

The City Space, Marriage and Female Friendship in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*

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Abstract

The paper interrogates human interaction in the 21st century city space of Lagos. Using setting to reflect, broaden and foreground emergent sensibilities of the city, the paper shows how this nuanced responsiveness influences the discourse of marriage, family, friendship, gender and identity in the novel. It argues that unlike previous uncomplimentary portrayals of the female in urban literary settings by many a male novelist, Atta rather changes the narrative and dwells on the fertile and reconstructed perspectives of the female. The paper captures some key socio-political and economic sensibilities as well as portrays of old and new varieties of city marriages. It insists that the city is a hotbed for female self-repositioning and personal progress as well as demonstrates that marriage in city space shackles yet uplifts the female. It explores a collage of healthy female bonding that influences and acts as a balm in soothing some harrowing experiences of city marriages. The paper concludes by showing how Atta foregrounds feminine dynamism and individualism in city marriage spaces.

Keywords: City Space, Sefi Atta, Nigerian Literature, Gender, Marriage and Female Friendship

Introduction:

One of the topical issues of modernist and post-modernist literature is the city space. Michel Foucault once predicted that, "The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space" (22). Space has always been present but as a concept it abounds with newness. City literature or urban literature, as it applies to fiction, simply connotes creative writing within a generous city setting with characters whose images evolve from their city experiences. Several authors have demonstrated the dynamic nature of the city. William Shakespeare in *Coriolanus* claims, "What is the citie, but the people? True, the people are the citie" (Act 3, Sc. 1).

Our daily lives, our experiences, culture and languages are controlled by categories of space we intersect over time and these Sefi Atta captures robustly in her novel, *Everything Good Will Come* (2005). She acknowledges the significance of symbolic and literary representation of the city space by replicating or historicizing innumerable guises of human sensibilities.

Atta's choice of the populous city of Lagos transcends mere fiction because the text bears a relationship with fact and fiction. Lagos as setting is at first subjective and then objective as she melds bold realistic characters to showcase the consciousness of urban landscape of poverty and possibilities, disappointments and betrayal, friendship and disillusionment and above all as a microcosm of the Nigerian urban society in its evolving flux. Some contemporary Nigerian novels like Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sister's Street* (2007), Teju Cole's *Open City* (2011), Chigozie Obioma's *The Fisherman* (2015), Igoni Barrett's *Blackass* (2015), Abubakar Adam's *City of Crimson* (2015) and Chibundu Onuzo's *Welcome to Lagos* (2017) reflect the ways in which the city space interrogates subjects like governance, power, gender, identity, marriage, family, love, survival, friendship and other experiences. *Everything Good Will Come* (2005) scrutinizes the societal consciousness of middle- and lower-class Lagos families to understand the reservoir of "counter sites", "simultaneously representing, contesting and inverting all other conventional sites of reading" (Foucault, *Of Space...*28). Hence, in Atta's mirroring of Lagos, juxtaposition is drawn to present duality of utopia/dystopia- blurred and disorienting experiences; and hope and the joys of survival that are sometimes obscure to the unobservable city dweller.

In fact, the city is viewed as an organism that affects the individual in ways different from the rural countryside. According to Rob Horning in his deconstruction of Georg Simmel's essay, "The Metropolis and the Mental", Simmel claims that the intensification of nervous stimulation in the city causes the metropolitan individual to react with his head instead of his heart (410). That is to say, the calculating minds of the city dwellers on one hand is pique and vigilant and on the other blasé as they traverse their ordeals. Therefore, the city novel provides diverse imagery, stimuli and challenges to test the individual's disposition, consciousness and intellectuality. Seemingly, Atta's novel demystifies and disarms the shackles and conspiracy of tradition, politics, culture, religion and patriarchy to maintain and subjugate the female.

The city is also an observatory of the sensibilities of human existence especially of an amalgam of people from different cultural backgrounds, social status, religions and political affiliations. Hence Daniel Paul McKeown sees the slipperiness and the fluidity of the city space as an enclave that is ambivalent creating borderline images as well as dissolving, changing and challenging moral and ethical ideals. For these reasons, Atta's city produces anxiety, doubt, hope and what McKeown projects as "...entire matrices of modern social conditions and stimuli" (11).

Paradoxically, the city's vastness opens the dwellers, especially in marital circumstances, to conventions, conditions of pleasures and pain; opportunity and adventure, bitterness, betrayal, assertiveness, friendship, in/dependence, ad/ventures and hostilities. Apart from the automatism and realisms of the working class, patriarchy and the nation as a whole, this paper is focused on marriage as an agency of estrangement, confusion and even excitement. Accordingly, Atta underlines the city as the place where a woman is more keenly aware of her differences; a space that educates the woman to express her dynamism as a living being. Ultimately, because the city is a social space quite different from the rural, this paper argues that, it communicates stronger ideals towards female emancipation than rural space. This paper deconstructs the physical city in conjunction with several feminine tropes of women as mothers, daughters, mistresses and wives in marital and quasi-marital situations. It draws

different images and metaphors of women at various points of marital encumbrance; images like the embittered woman, the religious fanatic, the misunderstood woman, the assertive, resilient and non-conformist woman against the docile, gullible, unresponsive, silent and unassuming woman. Or put differently, modern versus traditional female; independence versus dependence; power versus powerlessness and education versus illiteracy.

This paper uses the city space of Lagos as heterogeneous, impure, complex, varied, yet a luxuriant ground of signification to stress that women are different from men and nobody can coordinate anything especially in marriage situations. Consequently, the paper opines that for female identity, emancipation and responsiveness to her society to be a reality, several contrivances are required. Also, it projects female friendship in the city space as profiting, enriching, uplifting and soothing in spite of the innumerable challenges of being married and dwelling in the city.

II. “This is Lagos”: City sensibilities and social realism

A recurrent expression in Atta’s novel that captures the realism of the city is-“This is Lagos!” Sefi Atta’s *Everything Good Will Come* gives the reader an insight into the inner workings of the city of Lagos; yet, it demonstrates that the lives of the literary characters are similar to the lives of real Lagosians. The novel melds setting and character to give a robust reading of the novel as urban literature. The bildungsroman tells the story of Enitan, the protagonist from an early age of eleven as at 1971 to adulthood in Lagos as she navigates the city in the face of several challenges.

First it is pertinent to stress that Lagos is seemingly one of the most populous cities in Nigeria. Secondly, by the virtue of Nigeria being the most populous black nation on earth; it is no gain saying that the city of Lagos fomented several experiences - both good and bad. Hence, Atta incorporates a montage of real and imagined socio-economic and political experiences that interrogates the realism of the city space. To further capture the nuances of a city space, Atta expresses multi-layered social issues and illuminates city life as a hub of education, mis-education and repositioning on several fronts be it political, religious, social or gender. In fact, Chikwenye Ogunyemi points out that, African womanism deals with local and international challenges affecting both male and female in their societies. Ogunyemi further includes “totalitarianism, militarism, ethnicism, (post)colonialism, poverty, racism, and religious fundamentalism [that] prevent [African women] from having a space of [their] own, in which to recuperate in order to join the international discourse from a position of strength” (Wo/Man 114). Therefore, Atta’s position is to sensitize the people (male and female), of societal, gender and non-gender issues militating against human emancipation.

City literatures draw largely from the realities around them; culminating in social realism. That is to say, when discussing the literary city, account is given of comingling organic experiences of all spheres of the society and that is the concourse of this segment. In lieu of the foregoing, the novel starts with a looming Civil war that tends to divide Sunny Taiwo and his friends across ethnic lines. Although the novel is narrated from a first person point of view, this depiction tends to hark into the annals of Nigerian history. Atta contextualizes the Civil War in a city setting to historicize the nuanced discontent of the masses, their displacement, and complicity of the state to maintain subjugation of both male and female through the agencies of power during the civil war era. Enitan’s narrative starts with her innocent portrait of her middle class family and her immediate surroundings but still ignorant

of the social, economic, cultural and political dynamics. Enitan stresses her innocence thus, “From the beginning I believed whatever I was told, downright lies... although I had my own inclinations” (11). She acknowledges her age of innocence and such presents her personal views of issues she experiences even though her leanings come from a child’s perspective. So, to the young Enitan the realities of the Civil war were mere stories from characters like her parents, Akanni and Bisi.

Atta amplifies the past like most contemporary writers in order to feel the burden of responsibility by historicizing the cultural and social past. This echoes James Okpiliya who asserts that “the success of these contemporary writers is derived from their consummate ability to place their narratives in the context of historical experiences...they historicize discourse and textualize history. Events of the past and their ripple effects are foregrounded in such a manner that they successfully interpret the present as being the function of the dialectics of human struggle which by and large, is a continuum” (199).

By incorporating the Civil War experience into the novel, Atta tries to recreate both sweet and bitter memories. Laurie Vickroy in *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, observes that such retrospection into the past has been an urgent task for many writers as they attempt to preserve personal and collective memories from assimilation, repression, or misrepresentation, their works reflect a growing awareness of the effects of catastrophe and oppression (1). In respect to violence and destruction, relatively, the manifestation of civil war atrocities on the city of Lagos was minimal but Lagos experienced an upsurge in population, cultural and religious diversity as many Nigerians and non-Nigerians moved to the city to eke a living.

In part 1, 1971, Enitan is aware that, though Uncle Alex and Uncle Fatai are Nigerians, they are different individuals, Nigerians. Uncle Alex is a “Biafran Nigerian” but her father and Uncle Fatai are Nigerians. It is this realization apparently that destroys the friendship of the “three musketeers in the heart of darkness (13).

Section 2, “1975”, depicts Enitan at age fifteen in Royal College where she captures the differences and insights her college space provides:

Royal College girls came from mixed backgrounds. In our dormitory alone we had a farmer’s daughter and a diplomat’s daughter. The farmer’s daughter had never been to a city before she came to Lagos; the diplomat’s daughter had been to garden parties in Kensington Palace.... I met Moslem girls Zeinat, Alima, Aisha who rose early to salute Mecca... I met Catholic girls: Grace, Agnes, Mary, who sported gray crosses on their foreheads on Ash Wednesday. There were Anglican girls, Methodist Girls...I learned about women in my country, from Zaria, Katsina, Kaduna who decorated their skin with henna dye and lived in purdah; women from Calabar who were fed and anointed in fattening houses before their weddings; women who were circumcised. Uncle Alex had always said our country was not meant to be one (47-48).

From the above, we see a polyphonic interplay of tribe, language, class, power, religion and culture at work. Atta here notes that Lagos opens its arms to all the casualties of the war and for this reason; the cosmopolitan city is at first integrated yet splintered by this influx. Also noticeable is that the collages of girls painted are in the same social circle yet outside the socio-economic, political, cultural and religious circles. These differences and diversity add

to the colourful tapestry of the city of Lagos. This also can be captured in spaces like schools, market places, prayer houses, streets and social gatherings, in what Foucault calls the “heterochronies” or “slices in time” in establishing a taxonomy of typifying diverse spatial types (29). Atta recreates these “slice in time” in “heterotopias of illusion and compensation” of near life-like replica of the montage that makes up Lagos and Nigeria as a whole. In line with the foregoing, the city becomes the hall-mark of all that is right and wrong with the nation, a repository of dimensions and several hangovers of cultural, social and religious.

Atta further projects that the multiplicity envisaged in the city space communicates diverse vibes: good or bad, the ability to convey his intentions depends on his choice of words that creates the desired effect (Ashipu and Okpiliya, 81). These diversities continue to test the unity of Nigerians as it does fictional characters like Sunny and his friend Uncle Alex. Consequently, this advertently questions nationhood and generates atavistic blame game. For instance, Niyi stresses, “Who heads our government? Northerner. Who heads the army? Northerners. One Southerner wants to be president and they locked him up (223)”. This sentiment has affected the nation, its cities and its people as a whole. The city becomes a microcosm of the people’s general reaction to the dynamism and realism of their time and society.

The protagonist Enitan as a child is unaware of the poverty, hardship and squalor of the city dwellers because she is confined and protected in her middle-class family structure. But the moment she ventures outside of her comfort zone, she is confronted with differences-linguistic differences ‘Some Hausa girls cannot “fronounce” the letter P’ (49) and social montage of oddities. In contrast to her well-groomed school, she describes Owen Memorial School as “Juvenile Detention Homes and their worst students smoked hemp” (51). Despite Atta’s hopeful voice, she also creates a world filled with vile characters. Enitan witnesses life-changing experiences in which juvenile teenage boys smoke cigarettes and Marijuana, drink alcohol and gang rape her best friend Sherri. Her first experience of the “real” Lagos affects her and the people around her psychologically, physically, physiologically and socially. As she witnesses the rape of Sheri, her perception of trust, betrayal and sex becomes warped. Also, after the rape of Sheri, her romantic idea of boys and sex changes: she becomes guided, untrusting, uncommunicative and frigid. Under this darkening social plane, Enitan paints pictures of flawed male characters as fathers, uncles, cousins, brothers, husbands and friends.

In his “heteropolology of space”, Foucault opines that the city space is made up of many specialized sites to record crossroads of space and time (32) in some sort of juxtaposition of wealth/poverty, feminism/patriarchy, waste/efficiency, industry/commerce, residential life/work and pleasure and pain. The part, “1985”, dwells heavily on class inequality and its attendant realities of prostitution, violence, bribery, corruption, diseases, poverty, crime and other social vices. Enitan returns from London a mature woman with a more variegated viewpoint on life’s issues. She writes of her experiences as a National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) member, gets into a relationship with Mike Obi who helps feed her knowledge of the Lagos she leaves behind. Mike takes her to a place that broadens her awareness of herself, the city and the predicaments of the rich and the poor. She observes prostitutes in their trade “majestic and ugly” (90); she sees the teeming Lagos in the clutches of a new disease, AIDS, which she did not know much about. But she is sure that “people will hide and ignore it, like

the drug problem of the seventies” (91). She writes of armed robbery (93), parental estrangement (91) and concubinage (103). Enitan observes that Sheri has become “...sugary, as we said in Lagos; she had a man, an older man, a man as old as my father even, and he will pay her rent” (100). Sheri is now a kept woman, and in contemporary parlance a “slay queen” dependent on Brigadier Hassan for her upkeep. Enitan’s lens also captures the good as well as the bad. She sees the commerce, the beauty and the squalor of Lagos. She observes that Lagos, “was a hard city to love; a bedlam of trade” (101) where traders sell fake drugs (102), and a city of broken survivors” (285). Atta’s city is a city of paradoxes, a love hate disposition within Enitan whenever she thinks of Lagos.

But even when faced with the choice of Lagos and London, she chooses Lagos over the effective and efficient London. Charles Dickens in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1895) also juxtaposes London and Paris in the following words:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us (1).

In fact, Lagos bears the same paradoxical tropes in the Dickens’ classic noted above; it draws out parallels, benefits and deficiencies cluttered in the city space. Atta imitates the realities of Lagosians by characteristically probing the pulse of real social, political, cultural, filial, patriarchal, international and environmental experiences and change.

Atta’s choice of setting is a conspicuous and easy one because it is quite notable that the greater the number of people converge in a tiny space, the more offensive, aggressive, restless, rebellious and unpredictable the people become. Thus, the novel represents a robust panorama of bad governance, poor and irresponsible leadership. Apart from individuals behaving badly, the novel lays bare social dislocations and breakdowns in the leadership process, unstable government and dictatorship, creating a general atmosphere of quotidian inhumanity. The novel depicts the betrayal of both civilian and military leaders in a consistent vicious cycle of brutality, corruption and subjugation.

Evidently, the city becomes a hub, and an organism that bears the burden of signification in writing diverse breakdown in the socio-economic and political structures of the nation. All sectors are complacent and are satirized; these farce and comedy thinly veil the patina of insecurities, hardship and poverty the masses encounter in their everyday living experiences. For instance, when Enitan visits Mike Obi in his school, she realizes that academically, even the teachers are worse than their students. Some students are even older than the expected school age. The teachers are under-paid and as such vent their frustration on their students. But what is most unpalatable is the teachers’ unexaggerated assault on grammar and harassment of students. Enitan paints the scene thus:

“Turn your ugly face to the wall”, the man [Teacher] shouted. “Look at you. Tiffing mango from the tree when you have been warned consecu...” He whipped her legs. “Consecu...” he whipped her legs again.

“Consecutively”. He sucked his teeth. “Tiff”. (131)

The scene reflects the predicament of the educational sector in the country; teachers and students are caught in a web of frustration. Unqualified teachers are recruited as seen above as “stealing” becomes “tiffing”. Atta poses a big educational question thus, if teachers in city space are academically poor what would happen to those of the rural areas? Pathetically, the leaders both military and political are indifferent to these neglected situations; they struggle to out-do each other in suppression, negligence and denial. Hence, the people take refuge in the “principle of at least” (222) - a situation whereby mediocrity is appreciated. Several characters find themselves leveraging their aspirations, careers and even marital relationship for survival purposes. For instance, the lower-class characters like Titus, Dagogo, Alabi, Pierre are poorly paid and outwardly make no effort towards upturning their plights. When Enitan confronts her father about the poor remuneration of his staff, Sunny Taiwo clarifies that it is a generic situation and nothing personal. With such poor wages, characters tend to vacillate from one job to the other and some characters resort to some sort of shenanigans to make ends meet. For instance, Mike Obi is an architect cum painter, Enitan is a lawyer turned banker; Niyi moves from job to job. Sheri is a kept woman turn entrepreneur. The characters have no option than to continue working to further accentuate “the principle of at least”.

In spite of the economic hardships that bedevil the people, they are also faced with the perpetual fear of being imprisoned, detained without trial or killed in what Foucault recognizes as “heterotopias of crises or deviance”, whereby the prison is designed to monitor and discipline human behaviour. Fear keeps the people silent. Prison and imprisonment become historicized as foregrounded ordeals and unpalatable realities seen in the dilapidated nature of the Nigerian prison facilities and the attendant poor treatment of political prisoners and women, unlawful imprisonment, awaiting trial and the generally unhealthy condition of the Nigerian Prison system. Foremost, the novel looks at imprisoned women and how they handle their situation. In the prison narratives, Atta depicts impressionable characters like the Mother of Prisons and the schizophrenic Do-Re-Mi and others that are also representation of social imbalance in the nation. These characters have none to tell their stories because of the repressed freedom of speech and expression.

Atta also implicates the mass media as being part of the problem as she describes their limited power and complicity in areas of equity, corruption, justice and violence. Yet the media is more engaged in banal issues like gossips, marriage problems and divorce. A character like Peter Mukoro, a renowned journalist is constantly in and out of prison for his protest against the government but the media chooses to focus its attention on his sexual immorality. Here, Atta questions the integrity and significance of writing as journalist, novelist, artist and writer if it is not directed at the expected denunciation of the ills of the society. In other words, writers *qua* writers are not to keep mute or dwell on inanities in the face of brazen injustice and oppression. Consequently, Atta depicts the city as a microcosm of the nation, in which the mosaic of social problems forms the canvass for activism, resistance and protest by writers across genres.

Atta satirizes religion in the city. She opines that religion, customs and tradition are culpable and are interwoven in maintaining subjugation, especially female oppression. A brand of Christianity in Nigeria known as the “white garment church” is lampooned in the narrative. Enitan’s mother is presented as a senseless religious bigot who “killed” her only son out of ignorance. Instead of taking the sick boy to the hospital, she takes him to church. But she

justifies herself by stressing that, “there isn’t a mother in the world who wouldn’t believe that faith can heal her child after medicine has failed” (173). In Nigeria, the masses have been noted to fall back heavily on religion when all else fails and Atta uses this to her advantage. However, Atta expresses the pathos of silence and innocuous rebellion as described in the character of Enitan’s mother’s spirituality in the church space. At the end she realizes her foolhardiness when she claims:

I spent money on my church and what thanks did I get? For the first time in how many years last month my tithes were low. There were complaining. I told them I had other obligations. They said I must put God first. I told them I am putting God first... (293).

Even in prison, mockery is made of religion. Mother of Prisons often rebuke the religious who accuse her of blasphemy by saying, “Christian ko, Shit-stianni” (262, 263), she rather believes in her educational qualification as “secretary typist” (265) over any religious belief. Atta therefore portrays religion as a tool that maintains subjugation as she also underlines real human characters in the throes of normal human activities of struggling, surviving, eating, singing, laughing, sorrowing, quarrelling and mourning. The city space as discerned from Atta’s novel is caught in the web of hunger, starvation, displacement, imprisonment, poor or lack of basic amenities, disillusionment, fear, violence, greed, betrayal, alienation, dislocation, despair, indifference, poverty, insensitivity of Nigerian leaders, corruption and death; while on the other hand, Atta also finds inspiration discussing the positives of female friendship, freedom, bonding, resistance, resilience, survival, and hope.

III. Men fight for land and women fight for family: Interrogating marriage in the city space

In African Literature, the discourse and site of marriage usually carries along with it several allegorical tropes and metaphors; acting as a vehicle of gender discourse as well as inundating readers of certain socio-cultural ideals. Helen Chukwuma in “Voices and Choices: The Feminist Dilemma in Four African Novels” insightfully observes that:

The female character in African fiction hitherto, is a facile lackluster human being, the quiet member of the household, content only to bear children, unfulfilled if she does not, and handicapped if she bears only daughters. In the home, she is not part of the decision making both as a daughter, wife and mother even when the decisions affect her directly. Docility and complete subsumation of will is demanded and exacted from her. This traditional image of women as indeterminate human beings, dependent, gullible and voiceless stuck, especially in the background of patrilineage which marked most African societies (215).

Unlike the uncomplimentary portraiture of females by male authors in early African/Nigerian writings, Atta uses her craft to vocalize the plight of subjugation and marginalization women encounter even in city settings. The novel observes that marriages in the city are seemingly different from marriages in rural settings because of the characters’ responsiveness to gender roles. Feminine assertiveness in marriage is more radical within the city space as compared to marriages in rural areas which tend to be more accommodating and accepting of gender roles. Evidently, the city tends to make the female characters in most situations more vocal, independent and liberating. This gender mobility from rural to city centres according to Maurice Z. Shroder is a journey “from ignorance to maturity”. For instance, In Nigerian

literature, traditional female characters like Adah in Buchi Emecheta's *Second Class Citizen* (1975), Amaka in Flora Nwapa's *One is Enough* (1981) and Li in Zaynab Alkali's *The Stillborn* (1988) evolve into conscious women in city spaces. Consequently, the city space becomes therapeutic and signify feminine inspired transformation and growth.

The main test of African feminism is and would always be the marriage institution (Chukwuma, 217); this is because African feminism is different and accommodates the man as deductable from the diverse types/theories of feminism in Africa like Motherism, Stiwanism, Snail-sense Feminism and others. However, this paper appreciates the strands of Womanism and Nego-feminism. According to Charles Nnolim, "Womanism" is black-centred, it is accommodationist; it believes in the freedom and independence of woman and wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and see to it that men will change from their sexist stand (251). While, Obioma Nnaemeka views the term Nego-feminism in two prongs: one as, "the feminism of negotiation" and two, "no ego feminism" a feminism of give and take (358). Nnemeka further expresses that African Feminism works by knowing when, where, and how to detonate and go around patriarchal land mines" (380). Marriage is appreciated in African feminism but other issues within and outside the marriage space that require change must be negotiated and disarmed. Marriage remains a fertile site for reading gender as women assume their gender roles of nurturer, care-giver and mother. Marriage will continue to be a breeding ground for gender re/writing, mis/education and re/readings. It has and still is a site of emotional, economic and cultural in/dependence.

Atta starts by promoting the idea of the re-education of the girl child rather than domesticating her. In negotiating this scenario, men are made allies in this "re-education" process of the girl child. She captures this idea in her portrayal of Sunny Taiwo and how Sunny raises his daughter, Enitan, devoid of patriarchal impositions. Sunny stresses, "[when asked] where you learned such nonsense *ideas, that women must be domesticated, be doormats, and kitchen martyrs tell them* from your father and he is for the liberation of women" (24, our emphasis). Though women writers have held men culpable of patriarchal hegemony; they have unequivocally called for complementarity between men and women. Yet the pragmatic nature of cajoling the men folk into committing to raising a girl child in the spirit of a boy child has been lacking and this is where *Atta's Everything Good Will Come* goes a notch over and above most 21st century feminist literatures emanating from Nigeria. Fathers like Sunny Taiwo are capable of contributing to the raising of well-rounded Enitans of the Nigerian society.

Thus, this paper demystifies city marriage against the backdrop of the trope of the traditional marriage. It appeals for female responsiveness in marital institution as she creates a paradigm shift, tropes and images of "new women" who are "full rounder", individualistic, assertive, and independent in the city space of 21st century Lagos. Therefore, Atta's female characters decry traditional woman character replete in African literature: the timid, gullible, lackluster, subservient, dependent women and tactfully replaces them with models of liberated African women.

The female plight is made more severe in the city space as it also renders the women vulnerable, dependent and emotional amidst the travesty and travails of her immediate space. The portrait of the married female is though less condescending in the city space than in the

rural space but it also more psychological demanding for a city woman to cope with the nuances of marriage and her existence than in the rural area where a woman learns to understand her role from childhood. The city woman is at first far removed from patriarchal whims and caprices but she is doubly engaged through institutions of marriage and family to the sensibilities of patriarchy.

Even as a child, Enitan, the protagonist is exposed to gender issues. In fact, her father is to be praised for instilling male ideals on her daughter. She plays with a “catapult” (16). Her father makes her come to the realization that “kitchen work was ugly” (23) because her father makes her feel so. And that she “will not marry, or “have children” (26). His father champions “the Liberation of women” (24) through the education of his daughter. Atta projects the idea that city fathers are protective of their daughters from becoming traditional archetypal women who bend to male wishes and desires. Sunny Taiwo raises a child that expresses her opinion like a man and behaves like a man. But the Lagos city space in spite of patriarchal education still recalls the woman back to her traditional role of tending the kitchen and making children.

As a woman in her own home, Enitan’s husband realizes his wife is “not a domesticated woman” (210). In this note, Enitan expresses what a modern wife represents by projecting three prototypes/stereotypes of women thus, “strong and silent, chatterbox but cheerful, weak and kindhearted. All the rest were known as horrible women. I wanted to tell everyone, “I” Am! Not! Satisfied with these options...I would not let go until I am heard” (197). Enitan refuses to be labeled because she dilates these “neat” labels and sees these stereotypes as insulting and denigrating. After all, she has a job, her own car, she is intelligent and independent, yet, she is cheerful, kindhearted and even silent. Atta uses Enitan to query the dangers of gender labeling. Even though she hates cooking and other kitchen related feminine serfdom activities the Franco women refuse to speak against; she feels that does not diminish her. She is not a push-over; hence she fights on several fronts for her voice to be heard.

As a womanist character, Enitan is an activist that fights beyond the boundaries of the home front and as a nego-feminist she negotiates marital boundaries, challenges, impossibilities and becomes a mother and wife even though a rebellious one. She loves and respects the marriage institution but would never sacrifice her personal happiness for marriage. Other women see her disposition as atypical and others love her willfulness. She is a source of innovation to her friends, family and the women she comes across.

Most marriages painted in the novel are heavily deficient, lacking most ingredients that make a healthy marriage. One of such essential ingredient is communication. For instance, lack of communication between Enitan’s parents is responsible for their estrangement and eventual separation which has wide ramifications on their daughter. Early in the novel, Enitan observes that her mother never engages her in conversation, rather she talks and she listens (22). Even when her mother converses with her, it is rather a “talking down” not a “talking to” and as such would prefer to be caned when she does wrong “at least canning welts eventually disappeared” (23) instead, her mother would look at her disgustingly. On the whole, the Taiwos are a family of secrets and it takes several years to break the silence on their regrets and betrayal. The Francos in spite of their rich history as defenders and upholders of the law are silent on key matters. The matriarch of the family is treated as a servant despite her education. Enitan describes her as:

...one of those women who swallowed her voice from the day she was married. She was a nurse, and yet her husband and sons all lawyers, thought she couldn't grasp the rudiments of Offer and Acceptance. And so, she acted as she didn't. She called "precedence" "presidents", walked around with her underskirt hanging out. Whenever she tried to join in their legal discussions, they teased her (180).

For Toro Franco, marriage means a wife should become a doormat for the husband and forever silent even when mocked and laughed at by her own children. Toro is a trained nurse by profession but she carries the burdens of a yesterday's woman and aptly represents the "old school strand" of women, the ones untouched by the preachings of feminism.

Atta portrays male characters as flawed- cheating husbands and male friends, who cannot be trusted. She also describes them as women beaters and those who treat their spouses like semi-servants and doormats. In fact, one will expect from city literatures the discontinuance or the curtailing of patriarchy but Atta describes its severity and consequences in a city novel of the 21st century. Apparently, Atta's pen refuses to sketch a picture of an ennobling male character and all are seen as deformed in one way or the other. In fact, Enitan's mother's notes "Never make sacrifices for a man. By the time you say, 'look what I've done for you', it is too late. They never remember. The day you begin to retaliate, they never forget" (173). Atta reconfirms overall image of strained male and female relationship in the city when they should be reciprocity.

Another pattern deduced in most of the marriages is that of polygamy. Though the authorial voice avows that "polygamy was considered risqué" (104) but gradually it becomes the *norm de commerce* as every important male character in the novel has "another woman" and apparently this polygamous nature tends to stem from diverse reasons. For instance, Sunny Taiwo wants a boy to carry his name but he fails to acknowledge that he raises Enitan, his daughter as a male. In fact, he starts having an affair immediately after he loses his son and blames his puritanical wife who has agreeably discarded her bottles of perfume- a supposed healthy illusion for marriage-for gallons of holy water. Also, Brigadier Ibrahim Hassan is a typical polygamist, who wants a concubine, a "plaything" solely dependent on his charity and Sheri fits his supposed picture and expectation. In such patriarchal backdrop, Sheri goes further to lament her personal woes thus:

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 first child, our wedding and graduation days in that order. A woman may be forgiven for having a child out of wedlock...Marriage could immediately wipe out a sluttish past, but angel or not, a woman had to have a child. (105)

At this juncture it is pertinent to restate that Atta's feminist views influence her characterization. She takes to moralizing the fact that, marriage is necessary and motherhood is a prerequisite no matter the era or space. Atta also forewarns against youthful exuberance. Hence, Sheri's tragedy bespeaks the tragedy of a girl child trapped in the jungle of city space fighting against the objectification of her sex as it affects her entire life, dreams and aspirations. Sheri is raped, gets pregnant, tries to abort the pregnancy and eventual becomes barren. These occurrences alter Sheri's destiny as a woman and mother; she has no education, marriage, inheritance and a future. Sheri's character addresses young females in city spaces

and addresses the dangers of unhealthy relationship with the opposite sex. Sheri, though barren, rejects polygamy, concubinage and domestic violence to become free and happy. In spite of her harrowing childhood experience, she seemingly transforms into a strong and independent woman and eventually becomes the breadwinner of the Bakares.

Marriage requires sacrifice from both couple and it is quite traumatising when a marriage ends in divorce or loathing. Sadly, this is the case with some married characters in Atta's novel. For instance, Enitan's childhood is fraught with memories of her parents quarreling, fighting and their eventual breakup that leaves Enitan's mother embittered. The female characters are left with broken vows, shattered dreams and splintered idyllic fantasies of the 'together forever'; some of these battered divorced women become disillusioned while others like Enitan glory in their new found freedom. In a patriarchal state like Nigeria where there exist civil law and native law, Atta challenges the *status quo* of men always operating from a false vantage point of superiority; but appeals for complementarity, harmony, unity and gender parity especially in culturally defined and exclusive spaces like the kitchen for women and finances for men.

IV. "Then, I will be your best friend": female friendship and bonding

In negotiating the nuances of feminine role in society, a woman is faced with various challenges as mother, wife and daughter. As seen from the foregoing, the marriage space is a difficult and tasking site for women and a noticeable way a woman maintains and retains her sanity is through female friendship. Hudson Weems describes female friendship as a non-sexual relationship between women based on giving and receiving emotional and moral support, sharing stories and experiences, caring and nurturing each other. This form of relationship may occur between any women and does not necessarily involve sibling or mother-daughter relationships (65). Weems further points out that 'female bonding renders one sure way of bringing about ultimate success, for the sharing of one's life experiences often gives what is needed for that success. Hence, where there is a coming together of body, mind, and spirit, there is victory' (67). The mutual support and sharing provide opportunity to learn, grow and take advantage of the exchange. Learning not only from one's mistakes but from the mistakes of other women.

There is no gainsaying that the power of patriarchy constitutes a threat to female emancipation; but through female friendship, the healing power of female bonding helps in overcoming the problems women encounter. A case in point is the friendship between Enitan and Sheri, which despite their educational, physical, marital and emotional differences steadies the two to face the challenges of their society with constructive stoicism. Enitan and Sheri exhibit a formidable friendship akin to the ones read in some great African and African-American canonical feminine texts like Toni Morrison's *Sula* (1973), *Love* (2003) and Mariama Ba's *So Long a Letter* (1980). Most times female friendship is created across racial and class structures; but in the case of Enitan and Sheri, they share the same social class, same childhood though Enitan's mother rejects their friendship because of some ethical and religious sentiments. However, their friendship waxes stronger through the years. In spite of their similar mother-daughter estrangement, their relationship is quite educational as they teach and learn from each other and weather all challenges.

They also advise and empower each other stretching the bond of friendship into sisterhood and according to Weems: “if all sisters simply loved each another. Our children would be more secure, for they would have not just one female guardian, but many to attend to their needs” (73). The truism of women working together to upturn their squalid situation is recollected in the friendship between Sheri and Enitan as they seem to complement each other even as children and as adults. As children they share and confidence in each other their future ambitions and discuss women’s powerlessness in a politically unstable country. As adults, Enitan and Sheri help each other break the shackles of dependency, betrayal, domestic violence, estrangement and other emotional traumas. As demonstrated in other female relationships in the text, these sisters unequivocally exemplify the notion that, a friend in need is a friend indeed.

In the spirit of Sheri and Enitan’s nurturing and caring friendship, there are other revelatory female friendships as seen amongst the Bakare co-wives. They all bond for financial emancipation and Atta decries the notion of polygamous female rivalry replete in previous African feminine texts. Mrs. Williams, Enitan’s neighbor, is also a character that foregrounds female friendship by lending her hand when needed. She is also a victim of female subjugation and does not spend her energies on past despair but pictures a future full of hope and freedom. Woven into the tapestry of female friendship in the novel is that of female bonding for survival and solidarity depicted in the prison subplot where several societal issues are highlighted. Atta implicates religion, culture and tradition in maintaining women subjugation and how female friendship helps the female character overcome their squalid environment and predicament. Even in prison, female solidarity unites the female characters against institutions of power as seen in Grace Ameh and Enitan managing their prison mis/adventure. On the whole, female friendship possesses healing powers in overcoming societal prejudices; it also empowers and connects women on several planes - socially, emotionally, politically, culturally - and in addition heals their pains ((SyKadidia, 100). Female friendship also provides protection and comfort in times of calamity and domestic violence. In all, *Everything Good Will Come* fuels the artistic vision of the redemptive powers of female friendship, encourages and inspires women to connect so as to break out of the yoke and fight the injustices against women in a patriarchal, hegemonic society.

V. Conclusion

Cities are always a fascination as they affect people and vice versa. City spaces and experiences fictionalized or real capture the nuanced sensibilities of characters and real people alike. Cities are centres and sites of important social, political and economic transformations; they play vital roles in signaling opportunities, deprivations, inequality, violence, diseases, gender, corruption, exclusion and bad governance. Atta therefore excavates and polishes old as well as new varieties of female existence in the city space of Lagos. She historicizes national discontent, feminine, social, economic, religious and political issues viewed through the eyes of Enitan as she portrays the city of Lagos and like Dickens of London. Atta paints pictures of characters high and low, rich and poor, weak and strong, invented and real connected together for the purpose of understanding city space and contemporary life.

This paper treats Atta’s handling of the city space in discussing issues of marriage and friendship and proffers that without the right ingredients of communication, love, trust, mutual respect and gender parity, city marriages would lack stability. From the novel it has

been observed that most city husbands are philanderers and as a result, wives disengage themselves from husbands that threaten their freedom, peace and productive existence. Also observed is the notion that feminine liberty, freedom and interdependence are prerequisite for female growth and development. Nevertheless, in an unstable marriage, city wives are prone to divorce, yet some are even open to being co-wives hence co-mothering the children of others against the backdrop of previous feminine ideals as seen in the dispositions of the Bakares. Another forte of feminine streak portrayed by Atta is female contributions to nation building as exemplified in the characters of Grace Ameh and Enitan Taiwo. They are portrayed as liberators not only of the female folk but also their male counterparts.

In spite of the harrowing experiences of marriage and the instability in the country, Atta presents marriage as tasking and female friendships as liberating, healing and empowering. She disagrees with societal myths that girls in companies of boys are sexual objects that ought to be exploited and women are supposed to be domesticated, to always return to the kitchen space in spite of their degrees and careers to live and die as kitchen martyrs.

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