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**Silence ,identity and conflict : revisting patriarchal space  
in Buchi Emecheta's the joys of motherhood and Asare  
Konadu's a woman in her prime**

**Ngendakumana, Joseph; Sous la direction de : Dr. Divine Che Neba**

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**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT**

**SILENCE, IDENTITY AND CONFLICT:  
REVISITING PATRIARCHAL SPACE IN  
BUCHI EMECHETA'S *THE JOYS OF  
MOTHERHOOD* AND ASARE KONADU'S  
*A WOMAN IN HER PRIME***

By

Joseph Ngendakumana

SUPERVISOR

Dr. DIVINE CHE NEBA

Senior Lecturer,

University of Burundi

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## DEDICATION

To my late father;

To my mother;

To my family;

I dedicate this work.

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This work has been a contribution of many people to whom I owe much gratitude.

First and foremost, I am grateful to Dr Divine Che Neba, Senior Lecturer at the University of Burundi, who willingly accepted to supervise this work from its draft to completion. I express my sincere gratitude for his guidance, advice and criticism.

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## ABSTRACT

This work examines the female situation in Africa vis-à-vis the patriarchal set up. It portrays the African woman as a victim of circumstances, and how she strives to break the patriarchal barriers, which have entangled her from time immemorial. The work equally aims at exploring the different levels of conflict in the African society, and how these conflicts foster the marginalisation of the female folk. In this light, this work is predicated on the hypothetical contention that patriarchy perpetuates power imbalance, injustice, and creates a harsh environment for the female folk. The woman, as projected by Buchi Emecheta in the *Joys of Motherhood* and Asare Konadu in *A Woman in her Prime*, becomes a labourer, who labours to satisfy patriarchy and the self. This dilemma sometimes retards her progress, and places her in a *fait accompli* state. Constructed against the background of feminist and psychoanalytic theories, this work concludes that the quest for identity and freedom, create consciousness in the African woman, which makes her to reconsider her status within patriarchy.

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

From time immemorial, women in Africa have been suffering from patriarchal exigencies. They continue, to a larger extent, to be victims of situations they are not responsible for. In most African societies, traditions impede women to speak out their illtreatment. Within this imbroglio, the new African woman has been seeking ways of breaking this silence. She takes the path she feels can relief her from centuries of bondage. Buchi Emecheta and Asare Konadu are amongst the category of African writers who champion the course of liberating the African woman from centuries of patriarchal enslavement. In their works, they depict both the traditional and modern image of the African woman. In fact, the topic "Silence, Identity, and Conflict: Revisiting Patriarchal Space in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Asare Konadu's *A Woman in her Prime*" helps expose the binary oppositions between man and woman, patriarchy and woman, as well as tradition and modernity.

In these two novels, there is a clash of cultures, which leads to the recognition of female's identity. In this vein, Adaku in *The Joys of Motherhood* and Pokuwaa as well as Koramoa in *A Woman in her Prime* are determined to break down the traditional belief which teaches a woman to be passive and totally submissive within patriarchal set-ups. They attempt to cut the strings which, for centuries, have tied the African woman to the traditional pillar. In view of this, one is tempted to pose the following question: What is the destiny

of the African woman when she, in an attempt to liberate herself, entangles herself more in the patriarchal web? A satisfactory answer to this question will give us a clear understanding of the position of the African woman within the patriarchal space.

In order to facilitate understanding of this work, it is necessary to define certain key words which will preoccupy us in this study. These words include silence, identity, conflicts and patriarchy.

In *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, silence is defined as abstinence from speech or noise, being silent, taciturnity, non-betrayal of secret etc; fact of not mentioning a thing; absence of sound, stillness, oblivion, state of not being mentioned. Felice N. Schwartz and Jean Zimmerman in *Breaking with Tradition: The New Facts of Life* commenting on silence aver that

When we don't acknowledge the issues, we can't analyse them. When we don't analyse them we can't address them. The conspiracy of silence allows a perpetuation of the self fulfilling prophecy of failure.

(38)

As seen above and as far as this work is concerned, silence means not acknowledging; refusing to address certain issues; in short, an act of suppressing and subjugation.

As far as identity is concerned, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* defines it as absolute sameness; individuality, personality, equity of two

expressions for all values of the literal quantities. *The Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus* further views identity as the quality of being the same in all that constitutes the objective reality of separate things. This work will anchor on Aimé Césaire's notion of identity, which makes reference to "the dignity, the personhood or humanity of ... people" (Qtd Masolo, 27).

In the case of conflict, *The Concise Dictionary of Current English* defines it as a fight, struggle, collision, or clashing of opposed principles. Another word which deserves to be explained is patriarchy. *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines patriarchy as a society, system or country that is ruled or controlled by men. Lisa Tuttle in the same vein in *Encyclopedia of Feminism* views it as all known societies ruled by men, who control, and profit from women's reproductive capabilities. The concept of patriarchy is predominant in feminists discourse, thereby providing a way of working towards a theory of male domination and female subordination, and of recognizing that, despite the different forms it takes, all women suffer a similar oppression, which cannot be ended merely by changing the economic system, as purported by some scholars.

Samuel Asare Konadu was born at Asamang in Ashanti, central Ghana, in 1932, and educated at Abuakwa State College in Southern Ghana. In 1951, he joined the Ghana Information Service and worked as a reporter on a number of government newspapers and in broadcasting. He later went to London and the Strasbourg University to study journalism before joining the Ghana News Agency. In 1963, he devoted himself to research into traditional customs and

practices and to writing. He also started his own publishing firm, Anowuo Publications and its first books have met with remarkable success. His works include *A Woman in her Prime*, *Ordained by Oracle*, *Come Back Dora*, *Shadow of Wealth* and *Nightwatchers of Korlebu*.

Emecheta on her part was born in 1944 in Yaba, a small village near Lagos, Nigeria. Her parents, both from eastern Nigeria, died when she was a child. Emecheta was taken in by foster parents, who mistreated her. She grew up listening to the women around her telling stories, but in her culture women were not expected to be writers. She attended a missionary high school in Lagos until she was sixteen and then married a man to whom she had been betrothed since the age of eleven. At nineteen, Emecheta followed her husband to London. She had two children at the time, and was pregnant with her third; she eventually became a mother of five. During this time in London, Emecheta began to write. Her husband was so upset over her intention to become a writer that he burned her first novel, and after this, Emecheta decided to leave him. She later rewrote the novel and published it as *The Bride Price*. While struggling to become a writer, she worked part-time jobs to support her family and earned a degree in sociology at the University of London. Emecheta's early writing efforts initially met with repeated rejections from publishers. Her break came when the *New Statesman* accepted several of her essays about her life in London; these eventually became her published work, the novel *In the Ditch*.

Three of Emecheta's works focus on events in her life. Her first two novels, *In the Ditch* and *Second-Class Citizen*, are loosely based on her own experiences as a single parent, and are regarded as her most accomplished works. Both books revolve around a young Nigerian woman named Adah, and her search for a better quality life. In the first book, Emecheta depicts Adah's struggle to raise five small children while depending on welfare payments, attending college, and attempting to complete her first novel. The second book recounts Adah's immigration to England and her marriage to a domineering man who attempts to thwart her educational and professional aspirations. Their marriage dissolves as Adah, influenced by the women's liberation movement, begins to assert her individuality. *Head above Water* is a nonfiction work detailing Emecheta's childhood in a small Nigerian village, her career as a social worker in London, and the problems she encountered in securing a publisher for her writings. Three of Emecheta's novels dramatize the problems that African women typically encounter in traditional, male-oriented society: *The Bride Price*, *The Slave Girl*, and *The Joys of Motherhood*. It is this emphasis on the female plight that motivated me to re-visit the female question within patriarchy, through the lens of Asare Konadu and Buchi Emecheta.

This work therefore examines how patriarchy silences the African woman. It further portrays the African woman as a victim of circumstances, and how she strives to break the patriarchal barriers, which have entangled her from time immemorial. The work equally aims at exploring the different levels of

conflict in the African society, and how these conflicts foster the marginalisation of the female folk. Through this lens, the position of the African feminist will equally be taken into consideration.

The work centres on Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Asare Konadu's *A Woman and her Prime*. Other supplementary works dealing with woman's issues in patriarchal societies will equally be included.

The theories that will centre our discussion are feminism and psychoanalysis. First, feminism is concerned with difference and marginalisation of woman. Proponents and exponents to this theory include Elaine Showalter, Mary Wollstone Craft, Simone de Beauvoire, Buchi Emecheta, Virginia Woolf, and Kate Millet. They seek to end women's subordination in any way, for any reason. Feminist criticism which arose from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century women's movement should be understood as a political discourse, that is, critical, and theoretically committed to the struggle against patriarchy and sexism.

In the light of white critics, Elaine Showalter in *A Literature of their Own* argues that literary subcultures all go through three major phases of development. Those phases are: feminine (1840-1880), feminist (1880-1920) and female (1920-present). To begin with the feminine phase, it involves imitation of female writers on male published works. They imitate the prevailing modes of the dominant tradition. Second, with the feminist phase, she sees women protesting their lack of rights and works to secure them. Third, the

female phase which is the phase of discovery concentrates on exploring the female experience in Art and Literature.

Mary Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of the Woman*, depicts a woman as an oppressed class regardless of social hierarchy. She observes that men and women do not have equal power in all domains, and calls for women to improve themselves through education. What is important for her is that women should be taken as men's companions, not as inferior creatures.

Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* argues that French culture like all western culture is patriarchal, with men having all power over women. Women submit themselves, and take a second place. She rejects the assumption that women are born inferior, but made to be so. She ends inviting women to refuse to be the "other" and realise their possibilities.

Virginia Woolf points out the idea that women are rare in the process of writing. Works of art are full of depictions. Both male and few female writers depict the image of a woman who struggles for mental independence from men, as related to the difficulties of checking off any sort of burden she faces. Women should have the liberty and courage to write what they think, and feminist writings is to eradicate the exploitation and oppression of women by men in patriarchal society. The feminist approach is relevant to this study in that it will help us to have better understanding on how women interact in traditional society, and how things should be revised to better their lots.

Second, the psychoanalysis is another approach which is imperative in this study, since it is evident that any person frustrated by patriarchal premises can be psychologically affected. The major proponent to this theory is Sigmund Freud, and his disciples Carl Gustave Jung, Jacques Lacan and Alfred Adler. Their contributions to modern psychology is their emphasis on the human psyche. For instance, Freud assumes that most of our actions are motivated by psychological forces over which we have very limited control. To him, the unconscious plays a major role in human realisations and feelings although mankind is not aware of its presence.

According to Freud, the unconscious is a mental process whose effect are realised after a certain period. It refers to people who are voluntarily to stay with their own psyche. He further states that the mind is divided into three parts; that is the *id*, the *ego* and the *superego*, with a relation to conscious and unconscious. He argues that the *id* has instinctive energies of survival values, and has no vision on what may follow its actions. In the case of the *ego*, he says that it the regulator of the instinctual demands of *id* which gratifies our instincts for pleasure without regarding the social conventions, and the *ego* will help analyse the way it serves as an intermediary between character's inner self and the outer world. The *id* is unconscious while the *ego* is conscious. As far as the *superego* is concerned, it represents all the moral beliefs and structures. It helps children to internalise social values taught by their parents. It combines both conscious and unconscious, and is dominated by morality principle. It makes a balance

between the *id* and the *ego*. This theory is relevant since it puts together the thinking caps of both women and men in patriarchy. It equally helps expose why some people cling to certain values, and sometimes believe fervently in them, thereby making things more difficult to non-conformist.

Both theories do not contradict themselves. Instead, they complement each other. The psychoanalytic theory carries us deeper into the psyche of feminists, making it easy for us to understand why the woman needs to rebel against patriarchal exigencies.

Critics have lauded Emecheta for convincing characterization, and amusing, yet poignant evocations of her heroines tribulations. Many critics have asserted that she provides a thorough presentation of social themes in her novels, but some reviewers have argued that Emecheta has either ignored or shied away from certain larger social issues in her works. For example, several scholars claim that she did not address sexual discrimination in England in *Second-Class Citizen*. Commentators have disagreed over Emecheta relationship to feminism and to traditional African Culture. Much of this commentary has focused on *The Joys of Motherhood*. Some critics have asserted that Emecheta created Nnu Ego as the representative African woman, while others hold that Emecheta had neither the authority, nor the intention to speak for all African women. Salome C. Nnoromele in her article titled "Feminism in Literature" argues that *The Joys of Motherhood* is not a construction of the universal African woman. It is simply the story of a woman, who makes devastating choices and sacrifices for her

health and selfhood, in the pursuit of failed traditions, encapsulated in the idea of motherhood. She also argues that the novels set in Africa including *The Joys of Motherhood*, represent a feminist indictment of African patriarchal culture, and have lauded Emecheta for her portrayal of the effects of this culture on African women. She equally adds that Emecheta provides a needed feminine perspective on the lives and culture of African women. She concludes that Emecheta's novels compose the most exhaustive and moving portrayal extant of the African woman, an unparalleled portrayal in African fiction, and with few equals in other literatures as well.

Emid Schildkrout says that " The female relations in Hausa society similarly to that of most Islamic societies stress the domination, superiority of men in subordination and inferiority of women" (Qtd *Women and Work in Africa* 57). In this case, male is considered as a subject, while female is the other. She is oppressed by a man. She cannot speak out or denounce her illtreatment. If it happens for her to speak publicly, she is criticised as Ezra Fortman observes: "Women who spoke publicly in village meetings might be criticised for their boldness by both women and men" (Qtd *Woman and Work in Africa* 15).

Kathleen Gerson sustains in *How Women Decide about Work, Career and Motherhood* that their work aspirations interact with their desires to bear and rear children. These experiences of women also show how work and family decision emerge from the broader social context in which they occur.

Other critics have raised our attention on women's issues in African traditional societies. In this perspective, Mukayuhi Anne Marie in *Buchi Emecheta and the Woman Question* shows how women are victims of traditions. In terms of marriage, it is the parents who make all arrangements and formalities. She adds that most of the time, they sell their daughter as they would do with a goat or a piece of cloth.

Jocelyne Nicobireza in her dissertation "Impact of Traditions on Women's life in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*" points out that Nigerians glorify childbearing mothers and curse barren women, ignoring the role of the men in both situations. She adds that males consider the woman as an inferior person, who must be relegated to a second position. She submits to man and to traditions. In the second chapter she shows negative impacts that women endure because of traditions. She shows how polygamy, barrenness and bride price can cause women's mental instability or enslavement. She concludes by pointing out the way a woman should be liberated such as breaking traditional misconceptions.

This work differs from the above-mentioned in that, besides the illtreatment of African women, which is the pivot of the above-mentioned writers, this work goes further to explore the dilemma the African woman undergoes in satisfying patriarchy and the self.

In this way, this work is based on the hypothesis that patriarchy perpetuate power imbalance, injustice, and creates a harsh environment for the female folk.

In this light, the woman becomes a labourer, who labours to satisfy patriarchy and the self. This dilemma sometimes retards her progress, and places her in a *fait accompli* state. A state which is disgusting to most women. However, she tries to break these barriers in her own way.

Including the general introduction, this study consists of three chapters, and a general conclusion.

Chapter one entitled "Silencing the Woman" shows how patriarchy silences the woman. This chapter clearly shows how patriarchy oppresses the woman in terms of marriage, and places her as a victim of circumstances.

Chapter two titled "The New Image of the African Woman" shows how the woman tries to break away from traditional enslavement. She projects a new image, which does not satisfy the demands of patriarchy, but creates an identity for her.

Chapter three tackles the different conflicts that women undergo in patriarchal societies. These conflicts are three folds: First, there is the conflict between man and woman; second, the conflict between patriarchy and woman; and last, the conflict between tradition and modernity. A woman is placed at the centre of all these societal entanglements.

Finally, there is a general conclusion which summarizes the major arguments of the work, brings out findings and suggests possible research avenues for future researchers.

## CHAPTER I

### SILENCING THE WOMAN

This chapter examines how patriarchy silences the African woman. It portrays the image of the African woman vis-à-vis the demands of patriarchal culture in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Asare Konadu's *A Woman in her Prime*. This chapter equally intends to explore the place of an African woman as depicted by male or female writers.

A great number of writers, more often than not, have always placed the woman as a second class-citizen. They consider her nothing, so to say. Because of this general belief of female inferiority, many African societies associate women with story-telling and housework. This is partly because male writers have for long masterminded the literary world and African literature in particular. Llyd Brown in *Women Writers in Black Africa* draws our attention to the marginalization of women in Africa and notes that

Women writers of Africa are the other voices, the unheard voices, rarely discussed and seldom accorded space in repetitive anthologies and the predictably male-oriented studies in the field. Relatively, few literary magazines and scholarly journals in the West and in Africa itself have found significant space or time for African woman writers

on the continent, has become a tradition implicit rather than formally stated, but a tradition nonetheless and rather unfortunate one at that. (127)

The above quotation shows clearly how African women writers are marginalized in the field of writing. They are accorded a second place in the society.

In a paper presented in Stokholm in 1987, Ama Ata Aidoo in " To Be an African Woman Writer: An Overview and a Detail" analyses gender discrimination within patriarchal African society and comments that

It is definite that anything that had to do with African woman was of all vital pieces of information, the most ignored of all concerns; the most unseen of the all visible; and we might as well face it; or everything to do with humanity, the most despised. This had nothing to do with anything that African women did or failed to do. It had to do with politics of the wealthy of this earth who grabbed it and who held it. (172)

From all indications, gender discrimination is not something of the past, it still continues, and is presented in African art forms with all its ramifications.

The popular and favourite images of African women in literature, with particular focus on African tradition suffer from stereotype. The key stereotype is the idealisation of the pre-colonial African woman.

Juliana Makuchi and Nfah Abbenyi in *Gender in African Women's Writings: Identity, Sexuality and Difference* have significantly expose the negative effects of this idealisation:

This idealisation of the African woman that posits her status in transcendental symbol found itself duplicated in African literature with a parallel stress on the supremacy of motherhood, of fertile mother, of fecundity. This emphasis had the adverse effect of reaffirming woman's subordinate roles, given that, in the writings and thinking of these male authors. African women are virtually silent observers who simply fulfilled their destiny, without questioning it or the structures that sanctioned the roles they made to assume. (5)

The keynote in this quotation is that women's fecundity and maternity are her natural attributes. It becomes problematic when a woman gives birth to a girl, and worse when she is barren. In Asare Konadu's *A Woman in her Prime*, when Pokuwaa discovers that she is not able to respond to the demands of her society, that is, giving birth to a child, she decides to offer sacrifices to the gods on her way down to the river. She supplicates that

You are an unforgiving God,

God of our forefathers.

Your assistance is not temporary.

You are almighty.

Let all evil men fall before you. (3)

This quotation shows how Pokuwaa is beseeching her God to bless her so that she can bear a child. She puts her beliefs in God, and acknowledges that God can answer to her needs. A child will help integrate her in the society. Though all feminists share the common ground of need for political struggle against patriarchy and gender discrimination, the issues they underline are often varied and different.

Patriarchy's pegging of women to the traditions of society as the custodians and primary transmitters of social values, make it ever more difficult for women to extricate themselves from these traditions, even where they are unfair to them. Women, whether consciously or unconsciously, have come to define themselves according to these traditions, and consequently, have become ardent defenders. amid its attempts to thwart their vision. Women suffer from this oppressive machinery from outside traditional heritage, and from within the woman's own background as a result of years of exclusion. Shaped by patriarchy, Molara Ogundimpe in "African Women Culture and Another Development" presents this last obstacle as the most important problem to deal with. if women are to move towards their own liberation, she states:

Women are shackled by their own negative self-image by centuries of the interiorization of the ideology of patriarchy. Her own reactions to objectives problems therefore are often self-defeating and self-crippling. She reacts with fear

dependency complexes and attitudes to please and cajole  
where more self-assertive actions are needed. (35-36)

In traditional African society, a woman who does not conform to tradition tends to be viewed always as a whore or an alien. Because of this, that she is obliged to be submissive and quiet, so that her society can accept her. In reality, the woman is trapped and silenced in her own image, which is far removed from that of other human beings; who in her complexity, as every other human being, does not merit to be reduced. This situation is observed in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, when Kehinde opposes the husband chosen by her father for her. She declares:

I am not marrying that man ...

I don't like him ...

You don't even need to know him in advance.

You just marry him.

You are lucky you already know this one,

and that you know what job he is in. (204)

The above excerpt shows the opposition between Kehinde and her father. She refuses to marry a husband she does not love. Her father says that she does not need to know him in advance. This shows clearly that the girl is powerless in making a choice. Her father impedes her to marry a husband of her choice. She is not given room to choose the boy she loves; and is only communicated of a

new husband. The only thing she knows is that a husband has been chosen for her.

Tradition has a negative impact on women as she is silenced in many ways. For instance, when parents receive a bride price, patriarchy gives the impression that the girl has been bought. This prevents women from speaking out against any form of ill-treatment meted out to them. This situation is illustrated in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* when the narrator says: "Men never do wrong, only the women they have to beg for forgiveness because they are bought, paid for and must remain like that, silent, obedient slaves" (86).

The same silence and submissiveness is observed through the conversation between Chiago and Nwayibuzo in Buchi Emecheta's *The Slave Girl*, in which Chiago explains other means used by men to silence women:

I remember the last time .... I was bending down sweeping the floor when he came up behind me and jumped on me. He pulled out at the small breast I had then ...I was not at all developed. It hurt so and I screamed. Do you know what he did? He slapped me hard on both sides of my face. I cried and told his mother and I was ordered to shut up. He must have told some story to his father, because for quite a long time, he would cane me mercilessly for any little thing I did.

(3-4)

As seen above, the battered woman syndrome is another means of silencing women in patriarchy.

The negative impact of patriarchy on women is also observed when men refuse to involve women in certain conversations. This can be seen in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, when Okwonkwo refuses to answer the question put to him by his first wife concerning the clan's decision about the slave boy Ekemefuna. Okwonkwo retorts harshly : " woman, since when did you and I start sharing secrets" (9). This reaction of Okwonkwo shows clearly how women are belittled, to the extent that they have no right knowing what is happening around them. They are to execute commands from their husband, and are supposed to be quiet. Patriarchy does not understand why men should share secrets with women. A similar situation of neglecting female consent is also registered in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* when Agbadi organises his daughter's second marriage with Nnaife and says: " Nnu Ego, my pet child, you know I have been making preliminary arrangements for you to go to another man" (38). The answer that his daughter gives shows that she has not been consulted before. It becomes more clear when she says: "yes, father. I have noticed the movements of people" (38).

The African society, like most patriarchal set-ups, has certain bounds on women towards their husband, and parents towards their children. It is a parental obligation to arrange or seek life partners to their children. If parents have a boy who becomes of age, they, through relatives, locate a potential ideal wife for

their son. For instance, the relatives spot a girl in the neighbourhood, and together with the boy's parents, ask the girl's parents for her hand in marriage. In many cases, the boy's parents would identify a marriageable girl, mobilise the boy's agemates and carry the girl away, sometimes without her consent. The girl is compelled to stay, after losing her maidenhood. This kind of marriage is called "Guterura" in Burundi which literally means "lifting". These kinds of marriages are practiced in traditional Africa, and they help silence many girls.

As far as the African patriarchal society is concerned, the woman is portrayed in traditional light, hence, emerging as subservient to the man. Her entire life seems to be dependent on male presence. This situation is observed in Wole Soyinka's *The Swamp Dwellers* through Alu, Makuri's wife, and mother to the twins. She is the ideal wife for any traditional home. She is hardworking, obedient and virtuous, and always listens to the husband. She secures a place in patriarchy as Makuri acknowledges:

There wasn't a woman anywhere more faithful than you,  
Alu. I never heard a moment of worry in the whole of my  
life ... Not every man can look his wife in the face and  
make that boast, Alu. Not every man can do it ... And the  
chances you could have taken. Those traders-every one of  
them wanted you to go back with him... You don't belong  
here, they used to tell you. Come back with us to the city  
where men know the value of women ... Not, there was no

doubt about it. You could have had your choice of them.

(84-85)

Women trying to free themselves from these constrictions of tradition end up as alien in patriarchal Africa.

Simon de Beauvoir in *What is Feminism* underestimate the role of male feminist. It should be noted that though most men perpetuate patriarchy and sexism, there are some men who subscribe to feminism, and are against the destructive elements of patriarchy, which constantly closes the mouth of the woman in traditional Africa. Asare Konadu's *A Woman in her Prime* is a case in point. He tries to undo the twines of patriarchy on the woman by offering her a place in her society.

On the contrary, there are some women who undermine the feminist movement, by enhancing patriarchy. For example: women like Idil, Fatima Thabit and Sandra in *Sardines* are among those who foster patriarchy. It is evident that Idil fosters patriarchy because she upholds the supremacy of Semeter over Medina. She is an ardent believer that men are not obliged to have money accounts with their wives. Hence, she propagates for the subordination of women, and not equal opportunities for all.

Given the relative prominence of women in pre-colonial Africa, it is interesting that numerous African societies possessed culturally legitimate ways to ensure female subordination. For example, in many parts of West Africa, women kneel in front of their husbands. These cultural patterns may represent a

historical reaction by men against an earlier era when women's status was higher. A number of African societies have traditions that women once held power, and were overthrown by men, and now need to pay indemnities. One of such stories appears in James Ngugi's novel *A Grain of Wheat*. He states that

Many years ago, women ruled the land of the Agikuyu. Men had no property. They were only there to serve the whims and needs of women. Those were hard years. So they waited for women to go to war, [and] they plotted a revolt, taking an Oath of security to keep them bound each to each in common pursuit of freedom. They would sleep with all the women at once, for didn't know the heroes would return hungry for love and relaxation. Fate did the rest: women were pregnant: they take over met with little resistance. (27)

Though presented in fictional form, Ngugi might have drawn much from the pre-colonial Kenyan society, when the society in question was horticultural and matrilineal. In such a period, women would have had greater status than they had after the shift to plow agriculture and patrilineality; and the folk memory may have come to link the decline in women's status and the growth in male stature to an imaginary political overthrow of the sort Ngugi describes.

In most traditional African societies, particularly in Nigeria as well as in Burundi, a girl has no right to reject her parent's choice of a partner, whether the latter is old or young, ugly or handsome, and it is even more stressful that

patriarchy accentuates this silencing by asserting that a man is never ugly. Ubani, one of Buchi Emecheta's characters mentions in *The Joys of Motherhood* states that

How can a woman hate a husband chosen for her by her people? ... A woman may be ugly or grow old, but a man is never ugly and never old. He matures with age and is dignified. (71)

The above citation explains the fact that a woman has no right to refuse her parent's choice, no matter the looks of the husband. She is taught to be passive and submissive. A girl while still breast feeding can be affianced: " He who pays three-pence at birth puts his money into water or he pays dowry for a wife who wets his cloth" (Qtd Sylvia Leith – Ross, 96). This shows the general experience, and portrays the nature of such early engagements. She cannot deny or refute her father's choice, since her family has received a bride price at birth. This is also seen in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* when Idayi says to Agbadi that he must do something about her daughter and declares:

My friend Agbadi, you must do something about this daughter of yours ... Listen Agbadi, our outer compound looks as if there is a gathering or something let someone marry this girl. She has long passed the age of puberty. You don't want to be another Obi Umunna, do you? (29)

The African traditional woman is expected to marry early and give birth to many children. Girls are socialised early in their lives into key roles as mothers, housekeepers and producers. Indeed, a woman's status is measured largely by her capacity to reproduce and rear children. Children are regarded as the real bond between husband and wife. Marriage as social institution is justified by the birth of children. Among co-spouses in polygamous marriages, there is a considerable competition as to who will bear the greatest number of children. Since children are perceived as sources of security, joy and esteem; while barrenness is regarded as a social stigma.

Indeed, the incidence of barrenness is usually high in Africa, and childlessness amongst couples leads to divorce. This is observed in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* when Amatokwu avers:

I am a busy man. I have no time to waste my precious male seed on a woman who is infertile. I have to raise children for my line. If you really want to know, you don't appeal to me any more. You are so dry and jumpy. (32)

Children are indeed precious assets in Africa. Christine Oppong in a similar vein *Gender, in Work and Population in Sub-saharan Africa* postulates that

[Children] provide desperately needed labour to assist in farm, home and market. They provide the links of kinship

without which wives have no enduring rights in their marital homes or husbands' assets, including land and thus security as well as economic status in old age. Without them, conjugal links are tenuous and fragile, without them a woman is marginal, without them a woman can never achieve full social or spiritual status. (24)

This idea of marriage anchoring on childbearing is also evident in the novels under study. In Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, Nnu Ego, the protagonist in novel is infertile in the early days of her first marriage with Amatokwu. She puts the blame on herself when she posits:

I am sure the fault is on my side. You do everything right. How can I face my father and tell him I have failed? I don't like going there these days because his wives always rush out to get me hoping that I am already carrying a child. You can see the disappointment on their faces. (32)

Even though Nnu Ego complains about the way the society treats her because of her state, it does not mean anything to the husband. The same situation happens to her when Amatokwu tells her to move to a nearby hut reserved for older wives because his people have found him a new wife. He tells her that

My father is desperate. It is now known that your chi came from people down by the river. Their women are said to be

very strong. I am sorry, Nnu Ego, but I cannot fail my people. ( 32)

This idea of infertility or barrenness have split many marriages in Africa, as the husband of the partners seeks for better avenues. Having children in Africa is more important, since they serve as security at old age; assume continuity of the lineage; gain respect and power, and give a sense of completeness, satisfaction and identity to a man. Infertile or barren women have a lower social status in the community than the fertile ones. They are less respected, often harassed, and denied basic rights. If their husbands die, such infertile women are denied the right of inheritance to whatever property or wealth belonging to the family. The same view is stated by J.Ties Boerma and Zaida Magalla's in *Women and Infertility in Sub-Saharan Africa* as follows:

... in the past, and to a lesser extent, today infertile women could not be buried at the homestead or common cemetery as this was thought to bring misfortune to the whole family. Instead, she was buried in the bush, so that no one else from the family could inherit the barrenness. (196)

Even though there is a considerable awareness of the existence of infertility, the consequences of this situation are put squarely on women's shoulders. The society has developed several mechanisms to protect men to the detriment of women. The opposite view is observed in Asare Konadu's *A Woman in her Prime*, when the protagonist Pokuwaa divorces two husbands in

her quest for a child. Her mother firmly believes that it is superstitious: thinks it necessary to offer sacrifices to the gods, whose magical power may help her daughter, since to the people of Brenhoma, barrenness is a curse or a sign of ill omen. This is the reason why Pokuwaa offers sacrifices and says: " Great Tano, assist me in my plight. You're powerful and nobody can thwart your will" (6). Pokuwaa's prayer shows her belief in great Tano, who may help her to bear children.

Marriage without children in most African societies is considered as a failure, with the woman often viewed as the cause of the misfortune. In Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood*, when Nnu Ego moves from one *dibia* to the other, it is partly because of the importance attached to childbearing in traditional Africa, and the role a child plays within the patriarchal space in securing a place for the woman. Nnu Ego asks God to help her in order to get a child, and says: " ... they cannot help me forever. He is the first son of the family and his people want an heir from him as soon as possible. Please, help me" (32). It is evident that Nnu Ego is in despair because of her state of infertility . She knows that if she does not give birth as early as possible, her husband can kick her out. A similar desperation is recurs in Anna Githaiga's note on Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* when she affirms that

Ibo marriage ... has to be productive. Without children, it is incomplete. It is a problem that affects the married couple as much as it affects their neighbours. Failures to have children

may either suggest that the girl is morally lax or that she is cursed. So everybody is happy when a child is born. (25)

The above quotation shows that a woman gets joy or esteem when a child is born. Nnu Ego's womanhood starts on a wrong footing, when her first son mysteriously dies. Her second husband Nnaife manifests his greed in his compound, and boost his ego by opting for a polygamous marriage, because it is prestigious to him as a man. Nnu Ego's misery accelerates when she is blamed for giving birth only to female children, who are less valued in patriarchal societies. However, Nnu Ego who has experienced the pain of childlessness in her early life believes that a child is child, and what is important for her is to bear children. To Nnu Ego, child rearing is somehow a worthless investment, because the reward is taken away by patriarchy, leaving the mother empty handed and broken.

In the same perspective, Asare Konadu in *A Woman in her Prime* exposes a situation where Kwadwo Adwoa goes to spend three days with his other wife. The following thoughts come into Pukuwaa's mind as she contemplates desperately in silence in a stream of soliloquy:

Without a child I am a person who needs your company.  
When you are away I am alone. But if the high God is there,  
who comfort and keep my company. A matter of time ...  
and luck. Oh Adwoa! What luck is mine! People get  
children without going through half troubled Oath. I'm

travelling now. I can't sleep, and I am always waiting for the dawn.(15)

Most women are restless, until they have proven their motherhood. When Pokuwaa realises that she cannot give birth to the child she has been longing for, amid the myriad of sacrifices offered, she ironically says that she is going to have peace, and gives up crying for what she cannot get. She comforts herself as follows: "I think I am going to have peace at last ... I am going to give up crying inside me for that which I cannot get. I am not going to sacrifice anymore" (85).

The above quotation shows how Pokuwaa is tired of waiting the birth of a child. She decides to give up making sacrifices for what she cannot get.

This chapter aimed at examining the means through which patriarchy silences the woman. In the course of the analysis, it was realised that this silencing process is either direct or indirect: direct through men and indirect through women. At the end, the woman becomes a victim of circumstances beyond her control. In some cases, she learns how to live in silence, but in other circumstances, she attempts to break the silence by asserting herself within the very patriarchal space. This gives her a new status: that of a rebel or alien.

## CHAPTER II

### THE NEW IMAGE OF THE AFRICAN WOMAN

This chapter examines the new image of the African woman in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Asare Konadu's *A Woman in her Prime*. The woman in this light is assertive, and is ready to break the silence created by patriarchy. This chapter further clarifies the African feminist bent, by laying emphasis on the economic and social welfare of the woman, without totally rejecting patriarchy to men.

In the previous chapter, we have seen how marriage is organized: the woman's consent in marriage is not vital. Indeed, an element of force is implicit in the contract. A woman is sometimes taken by force to the home of the husband. She is expected to cry out, and she does all in her power to resist this journey into the fangs of patriarchy. However, it is sometimes extremely difficult for her to break the contract without jeopardizing her chances of any future marriage. This web, for centuries, has tied down the woman. To an extent, some critics hold that this is ritualised behaviour. The evidence below would suggest, however, that in a number of cases the bride's reluctance is quite genuine. Patricia Rading Obure in " Luo Women and Economic Change During the Colonial Period" writes this of her own marriage:

I was taken by force, as was the custom after Obure and I had met, his people sent a number of cows, then they came and took me by force. After I had spent three days with him I was taken back home with a lot of food, and a goat was slaughtered. I stayed at my parents' home for sometime, and then Obure's relatives met me again at Luanda and brought me back here. I ran away again. I did not like my husband because he was just an old man whose wife had died. That was why I used to run back home. I kept running away, and my family kept forcing me to return; and I did this until I got tired, and then I just stayed here in kowe. I cannot remember how long I lived with Obure before he died; but when he died I produced seven children. I was then taken by another man and we produced more children ... of the ten children, five live and five died. (Interview, 14,70)

Her reaction of running away projects the new African woman as a rebel. She is no more completely submissive or passive, but is ready to break the barriers created by patriarchy.

Adaku displays similar traits as Obure. By the time Nnaife serves in the British army, his family is forced to survive without much of the money promised by the government. In Lagos as Emecheta states, the only way to survive is to become part of the imbalanced economic structure. Adaku (Nnaife's

new wife) prospers in the new order; she sacrifices her tribal culture to survive. As events unfold, Adaku becomes more and more independent. Left to fend for herself, Adaku develops a successful mercantile character. This success leads to conflict between Adaku and Nnu Ego, when the latter returns from Ibuza. When this conflict escalates, the Ibo tribesmen living in Lagos are summoned to seek a solution to the "women's problems" (as if they have all the answers). Later, the men bitterly blame Adaku for the fight, may be because she has only daughters. Adaku attempts to demystify her Ibo culture, and strives for an alternative life, amid the consequences ahead of her. In a related conversation between her and Nnu Ego, more is revealed on this new attitude:

What are you going to do Adaku? What you have been wanting me to do. Leave this striking room. Why should I put up with all this any longer? Nnaife does not want me Nor did his people, so why stay? When he came back on leave, he was angry with me for your going home to bury your father... He accused me of not stopping you. So he came to my bed only as a second choice. I didn't mind, because all I wanted was a male child. But I didn't get pregnant ... What else is there for me to do? I will spend the money I have in giving my girls a good start in life. They shall stop going to the market with me. I shall see that they get enrolled in a good school. (168)

Adaku breaks with her tribal customs and decides to leave the house because she is disappointed with everything around her. Also, she considers herself as an alien, since patriarchy, from all indications, prefers women who give birth to sons. She further remarks that: "My Chi [Chi in Ibo culture, is one's spirit - self] be damned! I am going to be a prostitute. Damn my Chi(168).

Emecheta shows human fallouts caused not only by patriarchal order but the colonial structure epitomised by the city, which makes life sometimes more difficult. Lagos is separated from her traditional land and tribe. Adaku has no way to improve her situation. She cannot cultivate food, and this makes life more miserable. Because of this, she is forced to sell the only commodity she is left with : her body. Adaku's actions confirm the extreme suffering most African women endure in order to survive in Lagos.

By rejecting her oppressive tribal culture, Adaku however, frees herself from one's slough. She truly becomes independent and controls her future. Breaking away from her Ibo identity is an ultimate sacrifice. Her actions actually allow her to thrive in the new order as a business woman. Adaku's success, in turn, provides her enough money to educate her daughters.

The case of Pokuwaa in *A Woman in her Prime* is not very different from that of Adaku, as she struggles to break away from the old order. Here, the main focus is on Pokuwaa's sterility. When Pokuwaa discovers that she cannot bear a child, she divorces her first husband, Kofi Daafu. This fact of divorcing illustrates the new image of the woman created by Konadu, who does not wait

for her husband to divorce her, as the tradition demands, but surges to abandon the man before the worst meets her. She does it again with Kwaku Fosu for a similar reason. Her third husband, Kwadwo Fordwo, fears that as years go by, without any result of childbearing, she would wake up one day and divorce him, as has been the case with her former husbands. That is why he asks Pokuwaa to repeat the priest's drill to be sure that she performed it well. Kwadwo's fear is illustrated through the following passage: " At home, Kwadwo asked her to repeat the drill again in his hearing"(29). Pokuwaa, from all indications is a potential threat to patriarchy.

In African societies, the practice of offering to gods is frequent. Africans believe that the gods play a great role in procreation. When Pokuwaa realizes that the outcome of her sacrifices is not promising, she retorts: "I am not a woman, said Pokuwaa. And a woman does want a child; that her nature. But if her child will not come, what can I do? I can't spend my whole life bathing in herbs" (80).

The above quotation shows how Pokuwaa is very decisive, something which is not frequent among most traditional women. She rebels against tradition, which teaches women to be obedient and submissive towards their parents and husbands. Her actions shocks her parents, to an extent that they think they have no daughter. This pushes the father to say:

If she is not going to do what is necessary, then I must take  
out of my mind that I have a daughter. She is like any boy in

Brenhoma, for there is no difference between a barren woman and a man. (89)

So far, we have seen that the traditional woman is voiceless in front of the parents. She is expected to be quiet and submissive. This is not the case with Koramoa, Pokuwaa's friend, who unmasks the husband in a sexual scandal. She explodes:

He has started giving me trouble again over women. Only last night, when I was sitting here waiting for him, someone came to tell me that he was in the hut of Akosua Sewaa. I went there and caught them together. (34-35)

Patriarchy does not condone such behaviour from women; since men, within the patriarchal order are believed to be born polygamous.

Polygamy is allowed in traditional society, since a husband can marry as many wives as he wants. This is not common in modern societies. A man is allowed to marry one wife. Even if the woman is barren, they are obliged to stay together. Koramoa does not want to stand the weight of polygamy, and that is why she decides to divorce the husband. When Pokuwaa asks her of her husband, she says:

He has gone out, said her friend. He is so ashamed. He cannot look at my face. You see; I had seen him with her once, but when I asked questions he denied having anything

to do with. Now, I hear he wants to marry her. If that is true,

I shall divorce him. (35)

With the advent of modernism, women are doing all, sometimes at any cost, to emancipate themselves from traditional society. The founder of Kibbutz movement states as one of their historical missions, the total emancipation of women from the "shackles": sexual; social and intellectual imposed on them by the traditional society. After forty years of existence, an important Kibbutz journal proudly proclaimed that, the goal of sexual equality had been achieved:

We have emancipated her [the woman] equal rights from the economic yoke [of domestic services]. We have emancipated her from dependency on the husband, her provider and commander: we have given her a new society.

We have broken the shackles that chained her hands. (Qtd Spiro, 5)

Kibbutz ideology rejected the usual innate explanations, those that assume the genetic inferiority of women as well as those that attribute the social differentiation on the one hand, although hardly blind to the advantage reaped by males from the traditional system of sexual inequality. It also rejects the current prevalent social explanation that represents this system as a conscious or unconscious attempt by men to exploit women. Rather, Kibbutz ideology takes a somewhat different tract, attributing sexual inequality to what it termed "the biological tragedy of women."

This rather dramatic expression refers to social and cultural restraints imposed on women by virtue of their mammalian reproductive system. Since female bear children, and as mothers, they have the major responsibility of caring for them: they are tied to what Kibbutz ideology termed "the yoke of domestic service", while men are free to work in extra-domestic domains. This system of sex- role differentiation was held to be the core of sexual inequality, and from this core, all of its other facets were believed to follow. First, since men work in higher status, extra-domestic occupations, while women are restricted to low status domestic work, women are inferior to men in the social domain. Second, restricted to non-income producing work, a woman is economically dependent upon her husband and subordinate to men in the domestic domain.

Still as another consequence of her economic dependence upon him, the wife's social status is merged with that of her husband's so that the woman's identity as a social person is submerged in his.

The new image of African woman can also be examined through the lenses of educated girls. Those who have got the opportunity to go to school are the first to claim their independence. To reach this stage there should be a policy on equal rights to education. Educated girls hardly accept to be victims of tradition, and love later, since they are forced into marriage. This is what the new woman tries to flee. She needs to marry the husband she loves first. To illustrate this, Kehinde, a character in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of*

*Motherhood*, refuses to marry a husband chosen by her father, and stresses that she wants to marry the husband she loves: "Father, I want to marry an live with Lapidio, the butcher's son. I don't want any Ibuza man" (204). This quotation shows the power of love. The reaction of Kehinde proves that love has power, which can easily split families and relations, if not well handled. Kehinde as a new woman knows what loves is, and her education (whether formal or informal) tells her the same. In *The Second Sex*, De Beauvoir posits that

What woman understands by love is clear enough: it is not only devotion, it is a total gift of body and soul without reservation, without regard for anything whatever. This unconditional nature of her love is what makes it a faith, the only one she has. As for male, if he loves a woman, what he wants is that love from her. He is in consequence far from postulating the same sentiment for himself as for woman.

(642)

We can conclude from the above quotation that any marriage should be based on sentiments. If there are no sentiments, and that a man and woman are forced to live together, it is evident that there will be misunderstanding in the family, even though the marriages which are based on sentiment are not excluded from such drawbacks, but the later can survive because the choice is theirs.

One can believe that this process of rebellion has been infused within a larger systematic provocation, which is itself articulated in two different movements: first, through a choice of female protagonists, who are marginal in relation to their societies; through the exploration of cultural zones, that until recently, have been either taboo or dismissed as unimportant; and through reflection of the hidden mechanisms that explain the increasing instabilities of modern Africa. Second, through a search for alternatives to socio-political questions about a stagnant postcolonial Africa, and through the creation of a stable feminine voice that breaks with canonical masculine authority.

It is only with difficulty that lesbians accept the presence of a man inside the house, whether it be the official lover or any man. On the one hand, there is a claim to property- the body has become a form of merchandise- and the title to the property confirms the identity of the person who holds it. On the other hand, there is a girl's judgemental gaze that falls upon a mother who is indifferent and physically or mentally absent; or upon a woman, who appears weak in her relationships with men who treats her like an object. When the daughter is positioned as a judge, her hostile disapproval is particularly noteworthy. This is seen in Calixthe Beyala's *The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me*:

Sure, I knew her, Mama Lady, the woman who would run away with a brain that could reject anything that bothered her ... With a brain that could never deal with any regret or suffering. (46)

The mother is the pivotal figure as she represents a primordial object of criticism. As opposed to the traditional figures who creep along the wall to liberate themselves, Beyala in *C'est le Soleil qui m'a brûlée* presents a more advanced world in which men and women are limited to their sexual value, and in which a woman is reduced to being an object, a piece of merchandise. Nonetheless, in contrast to her mother and her friends, she manages to escape the vicious circle that would relegate her to an existence as female victim of man, because she manages to decipher man's double language. In order to do this, she has to deconstruct love in a systematic fashion, so as to be able to expose it, and examine it in all of its minute facets. She does this by reinterpreting love in such a way as to attain a complete awareness of the new woman's position in a relationship different from one where love is seen as a commercial object.

The revolt of the woman against her husband as we have seen in Emecheta and Konadu is also observed in Calixthe Beyala's later work *Assèze l'Africaine*, when the Countess's character illustrates both newly formed awareness of woman's power over man and the dangers women risk in searching for the easy success attained through a tacit or explicit financial contract with man. In such a position, the Countess becomes a voice for all women expressing her frustration, and a lucid critique of a situation, confronted as she is with patriarchal domination. In fact, due to her influence over Awono, Assèze's

probable father manages to voice certain truths, and to work for the benefit of either Sorraya or Assèze:

«Assèze n'ira plus à l'école? "demanda la Comtesse ..." Et alors? "demanda-t-elle..." " Elle n'ira plus à l'école comme les femmes mariées, les jeunes filles qui sont sacrifiées au profit des garçons. Elle n'ira plus à l'école comme les putes de ce pays que tu baisses, et tu voudrais l'y envoyer comme l'infirme minorité des femmes que tu n'arrives pas à baiser."

" Mais ... mais qu'est ce qu'il va devenir?" demanda Awono. "Comme tout le monde", dit la Comtesse qui en avais marre de parler. Une femme, une femme, tout simplement. » (Qtd Odile,168-169)

«Assèze won't go to school anymore? "the countess asked ..."Well? ... She won't go to school anymore just like the married women and the young girls who are sacrificed for the boys. She won't go to school anymore like all the whores in this country that you fuck, and yet, you say you want to send her there like the tiny minority of women you have no chance of fucking." (Trans. Mine)

"But ... but what will she become?" Awono asked.  
"Just like everyone else." answered the Countess who

was tired of speaking by this time. A woman, just another woman.» (Trans. mine)

The Countess is also a duplicitous character who tries to have her own power over Awono to the detriment of Sorraya and Awono's brothers. In this respect, she is stuck in the vicious circle that the other protagonists try to break out of. The character embodies a model of clairvoyance that is symbolic of the new woman and of the potential new society. In fact, Beyala takes apart and contradicts the traditional literary definition of the character at every moment.

The new woman does not accept to be submissive. She takes her own decisions, on whom to marry or not. This can equally be seen through Nuruddin Farah's work *From a Crooked Rib* when the heroine of the book Ebla refuses to marry Giumaleh a husband chosen by her grand father. She refuses a marriage, pretending that he is old, and that, she has not been consulted before. When she comes to know all the arrangements her grandfather has made together with Giumaleh, she becomes upset, and this is the reason which pushes her to flee towards a town that she does not know. When her grandfather sees that, he curses her saying: May the Lord disperse your plans, Ebla. May he make you the mother of any a bastard. May he give you hell on this earth as a reward(5). This quotation shows how Ebla is cursed because of her refusal to marry a husband chosen by her grand father. She knows that she is not an object to be passed from one hand to another, and prefers to become a prostitute rather than marrying a person she does not love.

While the African woman is still struggling for some basic human rights and freedom from the oppressive yoke of traditions which limit her role and choices, her counterpart in the West is clamouring for what appear to be in the African context, secondly human needs. Socio-economic as well as class factors are more crucial for the emancipation of African women, the majority of whom are still among the most economically, socially, politically and culturally exploited and marginalized of the world. For them, emancipation would mean, beside other things, self-reliance and the end of oppressive traditions and dependency syndrome.

African critical feminists point of view focuses on how women are challenging the status quo and becoming more empowered, self-reliant and actively participatory in different spheres of life, without totally rejecting what is traditional.

Speaking about the position of women in Islamic and Arab Worlds which partly envelops Africa, we can see that in some societies where women are given more rights, freedom and respect, they are further removed from liberation. Islam protects the muslim woman, who is decent, and who respects her home, husband and children. "Islam does not give rights to the woman who rebels and who [...] leaves her husband's home and refuses to return" (Qtd Nadia Hijab: *Woman Power* 33). This respect syndrome is patriarchy's way of integrating the majority of women into the hegemonic structure and isolating the

rebellious few. It is a device for perpetuating great silence that makes patriarchy thrive.

Different from Eurocentric feminist critiques such as psychoanalysis and lesbian or gay critiques, African feminism, as is the case with Emecheta in most of her writings, is largely committed to conscious, socio-political and cultural issues that affect women in their day-to-day experiences. Its purpose among others is to reveal and deconstruct the hidden logic of patriarchal ideology to present its contradictions, to create consciousness on gender issues and to bring about change in the situation of women in society.

First, African feminism recognises that the specific realities in Africa call for a different emphasis in the application of feminists principles. This brand for feminism calls upon African women to remove the yoke of foreign, class and gender domination. Asked in a series of interviews whether she considers herself to be a feminist, in *Gender in African Women's Writing: Identity, Sexuality and Difference*, Buchi Emecheta says:

I am a feminist with a small "f". I love men and good men are the salt of the earth. But to tell me that we should abolish marriage like capital "F" woman who says women should live together and all that, I say No! Personally I'd like to see the ideal, happy marriage. But if it doesn't work, for goodness' sake call it off. (7)

Second, African feminist address the issue of women's position in society historically, seeking to enlarge the role women could play in society. They give historical evidence of the competence of women at different levels of participation in public sphere. Historical figures of women warriors rules and priestesses are represented to show that the limited social roles women now play in Africa do not tell everything about their capacity and ability to contribute to society. Their call is for equal opportunity for both female and male and the images they present are intended to inspire other women in exploring their potentialities.

Furthermore, African feminists are committed to welfare of the majority of women who are socially, politically and economically marginalized. They seek to create opportunities for self-reliance and networking among women and thus clearly reject to consider the domestication of women as beasts of burden in African society. Once again, Emecheta's response about her being a feminist throws some light on the kind of feminism to which some Africans are committed:

I will not be called a Feminist here, because it is European.

It is a simple as that. I just resent that ... I don't like being defined by them ... I do believe in the African type of feminism. They call it womanism because you see, you Europeans don't worry about water, you don't worry about schooling. You are so well off. Now I buy land and I say

"Okey" I can't build on it to some women to start planting.  
That is my brand of feminism. (Qtd Makuchi and Nfah-  
Abbenyi: 7)

However, African history has numerous examples of strong women who have challenged the oppression and the marginalisation affected by patriarchy.

In the final analysis, we have noticed that the new African woman does not stand or keep silence when injustice is meted out to her, but strives and seek for solutions to her problems. The cases of Emecheta and Konadu's heroine are more glaring.

## CHAPTER III

### CONFLICTS

Conflicts result when people or groups are involved in serious disagreements or arguments. The focus of this chapter is therefore to show how conflict manifest itself in the African society: between man and woman; patriarchy and woman; tradition and modernity, with particular focus on Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* and Asare Konadu's *A Woman in her Prime*.

As far as conflicts are concerned, a lot can be deduced from the way a man treats a woman. The woman in traditional Africa is seen more or less as a servant. She enjoys no rights of her own, but is only used to ensure man's happiness. This can be seen in the division of labour between man and wife at home. In poor families, the wife does all the housework: child rearing, cooking, washing, fetching of water, serving the husband etc. So, she normally is supposed to handle all the joint earnings because it she who purchases food and clothing. The man's job is sometimes very risky. He is never asked to cook, sweep or wash clothes. This remains true, even when the wife goes out for an office job, with fixed and long hours of service. The man is left free to sit, read or visit, with the thought of assessing the wife in housework. Women do what men can, but only two social tasks are everywhere inescapably sex-linked: the begetting and bearing of children.

Besides the aforementioned social tasks attributed to women, other tasks can be executed both by men and women. Men can make excellent childminders, but in the absence of artificial feeding, babies have to be suckled. So, it is more convenient for child care to be a female occupation. Apart from these specific demands that are attributed to women, men and women should share the different tasks at home. Man is not asked to sit somewhere, and command as if his wife were a slave. What is abominable is that in most cases, when wives do not execute these commands or delay in executing them, they are beaten as if they were animals. What is astonishing is that husbands always believe that they have bought their wives, and as such, can treat them the way they like. This similar situation is observed through Nzowulu, a character in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Nzowulu beats his wife, even during pregnancy. What is not astonishing is that when he is summoned at the village council, he defends himself saying:

That woman standing there is my wife Mgabobo. I married her with my money and yams. I don't owe my in-laws anything. I owe them no yams, no money, I owe them no cocoyams. (64)

The above citation shows how Nzowulu defends himself by proving that he has the power over his wife since he has paid the bride price. He adds that he does not owe his in-laws anything, and that the wife is his.

In terms of marriage, it is common that any family has its root when it is rewarded with the birth of children. In traditional as well as modern Africa, the absence of a child is usually the root cause of most conflicts. Men do not even think that they may be responsible for it. Women are always victims of circumstances in such misfortunes in the family. They are ill-treated or kicked out from home or suffer other consequences. Kathy Mc A Fee and Myrna Wood in *The Article Bread and Roses* note that, many women's movements have experienced frustration, anger and fear from men as a result of the various injustices meted out to them. They add that these feelings stem from the same oppressive conditions that give rise to racism and chauvinism.

This similar conflict between man and woman is observed in Calixthe Beyala's work *Tu t'appelleras Tanga* (1988) [*Your name shall be Tanga* (1996)] when the protagonist Tanga is deprived of her notion of love as free, self-denial, the commodification of the body develops further. This commodification extends beyond usual prostitution, it constitutes the actual basis of relations between men and women. Within this context, Beyala depicts the primary relationship between a man and woman, which is a relationship of inequality, based on woman's humiliation and submission. There are many scenes of rape, violence and submission. The narrator in *The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me* points out that violence as follows: As he caresses her, he tries to hurt her tightly closed lips. A deep disgust overwhelms her and she gives such a start that he lets go of her... He forces her down, forces her to crouch. (24)

The war of sexes has been declared. In response to man's initial violence, the woman expresses a fierce desire to break the chain to "find the woman again ... and destroy the chaos." [( re) trouver la femme ... et anéantir le chaos] *The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me*(102). She responds by expressing an unequalled violence in her desires and fantasies:

And if she were to flow of history by tearing his sex organ with her teeth? And if with the sharp edges of her nails, she were to shred his lower belly? She'd make stew with his hair, a stew, black and sweet like the shade that pacifies her senses after the light has attacked them. (24)

A thorough examination of man's body marks a new step as it anticipates the introspection of the male voice in Loukoum, in *The Little Prince of Belleville*. Essentially, two types of men appear in Beyala's texts. In their profiles and behaviours, they embody the two sides of masculine identity. One is a cruel, violent man, who thinks he can prove his virility and identity by using his strength, and by dominating women with violence in sexual and nonsexual relations.

Men exert their power over women in all domains. The other type of scene is an expression of love in all its sensuality while still stressing man's violence. This can be found in Angèle Rawiri's *G'amàrakano au Carrefour* in the following passage:

[ Brusquement Eléwagnè s'abat de toute la hauteur sur elle, l'écrasant de tout son poids. Il presse avec violence sa bouche contre la sienne. La respiration coupée, Toula desserre les dents et entrebaille les lèvres. Une langue chaude et nerveuse fouille sa bouche réticente. Ses jambes sont violemment écartées. Elle essaie de se débattre. Mais Eléwagnè la maintient dans cette position et non sans tatonnement brutaux, introduit à l'aide de sa main droite son sexe en elle. Le corps et le cœur de Toula sont transpercés d'une douleur fulgurante ... Celui-ci s'agite, s'emporte. Sa respiration s'accélère.] (Qtd Odile 175)

All of a sudden Eléwagnè falls on her bearing down on her with all his weight. He presses his lips violently against hers. Short of breath, Toula opens her mouth slightly. A warm nervous tongue probes her reticent mouth. Her legs are violently splayed apart. She tries to resist, but Eléwagnè holds her in this position, and after a few brutal attempts, he inserts his sex in her with the aid of his hand. Toula's body and heart are split with an acute flash. He wriggles around, carried away. His breathing gets faster. ( Trans.mine)

The woman is denounced of her vampiric relation with man, and her nihilism: she feeds on man because she lives and acts for man alone, in other words, because she cannot exist without him. This can be seen in Calixthe Beyala's *The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me* when the narrator says:

They chewed on her. She submitted to their caresses, their kisses. For them to swell, she murmured obscenities. She forced hoarse screams and Ateba was never able to decide whether these were screams of pleasure or of pain. (96)

In this examination of woman's responsibilities for maintaining the status quo of relations, and keeping herself in the position of an object, Beyala demonstrates that this objectification is just as the woman's fault as the man's. The woman is responsible for her own slavery to the extent that she abides by patriarchal values that dictates her status, including her appearance. In looking for the authentic values, the woman must also embrace her own body, and her own criteria of beauty, rejecting the criteria that have been dictated by men and society, whether African or European. This search for the authentic woman is expressed symbolically when Ateba in Calixthe Beyala's *The Sun Hath Looked Upon Me* offers her body to the rain: "Ateba gets undressed and rushes out in the rain. She holds her body out to the water, she gives herself, she takes herself, she spreads her buttocks and offers her belly" (91). This is a scene of climax, of pleasure, but it also represents a desire to find a purity again, to wash oneself of all impurities. She is under the impression that each drop of water is making her

immaculately described as pale, unsatisfactory versions of love under the sign of lack. Against this general feeling of lack, woman now understands her right to pleasure to orgasm, refusing to be only man's plaything in the satisfaction of his pleasure. This view is depicted in Calixthe Beyala's *Seul le Diable le Savait*

[Et moi, quel plaisir? L'acte de posséder un homme sans éprouver le moindre sentiment, voilà ma condition, la justification de mon existence, ce qui est déjà plus que me combler!] (Qtd Odile 10)

And what pleasure is there for me? The act of possessing a man without having the least feeling, there is my condition, the justification for my existence, which is already more than enough to satisfy me! (Trans. mine)

From the above quotation, we see clearly that Ateba does not enjoy the sexual relationship with Jean because she fails to attain orgasm. Jean satisfies his needs without thinking of his partner's state. This can be the source of misunderstanding in many families. It can even lead to break up in marriages. To avoid this, women should break this silence by not being ashamed of expressing themselves in love matters. They should learn how to negotiate sex.

Conflict also results from the battle between patriarchy and woman. The ultimate test of womanhood in patriarchal societies is child birth. The ugly of this side is that, sometimes, the woman is at the centre of their oppression in this

domain. The barren woman as such becomes a stool for misery, as both men and women in the society tend to alienate her from all spheres of life. The story of Nnu Ego is structured on this premise. The initial infertility during her first marriage which tempts her to breastfeed her co-wife's baby leads to divorce, after severe beatings. Nnu Ego's second marriage with Nnaife is blessed by a son, but he mysteriously dies in his sleep. Nnu Ego attempted suicide is a harsh acknowledgement that she has failed as a woman. This attitude is reclaimed from the collective talk of her woman folk and apparently is the cruelist critic to those who cannot conform to traditional role.

Emecheta's views is that women should not be used as custodians of bad cultures. The novel has an ironic twist in its content in the way Emecheta somehow paints Nnu Ego as a frustrated woman, who valued child-upbringing as an investment. At the end of the day, the children she brings up cannot value her contribution to what they become in future.

Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* with its ironic overtone, and Asare Konadu's *A Woman in her Prime* attack the African description of womanhood. In the African context, a woman with no child is not considered as a full woman. The issue of childlessness has been topical in African women's literature. It is the central focus also in Asare Konadu's *A Woman in Prime*, since we know that in Brenhoma, to be barren or infertile is the worst thing that can happen to a woman, and can ineffect, create eternal conflict at home. Pokuwaa rebels against traditions by divorcing her husbands.

Konadu attacks women as being the most pitiless in protecting the traditions from which they do not always benefit. In this case, the conflict is directly between women themselves. The women are at times the harshest critics of those who do not conform to the traditional roles. For instance Nnu Ego takes self-criticism too far when she wants to take her own life. This happens when the first child she bears, who has saved her from the shame of barrenness dies in his sleep. The communal criticism of the women is highlighted when the village women discover why she wants to end her life. Their feelings are expressed by the omniscient narrator through these words: " And they all agreed that a woman without a child for her husband was a failed woman" (62). This statement expresses the view that African women equate motherhood with womanhood, concepts which are not necessarily directly proportional. It should be wrong to assume that Nnu Ego assumed the fulfilment of full womanhood, when she is later rewarded with many children. Nnu Ego has her private life stolen from her. She did not have anything to complain about having children, this is the joy of her motherhood. The problem that Nnu Ego does not predict earlier is that motherhood cannot be an investment in hope for a reward. Her grown up children quit her in order to begin their own life somewhere. Her reward for giving all she has is the greatest funeral Iboza has never seen. Nnu Ego is so angry, even at her death bed that she has been cheated by her children. Many people appeal to her in prayers but Nnu Ego keeps a death ear: "Nnu Ego had it all yet still did not answer prayers for children." (224)

Emecheta's stance at the end of *The Joys of Motherhood* is that there is more to womanhood besides motherhood. Emecheta believes that the joy of motherhood or parenthood lies hidden in knowing when to let the child go. This can suggest or explain that motherhood cannot claim rights of ownership on a child because the child belongs to the society.

Emecheta questions black motherhood as the ultimate for womanhood. Emecheta portrays the fact that childbearing causes both fulfilment and conflict, thus limiting fulfilment. Nnu Ego's life is therefore used by Emecheta to implicitly propose an alternative lifestyle for women. This is expressed by the narrator who comments on the psychology of the people of Iboza, when Nnu Ego tries to answer their prayers:

It took Oshia three years to pay off the money he had borrowed to show the world that a good son he was. That was why people failed to understand why she did not answer their prayers, for what else could a woman want but to have sons who would give her a decent burial? (224)

This highlights the African belief for the spiritual world, where the dead must be appeased. This, however, has an ironic twist in relation to the title *The Joys of Motherhood*, when Nnu Ego's rewards comes only after her death. This same belief figures at the beginning of Pokuwaa's sacrifices when she spent much time with her prayerful thoughts, beseeching her ancestors and gods to bless her efforts to get a child. She prays that:

You're not an unforgiving God.  
God of our forefathers.  
Your assistance is not temporary  
You are almighty  
Let all evil men fall before you. (3)

Pokuwaa fears to be a barren woman. She prays so that she can be saved from being a victim of patriarchal demands.

Patriarchy makes marriage an oppressive ground especially to women: they find it difficult to escape due to the barriers that enclose it. This situation can be illustrated when Emecheta writes:

On her way back to their room, it occurred to Nnu Ego that she was a prisoner, imprisoned by her love for her children, imprisoned in her role as the senior wife. She was not even expected to demand more money for her family. That was considered below the standard expected of a woman in her position. It was not fair, she felt the way men cleverly used woman's sense of responsibility to actually enslave her, they knew that a traditional wife like herself would never dream of leaving her children. (Qtd *The Joy*, 137)

This excerpt shows how a traditional woman is always passive and suffers internally. She accepts whatever happens to her, and stays at home. This may happen even when her husband marries other wives. Whatever one may think of

the moral aspects of this question, there is no denying fact that the Ibo woman's views on certain points related to marriage are broad, wise and generous. Take for example the childless household: one knows this question of children looms large in all African societies, but one is inclined to think that nowhere does it count for so much as among the Ibo, as our author in hand proves it. It is therefore no wonder that the absence of children is more hurting than anything else. Although parents know quite well that their son, by marrying in church, undertakes to have a single wife, yet, when after two or three years, the latter still proves barren, they are adept at making insidious remarks. We find this situation in Sylvia Leith Ross's writing: *African Women* as follows: "Your wife is no more than a piece of furniture in your house! Your wife eats and sleeps, and sleeps and eats: is it for this we paid dowry for her?" (270)

The husband probably pays no attention at first by constant pressure from the one side, and his own desire on the other, undermine his resistance. The wife herself, tired of the reproaches of her family in-law, and moved by her own deep grief and genuine sympathy for her husband, may, if she has the means herself, provide a second "wife", that is to say, a wife married according to native law and custom for the husband she has disappointed. Should this second wife have a child, she will rejoice as much as anyone, and would feel towards it as if it were her own. The general consequences in such homes is jealousy, which later gives birth to conflict over the husband or property.

In terms of chastity, it is an honour for the family in traditional society to find a virgin, otherwise she is humiliated in front of her people. There are practices which are performed in Ibo society on the wedding day. When they find the bride virgin, her husband's people bring full kegs of palmwine to her father the following day. We find this practice in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* when Nnu Ego's virginity is proven. It makes Agbadi her father to boast and say: "There is nothing that makes a man prouder than to hear that his daughter is virtuous" (31). On the contrary, when the daughter is no more a virgin, her husband's people bring half filled kegs of wine, and sometimes, the girl is rejected, creating conflict among families. In Burundi, virginity also plays an important role in marriages. There are practices related to finding a bride. If she is found chaste, her husband's people would bring a lot of presents to her parents including beer with straws without holes inside them. But when she is not found chaste, only few presents are presented with straws, with holes inside them. Africans believe that when a woman is chaste, it is easy for her to conceive. They teach daughters to behave well. When a girl loses her virginity, she is humiliated and alienated from the society. She is equally traumatised psychologically because she has in mind that she might be barren. All this shows how the African traditional society is very demanding as far as the woman is concerned. These demands create internal and external conflict to the woman in particular and her family at large.

As far as the conflict between tradition and modernity is concerned, it is worth considering the different views which make people of any society to be characterised or considered as traditionalist or modernist. Societies must always adopt new views, attitudes or needs as generations pass. Because of modernisation, the marriage institution has continuously been changing. At first, conjugal rights and duties placed women as passive and submissive members of society. But this is not the same today. Robert Kelly in *Courtship Marriage and the Family* postulates that

If a man was a poor provider, he could make the life of his family miserable and his wife was supposed to suffer in silence. She had no legal standing as a person; was not allowed to have any say in the financial affairs of the family, and in most cases could get a divorce.(127)

This is the fate of women in most patriarchal societies.

Another level of conflict stems from tradition and modernism. Nnu Ego portrays the image of a traditional woman, who is always passive, whereas Adaku, in the same novel represents the new woman, who is not ready to bear the burden of patriarchy. They do not view things the same. Nnu Ego submits herself to all traditional demands whereas Adaku, a modern wife, prefers to flee from all oppressions imposed by men and patriarchy. She is a liberated woman. The same conflict is observed in Asare Konadu's *A Woman in her Prime* when Pokuwaa gives up sacrificing, and divorces her husband, which is not a

prevailing practice in traditional society. Koramoa her friend is also a modern woman because when her husband cheats on her, by going out with Akosua Sewaa, she decides to divorce him.

Prophets of modernism predict that they would encourage and increase monogamous marriages, which according to them, necessitates concentrated effort at home, and ensures survival of marriages. In a research carried by Wambui in 1987, he found that there are too many cases of men who have been married polygamously, who have later in life become highly educated, and then, consider it expedient to look for a woman appropriate to their newly acquired status. They feel they have become modern and desire a woman who can confront the experiences of modern life with ease. In such cases, a man finally keeps her as his mistress. Further, no bride-price or any other marriage rites are performed during such a relationship.

Modern women are those who marry a mature man, who will take them for expensive holidays and shopping abroad, rent them a flat and give pocket money regularly. All this shows the changes in attitude and practices in the institution of marriage.

The social, political and economic statutes of women in the conjugal relationship has been lower than that of men in most cultures. About this, Robert Kelly writes:

The traditional masculine role also stressed masculine dominance in almost every important walk of life. This

dominance was carried over into family life in which wives and children were expected to be obedient and submissive to superior masculine experience and wisdom. (123)

The above quotation shows that men are attributed a dominant status in traditional society. Wives and children are to obey and submit themselves to the men who are superior to them. They also do not have any right to speak out or denounce forms of injustices meted out to them. Women, in patriarchal societies, are treated in the same way, and men sometimes beat them as punitive measure, and at another, to show their masculinity. Women are despised in such a way that their husbands sometimes, bring mistresses to sleep with them at their sight. This can be seen in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* through Agbadi. The narrator says:

Agbadi was no different from many men. He himself might take wives and then neglect them for years, apart from seeing that they each receive their own yam a day. He could bring his mistress to sleep with him right in his courtyard while his wives pined bit their nails for a word from him.(36)

This quotation shows clearly that African traditional men constantly create avenues for conflict within the marital institution. Men belittle their wives, and consider them as second-class citizen. Agbadi's wife keeps silence when her husband sleeps with a mistress in his courtyard. She is only ready to serve him.

To sum up, this section shows how Buchi Emecheta and Asare Konadu in their works *The Joys of Motherhood* and *A Woman in her Prime* respectively champion the course of exposing the conflict within the patriarchal space with all ramifications. They present characters whose beliefs are in opposition: some stand for tradition while others stand for modernity; some are adamant while others are rebels. Both men and women undergo conflict at varied levels, and from all indications, this conflict is orchestrated by patriarchy.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

This study set out to prove that patriarchy perpetuates power imbalance, injustice, and creates a harsh environment for the female folk. In the course of the work, we discovered that African women had long suffered from patriarchy, and are still suffering from it. Women are oppressed, and often pushed to the wall. However, writers have raised their voices, and showed much interest in liberating women. Amongst these are Simone de Beauvoir, Marry Wollstoncraft, Slyvia Leith-Ross, Buchi Emecheta, Asare Konadu, Calixthe Beyala and others. Their intention as revealed in their writings is to debunk the myth of male superiority.

From evidence obtained after an atomistic analysis of the patriarchal space, it is clear that the burden on women is dictated more by men than patriarchy. Patriarchy clothe women with negative images, thereby reducing them to second class citizens. With this overwhelming influence, the woman sometimes becomes docile, silent and passive in her own environment.

However, with the advent of modernity, the woman is striving to break these barriers created around her by patriarchy, through violation of certain traditional rites, and becoming more independent and industrious. The typical case is pictured through the characters of Adaku in *The Joys of Motherhood* and Pokuwaa in *A Woman in her Prime*. These new women reject the place accorded them by patriarchy. They show their abilities as active participant in the drama

of life. As such, they initiate action, and execute it to the detriment of the patriarchal order.

This work equally showed the different levels of conflict in the African society. We observed the conflict between men and women: how men treat their wives as slaves; how women are seen more or less servants; and how they are used as tools to satisfy men's ego within patriarchy. The second conflict operates between the woman and patriarchy: a woman with no child is not considered as a full woman. The last conflict is that between tradition and modernity, which once more proves that, all cultures are dynamic. At this level, we realized that time plays a great role in shaping events in all societies. As such, the African society cannot be left out.

By way of contribution to literature, this work is a continuation of the debate on the negative effects of patriarchy to female emancipation. Since literature is part of propaganda, the *raison d'être* of this work is also to enlighten women who have been victims of circumstances to be courageous in breaking the long silence meted out to them by patriarchy. It projects better avenues for the liberation and rebellion state from patriarchal enslavement. Further, it serves as a source of inspiration to other researchers, who are interested in women's issues.

In view of the above, the government should promulgate laws which guarantee the protection and safety of the female folk within patriarchal environs. To arrive at this stage, girls should be encouraged to go to school, and

parents who do not send their daughters to school should be taxed. Moreover, women should be independent than ever. This will prevent them from leaning more on men. Men should equally be realistic, by accepting their fault in sexual matters, and fecundity at home. In effect, any of the partners can be infertile, sterile or barren.

In order to avoid misjudgement, both husbands and wives should consult medics to ascertain their virility and fertility. Future researches can therefore focus on companionship in patriarchal societies and its effects on the economic, social and political development of Africa.

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