

## Cultural Hegemony and De-Domesticating the Woman in Postcolonial Narratives

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**Abstract:** Postcolonial culture and tradition has for ages defined the position, duties and responsibilities of women following certain gender, patriarchal and cultural stereotypes. The Postcolonial woman is perceived to use Buchi Emecheta's words as a "second class citizen". As a result, she is attributed domestic functions like a nurse, house maid, mother, mistress, cleaner, house wife, farmer, cook, and care giver amongst others.

From a Black Feminist and Marxist theoretical paradigms, this paper examines how traditional practices like early marriages, widowhood, female genital mutilation, lack of education, inability to own or inherit land have hampered and retarded the evolution of Postcolonial women. It further looks at the attempts made by women in the narratives of Seffi Atta, Buchi Emecheta, Alobwed'Epie and Arundhati Roy to confront and nullify the physical and mental barriers imposed on them by gender and obnoxious cultural practices. The novels therefore present and project women ready and willing to break the chains that have stifled their socio-political and economic growth.

The analyses in this paper reveal that education and the alteration of certain gender/ traditional practices are conditions sine qua non for the emancipation of the Postcolonial woman. The paper equally revealed that there is absolute need for cultural and gender roles to shift and feminist narratives altered to accommodate changes and evolutions in modern day society. For the Postcolonial women to fully exploit their God given potentials and make their voices heard, society must evaluate them in terms of their abilities and performances and not by gender.

**Keywords:** Culture, Hegemony, De-domesticate, Postcolonial woman, Narrative

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The plight of the postcolonial woman from time immemorial has closely been linked to patriarchy, cultural practices, and gender stereotypes. Women are said to have continuously suffered double oppression, while men had to be subservient to their colonial masters, women often had to be subservient to both colonial masters and the barriers imposed on them by culture and gender. The proliferation of critical debates and creative works by female writers on the position and role the Postcolonial women should play in society only testifies how important the topic has become in modern literary discourse. Just like colonization and patriarchy, the female authors have suffered exclusion from the literary scene which for years was dominated by their male counterparts. Ama Ata Aidoo in her article "To be an African Woman, Writer's Overview and a Detail" highlights the fact that though we all as Africans suffered from colonialism and global imperialism, the African woman's reality differs remarkable from her male counterpart. Aidoo argues that:

*One factor that has definitely damaged the career of so many women writers is the absence of attention from the critical world, there never was a question of African women writers wanting to be better than the African male writers, we were not asking to be hailed as geniuses; it was simply that some of the African women have written books that have been as good as some of the books written by some of the male writers and sometimes better. What we dare say though, in agreement with Virginia Woolf, is that what so many women write explains much and tells much that s certain (516)*

Aidoo in the above quote points out the fact that female authors have experienced the two facets of oppression and marginality dating as far back as the colonial era. These claims are equally punctuated by Lloyd Brown who asserts that: "African women writers are the unheard, merely discussed and

seldom accorded space in the repetitive anthologies and predictable male oriented studies in the field” (515). It is his deficiency that has provoked the proliferation of female writers and female subjects in most postcolonial narratives today. The main purpose of this paper is to investigate the role that cultural and gender stereotypes play in the plight of the Postcolonial women and the attempts made by the female protagonist in the novels under study to de-domesticate themselves and reassert their womanhood.

One of the problems faced by postcolonial societies today is the difficulty to deal with gender and cultural stereotypes. While some societies and cultures are altering traditional and customary practices to meet up with changing times, others have remained faithful to even those very obnoxious practices that continue to limit the evolution of women in their societies. Identifying the true value of a woman and situating her within her society have been the task of feminist movements in the past two decades. Most cultures and political movements in postcolonial societies have continued to relegate women to inferior roles and positions in their societies. Women have been assigned stereotypical roles like house wives, kitchen maids, farmers, house maids, cooks, cleaners, secretaries, nurses, care givers and in some extreme cases they have been qualified as “child bearing machines” in some parts of the world. Some have performed, and continue to execute these functions and roles in silence and dedication, while others have questioned and continue to ponder why such roles should be attributed to them eternally. Those who have championed the course to raise questions and criticize the stereotypes tagged on women are the educated and culturally enlightened ones, most of who live in urban areas. In some parts of rural areas, the widows are beginning to raise their voices to question their plight during marriages and after the death of their husbands. Sefi Atta, Arundhati Roy, Alobwed’Epie and Buchi Emecheta are novelists whose works (*Everything Good will Come*, *The God of Small Things*, *The Lady with the Beard*, and *Second Class Citizens*, respectively) can be considered as genuine attempts to de-domesticate and emancipate the postcolonial woman from their second class and peripheral positions by projecting in their novels, women who can do everything but subject themselves to cultural and gender stereotypes.

### 2. CONTEXTUAL DEFINITION OF SOME KEY TERMS

For the purpose of clarification, it will be useful preparation to contextually situate some key terms that will dominate our analysis in this paper. In the context of this paper, “Culture” will be viewed from Matsumoto’s perspective who considers it as “a set of attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors shared by a group of people, but different for each individual, communicated from one generation to the next” (1966:16). “Hegemony” is considered as dominance of one social group (in this case men) over the other (women) and “cultural hegemony” becomes attempts made by men or society to use cultural practices to dominate and oppress women over the years. To de-domesticate on its part means to get the woman out of her domestic limitations especially as some cultures still see a woman as good only for domestic activities. A stereotype will be considered in this study as “an idea, an image, a phrase or a habit that is fixed and unchanging” (*Chambers Universal Dictionary*:733). “Gender” in the context of this paper is considered as defined by Ross Murfin and Supryia M, Ray to mean “referring to a socially constructed identities, man, woman, masculine and feminine...gender is distinguished from sex, which is the biological designation of male or female, unlike sex, which is anatomical, gender is widely held to be a product of the prevailing expectations and stereotypes of a particular culture” (135-9). Cultural and gender stereotypes therefore become those cultural and gender habits that have not changed despite human evolution. Such stereotypes or biases include the prevention of women by some cultures to take part in certain activities, the domination of women by men in political, social and economic life by virtue of the fact that they are women. Other cultural stereotypes in some societies include, women being considered as child bearing machines, housewives, women being considered as property that cannot own property, women deprived of education, polygamist, widowhood, early marriages amongst many others.

### 3. CULTURAL AND GENDER STEREOTYPES AND THE DILEMMA OF THE POSTCOLONIAL WOMAN

Critics have argued that colonialist literature has been interpreted as an exploration and representation of the world at the boundaries of civilization. Motivated by the desire to conquer and dominate, the imperialists configure the colonial realm as a confrontation based on differences in language, social customs, cultural values and modes of production (Menjoh, 2006, 3). Postcolonial pro-feminist writers participate actively in decolonizing cultural barriers and re-defining the role of the

postcolonial woman. Consequently, most of their writings deal with the burden of female roles in urban and village communities and female marginalization in different spheres of life.

The publication of Mary Wollstonecraft's "A Vindication of Woman, Challenging the Rights of Women and the Wrongs of Men" states how dependent on men's approval women are in their self-understanding and their attempts to formulate their worldview. When women pursue their own way, too insistently to be understood or tolerated by men, they are labelled "mad" or "radicals". This is an old story that goes back many centuries to Greek Philosophers like Plato and Physicians who have described women's deviation from the generally accepted norms as "madness"

Since the plight of most African women is closely linked to patriarchal, which is a dominant cultural stereotype, an awareness of patriarchy and gender is important when approaching postcolonial texts because women have had experiences that are very different from those of men both in the colonial and post-colonial world. The growing awareness of women's writing and their relevance has been an integral part of the development of postcolonial literature and provides an important perspective within this era. While colonization alienated African women physically and psychologically through the lack of education and poverty, and further relegated them to the background in political decisions, patriarchy and gender biases in most African societies continue to classify women as second class citizens. This explains why in most literary works, especially those written by anti-feminists, women are provocatively and continuously ascribed stereotypical roles that denigrate them to the background such as housewives, kitchen maids, farmers, housemaids, cooks, cleaners, secretaries, nurses, nannies, and above all, child bearing machines. In a thought provoking article entitled "Voices and Choices: the Feminist Dilemma in Four African Novels", Helen Chukwuma argues that women were conceived as objects and not subjects in their societies. In her opinion:

*The female character in African fiction are facile, the quiet member of the household, content only to bear children, unfulfilled if she does not-she is not part of the decision that affects her directly-the traditional image of women as determinant human beings, dependent gullible and voiceless still exist especially in the background of patriarchy which marks most African societies.(131)*

The above stereotypes, defines and sustains the relationship between men and women in typically patriarchal societies.

These two novels under study expose the predicaments of postcolonial women but go further to demonstrate that despite the restrictive roles, women can develop the critical awareness, determination, and strength to fight against their alienation and emancipate themselves from the excesses of patriarchy and gender inequality.

Susan Arndt in her article "Buchi Emecheta and the Tradition of Ibo Continuation and Write Back" alludes to Mariama Ba, who opines that "The woman writer has a special task. She has to present the position of women in Africa in all its aspects. There is so much injustice in the family, in the institution, in the street, in the political organizations, discrimination is supreme..." (44) These lines are a vivid testimony of the plight of postcolonial women. As far as the novels under study are concerned, the novelists can be classified as feminist writers whose novels set out, not only to expose the plight of the postcolonial women but most especially, to criticize, satirize, and to some extent, abolish all forms of cultural and gender inequalities towards women.

To begin with, Alobwede D'Epie is one novelist who has proven in his novels that cultural and gender biases remain a major impediment to the evolution of the Bakossi woman in particular and the postcolonial woman as a whole. A fine example to buttress these claims is projected at the beginning of the novel *The Lady with the Beard* where the heroine, Emade is prohibited from digging a grave not because she is physically unable but simply because culture and gender prohibits her from doing so. In a typical patriarchal society, it is considered a taboo for a woman to dig a grave. Like drumming to announce a funeral, the act of grave digging is conditioned by gender and cultural stereotypes. Alobwede presents a society in which certain cultural practices must be carried out only by men. When Wobe's mother dies, Emade against tradition takes upon herself to dig the grave. It is an act which is considered as a taboo amongst the Bakossi people. Her flimsy justification is that the men neglected Mechane when she was sick and as such, she sees no reason why they should be involved in her burial talk less of deciding where she should be buried. Emade's act angered the boy to whom

Wobe had been betrothed in childhood but lost her to an Igbo man. The boy reeled in anger and quipped:

*Is it because we were unable to marry Wobe that you think we shall be unable to dig her grave? No doubt people call you the -lady –with- a- beard. You have suddenly grown a beard in Atieg. This is not Atieg. We can't tolerate that uppishness here. Etam go and call Mesume. It is Muankam that will settle this matter. (44)*

In the lines above, the boy is simply reiterating the fact that what Emade has done is culturally abominable. Women in the Bakossi land are not allowed to dig graves and it as a result of that that the boy instructs Etam to call for Mesume to come settle the matter. In the later part of the novel, Mboge evokes Emade's act in a conversation between the president of the choristers, Sango Mesume, Kole and himself spiced with the excessive use of proverbs. Addressing Sango Mesume, Kolle laments:

*Our people say if a man is shot in the forehead, the whole world should blame him for he was looking for trouble. But if he is shot in the back, he should be defended for he was fleeing from trouble. We have been shot in the back. Though you see us quiet, we are streaming in anger. We shall incarnate Muankum after this to handle a very serious violation of our tradition by a male-woman from Atieg. (47)*

In the lines above, Emade is provocatively referred to as a "male-woman" because what she has just done is culturally the exclusive reserve of the men. While the president of the choristers advice that they finish eating before discussing Emade's abominable act, Mbwoke on his part feels that the issue is too serious and should be discussed immediately because to him "ears don't chew, they listen"(47) and goes ahead to complain to Mesume what Emade has done. His complain deserves quoting here at some length:

*A tite Mesume. You are the oldest person in this village now. You are the only one who can tell us how things were more than a hundred years ago. Have you ever heard that a woman has dug a grave? If you look out, you will see a grave being dug. It is being dug in the middle of the courtyard by a woman, a woman from Atieg, a woman from Atieg who has held us by the neck for advising her not to violate her nature and the traditions of our land. We have called you to seek your advice because some of us suggested that we incarnate Muankum at once to handle this mater. Pomposity tells lies, or steals. That woman (Emade) does both. (47)*

As a patriarchal society, Emade's act is an abomination to the Bakossi people and as such, she has to be stopped or severely punished for violating cultural norms/ Also, in terms of its gender implications, the African Man considers the act of grave digging as a strenuous exercise which should be reserved for healthy, strong and energetic men. One is not surprised therefore when Alobwede refers to Emade as "the-lady-with-beard" because her strength and courage can only be attributed to that of a man. Once again, the passage above justifies our claims that gender biases and cultural stereotypes hinder the evolution of the Bakossi woman because there are certain activities women are forbidden to do not because they lack the physical strength, but because it is culturally unacceptable for their gender. One is therefore not surprised when Ahone confronts Emade for single handedly taking the decision to dig a grave without consulting them as initially agreed. She questions: "Why you started digging the grave without consulting me beats me. What special merit does a woman have for digging a grave men are willing to dig"? (44). Again, Ahone's questions only go a long way to buttress the fact that Emade has committed a cultural sacrilege by deciding to dig a grave when able men are ready and willing to do so and this act of hers, puts Ahone under tension because she is scared of the consequences of Emade's action.

Similarly, as in Alobwede's novels, Arundhati Roy in *The God of Small Things* presents a society where gender and culture acts as barriers to the emancipation of the Indian woman. The society is a highly patriarchal society where women have no rights to claim, own or inherit property. As if depriving them of the right to own or inherit property isn't enough, the Indian woman is equally reduced to a sex object as we see Mammachi looking for girls to satisfy Chacko's sexual desires. She has no claims to love who she so desires and marries a man presented to her by the society. As dictated by gender stereotype, the female and male in India do not have equal rights in society. Roy writes that:

*The march that surged around the sky-blue Plymouth on that sky-blue December day was a part of the process ...their demands were that Paddy Morber, who made to work in the feilds for eleven and a*

*half hours a day from Seven in the morning to six thirty in the evening be permitted to take a one hour launch break and that women's wages be measured from one repee twenty Five pousa a day to three rapee, and men from two repees fifty pousa a day..... (67)*

From the above except, one reaches that even though men and women put in the same hours of work, their wages are different because the Indian society is a gender biased society. We are equally made to understand that the Indian society, like most culturally stereotypical societies is one in which women are not supposed to own property. For example, Mammachi in *The God of Small Things* cannot name her factory and she has to wait for her son, Chacko to return and name it "Parachee Pickles and Reserves" (56). Also after Ammu's Cren, Rachel keeps the receipts only because Estha is not there for he is the natural custodian of his tickets, bank receipts, cash memos, cheque book" (156). These examples point to the fact that the Indian Society is gender bias and as a result, it prevents the woman from political and economic autonomy

In addition, female characters in Roy's novel, like in most postcolonial narratives, suffer from emotional abuses in various forms. Women are considered as objects at the mercy of their possessors, the men. As such, they are subjected to any kind of abuse and torture. Ammu and Mammachi for example are victims of domestic violence inflicted on them by their husbands. Ammu, a young woman, becomes separated from her husband as a result of physical violence and emotional abuse. Mammachi, an older woman suffers domestic violence and emotional abuse from the husband Pappachi even more than her daughter Ammu. This claim is supported by Packota Valarie in an online article entitled "Emotional Abuse of Women by their intimate Partners" where he states that:

*Older women are abused more than any other group, when their partners retire. This is because retirement can exacerbate the partner's feeling of isolation and add to his sense of alienation and level of self-worth. His frustrations are taken out on his partner coupled with the generational perception of the man being omnipotent in the family. An older woman has no choice but to stay because of the amount of time she has invested in the Relationship (6).*

The above view confirms Mammachi's relationship with Pappachi, as he beats her on a daily basis in the novel, Roy makes us to understand that Mammachi has gone through gruesome and dehumanizing experiences from her husband Pappachi. Every night he beats her with a brass flower vase. The beatings weren't new, what was new was only the frequency with which they took place (47).

Similarly, Adah in Buchi Emetcheta's *Second Class Citizen* faces a similar situation like Mammachi and Ammu in *The Gods of Small Things*. When Ada as a result of excessive child bearing resorts to family planning, Francis her husband takes offence and gives her the most beatings, renders insults on her and invites neighbors to watch the scene. Adah is referred to in the novel as second class citizen as a result of her gender and as such, she cannot decide on the number of children she wants. Women are considered in the context of the novel as child bearing machines and have no right to determine the number of children they so desire to have. Earlier in the novel, Adah narrates the pathetic incident where her birth is not recorded simply because she came at a time when the entire family was expecting a boy child. She is forced into marriage at an early age and deprived of the right to education because she is a girl child. The examples above only go to buttress our claims that gender and cultural stereotypes hinders the socio-political and economic emancipation of postcolonial women.

Moreover, besides wife battering, depriving women of their right to own or inherit land and determine the number of children to give birth to, gender and cultural stereotypes also deprive the African woman from education. Formal education for a girl child is considered a worthless expensive venture in most African societies, since most African societies are patriarchal and gender bias, male children are supposed to go to school while their female counterparts are supposed to get married and bear children. In *The Day God Blinked*, Lucia is deprived and denied the privilege to go to school simply because she is a girl child. Also in *The God of Small Things*, Pappachi promulgates this mentality in the Ayemenem society. While the male children have openings they desire and the family can support them to any level of education, the girls are made to look up to marriage as their ultimate goal in life. This is noticed in the text in the relationship between Chako and Ammu where Ammu can attend only primary school. The author tells us that:

*Amu finished her schooling the same year that her father retired his job. In Delhi and moved to Ayemenem. Pappachi insisted that a college. Education was an unnecessary expensive for a girl. So,*

*Ammu had no choice but to leave Delhi and move with them. There was little for a young girl to do in Ayemenem, other than to wait for marriage proposals while she helped her mother with house work (34).*

The above example gives us a picture of gender stereotyping as evident in the Indian society which is very similar to what happens in most postcolonial societies. Education for girls is an “Unnecessary Expense”, for boys it is a necessary expense. A girl is supposed to stay at home and help her mother with house work, helping her mother in this case does not limit itself to performing the daily household chores but extends to being trained to become a successful house wife. She is therefore made to replace formal education, which could be more rewarding, for informal education only aims at training her to fit into the society the way men would want her to behave since they constitute the commanding gender. This lesson is very important to her because while at home, she is waiting for marriage proposals. In other words, her mother is preparing her to fit into the role of wife, which the society and culture has designated for her. All other opportunities that schooling could bring to her are closed. Pappachi just like the Chinese sees education of a girl child as pouring water on flowers in a neighbor’s garden.

More still, Sefi Atta is another novelist who, in her novel, *Everything Good will Come* presents a society where gender and cultural stereotypes act as barriers to the socio-economic and political evolution of the Ibo woman in particular and the Postcolonial woman as a whole. Her novel projects a typically patriarchal society in which a woman’s value in society is measured not just in terms of giving birth to children but most especially giving birth to a male child. Arinota Taiwo in *Everything Good will Come* has to undergo physical and psychological torments of being rejected by her in-laws and even her husband because of her inability to give birth to a male child. The only child she managed to have died a sickling at a very tender age and this situation frustrates Arinota and drives her into a church cult in search of solace. Arinota’s daughter Enitan is shocked to hear that her father has another family outside his home in which he is most attracted simply because the lady has given her faith a male child, Enitan has to accept their and concludes that “an African cannot die without leaving a son”(298). This is because in a typically patriarchal society like the one presented to us by Sefi Atta, male children are considered as potential successors and a man without a male child TENDS to feel that his lineage will subsequently be wiped-out upon his death. Atta therefore presents a society in which women are made to accept the patriarchal stereotype that male children are more important than their female counterparts.

Besides the cultural and gender biases mentioned above, widowhood has been considered as one of the greatest impediments to the evolution of the postcolonial woman. It tortures women physically and psychologically and inflicts untold pain on them. Some cultures treat widows like slaves especially in circumstances where the widow is accused of being responsible for her husband’s demise. In some cultures, widows are expected to sleep on the floor beside their husband’s corpse, their hair shaved, go for days without bathing and eat only at specific periods. Some are expected to drink certain concoctions and perform particular rituals to prove their innocence Sefi Atta presents a very pathetic picture of the fate of widows in her novel through the loud woman that Enitan and Grace meets in the prison cell. As a widow, she is dehumanized by her in-laws who force her to drink the water that was used in washing her husband’s copse as proof of her innocence. They shave her hair, lock her up in the room and take her children away from her. While in prison, she laments on her ill treatment:

*I didn’t kill my husband. They said I did. The day I killed somebody, they said they were surprised. I had not bathed for days after my husband died...one dress on my back and nowhere to go. No food. They sent me out and left me nothing. I was walking the streets. .(275)*

When she is sent out of her husband’s home, a man in the streets sexually molest her. She retaliates immediately by killing the man and as a result, she is arrested and put in prison. The widow is left with no children, no husband and no property. Everything that can give her happiness is taken away because of gender and cultural stereotypes. The fact that the widow is nameless in the novel is an indication that her plight becomes that of most postcolonial widows. This incident once again goes a long way to justify our claims that cultural limitations imposed on widows acts as an impediment to the evolution of the postcolonial woman.

#### 4. DECONSTRUCTING CULTURAL AND GENDER STEREOTYPES AND RE-ASSERTING WOMANHOOD

Having examined some of the cultural and gender stereotypes that act as barrier to the evolution of the postcolonial women, the analysis in this section focuses on the attempts made by these women to emancipate themselves and make their voices heard. In the novels under study, there is a conscious attempt by the female protagonist either physically, psychologically, emotionally, culturally, or in some cases, economically to liberate themselves from cultural and gender boundaries. The task of re-defining the image of the African woman is the principal responsibility of the African writer. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar in their paper “The Mad Woman in the Antic” argues that there is a need for the female writer to transcend the norms of domination and explore her female consciousness and value systems:

*Before the woman writer can journey through the looking glass toward literary autonomy... she must come to terms with the images on the surface of the glass, that is, those mythic masks male artists have fastened over her human face both to lessen their dread or her “inconsistency” and by identifying her with the external types they have themselves invented to possess her more thoroughly. Specifically ...a woman writer must examine, assimilate and transcend the extreme images of “angels” and “monster” which male authors have generated for her. Before women can write declared Virginia Wolf, we must “kill the angel in the house” (812)*

A reconstruction of the female image as Gilbert and Gubar posit, must begin by understanding and exploring the origin and nature of images presented in anti-feminist texts.

Alobwed’Epie begins his novel by presenting a heroine who is determined, resourceful, self-reliant and powerful and capable of breaking the myth that only men can take the lead in certain human activity. Emade is elevated to a high social status and the manner in which she is portrayed in the novel, the reader is made to understand that Alobwed’Epie is about to break the myth and patriarchal assumptions that “man is the more important figure; woman is born to serve him, love him, be protected by him and assist in representing him” (Karl Menninger, 41). One is therefore tempted to contend that Alobwed’Epie is about:

*replacing the culture of domination with a world of participatory economics, grounded in communism and social democracy, a world without discrimination based on race or gender, a world where recognition of mutuality and interdependence would be the dominant ethos, a global ecological vision of how the planet can have access to peace. (Hooks, 110)*

To achieve the above, Alobwed’Epie creates a heroine who is presented as headstrong, determined, boisterous and generally endowed with masculine attributes. She is also known as male human who wages a perpetual oral and physical struggle against the idea that men are the authorized voice in society. Emade transcends her gender limitations as she demonstrates her charisma through the idea of defeating the two Wizards of the village. Emade underscores “I shall defeat the wizards of this village. I Emad’Akwe, slaughterer-of-slaves, Lion-of-the-unbroken tradition, widow-of-the-upstream-python” (12). One would say that Alobwed’Epie’s intentions is to change economic discrimination based on gender so that they could have equality with men of privileged classes” (Hooks, 2000: 110).

Emade projects herself as a man with extraordinary potentials, her expressions are full of zeal, demonstrating that the writer has endowed our heroine with much power. Like a warrior, she is so self-confident and resourceful. This explains why she is courageous enough to confront the hegemony of patriarchy. When her hut is on fire, Emade refuses to allow other women call for assistance. She even orders them to stop shouting. As the narrator says:

*...The accompanying women yelled to bring in the men. Emade ordered them to stop shouting and dashed into the hut. She got a gourd of water and bashed it into the fire. White smoke and wood ash billowed from the hut. Emade jumped out coughing. (13)*

The lines above show how courageous Emade is. Like a man, she dashes into the hut, gets a gourd of water and bashes it into the fire “white smoke and wood ash billowed from the hut and Emade jumped out coughing” (13). This incident shows a determined and courageous lady who has transgressed gender barriers.

Also, in the Bakossi tradition, it is exclusively the role of the men to play the drum to announce the funeral of someone. Gender stereotypes and culture gives men that prerogative because the traditional societies are typically patriarchal in nature. Nevertheless and to the surprise of her beloved sister,

Emade devours tradition and culture and takes a male position when her sister (Mechane) dies. She does not need to make an appeal to men for assistance. Emade considers herself equal to men. She violates the tradition and arrogate to herself a role that is exclusively reserved for men. Like we said above, traditionally, it's the responsibility of the men to play the drum to announce a funeral, but as the author makes us to understand:

*Emade went to Mechane's late husband's dilapidating house and got the drum that was covered with thatches, she puts it out and played... "She who wrestle with the gorilla at the cross-roads...she who beat the gorilla at the cross-roads wrestling...is no more, is no more..."(34)*

The author goes further to say that Ahome heard the drum and "thought that a male sympathizer had come from Ngolo and finding the deceased's compound empty, decided to inform the villagers in their farms that death had occurred in the village"(34). But to her greatest dismay, when she returns to the deceased compound, she found (Emade) seated playing the drum. As if drumming wasn't enough, Emade also decides to defy culture and tradition by digging the grave of Mechane, an activity that is culturally reserved for men. In her desperate attempt to confront and challenge those cultural and gender barriers that stand on her way, Emade engages in performing those activities that are exclusively reserved for men like drumming to announce Mechane's funeral, digging Mechane's grave and healing kids using traditional medicine. One is therefore not surprised when the author refers to her a the- lady- with -the- beard, Alobwede succeeds in his novel to prove that ability has nothing to do with gender and that for society to fully develop, certain obnoxious cultural practices must be altered to give everybody, irrespective of gender, the chance to fully exploit their God-given potentials.

Similarly, in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, the author presents a society where women are determined to break away from gender and cultural barriers in an attempt to emancipate themselves. To effectively achieve this, the women in Atta's novel become non-conformists whose principal objective is to break the rules that impose limitations on them. As the author narrates:

*Perhaps Ammu, Estha and she (Rachel) were the worst transgressors. But it wasn't just them. It was the other too. They all broke the rules .they all crossed into the forbidden territory. They all tampered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how much. The laws that make grandmothers, uncles, uncles, mothers, mothers, cousins, cousins, jam jam and jelly jelly. It was time when uncles became fathers, mothers lovers and cousins died and had funerals. It was a time when the unthinkable became thinkable and the impossible really happened. (3)*

As pointed out in the lines above, the characters all broke the rules and that define and impose limitations on them. Taken aback by the conscious efforts by the women to liberate and emancipate themselves, the author is forced to qualify the actions of the women as doing the "unthinkable" and "the impossible"

Like Roy, Sefi Atta is one Nigerian female writer who seems to be angry with any structure or institution that limits the potentials of the woman to evolve and become politically and economically useful to her society. In an attempt to liberate women against harmful traditional practices, gender stereotypes and various marginalizing forces, Atta like Roy portray characters that are determined to break away with the past and assert new identities for themselves. Bola Udegbe in "Female Dependence and Male Dominance in Contemporary Nigerian Families" states that issues raised by African feminists:

Underscore the power of African women to work with patriarchal cultural structures that are liberating and enabling while challenging those that are limiting and debilitating focuses on what African women are doing with/to patriarchal and cultural structures but keeps in view the ever-pervasive litany (particularly in women's studies) of what patriarchy is doing to/with African women. (94)

Life therefore becomes to these women a series of various forms of challenges to power structures that seek to peripherally define, domesticate and disempower them. As a result, Atta, like Roy, presents women in *Everything Good will Come* who are courageous, independent, self-determined, ambitious and assertive and are ready to challenge dominant and phallogocentric ideologies. They however have to do this through a simultaneous manifestation of their feminine attributes and Africanness in a bid to effect changes in women's conditions.

Like in Roy's novel, one of the tools women use to emancipate themselves from cultural and gender biases is education. Education is considered a very powerful institution and women endeavour to utilize every little opportunity available to participate in the educational or learning process. Education subsequently empowers them and offers them an opportunity to integrate themselves into the socio-political and economic life of their countries. Some feminists have even argued that the world will be a better place if we educate the women. The theme of the power of education in the emancipation of the Postcolonial woman has been exemplified in a number of postcolonial fictions including Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* and *Second Class Citizens*, Alobwed D'Epie's *The Day God Blinked*, Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things*, Tsitsi Dangaremba's *Nervous Conditions*, Yvone Vera's *Nehanda*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and Sefi Atta's *Everything God Will Come* amongst many others.

For example, Adah, in *Second Class Citizens* defies all odds and forces herself to school against her parent's wish who will prefer to nurture her to become a successful housewife. Enitan in Atta's *Everything Good will Come* believes that education is a very vital instrument for the woman to emancipate herself. Though Enitan grows up in a fairly enlightened family that does not see the place of the girl or the human exclusively in the realm of the kitchen or home, there are still various socio-cultural and economic residuals that she is confronted with. Enitan becomes furious with her mother for choosing to depend on her husband despite the fact that she had gone to school. She says:

*I had always believed my mother chose to depend on my father. The evidence was there in her dusty certificates. Our mothers walked out every day to work, she didn't. Now I felt no different from her, driving a car he had bought. My father would give a car but he would not pay me enough to buy one myself. The power had always been in my father's hands (156)*

Continuous dependence on a man meant that all the power belonged to him. Being the authority in the house, Arinota's husband is in the position to make major decisions concerning the welfare of his family and this automatically means that the concept of freedom, political power and property are still defined in terms of masculinity. Education is equally used as an emancipating tool in enhancing the woman's self-esteem and participation in her development. Enitan believes she is better off than the prostitutes in the bar who think that despite all her "propriety and education, a man was useless-ing me" (91). Enitan would not debase herself to that level because she knows her worth as an educated woman. It is through education that Enitan emancipates and reasserts herself in the society.

As an educated lawyer, Enitan knows her rights not just as a citizen but as a woman. She believes that civil and native laws differ in that the native law is only meant to oppress the woman through its rigid rules. Under the native law, a man is allowed to marry more than one wife. Women who find themselves in such a situation have to bear the inconveniences of living together under the same roof. Under the civil law, a woman will be free to choose what kind of marriage she wants. Enitan laments "And really, I don't know why we continue to follow the native law anyway, when civil law is in existence. It has no moral grounding, no design except to oppress women" (144). In spite of being disciplined with a slap or two from her husband, as a lawyer, Enitan knows she will not need his consent to get her a new passport. It is through her educational and professional influence that Enitan is able to convince her father to include her mother in his will. It is also thanks to her position in her father's firm that Enitan is able to push her father to fight for the inheritance rights of Sheri Bakare and her family. Custom in the Igbo and Hausa land holds that when a man dies, his brother inherits all his property. So Sheri's uncle is entitled to his brother's wealth. This places the wives and children in a difficult situation. However, Sheri's uncle does not have any chance of winning the court case because it can be proven that he deprived the wives and children of their rightful inheritance. Enitan is able to negotiate for the inheritance rights of her mother and friend through her educational and professional influence.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The analyses in this paper have proven that obnoxious traditional and gender practices impose limitations on the postcolonial woman and affects her socio-political and economic development negatively. As the analyses above have shown, women are evaluated not in terms of their abilities, but rather, in terms of the ascribed roles defined and sustained following gender and culture. While the novels of Alobwede, Roy, Atta and Emecheta portray and ridicule the excesses of certain cultural practices and gender biases, the authors equally in a very powerful manner, project female

protagonists whose principal missions are to confront, nullify, defy and break away from any barriers (cultural or gender) that stand as impediments to their emancipation.

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