed: "You just lie there," he said. "Like dead women...." The next time around my boyfriend strummed me like a guitar" (77). Thus, rather than getting a feeling of joy and excitement, she is burdened and strained by sex. In mature retrospect, she regrets having judged Sheri based on her romance and based on the traditional notion that bad girls got raped.

Again, a striking indicator of the opposing duality of liberated male and restricted female sexuality is reflected in the restrictions of movements to the female hostels of National Youth Corps members, which is not so in the male hostels. Women are kept under guard, but not so the men. Thus, Baba the security guard is jocularly described as the "Keeper of graduate vaginas" (*Everything* 88).

The perception of woman as food, as sex symbol and the object of male sensual desire, sometimes goes viciously violent. Rape is rooted in this stereotypical, warped imaging of women as food: food to be devoured by hungry men. And a hungry man, they say, is an angry man. Actually, the erotic potentiality of the female body as represented in the food metaphor often correlates with feminine beauty. The more beautiful a woman is, the more lust she inspires. Thus, eroticism of the female body is reinforced by beauty. And reflecting on Sheri's beauty, Enitan concludes:

I was glad I was not pretty. Prettiness could encourage people to treat a woman like a doll, to be played with, tossed around, fingered, dismembered and discarded. Prettiness could also make a woman lazy. Sheri was the Nigerian man's ideal: pretty, shapely, yellow to boot, with some regard for a woman's station. (109)

Thus, beauty predisposes the woman more to sexual objectification, reducing her

capacity for other more positive abilities.

Other dimensions of sexuality take the discussion further to issues of submission, role dichotomy, and male preference in the traditional status quo. The hierarchical power structure inherent in the male-female binary is evident in the concept of "istonia", referring to "the issue of male progeny, which allows the man to value male children more than the female ones" (Jonas Akung "Feminist Dimensions" online). Cultural requirements demanding that family names and heritage be perpetuated through sons bring about the overarching importance placed on the male offspring, leading to male preference. Enitan's mother becomes a tragic victim of this practice. The pains of losing her son to sickle cell disease pushes her to the precincts of insanity, a condition further compounded by her husband's treachery and involvement with another woman who sires for him a male child outside the marriage. An uncle trying to pacify Enitan's anger at this act of her father's clinches the point about "istonia": "Sunny always treasured you That was his mistake. But you know, an African man cannot die without leaving a son" (*Everything* 298).

From another angle, we find that women subjugation is perpetrated through female submission, particularly in marital relationships. In *Everything*, Toro Franco is the stereotypical image of a submissive wife who "swallowed her voice the day she married" (187). Enitan describes her in these words: "My father-in-law had tamed his wife, almost as if he'd scooped out her brains and left just enough for her to keep obeying him" (259). She is a symbol of the good woman; everybody says how nice she is and she effaces herself with cooking and serving others, possessing the approved quality of domesticity. Sheri displays a dependency complex in her relationship with Brigadier Hassan, to whom she submits by covering her head, cooking for him, and restricting her movements based on his orders.

Enitan is bothered about the expectations of subordination that places a demand on her to submit to her husband in the name of respect (187). She is subjected to her husband's authority, to the point that she cannot even grant an interview to the press on the issue of her father's detention, without obtaining her husband's permission. Thus, in her marital home she feels bound, restricted, and limited, making her compare her husband to a mini Idi Amin. She has seen her mother's and grandmother's suffering occasioned by the submission dynamics. She is conscious of the fact that in her maiden home, "the power had always been in my father's hands" (156).

By assigning a supposedly superior role to men, the society unwittingly places a relatively greater importance on males than on females. In practical terms, roles tend to be hierarchical in nature. Aside from the politics of sex, a person's role in life

is a correlative of the person's status and value. Males, therefore, by virtue of their conventionally accepted roles, are given precedence, invariably making them the prided sex. A clear pointer to gender hierarchy is that the higher we go, the fewer the women: women are bottom-heavy - that is, they remain in the higher number at the bottom of the socio-political ladder. A striking dramatization of role dichotomy, with its underlying disadvantages to women, is found in the choices of future career expressed by the young teenage friends, Enitan and Sheri. While Sheri inclines herself to the social construction of women as wives, mothers and cooks, Enitan is poised for a rebellion against the order. Thus, Sheri will like to become an actress while Enitan wants to be a president:

'I want to be something like.... like president.'

'Eh? Women are not presidents.'

'Why not?'

'Our men won't stand for it.....' (*Everything* 34-35)

Atta, in her narrative details and characterization, launches an assault on the traditional role biases, with Enitan's character designed as a weapon of assault.

Ultimately, sexuality marks the differences between the males and the females beyond the biological binary. The issue of role dichotomy, much like the opposing gender attributes of femininity in females and masculinity in males, is socially constructed to maintain socio-cultural decorum. In the process of nurture and socialization (as demonstrated in Sheri's inclination to the traditional notion of a woman's place), the woman herself becomes an agent in her own subjugation. This leads to a tendency towards what Ogundipe-Leslie describes as the "fifth mountain" on the African woman's back:

The fifth mountain on the woman's back - herself - is the most important: women are shackled by their own negative self-image, by centuries of interiorization of the ideologies of patriarchy and gender hierarchy. Her own reactions to objective problems therefore are often self-crippling. (Quoted in Davies and Graves 8)

In the novel, Sheri can be seen through the prism of the above postulation. Enitan's mother and grandmother, suffering from this complex, become heartbroken victims of overbearing husbands. Enitan rejects such a fate through her decisive and assertive act of quitting the marital space, which constricts her freedom and potentiality. Having so far explored the subjugating circumstances of women, we shall turn attention, in the following sub-section, to issues of resistance, amelioration, or protest in the struggle for a positive, liberated conditions for women. What we have

seen, so far, provides the background, basis or justification, for a counter sexist discourse that shall follow.

Voice and Subjectivity

Protest or resistance is hardly ever realizable through silence. Thus, Soyinka's idiom about the death or hopelessness of the one who keeps silent in the face of tyranny applies very pertinently here in a discussion of emancipating struggle for women. In Atta's "flyist-feminist" template, voice is claimed as a weapon for tearing down notions, structures or practices prejudicial to women. Repression is relieved through voice, which, in the given context becomes a resistance tool - an uncomfortable thing for the traditional order. This voice is appropriate to challenge socio-cultural practices and beliefs that work against women; it is the voice given to a woman's deep seated discontentment. A woman's vulnerable and under privileged position is marked by silence and surrender; but silence is no longer golden, as Florence Orabueze concludes in her commentary on Atta's *Everything*:

It is only by raising her voice in protest that she can gain her freedom, her family's and the entire country's. And to achieve this feat she needs the complementary voice of men, because it is very evident that silence in either gender is no longer golden. (101)

Voice is, therefore, claimed by women as a protest tool towards securing social reforms: Grace Ameh strikes this note in her conversation with Enitan: "Yes, yes, but you have a voice, which is what I always try to tell people. Use your voice to bring about change" (262- 263). Voice entails more than mere words: it includes action- and revolutionary action at that. Voice connotes power, affirmative action, assertion, emancipation and freedom from the destructive relegation of silence. On the contrary, silence connotes compliance, surrender, powerlessness, suppression, subjugation. Consequently, politics is claimed for women through voice since political apathy has hitherto kept women at home, through the traditional role binary between the male and the female. We are given a visionary image of women through women centred discourse of political issues of the country in the example of Grace Ameh and Enitan (302-304). Thus, the author envisions a world with strong assertive women credited with voice and visibility beyond the space defined for them by the society; women who are more than invisible hearth dwellers, more than kitchen martyrs, more than child bearers; women who transcend the traditional limits of domestic boundaries. Through Enitan's characterization, the patriarchal norm that cedes authority to men and demands submission from women is destabilized and

questioned. True to this temper, Enitan rejects the role determined for her by the social institution and challenges her husband for asking her to run domestic errands for him: "Why can't you go to the kitchen? What will happen if you go? Will a snake bite your legs?" (191). Then speaking for all women, she goes on to acclaim: "We are greater than our wombs, greater than the sum of our body parts" (192).

Thus, in such an assertive rage, Enitan leaves the hearth to "explore new dimensions that would help the women's cause", as Akung underlines ("Feminist Dimensions"). Fighting for the cause is impossible from the kitchen. Joining voices to the political cause, feminist issues join with issues of national reconstruction very much in line with the agenda for African feminism. Enitan is the revolutionary voice granted the authorial perspective. Prepared early for role revolution, Enitan is modelled for a revolutionary cause for women. As a teenager, she expresses a desire to be something like a president, and to have one child (34-35). Contrary to the accepted traditional norm, she also shows distaste for domesticity, a disposition which her father endorses when he says to her:

I see your mother is making you understudy her again..... You should tell her young girls don't do this anymore..... And if she asks you where you learned such nonsense, tell her from your father and he's for the liberation of women. (24-25)

Enitan's father further enjoins her to join the debating society rather than the Girls' Guide which is nothing but kitchen martyrdom in the making (44). It is worthy of note that the debating club shall provide her the opportunity to build, sharpen, and use her voice. In adult life, she fully matures into launching out in protest against the traditional dictates that subject women to the kitchen. She protests against the expectation of submission as well as the imposition of duties on women, as becomes evident in her reflection in the following excerpt:

I had seen how women respected men and ended up shouldering burdens like one of those people who carried firewood on their heads, with their necks as high as church spires and foreheads crushed. Too many women, I thought, ended up treating domestic frustrations like mild cases of indigestion (190)

Ultimately, she wages an all-out fight against the subjection of women to a destiny in the kitchen, the symbol of domesticity and the qualifying trait of a good woman. She rebukes Sheri for choosing such a fate, failing to flaunt her intellectual skills and helplessly deferring to Hassan, her man. At last, she succeeds in bringing Sheri to break off her dependency complex and to leave her restricted space with Hassan to forge her own destiny through a successful business career. Hitherto, Sheri

had confessed her faith in the traditional notion of a woman's role and station in life: "Maybe you don't know Education cannot change what's inside a person's veins. Scream and shout if you like, bang your head against this wall, you will end up in the kitchen Period" (108). However, Sheri is later proved wrong, as she finally subscribes to Enitan's revolutionary voice and impulses, leading her to rise above the limited vision of female sexuality. This underscores the power of voice to transform individuals and bring about social reforms. Considering the fact that respect for traditional heritage can be entrapping, Enitan says she respects her heritage, but also believes that "it's right to evolve and change" (115). She wields the weapon of her voice on issues around her: she confronts her overbearing father, condemning his ill-behaviour and accusing him of passing off "asinine behaviour... as manliness" (155). And when her father questions the non-participation of women in the general pro-democracy protests, she is able to place the problem of women in its proper perspective, revealing the fact that women are doubly yoked by home and state dictatorship:

Human rights were never an issue till the rights of men were threatened. There's nothing in our constitution for kindness at home. And even if the army goes, we still have our men to answer to.....'Bring on the women when the enemy is the state. Never when the enemy is at home.' (*Everything* 200)

Thus, Enitan offers her voice in defence of women, which she sees as the act of preserving the "woman self" against destruction. Woman, the target of offense by patriarchal ideology with its sexist practices, is expected to rise to the challenge of self-preservation in the face of oppression. A feminist critical fervour is, therefore, justified because it is indeed a duty to save oneself; thus, it is "in the interest of self-preservation to fight what felt like annihilation"(204). Voice, therefore, becomes an important weapon of defence in this life-preserving task.

Enitan's brief prison experience sharpens her voice and vision for social crusading. In her new awakening, she comes to the conclusion that the marital space is far too restricting to allow her the opportunity for the all-important task that drives her life's purpose. Therefore, she concludes: "When I die, I would be called to give account of my time here on earth. What a pity if I said I cooked and cleaned" (305). Her life's aspiration is sure to be atrophied in the home space. She sees the necessity to join the Human Rights group to pursue both the struggle for the country against bad leadership and the struggle for women against socio-political and cultural ills. It is only outside the marital space, without the dictatorial authority of the husband, that she can pursue the two-pronged struggle for the state and for women. The concluding

voice of her message, driven home with the drama of palongo dance is, "our men are free" (339), and not so, our women. Her exit from her marital home is well-motivated. In this freedom from the marital space lies a hopeful vision that everything good will come as the operational base for the woman begins to expand beyond the hearth. The marital space is the butt of attack because in it, man's freedom or hegemony is unquestionably guaranteed. In her action lies the demonstration of a protest with the hopeful suggestion that everything good will come from the freedom negotiated by the female self as an act of self-preservation. Consequently, in her newly acquired freedom she enthuses: "Nothing could take my joy away from me. The sun sent her blessings. My sweat baptized me" (340).

We further identify a revolutionary vision of role explored through the centring of the girl child. The male child is displaced to give emphasis to the female. This has become a feminist device employed to challenge the existing practices of male preference. In *Everything*, Enitan and Sheri are centred as girls, and then again Enitan gives birth to a baby girl.

Istonia is, therefore, subverted; and in this imaginative leap, girls rule the world - a very feminist projection of role revision. Family life thrives even without a son. As a matter of fact, the positive claiming of the female, tailored to a feminist cause, is best evidenced in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*. The assertion of the female is, therefore, a twentieth century heritage now being reinforced by the example of Atta's *Everything*, among others, in the twenty-first century. Beatrice and Ikem's posthumous daughter, named Amaechina, are the fictional forebears of this flourishing celebration of daughters in the contemporary novels. In the final analysis, voice for the females includes both resistance and power negotiation in a world where sexuality is hierarchically structured.

Very importantly, Atta in *Everything* advances the feminist cause to include a liberated attitude that allows women to express themselves as sexual beings who love and enjoy sex. We spot the image of Mrs Williams, who, being divorced, finds herself a boyfriend with whom she enjoys a happy sensual life, moving on in life with a successful career, in spite of her failed marriage (293). Her happiness seems to anticipate Enitan's blessings and joy upon calling it quits with her marriage. Before her marriage, Enitan is seen brandishing her sex allure by doing a strip tease, flashing a breast and turning to wriggle for the benefit of Mike, her boyfriend. When her father catches her and warns her about making herself so available, she is quick to retort: "This is modern day Lagos....Not Victorian England" (132). Thus, rejecting the sexual prudery epitomized in the Victorian era, Enitan subscribes to the rights to pleasurable sex for females. She, therefore, enjoys a happy sex life with Mike for the

brief moment of their relationship. A liberated sexual behaviour marks the index of her maturity and freedom from the influence of her mother's negative sexual attitude that has described her earlier years.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to examine the dramatization of the sexist notions about women, with an underlying motive for countering them and negotiating for better options in Atta's *Everything*. The text frames a "flyist-feminist" theoretical paradigm that underpins the consciousness of women's marginality, driving the narrative towards its artistic vision. In the novel, sexist conditions of women are foregrounded with a view to pulling down the ideas and practices that go contrary to the "woman being". In conclusion, the grand story of patriarchy, with its rigid, specific gender role binary that limits the potentialities of women, is not left unchallenged. Drawing on the logic of feminist critical thought, Atta's *Everything* contends with the tradition of males as the centred norm of human reality as condemnable and oppressively hierarchical. Espousing sympathy for the cause of the marginalized gender, the author has indeed revealed her "heightened sensitivities" and awareness of the "nuances of injustice" (Achebe, 115) against the females in society, thereby underscoring the point that there are remaining spaces for the continuing struggle for women.

Works Cited

- Achebe, Chinua. "The African Writer and the Biafran Cause." *Morning Yet on Creation Day*. New York: Anchor, 1976. 113-121. Print.
- . *Anthills of the Savannah*. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1988. Print.
- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. "We All Should Be Feminists." *Tedtalk*: Youtube. Web. Dec. 2012.
- Aidoo, Arna Ata. "Unwelcome Pals and Decorative Slaves: Or Glimpses of Women as Writers and Characters in Contemporary African Literature." *Literature and Society: Selected Essays on African Literature*. Ed. Ernest Emenyonu. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1986. 8-17. Print.
- "To Be an African Woman Writer - an Overview and a Detail". *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*. Ed. Tejumola Olaniyan, and Ato Quayson. MA: Blackwell, 2007. 513-519. Print.
- Akung, Jonas E. "Feminist Dimensions in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*." *Studies in Literature and Language* 4. 1 (2012): 114-122. Web. (date of access?)
- Alkali, Zaynab. "Gender Politics and Sexual Dynamics, Imaging Men in

- African Women's Writing: The Quest for Identity and Integrity." *Gender Politics: Women's Writings and Film in Northern Nigeria*. Ed. Ahmed Yerima and Saeedat Aliyu. Ibadan: Kraft, 2012. 11-20. Print.
- Atta, Sefi. *Everything Good Will Come*. Lagos: Farafina, 2005. Print.
- Chukwukere, Gloria. *Gender Voices and Choices: Redefining Women in Contemporary African Fiction*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1995. Print.
- Davies, Carole Boyd, and Ann Adams Graves, eds. *Ngambika: Studies of Women in African Literature*. Trenton, NJ: African World, 1986. Print.
- Fallon, Kathleen M. *Democracy and the Rise of Women's Movements in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins UP, 2008. Print.
- Nwachukwu-Agbada, J.O.J. "Nigerian Debut Novelists at the Turn of the New Century." *Justice and Human Dignity in Africa: Collection of Essays in Honour of Professor Austin Chukwu*. Ed. GMT Emezue, Inge Kosch, and Maurice Kangel. Lagos: HPC, 2014. Print.
- Jegede, Oluwatoyin. "Subversive (Re)writing and Body Poetics in Lola Shoneyin's *So All the Time I Was Sitting on an Egg*." *Ibadan Journal of English Studies* 7 (2011): 207-224. Print.
- Ogundipe-Leslie, Molar. "The Female Writer and Her Commitment." *African Literature Today* 15 (1987): 5-13. Print.
- Ojo-Ade, Femi. "Female Writers, Male Critics." *African Literature Today* 13 (1983): 158-179. Print.
- Orabueze, Florence. "The Prison of Nigerian Woman: Female Complicity in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Come*." *African Literature Today* 27 (2010): 85-102. Print.
- Ugbabe, Kanchana. "Nigerian Literature in the 21st Century: Aesthetic and Institutional Considerations." *Journal of the Nigerian Literary Society of Nigeria (JLSN)* 5 (2013): 13-24. Print.
- Uko, Iniobong I. "Female Sexuality in Contemporary African Literature from Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* to Aidoo's *Changes*." *LWATI: Journal of Contemporary Research* 8.3 (2011): 112-121. Web. 10 Jan. 2014.