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The Role of Nigerian Women in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005)

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Abstract:

*Our research paper studied the matters of patriarchy and women's resistance in Nigerian society through analyzing the two African works, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005). The aim of our dissertation was to depict the psychological and the physical impacts of patriarchal oppression and men's authority over black women. To achieve our goal, we relied on Alice Walker's *Womanism* (1983) and Clenora Hudson-Weems *Africana Womanism* (1993), we tried to demonstrate how the two writers Buchi Emecheta and Sefi Atta shown in their novels the different ways in which black women were marginalized by men and how they resisted to all patriarchal acts in order to regain their liberty. In fact, our work was made up of two chapters. In the first one, we relied on Alice Walker's concepts: racism, classism and gender inequality, we explained how these three oppressive forces affected black women's personalities and attitudes. In the second chapter, we exposed the African Nigerian culture and social expectations that abused and condemned Nigerian women through the use of Clenora Hudson-Weem's theory. Additionally, we explained how Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) tried to give voice to the oppressed black women to reach their self-fulfillment. At the end of our dissertation, we attained a conclusion that summed up the harsh conditions and the obstacles that Nigerian women were facing in their everyday lives and their resistance to the patriarchal acts.*

Key words: African Black women, racism, classism, gender inequality, womanism, Africana womanism, motherhood, family centerdness, identity, resistance.

General Introduction

Throughout the ages, black African women had been suffering from men's oppression and marginalization; these abusive acts had been a tradition that was passing from one generation to another. Like many countries, Nigeria was colonized by Britain, which affected black people's lives negatively; that is to say, the new culture of English colonialism had bad impacts on Nigerian people especially on women. In fact, black women were abused by both black and white males; because of their race and gender.

Our dissertation explores different issues like racism, classism, sexism and identity; basing on the two post-colonial novels Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) which show the position of black women who were multiply oppressed because of their gender and race. In spite of the fact that the male writers controlled modern African literature; Buchi Emecheta and Sefi Atta had been engaged in African Literature as producers of interesting subjects, which are related to women's rights. They were considered as the most important novelists who gave voice to black women and exposed their living conditions within the African patriarchal society. Buchi Emecheta and Sefi Atta aimed to change black women's position by encouraging them to resist against all the patriarchal domination of Nigerian culture and they worked further to give voice to all African women through their literary works.

After the birth of the theory of Feminism, which focused only on white women's rights and neglected black ones, many black women writers of the late 1970 and the 1980 like Alice Walker and Cleonora Hudson-Weems decided to find other movements, which bring new dimensions that differ from feminism. In 1983, on the one hand; the theorist Alice Walker introduced the theory of *Womanism* (1983) which was explained in her essay *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist prose*; it was based on everyday experiences of black women and

it showed how they were marginalized by black and white men. On the other hand, Clenora Hudson-Weems' *Africana Womanism* (1993) is an ideology, which was, dedicated to all African people especially women and it focused more on racial prejudice and social discrimination. In fact, the two theories were considered as a reaction to the stereotypes of women and they had a common aim, which was encouraging the African black women to fight against patriarchal system in order to gain their freedom.

Our dissertation discusses the patriarchal issues and the black women's resistance in Nigerian society by analyzing the two African literary works Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005). Thus, our work focuses on the problems that black women faced in the Nigerian society and their fight against men's oppression in order to get back their identity.

Review of the Literature

Most of black women writers examined the difficult social issues, which were based on African women's lives and their subordination because of their gender, class and race. Their literary works were based on women's suffering and social injustice caused by the white and black men. Therefore, black feminist critics had been presented to show the history of black women and how race, gender and sex affected their lives. For instance Mary Washington who believed on black feminist criticism; in her piece of work *Black women Image Makers (1974)*. She declared the social marginalization, which was commonly expressed by black women writers, and she claimed that: "we should be about the business of reading; absorbing and giving critical attention to those writers whose understanding of black women can take us further"¹. She found that black women had been rejected by their males and they struggled to have their rights within a dominant culture.

On the first hand, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood (1979)* came to show the reality of African woman's life under male control. This work had been criticized by many scholars namely Barbara Christian; in her book *Black Feminist Criticism (1985)*, she claimed that the experience of women as a mother was something completely obligated and it was the principal role which determined women's existence. Like in the case of Nnu Ego who believed on the idea, that woman's status was defined through being a mother; since she lived under the patriarchal society where black women were obliged to marry and bring children to identify themselves. Barbara Christian argued that most women characters in this novel were subjugated by their husbands and fathers like Nnu Ego's mother (Ona) who lived under the extreme rules of her society and struggled to have a male child to identify herself.³

In addition, in *Gendered Haunting: The Joys of Motherhood, Interpretive Acts, and Postcolonial Theory (2004)*, Stephane Robolin described how colonialism and gender

oppression influenced the life of many characters in Emecheta's novel. Robolin in his article talked about the experiences of Nnu Ego and her attempt to commit a suicide since her first child was died. This event showed the turning point of the novel and how it made Nnu Ego in trouble, she felt weak with no identity. However, she did not commit suicide and decided to confront her reality accepting her role as an oppressed woman. Robolin portrayed the cultural dominance over black women characters and defined their oppressive roles.⁴

Furthermore, Louise O'Brien showed in her article *Buchi Emecheta and African Dilemma (2001)* the way black women were in a dilemma either to remain with traditional culture or to follow the western culture of the colonizers which imposed different rules to black women and they were obliged to accept their expectations in order to survive. *The Joys of Motherhood (1970)* dealt with many oppressive issues like race, gender and class, which caused terrible conditions in the life of individuals. In the *African Dilemma (2001)*, O'Brien had introduced gender inequality around women of color and analyzed two distinct cultures where women were dominated by men's authority and they were identified through their sexuality and gender. For example, in the case of Nnu Ego who found herself in a dilemma between two different oppressed cultures; she faced many difficulties in western culture. O'Brien in her article came to feel black women with responsibility since they accepted another culture to have their own independence and to survive.⁵

On the other hand, Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come (2005)* told an emotional story, which displayed many familiar issues and women's struggle for gaining their identities. Taking Kehinde and Mbipom's article *Discovery, Assertion and self-realization (2011)* which talked about Sefi Atta's novel portraying the difficult experiences of Enitan from childhood to adulthood. Their point of view was based on Enitan's growth and her social interaction, which helped her to realize different situations in her patriarchal society. Through this point, Enitan became more confident and she challenged multiple oppression in order to express her

personality and to survive. Kehinde and Mbipom stated that *Everything Good Will Come* was “a courageous story about friendship, family, ambition and self-discovery”.⁶

Additionally, Sola Owonibe in her work entitled: *Identity and the Absent Mother in Atta's Everything Good Will Come (2017)*, focused on two major issues like identity and religion. She claimed that people identify themselves through their beliefs and religion, which could be the central element of developing one's identity. In *Everything Good Will Come (2005)*, Enitan's mother was a religious woman who devoted all her life to Christianity and she forgot her role as a mother, as Owonibe stated, “religion played a major role in the narrative, religion provides the motivation, and the impetus for identity formation and character's development. Postcolonial Nigeria, as depicted in the narrative contains different religious ideologies.”⁷ Thus, Owonibe in her article showed that Enitan was ignored by her mother since she was absent because she sacrificed all her time to religion, as a result, Enitan was grown without love and she never felt with her mother's affection. For her, a mother was very important in the life of a child but when she was absent, it created some psychological problems in the life of children.

Besides, most of critical views on *Everything Good Will Come (2005)* have introduced two characters Enitan and Sheri through their history within a dominant society. This novel demonstrated the everyday experiences of Nigerian women struggling to find their identities. Sefi Atta in this novel used a new technique of writing, which was a child narrator, she told the story from the point of view of the main character Enitan in order to attract readers' attention. From the point of view of Madelaine Hron in her article *The Figure of the Child in Third-Generation Nigerian Novels (2008)* where she examined the idea that a child narrator in Nigerian novels encouraged more writers to write about the different situations of everyone's life, whereas it can be difficult when it was narrated by the adult narrators.⁸

Issue and Working Hypothesis

After the pieces of research that we have done to find some existing literature on our concerned novels Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), we have perceived that they are acquired a lot of criticism from the point of view of feminism. This paper is based on hypotheses, which deduce that the two novels discuss many oppressive issues that black women face in their everyday lives. In fact, our dissertation discusses the atrocities that African black women suffer from because of their gender and race. The present piece of research aims at showing women's position in Nigerian African society and it attempts to depict how the two writers Buchi Emecheta and Sefi Atta give voice to the silent and oppressed women in a patriarchal society.

Our task in this dissertation is to show to the readers how the two novelists Buchi Emecheta and Sefi Atta; highlighted African black women's harsh conditions in Nigerian patriarchal society and their resistance; in order to break their stereotypical roles.

Methodological Outline

In our dissertation, we have discussed African women's role in a patriarchal society and their resistance. In the first part, we have introduced our topic, which describes black women's oppression by both black and white males and their struggle to get their independence. We have cited the review of literature of the two novels that we have already analyzed. The second section is devoted to methods and materials. On the one hand, we have the method section where we have tried to explain the two African literary theories that we have chosen to apply in our work: Alice Walker's theory *Womanism* (1983) and Clenora Hudson-Weems *Africana Womanism* (1993). On the other hand, we have Materials in which we summarized the two Nigerian Novels *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Everything Good Will Come* (2005). Furthermore, we have mentioned the biographies of the two Nigerian novelists; Buchi

Emecheta and Sefi Atta. In the third part, which is the results, we have dealt with the general ideas of each one of our chapters; which means that we have spoken briefly about the content of each chapter in order to attract reader's attention and to inform him/her about what he/she is going to find in the chapters. The last section is devoted to discussion, which is made up of two chapters. In the first one, we have explained how Nigerian women are marginalized and abused by both black and white men because of their gender and race. Through using some Alice Walker's concepts like racism, gender inequality and classism, we have tried to describe black women's roles in Nigerian society and how men mistreated them. In addition, in the second chapter, we have dealt with the abusive culture, the social norms and how they affect Nigerian black women within their community. In fact, Clenora Hudson-Weems' theory helps us to depict the real life of black women and how they struggle against the oppressive forces; in order to get their freedom. At the end of our dissertation, we have written a conclusion in which we have summed up the essential points discussed in all our work, we have demonstrated the patriarchal issues that African black women have faced in their everyday lives, as well as their resistance to gain their real identity.

Endnotes:

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2. Barbara Christian, "Black Feminist Criticism: An Angle of Seeing: Motherhood in Buchi Emecheta's and Alice Walker's *Meridian* (1984)" (New York: Colombia University Press, 1997), 230-237.
3. Stephane Robolin, "Gendered Hauntings: The Joys of Motherhood, Interpretive Acts, and Post-Colonial Theory" *Research in African Literatures*, vol.35, No.3 (Fall 2004), 76-92.
4. Louise O'Brien, "Buchi Emecheta and The African Dilemma" *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* 36. No. 1 (2001), 95-106.
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Methods and Materials

1-Methods

a- Summary of Alice Walker's Womanism In Search of Our Mothers Gardens (1983)

In order to discuss the role of African women in Nigerian patriarchal society in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), we will try to apply the theory of Alice Walker's *Womanism* which is clearly enhanced and well explained in her book entitled *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (1983) which is published in 1983. This theory aims to show to the readers the position of black women in patriarchal society.

Womanism is a term that is found by the theorist Alice Walker in 1983. This movement displays the triple issues of gender oppression, race and class domination; it aims to see the function of gender inequality and how black women are marginalized by black men and by white society as well. Alice Walker is one of the most well-known African-American writers, she studies the history of the African-American women from the difficult period of slavery and the struggle for civil rights, to the subjugation and hard rules imposed by the white people. Since the living conditions of the black women are different from those of white women, Alice Walker as other black feminists is aware of the need for another movement apart from feminism which would give colored women a chance to open their eyes and to see how racism, classism and gender inequality affected their lives, in order to change their bad situation and to gain their freedom. Izgarjan and Markov assert that; "As Walker's literary scope expanded and she developed into a more mature writer and political activist, she became aware of the need for a movement which would be different from feminism and which would offer colored women a space to formulate their policy. She named it Womanism".¹

Alice Walker in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983) expresses her will and readiness to change: "I believe in change: change personal, and change in society".² She coined the term *Womanism* as a reaction to the marginalization of black women caused by white feminists. Because it fails to encompass the perspectives of black women and they treated them as inferior and valueless because of their color.

Furthermore, the main purpose of Alice Walker is to name the Black women's resistance against the white men's authority, racism and against gender discrimination. It is obvious that black women are doubly marginalized, they are victims of both racial and gender oppression, they are obliged to face psychological and physical abuse caused by black men and white people as well. This is what leads Alice Walker to say that these women are "oppressed almost beyond recognition oppressed by everyone".³

Alice Walker in her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983) gives a definition of four aspects to explain the term Womanism and to clarify the relationship of black women with their culture and identity; it aims at showing their roles in the society. She claims that:

Womanist. From womanish. (opp of girlish, i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious). A black feminist or feminist of color. From the black folk expression of mothers to female children, you acting womanish, i.e., like a woman. Also, A Woman who loves other women, sexually and / or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women's strength...committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male and female...traditionally Universalist. Loves music... loves the spirit. Loves love... Loves struggles. Loves the folk. Loves herself. Regardless. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender.⁴

From what is said above, we can understand that womanism is about admiring, appreciating black women and valuing themselves and also criticizing the sexist and classist principles of white feminism. Furthermore, we can also see that black women are described by Alice Walker as brilliant persons who think correctly and who love themselves and others around them. In fact, *Womanism* is also about encouraging and empowering black, she explains in her writings

that *Womanism* “may include different meanings which focus not only on women but on men as well”⁵.

Moreover, in Alice Walker’s collection of essays *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (1983), the term *Womanism* indicates the significance of black women's relationship to men. Indeed, it highlights how black women's positions are not the same as those of white women in relation to men, which means that males hold the positions of authority while females hold inferior status. Walker states that:

It is a word that said more than that they choose women over men. More than that they choose to live separate from men. In fact, to be consistent with black cultural values (which, whatever their shortcomings, still have considerable worth) it would have to be a word that affirmed connectedness to the entire community and the world, rather than separation, regardless of who worked and slept with whom.⁶

To conclude, Alice Walker in her literary works describes the different obstacles that African black women have faced in patriarchal societies. She focuses mainly on the oppressive issues like race, class domination and gender oppression. In her collection of essays *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens* (1983); she shows the need to create another movement which is different from white feminism which excludes them from their rights, she called it *Womanism*. Alice Walker’s theory addresses the black females to fight all kinds of oppression and to challenge the policies which abused and neglected them; in order to build their confidence and self-sufficiency.

b- Summary of Clenora Hudson-Weems' Theory *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (1993)

Africana womanism is an African literary theory, which is introduced in 1980s by the African activist Clenora Hudson-Weems. It is an ideology, which deals with the historical experiences, the struggles and the problems that African people especially women, are facing in their everyday lives. Clenora Hudson-Weems in her *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* says that: "It is grounded in African culture and, therefore, it necessarily focuses on the unique experiences, struggles, needs, and desires of *Africana* women".⁷

Hudson-Weems in her theory *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (1993) lists eighteen characteristics, which allow black woman to have their role and become real *Africana* womanist:

The *Africana* womanist is self-namer; a self-definer; family-centered; genuine in sisterhood; strong; in concert with the *Africana* man in struggle; whole; authentic; a flexible role player; respected; recognized; spiritual; male compatible; respectful of elders; adaptable; ambitious; mothering; and nurturing.⁸

From the excerpt above, Clenora Hudson-Weems claims that each one of the descriptors has an important effect on the *Africana womanism*. They are indispensable for black woman's life, because they give her power and value. Alice Walker considers self-naming and self-defining as the important characteristics that can help African women to build their identities and to liberate themselves. She insists that every black woman should be named in the society, because this will reflect her real personality and identification in her life. Further, *Africana Womanism* is a communal approach, it encourages the independence of the entire African community, it gives a great importance to family and children and it does not see the man as women's enemy as other feminism did.

Africana Womanism finds out that black African women are neglected due to their race, gender, social and financial conditions. Black, white men and white women triply marginalize

them as well because they are black females. *Africana Womanism* differentiates itself from feminism which is viewed as “a separatist and non-inclusive agenda for Africana women”⁹.

Hudson-Weems thinks about the need to find a theoretical framework that can empower black women; she creates *Africana Womanism (1993)* as a new ideology specific to them. It is originated through studying the African culture. She gives an explanation to this term saying; “Africana means African-Americans, African-Caribbeans, African-Europeans, and Continental Africans. Womanism is more specific because terminology derived from the word woman is more specific when naming a group of the human race”.¹⁰ From what is said above, we can notice that Hudson-Weems has rejected feminism and other feminist ideologies for their inability to deal with the African woman experiences. She sees that feminism focuses on white woman’s obstacles and struggles; she tries to solve their problems, which are related to their gender. For Clenora Hudson-Weems, feminism deals only with white women’s sufferings from gender oppression; it ignores the African black women who are marginalized because of their race and class. She asserts; “Feminism, a term conceptualized and adopted by White women, involves an agenda that was designed to meet the needs and demands of that particular group”¹¹.

In this regard, Bates argues that:

Hudson-Weems’s term [Africana womanism] is neither a derivative of nor an appendage to African feminism, black feminism, feminism, or Walker’s popularly accepted womanism. One difference is that Africana Womanism rejects as foremost in women’s struggle gender as an issue and the male as an enemy...and it has no identification with any traditional feminist organizations.¹²

Africana womanism aims at fighting against different sorts of oppression, for the whole black African community to live in freedom. This theory prioritizes the respect of African women, children and men. To be clear, it discusses both African black women and men’s experiences and it supports them in order to get back their rights. Hudson-Weems expresses the need for a “concerted struggle with both Black men and women together aiming at eradicating their shared oppression”.¹³

To sum up, Clenora Hudson-Weems' *Africana Womanism (1993)* represents an ideology, which deals with black women's experiences and their struggles for independence. *Africana Womanism* is a theory that speaks to the whole black people especially black women, it aims at encouraging them to be self-reliant and to have a name in order to identify themselves in their society. In fact, Hudson and other black Africana Womanists have worked to unify African black men and women by establishing the idea that they share the same history in a racist world.

2-Materials

a-Summaries of the Novels

1-The Joys of Motherhood (1979)

The Joys of Motherhood is a novel written by the African Nigerian author Buchi Emecheta in 1979. It deals with a miserable story of a traditional Nigerian woman Nnu Ego who struggles through her journeys within both Ibo and Lagos cultures to have children and to take care of them.

At the beginning of the novel, Nnu Ego's father Agbadi plans for her marriage with a man called Amatokwu. However, after the marriage, she discovers that she is unable to have children because of her Chi (the spirit of a dead slave girl) who was forced to sacrifice her life to accompany her mistress and promised to come back with vengeance. Nnu Ego becomes a symbol of fertility in Ibo and she experiences pangs of humiliation. After that, Agbadi arranges for her second marriage to the Owulum family from Lagos.

Emecheta depicts that Ibo tribe is a patriarchal society where marriage and children are the most important elements in women's lives, however, in Lagos region people prefer money and success for the individuals. Bearing many children in Lagos is not valued because it causes financial problems. After Nnu Ego's arrival to the house of her husband's Nnaife, she does not

like his look and his way of life. When she has had many children, she struggles trying to be a traditional wife in a modern colonized society, which is Lagos.

Buchi Emecheta shows how Nnu Ego is oppressed and marginalized by the cultural norms, which force black women to be good daughters, wives and mothers. *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) depicts the effects of colonial system on Nigerian women. Upon the arrival of colonialism in Nigeria, the Igbo situation is changed, Nnu Ego and her husband experience poverty, Nnaife does not find a job because the masters for whom he works move to fight for their country. One day Nnaife and his colleagues are forced by British men to join army and were sent to Burma to fight in the world war one, which causes poverty and lack of money to his wife and his children. Nnu Ego is obliged to work and to go back to trade to nurture and to take care of her children.

The novel describes Nnu Ego's experiences during her husband's absence. She faces many obstacles while feeding her children, the tensions in the family continue due to famine. When the war ends, Nnaife is back home and he decides to arrange for his two daughter's marriage Kehinde and Taiwo, he does not care whether they accept or not. However, Kehinde refuses the man her father has chosen; instead, she wants to marry a young man from a Butcher family. One day, Kehinde escapes from home and when Nnaife has noticed, he goes to the Butcher's house angrily trying to murder the young man, fortunately, the police officers stop him. Kehinde is in her lover's side, Nnaife feels betrayed by his daughter and he does not expect this from her.

At the end of the *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), the novelist Buchi Emecheta narrates the miserable experiences lived by Nnu Ego. When she has become old and ill, her husband is in prison and her children have left her. Her oldest son travels to America, the middle one to Canada and the twin sisters get married and stay in their husband's houses in Lagos. Nnu Ego

finally goes to Ibuza alone and after days she dies. Her dream transform to nightmare, even though she has many children she does not experience the joys of motherhood.

2-Summary of *Everything Good Will Come* (2005)

Everything Good Will Come (2005) is a novel written by the Nigerian author Sefi Atta. The novelist shows how the Nigerian female characters like Enitan, grows up in post-colonial Nigeria and how she faces male oppression, gender inequality and the loss of identity. Sefi Atta reveals how Enitan tries to build herself after becoming adult.

Sefi Atta's novel tells the story of Enitan, an eleven years old girl, who grows up in a broken family. She is under the control of her parents, she fights to define her self-identify from the domination of her mother's religious thoughts and her father's manipulative acts. Enitan's brother dies and her mother Arinola becomes alienated from her, this completely traumatizes her. Enitan is close more to her father Sunny Taiwo who talks to her about women's freedom. However, he abuses his wife Arinola psychologically and economically using his patriarchal force. Sefi Atta displays how Enitan is dominated by her father, after her graduation from London University she becomes a lawyer as her father wanted, but after that she begins to realize her father's patriarchal authority over her and her mother.

Atta exposes the patriarchal dominance of men, when Sunday oppresses his wife psychologically and verbally because her child is died. In addition, he has a child out of their marriage, which causes a mental trauma to his wife Arinola who is found dead alone. Sefi Atta in her novel discusses the solidarity of women; she narrates Enitan's moral support to her friend Sheri who is rapped by Demola and his friends. Moreover, her determination encourages Sheri to liberate herself from her patriarchal husband who treats her as a sexual being and as a servant.

The author depicts the hard obstacles that Enitan faces in her conjugal life. She gets married to a man named Niyi Franco, at the beginning she feels good, but later she fails to have children. In fact, motherhood is viewed as a central element in the lives of Nigerian black women, thus Enitan's late pregnancy causes problems in her life and Niyi's community forces him to leave her because of her barrenness. After days, she becomes pregnant, and chooses to participate in the movement that calls for the freedom of the prisoners, including her father who is arrested by military government. However, Niyi is against this idea because of his patriarchal beliefs, instead he wants her to stay at home to cook and to take care of her family. Niyi joins the cold war and stops talking to her which causes her mental illness, then she decides to leave him with her baby, as she cannot support the patriarchal oppressive behaviour of her husband anymore, she becomes mature to choose her destiny.

At the end of the novel, Atta shows how Enitan and Sheri's friendship inspires many of black women to resist the patriarchal hardships and how it encourages them to create their own identities. In fact, Sefi Atta describes how the patriarchal Nigerian society affects black women psychologically and how they should help and guide each other to revolt against the impacts of patriarchy.

b- Biographies

1-Buchi Emecheta

Buchi Emecheta is a Nigerian author and sociologist; she is one of the well-known female African writers. She was born on 21 July 1944 in Nigeria, and she died on 25 January 2017. Later, at the age of 16 years she got married to Sylvester Onwordi who travelled to the University of London to study. She struggled to nurture and to take care of her five children while working and writing. She began producing works based on her daily experiences, including the sufferings and the obstacles she faced in England after joining her husband. Later her marriage becomes troubled because of her husband's offensive and abusive character, he even burnt her first manuscript as she mentioned in her novel *The Bride Price*. After the first version had been destroyed, Emecheta was obliged to work hard in order to rewrite the same manuscript. Emecheta's writing deals with the economic exploitation, the consequences of colonialism on African black people and the oppression of African women, she explores many problems and tries to find solutions. In fact, some African writers did not accept Buchi Emecheta's works, because they believed that her thoughts are based on the same principles and views of feminists and white westerns. Thus, Buchi Emecheta tried to prove that she is not a feminist and that she has different ideas, she states in her article "Feminism with a small f":

Being a woman, and an African born, I see things through and African woman's eyes. I chronicle the little happenings in the lives of African women I know. I did not know that by doing so I was going to be called a feminist. But if am now a feminist then I am an African feminist with a small f.¹⁴

In fact, Buchi Emecheta wrote an autobiography and different works for children, she was the author of more than 20 books including *Second Class Citizens* (1974) and *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979)

2-Sefi Atta

Sefi Atta is a Nigerian author and playwright; she was born in 1964 in Lagos, Nigeria. She was a daughter of a Christian mother Iyobo and a Muslim father Abdul Aziz Atta. Sefi Atta was raised by her mother after the death of her father in 1972. She got married to Gboyega Ransome-kuti a doctor. She attended Queen's College, Lagos and Mill field school in England. In 1985, she graduated with a B.A degree from Birmingham University. She was a chartered accountant in England and a CPA in the United States where she migrated in 1994. Since completing her studies in creative writing at Antioch College in California, Atta has devoted her time exploring contemporary Nigerian culture in her fiction. Her works focused on African issues like the role of black women in patriarchal societies, oppression and loss of identity. In fact, her love to art and Nigerian artists helped her to start writing, she first wrote short stories and then she began writing novels like her famous one *Everything Good Will Come*, which was published in Nigeria and United States.

Endnotes

1. Aleksandra Izgarjan and Markov Slobodanka, "Alice Walker's Womanism: Perspectives Past and Present" *Gender Studies* 11. No.1 (2012): 304-305.
2. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. (London: Orion, 2005): 252.
3. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens. Womanist Prose*. (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt B. J., 1984): 149.
4. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose*. San Diego, New York, (London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984): 11-12.
5. Alice Walker, *In Search of our Mothers' Gardens*. (New York, 1972): 11.
6. Ibid, 81.
7. Clenora Hudson-Weems, *African Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (Troy, Michigan: Bedford Publisher, 1993): 154.
8. Ibid, 155.
9. William Ntiri, "Reassessing Africana womanism: continuity and change" *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, 25, No.3 (2001): 164.
10. Clenora Hudson-Weems, "Africana Womanism and The Critical Need for Africana Theory and Thought" *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 21, No. 2(1997): 205-17.
11. Clenora Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (Troy, Michigan: Bedford Publishers, 1993): 22.
12. Gerri Bates, "Alice Walker: A Critical Companion". (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2005): 37.
13. Clenora Hudson-Weems, "Africana womanism: "The flip side of a coin" *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 25.3, (2001): 138-145.
14. Buchi Emecheta, "Feminism with a small f" *Criticism and Ideology*" (Uppsala: Scandavian Institute of African Studies, 1988):175.

Results

This section of our dissertation contains the main findings we have reached after our investigation. To achieve our aim, we have applied *Alice Walker's Womanism* and *Clenora Hudson Weems Africana Womanism* on the post-colonial novels Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005). After reading and analyzing our two selected works, we have obtained notable findings and remarkable pieces of information concerning the two authors, novels and their issues.

In fact, this piece of research analyzes the role of black African women in the contemporary Nigerian society. Through the protagonists of both novels, Buchi Emecheta and Sefi Atta portray how black women were presented as victims of patriarchal authority. The two works explore the harsh conditions of the unfair patriarchal system, which oppress and abuse black women. As a result, they show how these women seek for freedom and gender justice through different means of resistance.

In our first chapter of discussion, while analyzing the two novels, we notice the subjugation and oppression of black women by the indigenous men and the impacts of post colonialism on them, because of their gender and color. Through the use of Alice Walker's *Womanism* (1983), we perceive that female characters of both novels share the same position, they are considered as a second class in Nigerian sexist and oppressive society.

Within our second chapter, we find that women are controlled and abused by the social expectations and they are guided by the norms of patriarchal society. In addition, we have used Clenora Hudson-Weems' some concepts of *Africana Womanism* (1993) to explain how women's identity is taken out due to male domination who control them. At the end of the two novels, there is a self-realization of the two black characters Nnu Ego and Enitan who struggle at home and in society to gain their identity.

To sum up, our dissertation examines the position of black African women in Nigerian societies in which males have the authority over females. Buchi Emecheta and Sefi Atta depict their concern for the conditions of black women within the African social, economic and cultural fields. As a result, they attempt to raise the status of the marginalized African women and encourage them to resist to patriarchal domination in order to find out their freedom.

Discussion

In this section of our work, we are going to discuss the oppressive forces: racism, gender and classism and how they affected the African women's lives through analyzing the two Nigerian Post-Colonial novels: *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Everything Good Will Come* (2005). Indeed, we will deal with different social norms and cultural expectations, which have oppressed the lives of black women. In this part, we will try to explain how black women are dominated by the patriarchal society through the use of Alice Walker's theory: *Womanism* (1983) and Clenora Hudson-Weem's: *Africana Womanism* (1993).

Chapter One: Race, Class and Gender Issues

1-Racism in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Everything Good Will Come* (2005)

During the eighteenth century, Nigeria was colonized by Britain and most of black people especially women lived in harsh conditions. They are forced to leave their house to become slaves in a white dominated society where they have lost their own identities. For this reason, Nigerian authors like Buchi Emecheta produces a lot of works namely *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) to reflect on the lives of black women and to portray their difficult experiences under the colonial system.

Alice Walker in her book *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens* (1983) describes the challenges of black women and how the whites oppress them. They are extremely abused and humiliated in foreign lands where they are considered as the inferior race. In spite of the terrible experiences they are supported in many years of oppression, they are struggled to maintain their creativity and to express themselves. In fact, Alice Walker explores the issue of racial

discrimination and how it affects the lives of both men and women, she insists “to let them live with proud and self-respect, they shall create their own history”¹. Similarly, Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) depicts how black people are forced to work for the whites and they are considered as slaves. Their bodies support every aspect of abuse in every single day of their lives by the colonizers. Buchi Emecheta aims to present the white domination over black citizens through the use of many characters like Nnaife, the black man who has no voice when he is with his white masters Dr. Meers and Mrs. Meers. He is considered as inferior to them because of his dark skin, they give him orders of what to do and they treat him in a bad manner like an ‘animal’. Indeed, Nnaife is forced to work as a washerman for his white masters doing all kind of washings; this is clear in the novel:

Her husband Nnaife would get up at six morning by the clock the master and his wife had given him. He would then pull on his khaki shorts, eat the night’s left over food and dust to Dr Meer’s part sit on a kitchen stool by the first bath and wash all manner of articles, towels, women’s night dresses and what have you.²

In fact, Nnaife as a washerman feels undervalued by the white authority; he becomes dominated by the colonial system of his country. He works day and night for the rich white family in order to survive. His masters Dr. Meers keep calling him “Baboon” and Nnaife does not know the meaning of this word, they reduce any black man in their land. At that time, black people are mostly oppressed and humiliated by the whites due to their race and their ancestry. They are treated as savage and not human beings but they still working hardly to get money. Nnaife feels oppressed and lower by the white masters, he is considered as he:

Is dennuded of any cultural or historical being? Dr, Meers peered over the paper, smiled mischievously and answered Good Night Baboon! The woman went on for a while then suddenly realised that Nnaife was still standing by the door. She mentioned with her arm for him to go away. He heard Dr; Meers laugh and repeat the word Baboon.³

Alice Walker’s *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens* (1983) portrays the sufferings of black people through racism and its practices; they are mainly oppressed by the whites because of their origins and color. She aims to stop all forms of oppression and dehumanization against

black people and encourages them to defend their rights since they are victims of racial discrimination. For her they must believe in their abilities and change their history, she says; “we are people, a people do not throw their geniuses away. And if they are thrown away, it is our duty as artists and as witnesses for the future to collect them again for the sake of our children and if necessary, bone by bone.”⁴

Furthermore, the colonization had a great impact on Nigerian people and it comes with many changes to the country using different oppressive rules. Thus, most of Nigerians are controlled and deprived from their own rights, as it is said; “Colonialism intensified patriarchal oppression, often because native men increasingly disenfranchises and excluded from the public sphere, and became more tyrannical at home.”⁵ In this regard, Buchi Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) shows how black people are disempowered and silenced by the white colonizers because of their race. They are adopted the same way of oppression against women, for instance, Nnaife when he starts to work for the white men, he reinforces his power at home and tries to beat his wife Nnu Ego at every time:

One thing was sure: he gained the respect and even the fear of his wife Nnu Ego. He could even now offer to beat her up if she went beyond the limits he could stand. He gave her a little house keeping money, which bought a bag of garri (cassava flour) for the month and some yams; she would have to make up the rest from her trading profits.⁶

Buchi Emecheta displays the way in which the colonial patriarchal system raises the marginalization and domination against black women. In the colonized city of Lagos, most of black women suffer from colonization and they are exploited in a bad way, the patriarchal situations that they are faced make them silent. Hence, Emecheta displays different ways of oppression, which are reinforced by the racial colonial system. For her, the white dominant system in Lagos allows native people to subordinate their wives and it gives them the right to hurt them because of their race and weakness. For instance, Nnu Ego faces many difficulties in her life as a mother; she keeps doing her household chores while she has many creative skills

as her man. However, she witnesses violence and mistreatment by her husband because she is considered as weak. Buchi Emecheta declares that “In Lagos a wife would not have time. She had to work. She provided the food from her husband’s meager housekeeping money, but finding the money for clothes, for any kind of comforts, in some cases for the children’s school fees, was on her shoulders”⁷

Alice Walker’s work *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens* (1983) depicts black women’s experiences and their challenges. She gives an example of her mother and grandmother’s history since they are oppressed by the colonial patriarchal system due to their race. She shows how it is difficult to be a mother within a racist society, which uses all kind of punishment in their everyday lives. She declares that:

They were suspended in a time in history where the options for black women were severely limited [...] and they either kill themselves or they are used up by the man, or by the children, [...] whatever the pressures against them. And they cannot go anywhere. I mean, you can't, you just can't move, until there is room for you to move into. And that's the way I see many of the women I have created in fiction. They are closer to my mother's generation than to mine. They had few choices.⁸

Moreover, the colonial system is based on marginalizing some group of people because of their race and ethnicity. So, according to Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) racism is related also to ethnicity and culture; for example, there is a division between the Yorubas and Muslims, which creates some ethnic conflicts between them. In fact, the Yorubas disrespect the Igbo people and they have a bad relationship since they call them cannibals. This is why Nnaife is very angry about his daughter’s Kehinde who chooses to marry a man from Yoruba tribe. Nnaife’s racist behaviour over the Yoruba family pushes him to be violent when his daughter Kehinde escapes from home to marry a strange man; she definitely refuses her father’s desires and her cultural rules. He unconsciously tries to murder the young butcher man that causes him five-years in prison. Nnaife shouts angrily while walking to the butcher family:

Kehinde! My daughter! The butcher—I'll butcher him! With that, he bent down under his bed—anger made him so agile, so quick—reaching for the big cutlass which he kept there for emergencies, since that part of Lagos was often troubled with armed robbers. He picked up the cutlass, swung it in the air, as if aiming it at Nnu Ego, his eyes still glazed from sleep. That butcher and his son – I will teach them! My daughter! My daughter with a Yoruba husband? She is better dead –and with her the father of her man! Where are they.⁹

From this extract, we realize that racial conflicts are mostly between different ethnic groups that are intensified by the colonial system. Like it is mentioned in the novel when Nnaife rejects the idea of giving his daughter to a Yoruba man because they do not share the same religious principles. This novel depicts that according to Nigerian tradition, woman is obliged to accept her father's decision in order to be blessed by her community. In fact, Alice Walker portrays in her writings that black women are become victims by the colonial policy which oppress them in their everyday lives. She highlights the great power of colonial patriarchal society, which deprives women to have their own decisions, and she encourages them to learn how to define themselves by their own ideas.

In *Everything Good Will Come (2005)*, Sefi Atta portrays the severe military dominance in Nigerian society. She depicts the story of Enitan whose life is related to the political rules of her community, she narrates the tensions between Nigeria and Igbo region that results another form of exploitation in her country, which is military dominance. Following that, this system causes clearly many troubles among people of the two tribes, so the narrator Enitan in this novel recites the whole difficulties of her community as she claims:

I knew that our first Prime Minister was killed by a Major General, that the Major General was soon killed, and that we had another Major General heading our country. For a while the palaver had stopped, and now it seemed the Biafrans were trying to split our country in two.¹⁰

Indeed, the military system affects Nigerian people and causes many damages namely frustration, mistreatment and injustice to them. In this regard, Enitan states that even: "Twenty-five years after independence, and this nonsense. No light, no water, people dying all over the place, before their times, from one sickness or the other."¹¹ From the novel, we can understand

that any objection against this powerful system leads to enslavement and it exploits the life of all the inhabitants by taking their rights and independence. Taking the character Peter Mukoro, (Enitan father's friend) who is a journalist, is stopped by the police because of his writing against the army, which makes him furious, he claims for people's rights:

Peter Mucoro's other columns against the military government to release pro-democracy protestors land him in jail without trial and no option of bail. The petition of his lawyer and friend Sunny Taiwo, to the military government to release him also gets Taiwo in prison without trial.¹²

In this respect, Alice Walker's *Womanism (1983)*, which she explains in *Search of Our Mothers Gardens (1983)* focuses on racial discrimination over black people and their suffering. She encourages all people of black race to express themselves, she "aims to rid the world of all false stereotypical images of blacks especially men to recover the past rectify its misrepresentations and preserve the truth for future generations".¹³

Moreover, Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come (2005)* exposes violence and brutality used by the military system in Nigeria, which imposes itself on people. The country is in trouble and the military rule causes many difficulties among the citizens, they feel powerless and painful about the hard situations they live. Sefi Atta mentions the character Sunday Taiwo (Enitan's father) who expresses people's suffering and their worries about the military power, he says, "one hundred million of us, less than ten thousand of them and they want to run this country like a club that belongs to them? Then tell us, that we cannot talk? We can't say anything, or we will be locked up...older people afraid to talk"¹⁴. From this regard, we understand that military system effects on people's lives using power and control them in order to ruin the country. During this period of military rule, people become separated from each other and many tensions are created to reinforce the exploitation and violence between individuals. Certain relationships are disconnected and people become alienated from each other especially between men and women. They bring violence and oppression used by the military rule and transfer it to the domestic spheres. For instance, the character Brigadier Hassan

(Sheri's husband) is portrayed as the military man who uses a bad treatment toward his wife; he deprives her of her rights. This anti-social behavior leads to create conflicts and troubles in the life of the couple.

From this point, we can notice that the military dominance influences black men to adopt the same way of abuse against their wives. Women are portrayed as slaves under the colonial patriarchal society. Alice Walker in her work *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens (1983)* shows how black women are victims of exploitation by both the whites and black men. She claims that: "They are creatures so abused and mutilated in body, so dimmed and confused by pain, they considered themselves unworthy even of hope. In the selfless abstractions their bodies became to the men who used them."¹⁵

In addition to that, Sefi Atta comes with an important element that causes many troubles in the lives of Nigerian people which is economic problems and poverty. Black people suffer from the hard economic situation which influences their way of living and it creates poverty and violence among the citizens. Sefi Atta depicts the oppressive conditions of the two characters Enitan and Sheri during the period of civil war, where people are victims of violence and segregation. As portrayed in the novel, the economic hardships in Nigeria pushes black people to live in rural areas working on farms as slaves. Added to that, black women also are forced to live in the same way and hold the same lower jobs in order to survive. *In Everything Good Will Come (2005)*, Enitan depicts the sad realities of black women who live with violence, fear and oppression by the western world. They are regarded as inhuman beings; as a result, they become prisoners and badly treated in the prison where they generally have unhealthy conditions. Atta shows many characters like the Mother of Prisons who loses her freedom because of slavery.

I looked around. A few of the women were sitting up. They thought we were about to fight. I heard some more grumbling. Mother of prisons, she was always fighting, and she had no strength,

only for talking [...] we lay on the floor. Mother of Prisons by my side. She said she was not sleeping next to any stinking people, and there were many in this cell.¹⁶

From the quotation above, we can notice that black women struggle to express their feeling and reclaim about their suffering in prison. Alice Walker in her book *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens* (1983) shows the same bad conditions in black women's lives, for instance, she refers to a black slave girl named Phillis Wheatley; she is imprisoned by the white system since she is a poet. She is forced to be silent and she loses her life without expressing herself through her poets.¹⁷

Sefi Atta in *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) aims to show how black people struggle against slavery and racial oppression; they start to find solutions and work together to liberate themselves. Black women come with new ideas and create a form of solidarity in order to be free from all the oppressive forces. These women know that they have to work together and build female unity in order to make better conditions and to have their freedom. As it is appeared in this novel through the Bakare family, Sheri faces economic problems after the death of her father. She starts to work for her family with Enitan's help and together they have formed an organization based on solidarity with other women. Over the years, Sheri and Enitan's friendship become stronger, inspires many black women to fight against racial discrimination, and gives them power to express themselves.

Sheri leaves brigadier's house and concentrates on her flourishing business; and Enitan walks out of her marriage to pursue a life where she can freely fulfil her destiny. She becomes an advocate for women prisoners under the dictatorial military ruler ship of her country"¹⁸

This later gives to black women independence and a chance to improve themselves. In order to fight against the domination of women, the author shows this form of solidarity as a solution to struggle for the survival of the whole black people and realize their independence.

2-Classism in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Everything Good Will Come* (2005)

Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) deals particularly with the inferior status of colored women in Nigerian society; where they are subordinated and defined as second-class women in their community. For instance, the main character Nnu Ego suffers as an ignored woman in both Ibuza and Lagos tribes, she has to accept different roles according to the opposite cultures where she lives. As a result, we have noticed that most of women in Nigeria realize their status through their womanhood and the ability of giving birth to children. This is clear in the novel, when Nnu Ego leaves her region Ibuza to live in Lagos hoping that she will complete her mission as a mother. Agbadi's friend Idayi claims about Nnu Ego's situation:

That marriage should never have taken place. I do not think much of people who illtreat a woman because she has not yet borne a child. I would like our Nnu Ego to go away from here so they are not able to know much of her movements --you know the usual prying and gossiping.¹⁹

From the excerpt, we notice that motherhood is the source of female status, as it brings them the respect of others and defines their womanhood. *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) demonstrates that all Nigerian families consider children as the most important element in society, especially when it is a male child because it gives mother some kind of value in her community. According to Alice Walker *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens* (1983), the mother is the only responsible in every success of their children; indeed, their kids are the best creatures and their wonderful gardens. For Alice Walker, despite experiencing poverty and hardships, our mothers and grandmothers still able to express their womanhood through their children. She uses the history of her mother and grandmother as examples to show their capacity and the way she discovers their power. Even though they seem inferior and useless, they are strong enough to change their life and express themselves.²⁰

Buchi Emecheta demonstrates in her novel that man in the traditional Igbo society can do whatever satisfies him, while a woman needs to care about her children and her family. Black women believe that their husbands are the sole providers at home, contrary to them; they are defined as housekeepers working for their families and taking care of children. Emecheta talks about the struggle of black women in men's world, taking Nnu Ego as an example who respects the Igbo traditions which denies her status as a woman and she is forced to accept her husband as a sole provider:

She might not have any money to supplement her husband's income, but were they not in the white man's world where it was the duty of the father to provide for his family? In Ibo, women made a contribution, but in urban Lagos, men had to be the Sole providers; this new setting robbed the woman of her useful role.²¹

We notice from the extract that, in the upper and middle class, men are defined as superior to women. According to traditional culture, black women have never found their place in society; yet, they have the ability to do everything and made their private space. Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens* (1983) argues that black women hold some creative skills, which are not expressed since they are subordinated by the whites. They are condemned to do the household activities and they have courage to support many difficulties. Walker shows the hardworking of her mother and all her sacrifices, but she never receives any good treatment from her husband. Every man portrays his wife as a servant rather than a woman, she claims that: "Instead of being perceived as whole persons, their bodies became shrines, what was thought to be their minds became temples suitable for worship."²²

Besides that, Emecheta in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) goes further to explain the struggle of black women to have their liberation and to attain the equal rights as men. All their life women are connected to their husbands whether alive or dead because some of them are afraid they will not survive without men. The only place of black women is the kitchen, as it is shown in the novel where Adaku tells Oshia (Nnu Ego's son) to go and bring water then he

refuses. He says; “I am not going! I am a boy; why should I help in the cooking? That’s a woman’s job”²³. We can say that these social differences lead to men’s domination in patriarchal society. Taking also Nnaife as the dominated character when he returns home and he finds his wives have not cooked his meal, he starts to insult them “In bitter anger. His voice was tremulous and he directs his displeasure at Nnu Ego who seems to shrink under his stare”²⁴. Nnaife’s behavior towards his wives shows the oppressive role of men in an Igbo society where black females have not the same status as men.

Moreover, Emecheta depicts her characters as women who are submissive; they cannot make decisions by themselves. She mentions in her novel Nnu Ego’s questioning about the unfair treatment that women support, this character asks God about the reasons of women’s suffering and why all this injustice in their lives:

God, when will you create a woman who will be fulfilled in herself, a full human being, not anybody’s appendage? I am a prisoner of my own flesh and blood [...] Is it such an enviable position? We women subscribe to that law more than anyone until we change all this, it is still a man’s world, which women will always help to build.²⁵

This quotation explains Nnu Ego’s feeling about male dominance and how they are subjugated. She represents society as men’s world since it empowers men to use different oppressive treatments over their wives. Alice walker highlights the necessity of black women to struggle against the patriarchal system and class domination. In her work *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens* (1983), she encourages her people especially black women to find liberation and create their own history. She claims that: “I am occupied with spiritual survival, the survival of a whole of my people, but beyond that, I am committed to exploring the oppressions, the insanities, the loyalties and the triumphs of black women.”²⁶

Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), portrays the class issue through the experience of her females’ characters who are generally oppressed by social domination in which they live. In this novel, the main character Enitan fights against gender inequality and

classism. When she is a child, she dreams of becoming a president of her nation, however, she is deprived from all her desires by the Nigerian cultural expectations, which believe that black African women are unable to do whatever they want because of their lower class. According to Sefi Atta the social norms influence black female characters negatively. Like in the case of Sheri who accepts women's position which is given by others. This is clear in the novel when Enitan tells Sheri about her dream that she wants to be a president:

I want to be something like ... like president. Eh? Women are not presidents. Why not? Our men will not stand for it. Who will cook for your husband? He will cook for himself. What if he refuses? I will drive him away. You cannot, she said. Yes, I can. Who wants to marry him anyway? What if they kill you in a coup? I will kill them back. What kind of dream is that? Mine.²⁷

Sefi Atta writes down these words, to explain how women experience difficult situations in Nigerian society where there are all forms of oppression. She portrays that woman's place is in the kitchen doing all the hard work. Like in the case of Sheri who accepts her lower position and stay under control of her husband Ibrahim Hassan, she is convinced that woman should take care of her husband and children. Therefore, Enitan rescues her friend from the injustice life and encourages her to liberate herself living a normal life.

Afterwards, Sefi Atta portrays how Enitan convinces her friend Sheri to think more about herself and to escape from her husband's mistreatment, rather to create her own personality without counting on others. Thus, she initiates her own business following Enitan's advice to stop the bad relationship that she has with Ibrahim Hassan who keeps her at home doing all the household chores. Alice Walker in her piece of work shows the lack of self-realization of black women, they are used by the white people to believe in their weakness. For her most of black females are talented and capable to do everything even to lead a whole society. She says; "Women in general, are not a part of the corruption of the past so they can give a new kind of leadership, a new image of mankind [...] they are capable of tremendous, love and forgiveness, which if they use it, can make a better world".²⁸

Additionally, the issue of classism in *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) is shown through Enitan's marriage to her husband Niyi Franco, who believes that the role of women is to stay at home. After their marriage, Niyi and his family agree with the values of their society, which indicates that men are seen as the leaders while women should stay at home looking after their family's demands. Then, Enitan decides to leave Niyi because she never satisfies with their relationship she says: "Never once expected him to tell me I was beautiful."²⁹ while Niyi does not give any importance to Enitan, she is not the kind of woman he wants. Enitan does not accept her position as a servant, as it is mentioned:

Can you get these animals something? You have hands, she said. My friend, he said. Show some respect. Go to hell, she said. Why did you have to say that in front of my brothers? Well, why cannot you ever get them drinks for once? She answered. Why cannot you go to the kitchen? What will happen if you go? Will a snake bite your leg?³⁰

Alice Walker's *In Search of Our Mother Gardens* (1983), shows how black women are manipulated by the social norms and their expectations. Being black women lowers their status in many respects because they have been seen incompetent and worthless. Walker uses Jean Toomer's point of view on black women under the white domination to show the image of these poor women. For Toomer they are "exquisite butterflies trapped in an evil honey, toiling away that did not acknowledge them, except as the mule of the world"³¹, that is to say, they are always seen as mule since they carry many responsibilities and hardships that no one can support. This make them feel with disability and forget about their creativity since their bodies are used as tools working for the white people.

In Everything Good Will Come (2005), motherhood is very important in social class structures because having many children in a dominant society defines women's position; however, those who cannot bear children are presented as insignificant women. Sefi Atta in this novel uses Enitan as the main character who fails to have children and she depicts how the patriarchal idea influences her psychological state. Enitan dreams to have a lot of children in

order to express her social class as woman and mother, she explains in the novel her feeling when she gets pregnant:

The day I got pregnant, I sat on my bathroom floor crying over a stick. Thank you, God, I said. God bless you God. I waddled to Niyi, already imagining my stomach big, fell into his arms and his eyes filled with tears. A year Later, they looked at my stomach before looking at my face. I asked why they harassed women this way. We were greater than our wombs, greater than the sum of our body parts.³²

From what is said above, motherhood is viewed as an important element in society since it gives to black women strength to identify their positions. Enitan is one of those pitiful women who experiences violence by her husband Niyi. She is treated like sexual object without having any respect from her husband, sometimes she feels humiliated and unable to express her emotions. Alice Walker in her theory speaks about subordination of black females in the past and some of them are mothers and grandmothers. She tries to show in her work how they suffer from male dominance and convinces them to stand against any oppression. She says; “they lay vacant and fallow as autumn fields, with harvest time never in Sight and he saw them enter loveless marriages, without joy; and become prostitutes, without resistance; and become mothers of children, without fulfillment.”³³

3-Gender Inequality in Buchi Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come* (2005)

Buchi Emecheta discusses different types of oppressive issues in her novels, for instance in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), she deals with gender inequality which is portrayed as a serious problem in every aspect of human experiences. Black women suffer from unfairness and gender sexuality, which are made by the dominant society. Indeed, Alice Walker in her theory of *Womanism: In Search of Our Mothers Gardens* (1983) focuses on the struggle of black women against violent and sexist society.

Buchi Emecheta in her novel demonstrates social inequalities in Igbo society, most of black women suffer from domination due to gender role differences. This situation gives the preference for men over women since gender determines the position of any human being. Emecheta depicts the Igbo society and their expectations; they have two different visions for young men and women. The young boys have a superior position in society, they are taught to be powerful and to participate in different activities. While young girls are depicted as unskilled labor, they are prepared to marry at the young age to bring the bride price to their families. In *the Joys of Motherhood* (1979), Nnu Ego's twin sisters Taiwo and Kehinde are denied by their father because of their femininity. The birth of these two sisters is unwelcomed by the family especially by the father Nnaife, Emecheta writes: "Nnu Ego, what are these? Could you not have done better? Where will we all sleep, eh? What will they eat? "All this ballyhoo for two more girls! If one had to have twins, why girls, for Olisa's sake?"³⁴

Throughout their life, the two girls are disvalued and they have not the opportunity to study or to work because of the dominant society and their beliefs. The arrival of these twin sisters makes Nnu Ego feel sad because it is going to bring shame and dishonor to her position of a mother. On the contrary, Nnu Ego's birth of son brings joy and strength to family; they are received with celebration since they are considered as symbol of peace in Nigerian society. Alice Walker in her work *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens* (1983) aims to show the hardships of black women in patriarchal society and they still subordinated within their own communities. She writes that; "All history is current; all injustice continues on some level, somewhere in the world."³⁵ Many women of color are burdened violence and injustice because of their gender.

Furthermore, gender inequality and oppression are expressed in the past where black women are treated unfairly by their society. These dominant practices are used generally against black women since they are not in a position to become independent. From the novel *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), Emecheta explores the issue of gender discrimination in Ibuza where

female characters are forced to live with cultural ideas and its beliefs. She depicts how young girls are disvalued in every aspects of life due to gender, which determines whether the person is strong or inferior. In the case of the character Obi Umunna (Ona's father), a traditional man who forces her daughter Ona to take the position of a male child since he has no boys. Ona grows up with many responsibilities and accepts her father's decisions; she is not permitted to marry any one because her father believes that woman's place is in the house without freedom.

Emecheta illustrates from the novel:

Her father, despite having several wives, had few children, and in fact no living son at all, but Ona grew to fill her father's expectation. He had maintained that she must never marry; his daughter was never going to stoop to any man. People said what person in his right mind would leave his big spacious household and women who were willing to worship and serve him in all things to go after a rude, egocentric woman who had been spoiled by her father."³⁶

After the death of her father, Ona goes to live with her lover Agbadi and she gives birth to a girl child. Indeed, she disobeys the cultural traditions of her community and they officially condemned her to death. Emecheta aims to highlight the powerful system of patriarchy over women's lives and how they have no right to be independent.

Moreover, Buchi Emecheta in *the Joys of Motherhood* (1979) writes about gender based violence which is used by male characters against their wives. Black women are forced to marry at the early age, they experience violence and abuse when they fail to give birth to children. Actually, in Igbo culture women are obliged to accept the authority of their husband in order to achieve their womanhood, they must also bring children to ensure the continuity of their marriage. In this novel, Nnu Ego faces psychological and physical violence by her first husband Amatokwu when he finds that she cannot bring children for him. Her failure is considered as a great problem in her community since they believe that, the most important thing in African society is marriage and children. Emecheta shows how Igbo men are influenced by the social norms, which disrespect the infertile woman; she writes what Nnu Ego's father says to her husband Amatokwu:

Amatokwu, I do not blame you for beating her so badly. We will not quarrel, for we are in-laws, but let me take her to my house so that she can rest for a while, and I can look after her. Who knows, maybe after the calming effect of her family she will be cool enough inside to be fertile? At the moment, whatever the juice is by anxiety. Let her stay with me for a while.³⁷

From the passage above, we understand that the position of mother is respected in African society; however, the infertile women are oppressed by men and become victims of social injustice. Alice Walker in her essay *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens (1983)* shows the abuse that black women face in their lives and how they are forced to bear children. She expresses her thoughts when she says; “I believe in listening to a person, the sea, the wind, the trees, but especially to young black women whose rocky road I am still traveling”. Her aim is to liberate those women and give them strength to face the patriarchal system.³⁸

Sefi Atta in her novel *Everything Good Will Come (2005)* examines the issue of gender and sexuality in patriarchal society, which are used as tools to control women’s lives. Many black women are violated by their husbands due to unequal opportunities given to that gender. This novel centers on women’s subordination and sexual abuse and how they struggle to liberate themselves from all forms of humiliation and oppression. Black women have been victims of many negative violation and most of them are presented in this novel, for instance, the character Sheri who faces oppression and sexual violence in patriarchal society where male have the power of domination over females. She is the rape victim whose life breaks into pieces after this horrible fact; she is physically abused by a teenage boy Demola Ijayi in an Ikoyi park, where she goes with her friend Enitan to have fun in a party. Enitan witnesses the horrible event and she says:

I got up when I no longer heard voices, walked toward the van. From the angle I approached it. Sheri was lying on the seat. Her knees were spread apart. It was a silent moment; a peaceful moment. A funny moment too. I did not why, except my mouth stretched into the semblance of a laugh before my hands came up, then tears filled my eyes.³⁹

It is important to know that, sexual abuse leads to psychological effects in the victim, and it hurts the dignity of woman and makes her feel weak. All physical violence which are practiced

by men over black women bring them pain and depression, this is exactly what happen to Enitan when she discovers the rape incident of her friend Sheri. Accordingly, Alice Walker centers around individuals of color especially black as victims of maltreatment and oppression in a sexist society, she struggles for their privileges since she knows the danger of sexism, which is the great problem for black women who experience sexual abuse by black men. Walker thinks that for her responsibility to give a voice for those who suffer and she trusts “In change, change in personal and in society.”⁴⁰

Afterwards, Atta recounts Enitan’s journey to adulthood, in her first relationship with Mike Obi everything was good, she finds him as a mother who teaches her more about life and she is convinced that he is the best one for her. However, this relation takes an end and Enitan feels disappointed when she finds him one day with another woman. She realizes that some individuals portray females as sexual objects without any value since they abuse them physically and emotionally, as Enitan narrates the betrayal of her lover:

I brushed past him and opened the door. Lying on his sofa was a girl wearing nothing but a shirt. His Shirt. I recognized it. Her hair was cropped like a boy’s and she had bronze lips and eyes so haughty they did not even blink. She was so dark and so beautiful I could have wet myself from grief.⁴¹

From this point, we find that Sefi Atta presents such characters to show the mistreatment of male’s authority; she even depicts different issues faced by Nigerian women particularly young girls with sexual violence, gender discrimination. Generally, women are still being subordinated within the cultural ideas, yet they start to make a change using their voice and manifest against the inhuman actions.

In *Everything Good Will Come (2005)*, marriage and polygamy are the main social factors, which affect the everyday life of black women. The major women characters in this novel suffer from bad marriages; they never appreciate their relationships with men since they are portrayed as cheaters. Apparently, when women cannot bear many children, men have the

right to marry other wives in order to keep their position and become powerful. The freedom to have many spouses is accepted in the patriarchal society due to male gender which gives them power and privilege than women. In fact, several characters such as Enitan's father, Sunday Taiwo breaks his marriage with his wife and cheats on her with another woman expecting to have many children. Atta highlights the bad experiences of Enitan's mother and how she supports humiliation and violence by her husband, she says:

He was no good after you were born; I told him I did not want another child. God had blessed us with a healthy child. Why risk having another? But his family wouldn't hear of it. He had to have another wife, and his mother, that woman who suffered so much herself, threatened me too. Your father never said a word to support me.⁴²

From what is said above, we understand that women are exploited by men; they suffer from violence and physical abuse. Sefi Atta portrays the old beliefs of patriarchal society, which destroys the image of female gender; it makes them believe that women should accept their demands and their mistakes. Alice Walker *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens* (1983) shows many types of oppression and the image of black women who think that they deserve this kind of punishments. Walker in her essay argues that black women have the right to express themselves and to show the power they have, she says; "They were Creators, who lived lives of spiritual waste, because they were so rich in spirituality was their pathetic attempt to lighten the soul to a weight their work-worn, sexually abused bodies could bear."⁴³

End Notes:

1. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1983).
2. Buchi Emecheta, *the Joys of Motherhood: First Shocks of Motherhood* (London: Heinemann, 1979), 41.
3. Ibid, 42.
4. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 1983), 92.
5. Ania Loomba, *colonialism and post colonialism* (Routledge, 2007), 64.
6. Buchi Emecheta, *the Joys of Motherhood*, 135.
7. Ibid, 35.
8. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*, 315.
9. Buchi Emecheta, *the Joys of Motherhood: The Daughter's Honour* (London: Heinemann, 1979), 209.
10. Sefi Atta, *Everything Good Will Come* (Lagos: Interlink Book, 2005), 9.
11. Ibid, 108.
12. Ibid, 189-212.
13. David Thadious M., *Walker's Celebration of Self in Southern Generation* (New Jersey: Rutgers University, 1973), 105-123.
14. Sefi Atta, *Everything Good Will Come*, 183.
15. Ibid, 277.
16. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*, 238.
17. Sefi Atta, *Everything Good Will Come*, 173.
18. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*, 404.
19. Sefi Atta, *Everything Good Will Come*, 369-381.
20. Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood: The Mother's Early Life* (London: Heinemann, 1979), 38.
21. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*, 406-408.
22. Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood: The Mother's Mother* (London: Heinemann, 1979), 25
23. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*, 4.
24. Buchi Emecheta, *the Joys of Motherhood*, 143.
25. Ibid, 14.
26. Ibid, 209-210.
27. Alice Walker, *Everyday Use* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1973), 75-76.
28. Sefi Atta, *Everything Good Will Come*, 214.
29. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*, 153.
30. Sefi Atta, *Everything Good Will Come*, 184
31. Ibid, 145.
32. Alice Walker, *In search of our mothers Gardens: Womanist prose* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 232.
33. Sefi Atta, *Everything Good Will Come*, 35.
34. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*, 402.

35. B. Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood: A Man Needs Many Wives* (London: Heinmann, 1979), 209-127.
36. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*, 43.
37. Buchi Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood: The Mother's Early Life* (London: Heinmann, 1979), 12-13.
38. Ibid, 35.
39. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*, 272.
40. Sefi Atta, *Everything Good Will Come*, 65-66.
41. Alice Walker, *In search of Our Mothers Gardens: Womanist Prose* (Harcourt Bruce J. Publishers. San Diego, 1983), 252.
42. Sefi Atta, *Everything Good Will Come*, 4.
43. Ibid, 10.
44. Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mothers Gardens*, 233.

Chapter Two: Motherhood, Family Centeredness and Self-naming/Self-defining.

1- Motherhood in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Everything Good Will Come* (2005)

According to African culture, woman's status in her society is based on her ability of getting married and giving birth to children. Nigerian people especially men believe that motherhood is one of the important characteristics which gives power and privilege to women. In the twentieth century, African black feminists like Clenora Hudson-Weems starts to write about black women's experiences and cultural pressure to show how they are marginalized by men. For Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism* "looks at women in the context of African philosophy and way of life. It presents the African woman as having a different attitude and approach to the man in her world."¹ That is to say, *Africana womanism* discusses the different obstacles faced by black women. It portrays their sufferings in their own country where men are considered as superior to women and have the right to control their lives. Clenora displays that African women do not have the same rights and freedoms as men; because they are living in a patriarchal society where men oppress and marginalize women because of their gender.

According to Clenora Hudson-Weems' theory, motherhood is one of the main characteristics that defines women's status, she states that; "The Africana woman is committed to the art of mothering and nurturing, her own children in particular and human kind in general"². In this regard, Buchi Emecheta in her post-colonial novel *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) shows that the protagonist Nnu Ego is deeply influenced by Nigerian customs that give more importance to motherhood. She thinks that giving birth to children is the best way to be valued, this is clear when she tells her father; "when one grows old, one needs children to look after one. If you have no children, and your parents have gone, who can call your own."³. Thus,

social expectations in Igbo society show that black women gain respect and power only by providing children and being mothers. In this context, Derrickson states that; “Nnu Ego’s simple dream of becoming a mother is a dream rooted in cultural values of Igbo society where motherhood is the primary source of a woman’s self-esteem and public status.”⁴

Furthermore, Buchi Emecheta in her novel highlights how Nnu Ego was obliged to go through the oppressive male centric society in Izu. She lives under the pressure of her community and her family particularly her father Agbadi who plans for his daughter’s marriage with an Igbo man Amatokwu. After the marriage, Nnu Ego’s husband is expecting from her a male child because he thinks that children are the symbol of power and wealth. Unluckily, this marriage ends up without pregnancy and Amatokwu decides to leave her because she is unable to complete his demand, which is having an heir who can inherit everything after his death. He says; “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”.⁵ what is said before shows that motherhood is the primary condition for a successful marriage, since it permits the continuity of a couple.

Following that, Emecheta highlights that in Izu the husband of a barren woman has the right to look for another wife; this is what happened to Amatokwu, Nnu Ego’s husband who gets married to another woman in order to have many children. Therefore, this event has negative impacts on Nnu Ego’s life, she decides then to escape from Izu to another city in Lagos, to get away from her bad fate as infertile woman and to begin a new life with her second husband Nnaife. In their first meeting, she does not love him because he seems very ugly and obese, until he impregnates her and she gives birth to a baby boy Nguzi. Nnu Ego sacrifices all her life to be a mother in order to satisfy her family. After the birth of her son, she feels happy, she considers herself as a complete woman, as Buchi Emecheta illustrates in her novel:

She accepted Nnaife as the father of her child, and the fact that this child was a son and give her a sense of fulfillment for the first time in her life. She was now sure, as she bathed her baby son

and cooked for her husband, that her old age would be happy, that when she died there would be somebody left behind to refer to her as mother.⁶

Thus, Hudson-Weems' *Africana Womanism* states that; "Women are extremely valuable in the sight of society. Not only do they bear life, but they nurse, they cherish, they give warmth, they care for life since all human life passes through their own bodies."⁷ However, after days Nnu Ego fails again as a mother since her child Nguzi is died; she feels disappointed and thinks that she is not a real woman anymore. Buchi Emecheta depicts Nnu Ego as a victim of patriarchy because of her infertility in which she finds herself in a tragic circumstance with a weak marriage; she even loses the respect of her husband and her community as well.

Furthermore, Emecheta explains that motherhood is used as a form of discrimination. Thus, when a woman becomes a mother, she stills under the control of her husband and she is obliged to do all the household chores. In this novel, Nnu Ego's dream of being a mother came true; and she finally got a lot of children which bring her and her husband happiness. However, her joys did not last because of her low financial conditions; she needs to work hardly days in and days out in order to take care of her kids. In fact, Buchi Emecheta reveals the difficult experiences in the life of Nnu Ego who is described as a committed mother and homemaker. In this regard, Clenora Hudson-Weems states that; "The woman stands at the center of all the life-affirming activities and projects that sustain the family. She regulates and manages the rhythm of the home and the family and is free to perform her triple roles of mother, partner and breadwinner."⁸

Buchi Emecheta demonstrates how Nigerian black mothers struggle to help their children to survive, for instance, Nnu Ego who even begs her husband Nnaife to give her money to feed her children saying; "Just give us whatever you can, we will manage. I have nothing more to feed them with, Nnaife, would you like to see us starve?", however, he addresses her; "I am not adding a penny to that money; you can starve, for all I care. Sell your lappas. You are the chief

wife, use your head. I did not tear up the money, your son did. It's your responsibility to feed your children as best you can".⁹

The concept of motherhood in Africa is viewed as an important element for women's social status and their position; it is a way in which they can have an important place around their family and outside their society. According to Clenora Hudson-Weems' *Africana Womanism (1993)*, every black woman ought to marry and to give birth to children in order to show her womanhood. This is very clear in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come (2005)* where she portrays motherhood as a serious issue in the lives of Africana black women and how they are accepted only for their biological position as mothers. For instance, the protagonist Enitan is grown with Nigerian cultural expectations, which are affected deeply her way of living; she faces many problems to become a woman, to marry and to have children. Her father educates her with some patriarchal norms and he convinced her that marriage is something necessary to give birth to many children since it defines woman's status. After getting married to Niyi Franco, Enitan understands the importance of childbearing. For Clenora Hudson-Weems black Africana woman is seen as a complete woman only if she gets married which permits her to be respected in her community. She states that "We love men. We like being woman. We love children. We like being mothers. We value life. We have faith in God and the Bible. We want families and harmonious relationships."¹⁰

In fact, most of African wives feel their womanhood through giving birth to children especially boys, so Sefi Atta shows Enitan's incapacity of doing it early and how she is verbally abused by her husband. Afterwards, Enitan gets pregnant, which brings happiness to her husband and his family, as well, they start treating her in a good manner because she completed her mission as a mother; however, Enitan's joy does not last for a long time, because she fails as a mother when her baby is died:

Nothing is worse than the loss of a child, even if the child is never born. If a child dies in your care, people understand that you feel responsible. If a child dies within you, they immediately try to absolve you: it is God's way, there is to be no mourning. You never understand why.¹¹

From the excerpt above, we can notice the hypocritical image of Nigerian culture that oppresses woman and neglect her principles, this happens through the patriarchal thoughts of both her family and her community.

Additionally, Sefi Atta explains how the character Enitan who faces many difficulties to get some respect from her husband, does not lose hope and she challenges many obstacles especially her family's insistence to give birth to children. Enitan keeps trying until she gets pregnant: "The day I got pregnant, I sat on my bathroom floor crying over a stick. Thank you, God, God bless you, God. I waddled to Niyi, already imagining my stomach big; fell into his arms and his eyes filled with tears."¹² It is an honor for her and for her husband to get pregnant since it preserves their couple. Hudson-Weems' *Africana Womanism* claims that: "Personal relationship between the Africana couple be perfected if the family unit constituting the overall Africana community is to survive."¹³ From this quotation, we can notice that motherhood is one of the principles that can protect the marriage.

2-Family Centeredness in Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Everything Good Will Come* (2005)

The Joys of Motherhood (1979) portrays the life conditions of the character Nnu Ego and how she faces difficulties to unite her family. Emecheta depicts the way Nnu Ego lives in a patriarchal society where they give a great importance to family and raising children. Her infertility is revealed as an important issue since African women who experience childlessness; their husbands have the right to have relationships with other women. Emecheta depicts Nnu Ego's failure to have children and she says:

She was failing everybody. There was no child, Nnu Ego would take an egg, symbol of fertility, and kneel and pray to this woman to change her mind. Please pity me. I feel that my husband's people are already looking for a new wife for him. They cannot wait for me forever.¹⁴

From the quotation above, Emecheta displays the hard experiences of Nnu Ego when she fails to have a first child and she sees the sadness of her father who expects from her an heir, she thinks that it is a shame for her community where people's interest is based only around children. Thus, Hudson-Weems attributes in her *Africana Womanism (1993)* the image of family centeredness and mothering in which most of black females identify themselves as mothers first in order to build their own household. She claims that; "The Africana womanist insisted on identifying herself as mother and companion, as family centered, as she is more concerned with her entire family rather than with just herself and her sisters."¹⁵

Furthermore, Buchi Emecheta's *The Joys of Motherhood (1979)* describes the sacrifices of Nnu Ego in her life for the happiness of her family and she struggles to complete her role as an Igbo mother with many children. She actually wants to raise her own house portraying all her love and attention to her husband and sons. When she becomes a mother with her second husband Nnaife, her life changes and her family's conditions come to be difficult because of poverty and malnutrition, as a result, Nnu Ego starts to work hard to feed her sons and supports her family financially in order to give them a comfortable life. Emecheta demonstrates the hard situation that Nnu Ego faces for many years; she is obliged to work day and night for her family like it is cited below:

She sold all her clothes at a fraction of their cost to the Fulani streetwalkers, telling herself that if her sons should live and grow, they would be all the clothes she would ever need. The joy of trading in cigarettes had been that she would buy them at about half the market price and after sales make huge profit, the profit which went into feeding her family.¹⁶

From this point, we understand that Africana mother is known as the head of family since she faces many challenges in her life like poverty, nurturing children and taking care of the whole family. According to Hudson-Weems "Africana women have to be liberated to the community,

to family and its responsibilities”¹⁷, they must focus on their children’s protection and giving them strength in order to build a family. Emecheta captures the happiness of black women who arrive to complete their responsibilities like preserving a family and live with children around the house. She takes the protagonist Nnu Ego as an example of traditional woman who sacrifices all her life to maintain a strong family filled with joy and happiness.

In Nigerian society, parents especially fathers do not let their children make their own decisions; instead they decide for them even when it comes to choose one’s partner. However, in some cases, children break the rules imposed to them by their parents and they choose to live their own lives as they wish. As it is shown in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) where the Igbo girls are very affected by social norms, which change their lives and their way of thinking. For example, the character Kehinde (Nnu Ego’s daughter) breaks the Igbo traditional culture because her family refuses to let her marry to her lover; a strange man from another tribe, as it is mentioned in this novel: “Most Ibos, at that time, did not like their children marrying Yorubas. One tribe always claimed to be superior to the other. Even an Ibuza girl who chose another Ibo person outside Ibuza as a friend was regarded as lost.”¹⁸ Consequently, the character Kehinde refuses the idea that women are obliged to follow their family’s decisions, she decides then to escape and lives with a husband of her choice without any order or pressure from her family. On the other hand, her sister Taiwo is clearly connected with her family, she allows herself to do what her father wants and for them she is the ideal girl who deserves everything.

Added to that, family is based on relations and each member should be the provider in the house to maintain the well-being of each individual. However, in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) Nnu Ego’s children look at this issue differently. Oshia does not care about his family or the importance of holding his parents and sisters all together. He is depicted as a self-centered character who thinks only about himself and about his future. It is clear that for him education is more important than his family, these beliefs make him distant from all the members of the

house. He says; “I am saving to go to that university I told you about some time ago, Mother. I still want to go they have given me a scholarship. If I do not take the opportunity offered me now, it may never come again. His mother answers angrily; “God, Oshia, please don’t tell your father, it will kill him. He is becoming impatient about you not helping in the family.”¹⁹

In Nigerian society, traditions and customs have the impact on people’s lives, these beliefs have actually destroyed woman on the way she lives. Sefi Atta who raises the concept of family centeredness to show the effect of family’s problems on children’s lives reveals this issue. In Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), the protagonist Enitan refuses the idea of family and all kind of relations, since it is a space where she loses completely her childhood facing the oppressive behavior of her parents. She finds herself imprisoned in the house without any friends like other children; her only desire is to have a comfortable life without any pressure. Sefi Atta comes to tell us the different experiences of Enitan from her childhood to adulthood and she recounts her everyday life challenging her family’s ideas.

Who cared about what we thought at our age? Between childhood and adulthood, there was no space to grow laterally, and whatever our natural instincts, our parents were determined to clip off any disobedience: stop moping around. Face your studies. You want to disgrace us? At least the boys were saying something different.²⁰

From the passage above, Sefi Atta explains how a younger generation women have no voice at home and they are subjugated by their families’ expectations, which have a negative influence on the member of the house. Sometimes parents are the ones responsible for the sadness of their children. From the novel, we notice that Enitan’s father teaches her daughter his principles, which are very adapted to him. He gives a greatest importance to her education since it is a way to fight against any oppressive system; he even forces her to take his career as a lawyer in order to reclaim women’s rights.

Family-centeredness is not defined only through husband, wife and children alone but it is an environment where all members are presented as a whole. Indeed, it is important to know

that family is based on the entirety within its members because it provides relationships with parents and children. Hudson-Weems' *Africana Womanism (1993)* shows the importance of wholeness in family's relation which gives the livelihood of the house and keeps all the family members together. A family is the social unit which helps children to learn more about the traditions, norms and respect, but when it is disordered all the family members will be lost and disorganized. Sometimes children face different problems in their families especially when the parents are opposed to each other, the lack of their responsibilities create a bad experience of childhood.

In *Everything Good Will Come (2005)*, the character Enitan is affected by her parent's conflict, which results a break-up in her family's relation. She suffers from the absence of her mother (Arinola) because she is actually insufficient woman who acts in a bad way with her daughter and does not give any attention to her. Eventually, Arinola is against the idea of education because she thinks that girls should stay at home doing all the housework and she is convinced that daughters should be only good housekeepers. Enitan describes her as a "hollow, there was nothing in her, I would not say another word to her, only when I had to, and even then I would speak without feeling: Good morning, good afternoon, good evening. Good night"²¹. Consequently, Enitan faces her parents' divorce, which destroys the family structure and affects emotionally on her social behavior.

Furthermore, there is another character Sheri who faces many challenges in her life since she loses two things in her own family: children and marriage, which are considered the first step to be a complete woman. In Nigerian society, women's status is defined through their childbearing and marriage; however, Sheri is deprived from happiness in her partnership because she cannot bring children. She is also unable to live by her own way since all her family left her alone, her uncles come to take all her father's possessions, and let her outside the house, she finds herself with financial problems. She says, "When my father died who remembered

me? Chief Bakare done die, God bless his family. We did not even know where our next meal was coming from, and no one cared. Not even my uncle, who took all his money”²².

Thus, Sheri becomes frustrated by her family and the patriarchal society where she lives. She finds herself without any family’s affection and socially abused and what remains in her life is, “unhappiness, sexual frustration, and other deprivations”²³. Accordingly, for Hudson in the case of losing a family with whom the child shares his life, it will be difficult for him to integrate in the social world and he will be alienated from the others.

3- Self-naming/ self-defining in *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Everything Good Will Come* (2005)

Hudson-Weems’ *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* (1980) analyses the experiences of black women who fight for their independence in order to reclaim their beings. Clenora Hudson-Weems asserts that Africana women must create their self-identity by themselves, as a result, she makes this theory to call for all black women in Africa “to reclaim, rename and redefine themselves”.²⁴

In *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979), Emecheta depicts how Nigerian black women are obliged to accept the identities they receive from others especially the dominant culture. For this reason, they try to represent themselves by giving names to their own existence; this means that most of the Africana women ought to have a name that defines their personalities and to identify their positions in a society as being women and mothers. For Hudson-Weems, “the proper naming of a thing gives it essence”²⁵, this is what exactly happens to Nnu Ego who struggles through her journeys within both cultures Ibuza and Lagos. When she fails to have children in Ibuza, her husband Amatokwu and his community marginalized her, they even consider her as incomplete woman. After days, her husband decides to let her and to look for

another woman who will give him a child to satisfy him and his community, he addresses her: “I am sorry, Nnu Ego, but I cannot fail my people, 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 want to know, you don’t appeal to me anymore.”²⁶

After the bad experience that Nnu Ego has lived, she decides to travel to another tribe hoping to fulfill her dream as a mother to have an identity, which will help her to be valued. In Hudson-Weems’ *Africana Womanism* self-naming helps Africana women to become more responsible when defining themselves mainly with “the authenticity of her [their] activity, not that of another culture”²⁷. Despite the fact that Nnu Ego leaves her region Ibuza to live in Lagos where she has found a new culture with different expectations, she stays devoted to her traditional beliefs as a mother. That is to say, the Africana mother like Nnu Ego keeps her identity as it is and she never gives up her name as a mother.

Furthermore, Buchi Emecheta shows that knowledge and education are the essential elements, which help to regain one’s identity. In most of her works, she insists on education, in order to free black characters from colonial oppression and to ensure their own survival. *Africana womanism (1993)* declares that most of black people must have some objectives in life and become educated in order to be free; especially women who struggle to liberate themselves and their families. This is very apparent in the female character Adaku who is separated from all the cultural domination including men’s control; she teaches her daughters the importance of education. Adaku states proudly:

Oh, they are in a convent school. They live there and come home only during holidays. I am beginning to think that there may be a future for educated women. I saw many young women teaching in schools. It would be really something for a woman to be able to earn some money monthly like a man.²⁸

From the passage above, we notice that Adaku is very independent in her way of thinking; she faces colonial oppression through her reasoning, because she believes that education gives

Africana women an opportunity to find their freedom. Hudson-Weems supports the idea that women must be educated, as she states “women whose principal objective remains that of formulating their own criteria for assessing their realities, both in thought and action.”²⁹

In addition to that, in Emecheta’s *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) some characters bring a change within African cultural beliefs, like it is illustrated in this novel through the black character Oshia, Nnu Ego’s older son who breaks all the severe rules of his country. He struggles to be educated and escapes from his family’s responsibilities, thus his parents are extremely disappointed from his decisions. Oshia succeeds to have a school admission and travels to London for a better future. Here, education is presented as a way to define someone’s identity and to become free. As Oshia addresses to his brother Adim:

You are too young to understand, Adim. I do not want to live like my parents. Education is a life-long project. If I stop now, I shall only help them half the way. I intended to go further after leaving school. Say four to five years after that...then I shall be able to do something for them. Not now.³⁰

The achievements of those young generation help to create one’s identity and the word self-defining is one of the important element in *Africana Womanism* in which people are responsible for creating their status under the powerful system of that country.

Most of Africana Women find themselves without identity; they often seek their origins and where they belong. In *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), Sefi Atta shows the challenges of female characters to redefine themselves against any cultural domination. Taking the character Enitan who encounters many incidents in her life and she struggles to define herself within a patriarchal society. She accepts whatever her parents tell her and this has affected her life and her mental state. On the one hand, she lives with her traditional mother (Arinola) who is obsessed with her religious beliefs and neglects her. Enitan says; “My mother never had a conversation with me; she talked and she knew that I was listening. I always was. The mere sound of her footsteps made me breathe faster”.³¹ On the other hand, her manipulative father

Sunday Taiwo who has an ambivalent personality, forces her to join the law school in order to fight against the gender inequality. Sefi Atta reveals that Enitan starts to break her mother's strict rules, she meets her friend Sheri who lives in freedom and then she influences her to become aware of her environment and to think about her individuality. Thus, the following conversation between the two friends affirms this,

I want to be something like [...] the president. Eh? Women are not president. Why not? Our men will not stand for it. Who will cook for your husband. He will cook for himself. What if he refuses? I will drive him away. You cannot she said. Yes, I can. Who wants to marry him anyway? ³²

What is said above helps in shaping Enitan's life, which leads her to become aware of what she is enduring in her life. Her naivety is finally transformed to intelligence and awareness, as Sefi Atta states; "her meeting with Sheri is of great significance, as it marks her transition to an entirely new stage of life."³³

Afterwards, Sefi Atta exposes another principle, which is education that helps black female characters to shape their lives and to be more confident. It is clear in the novel when Enitan becomes young, she starts to understand well her life since her education in London provides her a realization about herself and she discovers a new identity as a liberated woman. In fact, according to *Africana Womanism* it is through self-defining that woman is ready to say with her own words "this is the reality of my daily existence"³⁴. Enitan at school becomes experienced; she meets girls from different societies who influence her way of thinking. Moreover, education provides Enitan with a great opportunity to open her eyes to see what is happening around, to challenge the space defined for her by others; Keyinde and Mbipom further argue that:

Secondary education in the boarding house at the Royal College marks another step in Enitan's social, moral and intellectual education. She is exposed to the reality of the multicultural nature of her nation, the myths and cultural practices that characterize these different ethnic groups. It is during this period that Enitan tries out her first relationship with the opposite sex. Forthrightly, Atta's heroine not only recounts the experiences that plague her as a growing woman in a tumultuous country but gets 'some assurance that our world was uniformly terrible.'³⁵

After Enitan's returning from London to Nigeria, the knowledge she has gained changed her mind about many things; she begins to take her own decisions. Sefi Atta discusses the solidarity of women; she recounts how Enitan meets again her friend Sheri who becomes a mistress to Ibrahim Hassan. She complains of Hassan, Enitan advises her "drop him, you don't need him"³⁶. Afterwards, Enitan addresses her wisely: "you are young and this man is treating you like a house-girl"³⁷. After their conversation, Sheri revolts against Hassan, "Raise your hand to hit Sheri Bakare, and your hand will never be the same again. Stupid man."³⁸ From this quotation, we understand that Enitan becomes assertive and clever; she even encourages others to be independent and to free. Sheri becomes aware about her husband's patriarchal acts and then she realizes her worth and individuality. When she chooses to abandon Hassan, Enitan encourages her "Sheri didn't need any man. I was there when she walked out on her lousy Brigadier, I envied her freedom"³⁹.

In fact, Sefi Atta shows that the influence of Enitan helps Sheri to become economically independent and to concentrate on her business, "within a year of starting her business she was able to buy herself one of those second hand cars and after two years, she was able to rent a place of her own"⁴⁰.

Additionally, Sefi Atta in her novel *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) encourages black women to fight against the patriarchal rules, to speak out and to express themselves. For her, every woman deserves to regain her own identity. Atta in her novel portrays Enitan as a strong woman. After Enitan's marriage to Niyi who mistreats her; she sees things differently, she becomes aware of men's manipulation, and she affirms that respect must be reciprocal. She asserts:

In my 29 years, no man ever told me to show respect. No man ever needed to. I had seen how women respected men and ended up shouldering burdens ... and the expectation of subordination bothered me most. How could I defer to a man whose naked buttocks

I had seen? Touched? Obey him without choking on my humility like a fish bone down my throat.⁴¹

Enitan has grown up; she becomes rebellious towards her society's cultural thoughts, which undervalue women. Sefi Atta depicts Enitan's quest for identity, which pushes her to join a group of black women who fight against the government, and support female's rights. Enitan calls the Nigerian women to express their womanhood and self-existence. She tells her father; "I don't know why we continue to follow native law anyways, when civil law is in existence. It has no moral grounding, no design except to express women"⁴²

At the end of the novel, Enitan becomes powerful through the education she has received in London and by her experiences; she liberates herself from the patriarchal society. As she finishes her story by saying, "Nothing good takes my joy away from me. The sun sent her blessings"⁴³ As Clenora Hudson-Weems, asserts in her theory *Africana Womanism (1993)* that; "women took the responsibility of self-definition into their own hands in lauding themselves as the irreplaceable part of the movement."⁴⁴ In fact, Enitan and Sheri's friendship inspires many black females to resist the patriarchal society; it encourages them to create their own identities and to fight for their rights. Sefi Atta in her novel shows that women should help and guide each other to revolt against the patriarchy and to liberate themselves.

End Notes:

1. Clenora Hudson-Weems, "*Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*" (Troy, Michigan: Bedford Publishers, 1993), 71.
2. Ibid, 72.
3. Buchi Emecheta, *The joys of motherhood* (London: Heinmann, 1979), 38.
4. Teresa Derrickson, "*Class, Culture, and the Colonial Context: The Status of Women in Buchi Emecheta's The Joys of Motherhood*" *The International Fiction Review*. University of Alaska Anchorage, (2012), 02.
5. B. Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*, 32.
6. Ibid, 54.
7. C. Hudson-Weems, "*Africana Womanist Literary Theory*" (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2004), 53.
8. Ibid, 67.
9. B. Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*, 136-137.
10. C. Hudson-Weems, "Self-naming and self-defining: an agenda for survival" *In Sisterhood, Feminisms and Power* (New Jersey: African World Press, 1998), 24.
11. Sefi Atta, *Everything Good Will Come* (Lagos: Interlink Book, 2005), 118
12. Ibid, 110.
13. C. Hudson-Weems, "*Africana Womanist Literary Theory*" (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2004), 82.
14. B. Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*, 32.
15. C. Hudson-Weems, "*Africana Womanism & Race & Gender in the Presidential Candidacy of Barack Obama*" (Bloomington, In: Author House, 2008): 58-65.
16. B. Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*, 104.
17. C. Hudson-Weems, "*Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*". (Troy, Michigan: Bedford Publisher, Inc.1993), 34.
18. B. Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*, 190.
19. Ibid, 200.
20. S. Atta, *Everything Good Will Come*, 110.
21. Ibid, 73.
22. Ibid, 105.
23. Ibid, 211.
24. C. Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanist Theory*, 156.
25. Ibid, 18.

26. B. Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*, 32.
27. C. Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*. (Troy, Mich.: Bedford Publisher, Inc. 1995), 56.
28. B. Emecheta, *the Joys of Motherhood*, 160.
29. C. Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, 50.
30. B. Emecheta, *The Joys of Motherhood*, 192-193.
31. Sefi Atta, *Everything Good Will Come* (Lagos: Interlink Book, 2005), 19.
32. Ibid, 33.
33. Ibid, 36.
34. C. Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*, 56.
35. Ayo Kehinde and J. E. Mbipom, *Discovery, Assertion and Self-realization in Recent Nigerian Migrant Feminist: The example of Sefi Atta's Everything Good Will Come*, 70
36. Sefi Atta, *Everything Good Will Come*, 132.
37. Ibid, 138.
38. Ibid, 169.
39. Ibid, 207.
40. Ibid, 207.
41. Ibid, 184.
42. Ibid, 139.
43. Ibid, 324.
44. C. Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*. (Troy, Mich.: Bedford Publisher, 2004), 56.

General Conclusion

This dissertation examines the miserable representation of African black women in patriarchal Nigerian society and their resistance to all forms of oppression; through analyzing the two Nigerian novels Buchi Emecheta's *the Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005). Our work studies the position that women occupy in African societies and the various structures that they are facing every day. Within the two literary works, we notice that the black Nigerian characters share the same marginal role in Africa, because they are abused, subjugated and even silenced by both white and black males dominated society.

The first chapter has depicted how women of color are the greatest victims of gender and racial oppression; thus, they are always reminded of their gender and color, which makes them inferior in societies where they are living. It has been shown that black women are confined by stereotypes and patriarchal acts by both indigenous and white men who treated them as "animals". Therefore, Both Nigerian and colonial cultures affected black women badly; they are exploited in the name of social norms. In fact, black women suffer from male dominance and segregation. Through using some aspects of Alice Walker's theory *Womanism* (1983), the African novelists Buchi Emecheta and Sefi Atta highlight gender inequality, racial and class issues and how they affect women's lives.

In the second chapter, we have discussed the way in which Black women are oppressed and prevented from having chances to play their real roles in Nigerian societies. They have to face physical and psychological abuse of the white as well as black men in order to survive. Moreover, it depicts some African patriarchal institutions like motherhood, family, and double identity under which black women are oppressed by patriarchal system. Through the use of Clenora Hudson-Weems' s some aspects of her theory *Africana Womanism* (1993), we have

concluded that even though black women suffered from men's dominance and patriarchy, they defy the traditional roles and resist the oppression forces trying to regain their identity and their freedom as well.

In short, this dissertation has dealt with the role of African black women in a patriarchal society. Through reading and analyzing the two African literary works *The Joys of Motherhood* (1979) and *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), we have analyzed the position of Nigerian women and their resistance to all forms of oppression. The two novelists Buchi Emecheta and Sefi Atta are the symbol of freedom, and optimism for a better future. They encourage black women to resist to the boundaries in order to fulfill their ambitions and dreams.

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