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De-Structuring Social Orders for Social Change: A Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Excerpts from Two Contemporary Literary Artifacts

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Abstract: This study is an attempt to examine how power is invested along gender lines through language choice in patriarchal societies. It also seeks to evaluate the way the female characters of the novels at issues shift from established ideologies regarding the portrayal of woman in fictional writings by female authors. In that regard, it draws on the broad Critical Theory diversely termed Critical Language Study (Fairclough, 1989), Critical Discourse Studies (Bloor & Bloor, 2007), Critical Linguistics (Wodak, 2001), Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 2012; Van Dijk 1995/2003), and more particularly on the Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (Lazar, 2007), to analyze actual products of interaction, i.e. texts, in fictional works (*Purple Hibiscus Everything Good Will Come* and) by two Anglophone African female writers, namely Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Sefi Atta. The research work reveals that both feminist authors endeavor, through their crafted characters, to deconstruct the social orders which have up till now downgraded or discriminated woman. This is definitely a crucial step in bringing out social and cultural change in the power relationship between the womenfolk and their male counterpart.

Keywords: Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, Language, Feminism, Power, Orders Of Discourse.

INTRODUCTION

Of the numerous functions it is called on to serve in social interactions, language is used to exercise and preserve power and privilege in society. As a matter of fact, language buttresses social institutions and is abused in the exercise of power and suppression of human rights (Widdowson, 1998; cited in Dooga, 2009). It has particularly been used to place and maintain the female gender under the fiddle of the scale. Indeed, for many years language has served to make women the excluded, the marginalized, and the deliberately oppressed. Endorsing this claim, Ofosu (2013) contends that "from girlhood to womanhood, the African woman has had to contend with many issues that militate against her 'being' as she journeys through life's winding cycles dictated by culture" (p.178). That marginalization, as argued by critical discourse analysts, has been however naturalized in such a way that those who suffer as a consequence, we mean women, fail to realize how many things that appear to be 'natural' and 'normal' are not at all so. The reason for this attitude, as underscored by Ofosu (ibid), is that society does not provide avenues for women to vent for their frustrations. In the same vein, Eggins asserts that in many interactive situations we do not in fact have many realistic choices to make. If we want to behave "appropriately" we have to accept the social definition of interpersonal relationships in that particular situation (Eggins, 1994).

However, with the flourishing of female writings, the sacred order which has hitherto deflated the female gender, is being questioned again and again through issues depicting the plight of womanhood. In two of such artefacts, especially *Purple Hibiscus* and *Everything Good Will Come* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Sefi Atta respectively, some characters created purposely, attempt to disarticulate the social norms that constrain gender inequality in society. The pursued objective here is, of course, to question the (unequal) power relationship between men and females for social change in society. Before undertaking the analysis proper, it is necessary to review what has so far been published on gender-language-power relationship, as well as the theories the present research work is premised on.

RELATED LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Related Literature Review

The issue of woman's place in society, or the role allotted to the womenfolk, has been of utmost concern for scholars or woman rights advocators/activists since the influx of such western theories as feminism, womanism, motherism, lesbianism, etc. The studies carried out in that sense attempt, in the first place, to identify the factors that account for the asymmetrical power relationship

between the two sexes, then to advocate for a representation or re-definition of women's identity in the society.

Weatherall (2002) sets a close relationship among the terms gender, language and discourse. According to her, it is through language (and discourse) that gender is produced and gains significance as a social category. She further states that two major theoretical frameworks have polarized the gender and language field. The first one is 'the *dominance'* approach, which explains women's language as a consequence of the relatively powerless position of women compared to men. The second framework, the '*difference'* or '*cultural'* approach, considers the speech of women and men to be alignment to a particular set of cultural values. It follows from this that the cultural norms or values established through settled institutions contribute, by means of language, to dominating the female, while granting the man a certain privilege or power. The scholar thus concludes that language not only reflects and perpetuates gender but language constitutes gender and produces sexism as social reality.

Holding the same view, Oluwayomi (2013) argues that gender is a socially constructed order; it is used to capture the differential roles of sexes in the society. From this, the analyst notices that pre-designed roles assigned by cultures and tradition limit the woman from attaining possible self-fulfilment. He therefore suggests that women's identity be redefined through a new gender order where equality, respect, and trust reign supreme. In concrete terms, he cogently recommends female bonding and/or solidarity as a major catalyst that springs women liberation in the society.

Attempting to demonstrate the close link between language, power and ideology, Koutchade & Amoussou (2017) undertake a critical linguistics analysis of gender representation in stretches of Amma Darko's prose fiction *Faceless*. Their aim here is to unravel how some discursive practices (or language use) can contribute to producing, sustaining and changing social relations of power between male and female. For that purpose, they cull and analyze from the abovementioned novel five discourse samples. They draw on both the Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics (notably Transitivity profiles) and Van Dijk's (2001) analytical framework. The findings disclose that in its everyday use, language contributes to the domination of women by their male counterparts. They also pinpoint how male characters have been projected in a negative light as a form of female vengeance. To conclude the researchers suggest that women break their silence by getting sound education viewed as the best weapon against all kinds of stereotypes imposed by patriarchal society.

As for Koussouhon *et al.* (2015), they explore how male characters are portrayed in four of Amma Darko's prose works. Drawing on feminist linguistics, they showcase, select some textual snippets from the four novels wherein male characters are portrayed in the roles they play as husbands or fathers or lovers. The results reveal that Darko evaluates male activities negatively, portrays them in roles that represent them as brutish, exploitative, eccentric, materialistic, lustful, greedy, deceitful, reckless and heartless. The linguists infer from this study that Darko subtly deconstructs patriarchy and overtly challenges its underlying sexist or androcentric ideologies.

Unlike the previous scholars who investigate male portrayal in prose fictions, Olusola (2016) attempts the misrepresentations of women in Nollywood movies. In that perspective, he carries out a lexical and sentential analysis of feminist ideology of the renowned film maker Tunde Kelani's two movies *Arugba* and *Ma'ami*. The analyst adopts Norman Fairclough's model of Critical Discourse Analysis to explain the way linguistic features are used to instantiate feminist ideology in the movies. Contrary to the common movies which project women as witches and sex slaves, *Arugba* and *Ma'ami* project the strength of womanhood. Indeed, linguistic features such as lexical indices, mood system, allusion, simile are examined. It is discovered that women can determine their fate regardless of what roles the society gives them and could survive even under the worst patriarchy. The paper recommends that movie stakeholders should give responsible roles to women and women should be sensitive and alive to their responsibilities as regulators of social political Nigerian entity.

Allagbe & Amoussou (2020) explore gendered characters (dis) empowering in discourses from Daniel Mengara's *Mema*. As a sociolinguistic analysis, the study posits that there is no such thing called an absolute powerful/powerless person, a sex/gender or social group in social life. To probe that contention, it draws on Norman Fairclough's notion of power and Michael A. K. Halliday's concept of register combined with qualitative approach to explore in four selected discourses from the novel at stake how gendered characters are empowered and disempowered at will. The findings display that Mema is surprisingly empowered at the expense of her male counterparts (Pepa and the male speaker) D1, Akoma is positioned as powerful also at the expense of her husband, Nkulanveng, in D2, but Nkulanveng, the elder from Biloghe's village and Old Meleng are all discursively empowered respectively in D3 and D4.

These discoveries do corroborate Van Dijk's (2003) view that "power is seldom absolute" (p.388); that is, it *is not a God-given or an essential right of a person, a sex/gender or a social group over others* (Allagbe & Amoussou, 2020); it can be won or lost depending on contextual events, and participants' awareness and commitment to change orders of

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discourse via discursive and/or non discursive social practices. Before attempting to showcase this through the linguistic and the extra-linguistic choices made in the novels under study, it is worth turning to the theories we adopt in this paper.

Theoretical Underpinnings

The current study is a critical analysis of discourses (or language uses) from writings by feminist authors. This implies that it draws, not on a specific method of analysis, but on a cluster of approaches since "critical discourse analysis subsumes a variety of approaches towards the social analysis of discourse" (Fairclough, 2012). In clearer terms, the theoretical framework employed in this inquiry is, as stated by Weiss & Wodak (2003) "eclectic and unsystematic" (p.6). As a matter of fact, we draw theoretical insights from three distinct but complementary disciplines, viz., gender studies, CDA, and FCDA.

Indeed, the whole study is rooted on the issue of gender. Taking account of the cultural, situational and ideological contexts of the events narrated in the literary artifacts under study, gender is meant to denote two things: (i) the socially constructed difference which forms the basis of inequality, oppression and exploitation between sexes (Oluwayomi, 2013) as set by patriarchal norms, and (ii) Butler's Performative Theory which assimilates the concept to a doing, practice or act, one performs in order to become a man or a woman (Koussouhon *et al.,* 2016). As socially constituted norms, gender attaches cultural roles to the classification of people into sexual categories. Drawing on this, Koutchade & Amoussou (2017) uphold that gender refers to the array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviours, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. For Ezeigbo (1999; cited in Amouzou, 2006), "gender is constructed along psychological, cultural and social lines" (p.25). However, with the advent of feminist theory, gender issues have been re-evaluated. In fact, scholars observe that gender is a shifting category, something that is not fixed but fluid. It appears hence as an action someone performs rather than an attribute or trait a person is ascribed. Endorsing this, Holmes & Meyerhoff (2003) assert that "to suggest that gender is something one continually does is to challenge the idea that gender is something one has. A variety of metaphors have arisen to capture this idea: gender as activity, gender as performance, gender as accomplishment" (p.27). It stands to reason from this that gender is a performed role which is constantly created by one's interactions with others and one's reactions to those interactions. Gender identity, in this case, is set by what 'one does', i.e., one's acts or deeds. As Butler (1988; cited in Koussouhon *et al.,* 2015) highlights, gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time-an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Those acts or gendered identities are inquired by scholars in a literary, linguistic, sociological, anthropological, historical, ethnographical, etc., perspective or a blend of them.

Talking of the critical stance adopted by some researchers or activists, especially feminists, on the question of gender, it is commonly known as Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis, a concept which originated from CDA. Diversely termed, CDA is a critical linguistic approach which is fundamentally concerned with analyzing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language (Wodak, 2001; cited in Koussouhon & Amoussou, 2017; Koussouhon *et al.,* 2018). Simply put, CDA takes an interest in the ways in which linguistic forms are used to express relations of unequal power. In that perspective, it attempts to critically analyze the relationship between language, ideology and society. Abounding in this line, Kress (1996) contends that critical studies of language (or CDA) aim to "bring a system of excessive inequalities of power into crisis by uncovering its workings and its effects through the analysis of potent cultural objects-texts- and thereby to help in achieving a more equitable social order" (p.15). Many studies in CDA with a gender focus adopt a critical feminist view of gender relations with the view to changing substantively the existing conditions of these relations.

In bringing together CDA and feminist studies scholars devise the theory of Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth FCDA), or Feminist Critical Studies, to advance a rich and nuanced understanding of the complex workings of power and ideology in sustaining (hierarchically) gendered social arrangements. It follows then that FCDA aims "to show up the complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities" (Lazar, 2007). In other words, FCDA is concerned with demystifying the interrelationships of gender, power and ideology in discourse. Simply put, the central concern of feminist critical discourse analysts is with critiquing discourses which sustain a patriarchal social order-relations of power that systematically privilege men as a social group, and disadvantage, exclude, and disempower women as a social group.

In practical terms, the feminist critical discourse analyst's role is to examine how power and dominance are discursively produced and/or (counter-)resisted in a variety of ways through textual representations of gendered social practices, and through interactional strategies of talk (Lazar, ibid: 149). It stands to infer from the foregoing that a FCDA approach is obviously interdisciplinary in nature. In this

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article, the interdisciplinarity will operate in two ways. First, in terms of methodology, we shall undertake close textual analysis of written discourses (drawn from the novels at stake) with a view to interpreting and explaining societal structures. Second, in terms of theoretical and empirical insights, the paper draws on a range of approaches such as Systemic Functional Linguistics, CDA, gender studies, and feminist studies. For the moment, it is worth enhancing the understanding of the topic through delineation of some useful concepts.

CONCEPTUAL TOOLS

Such concepts as social practice, orders of discourse, and social change are focal terms without which it will not be easy to capture the overall meaning of the topic of the current research work.

Social Practice and Orders of Discourse

Social practices can be thought of as articulations of different types of social element which are associated with particular areas of social life-the social practice of classroom teaching, for example (Fairclough, 2003). Van Leeuwen (2008) views social practices in more simple terms as «socially regulated ways of doing things» (p.6). In other words, social practices define particular ways of acting. It follows from this that social practices encompass both discourse (hence language) and non-discoursal elements. In this sense, Fairclough (2012) identifies the constitutive elements of social practices. These include Activities, Social relations, Objects and instruments, Time and place, Social subjects, with beliefs, knowledge, values, etc., and Semiosis. Although different, those elements are dialectically related, that is, they are not fully discrete, not fully separate elements, but are related one way or another. For instance, shopping typically involves both verbal communication with the shop assistant and an economic transaction. Talking and paying are thus two moments articulated together with the practice of shopping.

Orders of discourse, on the other hand, are intimately related to social practice. In that regard, Fairclough views an order of discourse as « a network of social practices in its language aspect» (Fairclough, 2003). He adapts the concept of order of discourse from Foucault (1981) to refer to « the ordered set of discursive practices associated with a particular social domain or institution (e.g. the lecture, the seminar, counseling, and informal conversation, in an academic institution), and boundaries and relationships between them» (Fairclough, 1995). It can be inferred from the foregoing, as sustained by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002), that the order of discourse is the sum of all the genres and discourses which are in use within a specific social domain. Put another way, the order of discourse constitutes the resources that are available. It delimitates what can be said.

It follows thus that the elements of orders of discourse are not things like nouns and sentences (elements of linguistic structures), but discourses, genres and styles. These elements select certain possibilities defined by languages and exclude others. Examples of orders of discourse include the order of discourse of the media, the order of discourse of the university, etc. Orders of discourse can therefore be regarded as the social organization and control of linguistic variation. However, Faircough (2001) upholds that an order of discourse is not a closed or rigid system, but rather an open system, which is put at risk by what happens in actual interactions. From this, it can be claimed that language users can change the order of discourse by using discourses and genres in new ways; thus generating social change.

Social Change

As stated above, orders of discourse are open systems which can be influenced by what happens in actual interactions. Endorsing that contention, Fairclough (2003) claims that texts as elements of social events have causal effects, i.e. they bring about changes. More immediately, text can bring about changes in our knowledge, our beliefs, our attitudes, values and so forth. It is important to emphasize from this that orders of discourse may change over time and these changes are determined by changing the power relations at social interactions. As Fairclough (1995) asserts:

> « We […] live in an age of great change and instability in which the forms of power and domination, are being radically reshaped, in which changing cultural practices are a major constituent of social change, which in many cases means to a significant degree changing discursive practices, changing practices of language use» (p.219).

It should be assumed that the rhythm of change in orders of discourse will mostly depend on the awareness of the underprivileged, as well as their commitment to put an end to the unfair condition they are subjected to. The next section will unveil, through a critical investigation of discourse types, how various orders of discourse are reproduced, resisted, or changed in given social practices.

CRITICAL ASSESSMENT OF SELECTED DISCOURSES

The coming analysis will be conducted in two phases. First, discourses (or snippets) sustaining patriarchal orders of discourse will be examined. Then, we shall dissect discourses that attempt to de-structure those set orders.

ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONALIZED GENDERED DISCOURSES

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Motherhood, Male Violence, and Woman's Submissiveness in Purple Hibiscus

Although *Purple Hibiscus* has received considerable critical attention since its publication in 2003 (Tunca, 2009), it still deserves appraisal as most of the studies undertaken on it have lack critical linguistic or critical discourse analysis standpoint. Motherhood, viewed as "the *potential* relationship of any woman to her powers of reproduction and to children; and the *institution*, which aims at ensuring that that potential- and all women-shall remain under male control (Rich, 1986, p. 13; cited in Mtenje, 2016, p. 66; emphasis in original), is clearly portrayed in the beginning of the novel. Informing her daughter Kambili about her pregnancy, Beatrice (Mama) goes on to explain:

> "God is faithful. You know after you came and I had he miscarriages, the villagers started to whisper. The members of our *umunna* even sent people to your father to urge him to have children with someone else. So many people had willing daughters, and many of them were university graduates, too. They might have borne many sons and taken over our home and driven us out, like Mr. Ezendu's second wife did. But your father stayed with me, with us". (p. 28).

It is clear from the statement above that in Eugène (Mama's husband)'s *umunna* (extended family), motherhood is likened to the capacity of a woman to procreate children, and more precisely male children. This is a typical representation of African patriarchal society where "a female child's primacy worth is her ability to produce a male child for her husband, for the child is the one who will continue the family name" (Mtenje, ibid: 67). This is in fact a short-sighted view of the woman's role which is unfortunately limited to procreation of (especially) male child. Commenting on that precept of the African traditional society, Anate (2014) argues that "they [mothers] are sometimes unjustly blamed for the child (female) they have made" (p.30) as if they had the capacity to willingly decide on the sex of the child to give birth to. Discontented at that practice, Uko (2006, cited in Oluwayomi, 2013) revengefully asserts: … it is now unattainable, obnoxious and unacceptable that womanhood is validated only through motherhood and procreation, where procreation implies the male-child principle" (p.377).

Rather than harshly go against that unfair position allotted to her, Beatrice seems to internalize such patriarchal dictates, and thinks she had better thank her husband for not complying with his family's requirements. Indeed, Beatrice has no choice but reason that way as she herself has been socialized in "a social structure that encourages gender marginalization and/or women enslavement backed up by age-long customs and native laws" (Oluwayomi, 2013). That internalization makes Mama submissively and stoically undergo abhorrent treatments from her husband. The narrator relates one of those unpleasant scenes as follows:

> Mama looked around the room. She stared at the wall clock for a while, the one with the broken second hand, before she turned to me. "You know that small table where we keep the family Bible, *nne*? Your father broke it on my belly". She sounded as if she were talking about someone else, as if the table were not made of sturdy wood. "My blood finished on that floor even before he took me to St. Agnes. My doctor said there was nothing he could do to save it." Mama shook her head slowly. A thin line of tears crawled down her cheeks as though it had been a struggle for them to get out of her eyes. (p. 253).

It can be inferred from the above excerpt that Eugène coldly exerts violence over his wife, even while the latter is pregnant. He is made Actor of the material process "broke" of which "belly" is a Goal, to show that he is the doer (or the performer) of aggressive acts on her wife. That unexpected behavior is so cruel that it consequently leads to (another) miscarriage. This is a disgusting case of ***domestic violence*** which, in Akunola & Ojo (2012)'s words, "accounts for more injuries to women than car accidents, muggings, and rapes combined" (p.135).

Despite the pains she internally feels, Beatrice seems to be bothered to narrate her misadventure ("she looked around the room", "she stared at the wall for a wall", "she sounded as if she were talking about someone else, as if the table were not made of sturdy wood"). Unable to retaliate or at least express openly her pent-up feelings, she surprisingly rejects her sister-in-law's advice not to go back to her husband so soon. She typically objects in the following terms:

> "Where would I go if I leave Eugène's house? Tell me, where would I go"? she did not wait for Aunty Ifeoma to respond. "Do you know how many mothers pushed their daughters at him? Do you know how many asked him to impregnate them, and not to bother paying a bride price?" (p. 255)

These four directives can rhetorically be interpreted both as a sign of incapacity to take a stand, and a consequence of patriarchal brainwashing of woman's mind. The incapacity concerned here is due to Mama's entire dependence on her husband. Attempting an explanation of Beatrice's reaction hereof, Mtenje (2016) assumes that: "Beatrice, whose *social and economic existence* is *tied to her abusive husband*, is trapped in a particular order which does not give her economic and social empowerment to break away from her oppressed status in life. She sees futility in breaking away from Eugene because of *over depending on her*

husband in everything, whether economic or social" (p. 70) (emphasis not in the original). In those conditions, the woman is compelled to get stuck to the cultural mores which maintain her in a subjugated position and prevent her from subverting the constraints imposed upon her. However, with formal education and the advent of such western ideologies as feminism, womanism, etc., these orders, set for long through powerful institutions, need be questioned to suit the new requirements of today modern society. In the following sub-section, we shall be concerned with how those orders are depicted in *EGWC*.

Woman's Subjugation, Institutionalized Marriage and Rape in EGWC

The enslavement or better, subjugation of women is the basic tenet of the patriarchal system. In Atta's debut novel, she focuses on it at several parts of the fictional narrative. In the excerpt below, the mortification of the woman gender is cautiously depicted:

> I had seen how women respected men and ended up shouldering burdens like one of those people who carried firewood on their head, with their necks as high as church spires and foreheads crushed. Too many women, I though, ended treating domestic frustrations like mild cases of indigestion…We, their daughters, were expected to continue. (p.184)

It can be inferred from the above that it is expected from women thorough respect which can culminate in 'domestic frustrations'. This total submission, as assumed, is set 'to continue' or to perpetuate from generation to generation. One channel of transmission of such a debilitating practice is through marriage, traditionally institutionalized as "autocratic and tyrannical empire ruled by the man" (Akung, 2012). This shows through the extract below:

> Better to be ugly, to be crippled, to be a thief even, than to be barren. We had both been raised to believe that our greatest days would be the birth of our child, our wedding and graduation days in that order. A woman may be forgiven for having a child out of wedlock if she had no hope of getting married, and she would be dissuaded from getting married if she didn't have a degree. Marriage could immediately wipe out a sluttish past, but angel or not, a woman had to have a child. (p. 105).

According to the narrator, being 'barren' (which can be scientifically accounted for), is viewed as more dangerous than, for instance, being 'a thief'. In addition, giving birth to a child as a result of a marriage (or outside the conjugal space) is the greatest treasure a woman can get. Having a child, no matter one's social and economic status, becomes a crucial requirement of the patriarchal system. However, Anate (2014) bitterly criticizes this ideological belief, claiming that "perpetuating this 'have-children-for-the-sake-of-having-children' policy" (p.29) is cynical and fatal.

Although rape is not a phenomenon set explicitly by patriarchy, it of course, derives from the stack and demeaning situations the woman has to undergo under that system. In the following, Enitan describes her friend Sheri after her being raped by her boyfriend:

> Tears ran down her face. I sat her in the chair and went to the kitchen to get a bucket and brush. The water gushed into the bucket and I wonder why I was so angry with her.... Laughing with boys, following them around, thinking she was one of them. Now I could smell their semen on her…Damola and his friends, they would suffer for what they did. (p.68)

It is inferable from this that Sheri is naively raped because she simply trusts her age group boys. In a society where, through the weapon of silence, the woman's voice is muffled, even little boys assume to be masters and accordingly take undue advantage on their counterparts, viz., girls. After all, the poor girl has to undergo by herself the lasting effects of such an execrable act. As the narrator informs later, "Sheri had gotten pregnant from the rape" (p.73). In the light of all those socio-cultural practices which violate human rights and impede the woman's creativity and social development, it is time to redefine or reevaluate the woman image. This view accords with Olusola`s (2016) observation that, "nowadays, women […] are becoming a force to reckon with. It is, therefore, important that a change of approach is adopted for the representation of […] women" (p. 73). Hence, the need to question or interrogate the existing orders of discourse in view to ultimately de-constructing them.

ANALYSIS OF DE-CONSTRUCTED ORDERS DISCOURSES

Ideological Effects in Purple Hibiscus

To begin with, it is important to stress that ideological effects are the effects of texts in inculcating and sustaining or changing ideologies (Fairclough, 2003). Here, the analysis is going to focus essentially on the enactment of discourses (or fragments) that contribute to changing common ideological representations or power relations between men and women. As a matter of fact, Aunty Ifeoma, Eugene's sister, is a perfect epitome of the feminist voice in the novel. Portraying her masculine character vis-à-vis Papa, Kambili asserts:

> Every time Aunty Ifeoma spoke to Papa, my heart stopped then started again in a hurry. It was the flippant tone; she did not seem to recognize that it was Papa, that he was different, special. I wanted to reach out and press her lips shut and get some of that shiny bronze lipstick on my fingers. (p. 85)

In this instance, it is obvious that Aunty Ifeoma, unlike Kambili's amazement, speaks to Papa on a perspective that translates as a conscious negation of the perception of Eugene as a 'god'. Indeed, Aunty Ifeoma's "flippant tone" is meant to demystify the authoritative character imbued in Papa as an embodiment of androcentric system. That reaction of Eugene's sister, she owes it to her (a) financial independence and (b) the education she gets which enlighten her and precludes her from blindly internalizing patriarchal customs and mores. That's why at the university where she teaches she doesn't care telling anyone (even the vice-chancellor) what she beliefs in her mindset.

As for Beatrice, she can no longer continue coping with the loathsome conditions her husband compelled her to live. Fed up with Eugene's tyranny, and in view to getting her children and herself liberated from her husband's jaws, she astoundingly decides to poison Kambili's father. She herself relates the events to her progeny:

> "They did an autopsy", she said. "They have found the poison in your father's body" (p.294).

It should, however, be noticed that while reporting the event, Mama feels no regret about her deed. On the contrary,

> she sounded as though the poison in Papa's body was something we all had known about, something we had put in there to be found… when she spoke, her voice was just as calm and slow. (ibid)

That unexpectedly bold act can be accounted from two perspectives. First, it is, following Okuyade (2009, as quoted in Mtenje, 2016), her way of "factur[ing] the patriarchal social structure" that imposes restrictions on her at all costs. Second, the author makes Beatrice perform such a radical act to express her feminist voice and show, in the way of Deacon (2003: 180, cited in Mtenje, 2016) that "resistance is not an external struggle *against* power, but an internal and dyadic exercise of power relations, over others as much as over ourselves… In power as in war, action and reaction are always relational". (p.73)

Woman's Liberation, Assertiveness and Affirmation of Identity in EGWC

In the face of those harsh cultural and societal norms, the female gender feels the need to rise for her liberation and her emancipation. This is what Enitan, the narrator in *EGWC*, decides to tell her uncle Fatai in these terms:

> I could hear my colleagues talking behind the door. I wanted to say that I didn't know how to think like an African woman. I only knew how to think for myself. (p.287)

In the above statement, Enitan is claiming her right 'to think for [her] self', not to be dictated what to think as a good woman- to borrow Ann (2015) terms-. As a matter of fact, the 'good woman' is that woman who suffers the effects of oppression, and neglect, and who must maintain a silence and passivity in order to remain good. Conversely, the emancipated woman is thought of as a '***real woman***' committed to getting out of the mould shaped for her by patriarchy. In Atta's view, the real woman should be active, courageous, bold and assertive. Through one of her female characters, namely Enitan, she showcases this in the following lines:

> 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. Then whoever plucked it out would say, "Look, it's her humility. She choked on it. Now she's dead". This may have been my redemption, since my husband needed a wife he could at least pity. Later that night, he called me aside and say, "Why did you have to say that in front of my brothers?"
>
> "Well, why can't you ever get them drinks for once?" I answered. "Why can't you go to the kitchen? What will happen if you go? Will a snake bite your leg?" (p. 184)

Enitan tenaciously sustains that the woman has the same rights with the man. Subsequently, she shouldn't show him respect, at least total respect as imposed by patriarchy. Beyond a mere intention, she overtly tells her husband that all that he is asking her to do, he has to do it by himself. In fact, this is a clarion call to all women that the time has come that they speak up to demonstrate that their place is not in the kitchen. In rising her voice thus, the woman is likely to affirm her identity as can be noticed below:

> When situations became trickier, my tasks became smaller. My husband asked why I was leaving him. "I have to", I replied. Three words; I could say them. (p.323)

Once again, Atta is casting a call to women, worldwide, that whenever the atmosphere becomes unbearable, they have no option but leave, to search their autonomy, their independence. However, the Nigerian female writer advises that the woman react bitterly if need be, as can be noticed in Sheri's following words to her husband brigadier:

> Telling me I'm a whore for going out. Your mother is the whore. Raise a hand to hit Sheri Bakare, and your hand will never be the same again. Stupid man… (p. 169)

From the above appears the feminist voice of the author. In fact, she believes that for women to move out of that oppressive system which has hitherto

maintained them in subjugation, they sometimes need to fight back, to retaliate because "freedom was never intended to be sweet. It was responsibility from the onset, for a people, a person, to fight for, and hold unto" (Atta, 2006). The question that remains unsolved though is how the feminist standpoint displayed in the two novels can evolve into social change in real life.

From Authorial Feminism to Social Change

Chimamanda and Atta have shown in their fictional narratives that despite the (tiny) roles society assigns women, they can blossom provided they commit themselves to changing their fate. Through such characters as Aunty Ifeoma, Beatrice and Enitan, they come to prove the feminist dimension of their literary artefacts. By making those characters assertive and sometimes bashing, the two authors plainly uphold that the woman must fight for her space no matter the patriarchal constraints or inhibitions laid on her because, as argued by Fairclough (1989), "being socially constrained does not preclude from being creative" (p.28). It stands to reason that no effective transformation of the woman conditions can occur unless the womenfolk undertake social struggle.

That struggle may take several forms. It may consist in (i) developing strategies of discourse dissent and resistance (Van Dijk, 2008), or (ii) getting involved in strenuous non discursive actions. In the first case, the woman deliberately breaks the ***silence*** imposed upon her by patriarchal lordship to "muffl[e]or mut[e] her voice or browbea[t] her to remain voiceless" (Orie, 2010; cited in Akung, 2012). Alone or in groups, the committed woman attempts to prove, as Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) put it, that actual ***discursive practices*** contribute to maintaining or transforming a given social order, including existing power relations. Indeed, Atta lucidly subscribes to this through the following advice given to Anitan by Ameh: "Use your voice to bring about change" (Atta, 2006).

With respect to the second type of social struggle, the means used transcends the 'discursive occasions' (Weiss and Wodak, 2003) to take the form of concrete actions. In a bid to display their pent-up feelings, (feminist) writers often make their characters indulge in unimaginable deeds in order to bring radical change about man-woman unequal social relations. Here, the authors intentionally craft active and ***assertive*** personae to vent and avert the sufferings the woman use to passively undergo or go through.

It should however be highlighted that beyond the scale of fictional writings, change is a social reality every woman is longer for. It is our strong conviction that that ***social change*** is a sine qua non condition for social stability and development. As a matter of fact, no human society can thrive if it promotes unequal relationships between the gender sets. Pewissi (2017) cogently subscribes to this position when he writes: "no human community can prosper and ensure the welfare of the whole community without involving the other" (p. 60). This contention is a call to ***cooperation*** and mutual understanding between the two sexes.

However, women should recognize that it's up to them, either individually or in groups, to take responsibility of their lives in their hands by showing strong will, determination or commitment, hope and cooperative sense. Once they get organized into sisterhood or bonding, they must consider the menfolk as an ally, not an enemy, to lead the battle for social justice and equality.

Last, but not least, ***woman empowerment*** is a vital step towards expected social change. In our view, work and sound education are two necessary factors for that empowerment. At this stage, the government is reckoned on to create some facilities to the female gender in terms of easy access to education, job opportunities, promotion of female excellency, and appointment of meritorious women to strategic positions.

CONCLUSION

By way of conclusion, it can be recalled that Chimamanda and Atta have genuinely crafted in their literary writings the patriarchal African society which debases the female gender through stifling cultural practices. They have also attempted to portray active, bold, courageous and assertive personae who defiantly strive to deconstruct or demolish those patriarchal cultures and mores. And here lies the feminist voice or stance in each of the two contemporary African female authors' prose fictions.

Unlike Fairclough and Fairclough' s (2012) contention that apparently, 'change' just happens, it is a fact of life, this paper does sustain that the woman can't change or re-define/reconstruct the status and roles the society ascribes her, unless she irresolutely decides to move out of the (patriarchal) space that puts limitations on her. However, for the female gender's dream to be actually fulfilled, she should cooperate with the menfolk. As Pewissi (2017) observes, no elements of the binary set can pretend to do without the other.

At last, government also should lend a helping hand to women in their quest "to bring a system of excessive inequalities of power into crisis […] and thereby to help in achieving a more equitable social order" (Kress, 1996; cited in Widdowson, 2004).

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