

Feminist Dimensions in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

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Received 31 November 2011; accepted 23 January 2012.

Abstract

Sefi Atta's debut novel *Everything Good Will Come* (2006) examines the growing up of a child from adolescence to adulthood. Through these various forms of growth the heroine becomes aware of her environment and how it affects her. This paper seeks to explore how these dimensions help in shaping the vision of the woman. The female characters in this novel are very assertive and utilize all means available to them to affirm their individuality. The paper also examines the socio-economic and political landscape of Nigeria and how it affects the psychology of the woman. The paper submits that the woman cannot continue in the space defined for her by the society; she must fight for her space both in the home and in the larger society. She must speak out because silence is no longer golden; it has become a destructive metaphor.

Key words: Assertiveness; Growth; Education; Rights awareness; Silence kitchen.

Jonas E. Akung (2012). Feminist Dimensions in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 4(1), 114-122. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/j.sll.1923156320120401.1930> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/j.sll.1923156320120401.1930>

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian feminist novels have moved from the themes of women in village or traditional settings with docile female characters who only look up to men as their benefactor to novels that have vibrant and assertive

female characters. The new feminist novels explore new dimensions that would help the woman's cause. These dimensions include: education and career, activism and participation. The women are no longer the occupiers of the solitary spaces in the kitchen; they are now at the forefront leading other women to achieve their goals.

Feminism in the last six decades has dominated literary discourses around the globe. In Africa and Nigeria in particular, the debates and counter-debates continue to rage; as a result there have arisen dichotomies leading to various shades of the same theory. Nigerian feminist writers and critics have adopted the non-militant version of feminism in order to accommodate the peculiar Nigerian experience. While doing this, the force of the radical version is played down. However, the feminist novel has continued to educate, inform and enlighten the woman to rise and fight for her rights. Sitting no longer helps; as the saying goes "a snake will not eat to its fill when coiled". According to Lisa Tuttle (1986) the feminist theory is "the advocacy of women's rights based on a belief in the equality of the sexes"(p.107). Tuttle's position agrees with the later views of Charles Nnolim (2009) who argued that feminist writers and critics have "fought successfully for the right of women"(p.47). These positions show that the dominant tenet of feminist writings is the liberation of the woman and the drive toward equality among the sexes.

The Nigerian feminist novel differs from the Western brand of feminism. The differences in ideological perspective have accounted for the different strands of feminism. These strands include: Womanism, Motherism, Stewanism and Femalism. In spite of the different strands, one thing binds them together: the achievement of the common goal of liberating the Nigerian woman. According to Aduke Adebayo (1996), accepting the emancipating nature of feminism; "the African feminist has discarded its violent and militant approach"(p.4). This also agrees with Elizabeth Ogini's (1996) position that the new form of Womanism, "desires that the man and

the woman should be in harmony in the home and society at large”(p15). The call for a harmonious relationship between the man and woman does not mean or translate to the woman giving up her right. Iniobong Uko (200) sees the theory as “a challenge of the status quo and a confrontation of the daily realities of women and women’s oppression” (pp10-10). The African woman is no more the docile type; she is assertive and at the same time acknowledges the importance of her male counterpart. This is perhaps why Helen Chukwuma (1994) states that “African feminism is accommodationist not exclusive and negativistic. Men remain a vital part of the women’s lives”(p.xvi).

The Nigerian feminist novel came as a counter discourse to the negative image of women in predominantly male authored works. The woman is no longer the *femme fatale*, a voiceless, mere extension of the man. The feminist novel challenges the society that has conditioned the woman and placed limitations on her.

In the feminist novel in Nigeria, the searchlight in literature has been turned on the wholesome woman who has attracted to herself recognition and acceptance. The feminist novel traces the female journey from ignorance and naivety to experience and selfhood. She now carves a name for herself. She is no longer defined by the man, but rather defines her role in the society.

Similarly Uko(2008) explains that:

Writings by African women actually transcend the shift from the peripheral to the central positions for women. They are largely concerned with the assertion of self, reaffirmation of female pride, authentication of African womanhood as well as a search for an independent identity. (p.67)

The quest for identity has remained one dominant ethos of the feminist novel in Nigeria. The Nigerian woman now has a name of her own and she no longer feels any pride when her identity is tied to the man. In another sense, Uko(2006) argues:

Evidently, the coming of age of African literature is identifiable by the true and pragmatic feminisation of the literary vision as well as a way of correcting absurd female images in African literature and culture. Here, the female writer explores the inner fibres of the androgynous ideal, thereby establishing and justifying the position of women (p.82).

As earlier stated, this paper is not intended to plunge us into the controversies that have trailed feminism and its application in African literature and criticism. There are divergent views about this theory. For instance, Maduka (2001) holds that feminism is predominantly a Western ideology (p,227). This paper acknowledges the views of critics like: Chinweizu, T. M. Maduka, Phyllis Chesler (2005) and Julia Annas’(1979). These critics have raised issues that are very controversial and at the same time cogent to a comprehensive understanding of feminist criticism of literature.

Sefi Atta has two major novels to her credit, *Everything*

Good Will Come (2006) and *Swallow*, (2010). Atta has published a number of plays, among which are: *Makinwa’s Miracle* (2004), *The Engagement* (2005), *A Free Day* (2007), *The Cost of Living* (2011). *The Cost of Living* was commissioned for the 2011 Lagos Heritage Festival. *The Naming Ceremony* was performed during actress Joke Sylva’s 50th birthday in September, 2011. *Hagel Ouf Zamfara* was premiered at theatre Krefeld Germany; this play is an adaptation of Atta’s short story “Hailstones”. Sefi Atta has remained one of the most prolific writers of our time. Her novels in particular are defining modus for future prose writing in Nigeria. Her stories are compelling and she brings artistic innovations and experimentations to bear. Her stint with the theatre also helped in enlivening her works. Atta is a bold and courageous writer who is ready to make her mark in the Nigerian literary landscape. *Everything Good Will Come* won the inaugural Wole Soyinka price for literature in Africa in 2006. Her short story collection *News From Home*, won the NOMA Award for publishing in Africa in 2009.

The reviews that have trailed the publication of *Everything Good will Come* attest to Atta’s genius. The *Time Literary Supplement* observes that the novel “depicts the struggle women face in a conservative society” *Sunday Independent* observes that the novel is about “the resilience of Lagosians”. These and many other reviews greeted the birth of *Everything Good Will Come*.

FEMINIST DIMENSIONS IN *EVERYTHING GOOD WILL COME*

Sefi Atta presents the various dimensions in this novel, among these dimensions are: the child’s growth, education, social awareness, fight for ones rights among others.

Growth

The story begins with eleven year old Enitan. At this age, Enitan is a naïve, ignorant, inexperienced child. She has been nurtured by her patriarchal father who showers her with love, thereby making her mother appear evil to her. She lives in their house as a hostage under her father and their gardener Baba. Her mother is a total distant person as she says, “my mother never had a conversation with me.... The mere sound of her footsteps made me breathe faster”(p.22). Ironically, it is from her father that Enitan learned of female liberation. Enitan’s father tells her; “if she asks where you learned such nonsense, tell her from your father and he’s for the liberation of women” (p.24). As a girl Enitan sees sex and marriage as not good enough. Enitan’s mother helps in making her think this way. Enitan reports, “sex was a filthy art, she said and I must always wash myself afterward” (p.26-7). Enitan received what may be termed sex education from the mother, but for what gain, she could not tell. Alone in her

room, she thinks aloud:

I wanted to ask, what if the bleeding started during morning assembly? What if I need to pee during sex? Before this, I'd had blurred images of a man lying on top of a woman (p.27).

Enitan here speaks like a child who is naïve and yet to grow. This also confirms Onukaogu and Onyerionwu's(2009) position that:

Atta rather achieves success in her attempt by the validity and grandeur of her narrative which traces the decisive moments of a young Nigerian woman's challenging life from infancy to adulthood. (p.114)

It is these decisive moments that inform the growth levels in this novel. On their part Keyinde and Mbipom(2011) argue that the novel:

Reveals an unbroken growth pattern till Enitan comes of age as a self-conscious and assertive woman. Enitan's process of growth comes with self-realization which prompts greater response and reaction to the activities which go on around her. These processes motivate her sexuality and individuality (p.67).

As the story progresses, Enitan becomes more and more aware of herself which helps in unveiling the central tenet of the novel which is self discovery and assertiveness.

Most of the things that would later change Enitan's perspective on things came from her friend and next door neighbour, Sheri. Sheri lives in total freedom from her parents. She sleeps and wakes when she likes. She reasons on her own unlike Enitan's reasoning that is conditioned by her father and mother. Sheri thinks of becoming an actress while Enitan's father insists Enitan must read law. The following conversation between Enitan and Sheri is revealing of how children perceive things that would later shape their lives:

"I want to be something like... the president"

"Eh?" "Women are not president"

"Why not?" "Our men won't stand for it. Who will cook for your husband"

"He will cook for himself"

"What if he refuses?"

"I'll drive him away"

"You can't" she said.

Yes I can. Who wants to marry him anyway?" (p.33).

This conversation later helps in shaping Enitan's life. Later she becomes aware of the political landscape of Nigeria and how it affects the woman. Sheri is exposed to things higher than her age. Sheri dissuading Enitan from her dream of becoming the nation's president is an example of patriarchal brainwashing of the woman. Sheri's role as Enitan's friend cannot be overemphasized. Again Keyinde and Mbipom explain thus "Sheri sets the pace for Enitan's social and moral education, its also contributes to the advancement and swift unraveling of the actions..." (p.69). These lead to greater transformation in Enitan, "her meeting with Sheri ... is of great significance, as it marks her transition to an entirely new stage of life." (Keyinde

& Mbipom, p. 68). Enitan is naïve and ignorant. When Akanbi has sex with Bisi, Enitan's house- help, Sheri is quick to notice and says: "He's doing her" (p.34). But Enitan does not understand and Sheri explained further "sex," she said. "Banana into her tomato. Don't you know about it?"(p.35). Enitan learns about her sexuality from Sheri and begins to grow from this point. In an attempt to find out what Sheri means by sex when into her and tries to check herself: "I dragged my panties placed the mirror between my legs. It looks like a big slug"(p.35). This episode calls to mind Shug and Celie relationship in Alice Walker's *Color Purple* (1973). In this novel it is Shug who educates Celie on her sexuality thereby helping to shape the latter's life. These practicals are to demonstrate the question she had earlier asked Sheri, "I mean with your husband, where does it go?" (p.35)

All efforts by Enitan's mother to stall this relationship with Sheri failed. The father asks: "What is this? She can't make friends anymore" Again he says, "You're her mother, not her juror" (p.40). Enitan's father imbued in her a revolutionary spirit: "anyone who bullies you beat them up" (p.42).

Education and Social Awareness

Armed with her father's instruction, Enitan at the Royal College became wiser and experienced. She met girls from different backgrounds.

I learned also about women in my country, from Zaria, Katsina, Kaduna who decorated their skin with henna dye and lived in *pardah*; women from Calabar who were fed and anointed in fattening houses before their weddings; women who were circumcised. I heard about towns in western Nigeria where every family had twins because the women ate a lot of yams, and other towns in northern Nigeria, where every other family had a crippled child because women married their first cousins. None of the women seemed real. They were like mammy water, sirens of the Niger Delta who rose from the creeks to lure unsuspecting men to death by drowning (p.48).

At Royal College the girls learned more about their families. This also equipped Enitan on what she will face later in life. This stage of her growth shows the primacy of education in the life of a girl child. The school offered her an opportunity to know what was going on in her country. "Outside our school walls, oil leaked from the drilling fields of the Niger Delta into people's Swiss bank accounts. There was bribery and corruption, but none of it concerned me ..." (p.50).

At school they are free from their parents who are ready to "clip any disobedience"(p.53). At school Enitan developed feelings for Daramola. We notice that it is Enitan who made moves into this relationship, not Daramola, thereby changing the traditional African patriarchal beliefs that it is only the man that can woo a woman. Atta holds that the woman could go for the man of her choice and make the relationship work. "I join them thinking only of Daramola"(p.57). Commenting on the role of education, Keyinde & 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. She also learns of the brutality that could result from relating with the opposite sex when Sheri is raped and commits a crude abortion to save her face. 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'. (Discovery, p.70)

All the fantasies about Daramola vanish like a mirage when Enitan learns that Daramola is not real. Daramola participates in raping Sheri:

Sheri was lying on the seat. Her knees were spread apart. The boy in the cap was pinning her arms down. The portly boy was on top of her. His hands were camped over her mouth. Daramola was leaning against the door (p.68).

Sheri is raped, devalued, ruined and is robbed of her womanity and pride. Enitan laments thus: "there was blood on her pubic hairs, thick spit running down her legs. Semen"(p.66). This singular event changed the life of Sheri. It sharpened Enitan's horizon for a better perception of the world. She began to ask some questions about existence: "Sheri had gotten pregnant from the rape. Didn't a womb know which baby to reject? And now that the baby had been forced out, how did it look?" (p.73). It is important to note that rape is fast becoming a global trend which if not checked will do great harm to the feminine psyche. Since Sheri is bold and assertive the men will do anything to bring her down and clip her wings. This notion is based on gender discrimination which is regarded as the worst form of oppression. Akachi Ezeigbo (1996) contends that the woman's sex is use against her "She is ridiculed, raped, calumniated, used, condemned and sometimes abandoned"(p.74). In *Everything Good will Come*, Atta attributes rape to poor parental background, peer group influence and moral and societal decadence. She indicts parent for failing in their duties. Thus, Dorcas Akintunde (2002:61) views rape as "a weapon of revenge"(p.61).

However, all the realities that Enitan encounters in her journey to adulthood; harsh as they appear; there are very revealing, and add to the total statement of the novel which aims at exposing the social realities which women face daily.

In London, Enitan had become aware of her sexuality. She says:

The first person to tell me my virginity belonged to me was the boy who took it. Before this, I'd thought my virginity belonged to Jesus Christ, my mother, society at large. My boyfriend... assured me that it was mine, to give it to him. In those brief seconds between owning and giving up my virginity he licked the walls of my mouth clean... After he pierced my bowels... (p.77).

The school provides the opportunity which the home denied her. She now knows her virginity belongs to

her and not to Jesus Christ. Studying law also exposed her to world politics. She joined the "Nigerian Student Community" (p.79) in London. This social and political awareness equipped her with political consciousness which she exploits to her advantage. With this, she could comment on the Nigerian socio-economic and political landscape at the time which is bedeviled by corruption and military dictatorship, "like my generation defined by the economics of their childhood, we were children of oil boom..."(p.81). On politics she says: "Politics in our country was a scuffle between the military and politicians" (p.81). She further says our democracy "had been a more debauched democracy: champagne parties, embezzlements" (p.81).

She blames the failure of the nation to advance positively on the men whom she says "were given to acts of cowardice" (p.82). Because of these acts of cowardice, the nation had sunk into the vicious circle of poverty and the people have become cynical "none really cared. Soldiers go. Soldiers come"(p.85).

Back to Nigeria and equipped with the knowledge which education offered her, Enitan is ready to make choices and accept the consequences which come with them. She enters into a relationship with Mike Obi, an artist, and later discovers that he is fake. She later reunites with Sheri who is also a mistress to Hassan, a Military General, and they began to recount their experiences. When Enitan asked Sheri if Hassan was treating her well, Sheri is quick to say "which one of our men really treats women well" (p.103).

The society in which Enitan and Sheri find each other is one in which it is "better to be ugly, to be crippled, to be a thief even, than to be barren" (p.105). Enitan further explains to Sheri thus:

A woman may be forgiven for having a child out of wedlock if she had no hope of getting married.... Marriage could immediately wipe sluttish past, but an angel or not a woman had to have a child (p.105).

At some point Sheri's advice Enitan becomes useful: "now, where I differ from most women is, if you lift your hand to beat me, I will kill you, god no go vex"(p.107). Armed with this assertive spirit, when Mike fails Enitan, she abandons him. When Sheri complained of Hassan, Enitan is quick to advise her "drop him"... you don't need him"(p.132). When Sheri thinks otherwise, Enitan cautions her "you are young and this man is treating you like a house-girl" (p.138). Sheri's suffering is blamed on polygamy, and the istonia tenet which promotes it.

This istonia is the issue of male progeny which allows the man to value male children more than the female ones. Enitan's mother Ariola suffers when she could not give birth to a male child in order to fulfill the society's idea of motherhood. When she could not, her husband sneaks out to have a male child outside their marriage and Ariola is kept in the dark for over 20 years. This shows

how morally debased the men have become. Enitan's father has other children outside the home and none of the family members knows of it. Florence Orabueze (2004) argues that "the Nigerian woman's primary role is that of procreation, of having babies and yet male babies. But society does not only expect her to have as many babies as fertility makes provide, she is expected clearly and unambiguously to have as many male children as possible. In other words having male children is the signal achievement through which she can raise her head high and feel a real sense of fulfillment" (p.108). As Enitan continues to learn and comes to terms with the stark realities of the woman's problems, and the experiences in her home; the need to move out of this patriarchal space becomes expedient. She confronts her father thus:

'Show me one case,' I said. 'Just one, of a woman having two husbands, a fifty-year-old woman marrying a twelve-year-old boy. We have women judges, and a woman can't legally post bail. I'm a lawyer. If I were married, I would need my husband's consent to get a new passport. He would be entitled to discipline me with a slap or two, so long as he doesn't cause me grievous bodily harm' (p.141).

In polygamy the women are placed in antagonistic position each fighting to prove she is worthy of her dowry. This Enitan says must go. The new woman marries for love and not to satisfy society's dictates. As she points out: "wives are not always in agreement" (p.145).

Both Enitan and Sheri must come out of the limited space to the outer space. Sheri for instance revolts against Hassan: "Raise your hand to hit Sheri Bakare, and your hand will never be the same again. Stupid man" (p.169). When Enitan queries, Sheri explains thus: "the man is jealous of me ... with all he has. He wants me to have nothing except what he gives me. He says he will take it all back. I said take it! All of it! I did not come to this place naked" (p.170). Sheri is no longer the naive girl who must wait for big Hassan; she moves out of his life and realizes her worth and individuality. As both women experience failures, Enitan soon realizes that she had to pitch tents with her mother and not her father anymore. Her mother advises her: "never make sacrifices for a man. By the time you say 'look what I've done for you', it's too late. They never remember" (p.173). Enitan now understands what her mother was saying. She notes that "I know that she hurt because of the sacrifices she'd made in her marriage. I really understood why she turned her mind to church with such fervor" (p.177). Enitan's mother lives her life for her husband and now she has lost all, as Enitan puts it: "In my country women are praised the more they surrender their right to protest. In the end they may die with nothing but selflessness to pass on to their daughters; a startling legacy...." (p.177). Her mother resorts to the church as an escape mechanism. Indeed the church helps to cushion the effect of Enitan's mother's plight and failed marriage. Mogu (2002) submits that "religion seeks to domesticate the conscience and the soul which together

constitute the essence of human being. By regulating the mental state of humans, religion effectively controls their physical behavior. Similarly, a society or community united by a set of religious beliefs subdues itself to such dogmas" (p.136). But Enitan sees her own marriage to Niyi as an escape from an overbearing father: "I did not shed a tear over leaving home" (178). Enitan will be a wife but not a domestic one as dictated by her society. Her mother-in-law is always in the kitchen cooking while her children loiter about the house. Enitan once asked her "don't you ever feel lonely in here Ma? Isn't the kitchen the loneliest room?" (p.181). Niyi on the other hand loved and protected his wife, but at the same time would want to protect his male ego that he is under the control of the wife. He pleaded with Enitan: "better watch what you're saying. Next thing they'll be calling me woman wrapper. Woman wrapper, was a weak man, controlled by his woman" (p.182). Niyi is a typical African man who is governed by ego rather than reason.

In marriage, Enitan begins to see things clearly and differently too. She began to notice the predicaments of the woman. She becomes enlightened and imbued with a revolutionary spirit. She becomes more assertive and refuses to play second fiddle. Respect for her must be reciprocal. She says:

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'd seen? Touched? Obey him without choking on my humility like a fish bone down my throat (p.184).

Enitan has grown up; she knows what is good for her; she is no longer a naïve docile girl who must hide once a man is around. Disobeying a man's orders, according to her, does not translate to disrespect, but if the man wants her respect and obedience, then he must earn them.

Atta explains that a woman respecting a man or obeying him is her human right and human rights would amount to nothing until the rights of husbands are threatened. Modern women should see themselves as modern wives who must assert their individuality and not live like their mothers. At a point Enitan begins to educate the women by conscientizing them of the need to know their rights which also include serving their husbands; "the women should not serve their husbands food" (p.196). This according to Enitan is a mild form of domestic protest. Atta is not calling on women not to feed their husbands, but they should not serve them like gods. Atta is not bothered about what the society will say because, "if a woman sneezed in my country someone would call her feminist" (p.197). According to Atta, "She would continue to tear every notion they had about women" (p.197). This will not be easy but she will continue: "I would not let go until I am heard" (p.198).

When Enitan complains to Sheri about Niyi's attitude

towards her: “the man behaves as if I’m his personal servant”(p.204), Sheri replies “show him sense jo” (p.205). Sheri plays a very important role in Enitan’s life. She is bold and courageous too. When she chooses to leave Hassan, Enitan commends her “Sheri didn’t need any man. I was there when she walked out on her lousy Brigadier.... I envied her freedom”(p.207). The woman must be economically independent. When Sheri left Hassan, she concentrated 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” (207). Chioma Opara (2004) also advocates for female bonding which she views as “a facet of female power”(p34). Opara’s views agree with the earlier views of Akachi Ezeigbo (1996) that “In Africa in the period before recorded history women found close ties which helped to strengthen their position. In this way, they were able to take decisions and uphold them in matters that concerned their welfare”(p.37).

Activism

Activism is another dimension of feminism in this novel. Atta is of the view that if women come together, they could fight for the common goal of the women and the society at large. “A group of army wives had founded a program for women in a village. They promised to train the village women to eradicate infant dehydration”(p.211). Here Atta calls on women to adopt female friendship, bonding or sisterhood as these would be one of the ways they can win the war against inequality, tradition and all other patriarchal dictates. Once this is achieved the advancement of women in the society would be achievable.

When Enitan’s father is arrested, she did not allow his business to fall; she filled the void. She joined uncle Fatai to fight for his release and the release of others. Activism is a dimension of feminism that has not been adequately explored. Enitan has to suffer incarceration as a price for activism. She is ready to give up her life for the survival of her society, in spite of her pregnancy which she would not want to lose; societal rejuvenation is paramount to her. Though her mother did not support her fighting for her father, Enitan is determined to fight on. Her mother says “not for a man who showed me nothing but wickedness” (p.219). In another instance Ariola Enitan’s mother argues that “too bad for your father ... he can’t keep a family together, now he wants to save his country” (p.220). All these did not discourage Enitan. It is at this point that she meets Grace Ameh a journalist and human right activist. Grace Ameh writes for the *Oracle Newspaper*. Ameh uses this paper to enlightens the public on the evil of military dictatorship and as a medium to fight oppression. For Enitan, the fight to save her father would not come from the kitchen; “how can I decide what to do about my father from the kitchen” (p.245). If the woman must fight for her right and that of others,

she must move out of the kitchen space. The kitchen has become a destructive metaphor limiting the woman from actualizing her dreams.

Besides, the kitchen, there is the man “how can I decide anything with a mini Idi Amin sitting right there in my house” (p.245). Marriage as construed by the society is an autocratic institution as symbolized in the metaphor of “Idi Amin”. This autocratic and tyrannical empire ruled by the man must be challenged and this can only be done through activism. African women have always participated in political activism. Grace Ameh and Enitan remind the reader of strong activist like Margaret Ekpo, Fumilayo Ransome Kuti, Queen Amina among others who were at the fore front of political activities that culminated to Nigeria’s independence. Imo Emenyi(2005) argues that: “This assertive spirit has brought the privileging of the male under scrutiny as well as present the modern woman as the disenchanting individual. Consequently, the self-conscious in literature is often regarded by the male elites as an individual who is corrupted by Western civilization, even though the Ikot Abasi women’s war of 1929 annuls this argument”(p.49).

Grace Ameh inspires Enitan as the latter continues to tap from her experience. “I visited Grace Ameh, hoping for some impartial advice on what to do about my father”(p.250). Ameh encourages Enitan to fight on not minding what the society is saying. The society would always silence the woman telling her to “shut up and face your family” (p.252). The society sometimes back its effort to silence the woman with scriptures: “A woman who doesn’t talk too much is a gift from the Lord”(Ecclesiasticus 26:14b). Ameh tells her “I don’t subscribe to that” (p.252). For silence, has become another form patriarchal domination which Atta explores in this novel. According to Orié (2010) “the summary of patriarchal lordship is silencing the woman, muffling or muting her voice or browbeating her to remain voiceless”(169). Grace Ameh advocates that women must speak out against injustice and oppression in their society because “silence is not a female virtue, but rather a covert way of destroying humanity” (Emenyi. p117). Ameh’s activism inspires Enitan with a fearless spirit and Enitan becomes very vocal. Ameh admonishes her to use her voice, “yes, yes, but you have a voice, which is what I always try to tell people. Use your voice to bring about change”(p.253).

The woman must align with other women, because standing alone, the woman becomes another victim. Ameh invites Enitan to join a Rights group- “there are people who are involved in the campaign for democracy, human rights and civil liberty organizations” (p.253). Enitan and Ameh attend the first meeting and they are later arrested by the oppressive instruments of the state and are subsequently incarcerated. In the detention cell, Enitan meets other women, some of whom their minds are lost

and have become insane; Do-Re-Mi and Mother of the Prison are insane. Another woman has sores all over her body. One of the women in the cell narrates her ordeal: "the fool touched my breast, I slapped his face. He pushed me to the ground"... I grabbed a big stone, whacked his head. I couldn't stop whacking.... Before I knew it, he died there on top of me" (p.265). This woman did not regret her action "it is my children I miss. Not him" (p.265).

Grace Ameh and Enitan are released the following day. These experiences remain stamped in Enitan's mind. She continues her life smiling: "that everyone smiling or not, had overcome adversity" (p.284). Enitan has overcome many adversities and she emerges stronger from all of them. Enitan fought until her father transferred the estate to her mother. She fought for his release from detention; she remained strong even when she lost her mother; she continues to fight for her family: "I've always said, men fight for land, and women fight for the family" (p.288).

Joining the Human Rights group Enitan becomes a campaigner not only for women, but for the well being of the nation. "With the military in power without a constitution, there was no other recourse besides protest, peaceful or violent. I was thinking of my country..." (p.293). With this at the back of her mind, Atta seems to be refuting the argument of the antagonists of feminism in Africa that women are more concerned with sectional interests that affect women only. Enitan joining the fight for democracy rather than fighting only for the women shows that the African woman has transcended sectional limitations. The salvation of the nation through the multiplier effect will in turn lead to the salvation of the woman. Enitan has become so bold that she could shout on military dictatorship to "get out of my country" (p.293). Enitan's activism pays off with the release of her father from incarceration. On the issue of rights, Uzor Maxim Uzoatu observes that "it is even worse for the woman in that the society somewhat compels her to be more of a sitting duck without the rights to propel her own life" (p.87).

The Kitchen

Another dimension of feminism that this novel explored is the kitchen and cooking. Enitan's mother belongs to the school of thought that the woman must not cook for the man. She threatens to stop cooking for her husband Sunny Taiwo, and he blackmails her by also threatening to stop giving the feeding allowances and calls her "kitchen martyr". She gives in because she has surrendered her job to cooking for the family. Mrs. Franco cooks for the entire family, "Sheri cooks for her brigadier man-friend, who runs around collecting girls" (Orabueze, p. 86-7). But it is only Enitan who refuses to follow this trend of cooking women. She keeps asking Niyi to go to the kitchen and find himself some food. When her Mother-in-law insists that she stays out of the kitchen because of her condition, she tells her the kitchen is a lonely place and another

prison. Atta uses Enitan's refusal to cook all the time for Niyi to refute the obnoxious dictum in traditional society that the place of the woman is in the kitchen. For Atta the kitchen kills the aspirations of the woman, and if the woman must achieve her dreams; she must move out of the kitchen space.

Commenting on Enitan's journey to adulthood and selfhood, Florence Orabueze further argues that "At that tender age, she sees events and, people, situations and actions naively but as she grows up, she interprets them and puts them in their proper perspective" (p.86). Orabueze's position is that between adolescence and adulthood there is a great transformation in Enitan's life. Orabueze's thesis buttresses the claim that Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* is a novel that explores the imprisonment of the Nigerian woman; one will agree with Orabueze that Atta actively explores in this novel the various forms of incarceration of the woman, both at home as a child, and in school as a girl; in society as a woman and in marriage as a wife. However what Orabueze does not say is that all the women in this novel transcend the limitations placed on them by this incarceration and herein lies the feminist matrix in this novel.

Style

The structure of *Everything Good Will Come* reflects the various stages of growth of the heroine. The first part "1971", shows the early stages in the life of Enitan and her friend Sheri. For instance Sheri is described as a hibiscus that attracted insects. But she is raped and later she is described as a scarlet hibiscus, because the rape and the abortion left her with a damaged womb. The second part set in "1975" sees Enitan in school, and her relationship with people of the opposite sex. The third part set in "1985", shows Enitan with more experiences and is also set in an atmosphere of military usurpation of political power. The final part set in "1995" also shows that the heroine has gained and garnered more experiences and has become more assertive. Keyinde and Mbipon(67) further point out that each of these phases "attests to a particular phase in the journey fo Enitan to self-discovery"(p.67). Atta's use of first person point of view allows the narrator the opportunity to comment on everything that goes on around her especially as they affect the women. However, this does not allow for objectivity, most events are narrated with overbearing sentiments. Using characters like Grace Ameh, Atta presents the events in the story with journalistic precision. The image of Idi Amin and Brigadier Hassan becomes a metaphor for military dictatorship at the time of the setting of the novel.

Silence is another stylistic device used to achieve the feminist thrust in this novel. All the characters experienced one form of silence or the other to achieve their aims. Sunny Taiwo's silence sends Enitan's mother out of the house; Niyi's silence drives Enitan to the spare room; it was silence that Niyi uses as a weapon to punish

his divorced wife. Sunny Taiwo still holds tenaciously to the patriarchal belief that a woman must seal her lips at all times. As the scriptures says "A woman who doesn't talk too much is a gift from the Lord"(Ecclesiasticus 26:14a) That was why he considers Clara Mukoro a disgrace because she reported to the media that her husband Peter Mukoro is detained. Enitan's father keeps silence when his family threatens to get him another wife if the wife fails to get him a male child; he could not rise to defend the wife. When he is arrested the wife uses silence as a revenge. Atta uses this weapon of silence to lampoon women who have remained silent in the face of growing oppression. According to Orabueze(2010)

Atta believes that gender silences in the face of oppression and brutalization are contributory factors to the erection and sustenance of the walls of imprisonment of the individual in the Nigerian society. She shows that silence can be a weapon and shield, depending on how the individual wants to wield it. She tenaciously believes that silence is no longer golden in the face of oppression and degradation... Indeed Sefi Atta strongly feels it is only the voice of the individual raised in protest against obnoxious native laws and custom and draconian leadership that can bring meaningful change in the society (p.96-8).

All the women bolted out of their silence and became vocal. This according to Atta is the only way they could bring meaningful change to the society.

Another stylistic effect in this novel is the reversal of stereotype. The women in this novel are bold, courageous, assertive, economically empowered. Sheri is a business woman who would not want to be controlled by Brigadier Hassan's wealth, Enitan has her job and does not bother about the Franco's wealth, Grace Ameh ply her trade in the volatile field of Nigerian journalism. Clara Mukoro refuses to be silent when her husband is arrested. On the other hand, the men are created as nonentities, and only exist with vain and bloated egos. Springfield who steals Enitan's virginity could only appreciate her by calling her a frigid woman. Mike Obi deceives Enitan that he loves her, but goes behind to sleep with other women. Daramola is a rapist. Enitan's father showers her with love so that she continues to see him as an idol. He keeps another family outside the home without the knowledge of the wife. Debayo Sunny Taiwo's son from another woman is like the father, proud and arrogant. With this it is difficult to agree with Orabueze that the male characters are not stereotyped. However, this study shares Orabueze's position that in the battle to liberate the woman, the woman is culpable as she has become both the victim and victimizer. Orabueze then opines that:

Atta feels that women are both victim and victimizer contributing as they do to the headache of others. Sheri goes out with Ibrahim, knowing full well that he has a family Sunny's mistress is aware he is married; yet she has four children for him. Peter Mukoro's second wife knows he is already married with children (p.100)

With this Atta's concerns here are that the woman

must be her neighbour's keeper if she is to be liberated in the society. Bonding, sisterhood and genuine friendship would be the only antidote for patriarchal oppression. The idea of victim victimizing victim should be done away with. Accordingly, Joy Bewaji (2011) argues that "The most elaborate imperfection of the female gender in a developing society is –that of self-loathing."(p80) It is the position of this paper that the woman must overcome self-loathing for her to make her mark in the society.

Atta also adopts the *Bildungsroman* narrative technique in revealing the growth of the heroine in this novel. This technique according to Abrams (2005) deals with "the development of the protagonist's mind and character in the passage from childhood through varied experiences... into maturity, which usually involves recognition of one's identity and role in the world" (p.200-1) Through this technique, Atta allows the heroine to react to the events and experiences around her. As the heroine grows, she becomes more and more aware of herself and begins to make changes. At the end of the novel Enitan is no longer the little girl who sits at the lagoon fishing with a fishing rod made from a tree branch and hook made from a wine cork. (*Everything*. 11) She is now fully matured and makes decisions that affect her, not minding the consequences of such decisions.

Similarly, the birth of a girl child has become a major stylistic device in the new feminist novel. The birth of girl child is to counter male progeny. Enitan is a female child, but she steps into her father's shoe; she is the one who fights for her father to be released.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the growing up of the female child from adolescence to adulthood. The various forms of growth help in shaping the heroine and other women in the novel. From the simple, ignorant and naïve girl, Enitan grows to become the speaking voice for the voiceless people. She could take decisions that affect her. She becomes solidified through education and her relationship with other women like her mother, Sheri, Grace Ameh and her mother in-law. In marriage, she did not allow her husband to rule her as a cattle herdsman. In the final analysis, though it took her time to get pregnant, she is not bothered, but she eventually gave birth to a baby girl. Sheri walks out of the space that limits her vision and aspiration, Enitan moves out of the overbearing influence of her father and husband, Niyi.

The paper opines that the woman can achieve her dreams if she moves out of any space that limits her aspiration. The political balkanization as this paper reveals, is blamed solely on the military usurpation of political power. It is also worthy to note that Atta blames the problem of the woman on both the man and the woman as both of them are culpable. Atta presents

women who are formidable and who would not allow any circumstances to subvert the actualization of their dreams. The central thesis of this paper is that Sefi Atta makes a clarion call on women to come together to fight for the common goal of the woman and society. Though she has argued that every work of art must not be didactic, from the analysis of this novel it reveals that the novel aims at cultivating a moral lesson on the Nigerian girl child to develop an independent mind.

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