

EUROPEAN SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL



December 2018
Vol. 14 No.35

ISSN: 1857-7431 (Online)
ISSN: 1857-7881 (Print)



European Scientific Journal, *ESJ*

December 2018

European Scientific Institute, ESI

The content is peer reviewed

December 2018 edition vol. 14, No. 35

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ISSN: 1857 - 7431 (Online)

ISSN: 1857 - 7881 (Print)

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Women’s Reactions to Men’s Patriarchal Oppressions in Selected Ghanaian Male and Female Novels

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Doi:10.19044/esj.2018.v14n35p18 [URL:http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/esj.2018.v14n35p18](http://dx.doi.org/10.19044/esj.2018.v14n35p18)

Abstract

Social imbalances between men and women are the bedrock of injustices women encounter in the world, particularly in African societies. Patriarchy is identified by womanist and feminist scholars as one of the social practices that give men more privilege and maintain women in peripheral roles. This article examines how female characters in African patriarchal settings of two Ghanaian male and female novels, Asare Adei’s *A Beautiful Daughter* (2012) and Amma Darko’s *The Housemaid* (1998) have been able to face/cope with men’s oppressions through womanist and radical feminist theories. The findings have revealed that majority of the female characters are empowered economically and socially in the male and female fictional texts, and this has enabled them to combat men’s patriarchal oppressions. The female characters’ reactions vary from one another. Some of them made use of pacific ways such as dialogue, feminine solidarity or sisterhood in their attempts to address men’s patriarchal oppressions, while others have made use of violence against men and children in their quest for justice and equality.

Keywords: Patriarchy, injustice, womanism, radical feminism, women’s reaction

Introduction

Patriarchy is identified by womanist and feminist scholars as one of the social practices that oppress women. This is because it mostly gives more privileges to the menfolk than the womenfolk, especially in traditional African societies. This article examines how female characters in African patriarchal settings of two Ghanaian male and female novels, Asare Adei’s *A Beautiful Daughter* (2012) and Amma Darko’s *The Housemaid* (1998) have been able to face/cope with men’s oppressions through womanist and radical feminist theories. In the next section, we clarify patriarchy followed by a theoretical

framework section. After this, we present (in section 3) women’s reactions to male oppression in the selected novels.

1. Patriarchy

According to the *BBC English Dictionary*, “Patriarchy is a system in which men rather than women have all or most of the power and importance in a society or group.” Patriarchy makes men regard women to be weak and inferior. Kate Millett (1969) as cited in Carter (2006, p. 94) argues that patriarchy is all-pervasive and treats females universally as inferior. In both public and private lives, the female is considered a subordinate. In fact, patriarchy has been identified by feminist scholars as one of the social systems that oppress women. Oppression is considered as the “absence of choices”(Lay & Daley, 2007, p. 50). Not only can oppression harbor absence of choice but it can also take different forms (Bodjrènou, 2016, p. 147). Asgher *et al.* (2016, p. 147) note that “[...] oppression on women makes their lives miserable and full of pain, but when women work against oppression and get power they become free.” On this premise, it could be argued that patriarchal structure is the root cause of gender inequality or rift.

Indeed, patriarchy is a social structure that makes women’s perception of themselves as subordinate, natural or normative. This is further confirmed by Mboya’s position that “Patriarchy compels women to believe that their inferior position is natural and irredeemable” (2010, p. 24). Again, Mukabi and Burkeywo (2016, p. 29) claim that “Patriarchy looks at women as objects.” Similarly, Amouzou (2006, p. 97) contends that “Patriarchy is that form of social organization in which males exercise power and thus create for female an inferior status.” Furthermore, Weedon (1987, p. 2) concludes that “Patriarchal power rests on the social meanings given to biological sexual difference. In [a] patriarchal discourse, the nature and social role of women are defined in relation to the male as norm. This finds its clearest expression in the genetic use of the terms ‘man’ and ‘he’ to encompass all of humankind.”

Feminist critics, scholars and theorists have demonstrated to the world how patriarchy is or can be detrimental to the evolution of women. Asiyanbola (2005, p. 3) notes this in a clearer way in what follows:

Feminists have argued that in any of the historical forms that patriarchal society takes, whether it is feudal, capitalist or socialist, a sex [or] gender system and a system of economic discrimination operate simultaneously. It is observed in the literature that the establishment and practice of male dominance over women and children, is a historic process formed by men and women, with the patriarchal family serving as a basic unit of organization.

Walby (as cited in Holmes, 2007, p. 14) puts forth that “[...] patriarchy is made up of six structures: paid work, household production, culture, sexuality, violence, and the state.” In fact, this classification has evolved into what is called public and private patriarchy. She further contends that “both public and private [forms of] patriarchy operate within contemporary society, but the dominant form is now public. The old domestic form excluded women from the public sphere, while the new ‘public’ form segregates them into particular jobs and into the lower levels of the hierarchy.”

As a matter of fact, the above contention agrees with Kate Millet, a radical figure in the second war of feminism, who holds that “Patriarchy subordinates the female to the male, it treats the female as inferior to male and this power is exerted directly or indirectly, in civil and domestic life to constrain women [...]” (as cited in Ibeku, 2015). From the ongoing, it follows that feminist scholars have worked out different paradigms in order to theorize and circumscribe patriarchal oppressions of women in literature and, by extension, society. Carter (2006) points this out better:

What unites the various kinds of feminist literary theory is not so much a specific technique of criticism but a common goal: to raise awareness of women’s roles in all aspects of literary production (as writers, as characters in literature, as readers etc.) and to reveal the extent of male dominance in all of these aspects (p. 91).

2. Theoretical Framework

This study draws its theoretical underpinnings from womanism and radical feminism. Both are movements that touch on the social lives of women and aim to curb the oppressions that women face in the society. Ibeku (2015) argues that

[...] feminism is women-oriented and concentrates on issues that concern women. It is a literary movement that tends to bring about a change in the society especially on how women are treated; it tries to discourage discrimination and humiliation on women; it focuses its attention on emancipation of women. A lot of emphasis has been made on feminism and its stand in the African novel (p. 427).

Likewise, feminism reflects “a world view that values women and confronts systematic injustices based on gender” (Lay & Daley, 2007, p. 50). In this sense, Mama (2005) contends that “feminism refers to the political and intellectual struggle for the liberation of women.” Similarly, Amouzou (2014, p.13) claims that “a central task of feminism is to examine women’s oppression and the possibilities for resistance and positive change.” In the same vein, Koussouhon *et al.* (2015, p. 315) argue that “[...] the utmost aim of feminism is to confront male-dominance and power as well as free the

womenfolk from all forms of societal ills strengthened by patriarchy or systemic institutionalized sexism both in literature and society.” In addition, Lay & Daley (2007) stipulate that:

[...] one central feminist theory has not evolved; basic principles are commonly given when describing feminism. These principles include ideas such as valuing women and their experiences, identifying conditions that oppress women, changing society through advocacy, and recognizing that many factors, not just gender, impact a woman’s actions and views (p. 51).

Hooks (2000, p. 1) claims that “[...] feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression.” However, it would be inaccurate to think of feminism as a single theory because there are many conceptualizations or variations of it. Lay & Daley (2007, p. 51) opine that “Feminism has evolved in different arenas rather than as one unified concept. The labels that define those arenas have varied. The most commonly used are eight separate feminist theories: black feminism, radical feminism, cultural feminism, lesbian feminism, liberal feminism, Marxist feminism, materialist feminism, and socialist feminism.” Radical feminism, a branch of feminist theory, is used to study the portrayal of female characters in contemporary African male and female novels. In this sense, Ibeku (2015, p. 430.) notes that “[...] Radical feminists [...] use violence in order to gain their freedom.” Similarly, Adjei (2009, p. 47) points out that “radical feminism attempts to draw lines between biologically-determined behaviour and culturally-determined behaviour.”

Unlike radical feminism, womanism strives for a meaningful union and survival of women, men and children. For instance, the notion of inclusiveness can be deduced from “Alice Walker’s definition of the ‘womanist’ meaning a woman who is committed to the survival of the wholeness of entire people...”(Ogunyemi, 2006, p. 28). Drawing on this, Koussouhon & Dossoumou (2015, p. 130) claim that womanism is an inclusive theory which is centered on the natural order of things in nature, society and family. Indeed, the inclusive connotation in womanism as pointed out by Walker, Koussouhon and Dossoumou has shown that radical feminism is different from it. The difference between radical feminism and womanism is that it (radical feminism) is a social movement that revolves around the eradication of sexism and provision privileges to woman gender alone while womanism, as argued by Layli (2006, pp. xx-xxi) “does not emphasize or privilege gender or sexism; it rather elevates all forms of oppression irrespective of gender, race or class, to a level of equal concern or action.” The above positions of womanist and radical feminist theories have helped in appreciating women’s reactions to men’s patriarchal oppressions in the selected novels under study.

3. Women’s Reaction to Men’s Patriarchal Oppressions in the Selected Novels

Here we provide a womanist and radical feminist reading of the selected novels.

3.1. Womanist and Radical Feminist Thoughts as a Women’s Armour against Patriarchy in Adei’s *A Beautiful Daughter*.

The African contemporary male novel under study presents two different types of women’s movements: womanist and radical feminist. Mbatha (2009, p. 23) holds that radical feminists see patriarchy as politically responsible for structural domination over women. The womanists, however, perceive patriarchy as an element of a woman’s culture, and not of her femininity, they value and advocate for a holistic human-based approach to life and society.

Indeed, the women, in Adei’s *A Beautiful Daughter*, have recourse to womanism and radical feminism. The choice of one over the other is, however, influenced the level of humiliation and dehumanization the women encounter in their marital homes and society. Adei portrays the challenges faced by women in the Ghanaian society through the female characters of Esi and Mansa: Esi is Pokua’s younger sister, Sam’s first wife and Baaba’s mother, while Mansa is Kojo’s mother, and Sam’s second wife. Esi feels humiliated for the fact that her husband does not involve her and her daughter in his project of building an apartment but he does involve his mistress, Mansa. This can be noticed in the following extract from the novel: “He [Sam] doesn’t involve us [Esi and her daughter, Baaba] because of her [Mansa]. I [Esi] have become useless”(Adei, 2012, p.10). Meanwhile, Mansa, on her part, feels humiliated and dehumanized because she is a woman with a child. This scenario depicts the patriarchal perception and behaviour as obtainable in contemporary Ghana: “Accra is a big place but wherever you go, they all think the same way about women with children and yet not living with their children’s fathers”(p. 63). It is important to note that Adei’s portrayal of Esi’s and Mensa’s problems is different from that of pioneering African male writers. Capo-Chichi *et al.* (2016, p. 1150) observe that in most male writings, women are depicted as dancing to every clap of their husbands; they are depicted as voiceless and treated as objects, senseless and incapable of making decisions. Nonetheless, Udumukwu (2007, p. 3) confirms that in the pioneering male-authored novels, the representation of the female gender as a good woman with “two principal features of silence and passivity” is gradually subverted in contemporary African fiction. Such is the case with Adei’s novel, *A Beautiful daughter* which portrays Esi’s feminist approach to humiliation and dehumanization as double-faceted. That is, the double-faceted approach is both womanist and radical feminist in nature.

In African tradition, it is a taboo to be a divorcee (Ibeku, 2015, p. 431). Indeed, in Adei's *A Beautiful Daughter*, the taboo around divorced women who have children out of wedlock or separated from their husbands in the patriarchal social practices is questioned in the character of Mansa: "[...] men in Accra don't like women with children. They call us born-one, buy-one-get-one-free, and all sorts of names"(Adei, 2012, p. 56). By bringing to the reader's awareness the humiliation of these women in the Ghanaian society, Mansa has been made to develop a double-faceted feminism, which womanishly endorses humiliation coming from the men folk and the patriarchal structure. In fact, the writer has attributed this womanist and radical feminist role to Mansa in order to confirm to the reader the common adage that says "There is no smoke without fire"(Odiaka, 2007, p. 193). This is to say that every action, be it womanist or radical feminist, adopted by women, has a root cause. Although the narrator does not fully inform the reader about Mansa's attitudes towards her first husband, Asamoah, Kojo's father, the reader has been informed that he makes her pregnant, abandons her and travels to have fun: "And his father is just having fun abroad. Forget about the irresponsible Asamoah"(Adei, 2012, p. 55). Again, the narrator informs the reader that she goes and drops her son, Kojo, with her first husband's wives after giving birth to him in his absence. The narrator further informs the reader through Mansa's father that Kojo has been bullied by his stepbrother, and that is why he has gone to fetch him: "He [Kojo]'s been here about two weeks now. His stepbrothers have started bullying him, so I [Mansa's father] went and brought him [...]"(p. 181). Likewise, through Dansua's (Mansa's mother's) discussion with Asamoah, the reader is aware that Asamoah has impregnated Mansa and refused to marry her because he has already had a wife, and that he has come to claim his son, Kojo, arguing that he wants to send him to school in the UK (p. 121). Later, the writer informs the reader through the discussion between Mansa and Asamoah that Mansa has married Sam and has made him adopt Kojo, who Asamoah has come to claim back (p.123).

Indeed, it is a little bit difficult to prove the womanist aspect in the relationship between Mansa and Asamoah because she is not living under his roof with her son, but she may have erstwhile developed the womanist behaviour. She does not hate him. Clenora Hudson-Weems (as cited in Amouzou, 2006, p. 102) argues that "[...] any man-hating ideology [is] considered ... as un-African womanism [...]", but the fact that Asamoah does not take his responsibility as a man and father of her son may have given room for that. Another thing one can deduce in Mansa's action is that she does not deliberately hate Asamoah but the humiliating circumstance she encounters in her relationship with him may have forced her to become radical feminist. Some of the questions that every womanist/feminist reader may want to ask here are:

- how many women have fallen victims of Asamoah?
- what have the women and their children become?
- what strategies have the women used to cope with humiliation and dehumanization from Asamoah?

The answer to the above questions lies with Mansa alone because she is the only one the writer presents to the reader as one of Asamoah's wives. As stated earlier, Mansa does not behave like the traditional African woman who chooses to suffer oppression from the men folk either for her children or to be seen as a good woman. She has rather chosen to abandon her son to Asamoah's care: "You came and dumped the boy on me when I could not be around to give him the needed attention."(Adei, 2012, p.123). She never hides her radical feminist ideology when she meets her son, Kojo with her parents on one of her occasional visits to her parents at a village called Patakro. Although her parents, especially her father informs her that he has gone to fetch the son because he is ill-treated by his step-mother, she never hesitates in asking her son questions: "How are you?"... 'What are you doing here?' Mansa's face showed great concern"(p. 54). Indeed, the second question Mansa asks Kojo, her son, shows that she does not expect the coming of her son to live with her parents. In other words, her son is somehow not her priority but her work which represents the source of her freedom. This female portrayal counters and shifts away from conventional ideologies of gender representation which are repeatedly evidenced in works like Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *Arrow of God* (1964), Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine* (1966), Wole Soyinka's *The Interpreters* (1972), to name just a few. Simply put, Adei has depicted in his fiction a contrasted image of the African woman, the real woman in postcolonial Africa:

There is a sharp contrast between the traditional African woman and the real woman in postcolonial Africa. Far from being the source of comfort and rest (the sweet mother as she is perceived in popular imagination), the "good" woman in sub-Saharan or the traditional African woman Africa happens to be that woman who suffers the effects of oppression, and neglect; and who must maintain a silence and passivity in order to remain good. Silence and passivity are two principal features of the good woman (Udumukwu, 2007, p. 3)

Despite the fact that Asamoah does not play his role as a responsible man/husband and father, Mansa does not bother herself with it. She continues with her work, as a banker, in Accra, the capital city of Ghana. In the city, she helps Sam, the man who she later marries, to secure a bank loan when he is jobless after graduating from the university: "[...] at that time, this woman [Mansa] was actually helping me to secure a loan from the bank where she

worked. It was that loan that enabled me to start my own business”(Adei, 2012, p.39). Mansa’s radicalism, as noted, increases when she encounters humiliation in her course to remarry. In fact, she is a victim of gender inequality and injustice in the Ghanaian city, Accra. In the city, women with children or women divorcees are continuously humiliated by the Ghanaian menfolk whenever they decide to remarry. So, she sees this men’s attitude towards women as injustice because there is no record of a male divorcee who has been humiliated or rejected at the point of remarrying: “Today’s men don’t want to take care of somebody else’s child- but they expect us, women, to take care of their other wives’ children,’ Mansa lamented”(p.56). Elsewhere, she laments that: “Now, I am unable to do anything for my son, while Sam’s daughter seems to have everything in the house. This of course hurts,’ Mansa revealed. ‘What then do I benefit from my toils with Sam?’ she cried”(p. 56). As a result of this, Mansa suffers psychologically. She suffers a form of emotional abuse. Osirim (2003, p. 153) notes that “[...] violence cannot be solely understood as physical abuse, but as a phenomenon that takes on a myriad of forms, including the economic and the psychological.” Adei has actually proved his adherence to radical feminism by not allowing Mansa to endure this situation all through. He has allowed her to develop radical feminism. According to Ibeku (2015, p. 430) “...radical feminism is usually a reaction to violence. It is a measure taken by the victimized to gain his/her freedom.”

The above-mentioned way of treating women often leads to a resultant show of often leads to a resultant show of radical feminism as exhibited in Mansa’s behavior in ill-treating Sam’s daughter, Baaba, using emotional or psychological abuse like neglect, defamation, ridicule to mention a few. Furthermore, she buys Baaba (Sam’s daughter) indecent clothes so as to make her look like a whore. She approves her bad company with Okai, an artist so that Sam may chase her away. She finally succeeds in her plan when Sam discovers that his daughter is pregnant and sends her out of the house: “Dare not step into this house any more, or I’ll tear you into pieces. Go to the idiot who made you pregnant’, Sam ranted and then return to Mansa”(Adei, 2012, p. 56). As a matter of fact, Mansa does all this because she sees Baaba, her stepdaughter, as her rival: “I’d like to love Sam’s daughter but I just can’t. I always see myself rivaling her for Sam’s love...” (p. 56). Moreover, she succeeds in making Sam adopt her son, Kojo, as an orphan who later bears Sam’s name after his adoption as “Kojo Sam Quaye Junior”(p. 60). It can then be concluded from this that Mansa is portrayed by Adei XE "Adei" as a victim and a liberator of other women living under the yoke of humiliation and dehumanization from the menfolk and the patriarchal setting. By so doing, he has proved to the reader that frustration, humiliation, and dehumanization can make one adopt radical ways which are sometimes opposed to traditionally

accepted norms. Again, he has legitimated Mansa's use of violence, both psychologically and physically, towards Baaba, Sam's and Esi's daughter, in the name of freedom. In short, the way of portraying Mansa as a violent woman proves Adei's support for the feminist paradigm. Dutton & Tonia (2005) postulate that "[...] the notion that domestic violence is primarily a culturally supported male enterprise and that female violence is always defensive and reactive" (p. 683). Men's violence against women could be strengthened by women's violence against children. This is shown by Sam's battering of Mansa for maltreating his daughter, Baaba. As Uzuegbunam (2013) XE "Uzuegbunam" rightly observes,

The prevalence of women's violence by women themselves is high and has been considered as an important factor in the persistence of violence against women. If the owners of land desecrate the land they live in, they would not blame anybody for the land's extinction. Any house divided among itself can never stand (p. 190).

In conclusion, Adei, through his literary oeuvre, *A Beautiful Daughter*, has shown that Mansa's adoption of womanism and radical feminism is meant to help her cope with humiliation, dehumanization and injustice caused by the patriarchal structure of the Ghanaian society. He has also shown through her that, whatever school of thought women adopt, they should bear in mind that their common enemy is the patriarchal structure of the society. Therefore, if women who have children without fathers ill-treat children to safeguard their rights, this can surely bring about male violence. In the next sub-section, we embark on women's economic empowerment as women's shield against patriarchal oppression in Amma Darko's *The Housemaid*.

3.2. Women's Economic Empowerment as a Shield against Patriarchal Oppression in Amma Darko's *The Housemaid*

Many scholars have identified women's empowerment as an efficient means against male oppression. Whitmore(1988, p. 13) defines empowerment as "an interactive process through which people experience personal and social change, enabling them to take action to achieve influence over the organizations and institutions which affect their lives and the communities in which they live." In the same way, Luttrell *et al.* (2009, p. 16) note that "empowerment is defined in terms of both individual capacities and collective action to address inequalities." Women can be empowered socially, economically, politically and culturally. Economic empowerment of women as a means of fighting against male domination is noticed in Amma Darko's *The Housemaid* through her female characters: Sekyiwa, Tika, her daughter, Teacher, Mami Korkor, etc.

Women's economic dependence is one of the situations which submit them to male domination. It is usually advocated by many feminist critics that women should fight to free themselves economically (Amouzou, 2014, p. 15). In fact, Darko has economically empowered most of her female characters. She does not portray women in her fictional text as mere domestic housewives. She represents them as economically self-actualized individuals. These female characters bear such metonymic expressions as "*the yam woman*", "*the tomato seller*", "*a tiger nut-seller*", "*the cassava seller*", "*a garden-egg seller*", "*the salt seller*" and "*the okra seller*" (Darko, 1998, pp.7, 8-12) (italics ours). For instance, Mami Korkor is depicted in the fiction as someone who alone caters for her children when her husband has failed in his role as a father. Darko informs her reader that "She had to hawk fish dawn to dusk to earn just enough to feed herself and her four children. They all depended on her. Not a pesewa came from their father."

Feminist ideology should not encourage (as sexism has done) women to believe they are powerless. It should clarify for women the powers they exercise daily and show them ways these powers can be used to resist sexist domination and exploitation (hooks, 1994, p. 242). By empowering her female characters economically, Darko has valorized them socially. For instance, in a public debate as regards whose responsibility it is in a case of child dumping, a woman called a tomato seller openly shuns a man: "'Shut up! SHUT UP!' the tomato woman shouted. 'Why do you men always try to make nonsense of issues, just to escape blame?'" (Darko, 1998, p.7) In the same vein, another woman, supporting her sister, discourages a male cart pusher by deliberately cutting down the price of carting her yams, which in actual fact is a covert threat or warning: 'Then as for this, my brother, let me shut my big mouth up before my madam customer here decides to let someone else cart her yams,' quipped the scarred pusher."(pp.7-8) Again, she has proved, through Tika, a school drop-out but a young successful businesswoman, that "Money is the power word. Not book."(p. 24). That infers that someone who is educated but does not have money has no power in the contemporary Ghanaian society. Money actually helps Tika and her mother, Sekyiwa, to reduce or cope with patriarchal oppressions. In the novel, Sekyiwa, is depicted as one of the wealthiest market mummies (p.18). She is also represented as a cougar; she pays young men to satisfy her sexual desires in that her husband's libido has grown weak: "She gave them [young men] good money; they gave her good sex. Life's satisfaction shone in her eyes." (p.18). Likewise, Tika, Sekyiwa's daughter, uses her money to pay the school fees of her first school boyfriend, Owuraku. As the writer informs the reader, "By the time, Owuraku had finished with the sixth form and was going on to the university Tika was providing for all his needs."(p.22) Although Owuraku and Tika finally end their relationship because he cannot accept her bedding custom officers and

others to earn more profits in her business, she is not as harsh as her mother, who calls her husband's manhood 'dead penis'.

As it is obvious in the foregoing, Darko has also empowered the above-mentioned female characters through sexuality. In fact, feminist scholars claim that sexuality is a liberating power for women. In *The Housemaid*, a female character called Akua in her search for a better life, decides to move from her native village Kataso to Kumasi. But she happens not to have money to pay the driver. Instead she willingly accepts to pay him with sex. This can be deduced from the following dialogue between Akua and the driver: "“You have the money to pay me?” ‘No’. He grunted. ‘So you won’t pay me?’ Akua unbuttoned her blouse. The driver’s eyes blazed with consent. She removed her pants. He grinned, and stopped the truck in a scheduled bend. ‘But don’t make me pregnant,’ Akua cautioned”(pp.30-31). In the foregoing text, Akua barters sex (her body) for a trip to Kumasi. Here, the female depiction counters conventional gender positioning in African literature in that it encodes a sexuality which is characterized by ownership and freedom. This is to say that the narrator portrays the young woman as the owner of her body (or sex) and as such, is free to decide however she wants to use it. In fact, this is a form of empowerment against the traditional shackles of patriarchy. The same trend is noticed in many anonymous girls in the city who are Akua’s friends. They exchange their bodies for means of survival in the city. One of them proudly says “The owner of my base has returned from abroad and wants to resume work on his building, so I had to bribe Atinga yesterday with a couple of quick rounds behind the blue kiosk to get him to find me a new place”(p. 95).

In this fictional text, while Darko obviously gives a picture of a hellish condition women are forced to go through in society, she actually represents them as people who have this condition under control. They actually do so through/with their sexuality. The case of Tika, a businesswoman, is indicative here. She, under constraint, beds various men:“Shop owners, bank managers, customs officers”(p. 23). Though these men overtly or covertly think that they are using her, she, as repeatedly indicated in the novel, is the one who is actually using them in that each of them has a utilitarian role that they play in her life. They all help her make more profits in her business. For instance, Samuel, a customs officer at the border, by accepting sex instead of cash from Tika as bribe, unconsciously helps her cut down the customs duties she has to pay on her imported goods.

Some customs officers accepted cash bribes in exchange for reduced tariffs but this did not apply to Samuel, the chief customs officer at the border, when the businesswoman involved happened to be young and pretty. He turned down Tika’s cash offer and indicated lewdly that what he wanted from her was sex (p.23).

Feminists [have] protested against male-dominated portrayals of women as sex objects, but expressing disgust at stereotypes alone would not bring change (Holmes, 2000, p. 237). In fact, Darko has represented the sexual behaviour of her female characters radically. By so doing, she has espoused what Shulman (1980, p. 596) says about early radical feminist ideas about sex:

What were the early radical feminist ideas about sex? Naturally, as Women's Liberation Movement [WLM] was a political movement the new attention directed by radical feminists to our sexuality had to do with power; with taking for ourselves the control of our lives and our bodies that men- through the laws, customs, and other institutions of a male-ruled society- had appropriated.

Conclusion

Patriarchy is a system where most societal powers and considerations are vested on men at the expense of women. It has been identified by radical feminist and womanist scholars as one of the oppressing forces that hinder gender equality. This article has examined how female characters in African patriarchal settings of two Ghanaian male and female novels, Asare Adei's *A Beautiful Daughter* (2012) and Amma Darko's *The Housemaid* (1998) have been able to face men's oppressions of women.

The male and female authors have used womanist concept and radical feminist ideology to give voice to women against men's patriarchal oppressions through the way they depict their female characters. The findings have revealed that majority of the female characters are empowered economically and socially in the male and female fictional texts, and this has enabled them to combat men's patriarchal oppressions. The female characters' reactions vary from one another. Some of them have made use of pacific ways such as dialogue, feminine solidarity or sisterhood in their attempts to address men's patriarchal oppressions, while others have made use of violence against men and children in their quest for justice and equality.

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