

**WIFELY SUBMISSION
AND FILIAL OBEDIENCE:
PATRIARCHAL SUBJUGATION
OF WOMEN AND CHILDREN
AND STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE
IN SELECTED LITERARY TEXTS
SET IN AFRICA**

KIMMÉRA SHERRILYN PILLAY

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (English Studies), in the Graduate Programme in the School of Arts at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

DECEMBER 2020

SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR CHERYL STOBIE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
INTRODUCTION – PART ONE	1
AIMS AND OBJECTIVES	11
METHODOLOGY.....	12
STRUCTURE OF CHAPTERS	13
Chapter One.....	13
Chapter Two.....	14
Chapter Three.....	14
Chapter Four.....	15
Chapter Five.....	16
Conclusion.....	16
INTRODUCTION – PART TWO	18
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE	18
Religion.....	18
Post-colonial Feminist Theology.....	23
LITERATURE REVIEW.....	27
<i>From a Crooked Rib</i>	27
<i>God Dies by the Nile</i>	28
<i>Purple Hibiscus</i>	28
<i>Infidel</i>	29
<i>Not without Flowers</i>	29
THEMES	30
Men vs Women.....	30
Sons vs Daughters.....	32
Polygyny.....	34
Prostitution.....	35
Female Genital Mutilation.....	36
Hijab.....	38
Domestic Violence.....	38
Religious Exploitation and Unscrupulous Prophets.....	40
Proverbs.....	42
<i>Bildungsroman</i>	42
CONCLUSION.....	43
CHAPTER ONE	44
Introduction.....	44

Nuruddin Farah’s Background and Engaged Literature	49
Synopsis.....	50
“Alhamdulillah. Istagfurullah. Subhganallah”	51
“To Fly Away; like a Cock”	54
“Ebla was Nature, Nature had Personified in Her”	55
“Girls were Materials, just like Objects or Items on the Shelf of a Shop”	57
“You are my Wife”	59
“I Love Life, and I Love to be a Wife. I don’t Care Whose”	63
“I am Master of Myself”	67
Conclusion	68
CHAPTER TWO	70
Introduction	70
Nawal El Saadawi’s Background and Works for Social Justice	75
Synopsis.....	76
Gender Inequality.....	77
Sexual Predation and a “Devout Muslim”	79
Patriarchal Image of Women.....	82
Infanticide and Battering to Death.....	85
Insanity vs “Unveiling of the Mind”	88
Darkness vs Light	90
Conclusion	91
CHAPTER THREE	93
Introduction	93
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Background and Feminist Writings.....	99
Synopsis.....	100
Home is an Escape from Enugu.....	101
Home is an Escape to Nsukka	107
Religion used as an Instrument for Oppression.....	112
Religion used as an Instrument for Liberation	119
“Defiance is like Marijuana”	123
Conclusion	127
CHAPTER FOUR.....	128
Introduction	128
Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s Background and Establishment as Emancipator for Women.....	138
Synopsis.....	139
Social Control and Gendered Violence in Clan-based Somalia.....	140
Wounding and Mutilation of the Female Body	143
Physical and Psychological Ramifications of FGM	146
Psychological and Social Functioning within Polygamous Family Structures	148
Religious and Patriarchal Abuses in Islam.....	150
Poststructural Feminist Atheism.....	155
Conclusion	159

CHAPTER FIVE	162
Introduction	162
Amma Darko’s Background and Feminist Representations	169
Synopsis	170
Human Rights Violations in the WCS Prayer Camp.....	171
Whip to Conquer Satan.....	175
Prophet Abednego	178
Religion as an Instrument to Oppress Women.....	181
False Cures and Stigmatisation of Aids.....	185
“Breaking the Silence”.....	188
Conclusion.....	192
CONCLUSION	194
BIBLIOGRAPHY	206

DECLARATION

I, Kimméra Sherrilyn Pillay, declare that:

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data, pictures, graphs or other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other persons.
4. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other researchers. Where other written sources have been quoted, then:
 - a. Their words have been re-written but the general information attributed to them has been referenced.
 - b. Where their exact words have been used, the writing has been placed inside quotation marks or shown as an indented quotation, and referenced.
5. This thesis does not contain texts, graphics, or tables copied and pasted from the Internet, unless specifically acknowledged, and the source being detailed in the thesis and in the references sections.

Kimméra Sherrilyn Pillay

Student Name

KS Pillay

Student Signature

3-03-21

Date

Prof. Cheryl Stobie

Name of Supervisor

C. Stobie

Signature

3-03-21

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis would not have been possible without the support, encouragement and assistance of many individuals. I would like to extend my gratitude to the following:

Professor Cheryl Stobie for expertly supervising and guiding me through this research. I am hugely indebted to you for your unwavering support, motivation and advice.

National Research Foundation for their financial assistance towards this research. This work is based on the research supported by the National Research Foundation of South Africa (Grant Number: 113212)

Neelan Naidoo, Jayshree Naidoo, Jenna Singh, Lisa Padayachee and Rammathi Permessor for your endless prayers and for encouraging me in all of my pursuits and inspiring me to follow my dreams. Moreover, I want to acknowledge my deepest appreciation to **Jayshree Naidoo** for making all the sacrifices you do so that I can accomplish my goals.

Shaldin Pillay for your unflinching love, care and support. You are my pillar of strength and I am grateful to you for standing by my side, believing in me and encouraging me.

Finally, and most importantly, I offer thanksgiving to **God** for the wisdom he bestows upon me as well as the strength, good health and peace of mind.

ABSTRACT

This thesis performs a textual analysis of Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* (2006 [1970]), Nawal El Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile* (2015 [1985]), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2013 [2003]), Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Infidel* (2007 [2006]) and Amma Darko's *Not without Flowers* (2007). Using theoretical insights derived from gender studies and religious studies and methods of textual analysis, I argue that the first two selected novels (set almost two generations ago) represent patterns of patriarchal and religious oppression within particular Islamic cultures in Africa that have strong correlations with oppressive patriarchal practices in Christian as well as Muslim families as represented in twenty-first century texts with other African settings, although significantly more resistance to these forms of oppression is represented in the later texts, partly as a result of globalisation.

In this study, I perform a textual analysis of five primary texts from diverse contexts, settings and time-periods to explore the representations of women and children subject to patriarchal oppression. These texts date between the years 1970 to 2007 and all have an African setting; however, the settings of the texts are also spread across other locations, for example, Saudi Arabia and the Netherlands, highlighting the widespread prevalence of the issues. The selected texts centre on battering, domestic violence, sexual abuse, polygyny, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriages and prostitution, which are topical issues in contemporary Africa as well as across the globe.

The argument, therefore, undertakes an analysis of wifely submission and filial obedience as a result of patriarchal subjugation through a feminist lens. I argue that religious, social and political spheres are used to support the patriarchal system, which subsequently results in the subjugation of women and children. Through a textual analysis of the five literary texts, I examine representations of the subordination of women and children because of paternalistic dominance. I also focus on the roles that secular and religious law play in sustaining the patriarchal order within the texts. The second objective of this thesis is to explore the authors' redefinition of female identity exemplified in the literary feminine consciousness and commitment to post-colonial feminist theology. To achieve this goal, I explore women's and children's struggles for equality and emancipation from patriarchal systems by analysing their strategies of resistance.

INTRODUCTION –

PART 1

This thesis performs an in-depth critical analysis of the following five texts: Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* (2006 [1970]), Nawal El Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile* (2015 [1985]), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2013 [2003]), Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Infidel* (2007 [2006]) and Amma Darko's *Not without Flowers* (2007). In this study, I employ theoretical insights derived from gender studies and religious studies and methods of textual analysis to formulate an argument that the first two selected novels (set almost two generations ago) represent patterns of patriarchal and religious oppression within particular Islamic cultures in Africa that have compelling correlations with oppressive patriarchal practices in Christian as well as Muslim families as represented in twenty-first century texts with other African settings, although significantly more resistance to these forms of oppression is represented in the later texts, partly as a result of globalisation. Part one of this introductory chapter makes reference to the relationship between patriarchy and globalisation and also includes a concise overview of the research presented in the body of this thesis. This chapter includes a discussion of the framework, context, research objectives, methodology and structure of the thesis. In addition, it focuses briefly on a discussion of African feminism, in particular, African feminist literary theory and African feminist theology. Part two of the introduction comprises an analysis of the key theories and themes related to the texts as well as a discussion of past research on the primary texts.

The relationship between patriarchy and globalisation is fundamental in order to study the correlating effects on women. The emergence of globalisation in the 1980s has resulted in the world experiencing a mutual exchange of views between individuals, organisations and economic systems worldwide. There are both pros and cons of globalisation;¹ however, my

¹ In Elizabeth DeWaard's article titled "Patriarchy: The Missing Link in Understanding Globalization's Impact upon Women", she argues:

globalization is largely a manifestation of patriarchy and adversely affects women worldwide through a lack of consideration for women's issues, promoting goal-oriented growth without protective measures, and an overwhelming focus on the public sphere (politics and economics) and disregard for the private sphere (home and family life). (2014:1)

DeWaard's view is that globalisation is not a substandard economic strategy, or oppressive regime or system; however, she argues that "globalization does negatively impact women because it applies masculine values and

argument in this thesis is that globalisation has promoted women's development and individuality. Rhoda Howard-Hassmann, a distinguished scholar of human rights, contends that even though globalisation is considered to be the most critical challenge to the universality of human rights in the twenty-first century, it promotes women's human rights (2011:442). She also argues that "in the last 40 years, a period roughly coincident with the current round of globalization, women's material well-being has improved drastically" (442). Using statistics from the World Bank, she states:

Women's life expectancy at birth increased worldwide from 60.8 years in 1970 to 71.1 years in 2008. The worldwide fertility rate declined from 4.73 births per woman in 1970 to 2.54 births in 2008. In 1980, only 50 percent of females over the age of 15 were literate; this increased to 76.3 percent in 2008. In East Asia and the Pacific, a heavily globalized region, women's life expectancy rose from 60.2 years in 1970 to 74 in 2008; the fertility rate dropped from 5.59 to 1.94 births between the same years; and the literacy rate rose from 55.7 percent in 1980 to 90.1 percent in 2008. Even the poorest area of the world, Sub-Saharan Africa, witnessed improvements. Women's life expectancy increased from 46 years in 1970 to 53.2 years in 2008, and the fertility rate declined from 6.72 to 5.11 births. (442)

From the above facts, Howard-Hassmann argues that economic globalisation has promoted women's human rights. Economic globalisation generally has a positive influence on women's status as a result of an increase in job opportunities, which has resulted in women exercising economic autonomy. Howard-Hassmann also explains that globalisation is also a source of personal autonomy for women. This is discussed as follows:

Access to one's own income is a major means of empowerment for women; a woman who has her own income does not rely on male family members for her survival and has a higher chance of escaping male control and violence. Management of her income, moreover, empowers her with mathematical knowledge, bargaining skills, and the capacity to make her own decisions. By providing some women opportunities to earn incomes in their own countries,

perspectives to a multi-gendered problem" (10). Although globalisation has resulted in women having more economic independence, it has also resulted in negative consequences for them as they are "double burdened" with work and family responsibilities. Some women are also faced with the predicament of choosing between having children or a job. DeWaard describes globalisation as a masculine process mainly because men hold the decision-making power in terms of "formulating, advocating, implementing and evaluating globalization" (10). Women are positioned into jobs which were previously occupied by well paid, high status men but when they receive the positions, they are lower paid, and the jobs are proletarianised. In addition, she argues that globalisation fosters masculine values, thus suppressing feminine values and skills. Women now have a part of the global workforce; nevertheless, some are subject to substandard working conditions which is undesirable for their health and body.

economic globalization also reduces the attractiveness of the more abusive types of international migration. (444)

In this thesis, I argue that the resistance of subjugated women against patriarchal structures has increased partly as a result of globalisation.¹ Globalisation has resulted in new conceptions of sexuality, reproduction and femininity. Furthermore, women and children have an opportunity to make autonomous choices to earn an income and escape pressures of forced/bartered marriages or sexual slavery/prostitution because of globalisation, which has resulted in the spread of human rights laws and internationalisation of laws protecting women and children. However, the implementation of laws does not necessarily result in the application of laws. Achieving equitable status between men and women and eliminating all forms of discrimination against women are fundamental human rights and United Nations values. UN Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres notes that “achieving gender equality and empowering women and girls is the unfinished business of our time, and the greatest human rights challenge in our world” (United Nations 2021).

The overarching theory that applies to this thesis is African feminism, in particular, African feminist literary theory and African feminist theology. African women have been denied a voice in research so African feminism creates a space to reclaim and celebrate that voice. There are many definitions of feminism and I acknowledge that many African women writers refuse to identify with the term “feminism” because of the apparent exclusion of discourses of race and class. In addition, “to say that all writing by women and about women has feminist implications would be a generalization undermining the very foundations of the concept of feminism” (Nkealah 2006:133). In this study, I do not engage in a discussion of the debates on feminism but employ the term to describe the selected authors because of the feminist nature of their literary works. The use of this term to describe African writers is supported by a quotation, extracted from the Charter of Feminist Principles of African Feminists (2006), by women from all parts of Africa who state:

As African feminists, we are also part of a global feminist movement against patriarchal oppression in all its manifestations. Our experiences are linked to that of women in other parts of the world with whom we have shared solidarity and support over the years. As we assert our space as African feminists, we also draw inspiration from our feminist ancestors who blazed the trail and made it possible to affirm the rights of African women. As we invoke the memory of those women

² DeWaard defines globalisation as the “breakdown of barriers or borders across the globe to promote the free flow of goods, people, communication, and knowledge” (2014:2).

whose names are hardly ever recorded in any history books, we insist that it is a profound insult to claim that feminism was imported into Africa from the West. We reclaim and assert the long and rich tradition of African women's resistance to patriarchy in Africa. We henceforth claim the right to theorize for ourselves, write for ourselves, strategize for ourselves and speak for ourselves as African feminists. (5)

The selected African feminist writers use their literary works to challenge deeply engrained and culturally sanctioned patriarchal and religious hierarchies of gender-based dominance and cultural valorisation. All four novels may be regarded as both political and literary texts as the texts dramatise the socio-political issues prevalent in Somali, Egypt, Nigeria and Ghana. In addition, the selected authors employ literary techniques such as imaginative reconstruction to counter-hegemonically represent the protagonists as women who are able to dismantle oppressive patriarchal structures. Moreover, the authors utilise cultural criticism and feminist literary activism in their works as tools to redefine and reassert the identity of African women. In this thesis, I employ the term "African feminism" as an umbrella term for a range of African theorists' ideas who are aware of the hazards of Euro-American white focused feminism and who are focusing their attention on concerns that apply to life experiences of women in various African contexts. Naomi Nkealah, a key scholar in African feminism, explains: "Over the past three decades, African feminisms have increasingly emphasised the need to resist cultural imperialism by which the West undermines the philosophical ideologies and belief systems of African peoples" (2016:61). Nkealah adds: "African women's responses to the inequities of Western feminisms have resulted in theorisations of indigenous feminist models that aim to *speak* feminism from (1) an African cultural perspective; (2) an African geopolitical location; (3) and an African ideological viewpoint" (61). African feminism is theorised on indigenous models which centre on the histories, cultures and experiences of African women and are also aimed at empowering women and enlightening men (63). African feminist writers are committed to combating gender inequality. Hence, through their literary works, they highlight the oppression and subjugation of women with the aim of redressing the situation of marginalised women who are denied access to full human rights and equal status in society. In other words, feminist writers strive for the liberation of women from patriarchal institutions that relegate women to subordinate positions.

The term "African theology" is used to denote the theological reflection that is established on the social, political, cultural and economic experiences of African people. African theology emerged at approximately the same time that African countries were liberating themselves

from colonialism. Hence, there is a close relationship between African theology and liberation of Africans from colonialists. The three major religions on the African continent are African indigenous/ traditional religions, Christianity and Islam. However, there are substantial differences within these three major religions based on the socio-political, geographical and cultural settings. While the African experience of colonialism resonates with various biblical stories, for example the captivity of Israelites in Egypt, issues that characterise post-colonial African nations are central to African theology. The failure of post-colonial African leadership, as a result of poor political and economic policies coupled with greed and corruption, questions human dignity, which is at the centre of African theology. The five selected texts all draw attention to repressive post-colonial African regimes with citizens subjected to abject material poverty. Circumstances that prevail in these texts include corruption, poverty, famine, human degradation, HIV/Aids and squalor. It is also noteworthy that all the countries represented in the texts (except for Kenya) are north of the equator, as these regions have a strong Islamic population. Furthermore, north Africa was the centre of the Arab uprising in 2011.

From a Crooked Rib and *Infidel* are both written by Somali-born authors and centre on the Islamic religion. Islam has been a part of Somali society for approximately 14 centuries as it was first introduced during Prophet Muhammed's time. *God Dies by the Nile* also focuses on Islam but is set in Egypt, where Islam has been the dominant religion since the Muslim conquest of Roman Egypt between the 10th and 12th century. *Purple Hibiscus* (set in Nigeria) and *Not without Flowers* (set in Ghana) concentrate on traditionalism and exploited Christianity. In both Nigeria and Ghana, Christianity was brought into the countries by missionaries in the 15th century.

African feminist theology is rooted in feminist theology which is further categorised as liberation theology. Feminist theology centres on the liberation of women from all forms of sexism and patriarchal oppression. Isabel Phiri, an academic and professor within the field of African theology, acknowledges the importance of African cultures as it gives Africans their identity (2004:17). Phiri notes: "Unfortunately, all African cultures have viewed women as less important than men, thereby making it difficult for women to have valid relationships with self, others (both women and men), creation and God" (17). As a result of this gender inequality, "African women theologians are calling men and women in their religions of Africa and society to examine their cultures again from a gender perspective" (17). African feminist

theologians focus on exposing the ideological justifications for the oppression of women present in religions and cultures. In addition, they encourage collaboration and mutual partnership in the “vision and struggle for African liberation from all forms of oppression” (21). Phiri discusses the importance of African feminist theology as follows:

African women’s theologies are a critical, academic study of the causes of women’s oppression: particularly a struggle against societal, cultural and religious patriarchy. It is committed to the eradication of all forms of oppression against women through a critique of the social and religious dimensions both in African culture and religions.

African women’s theologies take women’s experiences as the starting point, focusing on the oppressive areas of life caused by injustices such as patriarchy, colonialism, neo-colonialism, racism, capitalism, sexism and globalisation, to mention a few. (21)

As mentioned above, all five texts are written by African feminist writers who explore the roles and statuses of women and children in various African countries. African feminist theology centres on addressing issues on women’s oppression and marginalisation. Nkeahlah states: “African feminists are concerned about the continued marginalization of African women under the three-striped banner of culture, tradition and religion” (2006:136). In their feminist works, African feminist writers advocate for a modification of culture which “would permit/ liberate/ empower women to function within a limitless space without trespassing on forbidden enclaves” (139). Nkealah notes that the ultimate goal of feminism is “the triumphal emancipation of the woman as a unique, distinct individual with a mind uncluttered by patriarchal beliefs and abusive submission to tradition” (2006:135). In feminist literature, African women occupy a centre stage and the female protagonists are projected as worthy, effectual and contributing women. In the five texts selected for discussion, the female characters are portrayed as resourceful as they employ their intellectual and physical strength to achieve self-fulfilment and contribute to societal development. The selected feminist authors also reflect strategies for combating patriarchal oppression, misogynistic beliefs, harmful cultural practices and sexist ideologies.

The selected literary works in this thesis all form a corpus of literature owing to their feminist nature. The texts do not merely deal with issues of gender but explore the intersectionality of race, class, sexuality and spirituality. The texts also centre on the exploitation and oppression that characterises the lives of women, but all five texts also offer an imperative for change. In all the primary texts, the feminist characters are represented as rebels against patriarchal

intrusions; however, in each text, the rebellion varies.

As discussed above, African feminist literature reflects the challenges women face within an African context as well as the creative ways in which women deal with these challenges. Akachi Ezeigbo proposes the model “snail-sense feminism” which is a model that adopts the habits of snails to describe how women survive within Nigeria’s patriarchal culture. “Snail-sense feminism” is about how women survive in a patriarchal environment where male dominance is unassailable, where women’s freedoms are relentlessly curtailed by social, religious and cultural taboos (2012:27). This model is informed by women’s “tendency to accommodate or tolerate the male and cooperate with men” (27). The “snail-sense model” is portrayed in *Purple Hibiscus* through Beatrice’s survival strategy (till she eventually murders the patriarch at the end of the novel).

Nkealah offers an alternate feminism model called “cameline agency” which is established on the agency of a camel, which “has a superior ability to surmount obstacles in its environment” (2012:122). Nkealah notes: “Cameline agency is all about the agency of women – the ability of oppressed women to act decisively to change their circumstances and regain control of their lives” (123). This thesis is centred on the strategies of resistance of the female characters in the selected texts. I explore how the selected feminist authors reflect the transformation of the female characters from a position of marginalisation and disempowerment to one where the characters are able to think and act independently.

This study focuses on how religion is used as an instrument to facilitate patriarchy and to oppress women and children. The Bible, Qur’an, Hadith and many other religious texts have subordinated, confined, and suppressed women as a result of biased interpretations. The above religious sources have been misinterpreted and translated to reflect that women must stay within the household and have nothing to do with public life. In addition, some religious texts are sexist in nature, for example, St Paul’s instruction in 1 Timothy 2:12 declares: “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, she must be silent” (Holy Bible: New International Version). Religion, culture and tradition are regarded as sources of oppression and inequality for women and children. However, the above structures are all socially constructed; therefore beliefs can be interrogated and deconstructed. In the context of feminism, violence and sexual abuse, women and children have found themselves at the centre of the debates about their identities. Gender, sexuality and power intersect to define

and control women's and children's identities. The notion of identity is closely linked to issues of hegemony and power. Furthermore, identity is connected to one's religion, culture or tradition as beliefs and customs play a significant role in creating an identity. African feminist theology focuses on addressing the inequalities between the sexes and redefining women's identities.

I have selected five texts from diverse contexts, settings and time-periods to explore the representations of women and children subject to patriarchal oppression. These texts date between the years 1970 to 2007 and all have an African setting; however, the settings of the texts are also spread across other locations, for example, Saudi Arabia and the Netherlands, highlighting the widespread prevalence of the issues. The five texts centre on battering, domestic violence, sexual abuse, polygyny, female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriages and prostitution, which are topical issues in contemporary Africa as well as across the globe. In addition, this thesis centres on the strategies of resistance for women and children. In all five texts, the authors represent characters who critique hegemonic power challenge traditional viewpoints, particularly in respect of their identification and control of their bodies. The selected authors have taken a political stand to focus on issues of gender relations, power and inequality, as well as the exploitation of African and religious cultural beliefs. The chosen authors challenge hegemonic patriarchal beliefs and provide a demystification of patriarchal stereotypes and cultural traditions that are used to subjugate women and children.

The five texts that I have selected all feature patriarchal power structures and practices that precede them. One such practice is FGM, which is highlighted in three out of the five texts, is an important theme for this thesis. Hence, I have selected two texts from Somalia, as According to UNICEF, Somalia has the highest cases of FGM/C in the world with 98% of girls undergoing it between the ages of 5 and 11 (Plan International 2020). Furthermore, I have chosen to analyse Ali's autobiography as she provides a subjective account of her experiences of FGM. Her autobiography, which offers inside knowledge and non-fictional accounts of patriarchal oppression and religious exploitation, is also an important lens for analysing the fictional social realities represented in the other four selected novels. The issue of FGM is also a current global issue, which has exacerbated during the Covid-19 pandemic, as in the case of religious exploitation. The Covid-19 lockdown has been an opportune time for FGM practices to escalate and "According to the United Nations Population Fund, COVID-19 could have far reaching

impacts on the effort to end FGM/C, with a potential 2 million FGM/C cases occurring over the next decade that could have otherwise been averted” (Plan International 2020). Similarly, during the Covid-19 pandemic, religious exploitation has also exacerbated, as discussed in Chapter Five. In summary, the five authors’ works feature contemporary themes and issues that are prevalent in society today.

My research in this thesis focuses on an analysis of how religious practices – Christian, Muslim and traditional – are represented in five literary texts set in Africa as oppressing women and children, as well as the challenges to this structural violence. The title of this thesis sets up the positional and hierarchical relationships between both husbands and wives and parents and children. The words in the title “Wifely Submission” signpost the words written by Paul in the Bible in Colossians 3:18, which read as “Wives, be submissive to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord” (Holman Christian Standard Bible). There are many interpretations of the above-mentioned verse. These include the New International Version which reads: “Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord”, New American Standard Bible which is translated as: “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord”, Contemporary English Version states: “A wife must put her husband first. This is her duty as a follower of the Lord” and the GOD’S WORD Translation which translates as “Wives, place yourselves under your husbands’ authority. This is appropriate behaviour for the Lord’s people”. The various interpretations quoted above highlight the contradictions found in Christianity as a result of miscellaneous versions of scriptures and the Bible as a whole. The keywords in the interpretations above are “subject”, “submissive” and “submit”, which all point to the subjugation of women. However, the instructions of “as is fitting in the Lord” is frequently ignored and has resulted in oppressive paternalistic dominance. The command “as is fitting in the Lord” points out that there are exceptions when wives do not have to submit to their husbands. Hence, wives are under no biblical obligation to submit to familial oppression or violence as this is contrary to religious precepts.

There is also a responsibility for husbands in Colossians 3:19, which appears in the Holman Christian Standard Bible as “Husbands, love your wives and don’t be bitter toward them”. Other interpretations, such as the New International Version, declare to husbands “do not be harsh”, and the Contemporary English Version orders husbands not to abuse their wives. The first keyword in this verse is “love”, which expresses the highest spiritual affection as the foundation of religion, particularly Christianity. The Bible specifically instructs that love

should not be transformed into hatred and that husbands should not be hostile. Wives have a duty of submission to their husbands, but the husbands praised in the Bible are ones who are affectionate and not tyrannical. The verses quoted above are pertinent for the purpose of the discussion of the argument in this thesis as they underline the relationship between men and women in the Bible. The words “Filial Obedience” in the title also signpost the instructions given by God for the Christian household and focus on family relations. Women are viewed as subordinate to men and their duty of submission to their husbands is primarily insisted upon. Children are also instructed to be obedient to their parents but fathers (and in some versions parents) are also instructed to show compassion towards their children.

The argument, therefore, entails a feminist analysis of representations of wifely submission and filial obedience as a result of patriarchal subjugation. I argue that religious, social and political spheres are used to support the patriarchal system, which subsequently results in the subjugation of women and children. Through a textual analysis of the literary texts, I examine representations of the subordination of women and children because of paternalistic dominance. I also focus on the roles that secular and religious law play in sustaining the patriarchal order within the texts. The second objective of this thesis is to explore the authors’ redefinition of female identity exemplified in the literary feminine consciousness and commitment to post-colonial feminist theology. To achieve this goal, I explore women’s and children’s struggles for equality and emancipation from patriarchal systems by analysing their strategies of resistance. The protagonists in the chosen texts are portrayed as heroines rather than victims as they challenge the circumscribed patriarchal structures that suppress their individuality. In conclusion, I argue that the main characters are exemplified counter-hegemonically to reflect their power to assert their individuality.

This thesis covers new ground. It is conducted through the lens of gender and religious studies as I research the representations of Christian and Islamic scriptures, theological doctrines, and traditional patriarchal practices, as exemplified in African literary texts. This study demonstrates how these religions have been utilised in similar physically and sexually oppressive patriarchal contexts to support wifely submission and filial obedience. This research is important as oppressive patriarchal practices are extremely dangerous and harmful to both women and children, and this oppression cannot be combatted until its roots, including its religious affiliations, can be fully understood. Within the framework of English Studies, I explore the literary representations of the gendered body, the body in pain, the

relationship between the body and power and the body as a site of survival. In literature, women's bodies are symbolic, and authors use the female body to signify the patriarchal control of women's sexuality. This is also directly linked to central themes of this thesis, namely: veiling, FGM, rape and abuse. My research also focuses on an analysis of the psychological effects of the female characters who are subjected to rape, FGM, polygyny and violence. The psychological ramifications of patriarchal practices as well as the pressures on women to conform to societal and cultural expectations are key areas under scrutiny in this study. Furthermore, in literature, representations of the "female malady" (Showalter 1985) and mental illness are used as a reflection of societal ills, hence critical engagement with these representations in relation to female gender ideologies is pertinent. Alternatively, and innovatively, I also investigate the connection between the profile of masculinity and the "dark triad" of psychological traits in relation to the characterisation of a patriarchal character.

The final analytical chapter of this thesis also presents an innovative textual analysis of Darko's novel *Not without Flowers*, as I draw parallels between instances of religious exploitation in the novel to those that occurred in 2020 during the global Coronavirus pandemic. In summation, this research explores the patterns of patriarchal and religious oppression in texts published between the dates 1970 to 2007, which are fictional representations of social realities. This thesis engages in a textual analysis of the work of five authors whose texts focus on empowering individual and communal aspirations for social justice and transformation, addressing societal challenges and advancing environmental awareness.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of this thesis, as already stated, are to explore the relationship between religion, social and political spheres and patriarchal oppression in five selected literary texts. This is achieved by analysing the patterns of patriarchal and religious oppression within particular Islamic and Christian cultures in Africa in the texts. In addition to this, I explore the representation of subjugated women and children characters in the texts who encounter oppression/abuse from patriarchal figures and how the principal characters progressively resist various forms of oppression.

This thesis explores the various patriarchal practices represented in the elected texts. Secondly, I examine how patriarchy is supported by social, political and religious forces in the texts. This thesis also explores the representation and depiction of principal characters. Consequently, I analyse the various oppressions associated with the characters because of their subject positions/identities. Fifthly, I explore how the principal characters internalise their oppression. Another aim of this research is to identify the strategies adopted by the characters to cope with oppression/patriarchy. In addition, I analyse how women and child characters challenge hegemonic patriarchal beliefs and provide a demystification of patriarchal stereotypes and cultural tradition. Furthermore, I explore how women and child characters develop a sense of agency or autonomy. Lastly, I focus on how the resistance of the main characters progressively increases partly as a result of globalisation within the main texts.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology of my study is qualitative research focusing on a textual analysis of the chosen literary works. Catherine Belsey (2013:160) astutely notes that “textual analysis is indispensable to research in cultural criticism”. In this textual analysis, I focus on discourse analysis, content analysis and narrative research. Textual analysis as a research method encompasses a direct encounter with the primary work itself (160). Literary texts are made up of themes; hence I am exploring one avenue focusing on the religious exploitation, patriarchy and oppression in the primary texts. An analysis of the representations of characters who encounter oppression from a religious patriarchal regime in the primary texts is explored. I engage with the dialogue in the selected texts for analytical purposes. The chosen primary texts are explored carefully and closely focusing on the structure, plot and patterns in the text. This involves identifying recurring images, repeated phrases and actions. In addition, I ascertain the dominant themes, metaphors and symbols that run through the text. The selected texts have corresponding themes of identity, oppression and liberation. Consequently, I examine these themes in relation to post-colonial feminist theology. I also explore the religious ceremonies and religious symbols in the texts by analysing their roles in advocating patriarchy. In addition, I examine the motifs of journey, escape, prostitution, and solidarity.

STRUCTURE OF CHAPTERS

There are five main sections that constitute this thesis, each focusing on one of the five primary texts. The texts are arranged in chronological order to signal the patterns of patriarchal and religious oppression prevalent over the time of span of writing. Chronology also has a bearing on the treatment of women and children in the selected texts as I explore the changes that have occurred in the time span depicted.

Chapter One:

The first novel, *From a Crooked Rib* by Nuruddin Farah, was first published in 1970 and focuses on patriarchy in Somalia where women's lives and experiences are controlled by traditional patriarchal and Islamic customs. The primary aim of this chapter is to explore the subjugation and oppression of women in Somali society. The title of the novel is based on the traditional Somali proverb which states, "God created Woman from a crooked rib; and anyone who trieth to straighten it, breaketh it" (Farah 2006 [1970]). Throughout the novel, the protagonist, Ebla, tries to challenge these customs and patriarchal ideologies. Ebla is projected as a multi-dimensional *Bildungsheld* character as she quests for independence, freedom and dignity. As a result of her philosophical outlook of life, she questions religious and patriarchal doctrines and asserts her autonomous individuality.

In this chapter, I provide a background of Farah and highlight how his writings focus on injustices in Somali society. This chapter also focuses on an examination of the Islam-based totalitarian dictatorship/law, tribal patriarchy and the challenges of nomadic pastoralism in relation to the characterisation of Ebla. From a feminist perspective, I also focus on an exploration of the relationship between Ebla and nature. Furthermore, in this analysis, I explore the representation of the body and embodiment(s) in terms of the following themes: the gendered body, the body in pain, the relationship between the body and power and the body as a site of survival. This chapter also centres on a discussion of the power dynamics, gender hierarchy and male dominance in Ebla's life post-marriage, and how prostitution is represented to reflect antagonistic gender relations.

Chapter Two:

God Dies by the Nile (which was first published in English in 1985) is written by Egyptian feminist Nawal El Saadawi and explores the lives of women who are victims of the patriarchal structure established by social, religious and political spheres. The primary objective of this chapter is to explore the roles patriarchy and religion play in maintaining the unequal status quo between males and females. In the text, Islam is manipulated to support the oppression of women; however, through the representation of key female characters, Saadawi reveals the resistance of women against patriarchal structures.

Chapter Two first focuses on a discussion of Saadawi as a feminist writer for social justice. This is followed by an examination of gender inequality and the negative effects of male hegemony and cultural patrimony. The next section centres on an analysis of the sexual perversion reflected in the novel by exploring the characterisation of the Mayor and two of his conspirators, Sheikh Zahran and Haj Ismail. This chapter focuses on how the system of patriarchy is fortified by traditional beliefs, religion and politics, therefore, in my analysis, I identify how the three spheres promote male dominance and female subjugation through a discussion of significant events in the text. Subsequently, I investigate the patriarchal image of women through an analysis of the characterisation of Fatheya. I also explore how women's bodies are subjected to external social controls through practices such as female genital mutilation and defloration. In relation to the above, I explore how Saadawi critiques ingrained social practices through the novel's representation of the infanticide of the baby boy and the battering to death of Fatheya in her attempt to protect him. Drawing from Elaine Showalter's text, *The Female Malady* (1985), I explore the representations of insanity in *God Dies by the Nile* and discuss how through Zakeya's insanity, there is an "unveiling of the mind" which results in a protest against the oppressive patriarchal regime. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the juxtaposition of darkness and light in the novel.

Chapter Three:

The third text, *Purple Hibiscus*, is authored by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and is set in Nigeria. The novel was first published in 2003 and explores the disintegration of the family unit as a result of exploited Catholicism and violence within the household. However, it also highlights how religion is used to encourage individuals who are mourning to strive for

freedom from tyranny.

My main objective in Chapter Three is to explore the relationship between religion and patriarchal oppression in *Purple Hibiscus* and focus on the effects of religion-endorsed patriarchy depicted in the text. This chapter begins with a discussion of the background of the author of *Purple Hibiscus* as well as a synopsis of this text. There are five main sections that constitute the textual analysis of the primary text. The first section examines the oppression of the nuclear family unit by the patriarch, Eugene. It also explores the connection between the profile of masculinity and the “dark triad” of psychological traits in relation to the characterisation of Eugene. Section two explores the characterisation of the main characters and their experiences in Nsukka. It also focuses on an analysis of how the principal characters become aware of their potential for social, cultural and psychological freedom. The succeeding sections centre on a discussion of religion as an instrument for oppression and liberation. The final analytical section explores the role Catholic feminist theology and syncretic religion play in liberating the main characters and also how religion encourages them to defy the oppressive religious patriarchal regime and attain liberation and empowerment through defiance.

Chapter Four:

Infidel (which was first published in English in 2007) is the autobiography of Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a Somali Dutch activist and politician. Ali narrates her journey of living in Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, Kenya and the Netherlands. Her autobiography focuses on her life being raised as a Muslim woman by strict Islamists and how she rebels against religious fundamentalism.

In this chapter, I investigate Ali’s struggle for freedom, equality and justice, and her critique of traditional African and Islamic oppression of African women. I also analyse how she uses her autobiography to challenge Muslim fundamentalism and explore the significant events in her life where patriarchal and religious oppression thwart her personal development. My textual analysis begins with a discussion of Ali’s account of the social control and gendered violence in tribal communities in Somalia. This is followed by an analysis of the importance of circumcision in Somalia, the discourse of FGM in Islam, and Ali’s experiences of FGM as narrated in *Infidel*. Subsequently, I investigate the physical and physiological ramifications of

FGM through a discussion of Haweya, Ali's sister. The next part of the textual analysis centres on an exploration of the mental state of Asha (Ali's mother) as a result of the polygynous family structure, and the abuse she inflicts on her children, particularly her daughters, to instil obedience and responsibility. Drawing on the theme of violence and oppression, I explore the violent episode inflicted by an Islamic religious figure because of Ali's defiance of religious instructions. In addition to this, I investigate the misogynistic and androcentric practices in Islam that Ali highlights in *Infidel* through a discussion of Ali's experiences in Saudi Arabia, as well as the role of the hijab and the patriarchal rules for women that force them into submission. Subsequently, the final section explores why Ali has renounced her Islamic religion from the perspective of poststructuralist feminist atheism.

Chapter Five:

Amma Darko's *Not without Flowers*, published in 2007, explores the lives of Ghanaian women whose lives are characterised by family crises, polygyny, adultery, childlessness, mental disorders, suicide and HIV/Aids. Furthermore, it deals with the issue of misused Christianity as unscrupulous prophets/pastors in Africa prey on vulnerable women.

The primary objective of this chapter is to explore the religious exploitation and oppression and/or stigmatisation of vulnerable women in *Not without Flowers*. My analysis centres on the human rights violations that occur in religious institutions and how mental illness is considered to be caused by a spiritual force or demonic possession. Following my review of a prayer camp, I explore the characterisation of Prophet Abednego. I also analyse and compare the representation of Prophet Abednego to Prophet Mboro, as well as Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013). The next section focuses on an examination of the stigma associated with HIV/Aids and the proliferation of counterfeit peddlers. The final analytical section centres on Darko's deconstruction of patriarchal structures and its underlying sexist and/or androcentric ideologies, as well as her redefinition of women's situations.

Conclusion:

The final chapter of this thesis is the Conclusion, which offers a summary of the main arguments throughout this study. In addition, this chapter outlines the common features as

well as substantial differences between the main texts. Finally, I highlight the importance of religion as a source of equity and justice for challenging hegemonic discourse as reflected in the texts. The selected authors reveal how religion is used as an instrument to facilitate patriarchy, which leads to oppression against women and children; however, they also highlight how religion is also a means of liberation, as it encourages those who are suffering or mourning to strive for freedom from tyranny.

INTRODUCTION –

PART 2

In this second part of my introductory chapter of my thesis, in my theoretical perspective, I introduce the key theories and concepts that are pertinent for my analysis of the five literary texts. I analyse the importance of religion, particularly Christianity and Islam, and how religious fundamentalism is engineered, encouraged and employed as a weapon by patriarchs to control women. This thesis applies a feminist lens to perform a textual analysis of the texts, hence an exploration of post-colonial feminist theology is critical. The next section of this introductory chapter encompasses a literature review which focuses on themes of settings, the dichotomy between males and females, and sons and daughters, polygyny, prostitution, female genital mutilation, domestic violence and religious exploitation in relation to the selected texts.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

This thesis focuses on a feminist study within the framework of religion and patriarchal oppression. In this section, I provide a detailed discussion of religion, the Bible and Qur'an in relation to patriarchy, male dominance and oppression. This section also centres on a discussion of feminism in relation to this thesis.

Religion

Religion is defined as “what people believe in; their spirituality and how this shapes people’s relationships with each other and with God – the Almighty” (Rwafa 2016:43). The history of literature reveals the close relationship between religion and literature “as literature mirrors the society, it reflects upon the various cultures and religions existing in a particular society” (Bedana, Laishram & Singh 2016:2). Religion influences the ways individuals see themselves, their past and present. Religion cannot be seen independently from the social, economic and political context within which it unfolds.

Religion plays a central role in the selected primary texts, which are structured around Protestant Christianity, Catholicism and Islam. Islam and Christianity have been manipulated

and used to “entrench the subservience of women to men and the restriction of women to certain disciplines” (Olajubu 2007:133). There is a direct link between religion and patriarchy as religion may be regarded as an instrument that is used to preserve patriarchal power relations by sanctifying traditional notions of family. Shahida Zaidi et al. who focus on sexual rights and gender roles in a religious context have found that the status of women is defined by religion or society which often affects women’s health, and this also results in domestic violence, poor pregnancy outcomes and maternal morbidity (2009:151).

Focusing specifically on Christianity, Gerald West states that the “history of the Bible and its interpretation has been a history of silenced women” (1993:52). The Bible is used as an instrument to promote patriarchy and oppression by proselytising individuals to believe that this is the way God wants it and this is also the only possible way. According to various interpretations of the creation story in Genesis, the first woman was not created from the dust of the earth but from Adam. In addition, since God created Adam in his own image, Adam is regarded as perfect and an artefact of God. Moreover, male dominance is supported by the creation story as Genesis 3:16 states that “he shall rule” while 1 Corinthians 11: 7-9 echoes the ideas that “a man [...] is the image and glory of God; but a woman is the glory of man”. Male dominance is perceived as a power given to men by God (Holy Bible: New International Version).

Male leadership is also accentuated in Islam. The interpretation of the Qur’an by feminists is a relatively new phenomenon. Haleh Afshar, an academic in politics and women’s studies notes:

Until the twentieth century scholarship had been almost exclusively the domain of men even though there is nothing in the text of the Koran that prohibits women from reading and understanding the Koran for themselves. The absence of women from the process of interpretation of the holy text, tafsir, has resulted in man-made laws that have been detrimental to them and their interests. (2008:422)

In Chapter Four of this thesis, I explore how the Qur’an is viewed as a patriarchal text that is detrimental to women and their interests. As a human rights and political activist, Ali’s criticism of unequal gender relations in Islam can be summed up in her statement: “What matters is abuse, and how it is anchored in a religion that denies women their rights as humans” (2007 [2006]:309).

Riffat Hassan, a key Islamic feminist, also challenges the presence of misogynistic scriptures within Muslim sources which have supported gender inequality. In Hassan's article entitled "The Development of Feminist Theology as a Means of Combating Injustice Toward Women in Muslim Communities/Culture", she argues that Islamic tradition has remained largely patriarchal even in present society due to Islamic sources being interpreted by Muslim men only (1995:80). The Qur'an does not create a hierarchy between men and women; however, patriarchy has been assimilated into Islam. The interpretation of the sources has been used to advocate male supremacy based on the biased interpretation from the Qur'an that men are "rulers" or "managers" (82).

The rights of women and gender roles in Islam have been enshrined in the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad through the Hadith text, which are the two main sources of Islamic law. The Hadith is viewed as a secondary source after the Qur'an. The Hadith focuses on various aspects of Islam including the rights and protection of women. A number of *ahadith* have been criticised for their biased content and advocacy of gender inequality. Misogynistic features in the Hadith were unquestioningly accepted; however, many scholars have begun questioning its reliability and authenticity as a result of scriptures that are in favour of gender bias and have resulted in the discrimination of women. A significant feature in the Hadith is the description of the Hadith woman as a crooked rib, which relates to the belief of the origin of women and female nature. The issue of the crooked rib is discussed in Nuruddin Farah's novel, which is premised on the belief that Eve was created from Adam's rib, which signposts their crooked nature. This unequal creation story has subordinated, imprisoned and suppressed women. Farah reflects the stereotypical images of the subordinated women in his text.

Shariah law is built on the Qur'an and the Sunna and Hadith of the Prophet. The Shariah law is implemented fully only in some Muslim countries, for example, Saudi Arabia and Iran; while in other Muslim countries, there is a dual system of secular and religious courts. The adherence to Shariah law is reflected in the selected autobiography, *Infidel*, as Ayaan Hirsi Ali narrates her experiences of living in Saudi Arabia amidst the misogynistic laws. Hassan argues that these laws are accepted in society even though they "specified that women were less than men in fundamental ways because Muslims, in general, consider it a self-evident truth that women are not equal to men" (1995:82).

In a seminar on women and religion in 1996, Hassan lists some of the "arguments" used to

advocate gender inequality in Muslim societies. These include:

- that according to the Qur'an, men are “*gawamun*” (generally translated as “rulers” or “managers”) in relation to women
- that according to the Qur'an, a man's share in inheritance is twice that of a woman
- that according to the Qur'an, the witness of one man is equal to that of two women
- that according to the Prophet, women are deficient both in prayer (due to menstruation) and in intellect (due to their witness counting for less than a man's). (1998:143)

Hassan also lists the three theological assumptions for men's superiority over women. These assumptions are:

1. that God's primary creation is man, not woman, since woman is believed to have been created from man's rib, hence is derivative and secondary ontologically;
2. that woman, not man, was the primary agent of what is generally referred to as “Man's Fall” or man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, hence “all daughters of Eve” are to be regarded with hatred, suspicion, and contempt;
3. and that woman was created not only from man but also for man, which makes her existence merely instrumental and not fundamental. (144)

The theologically inferior status of women in Islam and Christianity derived from the creation story of Eve (Hawwa in the Qur'an) from a crooked rib. From a patriarchal perspective, Eve is regarded as a secondary, superficial and contingent creation from Adam's crooked rib. In addition, the belief that Eve is created from man has been manipulated to support the ideology that women are subordinate to men and that women are created for men. In *Not without Flowers*, Amma Darko signals some of the stereotypical beliefs of women through a character who says: “Women? When I observe the behaviour of some of them, I cannot help heaping praises on God for creating Adam before Eve. Had Eve preceded Adam, eh! Women would have caused us to carry them on our back twenty-four hours a day” (Darko 2007:124). In addition to stereotypical beliefs, the misinterpretation of Islamic teachings and texts is a cause for the marginalisation of Muslim women, as discussed in my textual analysis of *Infidel*. The second myth based on Christian tradition but existing in the minds of Muslims is the myth of feminine evil (Hassan 1995:86). Eve was deceived by the serpent, which resulted in the introduction of evil into the world. Therefore, women are believed to be the cause of sin and evil. Women are regarded as sources of discord who are incapable of rationality and being leaders in public, private or religious spheres. The above negative

interpretations of women have been applied to social, religious and political contexts and influenced diverse traditions and customs, which has resulted in the oppression of women.

Similar to the arguments that Hassan lists for the reasons used to advocate gender inequality in Islam, in *Infidel*, Ayaan Hirsi Ali criticises the unfair rules for women in the Qur'an. She is critical of the views that a woman's testimony is worth half of a man's. Furthermore, Ali challenges the misogynistic and androcentric practices in Islam through the narration of her experiences in Saudi Arabia which she describes as an "Islam originated country" that is strictly governed by scriptures from the Qur'an. Ali explains that by law in Saudi Arabia, women must be in the care of a man; therefore, women are not allowed to go out into public without a male guardian. Ali also draws attention to the theological inferiority of women within patriarchal Muslim societies as "A Muslim woman must not feel wild, or free, or any of the other emotions and longings [...]. A Muslim girl does not make her own decisions or seek control. She is trained to be docile" (Ali 2007 [2006]:94). In my investigation of *Infidel*, I perform an analysis of Ali's description of the status of women in Islam. I also explore Ali's atheist belief structure as she has emancipated herself from the concept of God and religion because of the oppressive and dehumanising beliefs and practices encumbered in Islam.

In Catholic feminist theology, one of the feminist critiques focuses on the association between Eve and Mary. In the past, Eve was "moulded to suit the patriarchal needs of the religious leadership" (Hamington 1995:130). However, counter-hegemonically, Mary is regarded as the new Eve as "She is a 'superheroine' whose goodness overcomes evil for herself and her gender" (125). The polar dualism between Eve and Mary is perceived as a foundation for the redefinition of Christian concepts of womanhood. While Eve was disobedient, cursed and subjected to condemnation, Mary is represented as an obedient woman, blessed by God and one who experiences praise and salvation (137). Mary is personified as "the model of moral perfection" and her existence "solidifies the identification of women with Eve" (146). This feminist analysis of Mary as the new Eve challenges the subjugation of women in patriarchal contexts.

Despite the presence of some misogynistic scriptures, the Qur'an and Bible equate women with men in terms of rights and responsibilities and women are seen as a counterpart for men. Moreover, there are no theological doctrines that state that women are responsible for the fall of humanity. Patriarchal culture has influenced Hadith literature which resulted in the

misogynist features. However, the Qur'an reveals the same rights and obligations for both men and women.

Post-colonial Feminist Theology

Post-colonial feminist theology focuses on critical questions about colonialism, race and gender in relation to religion. In this thesis, I explore the multiple layers of oppression and women's experiences of patriarchy and religion in diverse African contexts.

There are many instances where the church neglects women and where Christianity ignores African cultures or collaborates with patriarchy. These instances are investigated during my textual analysis of the texts. In addition, Rosemary Ruether, feminist scholar and Catholic theologian, explores the relationship between institutionalised violence and erroneous theological thinking. She argues that a major form of violence against women and the abuse of women's bodies has been the denial of women's sexual and reproductive agency (2008:6). Patriarchal structures control women's bodies and sexuality through beliefs about purity, marriage, reproduction, abortion, veiling and female genital mutation, all of which are explored in the thesis.

In feminist religious discourse, scholars "challenge the connection between women and nature and any forms of biological determinism that contribute to women's subordination" (Kwok 2005:217). Feminists are critical of the religious sources that are used to support the domination of women and children in patriarchal families. Through counter-hegemonic discourse, "feminist religious thinkers project their hope through a reclaiming of the body, a reevaluation of nature, and an emphasis on women's connection with nature in various ways" (218). In this thesis, I explore the symbolism of nature in the texts. I also focus on how the main characters search for cultural and spiritual resources as coping mechanisms in a male-dominated society.

Rita Gross, a key theorist in feminism and religion, explains:

Feminism as social vision deals with views about ideal social arrangements and interactions between women and men. Therefore, almost by definition, all feminist perspectives are radically critical of current conventional norms and expectations and advocate some degree of change in social, academic, political, religious and economic institutions to foster greater equity between men and

women. (1996:22)

This research is particularly located within the theoretical perspective of African feminist research. African feminism is aimed at changing social and humanitarian conditions through the focus of gender imbalances between dominant patriarchal systems and subservient females. African feminism was created as a way to address the concerns of African women as it is socially and culturally specific to African women. Themes under African feminism which are also pertinent for this thesis are: women's legal and political rights, violence, reproduction, sexual liberty, female genital mutilation, polygyny and exclusion. This theoretical paradigm is used in the thesis to reflect the women and child characters' emancipation in a predominantly patriarchal world.

Farah, the only male author for this study, has been described as "The African writer who has done the greatest justice to female existence in his writing" (Okonkwo 1984:217). He depicts "the progress which women have made within the constricting African landscape" (217). Furthermore, Farah is regarded as the "the first feminist writer to come out of Africa in the sense that he describes and analyzes women as victims of male subjugation" (Petersen 1984:98). He is engaged in exposing the parlous situation of Somalian women, which forms part of his crusade against tyranny and victimisation of all individuals who are denied their legitimate rights.

Feminist social philosophy is critical of patriarchy as it deems it an obstacle for women as it promotes male dominance and female subservience. Feminists also explore "the centrality of the concept of having power over others in a patriarchal society" (24). Patriarchal societies objectify women as nonhuman; however, feminist social philosophy "encourages women's authentic, empowered namings of reality and demands that these namings be taken seriously by the whole society" (28). Feminist scholars demand a transformation of patriarchal cultures, religious traditions and society as a whole by focusing particularly on removing fixed gender roles. In *From a Crooked Rib*, the protagonist, Ebla, desires empowerment and freedom. She ponders: "Escape! To get free from all restraints, from being the wife of Giumaleh. To get away from the unpleasantries. To break the ropes society had wrapped around her and to be free and be herself" (Farah 2006 [1970]:10).

Catholic feminist theology encourages individuals to discover hidden symbols of liberation that have been submerged within Catholicism. Marian imagery is a powerful feminist critique of patriarchal canons as the symbolism of Mary reveals that women can escape the misogynistic prescribed roles imposed on them while obeying their religion. In Chapter Three, I explore the importance of the Marian imagery within the Catholic phenomenological framework and feminist liberation. Mary is described as a “living metaphor for women and the feminine spirit”, and she is a “dynamic projection of every woman’s experience and every woman’s hope” (Hamington 1995:2, 51). In *Purple Hibiscus*, Mary is symbolised as an egalitarian and empowering religious figure who invokes female expression and the full humanity of women. The apparition of Mary in the text highlights the importance of the structure of Catholicism, but it also displays the power of women who aspire to be liberated from within these patriarchal and oppressive traditions.

Islamic feminists emerged as a new discourse of women, gender and equality in Islam. These feminists developed as a result of the need for transformation of Islam by realigning it with Qur’anic messages that promote gender equality and social justice. Their central principle is full equality in the public and private spheres. An agenda of Islamic feminists which is central for this thesis is gender equality within the family. This is a highly contested arena as the patriarchal family is perceived as natural and religiously ordained by paterfamiliaes.

Yolanda Dreyer, a theorist in women’s spirituality and feminist theology, explains that in a similar manner to Islamic practices, Christianity has contributed to the restriction of women as they are

taught to sacrifice themselves for the sake of others and, in doing so, they disappear into the background. In male-dominated societies women are socialised to accept negative images attributed to them by others (weak, passive, submissive or evil and wild – virgin or slut) and internalise this in the form of a negative self-perception which detracts from the possibility of having a meaningful life. (2011:2)

African feminism focuses on the roles that gender, culture and social logic play in defining women’s roles and functions in African society. Power and sexual politics are highly controversial issues, particularly within the African continent, but are also international issues. Studies of women focusing on their roles as mothers, wives and lovers ensued in disproportionate awareness of the sexual aspects in their lives (Begum 2006:105). In

religious, cultural and philosophical traditions, women are identified by bodily aspects rather than with their mind or spirit. However, the issue of control of women's bodies is a central issue, principally in gender equality. In contemporary works, the subject of "women's body as a violated space that needs healing" is a recurrent theme as feminist authors explore issues of "polygyny, the pain of childlessness, female genital mutilation, rape of women, or spousal abuse" (Eze 2015:317). Feminist authors encourage women to assert their autonomy over their bodies and critique paternalistic dominance.

The issue of women's and children's emancipation is a topical issue in contemporary society. There has been a vast improvement in the lives of Muslim women across many Muslim countries as there has been an increase in women's employment and education. In many Muslim countries, women have also acquired important legal and political rights, for example, the right to educate, the right to vote and be elected into state positions, and the right to be in non-domestic spaces. There was a great stir in 2017 when Saudi Arabia passed the law that women are now allowed to drive in the country. However, oppression against Muslim women still prevails in society today. Injustice against women and children continues to exist in African (and international) societies in spite of the intervention of international, national and domestic protections. Women and children are marginalised because of the existence of intransigent and retrogressive traditional and religious beliefs and practices. In "Islam, Women and Violence", Anne King notes: "women are fighting for basic human rights and freedoms in parts of the Islamic world where the State, religious authorities (the ulema²) and the patriarchal family assume the right of the legal and moral surveillance" (2009:293). King explains: "Women speak out against a literal interpretation of the Qur'an, challenge Islam conservatism or command a separation of religion and state frequently face anger, hate and death threats" (295).

Nawal El Saadawi critiques the universal patriarchal class system that oppresses women through various practices, predominantly female genital mutilation, which she was forced to undergo at a young age. She also fights for women's social and intellectual freedom. Saadawi advocates for equality between countries, classes and sexes. Saadawi also challenges the misogynist and androcentric practices of the Islamic culture in her novel, *God Dies by the Nile*, by exposing physical, sexual abuse and psychological abuse of women and children.

³ The ulema refers to a body of Muslim scholars who are acknowledged for their knowledge of Islamic sacred law and theology.

“Mending of creation” is a metaphor used to “describe the responsibility of women to fight injustices and to restore wholeness in society” (Kwok 2005:210). In *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible* (2008), Musa Dube offers a feminist interpretation of the Bible which can be liberating for women in patriarchal and oppressive contexts. Adichie brings to light how the Bible can be used to liberate oppressed women and children in *Purple Hibiscus* when Kambili reads scriptures from the Bible, which are a source of hope and encouragement for her. In this thesis, I explore other instances where the selected authors represent religion as a source used to liberate women and children.

In my textual analysis of *Purple Hibiscus*, I also explore the Catholic feminism present in the novel as well as the symbolism of Mary. Mary is regarded as the “single most significant female religious figure in Western civilization” (Hamington 1995:1). She is also a central figure in feminist theology who represents liberation from patriarchal ideologies. Mary is viewed as a potent and charismatic leader who motivates Kambili to discover the feminism within herself and to take control of her life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

From a Crooked Rib

Dubravka Juraga (1997:205) explains: “One of the main projects of Nuruddin Farah’s fiction is to expose the complicity between the traditional patriarchal Somali family and oppressive political conditions in his native Somalia”. Through his fictional works, Farah highlights the connection between the political and personal as the patriarchal family is often regarded “as a central tool of political oppression in a variety of social institutions” (205). His fiction also provides a critique of Somali’s traditions, customs and beliefs. In this thesis, I explore how the selected novel may be regarded as a counter-hegemonic text through an analysis of how Farah critiques the deeply entrenched cultural convictions of male dominance and female subjugation and his promotion of equality and justice. Peter Schraeder (1988:15) notes that Farah’s novel centres on the protagonist’s desire for emancipation from her inferior role in Somali society. In this thesis, I explore the subordinate nature of women in Somali society by examining the plight of the protagonist, Ebla, in the context of a patriarchal and traditional Islamic culture. I also explore how Ebla defies patriarchal and cultural beliefs.

God Dies by the Nile

Alamin Mazrui and Judith Abala (1997:18) explain that *God Dies by the Nile* explores the “unholy trinity” between religion, politics and sex as these three forces oppress the lives of women within Egypt. However, in their article, they do not perform a detailed textual analysis of the effects of these three forces within the novel and the effects on women and children. Saadawi challenges the misogynist and androcentric practices of the Islamic culture in her novel by exposing physical, sexual and psychological abuse of women and children. In this thesis, I explore the above effects within the novel. From an androcentric perspective, Andrew Nyongesa explores the representation of men and African culture in *God Dies by the Nile*. In his article, he argues that Saadawi “attacks male dominance by presenting African men as callous sex perverts” (2017:11). He cites Zeinab’s rape episode and Fatheya’s murder. However, he does not explore the psychological effects on Zeinab after the rape incident as well as the causes surrounding the murder, which are pertinent as individuals in the community brutally murder a baby. In this thesis, I explore the oppression of women and children in diverse settings. It must be noted that I am not generalising about *all* practices in Africa or all religious manifestations. However, I am investigating specific texts written at particular times about specific cultures and religious denominations in order to see connections and disparities, as well as indications of change.

Purple Hibiscus

Kirti Kulshrestha (2013:2) emphasises that *Purple Hibiscus* portrays a man’s obsession with religion such that he negates his responsibility to family and controls them with an iron hand. In Christianity, men are encouraged to use the rod, which leads to violence and abuse in homes, while women are encouraged to be submissive and respect the decisions of men. Francis Ganyi (2013:2) states that Adichie’s work is primarily set within the dictates of the very powerful Roman Catholic faith and that the novel highlights the consequences of fanatical adherence to religion on individuals and society in general. The patriarch’s tyrannical devotion to archaic Catholicism not only destabilises his family emotionally and physically but also lays the foundation for his tragic end (4). Eugene’s practice of an archaic mode of Christianity results in him brutally imposing fanatical religious views on his family. The theme of misused religion is pertinent for the thesis.

Infidel

Mohammad Pakri and Renukha Anandan (2015:198) state that *Infidel* “describes the patriarchal interpretation of Islamic teaching through the Qur’an (Holy Book), the Hadith (Sayings of Muhammad) and Shariah law as factors contributing to unequal and unjust treatments of women in Islamic society”. In this thesis, I argue that the Bible, Hadith and many other religious texts have subordinated, confined and unconsciously suppressed women as a result of biased interpretations. The memoir narrates the story of Ali’s battle against the sexual exploitation and oppression of women from unjust patriarchal beliefs (198). In this thesis, I explore the accounts of the protagonist’s journey and personal experiences growing up in Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Kenya. I also analyse how traditional customs such as female genital mutilation, wearing the hijab and marriage are used to uphold patriarchy. Moreover, John Marah (2013:31) points out, “Ali’s grandmother’s Islam, informed by her traditional African culture, was often expressed in proverbs, folk tales, fables, and other traditional African verbal expressions, rooted in the nomadic life of her people”. Myths, proverbs, customs and beliefs have played a significant role in shaping gender roles and the mindsets of both men and women. The thesis focuses on how proverbs are linked to values, attitudes, stereotypes, prejudices and ideologies. Furthermore, I discuss how proverbs are defined by social and cultural beliefs which result in them subordinating women and children.

Not without Flowers

Juliana Ofori (2013:178) explores how “Darko uses prose fiction as a vehicle to cross-examine the complexities of the Ghanaian woman’s life in relation to culture and gender”. The text explores issues of polygyny, motherhood and childlessness, which are dominant issues in Africa. Prostitution is also a dominant issue in *Not Without Flowers* as Darko reveals that women “find themselves trapped in the world of prostitution where they have no voice as to whom they engage or what is paid for their services” (181). Furthermore, prostitution is represented as a form of slavery, where women are sexually abused and exploited (181). The representation of prostitution in Darko’s text is contrasted with prostitution in the other primary texts, where it is reflected as a form of resistance against male dominance. In addition, Koumagnon Agboadannon and Ashani Dossoumou’s article draws attention to the social, moral and spiritual “deliquescence” in contemporary Africa, and

they observe that Darko's text provides insight into the presence of "fake prophets" who promote "fake" Christianity (2018:28). The thesis centres on how pastors and other religious leaders have used religion to manipulate individuals. Over the last few years, various forms of religious exploitation were exposed over social media. Recently, in South Africa and across the continent, congregants have endured having Doom sprayed in their faces, being made to eat grass, snakes and Rattex all in the name of God. I analyse and compare the representation of Prophet Abednego in *Not Without Flowers* to pastors/prophets who have been exposed for injustices on social media, for example, Prophet Sanyangore, as well as Prophet Bitchington Mborro in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names*.

THEMES

Men vs Women

The objectification of women in marriage is described as follows:

To be a wife meant becoming the property of a husband, taking a secondary position in a marital hierarchy of power and worth, being legally and morally bound to obey the wishes of one's husband, and thus, quite logically, subject to his control even to the point of physical chastisement or murder. (Dobash & Dobash 1980:33)

In both historical and African traditional societies, women are depicted as second-class citizens whose lives are commanded by traditional roles of marriage, motherhood, and female subordination. In the primary texts, the negative portrayal of women is reflected as the main characters have traditional stereotypical roles imposed on them by patriarchal forces. Chielozana Eze, key scholar in African literature and cultural studies, states: "In patriarchal cultures, women are at a disadvantage because of the inferior categories through which society judges them" (2015:315). In traditional societies, women are defined primarily by the males in their lives: firstly, by their fathers when they are born, then by their husbands through marriage and then by their sons. Secondly, they are defined by their sexuality and maternity. The primary purpose of wives in tradition societies is to produce male heirs and supervise the male household for the good status of their husbands. Marriage is seen as the link between procreation and kinship, and women are perceived as the source for men to continue their lineage.

In patriarchal households, husbands are seen as the sole providers for the materialistic needs of women in exchange for their submission, domestic, and sexual and reproductive services. The husband's commitment to marriage is traditionally considered as primarily one of financial support. This is evident in *From a Crooked Rib*, as the protagonist states: "Enslavement was what existed between the married couples that she had met. The woman was a slave. And she was willing to be what she had been reduced to, she was not raising a finger to stop it" (Farah 2006 [1970]:74).

Sexuality is defined as a private matter; however, it is controlled by the social, religious and political systems which direct and control sexuality. Patriarchal African cultures and tradition prevent a married woman from questioning or challenging her husband on any family issues, including her material wellbeing (Rwafa 2016:48). A common traditional practice within some countries in Africa is also forced marriage or wife barter. This is exemplified through acts or forms of transactions where the girl is exchanged or sold. This practice is in accordance with the belief that women are chattels as their existence is defined as capital assets or commodities. Women's sexuality is regarded as a commodity as women are unquestioningly bartered or bought in marriage for the benefit of their families, which is reflected in *From a Crooked Rib*. Daughters of the poor are sold into marriage or prostitution for economic advancement. The sexual services of females are seen as a form of labour.

Female sexuality is perceived as a "symbol of human weakness and the source of evil" (Lerner 1986:201). Women within patriarchal constraints are easily reified as others control their sexuality and body. In patriarchal societies, women are taught that the husband is the head of the home, therefore they are to respect and submit to him. This includes submitting sexually to men as husbands have an implicit right to impose sexual intercourse.

In several traditional societies, a man is respected in society when he is able to control his wives, daughters and sisters. In addition, masculine identity is closely linked to males' sexual desires. Fatema Mernissi, a feminist writer and sociologist, highlights the importance of the male penis in Morocco. From a young age, the male child is taught by his sisters, aunts or maids that the penis is their master (1985:162). The child is encouraged to repeat the sentence, "This is their master" while the women point to the penis (162). Furthermore, kissing of the male child's penis is a common gesture for a female relative when visiting the child for the first time after he is born.

Cultural beliefs deem men as sexually virile; hence, women are subject to criticism when the couple fails to have a baby. In *Not without Flowers*, Amma Darko elucidates on how a woman's failure to procreate is viewed as a failure on her to participate in the life cycle. Idan is unfaithful to his wife, Aggie (who is barren) and believes that he has impregnated his lover.

The response from his mother to Idan's infertility is celebration and joy that he has successfully impregnated a woman. After seeing his mother's response, Idan ponders: "Aggie was going to have to accept it, that it was her womb that was to blame after all" (Darko 2007:211). Even though Aggie is distressed because of Idan's infidelity, he uses Aggie's infertility as a justification for his actions. Furthermore, Aggie's infertility is viewed as a failure to fulfil her marital obligation. The stigma of childlessness is also revealed through the characterisation of the fifth wife of Pesewa, who describes her barrenness as follows:

It was emotional suicide. To know you cannot conceive a child is bad enough. When you don't know you cannot conceive a child and believing you can, you can go through heaven and hell trying to, under the intense watchful eyes of your husband and his family, all to no avail; you live your whole life, daily dreading the sign, any little sign, which pointed to an oncoming menstruation. The waiting, the hoping, that no drop of blood would show its head. And then it does and continues to, month after month. It leaves you in emotional tatters. (97)

A woman who is unable to procreate is viewed as incomplete, as "Physically, socially, spiritually, and emotionally, procreation is considered to be a woman's obligation to the ultimate essence of life itself" (98). The selected authors examine the intricate roles and symbolic parameters of women as daughter, wife and mother. These identities are prescribed to women, and departure from those identities are deterred. The protagonist in *From a Crooked Rib* transcends the boundary of traditional female roles to venture into areas of control as she decides not to marry the suitors whom family members choose for her. Farah aims to create spaces of female power in social and religious spheres within his text, thereby transgressing patriarchal boundaries designed to marginalise women.

Sons vs Daughters

Female children occupy a precarious position in patriarchal societies as a result of the intersection of age and gender. The girl child's identity is synonymous with inequality, indifference and exclusion. In contrast, the boy child's identity is defined by power, authority and control. In *From a Crooked Rib*, Ebla narrates her experience as follows:

Goats for girls and camels for boys got on her nerves more than she could stand. To her, this allotment of assignments denoted the status of a woman, that she was lower in status than a man, and that she was weak. “But it is only because camels are stupid beasts that boys can manage to handle them,” she always consoled herself. She loathed this discrimination between the sexes; the idea that boys lift up the prestige of the family and keep the family’s name alive. Even a moron-male cost twice as much as two women in terms of blood compensation. As many as twenty or thirty camels are allotted to each son. The women, however, have to wait until their fates give them a new status in life: the status of marriage. A she-camel is given to the son, as people say “tied to his navel” as soon as he is born. “Maybe God prefers men to women,” she told herself. (Farah 2006 [1970]:10)

Gender-based discrimination against girl children is prevalent across the world. From the above extract, one can deduce that girls and boys are treated differently in Somali society. Male children are considered a blessing and their births are celebrated. Sons are privileged over daughters as male babies are given more attention than female babies, and they are also fed better (Labeodan 2007:113-114). Parents also generally invest more on their sons in terms of education as compared to their daughters because they believe that sons will take care of them when they are old. Furthermore, sons need to be intellectually prepared to be leaders of their household and families. Boys are encouraged to focus on individual development, independence and financial responsibility. Boys are allowed to meander around freely without supervision while girls are domesticated. Girls are also encouraged to emulate the behaviour of adult women. They are taught attitudes of love, respect and obedience. Girls are indoctrinated to believe that the roles of wife and mother are more important than anything else. Hence, they are taught to serve in that capacity and are prevented from receiving an education. Their lack of education hinders their development and empowerment as they are denied opportunities to occupy jobs that require educational qualifications. This is an issue Ali protests against in the autobiography, *Infidel*.

Chastity is a prescribed norm for women in patriarchal societies. Girls are expected to be pure and innocent before marriage, as they have to remain virginal until their wedding night. If not, the bride is returned to her parents, while boys have the privilege to engage in pre-marital sex. Furthermore, virginity is viewed as an asset in traditional communities as the parents of a bride virgin collect more dowry in respect of the bride’s virgin status. If a woman is a virgin, she is viewed as honourable. However, if she is not, she is viewed as sexually loose. Virginity is regarded as a sign of good family upbringing and adherence to traditional norms. In *God Dies by the Nile*, defloration is celebrated by a ceremony which highlights the importance of chastity in Egyptian society as a woman’s honour is dependent on it.

Through the representation of the fifth wife in *Not without Flowers*, Darko also touches on the importance of honour within the family. After the fifth wife's first sexual encounter, she falls pregnant, but she does not disclose this information to her father as "He would have killed her and gone to give himself up to the police for killing his own daughter with his bare hands" (Darko 2007:263). Instead, she goes to another town where she terminates the pregnancy (as it was an ectopic pregnancy and it would have to be terminated anyway). During this termination, further complications arise as the doctor severs both of her fallopian tubes. Hence, she opts to marry Pesewa and become his fifth wife as she needs emotional security which he offers her in abundance, with the added advantage of financial security.

Polygyny

Polygyny is a common practice in Africa. Patriarchal cultures provide men with the right to marry more than one wife. Moreover, in traditional societies, a man with many wives and children is perceived with high esteem. Polygyny is regarded as a founding contributor to the destruction of women's lives from the middle and lower class. When husbands in polygynous marriages find new wives, they tend to start maltreating the previous wife. Polygyny causes emotional and psychological stress; however, women also face economic deprivation as a result of the absence of the husband's income. Moreover, this has tragic consequences on the lives of the children, as husbands may stop paying for the children's school fees or school materials.

In *God Dies by the Nile*, the subject of polygyny is brought to light through the representation of Sheikh Hamzawi, who is an Imam of the Mosque. Even though he is a religious figure, he manipulates his social and economic status to attain a fourth wife, who is young enough to be his grandchild. Sheikh Hamzawi's decision to remarry is constructed on his desire to bear a son who can continue his lineage. However, the reader is made aware that he is infertile, therefore there is an implicit indication that this relationship is instituted by sexual desires.

Darko's *Not without Flowers* also focuses on the culture of polygyny in African society. Through the depiction of Penyin and Kakraba, Darko exemplifies the harmony and trust that exist between co-wives in some polygynous marital homes. Despite the absence of discord between the co-wives, after harbouring years of pain, Kakraba, the first wife of Ntifor, declares:

Even while I shed my tears. Do you recollect the many nights that even though it was my turn to share his bed, he entreated me with words and gifts of pacification to exhibit maturity and kind understanding for his wish and preference to have you share his bed instead? Did you know what it implied? The indirect message it relayed to me was that sleeping with me was a waste of his seed at a time when he wanted children? Yet even when you had your first child and were nursing, he still found excuses not to have me share his bed. He had put it inside his head that I wasted his seed. It killed his desire for me. (Darko 2007:161)

The above passage reveals the pain of monogamous marriages being transformed into polygynous ones and the effects this change has on the minds of the first wives. Kakraba harbours pain for decades because of her infertility and her husband's lack of affection towards her. Even though the co-wife refers to children that Penyin bears as "our children", Kakraba notes: "The creases and folds and marks of childbirth are on your belly, not mine" (162).

Prostitution

In the novel *From a Crooked Rib* Mother Africa is represented as a "whore" (Stratton 1994:44). The female characters function as an allegory for the country of Somalia as the citizens are subject to continuous unrest from the inception of colonialism. This allegory emphasises the subordination and subjugation of women in patriarchal societies where men control the social, economic and religious systems. The prostitute metaphor is adopted to "reproduce the attitudes and beliefs necessary for preserving the otherness of women and hence to perpetuate their marginalization in society" (44). However, the prostitute metaphor also counter-hegemonically infers men's degradation and implies women as "agents of moral corruption, [and] as sources of moral contamination in society" (53).

In my textual analysis of *From a Crooked Rib*, I explore the protagonist's decision to resort to prostitution as a means of survival. Through this decision, the protagonist, Ebla, acquires emancipation, financial provisions and autonomy. Furthermore, prostitution in the novel is depicted to reflect the chauvinistic gender relations that pervade Somalia. Only men are permitted to have polygamous marriages; however, Ebla's decision to take a second husband is signified as a cultural defiance as it challenges patriarchal demands for one-sided monogamous unions as the basis for socially approved female sexuality.

Prostitution is also a system and strategy that women have adopted to counter male dominance as it is an independent way of life for women. In *Not without Flowers*, prostitution is described as a “win-win situation” as there are “No expectations of a lasting relationship, from either side. She fulfils for him those sexual fantasies and desires that probably appal his ‘ringed’ better half at home. In return for which he also provides her with the financial security she craves for” (Darko 2007:80-81).

Female Genital Mutilation

Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) refers to various procedures that involve partial or total removal of the external female genitalia. It is an African cultural practice that is detrimental to women and according to the World Health Organisation (2020) has no health benefits. FGM may include clitoridectomy, excision, infibulation or any other harmful procedure to the female genitalia for non-medical purposes. Dorcas Akintunde is one of the key theologians who focuses on exposing the danger of harmful cultural practices such as FGM. She explains that FGM is “a practice that has proved injurious to the health of women” (2007:88). Furthermore, it is a practice that “affects millions of girls and women in about twenty-eight countries in Africa” (91). It is viewed as a traditional dehumanising practice that suppresses women and robs them of their sexuality. Across the world, FGM is considered a violation of the human rights of women and girl children as it entails removing and damaging normal and healthy female genital tissues and interferes with the natural function of their bodies.

In *Infidel*, Ali draws attention to “sacred suffering” through her portrayal of Islam as a religion that is intrinsically oppressive and detrimental to women through criticism of various Islamic practices. In Chapter Four of the thesis, my analysis centres on the suffering Ali and Haweya (Ali’s younger sister) are subjected to as a result of FGM, which is viewed as a customary tradition in Somalia and is a means of controlling sexuality and preserving chastity, and is regarded as protection from rape. Despite the health risks and painful experiences, female circumcision is believed to be a religious edict and beneficial tradition.

In Chantal Zabus’s article “Writing Women’s Rites: Excision in Experiential African Literature”, she explores the representation of FGM in post-colonial African women’s literature. She asserts:

Over the past 2 decades, the body of literary representations of excision (a.k.a. “female circumcision”) has considerably grown, but it still constitutes a little explored corpus, in inverse proportion to the wide socio-geographical spread of the practice and the sheer mass of information available from activist organizations and media networks or the research carried out in cultural anthropology, law, and sociology. (2001:335)

Nuruddin Farah is one of the male writers whose works focus on exposing the heinous crimes that women are subjected to, of which one is FGM. Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s text is also an example of a female experiential text. Ali’s account in *Infidel* demonstrates that women in the Arab-Muslim world have been subjected to FGM over a long time. While Islamic religious texts do not command this practice, it has been adapted into Islam as a cultural mandate. In the text, excision is represented as a practice used to preserve women’s chastity by controlling their sexuality. Through the discussion of Haweya’s circumcision, Ali points out the physical, psychological and moral violence inflicted through the process of excision.

Zabus lists three steps that writers use to delineate the representations of FGM in the text. These three steps are: “(1) in-passing; (2) auto(-)biography and (3) suturing” (2001:336). “In-passing” is a method whereby the author describes in passing difficult issues women are confronted with (36). This is reflected in Farah’s *From a Crooked Rib* as the protagonist, Ebla, reminisces about the three most painful experiences of women, namely FGM, sexual intercourse and childbirth. In the text, Ebla also reinforces the status of FGM as an immutable traditional practice as girls are forced to undergo this ritual in spite of the life-threatening consequences. In Nawal El Saadawi’s *God Dies by the Nile*, the ritual is also revealed in passing by Fatheya on the night of her marriage, after she is deflowered. In this episode, Saadawi brings to light how women’s bodies have been subjected to external social controls through traditional and patriarchal practices such as FGM and defloration, which are used to suppress women’s sexuality. In *Infidel*, Ali draws attention to the psychological barriers and prejudices that characterise the lives of uncircumcised girls. FGM causes physical and psychological harm, and “the practice deprives the victim of an essential part of her body, making her lose control of her sexuality and self-esteem” (Akintunde 2007:104). FGM echoes the inequality between sexes and is an extreme form of discrimination against women.

Hijab

The hijab, which refers to the Islamic cover for women, “has become one of the most contested arenas both among Muslim women and between Muslim and non-Muslim women” (Afshar 2008:411). In Islam, Muslim women are commissioned to cover their entire body except for their face and hands. Veiling is regarded as a symbolic form of seclusion. Leila Ahmed explains that the “use of the veil classified women according to their sexual activity and signalled to men which women were under male protection and which were fair game” (1992:15). Respectable women were veiled while women who were “publicly available”, for example harlots and slaves, were forbidden from wearing the veil and if they were caught, they were liable to penalties (14).

The hijab is a symbol of political resistance/assertion to Western hegemony, faith and identity; however, it also is an emblem of women’s submission to men. The hijab has been synonymous with conceptions of identity, agency, independence and emancipation. In addition to the hijab as a symbol of political Islam and cultural identity, it is also a symbol of Muslim women’s oppression because of the beliefs that the hijab is a means to control women’s behaviour and sexuality.

Domestic Violence

Domestic violence and abuse against women and children are perturbing problems in many communities, despite progressive policies and legislation. “Domestic violence is one way in which men exercise their hegemonic masculinity over women”, states Rwafa (2016:49). The imbalances of power in gender inequality and discriminatory patriarchal practices against women and children have enforced physical violence. Physical violence is a means of controlling and oppressing women and children, but it is also “one of the most brutal and explicit expressions of patriarchal domination” (Dobash & Dobash 1980:ix). Men in most Western countries no longer have the explicit legal right to beat their wives, but the legacy remains, hence force, domination and control still exist and are supported by a moral order (ix). Only a limited number of women publicly expose their abuse leading to coverage by the media or cases brought to court, while the majority remain unnoticed or unmentioned as they attempt to continue living their lives normally by concealing the wounds with attire or makeup.

Patriarchy is one of the key factors behind domestic violence as “Men see themselves as controllers of women, and because they are socialized into the use of violence they are potential aggressors against their wives” (22). In patriarchal societies, men demand compliance and women are subject to punishment through violence for non-compliance. Through violence, husbands make an explicit and powerful statement about the wife’s failure to meet their perceived needs. Furthermore, obedience from wives and children is mandatory within the patriarchal familial unit. In other words, patriarchy provides men with the right to inflict violence against their wives and children as it is regarded as a tool to remedy inappropriate behaviour. In Ghana, women even thank their husbands for beating them (Oduyoye 2007:4).

Studies reveal: “for women and children, the family is the most violent group to which they are likely to belong” (Dobash and Dobash 1980:7). Violence in the home is a frequent occurrence in contemporary society. Adichie reflects the horrors of domestic violence and abuse within the home. Wife battering is defined as “a calculated act of violence and unrestrained terror by men against women in the family” and “has been documented as the most common form of domestic/family violence” (Tiarniyu 2005:261). In *Purple Hibiscus*, there is a violent atmosphere that pervades the home, and the fear of violence haunts Beatrice and the children. There is no freedom in the home as the characters are subject to domestic abuse, and their feelings are suppressed as “Eugene quarrels with the truths that he does not like” (Adichie 2013:95).

Studies reveal that “Children are the most frequent targets of what might be referred to as casual or legitimate applications of physical force” (Dobash & Dobash 1980:10). In many households, the beating of children is regarded as a standard practice in child rearing for them to learn how to behave correctly. In addition, the violence is seen as actions that are in the best interests of the child. Parents are hierarchically superior to children, therefore they have the right to impose domination.

In Morocco, laws and customs preserve the subjugation of women’s status (Mernissi 1985:11). Family laws are premised on male authority. This secular tradition is reflected through the characterisation of Eugene. Husbands are viewed as superior, consequently it is their right to control and manage their wives’ behaviour. Husbands assert their authority by beating their wives into submission when they feel they are losing power. This is reflected

through Eugene's behaviour as he employs mundane tasks to assert his position of authority and dominance. Contrary to the abuse inflicted by patriarchs within the familial sphere, in *Infidel*, the reader is acquainted with abuse perpetrated by the matriarch. In my analysis of this text, I explore Asha Artan's mental state as a result of the polygynous family structure and the abuse she inflicts on her children, particularly her daughters, to instil obedience and responsibility.

Religious Exploitation and Unscrupulous Prophets

During the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020, many religious organisations supported and encouraged the South African government's regulations; however, many opted to ignore the prescripts of the declaration of the national disaster in the nation and globally. Worshippers both nationally and internationally continued to gather in large numbers during the pandemic, opting to place their lives in the hands of deities instead of obeying regulations from government officials. In South Africa, Bishop Timothy Ngcobo asserted that "he will gather his flock for Easter services and continue church work because God is the only way to cure the Covid-19 pandemic" (Singh 2020). Ngcobo's disobedience towards state laws followed in the wake of various churches being criticised for mass gatherings, which were proven to accelerate the spread of the disease, reflecting how religious institutions, in particular churches, can be used as instruments to administer harm on congregants. In South Korea, half of the cases reported for Covid-19 infections were traced to a church meeting of the Shincheonji Church of Jesus (Robinson 2020). The leaders of this church are "accused of homicide, causing harm and violating the Infectious Disease and Control Act" (Bicker 2020).

A significant point to be noted is that the leader and founder of Shincheonji Church of Jesus, Lee Man-hee, claims that "he is the second coming of Jesus Christ and identifies as 'the promised pastor' mentioned in the Bible" (2020). However, he is not the first and only religious leader who claims to be the "second coming of Jesus Christ", as several men are promulgating these false revelations. In South Africa, Moses Hlongwane (also self-proclaimed as the King of Kings, The Lord of Lords, Jesus) maintains that God "identified him as the Messiah during a dream in 1992", while in Zambia, Bupete Chibwe Chishimba (also known as Parent Rock of the World, Mr Faithful, Mr Word of God) proclaims the same and is referred to as Jesus by his "disciples" (Bendiksen 2017).

While several men are proclaiming themselves to be the Messiah, there are even more unscrupulous prophets emerging in society. In *Not without Flowers*, Darko sheds light on these prophets through the characterisation of Prophet Abednego, who is representative of the proliferation of certain prophets in Africa who deceive vulnerable individuals with outlandish miracles and prophecies. Moreover, these prophets exploit and distort biblical scriptures for their personal prosperity. Through the depiction of Prophet Abednego and discussion of various instances of religious/traditional leaders' exploitation of individuals, Darko reveals how individuals under the guise of religion exploit citizens and support mass poverty.

Women burdened by socio-economic challenges turn to religious institutions and leaders for aid but are easily deceived because of their desperation and strong religious beliefs. Darko also draws attention to traditional healers who offer love/marriage potions to women to "charm" men, particularly "wealthy, old men" (Darko 2007:291). This resonates with the marriage miracle conference held by Congolese pastor (Alph Lukau) who claimed that R5000 and prayer will get all women the husbands they desire (Makhoba 2019). Furthermore, in the novel, an occultist whom women go to "sometimes make[s] the clients sit on buckets and wash their ..." (Darko 2007:291). Through these descriptions, Darko highlights individuals' desperation in times of crisis and how traditional/religious leaders exploit them in these times of distress. A woman desperate to acquire a German visa is not only exploited financially but sexually as Prophet Abednego asks her "to wear a G-string for a spiritual bath of cleansing in the sea at midnight alone" (364). This is also consonant with occurrences in society. In 2014, a Nigerian pastor ordered women to take off their clothes and stand naked on a beach so that he could kiss their behinds. This kiss, he explained, was a blessing to ensure that they got the right marriage partners. Furthermore, in 2016, a pastor ordered female congregants to come to church without underwear so that Christ could enter (Sowetan Live 2014).

The issue of religious exploitation is also foregrounded in *Infidel* through the *ma'alim* who attacks Ali while she is wearing only an undershirt and skirt. In this violent episode, the reader sees how religious abuse is administered under the guise of religious teachings/discipline. Furthermore, the repercussions of this violence are revealed in this scene as the *ma'alim* uses a "sharp stick" and also shoves Ali's head against the wall, which results in her skull being fractured.

Proverbs

The patriarchal interpretations of Proverbs are a way of enforcing, presenting and justifying unequal power relations between men and women. Anthonia Dickson and Mary Mbosowo define African proverbs as follows:

Proverbs are short popularly known statements which contain wisdom, truth, morals, socio-cultural precepts and heritage of a particular ethnic group. Every ethnic group in Africa and the world over has its set of proverbs, maxims and popular sayings formulated and collected over several generations. Proverbs reflect the community's world view by projecting her beliefs, moral attitudes and inner life. Existing in every language community, they constitute a very important category in African folklore. (2014:632)

Proverbs are linked to values, attitudes, stereotypes, prejudices and ideologies. Examples of African proverbs about women include: “*The woman is like a child. (She must be guided at all times)*’, *The mind of the woman is as twisted as her breasts*’, *The woman never thinks beyond the bed she sleeps on*’, *A woman and an invalid are the same thing*’ and *Words for women, action for men*” (633-634). The proverbs mentioned above depict gender discrimination in African society, and they function to sustain hegemonic male dominance and female subordination. The adoption of African proverbs about women has a substantial impact on the roles and status of women as it is used to subdue and marginalise women. Patriarchal proverbs target women's intelligence and cognition. In addition, the above proverbs reflect antagonistic social and cultural beliefs and may be regarded as verbal violence against women.

Bildungsroman

“*Bildungsroman*” is a term derived from German literary criticism. *Bildungsroman* or novel of formation is a genre of literature that explores the development of the *Bildungsheld* who is usually a young male person who develops from ignorance and innocence to wisdom and maturity. *Bildungsroman* is typically associated with male protagonists' growth as traditionally social options are only available to men. Furthermore, it is stereotypically believed that only males can achieve full adulthood by their journey through the Oedipus complex.

Florence Stratton explains that the female *Bildungsroman*

stands in opposition to the entire African male literary tradition – a tradition to which the very notion of female development is alien. For it is a form which, by its very definition, characterizes women as active and dynamic – as developing. Women are, in other words, conceptualized not as the Other but as self-defining. Furthermore, their status as historical subjects is given due recognition. This, then, is the form which [...] seeks to subvert the Manichean allegory of gender by putting female subjectivity in process. (1994:107).

Feminist authors employ the *Bildungsroman* genre as a counter-hegemonic strategy to redefine femininity and challenge patriarchal practices. The selected authors narrate stories that are centred on the lives and experiences of women and children. Furthermore, women are depicted as active agents because they do not passively accept the oppressive conditions or situations imposed on them. In addition, they engage in activities that are outside the conventional female domain. The selected authors depict their female characters as ones with access to power in the society in which they live. The authors have also succeeded in liberating their protagonists from mythical patriarchal roles by defining their individuality and asserting their independence. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie depicts female characters who exhibit strength and resilience as they navigate the confines of patriarchal structures.

CONCLUSION

As previously discussed, patriarchy is deeply entrenched into society and it is directly linked to religion. Patriarchy has also unfairly disadvantaged women as a result of its justification of abhorrent and inhuman practices, such as FGM, violence and polygyny. Furthermore, religion has played a significant role in both strengthening and challenging patriarchy. In the next five analytical chapters, I engage in a textual analysis of the primary texts and also draw from various theoretical perspectives and secondary sources to uncover the fictional representations of patriarchal and religious oppression in the literary works. In my analysis, I show that there are instances of oppression, in terms of gender inequality, violence and exploitation, but the possibility of opposing these is exhibited by the selected feminist authors who challenge patriarchal codes.

CHAPTER ONE

“SOLD LIKE CATTLE”: THE OBJECTIFICATION OF WOMEN IN NURUDDIN FARAH’S *FROM A CROOKED RIB*

“I don’t want to be sold like cattle.”

“But that is what we women are – just like cattle, properties of someone or other, either your parents or your husband.”

“We are human beings.”

(Farah 2006 [1970]:71)

Introduction

In *From a Crooked Rib* (2006 [1970]), Nuruddin Farah sheds light on the inequalities of Somali society whereby women are subjugated and oppressed by patriarchal and chauvinistic canons which render them chattels in society. In the selected literary text for discussion, women are objectified and treated as entities that are valued for their use by others. This is exemplified through the central character of the text, a woman who is subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM), forced marriage or bartering, abuse and rape, which in turn leads to the postulation that, within the novel, women are treated like properties or commodities and bartered off for the worth of domestic animals, for example, camels or cattle. Farah’s representation of the protagonist, Ebla, points to women’s subservience and devaluation within the circumscribed roles assigned to them in traditional patriarchal societies, which in turn results in the denial of their legitimate rights. However, Farah’s portrayal of Ebla is not limited to her victimisation and subjugation as she is projected as a multi-dimensional *Bildungsheld* character who exhibits “cameline agency” as she quests for independence, freedom and dignity. As a result of her philosophical outlook of life, she questions religious and patriarchal doctrines and asserts her autonomous identity. Furthermore, she rebels against

the hegemonic patriarchal structure as she desires liberation from the manacles of patriarchal subjugation.

An explanation of the title of the novel in relation to gender studies and religious studies, as well as an exploration of how the Qur'an is used as a religious source to justify the oppression and subjugation of women in the novel, are indispensable in understanding the context of the text. The title of the novel signposts the popular and traditional Somali proverb revealed in the novel which states, "God created Woman from a crooked rib; and anyone who trieth to straighten it, breaketh it" (Farah 2006 [1970]). The above-mentioned proverb divulges the patriarchal Islamic Somali society exhibited in the text, which is based on intransigent and retrogressive beliefs that subjugate and marginalise indigenous women. In addition, this proverb is rooted in the unequal creation story of Adam and Hawwa from the Qur'an. The two beliefs which have been misinterpreted from the creation story form the basis of this analysis. The first belief is that women were created from Adam, therefore they are inferior and a secondary class to men. The second belief related to the crooked rib signifies women's crooked nature, whereby women are purported to be deficient in mind and religion. Farah reiterates this proverb as it resonates with the subject matter foregrounded in the text which highlights the inequality between men and women. Through these representations, Farah exposes how exploited religion has contributed to relegating women to a secondary and subordinate status in society. He also highlights how women are subjected to restrictions of modesty, pre-marital chastity and fidelity.

Elizabeth Grosz is a key scholar in feminism who challenges the position of corporeality and highlights how embodiment is significant in understanding how power relations govern sexual difference. She explains that the mind/body dualism is gendered as women are stereotypically associated with the body which is usually aligned with irrationality, passion and uncontrollability, while men are associated with the mind, which signifies reason and rationality (1999:267). This dichotomous relationship has been the source from which patriarchal structures procure their power to subordinate women. Farah makes the reader aware of this patriarchal relationship and sexual differentiation through the title and the content in the novel. In *From a Crooked Rib*, women's bodies are projected as not only different from but also inferior to men's bodies. This inferiority is constituted on the ideology that the female body lacks self-containment, and consequently by association, that women lack restraint, self-identity and autonomy.

The mind/body dualism is significant in understanding the relationship between women and nature. Val Plumwood states:

The inferiorisation of human qualities and aspects of life associated with necessity, nature and women – of nature-as-body, of nature-as-passion or emotion, of nature as the pre-symbolic, of nature-as-primitive, of nature-as-animal and of nature as the feminine – continues to operate to the disadvantage of women, nature and the quality of human life. (1993:21)

Plumwood draws readers' attention to the gendered politics of "nature". Both nature and women are construed together as a result of the acceptance of their mutual exploitation as well as their subordination and devaluation. In the novel, Farah reflects how women's female sexuality is denigrated, and their bodies are naturalised as primarily procreative. Farah also emphasises the power of traditional and religious patriarchal representations and the repercussions they have on the subjectivity and body of women. In Simon Gikandi's article entitled "Nuruddin Farah and Postcolonial Textuality", he states: "In Farah's deployment of the figure of woman as the agent of disenchantment with the political culture of the emerging Somali nation, we have a compelling critique of one of the most powerful tropes of African nationalism: the association of woman with tradition, nation, and nature" (1998:753). Drawing from Gikandi's argument, I analyse how Farah also positively personifies and redefines nature through his depiction of nature as a support for Ebla who is projected as closer to nature than with individuals in the text. Ebla consciously positions herself with nature as she feels in harmony with animals and nature as a whole. In this analysis, I explore the significance of the "cock" in the text in relation to Ebla's escape from patriarchal constraints. I also highlight how Ebla aspires to awaken her inner strength and finds courage to defy patriarchal authorities in the novel. Farah favours nature, passion and women over the culture, reason and male side of the dichotomy.

In this analysis, I also explore the physical and psychological journey of Ebla, her predicament as a woman in a patriarchal society and her revolt against patriarchal Islamic tenets. The title of the novel is ironic as Ebla counters and challenges the traditional, patriarchal roles of women in Somali society and questions sexual inequality and the subordination of women. The word "From" in the title has two meanings: first, it ironically references the story in the Abrahamic tradition of women's origin, and secondly, it suggests that after "From" is a "To", which the novel fleshes out. In my analysis of Ebla's agency and

resistance against patriarchal tenets, I employ Naomi Nkealah's (2017) model of "cameline agency" to describe the creative tactics Ebla adopts to counter patriarchal constraints. In the novel, Farah employs the portraiture of the prostitute and theme of prostitution, which is epitomised as a system and strategy that women have adopted to counter male dominance as it is an independent way of life for women.

The setting of the novel is Somalia in the 1960s and Farah presents the history of Somalia from the colonial period to the time of independence. This is allegorically represented through Ebla's characterisation as her subjugated status is elevated to one of self-assertion and independence as she symbolically journeys from confinement to emancipation. In an interview with Maya Jaggi in 1989, Farah notes that "the percentage of women who have reached that level of male equality is very small compared to the majority who remain enslaved to a system which is partly traditional and partly modern" (179). In the interview, he further describes female circumcision as a "barbaric act" and argues that "anything which endangers people's lives, encroaches on the dignity of women – whether it is traditional or non-traditional – that thing must cease. Society must be turned into a humanitarian one" (179). However, over four decades after the publication of *From a Crooked Rib*, FGM is still a perturbing problem in Somalia as many elders in the country believe that FGM is a religious ritual that is mandatory for their daughters to be accepted by Allah (Ajiambo 2019). Furthermore, girls who do not undergo FGM are subject to stigmatisation and social exclusion. After studying Islam in Yemen for seven years, a religious teacher, Sheikh Ibrahim Hassan, has returned to Somalia and launched a campaign to end FGM and has recently rescued more than 200 girls from Somaliland who had been forcefully taken to a traditional circumciser (2019). During his study of Shariah, Hassan realised that FGM was not part of Islam and for that reason, he has tried to convince Somalians to abandon this act as it is neither a religious requirement nor a religious practice, as he believes that it is against Islamic teachings (2019). According to the United Nations Children's Fund, in Somalia, 98% of the female population between the ages of 15 and 49 have been subject to FGM (2019).

This chapter aims to investigate how Farah exposes how women's status is relegated to that of beasts, commodities and properties through repressive patriarchal institutions in Somali society as well as inequitable ideologies of polygyny, clannish attitudes, male chauvinism and dictatorship. Farah, as an advocator for feminism, decodes the female body, both critiquing its representation and liberating it from hegemonic, patriarchal constructions. In this study, I

employ a feminist lens to explore the objectification of women in a patriarchal context that objectifies the female body and equates women's worth with their bodies' appearance and sexual functions. Elaine Scarry, a key theorist for this chapter and the author of *The Body in Pain*, significantly notes: "Physical pain happens, of course, not several miles below our feet or many miles above our heads but within the bodies of persons who inhabit the world through which we each day make our way, and who may at any moment be separated from us by only a space of several inches" (1985:4). In *From a Crooked Rib*, Farah vocalises the pain women experience in traditional patriarchal contexts. In this study, I explore the representation of the body and embodiment(s) in terms of the following themes: the gendered body, the body in pain, the relationship between the body and power and the body as a site of survival. In the novel under analysis, the body materialises as a recurrent motif as Farah both reinforces and challenges hegemonic patriarchal stereotypes, particularly in respect of the female body. The female body is represented as wounded and scarred as a result of FGM, abused through violent attacks and violated through forced sexual intercourse. However, the body is also a source of strength.

The next section of this chapter looks at the background of the selected author, Nuruddin Farah, and highlights how his writings focus on injustices in Somali society, particularly with respect to women. This is followed by a synopsis of *From a Crooked Rib* illustrating the main plot of the text. In terms of the textual analysis, this chapter is organised as follows: the first section engages with the Islam-based totalitarian dictatorship/law, tribal patriarchy and the challenges of nomadic pastoralism in relation to the characterisation of Ebla. The following section focuses on an analysis of the analogy of the "cock" and Ebla's desire to escape patriarchal constraints. I adopt a feminist lens in this study, and as nature is a significant aspect of feminist studies, I embark on a discussion of Ebla's connection with nature in relation to feminism. Developing on the feminist aspects of the text, I explore the commodification and objectification of women and their bodies. The succeeding two sections centre on power dynamics, gender hierarchy and male dominance in Ebla's life post-marriage, and how prostitution is represented to reflect antagonistic gender relations. Since Ebla uses her body as a site of survival, I discuss how Ebla is exemplified as a *Bildungsheld* character who exhibits defiance and rebelliousness against the patriarchal structures. The final section of this chapter provides a conclusion to this textual analysis.

Nuruiddin Farah's Background and Engaged Literature

Nuruiddin Farah, a prominent figure of Anglophone literature in Africa, was born in 1945 in Baidoa, in Italian Somaliland. At a young age, Farah moved to the Ogaden region of Ethiopia. He grew up in a multi-lingual environment and studied English, Arabic and Amharic at several schools. After working for the Ministry of Education, Farah studied literature and philosophy at the Panjab University in India. After being forced into exile for his writing, Farah has lived and taught in numerous countries, including the United States of America, Britain, Germany, India, Italy, Nigeria, Sweden, Sudan and South Africa.

In 1974, Farah was banished into exile by President Siyad Barre (the dictator who ruled Somalia from 1969 to 1991) because of his writings that exposed the social and political reality in his homeland. Farah's writings may be categorised as "engaged literature" (Pucherova 2016:27). His texts challenge the African dictatorship in the country; however, they also draw parallels between patriarchal oppression and political oppression. Dubravka Juraga explains that "One of the main projects of Nuruiddin Farah's fiction is to expose the complicity between the traditional patriarchal Somali family and oppressive political conditions in his native Somalia" (1997:205). Through his fictional works, Farah highlights the connection between the political and personal as the patriarchal family is often regarded "as a central tool of political oppression in a variety of social institutions" (205). His fiction also provides a critique of Somali's traditions, customs and beliefs. Farah exposes the unequal gender relations reinforced by Islamic patriarchs. His work may be regarded as counter-hegemonic because he critiques the deeply entrenched cultural convictions of male dominance and female subjugation and promotes equality and justice. He also offers an alternate view to the traditional Muslim identity.

Farah is a novelist, playwright, essayist and short-story writer. Annie Gagiano describes him as "a simultaneously elegant, elusive, stylistically playful (and metaphorically extravagant!) writer, and an exhortatory, morally scrupulous one" (2006:252). He is regarded as the first Somali novelist after he published his first novel, *From a Crooked Rib*, in London in 1970, and this text is also the first novel in English from Somalia. Farah is also the author of the following novels: *A Naked Needle* (1976), *Sweet and Sour Milk* (1979), *Sardines* (1981), *Close Sesame* (1983), *Maps* (1986), *Gifts* (1992), *Secrets* (1998), *Links* (2003), *Knots* (2006), *Crossbones* (2011), *Hiding in Plain Sight* (2014) and *North of Dawn* (2018).

Synopsis

From a Crooked Rib is narrated by a third-person omniscient voice that narrates the story of the protagonist, Ebla, an uneducated nomadic Somalian woman, who is on a quest for freedom and an independent identity in a society dominated by patriarchal men. Ebla's destiny is determined by her identity as a poor, uneducated, nomadic orphan, who is entrusted to her grandfather's care. In addition, she is illiterate as she can neither read nor write Arabic, but she knows the Surahs⁴ by heart, which highlights the importance of Islam in Ebla's family.

Ebla is a member of a *Jes* (a unit of several families living together) in the countryside where life is governed by the spring season and green pastures. When Ebla is 18 years old, her grandfather arranges her marriage to an older man, Giumaleh, who is of an age to be her father, in exchange for camels. However, Ebla chooses to extricate herself from these patriarchal constraints and determine a destiny for herself.

The narrative centres on Ebla's personal struggle as she flees from the above-mentioned bartered marriage orchestrated by her grandfather in the Ogaden desert in search of refuge in the town of Belet Wene. She abandons her nomadic roots in the hope that the city will provide her with "greener pastures". In the city, at her cousin Gheddi's house, she forms a friendship with her neighbour (a widow) and Gheddi's wife, Aowralla. However, she soon learns that she is subject to commodification again as her cousin intends to marry her to a broker who has tuberculosis in order to settle his debt. In addition, she finds life miserable in Belet Wene, where she has to assist with child-birth and act as an errand-girl.

Ebla realises that women's identities are defined by marriage; however, she refuses to marry the broker, so she resorts to marrying Awill (the widow's cousin) who assists her in escaping and travelling to Mogadiscio. Her decision to marry Awill is based on her belief that since he is an employee of the Italian colonial service, education must have remodelled him from patriarchal ideologies. However, in Mogadiscio, she discovers that she is subject to male dominance once again as during her first night with Awill, she falls prey to violence and sexual assault. In addition, soon after their marriage, he leaves for Italy to prepare for

⁴ Surah is an Islamic term used to refer to a chapter of the Qur'an. There are 114 Surahs in the Qur'an, each divided into verses.

Independence. During Awill's absence, Ebla forms a close relationship with her landlady, Asha, who is represented as self-governing and strong-minded. When Ebla discovers that Awill is having an affair with an Italian woman, she decides to take a second husband, with the aid of Asha, who asserts that men and women are both equal and indispensable. The novel ends with Ebla's discovery that she is pregnant with a child whose father she cannot identify.

“Alhamdulillah. Istagfurullah. Subhganallah”

Somalia is described as a country “deeply steeped in the culture of Islam” (Pucherova 2016:27). In *From a Crooked Rib*, Farah explores the lives of the Somali people, their social ethics and the traditional, cultural and religious practices prevalent in the community. The lives of the women in the text are characterised by Islam-based totalitarian dictatorship/law, tribal patriarchy and the challenges of nomadic pastoralism. Through the character of Ebla, Farah questions the religious practices that demean women's individuality by restricting their freedom, limiting their rights and imposing strict, discriminatory canons. Within this framework, I explore the characterisation of Ebla and her escape from the forced marriage orchestrated by her grandfather and the repercussions of her defiance.

The novel opens with Ebla's grandfather cursing her as a result of her disappearance. At this moment in time, no one is sure whether she has run away or eloped with a man. Ebla's grandfather squats on the ground, holding his rosary tightly, praying and repeating the words “*Alhamdulillah. Istagfurullah. Subhanallah*” (Farah 2006 [1970]:5). From this scene, one can deduce that the text is centred on Islam. This opening scene is an invocation of the world of the Somali culture and Ebla's grandfather who “seeks to be a custodian of the ‘tribal’ memory and the traditional weltanschauung” (Gikandi 1998:753). However, this positive scene abruptly shifts as Ebla's grandfather snaps the beads of his rosary and begins profaning her saying, “May the Lord disperse your plans, Ebla. May He make you the mother of many a bastard. May He give you hell on this earth as a reward” (Farah 2006 [1970]:5). From this first scene in the prologue, religion is painted both positively and negatively. Ebla's grandfather tightly clutches on to the rosary as a sense of reprieve to ease his pain and distress. However, he also uses prayer to curse his granddaughter. This prayer is unequivocally disturbing as one would expect a grandfather to shower blessings on his orphaned granddaughter, who is left in his care. Instead, he curses her and her generations to

ensue. This opening curse is quite ironic as the novel ends with Ebla unable to identify the father of her child. Even before the child is conceived, he or she is derogatorily labelled as a bastard, which is against the Islamic culture as Islam denies that any person should be blamed for a sin that is committed by another person⁵ (Farag 2017). In addition, this child has to bear the burden of his or her mother's defiance even though he or she is innocent. Through this perturbing illustration, Farah questions the illegitimate use of Islamic principles, especially in respect of its justification of the exploitation of women and guiltless beings.

Throughout history, women have been held back from voicing their experiences of oppression. Because of this disparity, Kirsten Holst Petersen believes "women should have the last say in the discussion about their own situation" (1984:45). This belief is in line with the fact that women have a history, culture, language, experiences and values that differ from those of men. Furthermore, women speaking out about their oppression is also a form of empowerment as, during this process, women are given the opportunity to freely analyse, develop and voice their emotions without any external interference. In addition to the above, male writers have been criticised for being unable to accurately speak for women constrained by patriarchy when they have not directly experienced it themselves. For this reason, many male writers have not written novels exclusively from a women's perspective. However, Petersen acknowledges that Farah's *From a Crooked Rib* is a "clear repudiation of traditional society's treatment of women" (39). In the text, Farah strives to diminish gender roles and stereotypes by reflecting the ways in which patriarchal structures can oppress women. Petersen further adds:

Farah's nomadic, cattle-raising, hierarchical and Muslim Somalis are far removed, both in space and tradition from the acephalous, crop-growing and settled traditional societies of the mainstream of modern African literature, and he is under no obligation to admire it; on the contrary, he finds its patriarchal power structure repugnant and sees its maltreatment of women as one of its most serious abuses. (39)

As a male writer, Farah does not endorse the traditional patriarchal system; instead, he draws attention to the perceived flaws in Somalia in his writings. Farah also highlights how gender inequality is a major contributor to the low status of women, and reveals the disproportionate

⁵ This is based on a scripture from the Qur'an which reads: "Every soul draws the consequences of its acts on none but itself: no bearer of burdens can bear a burden of another. Your goal in the end is towards God: He will tell you the truth of the things wherein you disputed" (Qur'an 6:14).

representation of women living in abject poverty. From the grandfather's prayers, one can deduce the patriarchal stances whereby women are defined by their biological potentiality and reproductive systems. Furthermore, Ebla's grandfather is in a state of distress as he cannot comprehend Ebla's defiance, as women are envisaged as submissive.

In *From a Crooked Rib*, customs, tradition, religion and ideologies are depicted as intangibles that impinge on the status of women. Ebla is objectified and her marriage is arranged, in exchange for camels, without her consent. This reveals the patriarchal paradigm of how women are forced into submission, firstly by the patriarchs in their family. Girls are educated into deference and obedience and taught to accept the decisions of the family patriarchs who are deemed guardians of the family's honour.

The relationship between the traditional patriarchal Somali family and oppressive political conditions is reflected in the novel under study. This allegorical feature is described by Helmi Meriem as follows:

the women in Farah's fiction become instruments to reconstruct Somalia and to reshape society by giving a new meaning to womanhood. In his fiction, women's struggle for freedom and for the right to voice themselves become an allegory for a nation in search of its voice. New womanhood becomes interchangeable with a new Somalia, and eventually, Somalia becomes once more the mother, as opposed to its status as a father-land in a dictatorial system. (2016:84)

The women in the text function as allegorical symbols to represent the Somali nation. Familial patriarchal oppression is used to suppress women and children in the household, while patriarchal political oppression is used to control citizens of the country. The women in the text operate as microcosms of society, and the violence inflicted on them is symbolic of the physical and psychological abuse Somalians are subject to under Barre's regime. The fate of Ebla is also symbolic of the fate of the Somalians. Derek Wright states that the women represented in Farah's fiction aim to "control their own destinies, either by trying to live outside the patriarchal structure or by modifying it from within" (1990:23). Ebla escapes from the forced marriage and patriarchal structures in search of autonomy. She exhibits strength, power and audacity, which are commendable characteristics for women confined in shackles of patriarchy.

When Ebla escapes, she prays using the same words her grandfather repeated, even though she did not understand what they meant. However, she understood that these words were God's words and, therefore, sacred. She prays and puts her "Fate in her faith" (Farah 2006 [1970]:16). This is significant as her prayer is juxtaposed with her grandfather's prayer, signifying how prayer is a form of therapy for those in arduous situations. Ebla steps into an unknown journey with prayer and faith as her only mechanisms.

Ebla's identity as African, Muslim and woman creates her marginalisation. The intersectionality of race, nationality and gender are used to define her identity. However, she defies oppressive patriarchal tradition and chooses a destiny for herself. Ebla's name "means 'Graceful' and she always wanted her actions to correspond with her name" (7). She is sanguine and believes that all problems can be solved. Furthermore, she aims to "shape the bad to be like the good – with God's help and guidance" (35). In the novel, Farah explores the alternatives available to women in a society ruled by tyrannical men. As discussed in the above section, the only viable option for Ebla is to escape into the unknown with the aid of faith and hope.

"To Fly Away; like a Cock"

In view of the fact that nature is an important aspect of feminism, I explore the symbolism of the "cock" in relationship to Ebla's desire to escape the countryside with its patriarchal restrictions.

She desired, more than anything, to fly away; like a cock, which has unknotted itself from the string tying its leg to the wall. She wanted to fly away from the dependence on the seasons, the seasons which determine the life or death of the nomads. And she wanted to fly away from the squabbles over water, squabbles caused by lack of water, which meant that the season was bad. She wanted to fly away from the duty of women. Not that she was intending to feel idle and do nothing, nor did she feel irresponsible, but a woman's duty means loading and unloading camels and donkeys after the destination had been reached, and that life was routine. (11)

Ebla uses the analogy of a cock to describe her escape from patriarchal constraints. This is significant as a cock is a male bird, therefore she highlights the power and freedom males have to escape as opposed to females. However, she also counters the notion that males only have this power by comparing herself to a cock, emphasising that she also has the ability to

fly away. A cock is also associated with awakening, confidence and sharing one's voice. Ebla aspires to awaken her inner strength and find confidence and candour in defying oppressive practices. Additionally, the image of the cock unknitting itself signifies Ebla's desire to free herself from the traditional nomadic and patriarchal constraints.

From a young age, Ebla is aware that "life did depend on green pastures" (6). She yearns for a living where sustenance is not dependent on natural elements or where women are not trapped in monotonous tasks related only to farming. Traditionally, women are assigned menial duties in the milieu. However, Ebla feels inclined towards a life not governed by traditional and male-controlled canons. She desires an escape from the feminine connection with nature or in other words, the traditional "duty of women" whereby they are viewed in terms of marriage and reproduction.

Ebla desires an escape from the countryside, her harsh life and forced marriage to Giumaleh. For her, escape means freedom, new life, and "divine emancipation of the body and soul of a human being" (10). She desires independence and the ability to exercise autonomy over her life and body. She resents the patterns and restrictions of nomadic life. In addition, Ebla's escape symbolises her defiance against patriarchal codes and subjugating traditions. She is aware of the discriminatory patriarchal practices that render women powerless and insignificant. At the beginning of the text, Ebla is cognisant that marriage is one of those patriarchal practices that will imprison her and suppress her identity. Consequently, she decides to escape and live a life according to her own will.

"Ebla was Nature, Nature had Personified in Her"

In *From a Crooked Rib*, Farah critiques patriarchal Somali society through the adoption of the motif of nature. Through the mind/body dualism, which is directly linked to the nature versus culture dichotomy, Farah reveals how society categorises and differentiates between individuals. He expresses how people are categorised as "us" or "other" and attention is placed on the hegemonic group while the "other" group is excluded. In the novel, Farah favours nature, passion and women over the culture, reason and male side of the dichotomy. Women and nature are redefined in a positive manner.

Plumwood notes that in feminist studies, nature is signified as follows:

Nature, as the excluded and devalued contract of reason, includes the emotions, the body, the passions, animality, the primitive or uncivilised, the non-human world, matter, physicality and sense experience, as well as the sphere of irrationality, of faith and of madness. In other words, nature includes everything that reason excludes. (1993:19)

In the novel, nature is juxtaposed with life in the city. When Ebla arrives in Belet Wene, she explains that she “felt more at home being near the cow than she would with the townspeople” (Farah 2006 [1970]:25). This is significant as she feels detached from the city life, which she describes as “miserable.” In addition, her first responsibility in town is to put the cows in the cots. She encounters a calf-less cow which she learns is a rebel cow which refuses to be tied by the leg to the pole or be dragged into the cot. Ebla ponders:

the other cows had every reason to object to being tied to the poles, but this cow had no calf to run to. As is usual, the calf had been killed and eaten only five days after it was born. The cow had given birth for the first time and this was done to teach it that, in case its future calf died, it could be milked with ease.

Cows are beasts, calves are beasts and so are goats. “But we are beasts, too,” she thought. “Isn’t my grandfather a beast?” If one shows one’s bestiality by what one does then we are only better than these beasts by trying to explain our doings in such a way that we won’t appear ridiculous to our friends.

“Kill a beast’s calf,” she continued thinking. “And to him it is as painful as it is to human beings. But if this is not brought to an end, one day the strain will make them speak out, blast everybody and reveal their anguish which they have been storing up for so long.” (30)

Ebla first uses the analogy of the cock to highlight her oppression and desire to escape. In the above extract, she describes the oppression and defiance of the calf-less cow named “Bafto” which denotes her white colour; however, they nickname her “Toje” which refers to her being a rebel. Bafto is projected to highlight the mutual exploitation of nature as well as humans. Furthermore, cows’ existence is based on reproduction, in precisely the same way that women are defined by their biological potentiality and reproductive system. Farah also draws parallels between Ebla’s grandfather and the animals, thereby countering the idea that only women can be associated with nature. She compares her grandfather to beasts in a negative manner, emphasising his animalistic patriarchal attitudes and behaviour. Ebla feels sympathy for the cows as they are unable to tend to themselves. Later in the text, when Gheddi is in a financial predicament, Bafto is sold. Ebla then comes to the realisation that there is no difference between her and the cow as they both were sold to a broker.

There are both positive and negative connotations of Ebla's connection to nature. As Gikandi has observed: "Farah undermines this association of woman and nature by surrounding it with images and figures of silence and death that question the notion of woman as the embodiment of nature. For when she is reduced to nature, Ebla is deprived of her subjectivity and is cut down to the objectified world around her" (1998:753). However, in the above analysis, I adopt a feminist lens to reflect how Farah counter-hegemonically adopts the dominant and ancient tradition connecting men with culture and women with nature in *From a Crooked Rib*. This ancient tradition has negative connotations of signifying that women are characterless, domestic, and restrained. However, Farah portrays the connection between women and nature in a positive light, as discussed above. In ecological feminism, women consciously position themselves with nature hence, Ebla feels in harmony with animals and nature as a whole. Ebla is always in search of the "milk of human kindness" (Farah 2006 (1970):59). Ironically, she receives this kindness from animals and nature instead of humans.

"Girls were Materials, just like Objects, or Items on the Shelf of a Shop"

From experience she knew that girls were materials, just like objects, or items on the shelf of a shop. They were sold and bought as shepherds sold their goats at market-places, or shop-owners sold the goods to their customers. To a shopkeeper what was the difference between a girl and his goods? Nothing, absolutely nothing. (75)

The above quotation emphasises the commodification of women. In the text, the female body is represented as a source of pleasure for males, hence reducing the female body to a mere object of desire. This section centres on a discussion of the objectification of women in relation to the hijab. It also draws parallels between the hijab and the view that women are sexual creatures that need to be constrained.

Farah highlights the objectification of Muslim women through the widow's account of the hijab. The widow notes that she had to cover her whole body as it is what her religion requires.⁶ In light of her comment, her use of the hijab is a form of objectification as it affects the way she and others view her and her body. She also states that her religion requires her to

⁶ In Ekaterina Yahyaoui's article "The Islamic Veil and its Discontents: How Do They Undermine Gender Equality", she notes: "the text of the Quran itself, the primary source does not contain any clear imposition of a head cover, even less so of a face veil or an entire body-cover for women. What is clearly present in this primary text is the requirement of modesty for both men and women. This fact is acknowledged by opponents and supporters of veil" (2012:7).

dress modestly, hence there is a subtle implication that it is not what she wants. This also reveals that she is being enslaved and suppressed as she does not have control of her body or life. In Islam, the tradition of women covering their bodies in public is linked to the virtue of modesty. The hijab is a means of protecting the modesty, privacy, and sanctity of women's bodies from external gaze in the public domain. Furthermore, women are primarily seen as sexual creatures whose hair and bodies incite desire, thus the veil protects women from lasciviousness and impudence. This view of women as sexual creatures who need to be controlled is depicted when the widow describes her husband as being jealous as a monkey. She narrates the story of the monkeys as follows:

“Well they cover the ‘thing’ with sticky, wet mud before they leave her. The whole area and its neighbouring area, I mean.”

“What does that symbolize?”

“That will enable them to know whether or not the female has been made love to during the male monkey's absence.” [...] “He sniffs at it” [...] “If the ‘thing’ is wet, and there is an opening then he beats her like the devil.” (51)

Once again, males are equated to animals accentuating their animalistic and illogical behaviour. The widow compares her husband to monkeys because of his extreme jealousy. He divorces her because of his distrust as he could not speak Somali, therefore whenever she spoke to a man, he believed she was having an affair with him or if it was a woman, he believed she was a procurer. This resonates with the chauvinistic beliefs that women are sinners and temptresses.

Islamic veiling remains a highly contested and sensitive issue in society. The hijab is signified as a means of regulating sexual behaviour and is, therefore, linked to the issue of gender repression. However, the positive associations of the veil cannot be ignored as the veil is regarded as a strong religious symbol in Islam. As previously discussed, the hijab is regarded as a form of sexual objectification which serves to maintain gender oppression. In addition, the female body is perceived as both the source of and the repository for sexual desire.

“You are my Wife”

In the context of patriarchal oppression, I discuss the power dynamics, gender hierarchy and male dominance in Ebla’s life post-marriage.

Ebla goes with Awill to Bondere in Mogadiscio where they reside in a single rented room without any cooking utensils as Awill explains he does not eat here. This is an indication of Awill’s life as he continuously travels from one place to another. He also leaves for Italy a week after their marriage. Despite his itinerant lifestyle, he still opts to get married so that he can satisfy his male sexual desires. This negative patriarchal nature of Awill is further reinforced as he has full knowledge about his trip to Italy and his absence from Ebla; however, he does not share this with her until he is about to depart. This points to the traditional belief that women are associated with passion and not reason. Hence, they do not need to be kept in the loop with regard to corporate affairs. Furthermore, Awill decides Ebla’s fate during his absence even before they arrive in Mogadiscio, highlighting how, after marriage, women become shadows of men. Ebla is not given the power to make any decisions for herself as her new husband dictates her life. Their unequal relationship is further reinforced when Awill’s friend questions him about his marriage in relation to his departure, and he answers in Italian saying: “Ho mia moglie. Ma non voglio distruggere la mia vita per una donna” (99). This translates as “I have my wife. But I do not want to destroy my life for a woman”. Ebla is viewed as secondary and incidental as he does not show any affection towards her. Their marriage is represented as a mere transaction. This is further reflected when Awill notes that he does not know her age as he did not bother to ask. Neither Ebla nor Awill has much knowledge about each other prior to their arrival in Mogadiscio. To Ebla’s disappointment, she discovers that he smokes, and she questions him as to why he did not tell her as she would not have accepted his marriage proposal.

Farah brings to light the issue of marriage in Islam as Ebla objects to sleeping on the same bed with Awill before marriage. However, Awill questions her, asking, “Why did you come with me from Belet Wene?”. Ebla answers: “Of course to marry you”, and Awill explains, “Then we are married” (85). Ebla is uncomfortable with this situation and tells Awill not to come near her, but he repeatedly says to her, “You are my wife” (86). The scene is described as follows:

He moved towards her. Her feet were under his arms, and his face near her breasts. He crawled upward, towards her, like a crocodile. [...]

Ebla wanted to get out of bed and run away. For a second she forgot that the door was bolted and that it would take her some time before she was able to unbolt it. She also forgot that Awill was in her way. It was not that he was stronger than she, but a woman never fought with a man, she should be submissive and never return his blows. A good woman should not even cry aloud when her husband beat her. “But this is not my husband – not yet. Maybe later. Maybe, when I have become his wife, he can do whatever he wants with me and I won’t cry” [...]

Awill stood up straight and showered hard blows upon Ebla – in the mouth, at her head, on her belly. He gave her a kick or two on the belly as she tried to bite him. Ebla did not cry, she wanted to, but she knew she should not. (86)

From the above extract, it is revealed that the female body is represented as inherently vulnerable as compared to the male body. Ebla is uncomfortable with having any sexual interactions with Awill as they are not yet married; however, he does not accept her repudiation. Instead, he exerts his brute virility on her, and she is rendered powerless despite the physical strength she possesses as she is unable to overpower him. Anastasia Powell, author of *Sex, Power and Consent*, explains: “When we consider young women’s experiences across the continuum of sexual violence from choice to pressure to coercion to force, it becomes apparent that the social and cultural context in which sex occurs is enormously important and has very real effects” (2010:29). Ebla allows Awill to beat and rape her as she does not have the power to contest his actions. This violent episode highlights the social and cultural context of patriarchal Somalia as women do not have power over their bodies. This extract also reveals the gendered body, women’s body in pain and also the body in relation to power. “The rarity with which physical pain is represented in literature is most striking when seen within the framing act of how consistently art confers visibility on other forms of distress”, explains Scarry (1985:11). Ebla is portrayed as a weaker vessel subject to the vicious force as women are not allowed to retaliate or defend themselves. In the bedroom, Ebla is in pain while Awill is represented as partially or wholly oblivious to Ebla’s pain. Furthermore, he continues to inflict the pain on her until he is victorious in his sexual combat. The language in the above extract also reveals the predator and prey relationship between Awill and Ebla, as it appears as if she is being stalked and then devoured by him. Farah further demonstrates a common feature of sexual violence whereby the perpetrator is someone known rather than a stranger. After their sexual intercourse, Awill looks at her and describes her as a “lovely creature” (Farah 2006 [1970]:90). This highlights how women are

objectified, but this is also ironic as Ebla describes him as a crocodile, emphasising how animalistic his behaviour is. After the sexual intercourse, she explains: “She was no longer a virgin, she was a woman now, the wife of Awill, but only if he wanted her” (90). Ebla’s comment reveals how women’s identities are defined by their bodies, virginity and sexual intercourse. At this moment, Ebla also wishes that she was not a woman as women are subject to FGM, sexual intercourse and child-delivery, which are regarded as the three most painful experiences to be endured. This flashback is a reflection of Scarry’s comment which states: “Physical pain has no voice, but when it at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story” (1985:3).

The issues of FGM, sexual intercourse and child-delivery are echoed through the experiences of Ebla and Aowralla. After Ebla’s first sexual encounter, she is in awe of her mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. This is a celebration of the female body which has to undergo the above-mentioned painful experiences. Ebla recounts her experiences of FGM during which her legs were tied together and they “sliced out her clitoris and stitched the lips together” (Farah 2006 [1970]:137). There is also beating of drums so that the girls’ cries are obscured, and if a girl cried too loudly, they thrust a piece of cloth into her mouth. “To witness the moment when pain causes a reversion to the pre-language of cries and groans is to witness the destruction of language”, notes Scarry (1985:4). In this recollection of Ebla’s memories of FGM, she articulates the great pain girls experience, and reveals how this pain results in them being bereft of the resources of speech, which is signalled through their cries. However, she also underlines how speech and language are seized from these girls as they are silenced by those responsible for their pain. Ebla describes this traditional act as not only painful but barbarous. In a sermon that was broadcast on radio, an advocator for the end of FGM, Sheikh Hassan, states: “We are killing the dreams of our girls by subjecting them to this brutal act” (Ajiambo 2019). FGM causes both physical and psychological damage on the lives of the victims. Additionally, it is identified as “a basic violation of girls’ and women’s rights to physical integrity” by Anika Rahman (Director of the International Program of the Center of Reproductive Law and Policy) and Nahid Toubia (Associate Professor at Columbia University School of Public Health) (2000:3). Rahman and Toubia also note that FGM is not a religious practice but a cultural one, as it is a practice that predates the arrival of Islam in Africa and is not a requirement of Islam, which is further discussed in the following chapters (6). Even though FGM is identified with Islam in several African nations, there is no direct call for FGM in the Qur’an, Islamic law or Hadith (6). From the above information, it can be

concluded that FGM has been misconstrued as a mandatory religious practice by patriarchal religious leaders who intended to control women's sexuality.

The second most painful experience in Ebla's life is when she has her first sexual encounter with Awill and loses her virginity. She notes that it was "indescribably painful. She had bled and he rejoiced seeing her blood, as his manhood depended upon breaking her chastity" (Farah 2006 [1970]:137). Ebla's inability to describe this pain is evidence of Scarry's comment that "there is no language of pain, that it (more than any other phenomenon) resists verbal objectification" (1985:12). In addition to this, Scarry describes a weapon as "an object that goes into the body and produces pain; as a perceptual fact, it can lift pain and its attributes out of the body and make them visible" (16). In the novel, the male penis is epitomised as a weapon used to inflict pain on the body of Ebla and other women. The male penis is also a catalyst for reproduction, which Ebla notes is the third most painful experience for women.

Since Ebla does not directly experience child-delivery, Farah exposes this painful experience through the persona of Aowralla, who is mostly identified as Gheddi's wife in the text, emphasising her suppressed identity. Her pregnancy state is described as follows:

Nine months' pregnancy – she felt pain, especially in the back: the spinal cord seemed to make things worse. Her legs served her no more, her hands seemed to be there only to wipe away the moisture that had been the result of the heat. Some drips of perspiration, sour in taste but queer and good for a pregnant woman like herself, dropped into her mouth, or into her eyes, the latter being absolutely unbearable. (Farah 2006 [1970]:29)

The above extract reveals the incessant and agonising pain Aowralla has to endure during her pregnancy. She is rendered incapacitated as she is unable to move or do anything for herself. A basic requirement like water has to be given to her through the assistance of Ebla. The above depiction is also quite repulsive as Aowralla is described as perspiring uncontrollably which reveals her insufferable state.

During Ebla's first sexual encounter, she is represented as a victim who is subjected to excruciating pain. Ebla is unable to resist Awill's attempts and he tells her she is his wife because they will be married in a few hours. Ebla describes this experience as torture as she was a virgin, while Awill had a number of sexual encounters with harlots and even a woman

ten years his senior, which he regarded with a sense of achievement. He previously satisfied his sexual desires at brothels, but since his last experience where the harlot took his money and never returned to satisfy his desires, he decided never to visit a harlot again but instead marry. This is the first positive representation of prostitutes as powerful and a threat to the established male order.

The patriarchal nature of Somali society is further reinforced in the marriage of Awill and Ebla. Ebla is not present for her marriage; however, the Sheikh acts as her agent to speak for her. Women are represented as shadows of men, which is a motif discussed in the next chapter. They are excluded from the public domain and are confined to the domestic sphere. In patrilineal Somalia, married women are disempowered by the marriage contract that reduces them to property owned by their husbands. Furthermore, Farah also brings to light the social adjustments girls have to make to commemorate their new status of adolescence or wifehood. In terms of hair, Ebla explains: “Only an unmarried woman – and especially a virgin – could keep it plaited” (92). Women have to assume physical changes to publicise their status in society, which is a form of social categorisation and discrimination.

“I Love Life, and I Love to be a Wife. I don’t Care Whose”

Contrary to her beliefs at the beginning of the novel, Ebla resorts to a second marriage as security lies in marriage for women in patriarchal societies. Ebla also circumvents Muslim culture by having two husbands simultaneously. Furthermore, she employs “cameline agency” as she resorts to “prostitution” by using her body as a site of survival. Farah adopts the theme of prostitution in the novel to reflect the antagonistic gender relations that pervade Somalia. Prostitution is a controversial issue in society as despite the laws and customs that prohibit soliciting and despite the abhorrence from some moralists, prostitution continues to proliferate in many parts of the world.

There is growth in Ebla’s character after her marriage to Awill. When she sees a photo of Awill with another woman in Italy, she concludes that she will not run away again because she had run from the country to Belet Wene, and from there to Mogadiscio. If she runs away from there, she would run into the ocean. This reveals Ebla’s optimism and desire to succeed despite the challenges she encounters. Awill’s unfaithfulness is a catalyst for her own individuality and strength of character.

“Cameline agency” is a relatively new concept used to describe “women’s survival in post-apartheid South Africa that offers more functional methods of empowerment than snail-feminism does” (Nkealah 2017:121). I argue that Ebla’s actions can be categorised as “cameline agency” as this model is about the agency of women, particularly the ability of subjugated women, to act resourcefully to transform their situation and reclaim their lives (123). Nkealah premises the model on the camel as it has a “superior ability to surmount obstacles” (122). Furthermore, “By its sheer imposing size, it inspires respect. But more important than that is its ability to draw on its own resources to survive in extremely harsh conditions and to protect itself from danger” (122-123). This model is apposite for the novel and its context as “the camel image is dominant in Somali poetry as a metaphor for female beauty and qualities of endurance” (123). Ebla’s actions can be equated to those of a camel as she does not mourn her predicament but instead acts decisively to change her situation by using her body as a resource to take control of her life and improve her situation.

In the text, marriage is seen as a means for defining womanhood but is also regarded as a means of survival. With encouragement from Asha, Ebla resorts to a second marriage to a man named Tiffo from Baidoa who has two daughters of marriageable age and two sons. Ebla resorts to marriage as an only option for her survival, as she explains: “I love life, and I love to be a wife. I don’t care whose” (Farah 2006 [1970]:112). This is an indication of what life means for a woman: marriage provides Ebla with refuge. As an act of defiance, Ebla resorts to a second marriage because of Awill’s unfaithfulness. This act is seen as emancipation from both male domination and the traumas and nightmares of a failed and flawed marriage. Furthermore, Ebla anticipates that a second marriage will provide her with additional financial provisions. However, within a short period of time, Asha is displeased by the financial and marital behaviour of Tiffo and she tells Ebla, “He treats you like a harlot” (129). Ebla objects to this comment from Asha as she argues that she is not and will never be one. Ebla does not see herself as a sexual object during her relationship with Tiffo because she has the power to determine when to have sex with him. This is reflected when Tiffo arrives at her house during the visit of her brother and the widow, and Ebla asks him to leave. This is in contrast to the previous sexual encounter with Awill where she is forced to provide sex even though she does not want to. Furthermore, Awill’s decision to marry Ebla is based on satisfying his male sexual desires after he is deceived by a prostitute. Hence, Farah reveals the sexually repressive nature of men as well as how prostitution is a means for them to relieve sexual tensions.

In Islam, only a man is allowed to engage in polygamy, as men are afforded the opportunity for polygyny, but polyandry (for women) is permitted. Therefore, Farah's representation of Ebla having two husbands simultaneously is a transformative gesture. This is virtuous of Farah, when considering that the text was published in 1970, as this is an explicit attack on male chauvinism. Farah offers a counter-hegemonic picture of a Muslim woman in control of two men who are co-husbands without knowing it. Through this depiction, there is a reversal order of normative practices, and Farah challenges both secular and religious institutions.

Chinyere Nwahunanya notes that in literary tradition, with only a few exceptions, male literary critics reproduce stereotypical and chauvinistic images of the prostitute.⁷ He adds:

Prostitution is acknowledged to be one of the oldest professions the human race has known. But despite its age, prostitution is still used pejoratively to describe the occupational engagements of women of cheap virtue who thrive on unbridled sexual promiscuity. This pejorative attitude to prostitution arises from stereotyped social attitudes towards women, prudery and the double standards which men have been observed to operate all through history. (2012:340)

Negative images of prostitution usually reflect women as vulnerable and exploited by men. Furthermore, prostitutes are sporadically portrayed as undignified and impure figures. Farah employs the portrait of the prostitute to re-emphasise and challenge the position of subjugated women in Somalia and in Africa. Ebla resorts to a second marriage as an expression of anger and revolt against Awill's unfaithfulness. In addition, her decision to take a second husband reflects her imbued strength to challenge Islamic traditions, as only men are permitted to have polygamous marriages.

In Tiffo's polygynous marriage, he does not treat Ebla as his wife; however, when she questions him about his relationship with his first wife, he becomes angered and tells her, "I am not going to be questioned by my wife, so don't speak to me like that" (Farah 2006 [1970]:132). Ebla then responds by telling him that she is also married. He laughs and is whimsical and witty as he cannot contemplate her being married to any other individual. Tiffo tells Ebla his wife's name in exchange for her telling him her husband's name;

⁷ In Emile Zola's *Nana*, the protagonist, Nana, is represented as seductress who is wicked, cruel and brings about the downfall of others. Another example is Abbe Prevost's *Manon Lescaut* which embodies a heroine who is described as a demon with an angel face (343).

however, when she does tell him, he does not believe her. Ebla asserts herself and says with authority, “You have another wife and I have another husband. We are even: you are a man and I am a woman, so we are equal. You need me and I need you. We are equal” (132). This scene is similar to a “camlane agency” scenario in other texts, such as Shaida Kazie Ali’s *Lessons in Husbandry* (2012), where “the application of camlane agency leads to the reformation of Islam where patriarchal conservative Islam is transformed into a modernized, progressive Islam, with women having more freedoms sexually and socially” (Nkealah 2017:126). In this novel, however, Tiffo responds in anger, saying, “We are not equal. You are a woman and you are inferior to me. And if you have another husband, you are a harlot” (Farah 2006 [1970]:132). This is a reflection of the unequal relationship between men and women in Somali society as women are subjected to inferior treatment and labelled with sexual slurs. Men are provided with the right to have multiple wives while women are expected to remain faithful. Wives are also expected to remain docile and not question their husbands. Tiffo divorces Ebla when he becomes aware that she is really married to someone else.

Farah highlights the gender imbalances that force women to live in ways that society deems undignified. From a feminist perspective, Farah’s adoption of prostitution in the novel is a manifestation of gender antagonism. In the text, prostitution reflects the conflict between men and women, particularly women from nomadic settings, who have unequal resources and social and economic power. Farah leaves the reader to grapple with the question as to whether Ebla can be labelled a prostitute since she takes on the identity of being Tiffo’s wife. Prostitution is represented as sexual deviance but also an active rebellion against the traditional customs and canons in Somalia. Farah brings to light the chauvinistic practices that enable men to engage in polygynous marriages while women are subject to monogamous marriages. Ebla’s decision to take a second husband is signified as a cultural defiance as it challenges patriarchal demands for one-sided monogamous unions as the basis for socially approved female sexuality. Through the characterisation of Awill and Tiffo, Farah portrays the double standards of patriarchal men who are afforded greater sexual freedom. However, he also offers transformative models of an equal society where both men and women are afforded polygamous marriages.

“I am Master of Myself”

From a Crooked Rib may be categorised as a *Bildungsroman* as it depicts the journey of the protagonist as she defies oppressive patriarchal traditions and establishes an autonomous identity. In the novel, Ebla protests male dominance and female subjugation. Furthermore, she displays strength of will, “cameline agency” and autonomy. As a *Bildungsheld* character, the journey of Ebla’s growth throughout the novel is worthy of discussion.

Ebla’s migration and the female characters she becomes acquainted with play a crucial role in her quest for individuality. Brian Worsfold notes that the female characters and respective settings featured in the text are symbolic and meaningful to her personal emancipation (2010:162). In Mogadiscio, after Awill’s departure, Ebla forms a close bond with Asha whom she is very fond of because Ebla explains that she was the first person who regarded her as an equal. Asha plays a profound role in the development of Ebla’s identity because Asha does not encourage Ebla to passively accept Awill’s infidelity; instead, she persuades her to act decisively and seek revenge by remarrying. This second marriage is a palpable act of defiance and rebelliousness against the patriarchal structure.

At the age of twenty, Ebla chooses to be responsible for herself as she says, “In future I will be myself and belong to myself, and my actions will belong to me” (Farah 2006 [1970]:130). She acquires a sense of accomplishment when she asks Asha to stay out of her affairs and she declares, “I am master of myself” (130). Ebla further notes:

[“] Men should consider that the existence of a woman is not just a means to an end, but that she can be an indispensable companion for life. I could be bought, I could be sold, just in the way that my cousin tried to sell me – or my first would-be husband bought me. But one thing they could not pay for is my indispensability. I am a woman. And I am indispensable to man.” (95)

The above extract reveals the plight of women in traditional patriarchal environments where they are objectified and considered to be objects of sexual satiety and a means of reproduction. Ebla challenges these biased hegemonic views and asserts her individuality and equality. Ebla acknowledges that she is equal and indispensable to men; however, as a woman in patriarchal Somali society, she still occupies a subordinate position. Petersen argues that “None of [... Ebla’s] problems are solved in the course of the book, but the reader

is left with a clear vision of the narrow space within which a Somali woman can define herself” (1981:100). This vision of the future correlates with texts premised on “camlane agency” which “create social spaces where things are done differently, in contrast to a past system founded on patriarchal hegemony, to the extent that the previously marginalised and disempowered – women in this case – are able to think and act in ways that convey an awareness of their personal value” (Nkealah 2017:123).

Farah reshapes and revises the Islamic conceptualisation of women. This conceptualisation is in line with the feminist view of women which highlights that the Hadith instructs that men should “act kindly towards women”. The fact that women were created “from a crooked rib” is also not an insult in any way, shape or form because the perfect rib is in fact, crooked. Ebla’s reinforcement at the end of the novel is an assertion of women’s perfect natural state. Furthermore, Farah highlights that the relationship between men and women is based on complementing and completing one another.

Conclusion

In the novel, *From a Crooked Rib*, Nuruddin Farah projects the patriarchal oppression of Somali women that reigned in the 1960s and which is still a perturbing issue in society. He reveals how women are viewed as inferior creatures who are treated in the same way as property and possessed by the male patriarchs in their lives. The protagonist, Ebla, challenges two forms of domination, one perpetuated by the father figure which in this case is her grandfather in the text, who regards her as a commodity. The second form of domination is by her husband, who continues the practice of patriarchal attitudes of female subordination. In addition, Farah projects the rebellion and resistance of women from oppressive patriarchal canons. Through the characterisation of Ebla, Farah highlights that women have the power and aptitude to resist male dominance and achieve emancipation. Ebla’s ideological transformation is a counter-hegemonic one as, by the end of the novel, she embodies resilience and fortitude as she believes that both men and women are equal and can compete accordingly. This is in relation to the objective of “camlane agency” which “conjures a new system where patriarchy gives way to a more egalitarian society populated by de-gendered women and men, where women – like men – can break socially imposed codes of silence and be hailed for their daring” (Nkealah 2017:129).

From a feminist perspective, Farah also offers a redefinition of the female body as Ebla uses her body as a strength and a source of power. In the text, Farah is able to redefine the body, in terms of its importance in the construction of identity as well as a site of oppression. In the text, the body transforms from a site of vulnerability to a site of survival.

Farah also presents both positive and negative representations of female characters. The widow and Aowralla are presented as passive individuals whose lives are dictated by patriarchal Islamic culture, while Asha is presented as an audacious feminine figure who is strong, independent and astute.

As a socially engaged and engrossed novelist, Farah exposes the plight of women subject to oppressive patriarchal practices. He reveals how religion and culture have been used to justify abhorrent and inhumane practices. However, these experiences are not limited to the country of Somalia only as gender inequality and oppression are issues affecting women in patriarchal systems across the globe.

CHAPTER TWO

SILENT SILHOUETTES OPPRESSED BY THE DARKNESS IN NAWAL EL SAADAWI'S *GOD DIES BY THE NILE*

Up to the present there has not been a separation between God and rulers. The pope is a political and religious figure. Secularism or separation between state and church has never been completed even in the most secular of Western countries. In the United States, in spite of the so-called religious freedom, Christianity holds sway. Some American presidents encouraged religious fundamentalist groups inside and outside the United States. Ronald Reagan and George Bush, for example, empowered Christian fundamentalist groups in the United States. In Afghanistan, they funded Islamic Fundamentalists and used them to fight the Soviet Union. The Vatican is politically and religiously active all over the world. It tries to promote Catholicism as the state religion and popularize Roman Catholic laws and family laws within the so-called secular countries. The Vatican is one of the institutions of Christian fundamentalism, and expresses solidarity with other fundamentalists – Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhist – especially in matters related to women and their sacred role in the family, as obedient wives and devoted, self-effacing mothers.

(Saadawi 2005:31)

Introduction

In the above epigraph by Nawal El Saadawi, she highlights that religious fundamentalism is a universal issue as there is no secular state in the world because of the presence of patriarchal class systems. The relationship between religion and politics is a prevailing theme in African literary texts as is discussed in this chapter using the above-mentioned writer's literary work. The literary text for examination in this chapter, *God Dies by the Nile* (2015 [1985]), is centred on themes of cultural patrimony and religious fundamentalism. In the above

quotation, Saadawi also notes that women are victims of both the capitalist class and patriarchal systems. Even though patriarchy is a social system, it has been instilled in society as a hegemonic ideology so that patriarchal men can predominate in roles of political and familial leadership. This male domination has resulted in women losing their autonomy and identities as reflected in the novel which connects to the title of this chapter: *Silent Silhouettes Oppressed by the Darkness in God Dies by the Nile*. I have employed the metaphor of women as silhouettes in the title because first, a silhouette is featureless, emphasising women's lack of identity in patrimonial contexts. Silhouettes are also usually associated as speechless, voiceless and inaudible. However, I have added the word "silent" to further emphasise women's subordination and submission as they are commanded to remain silent in all aspects of political, social, religious and familial domains as these are deemed male territories. As mentioned in the epigraph, women play a "sacred role in the family, as obedient wives and devoted, self-effacing mothers" (31). The second connotation of the word "silent" signposts the oppression, violence and abuse women are subject to and to which they cannot resist or object. As "silent silhouettes" women are rendered voiceless and are dehumanised by oppressive patriarchal and religious structures. However, the second association of a silhouette is that it is a solid shape. The word "solid" has connotations of not yielding to pressure and being characterised by good substantial quality. Therefore, given the background of Saadawi as a feminist writer, the positive connotation of women as silhouettes is that they have the ability to withstand stress and force and can still retain their character as represented by the protagonist in the text who finally establishes her dignity and identity at the end of the novel. The protagonist's act of killing the oppressive Mayor, is symbolic of oppressed women's ability to transcend docility and acquiescence.

From the above introductory paragraph, it can be noted that language and symbolism are key features for this literary analysis of *God Dies by the Nile*. This chapter allows for an investigation of how Saadawi uses language to position certain sides of women's rights into gender-dominated categories. I also explore how Saadawi employs language to construct alternative forms of symbolic meaning to redefine hegemonic views. My analysis centres on Saadawi's use of juxtaposition as a literary technique to contrast men and women, god and individual, human and beast, and good and evil. Juxtaposition is employed in the novel to encourage the reader to make comparisons between various subjects as well as to challenge the perspectives on these subjects. From the title of this chapter, I juxtapose the "silent

silhouettes” with the “oppressing darkness” which signposts the oppression women are subject to in Egyptian society.

A key theorist for this analysis is Riffat Hassan, a theologian and leading Islamic feminist scholar of the Qur’an. In her article titled “Feminism in Islam”, she asserts: “the fact remains that until the present time, the Islamic tradition and Muslim culture remain overwhelmingly patriarchal, inhibiting the growth of scholarship among women particularly in the realm of religious thought” (1999:250). In a similar manner to Hassan, Saadawi opposes Islamic traditionalism because of the unequal sex roles and oppression of women as a result of the rigid interpretation of the Qur’an.

Mawt al-rajul al-wahid ‘ala al-ard (The Death of the Only Man on Earth, which was first published in English in 1985), is a novel by Egyptian writer, Nawal El Saadawi, and was translated from the Arabic version to English by Sherif Hetata with the title *God Dies by the Nile*. Through a textual analysis of the novel, I explore the roles patriarchy and religion play in maintaining the unequal status quo between males and females. Sexuality is one of the themes Saadawi employs to draw attention to gender inequality in Egyptian society as well as oppressed women’s lack of control over their bodies. In the text, the Mayor misogynistically alleges that men are by nature immoral and therefore permitted sexual freedom while the most precious thing women possess is their virtue. Throughout this chapter, I reveal the dynamics of patriarchy whereby women must play the secondary role of preserving the honour of the men in their lives through maintaining their virginity before marriage and chastity after marriage. Furthermore, women in the text have no control over their bodies as traditional practices such as female genital mutilation (FGM) and defloration are inculcated and enforced onto them.

In Egypt, genital mutilation is a mandatory tradition for both men and women. Saadawi is critical of this tradition as she notes in her essay on “Women, Religion, and Postmodernism” that “God does not order his people in the Koran or in the New Testament to circumcise males or females” (2005:28). Female genital cutting was banned in 2008 and criminalised in 2016 in Egypt. However, this practice is still forced onto girls as it has been embedded in individuals’ minds. According to UNICEF, FGM is endemic in Egypt, where 91% of women and girls (27.2 million) are subjected to this tradition (Reuters 2013).

In this chapter, I discuss how Saadawi, as a feminist writer, exposes how social, economic and political forces manipulate Islamic tradition so that male exploitation is legitimised, and women are subject to violence and oppression. I argue that Allah (God) and the Islamic religion are used to exploit and subjugate individuals and justify the injustices of the dominant class. The Sheikh in the text is viewed as the most religious and prestigious person in the town; however, he himself acknowledges, “People have become corrupt [...] You can search in vain for Islam, or for a devout Muslim. They no longer exist” (2015 [1985]:29). Islam is the official religion of Egypt; however, Saadawi makes it clear that Islam as a religion is not discriminatory, as the Qur’an states that all people are equal before Allah. Gender inequality is therefore espoused through the misuse of Islam by patriarchs to legitimise male domination. Women are subject to religious socialisation that results in their becoming objectified and secondary citizens in society. This socialisation also leads to them losing their identities.

The title of the novel signposts the relationship between religion as an ideology and patriarchy as a social system which are hegemonised in society. Saadawi uses the word “god” as a symbol for the head of the village, the Mayor. In other words, she humanises God by describing the Mayor as God. This metaphor indicates the Mayor’s power as he is viewed as omniscient and omnipotent. From the first page of the novel, the reader becomes aware that the “mayor was a god and no one could punish him” (3). Furthermore, the characters note: “We are God’s slaves when it’s time to say our prayers only. But we are the Mayor’s slaves all the time” (87). The Mayor exploits political power and religion to oppress the peasants in the text. Saadawi presents the reader with an ominous picture because the Mayor is illustrated as more powerful than God. The lives of the characters are also dependent on the Mayor who is self-loathing and predatory. Hence, they are doomed to failure because, ironically, religion and God are positioned subordinate to him.

In the text, Islam is represented as an instrument manipulated to support the oppression of women; however, through the representation of key female characters, Saadawi also reveals the resistance of women against patriarchal structures. Through Fatheya’s protection of the illegitimate child, she shows defiance and rejection towards the double standards of the patriarchal system. Moreover, Zakeya’s transformation in character from submissiveness and silence to rebelliousness and emancipation reflects women’s ability to empower themselves from oppressive patriarchal constraints. Through Zakeya’s mental illness, there is an

“unveiling of the mind” where she is enlightened about her oppression and the person responsible for her situation. A second key theorist for this analysis is Elaine Showalter, a leading literary critic, feminist and writer on socio-cultural issues. Showalter argues that feminine mental illness is a protest against feminine subjection, oppression and exploitation. In this analysis, I adopt Showalter’s argument to describe Zakeya’s illness and her revolt against the Mayor and his tyrannical regime. Showalter notes, “Madness itself became intelligible as a strategy, a form of communication in response to the contradictory messages and demands about femininity women faced in patriarchal society” (1985:222).

In the analysis of the novel, I apply a feminist critique to examine how Saadawi as a feminist writer uses rhetorical strategies to present her perspective on women’s rights. Nayef Al-Joulan’s article entitled, *The Stylistics of Repetition: Gender and Class in Nawal El Saadawi’s God Dies by the Nile*, explores how oppression is portrayed in the text “by focusing on the symbolism and the stylistics of repetition in the presentation of certain patterns of class and gender oppression” (2007:72-73). Al Joulan argues that Saadawi’s use of repetition as a narrative tool “is a successful conceptual and cognitive stylistic narrative device, which also strengthens the novel’s carefully woven symbolism” (72). In this analysis, I explore the repetition and symbolism of light and darkness. I argue that darkness is used to emphasise the incessant oppression and exploitation of peasant women, whereas light is symbolised as a source of hope and poise. At the end of the novel, we see how light conquers darkness. Zakeya undergoes a physical, spiritual and psychological transformation as “the darkness of her mind was no longer the same. It had changed. Nor was her mind the same mind it had been before” (Saadawi 2015 [1985]):203).

This chapter first focuses on a discussion of Saadawi as a feminist writer for social justice. This is followed by a brief synopsis of the text in which I highlight the main events which are further discussed in the textual analysis that follows throughout the chapter. The next section, titled “Gender Inequality” explores the patrimonial society represented in the novel which is rooted in patriarchal beliefs that women are subordinate. Through an analysis of the characterisation of the protagonist, Zakeya, I explore the effect indigenous patriarchal systems have on the lives of oppressed peasant women in Egypt. The next section focuses on the sexual predation in the text and how patriarchal systems are strengthened through the fortification of religion, traditional beliefs and politics. This is achieved by exploring the character disposition of the Mayor, Sheikh Zahran and Haj Ismail. One of the objectives of

this chapter is to explore how women are oppressed by class, gender and religion. Therefore, the following section focuses on an investigation of the patriarchal image of women through an analysis of the representation of Fatheya. This is followed by a discussion of the representation of the illegitimate baby boy and Fatheya's protection of him, which tragically results in both of their deaths. The next section explores insanity as a "female malady" and how Zakeya triumphs against the patriarchal order through her psychological illness. The final analytical section focuses on the juxtaposition of darkness and light in the novel.

Nawal El Saadawi's Background and Works for Social Justice

Nawal El Saadawi was born in Egypt on the 27th of October 1931. She has a degree in medicine and trained as a psychiatrist and physician. She worked as Director of Public Health at the Ministry of Health for the Egyptian government until she was dismissed from this post because of the publication of her first book of non-fiction entitled *Women and Sex* in 1972. This text contextualised the various abuses perpetrated against women's bodies, including FGM. As a result of Saadawi's feminist and political activism, she was arrested in September 1981 by Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat. She was released later that year, a month after Sadat's assassination.

Saadawi has been labelled as anti-Islam, anti-Egypt, and hence defiant, so she has received numerous death threats and her name was put on a hit list. In 1988, she was forced to flee Egypt and worked at a number of prestigious universities in the United States of America. She returned to Egypt in 1996 where she continued her activism. In the 2004 Egyptian elections, she stood as a presidential candidate.

Saadawi is an internationally acclaimed novelist and leading feminist. She began writing early in her career. She has written several novels, short stories and memoirs, including *Woman at Point Zero* (1975 [2007]), *The Hidden Face of Eve* (1977 [2015]), *Memoirs from the Women's Prison* (1986), *Searching* (1991), *Zeina* (2008), *Off Limits: New Writings on Fear and Sin* (2019) and many other novels and non-fictional books. Saadawi is a writer for social justice as she explores the relationship between patriarchy as a system and religion as an ideology to support the above-mentioned system. Through her fictional works, she exposes the condition of women, religion, and social, economic and political systems within society. She also exposes the truth about cultural hegemony and religious extremism.

Synopsis

God Dies by the Nile centres on one family in the town of Kafr El Teen, a village on the banks of the Nile. This family consists of Zakeya and Kafrawi who are siblings, Kafrawi's daughters (Nefissa and Zeinab) and Galal (Zakeya's son and Zeinab's husband). As peasants, their lives are characterised by hard labour where they have to till the land for its meagre harvest. Furthermore, this family is under siege and are exploited by an oppressive patriarchal system which is controlled by the Mayor and his co-conspirators. The Mayor utilises coercive power to uphold his status of leadership over the people of Kafr El Teen. His primary objective is to attain power, money and women. Consequently, he abuses every relationship to achieve his goals.

The novel opens with Zakeya, a central character in the novel, who we later learn is married to Abdel Moneim, the father of her ten sons and six daughters, all of whom have died, except one son, Galal. Galal is recruited into the army and returns towards the end of the novel, dispirited and unrecognisable to his family. At the beginning of the text, Zakeya and her brother discover that Nefissa has disappeared. We later learn that she flees Kafr El Teen after detecting that she is pregnant with the Mayor's child, as well as to escape the Mayor's ruthless domination. Following the advice of Om Saber, Nefissa travels to Al Ramla to seek assistance from Nafoussa.

When the inhabitants of the Kafr El Teen learn about Nefissa's pregnancy, the Mayor initiates rumours that the father of the child is Elwau, who is later killed by the Mayor's subordinates, who then falsely accuse Kafrawi of his murder. Kafrawi is imprisoned and subjected to unjust interrogation.

Nefissa gives birth to a baby boy who is left in front of the home of Sheikh Hamzawi and his wife, Fatheya. She is automatically drawn to this baby; however, he is accused of all the troubles that occur in the town because he is a child born of sin and fornication. Sheikh Hamzawi loses his position in the mosque because of his choice to adopt the child. Fatheya and the baby are eventually tragically killed.

After Nefissa's disappearance, the Mayor sets his eyes on her younger sister, Zeinab. Through the help of his assistants, she is forced to work in his house. However, when Galal

returns he seeks out Zeinab, as they were betrothed, and defiantly marries Zeinab against the Mayor's will. This angers the Mayor, which results in his imprisonment also.

At the end of the novel, Zakeya finally gains the courage to seek vengeance against the Mayor after seeing her brother and son forcefully imprisoned and her two nieces forcefully taken from her. She goes into the Mayor's house with a hoe and kills him by crushing his head.

The novel explores the "unholy trinity" between religion, politics and sex as it oppresses the lives of women within Egypt (Mazrui & Abala 1997:18). The "unholy trinity" or three interrelated spheres in the text are: first, religion, which is represented by Sheikh Hamzawi, the Imam of the Mosque; second, socio-cultural tradition, which is represented by Haj Ismail, the barber and local healer; and third, political power, which is represented by Sheikh Zahran, the head of the Village guard. The above-mentioned characters "act in addition, as sycophants and 'court-jesters' who form a protective wall around the Chief and provide him with the music of the invulnerability of the patriarchal dispensation" (Saadawi 2015 [1985]):20). The Mayor of Kafr El Teen utilises Islam and the Imam of the mosque in order to gain political and personal goals. Saadawi reflects how Islamic religious beliefs and practices potentially support politics in the text.

Gender Inequality

"Muslims, in general, consider it self-evident that women are not equal to men who are 'above' women or have a 'degree of advantage' over them", argues Hassan (1999:253). As a feminist writer, Saadawi presents the adverse effects of male hegemony and cultural patrimony. In *God Dies by the Nile*, women are oppressed by the men in their family, in society and on the streets. This oppression is symbolic of the gender inequality in Egypt whereby traditional gender roles are prevalent and clearly defined. The primary objective of this section is to explore the effect indigenous patriarchal systems have on the lives of oppressed, peasant women in Egypt.

From a young age, Saadawi personally experiences gender inequality. In the introduction to the novel, she notes that even though she was more intelligent and proactive than her brother, he was viewed more favourably and given more freedom and more food than she was. These

actions were justified by the rationale that it is what God pronounced. Saadawi's comment highlights the circumscribed roles men and women are given within the traditional Islamic family which lead to radically different life experiences, opportunities and outcomes for each individual. In Isam Shihada's article titled "The Patriarchal Class System in Nawal El Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile*" she explores how women are "victims of the patriarchal class system consolidated by politics, religion, and social customs" (2007:162). Drawing from Shihada's argument, in this section, I argue that the intersectionality of gender and class conspire to control women's identities and restrain their subject positions. In this section, I explore the challenges the central character in the text is subject to and the effects on her psyche.

Saadawi reflects gender inequality through the characterisation of the protagonist. At the beginning of the novel, we are introduced to the protagonist, Zakeya, who is plodding in the fields with her buffalo. Al-Joulani notes: "This is a daily ritual; the repetition itself is a motif of hopeless monotony" (2007:74). Zakeya's life is subject to monotonous routines of tilling the land. This is symbolic of peasant women whose lives are restricted to the domestic sphere doing laborious tasks. One of the patterns of repetition in the novel equates beast and human (72). In the novel, Zakeya is metaphorically compared to a beast in terms of appearance and abilities. As discussed in Chapter One, there is a direct theoretical connection between feminism and animals. Through this connection, Saadawi highlights that the oppression of women is inextricably linked to the ways animals are understood and abused. Zakeya is described as "gaunt, severe, bloodless. The lips were tightly closed, resolute, as though no word could ever pass through them" (Saadawi 2015 [1985]):7). In the same way as animals are speechless and inaudible, Zakeya is reduced to an object as she is described as "bloodless" and unable to express herself. The word "gaunt" also relays her physical state as she is emaciated by the physical tasks she undertakes, as well as the physiological burdens the reader becomes aware of later in the novel. In addition, both Zakeya and the beast "lack luster, are silent and staring. The use of visual imagery is interesting in that although both have their eyes wide open, none of them as yet has the total mental recognition that would explain their present predicament" (Al-Joulani 2007:74).

The reader discovers throughout the novel that Zakeya has been subject to privation, abuse and patriarchal oppression from birth because of her identity as a woman and peasant. When she is born, her father strikes her mother because she did not bear him a son. This is an

indication of patriarchal Islamic practices, as “A woman who only gives birth to daughters is likely to be the target of harsh and abusive behaviour and threatened with divorce” (Hassan 1999:269). Zakeya also reminisces about “the times when she ran behind the donkey and the hot earth burnt the soles of her feet”, and she ate salted pickles and green peppers when she “felt something like a slow fire deep down inside the walls of her belly” (Saadawi 2015 [1985]):118). As a young girl, she was also exposed to FGM and harassment from the menfolk who would pinch her breasts. After marriage, her condition worsens as she is subject to battering from her husband, Abdel. One of the reasons for her battering is giving birth to daughters instead of sons.

Egypt has been described as a “highly gender-stratified setting where domestic violence against women is common” (Yount & Li 2010:333). Saadawi brings to light how patrimonial societies in Egypt condone the oppression against women because of the patriarchal interpretation of the Qur’an which endorses gender inequality. Women encounter gender discrimination through patriarchal attitudes and practices, which privilege men from the level of the family to the state. From birth, women are socialised into subservience and compliance. Research by Kathryn Yount and Li Li shows that “Women who experienced corporal punishment or maltreatment by a parent and female genital cutting had higher odds of experiencing physical domestic violence” (342). This is reflected through Zakeya, who describes her father as abusive, and as a young girl, she is also subject to FGM. In patriarchal Egyptian communities, violence is viewed as a legitimate form of discipline. However, Saadawi makes the reader aware that violence against women is a ubiquitous problem as it has life-threatening consequences on women’s health and well-being. Zakeya’s affliction is described as a lament “which has no end, and sees no end to all the pain of life, as long as the long hours of her days and nights” (Saadawi 2015 [1985]):119)

Sexual Predation and a “Devout Muslim”

In *God Dies by the Nile*, Saadawi presents an African culture that “presumably gives men authority to violate ethical standards in their treatment of women: men are gods, above the law thereby given to their primordial instincts. They commit diverse acts of sexual perversion without retribution from society because the culture permits them to do so” (Nyongesa 2017:1). The Mayor in the novel is “above suspicion, above the law, even above the moral rules which governed ordinary people’s behaviour. Nobody in Kafr El Teen would dare

suspect him. They could have doubts about Allah, but about [the mayor]... It was impossible” (Saadawi 2015 [1985]):152). This section details the sexual predation reflected in the novel by exploring the characterisation of the Mayor and two of his conspirators, Sheikh Zahran and Haj Ismail. The following accounts of Sheikh Zahran and Haj Ismail reveal how tradition and religion are used as repressive tools to oppress women. The system of patriarchy is strengthened through the fortification of traditional beliefs, religion and politics.

The male characters in the novel are depicted as sexual predators who prey on the women in the area, particularly peasant women. As mentioned above, the intersectionality of gender and class are manifested to suppress and oppress peasant women of the toiling class. The Mayor is described as “a great giant, a monstrous devil who walked on twenty iron legs” by Nefissa when she is a young girl (36). This description of the Mayor is apposite as he is reflected as a beast or fiend who preys on susceptible women. The adjectives “great” and “monstrous” also allude to his colossal power as he is represented as infallible. Saadawi “deconstructs the patriarchal class system by showing us its dark side where women are raped and destroyed for being women and even men are eliminated for failing to support fully the patriarchal class system” (Shihada 2007:163). At the age of 12, Nefissa is summoned to work for the Mayor for twenty piastres a day. When Sheikh Zahran comes to take her away, she hides in fear and he tells her: “You’re a stupid girl with no brains. How can you throw away all the good that is coming to you? Do you prefer hunger and poverty rather than doing a bit of work?” (Saadawi 2015 [1985]):37). The Mayor and his associates first manipulate and exploit the peasants’ indigence so that they can acquire them as slaves. However, when Nefissa objects, Sheikh Zahran does not continue to force her, telling her that she is free to decide her own fate but that her refusal seems against what Allah wants. This signals that the second tool to acquire women is religion. Nefissa’s defiance is viewed as direct disobedience towards Allah.

Kafrawi accepts the Mayor’s request for Nefissa to work for him; however, he explains that Nefissa is refusing and does not know what to do. This results in Sheikh Zahran questioning his manhood as men are expected to make decisions for those in the household. He adds that Nefissa should be beaten as he says, “Don’t you know that girls and women never do what they told unless you beat them?” (38). This comment is in line with the discussion in the above section where violence is viewed as a legitimate form of discipline. Kafrawi heeds his advice, clambers to where Nefissa is, strikes and tugs at her hair so that she obliges. Violence

is used as a weapon by patriarchs in the household to enforce authority and ensure that their orders are obeyed. This indicates that through violence, daughters are taught to accept male antagonism. After her beating, Nefissa is forced against her will to go to the Mayor. This signals that within the patriarchal household, daughters are property owned by their fathers and can be deputised to suitors at any given time.

The Mayor also perceives women as objects which can be possessed and figuratively devoured. When he lays sight on Zeinab, he is immediately smitten by her beauty and seductively says: “the youngest is always the most tasty” (26). This statement reveals the Mayor’s immoral and promiscuous character. In addition, it reveals his view of women. After sexually abusing and impregnating Nefissa, the Mayor is still not appeased and wants to fulfil his sexual desires by seizing Zeinab as his slave. Even though Zeinab defiantly objects to the Mayor’s request, he succeeds in securing Zeinab through the help of his co-conspirators. Haj Ismail advises Zeinab to take Zakeya (who is suffering from a psychological illness) to the mosque where she will meet a “religious” man who will help drive out the evil spirit inside of her. However, this “religious” man orders her to go to the Mayor’s house and instructs that “She must never walk out of it again until the owner of the house orders her to do so. He is a noble and great man” (142). Zeinab willingly listens to the man and goes to the Mayor because she believes Allah sent her and that it is his will for her to be there. The Mayor reacts to her presence by saying to himself, “Devil, son of a devil. What a cunning rogue you are, Haj Ismail” (146). The above instance reveals the Mayor’s infallible power whereby all spheres and resources in society are under his control. Therefore, he is able to acquire anything or anyone he desires. In other words, he utilises his power and wealth to exploit peasant women economically and sexually.

In the introduction of the novel, Saadawi avers: “The majority of people in Egypt were deprived of their basic material needs. Our television screens were flooded with religious men preaching chastity, modesty, spirituality and the veil [...]. For women, the veil and female genital mutilation came to be part of authentic Islamic identity” (5). *God Dies by the Nile* reflects how political and religious systems are used to suppress individuals.

Sheikh Hamzawi tugs onto his rosary beads during his sinful behaviour. He states:

All peasants steal. Theft runs in their blood like the bilharzia worm. They put on an innocent air, pretend to be dull, kneel down before Allah as they would never

think of disobeying Him, but all the time, deep inside, they are nothing but accursed, cunning, unbelieving, impious sons of heretics. A man will prostrate himself in prayer behind me, but once he has left the mosque and gone to the field, he will steal from his neighbour, or poison the man's buffalo without batting an eyelid. (29)

The above description from Sheikh Hamzawi is ironic as this best describes his actions. In this scene, he is plotting with his colleagues on a way to defame Kafrawi. They accuse him of stealing, fornication and murder. The above extract also reveals the prejudice of the upper classes towards peasants. Individuals from the ruling class manipulate stereotypes about peasants so that they can support the Mayor's illicit acts, for example, the imprisonment of Kafrawi and Galal. As already noted, Sheikh Hamzawi claims: "You can search in vain for Islam or for a devout Muslim. They no longer exist" (29). However, when the Mayor shows disapproval to his comment, he quickly asserts: "Except of course where you are dealing with upper class people of noble descent like his highness, the Mayor. Then it's a different matter" (29). This statement is also ironic as the Mayor is characterised as filled with rage, antagonism, and undeniable self-loathing. Furthermore, Sheikh Hamzawi is cognisant that the Mayor is a "dangerous man, and fears no one, not even Allah" (163). However, he neglects truth and justice and supports the Mayor exclusively.

The above discussion reveals how patriarchy as a system thrives because of the fortification of religious, social and political spheres. Patriarchy is socialised into society and coercive power is used when individuals are defiant. Furthermore, patriarchs in the household are not left unscathed as their manhood is questioned when their wives or daughters are insolent, as discussed above through the characterisation of Kafrawi.

Patriarchal Image of Women

Patriarchy is considered to be the prime obstacle to women's advancement and development. In *God Dies by the Nile*, Saadawi portrays the low status of women in Egyptian societies and the lack of prospects for autonomy afforded to them as a result of patriarchal, religious and traditional forces. Women are bartered off for marriage by the patriarchs in their families. Thereafter, they are subject to patriarchal domination from their husbands. Hassan argues: "a

Muslim woman learns almost as an article of faith that her husband is her *majazi khuda* ('god in earthly form')" (1999:267). In this section, I analyse the patriarchal image of women through the representation of Fatheya. I also explore how women's bodies are subjected to external social controls through practices such as FGM and defloration.

In the novel, Fatheya is portrayed as a defiant woman in her marriage as she is described as follows:

His wife, Fatheya, was not like his previous wives. None of them would ever have dared to look him straight in the face, or to say anything inappropriate to him, or compare him to any other man in Kafr El Teen, let alone to a cock which had crowed a few moments earlier, and which she had the impudence to insinuate was better than he. (Saadawi 2015 [1985]:47-48)

The above extract reveals Fatheya's resilience in the face of patriarchy as she attempts to assert herself. She is characterised as courageous and assertive as she challenges her husband. The word "impudence" further emphasises her courage as she shows disrespect and effrontery. This description of Fatheya is in opposition to the patriarchal image of women who are expected to be "righteously obedient". Fatheya also exhibits rebelliousness through her protection of the illegitimate child, as is discussed in the following section.

Despite Fatheya's haughtiness towards her husband, Sheikh Hamzawi, he does not let it affect him as he recalls that he had succeeded in forcing her to marry him against her will and obliging her to live with him in the face of his virility. After three marriages, Sheikh Hamzawi requests to remarry so that he can bear a son before he dies. Fatheya is young enough to be his grandchild; however, this does not affect his decision as he is keen on marrying her from the time he first lays eyes on her, because he says "the look of her revives my spirit" (49). The fact that she is the daughter of a poor man also prompts this marriage. In a similar manner to Nefissa's defiance, Fatheya hides above the oven while Haj Ismail explains that this is God's plan to take her out from a peasant lifestyle and transform it into a better one through her marriage to a devout man. When this fails, he advises her father to continuously beat her so that she can be convinced.

"Since women's sexuality is so vitally related to men's honor and self-image in Muslim culture, it becomes vitally important in Muslim societies to subject women's bodies to

external social controls”, claims Hassan (1999:270). Fatheya’s entire body has to be concealed, except for her face and hands. In addition, she is to be confined to her house, “never to be seen elsewhere except twice in her life” (Saadawi 2015 [1985]):52). The first is when she leaves her father’s house to go to her husband’s and the second when her body leaves for the burial grounds. This is an indication of the physical and metaphorical veil that is placed on women as they are restrained and entombed by oppressive veils that confine them to the house.

Fatheya is carried into her new house like a “sack of cotton”. This image has both negative and positive connotations. It negatively reveals the objectification of women who are viewed as property by their fathers and then by their husbands. The word “sack” also negatively implies that she has no agency in her fate. However, from a feminist perspective, a sack is a bag made of strong material for holding grain or objects in bulk. Therefore, this image positively characterises Fatheya as a woman who is strong, adept and able to withstand a lot of burdens as a woman, as discussed in the next section.

One of the responsibilities women are ascribed is chastity. After Fatheya’s virginity is taken from her, it is celebrated when the white cloth is stained. This celebration highlights the importance of virginity in Egyptian society as a woman’s honour is dependent on it. At this moment, Fatheya ruminates about her FGM experience at the age of six. FGM is another form of external social controls used to suppress women’s sexuality. From a young age, Fatheya always felt like there was something ungodly and unclean about her, therefore when she is told they were going to remove the “bad, unclean part off”, she feels relieved. Fatheya’s belief that there is something wrong with her is an indication of the cultural beliefs ingrained in girls and women that if they do not undergo circumcision, they are dirty or sinful. Egyptian society dictates the impurity of females’ bodies and indoctrinates their minds into accepting FGM as a mandatory traditional practice. At the age of six, Fatheya is subject to the harmful and painful process of FGM in the hope that she will be accepted in society. However, after the FGM, she still remained “unclean” because during her menstruation people looked at her with disdain and would avoid her. This reveals how false the traditional practice of FGM is. In Egypt, FGM is a weapon of patriarchy as this practice is believed to reduce females’ sexual desires and to secure their chastity before marriage and their fidelity during the marriage.

Even after Fatheya's marriage, Sheikh Hamzawi treats her like a leper during her menstruation, and "If his hand inadvertently touched her shoulder, or her arm, he would exhort Allah to protect him from the evil Satan" (57). This reveals how women's bodies are seen as contaminating. Saadawi emphasises that it is not only female genital organs that cause them to be viewed as impure, but the menstrual cycle is also another predetermining factor used to judge women as impure. Fatheya is also prevented from reading the Qur'an or listening to it being read or recited during her menstruation.

Hassan notes: "Most *ahadith* dealing with the subject of married women describe a virtuous woman as one who pleases and obeys her husband at all times. Pleasing the husband can, in fact, become more important than pleasing God" (1999:267). Muslim women are indoctrinated to believe that they cannot obey Allah without pleasing their husbands. Therefore, they are relegated to suppressed subjects who have to cater for the needs and desires of the patriarchs in their lives. Furthermore, they are subject to discriminatory practices which are used to suppress their sexuality.

Infanticide and Battering to Death

Illegitimate children are derogatorily labelled as sinful and are subject to discriminatory treatment. *God Dies by the Nile* critiques such ingrained social practices through its representation of the infanticide of the baby boy and the battering to death of Fatheya in her attempt to protect him.

When Sheikh Hamzawi and Fatheya see the baby boy, they say he is "An angel from heaven", "a gift, a blessing from Allah" (Saadawi 2015 [1985]:61). However, within a short period of time, Sheikh Hamzawi labels him as an "accursed creature, fruit of fornication and sin" (158). This reveals Sheikh Hamzawi's detestable and abominable attitude towards the baby. This innocent baby is also viewed as ill-omened and is blamed for all the calamities that occur in Kafr El Teen, for example, the worms eating the crops in the fields. Furthermore, Sheikh Hamzawi is relieved of his position in the Mosque and loses respect from those in the town because he opened his house to a child born of sin. Hence, he elects to adhere to the Mayor's suggestion to send the baby to a home for illegitimate children; however, Fatheya rejects this and chooses to protect the infant. When Sheikh Hamzawi questions Fatheya's actions, his "rosary would begin to tremble even more violently between

his fingers, as though he in fact knew the reason, but would not admit it” (159). The rosary is a symbol of religion and spirituality. Therefore, the rosary trembling between his fingers denotes his fear and anxiety because of his disregard towards religious conduct. Even though Sheikh Hamzawi is a representative of Allah, he declares: “Allah is not going to make the heavens pour manna on us” (162). This remark further underlines that he fears the Mayor more than Allah as he is cognisant that it is the Mayor who “holds their daily bread in his hands and if he wants, he can deprive them of it” (163). The Qur’an does not advocate condemnation as Allah is the only judge. However, illegitimate children are condemned as sinful and accursed. Fatheya’s defiance is further reinforced through her decision to continue to protect this illegitimate child. She declares: “Only that which is sinful should be condemned” (61). This assertion is a symbolic resistance against the double standards of the patriarchal system. She even challenges Sheikh Hamzawi by saying, “Shame on you [...]. You are a man of God. He’s a small, innocent child” (161). In this rebuke, we see Sheikh Hamzawi, a “religious” figure, being juxtaposed with the infant. As a “religious” man, Sheikh Hamzawi is expected to be devout, holy and merciful; however, he is callous and vindictive towards the innocent baby.

When a fire erupts in the village, the baby is blamed, and the villagers are determined to do something because they believe they are a “God fearing people” (176). Fatheya attempts to protect the child while the villagers try to tear the child away from her. This scene is described as follows:

The night descended on the houses of Kafr El Teen like a heavy silent shadow, breathlessly still as though all life had suddenly ceased. The men high up on the bank moved hither and thither like dark spirits or ghosts which emerged from the deep waters of the Nile. During the struggle for the child, Fatheya’s clothes were torn away, and her body shone white, and naked, like that of a terrible mermaid in the moonlit night. Her face was as white as her body, and her eyes were filled with a strange, almost insane determination. She was soft, and rounded, and female and she was a wild animal, ferociously fighting those who surrounded her in the night. She hit out at the men with her legs, and her feet, with her shoulders and her hips all the while holding the child tightly in her arms.

Hands moved in on her from every side. They were big, rough hands with coarse fingers. The long black nails were like the black hoofs of buffalo and cows. They sank into her breast tearing flesh out of flesh. Male eyes gleamed with an unsatisfied lust, feeding on her breast with a hunger run wild like a group of starved men gathered around a lamb roasting on a fire. Each one trying to devour as much as he can lest his neighbour be quicker than him. Their hands moved like

the quick paws of tigers or panthers in a fight, their eyes lit by an ancient vengeance, by some furious desire. In a few moments Fatheya's body had become a mass of torn flesh and the ground was stained red with her blood.

But after a while the river bank had become the same as it always was at night, no more than part of the heavy, silent darkness that weighed down on everything. (177-178)

In the above extract which begins with the setting of the scene, the time of day is significant in relation to the context of violence and oppression of women in the novel. Night, being the antithesis of day, is symbolic of death and the ending of life which is further reinforced in the words "life had suddenly ceased". The night is also associated with "darkness" which is a symbol discussed throughout this chapter. In this extract, we see that the oppressors and perpetrators are described as "dark spirits or ghosts". Saadawi employs this image to emphasise their supernatural, malevolent and inhumane behaviour as they tear the clothes off Fatheya and brutally attack her. In this extract, the "dark spirits" are juxtaposed to Fatheya, whose body is described as white. Furthermore, both Fatheya and the perpetrators are equated to beasts, with different effects. Saadawi compares the oppressors to creatures to emphasise their animalistic and brutish actions as they tear out Fatheya's flesh and devour her. The words used also reveal their predatory conduct as they have an "unsatisfied lust" and "ancient vengeance". "Ancient" also indicates their patriarchal and atavistic mentality as they rely on myths and customary beliefs. Hence, they blame the baby for all their misfortunes and believe that the baby's death will restore Kafr El Teen.

Fatheya is metaphorically compared to a wild animal as she protects the child until her last breath. This image depicts her as spirited and ferocious. Women are usually stereotypically viewed as passive and submissive; however, in the above extract, it says, she "hit out at the men with her legs, and her feet, with her shoulders and her hips". These actions divulge her strength, defiance and rebelliousness. However, she is overpowered by the number of persecutors who reduce her and the baby to "a mass of torn flesh".

The representation of the illegitimate baby in the novel who is subject to discrimination reveals the archaic socially ingrained practices in Egyptian society. This baby is also a symbol of the sexual freedom men from the ruling class (such as the Mayor) had. However, the Mayor is not subject to any indictment or conviction. Even though the baby and Fatheya are innocent, they are the ones subject to a ferocious and inhumane murder by perpetrators who

believe in ancient myths about illegitimate children. Nonetheless, Fatheya's protection of the illegitimate child is viewed as rebelliousness as she challenges the patriarchal system and her male perpetrators by ferociously fighting back like a wild animal.

Insanity vs “Unveiling of the Mind”

Stereotypically, women are viewed as “uncontrollable” in patriarchal religious and spiritual traditions. In *The Female Malady*, Elaine Showalter counter-hegemonically views madness as a “female malady” and she equates femininity with insanity. Previously women were discriminated against and stereotypically categorised as mentally ill when they did not conform to culturally accepted norms. However, Showalter's notion of the “female malady” is a protest against feminine subjection and oppression. Drawing from Showalter's argument, I explore the representations of insanity in *God Dies by the Nile* and discuss how through Zakeya's insanity, there is an “unveiling of the mind” which results in a protest against the oppressive patriarchal regime. Showalter further claims: “There have always been those who argued that women's high rate of mental disorder is a product of their social situation, both their confining roles as daughters, wives and mothers and their mistreatment by a male dominated and possibly misogynistic psychiatric profession” (1985:3). In the novel, Saadawi brings to light the effects domestic violence, sexual abuse and oppressive patriarchal acts have on Zakeya through the delineation of her psychological illness. However, Saadawi also reveals how women have the power to acquire liberation from oppressive regimes. As a counter-hegemonic character, Zakeya is represented as an agent of change who through a violent act of rebellion breaks the cycle of tyrannical oppression.

In the text, Zakeya suffers from depression and psychological disorders which stem from cultural patrimonial oppression as well as the oppressive acts of the Mayor. Hence, Zakeya's insanity is a symbol of patriarchal institutions that oppress women and inevitably drive them insane. Those around Zakeya allege that the devil has consumed her body and refuses to leave. Haj Ismail comments “Zakeya is possessed by a devil [...] and it will not leave unless she listens to my advice” (Saadawi 2015 [1985])123). Zakeya and Zeinab are trusting of Haj Ismail even though he has a hidden agenda to persuade her to go to the Mayor's house, as discussed above. Zeinab's trust in Haj Ismail is representative of the uneducated Egyptians who are not knowledgeable about mental health problems and who rely on religious and traditional figures. Haj Ismail gives Zeinab an amulet which costs five piastres and Zakeya

mutters: “Even God wants us to pay Him something. Yet he knows we own nothing” (125). This first reveals how religious representatives exploit individuals by manipulating the situation for their own financial gain. However, the second part of the above scenario reveals Zakeya’s ability to critique the actions of those around her. For the first time in the novel, she exhibits audacity and prudence. Through her mental illness, she experiences a transformation. This is described as follows: Zakeya’s “eyes stared into the night with a terrible anger like the anger of some wild beast being hunted down. In her mind something was happening slowly, something like thinking, like a tiny point of light appearing in a dark sky” (203). Once again, we see the equivalence of human to beast. However, Saadawi uses language to highlight Zakeya’s defiance and empowerment. Instead of the “wild beast being hunted down”, a light finally appears and saves the “beast”.

Through Zakeya’s madness, there is an “unveiling of the mind” where she can finally see things clearly. This is a metaphorical veil which refers to the religious and patriarchal constraints that she is finally removing from her life. She asserts, “I was blind, but now my eyes have been opened” (205). She was metaphorically blinded by the darkness, but she is finally enlightened. Her act of killing the Mayor is symbolic of oppressed women’s ability to transcend docility and submission. Zakeya finds satisfaction in the realisation that the Mayor is her oppressor, and her ability to kill him is a source of pleasure that she finally has control of her life and circumstances, instead of the Mayor controlling her.

Contemporary approaches “have shown women, within our dualistic systems of language and representation, are typically situated on the side of irrationality, silence, nature and body, while men are situated on the side of reason, discourse, culture, and mind” (Showalter 1985:4). In *God Dies by the Nile*, Saadawi reflects the contemporary approach of women through the representations of the oppressed women who are equated with beasts. Both the women and beasts are exploited by the patriarchal ruling class. Furthermore, the women in the novel are characterised as submissive and “silent”. However, Zakeya overpowers the patriarchal ruling class. Through experiencing and overcoming her mental illness, she gains courage and valour to protest against feminine subjection, oppression and exploitation.

Darkness vs Light

The apposition between dark and light in *God Dies by the Nile* is an example of Saadawi's use of juxtaposition as a literary technique. This juxtaposition is employed as a repetitive device in the novel whereby darkness is used to emphasise the incessant oppression and exploitation of peasant women. On the other hand, light is symbolised as a source of goodness and hope for those oppressed in the text.

The word "darkness" in the novel as well as in my title connotes evil, oppression and fear. However, I have also personified the darkness in my title to represent the Mayor and his co-conspirators who are oppressive. The imprisonment of girls in the Mayor's house is illustrated through images of "bars", which metaphorically signals their helplessness and imprisonment by patriarchs. Furthermore, the bars are described as black which is connotative of the darkness that lurks inside. This foregrounds the evil and oppression which lurks behind the bars. In addition, the iron gate of the Mayor's house is representative of "the rigidity of the social, political, and economic wall that separates the ruling class and the ruled. But the iron gate also symbolizes the cold and inhuman character of the patriarchal disposition" (Mazrui & Abala 1997:21). This dark description of the Mayor's house also alludes to the death, destruction and captivity he initiates.

Before Zakeya acknowledges that the Mayor is responsible for her situation, she is in a metaphorical darkness as she is obscured and concealed from the facts. She also lacks knowledge and courage. However, during her enlightenment and "unveiling of the mind", there is an illumination and intelligence she acquires which accompanies her transcendence into autonomy. Light is also a symbol for reason, hence Zakeya's enlightenment challenges the stereotype that women lack rationality.

As the characters experience more and more mayhem unfolding, "There was another long silence as heavy and as oppressive as the surrounding darkness lying over the village" (Saadawi 2015 [1985]):188). This darkness is representative of physical, psychological, sexual and gendered oppression. However, in the novel, light conquers darkness. Zakeya's enlightenment provides her and the rest of the peasants in Kafr El Teen with an end to oppression which was instigated by the Mayor. His death generates sentiments of hope and optimism.

Conclusion

God Dies by the Nile is situated in the community of Kafr El Teen, which is controlled by the Mayor and his two associates, the Imam, Sheikh Hamzawi and the Chief of the Village Guard, Sheikh Zahran. These three patriarchal authorities rely on secular and religious law to maintain the status quo. The mayor imitates God and acts as a representative of God to give orders and mandates obedience from the community, and the Imam is symbolic of the Islamic religion that has failed women because of patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an. By juxtaposing religion and sin, Saadawi leaves the reader with the same conclusion as the characters that "The only devils in this world are humans" (86). Furthermore, the prayers of the dispossessed characters remain unanswered because "Allah alone is not enough" (107).

The female Egyptian characters in the novel are a microcosm for oppressed women across the Arab world who are subject to physical, psychological and sexual challenges. The theme of gender exploitation is manifested in the novel as Saadawi explores the systematic abuse of women, particularly from those of the lowest class. Zakeya represents powerless, female subjects from the toiling class who are oppressed and exploited by the political and patriarchal system. Alternatively, Fatheya is archetypal of the patriarchal image of women who are viewed as property by the patriarchs in their lives. In addition, both Zakeya's and Fatheya's bodies and sexualities are restrained through social and traditional practices.

Saadawi highlights the repressive trends, structures and practices in patriarchal areas in Egypt. The women's lives in *God Dies by the Nile* are characterised by physical and psychological turmoil. However, the ending of the novel is a reflection of women's ability to acquire liberation. Zakeya exhibits courage in the face of tyranny. After killing the Mayor, she discovers "a different world to the world she had known" (208).

In the epilogue, Saadawi notes that women's roles are dictated by religious fundamentalists who define women as: "obedient wives and devoted, self-effacing mothers" (31). These roles are reflected throughout the novel as the reader is cognisant of the oppression of women by the "darkness". The men in the novel regard women as contaminating and bestial, therefore they are subjected to atavistic social practices, while the darkness in men's hearts is revealed by their sexual predation and truculent behaviour. As mentioned in the epilogue, "there has not been a separation between God and rulers", therefore for the darkness to be eradicated,

god has to die. This metaphorically signposts the termination of religious patriarchal systems so that women can be liberated from oppression.

CHAPTER THREE

BREAKING GODS: DEFIANCE AGAINST THE RELIGIOUS PATRIARCHAL ORDER IN CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE'S *PURPLE HIBISCUS*

Oppression and resistance dialectically envelop everyday life, for both the privileged and the oppressed. The disenfranchised live under regimes in which the repression ranges from brutal to institutionally subtle. The privileged socially reproduce their rule through ideology that justifies and policy that institutionalizes subjugation. However, rejecting depression, detachment, and disaffection that emerge from surviving ruling-class regimes, many previously dispirited, instead choose defiance. They engage in subjectivity struggles by crafting critical consciousness and refusing to be dupes to ideology that represents them as inferior.

(Musolf 2017:xi)

Introduction

The above epigraph by Gil Richard Musolf in *Oppression and Resistance: Structure, Agency and Transformation* resonates with the subject matter in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2013 [2003]). Musolf argues that oppression engulfs human experience as the oppressed confront everyday life besieged by hegemonic ideologies that institutionalise unequal power relations. In this chapter, using the above-mentioned novel, I argue that the systems of patriarchy and religion are used as ideologies to justify the oppression and subjugation of women and children. The concept of patriarchy was originally used to describe a "male-dominated family". However, contemporarily the concept is used to define male domination and the unequal power relations between men and women. In the novel, patriarchy is represented as the prime obstacle in the lives of the patriarch, Eugene Achike,

and his family. Although *Purple Hibiscus* was written almost two decades ago, patriarchy is a still a perturbing social issue in Nigeria, “where toxic masculinity pervades politics, the economy, and society” (*Mail & Guardian* 2019). In 2019, in North-central Nigeria, a woman was mercilessly beaten and bludgeoned with an axe by her intoxicated husband (2019). After becoming unemployed, his honour and masculinity were threatened and he became suspicious about his wife’s fidelity, therefore her late arrival from work was a trigger for him to exert his power and headship (2019). This physical power and adherence to masculine behaviour is reflected through the characterisation of Eugene who asserts his patriarchal dominance, and whenever his family fail in their responsibilities, they are subjected to physical forms of violence. Eugene’s spiritual misconceptions and entrenched traditional beliefs of male headship within the home allow him patriarchal authority and supremacy.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, religion is used as an instrument to facilitate patriarchy, which leads to oppression against women and children; however, religion is also a means of liberation, as it encourages oppressed individuals to strive for freedom from tyranny. The primary objective of this chapter is to explore the relationship between religion and patriarchal oppression in *Purple Hibiscus* and to discuss the effects of religion-endorsed patriarchy depicted in the text. My analysis centres on the representations of the lives of Beatrice Achike, Kambili Achike and Chukwuka Jaja Achike, who encounter relentless oppression from an oppressive, patriarchal figure in their home in Enugu. The second objective of my study is to evaluate the strategies the above-mentioned characters adopt to achieve defiance against the religious patriarchal order in the novel.

In order to illuminate the religious patriarchal order in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*, I explore the characterisation of Eugene, who exhibits the “dark triad” traits which are associated with socially, ethically and morally aversive beliefs and behaviours (Paulhus & Williams 2002). As a result of these traits, Eugene is exploitative, aggressive and sadistic, and this ensues in negative psychosocial outcomes for his family. Eugene is profiled as a patriarchal and religious fanatic who exerts physical power to maintain his authority within the familial sphere. In contrast to the above, I juxtapose Eugene’s “dark triad” traits with the protagonist, Kambili, who exemplifies the “light triad” traits (Kaufman, Yaden, Hyde & Tsukayama 2019). The “light triad” traits are the conceptual opposite characteristics of the former as these traits are correlated with personal growth, altruism, self-efficacy, self-transcendence and spirituality. Through Kambili’s growth in character, critical consciousness and

embodiment of the “light triad” traits, she is able to achieve defiance against the religious patriarchal order and she acquires autonomy and liberation from oppression.

This chapter begins with a discussion of the background of the author of *Purple Hibiscus* as well as a synopsis of this text. There are five main sections that constitute the textual analysis of the primary text. The first one, entitled “Home is an Escape from Enugu”, focuses on an examination of the oppression of the nuclear family unit by the patriarch, Eugene. I also explore the system of patriarchy and the rules Eugene adopts to keep his family dominated and subordinated. The connection between the profile of masculinity and the “dark triad” of psychological traits in relation to the characterisation of Eugene also forms part of my analysis in the first section. Section two centres on a discussion of Kambili’s and Jaja’s self-discovery and self-realisation during their journey to Nsukka. It also centres on an analysis of how the siblings become aware of their potential for social, cultural and psychological freedom. Thirdly, I engage in a discussion of religion as an instrument for oppression by exploring Eugene’s archaic form of Catholicism which oppresses and demeans those around him. I also explore how Catholic theology has been used to indoctrinate individuals, as well as the religious oppression and exploitation exposed in the novel. The final analytical section explores the role Catholic feminist theology and syncretic religion play in liberating the main characters. I also discuss the characterisation of Kambili in relation to the “light triad” traits as well as the strategies the central characters adopt to defy the oppressive religious patriarchal regime and attain liberation and empowerment.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene exhibits masculine characteristics, namely assertiveness, dominance and malevolence. This chapter focuses on a discussion of how the “dark triad” traits are associated with individual differences in gender roles, particularly masculinity. The “dark triad” is a concept used in psychology to refer to the three inter-related high-order personality traits of psychopathy, narcissism and Machiavellianism. The description of these traits as dark emphasises their vindictive qualities, as individuals who score high on these traits are more predisposed to commit offences and initiate social distress. Delroy Paulhus and Kevin Williams note that common features of the personalities that compose the “dark triad” are: “a socially malevolent character with behaviour tendencies towards self-promotion, emotional coldness, duplicity, and aggressiveness” (2002:557). In my analysis, I examine how the “dark triad” of personality traits are correlated with Eugene’s actions and the profile of masculinity.

Masculinity is established by social expectations within a culture, and the Roman Catholic Church has been criticised for its role in institutionalising male dominance. George Weigel, American author, political analyst and social activist, claims: “The Catholic Church is, arguably, the most controversial institution on the planet; it is certainly the world’s most controversial religious institution” (2001:2). Weigel adds that “the Church is sometimes an object of hatred and scorn, especially for those who think that the Church’s teachings dehumanize or marginalize them” (2). In *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene practises a repellent form of Catholicism which is not only bigoted but encompasses an endless chain of prohibitions. In Kriti Kulshreshta’s article entitled “A Pagan-Christian Discourse: A Comparative Study of Aeschylean Play *Agamemnon* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*”, she emphasises that *Purple Hibiscus* portrays a man’s obsession with religion such that he negates his responsibility to family and controls them with an iron hand (2013:2). Kulshreshta further states that Eugene practises an archaic mode of Christianity, where God is seen as merciless and obeying God entails leading a puritanical way of life, therefore he brutally imposes fanatical religious views on his family (7). Drawing from Kulshreshta’s argument, I explore the connection between the “dark triad” of personality traits and Eugene’s punitive behaviour. Furthermore, I analyse how Eugene’s form of archaic Catholicism, which is oppressive and dehumanising, is in opposition to the true meaning of Catholicism, which endorses freedom and humanity for all individuals.

Catholicism is founded on love and at the core is the aphorism, “God is love”. Despite the centrality of love in Christian canons, suffering and tribulations are also intrinsic to human experience. In the novel, Adichie exposes the physical, emotional and spiritual pain the main characters endure. However, the characters, particularly Beatrice, are perceptive of God’s love. The Bible gives guidance on the meaning of suffering and how one can best endure it. Ephesians 6:13 reads, “Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand” (New International Version). In the novel, Beatrice’s t-shirt, labelled “God is Love”, serves not only as memento of God’s love but as a metaphorical armour. Furthermore, the principal characters’ defiance can be justified according to God’s word as scriptures in the Bible vindicate bravery against one’s enemy as well as a resistance to being conquered.

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie exposes the condition of oppressed women in Nigeria through the representations of central characters who occupy inferior positions in society. This is

symbolic of Nigerian society in which men dominate in the social and private spheres. Religion, culture and social structures play a major role in the creation and decree of the patriarchal ideology. Franca Attoh argues that religion is an instrument of female oppression and marginalisation in Nigeria as religion supports the patriarchal ideology (2017:159). Attoh further notes: “Religion had influenced the relationship between men and women for centuries and entrenched male domination into the social structure of society thus helping to reinforce patriarchy” (159). In this chapter, I explore how gender roles are ascribed to individuals through socialisation and how religion is used as an instrument to reinforce these patriarchal and gender-specific roles.

Sede Alonge, a Nigerian writer and lawyer, comments in an article about violence in her home country: “I grew up in a country where female subjugation is too often justified as reflecting ‘traditions’ and abuse can become normalised” (The Guardian 2018). The above comment from Alonge highlights the relationship between patriarchy and gender-based violence which is entrenched in the intrinsic ideologies of coercion, subversion and subjugation of women and girls. In Nigeria, 23% of women have been subjected to physical or sexual violence by their husbands (2018). In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie highlights how the patriarch exercises his power through violence and abuse.

In addition to the violence and oppression revealed in the text, *Purple Hibiscus* also illustrates the transformation of the main characters from a position of subjugation to one of liberation. One of the theorists for this chapter is Tina Beattie, a leading Catholic and Marian theologian, whose work focuses primarily on the relationship between Catholic tradition and contemporary culture, particularly in areas centred on gender and sexuality, which are central themes in my analysis. In Beattie’s book, *New Catholic Feminism*, she seeks to develop a “feminist theology of grace informed by a sense of the sacramentality of creation and by an awareness of the significance of prayer, revelation and faith for Christian ways of knowing, through a critical feminist refiguration of contemporary Catholic theology” (2006:4). In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie develops new meanings and possibilities for the central characters through liberating feminist theological representations which Jaja and Kambili are introduced to in Nsukka. Through a pilgrimage experience in Nsukka, Kambili discovers her God-given aptitude to revolt against oppressive patriarchal and religious ideologies.

Mary is a central figure in feminist theology as she is the mother of God and is revelatory of the “feminine” or “maternal” attributes of God. Ivone Gebara and Maria Bingemer as feminist liberation theologians offer a counter-hegemonic vision of Mary as one who challenges male-centrism, dualism, idealism and one-dimensionalism. In Gebara and Bingemer’s book, *Mary: Mother of God, Mother of the Poor*, they highlight the importance of feminist liberation symbols as “women are awakening to the reality of their own being and to the experience of an independent life” (1989:12). This is reflected in *Purple Hibiscus* as Kambili has a sudden awakening of a spiritual nature during a pilgrimage to see the apparition of the Virgin Mary. Kambili’s observation of the apparition is reflective of the view that the “mystery of Mary brings a new word about the world” (174). Not only does Kambili acquire a desire to seek independence but she also seeks to create an identity independently of predetermined patriarchal and religious definitions that previously limited her sphere of influence. In addition to the above, Kambili discovers a new form of Catholicism which is in contrast to the one practised by Eugene as it is one full of love, joy and hope. As a powerful symbol of feminism and liberation, Mary is perceived as “not only one who ‘lives in God,’ but also one who is in solidarity with [oppressed individuals’] sorrows and joys” (174). Kambili finds comfort in this new form of Catholicism, which is why I argue in this chapter that religion is also a source of liberation.

In this textual analysis, I investigate the characters’ transformation and the factors that promote the characters’ defiance against cultural patriarchal oppression. *Purple Hibiscus* can be identified as a *Bildungsroman* as it describes the positive development or education of leading characters which lead to their physical and emotional maturity. This transformation is connected to the true meaning of Catholicism which is “about affirmation: the affirmation of humanity, and of every individual human life, by a God passionately in love with his creation” (Weigel 2001:1). Adichie creates a *Bildungsroman* where the characters learn to navigate through life within a multiplicity of educational, political, social and religious paradigms. Jaja and Kambili journey from adolescence to psychological and emotional maturity. The young siblings achieve independence and individualism through defiance as they both disrupt stereotypes established by patriarchal authorities and they focus on acquiring justice. In the text, syncretic religion is also used as a means of liberation as it encourages Kambili to challenge oppressive patriarchal and religious doctrines.

In my discussion, I explore the notion of syncretism in relation to the principal characters' mental and spiritual attributes at the end of the novel. Rosalind Shaw and Charles Stewart (1994:1) state that "syncretism has been ascribed a neutral, and often positive, significance". It involves "religious synthesis [... and] attending to the workings of power and agency" (6). In the primary text, Jaja and Kambili amalgamate traditional African Igbo culture with Catholicism, and this syncretic religion is directly linked to their growth and development. Kambili's profile at the end of the novel may be correlated with the "light triad" which is a concept used to describe one who is loving and has an altruistic orientation to others. Scott Kaufman, David Yaden, Elizabeth Hyde and Eli Tsukayama explain that the "light triad" consists of three facets: Kantianism, Humanism and Humanity (2019:1). These traits define individuals who are compassionate, value the dignity of others and who believe in the goodness of humans.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's Background and Feminist Writings

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is an award-winning Nigerian writer, social thinker, and a leading and celebrated African icon. She was born on the 15th of September 1977 in Enugu, Nigeria. Adichie studied medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria but after a year and a half, she left for the United States of America where she studied communications and political science in Philadelphia. Adichie has a transcultural identity as she divides her time between the USA and Nigeria.

Adichie is described by Ernest Emenyonu as follows:

she established herself as Africa's pre-eminent story teller who uses her tales to give meaning to the totality of the world as she perceives it, producing in effect, narratives that seek to shape a new world of understanding as they give expression to realities people know and human commitments and awareness they need to know. (2017:1)

Adichie's works are contemporary and relevant for individuals of any age or location. Furthermore, they cut across racial and linguistic boundaries. Therefore, her works have been translated into more than 30 languages and have appeared in various publications. She is the author of *Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), *The Thing Around Your Neck* (2009a), *Americanah* (2013), and *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen*

Suggestions (2017). Her novels focus on a critical engagement of issues vis-à-vis politics, race, identity, gender construction, love and sexuality. In addition, Adichie is well-known for her 2009 TED Talk, *The Danger of a Single Story* and her 2012 talk, *We Should All Be Feminists*.

Adichie is a prominent and successful African feminist whose claim that “we should all be feminists” elaborates that feminism is about justice and equality for all, in particular, women who are excluded in society. Adichie is principally concerned about the gender inequality prevalent in Nigerian society which has resulted in women becoming invisible or silenced by gender expectations. In *Purple Hibiscus*, she uses her gift of writing to tell the story of the destructive nature of patriarchy and religious fanaticism for both women and children. In her 2009 TED Talk, Adichie asserts: “Stories matter. Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanise. Stories can be used to break the dignity of the people, but stories can also be used to repair that broken dignity” (Adichie 2009b).

Synopsis

Purple Hibiscus is set in post-colonial Nigeria and centres on the growth and development of the protagonist, Kambili Achike. Kambili’s family consists of her father, the patriarch, Eugene, her mother, Beatrice, and older brother, Jaja, who all reside in a wealthy home in Enugu. *Purple Hibiscus* is narrated through the eyes of Kambili who describes her personal experiences of growing up in a home controlled by a patriarchal and religious fanatic.

The novel begins on Palm Sunday during a cataclysm as Jaja refuses to receive his communion in Church. From the beginning of the text, it can be noted that religion is a central theme. Furthermore, Eugene’s reaction to Jaja’s defiance foregrounds his religious extremism and authoritarianism. Eugene’s oppressive behaviour is further revealed when he beats Beatrice for declining to visit Father Benedict. During this violent episode, Beatrice has a miscarriage. The violence does not end here as Jaja and Kambili are subjected to violent attacks throughout the novel whenever they fail to live up to Eugene’s standards and rules. In addition, towards the end of the novel, Beatrice has a second miscarriage owing to Eugene’s violence.

Eugene's religious extremism is reinforced through his relationship with his father, Papa Nnukwu. When the family visit Abba, Eugene objects to visiting Papa Nnukwu because he is a traditional believer. Eugene also has a bad relationship with his sister, Ifeoma; however, he allows the children to stay with her for some time.

Jaja and Kambili journey to Nsukka to spend time with Aunty Ifeoma and her family. During this time away from Enugu, they are relieved from physical and psychological pain. However, they also encounter a unique way of life characterised by laughter and freedom. This journey provides them with the courage to rebel against the patriarchal regime.

There is a power shift in the text as Beatrice plots and kills Eugene by poisoning him. Jaja also gains courage to assert himself and chooses to take responsibility for Eugene's murder, which ensues in his imprisonment. The novel ends in a hopeful tone as Jaja is about to be released from prison after serving three years.

Home is an Escape from Enugu

In *Purple Hibiscus*, the subjugated characters, namely Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili, are subjected to atrocities of violence and abuse in their home by a patriarchal individual who exhibits behaviour related to the "dark triad" of psychological traits: psychopathy, narcissism and Machiavellianism. For this reason, the characters desire an escape from their home in Enugu which is represented as an oppressive environment in the text. Home is not only a place of nurture, comfort and protection but it is also a place of catastrophe and danger (George 1996:6). This discussion centres on the religious, patriarchal oppression that occurs in the Achike home in Enugu which is representative of post-colonial Nigeria. In addition, I explore the connection between the profile of masculinity and the "dark triad" of psychological traits in relation to the characterisation of Eugene.

In patriarchal societies, the balance of power is distributed in favour of males. The ideology of patriarchy is one of the reasons behind the unequal power relations between men and women. Abiodun Adeniji defines patriarchy as "a system of societal valuation of gender activities which valorises the roles played by males while downgrading those played by females" (2015:22). In addition, patriarchy advocates the chauvinistic ideology that women are innately inferior to men. Patriarchy encourages the subordination of women to men in all

cultural domains, to be precise, familial, religious, political, economic, social, legal and artistic. This results in the marginalisation of women as well as children who are subject to discriminatory rules and practices of men.

Eugene is described as a “business tycoon and Catholic fanatic who rules his home like a military dictator” (Adeniji 2015:25). He is aggressive, despotic and has an oppressive and patriarchal attitude. His portrayal may be attributed to the “dark triad” traits which are “associated with a variety of sex-differentiated and gender-relevant aspects of psychology including limited empathy, impulsivity, and seeking dominance and prestige” (Jonason & Davis 2018:102). In the text, Eugene puts his needs and desires before his family’s and believes that he knows what is best for them. Kambili has no choice about her future education, as when the time comes Eugene will decide for her. Eugene also embodies pride and narcissism as he expects compliments from his family each time a new product is released in his factory. Even though Eugene’s factory’s juice tastes like “urine”, the Achike family has to lie and say it tastes good, “just like white wine” (Adichie 2013 [2003]:14). Furthermore, Eugene’s instructions are like decrees as they cannot be disobeyed. Eugene has an established routine and directive regulating every aspect in the Achike home. Jaja and Kambili always have to speak with a purpose, and there is even a right way to say thank you in their home. Beatrice and the children have to follow Eugene’s directions unquestioningly, and whenever they fail in their responsibilities they are punished severely and brutally.

The novel begins in the middle of a crisis at Kambili’s home in Enugu where she explains that “things started to fall apart at home” (Adichie 2013 [2003]:3). This is an intertextual reference to Chinua Achebe’s novel, *Things Fall Apart* (1959). In Achebe’s novel, Chief Okonkwo says, “No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his woman and his child [...] he was not really a man” (35). This is significant because it emphasises the patriarchal and traditional nature that exists in the Nigerian post-colonial society that is represented in the text. *Purple Hibiscus* focuses on the disintegration of the family when Jaja rebels against his father and his faith by refusing to take Communion, which is described by Eugene as a “mortal sin” (Adichie 2013 [2003]:6). According to Eugene, Jaja’s defiance is against Catholicism. Chapter 5 of the decree on the sacrifice of Mass states: “The holy council wishes indeed that at each Mass the faithful who are present should communicate, not only in spiritual desire but also by sacramental partaking of the Eucharist, that thereby they may derive from this most holy sacrifice a more abundant fruit” (*Canons and Decrees of the*

Council of Trent in Brown 2010:360). However, there has been a shift in the Catholic Church's tradition of Eucharistic worship. Gavin Brown explains, "most Catholics attending Mass come forward to receive Communion as a matter of course" (359). In addition, Eucharistic discourse has led to Catholics believing that communion is an "extraordinary personal union with Christ" and does not only involve the physical partaking of the sacrament (407). However, Eugene practises strict adherence to archaic Catholic doctrines to an extreme which results in the physical abuse of his family. The Sacred Congregation of the Council explains: "Though freedom from venial sin was deemed preferable, only a state of mortal sin actually prevented one from approaching the heavenly banquet" (*Sacra Tridentina Synodus* in Brown 2010:362). Eugene asserts: "nothing but a mortal sin would keep a person away from communion two Sundays in a row" (Adichie 2013 [2003]:6). Eugene maintains that refusing to partake in Communion condemns Jaja to a state of mortal sin and consigns his immortal soul to perdition. He says, "You cannot stop receiving the body of our Lord. It is death" (6). A refusal to partake in Communion is not deemed a mortal sin under Catholicism; however, Eugene manipulates the doctrines and regards Jaja's refusal as a mortal sin. Eugene deploys religious doctrines to serve his own needs for power and to maintain control over the Achike family. Jaja's defiance is also a direct threat to Eugene as a god-like figure and spiritual leader of their home.

In Enugu, the Achike home is luxurious as their yard is "wide enough to hold a hundred people dancing atilogu, spacious enough for each dancer to do the usual somersaults and land on the next dancer's shoulders" (9). However, Kambili still feels suffocated because their home is repressive, as she feels like "the off-white walls [...] were narrowing, bearing down on me" (7). Her description of the walls being an "off-white" accentuates that their home lacks purity, peace and love as white is stereotypically associated with the above connotations. In addition, she says, "all that cream blended and made the room seem wider, as if it never ended, as if you could not even run if you wanted to, because there was nowhere to run to" (41). Eugene controls every aspect of their lives and Kambili feels trapped in her home. Jaja and Kambili's only guidance comes from their influential father who they believe is like a God to the people he supports. They are suffocated in their life as they are powerless to do anything freely. Eugene gives them a mundane schedule that only allows them to eat, study, pray and sleep as he explains that he likes order. Kambili is teased at school for being a snob because she is reclusive as she lives in fear. She explains that "once, Kevin told Papa I took a few minutes longer, and Papa slapped my left and right cheeks at the same time, so his

huge palms left parallel marks on my face and ringing in my ears for days” (51). Kambili also stutters when she speaks. She sees how openly everyone else can speak and yet she is always silenced because of her repressive life. Kambili remains silent or utters words that she does not intend to because she is also unable to express herself. She explains, “I meant to say I am sorry Papa broke your figurines, but the words that came out were, ‘I am sorry your figurines broke, Mama’” (10). She also is unable to voice her oppression and connect her father to the violence. Whenever Jaja and Kambili are questioned they look at their father for answers, emphasising that their voice has been taken away from them. In the Achike family, communication occurs through a language of the eyes.

Eugene speaks out for the truth and freedom; however, the violence and truth in their home are repressed. There is a violent atmosphere that pervades the home, and the fear of violence haunts Beatrice and the children. There is no freedom in the home as the characters are subject to domestic abuse and their feelings are suppressed, as “Eugene quarrels with the truths that he does not like” (Adichie 2013 [2003]:95). Beatrice’s miscarriages and Jaja’s deformed little finger are unspoken secrets (Hewett 2005:81). Beatrice is accused of having selfish desires by refusing to visit Father Benedict. Consequently, she is beaten by Eugene and loses her baby. This traumatic event leads to Kambili having difficulties studying as she sees visions of a “bright red, the red of flesh blood. The blood was watery, flowing from Mama, flowing from my eyes” (Adichie 2013 [2003]:35). There is a direct connection between Catholicism and Eugene’s abuse. At the beginning of the novel, Eugene beats Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili with a belt while “muttering that the devil would not win” (102). Secondly, he pours boiling water on Jaja and Kambili’s feet in order to teach them not to walk into sin. Finally, when Kambili disobeys Eugene by wanting to keep Papa-Nnkuwu’s picture, Eugene violently attacks her. Kambili says:

He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes. He talked nonstop, out of control, in a mix of Igbo and English, like soft meat and thorny bones. Godlessness. Heathen worship. Hellfire. The kicking increased in tempo and [...] I curled around myself tighter, around the pieces of painting [...] Kicking. Kicking. Kicking [...] More stings. More slaps. A salty wetness warmed by mouth. I closed my eyes and slipped into quiet. (210-211)

In the above passage, the reader is presented with a sinister depiction of Eugene as a perpetrator of violence in his home. The reader also becomes aware that Eugene’s violence is

strategic and intentional as he justifies his actions by pronouncing religious terminology such as “Godlessness. Heathen worship. Hellfire”. These words reinforce his religious extremism as he believes he is performing a religious act of restoration. However, these words also function ironically as they underline Eugene’s “Godlessness”. Eugene considers himself to be a spiritual and righteous representative; however, his actions in this passage reveal his “Godlessness” as violence is not endorsed in the Bible. Colossians 3:20 of the New International Version reads: “Children, obey your parents in everything for this pleases the Lord”, but this is also followed by a corresponding verse which says: “Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged” (Colossians 3:21). Various other interpretations use the adjectives of “aggravate”, “provoke”, “exasperate”, “anger”, “vex”, “harass” or “make resentful”. Children have a duty of obedience to their parents; however, fathers are instructed to show compassion and gentleness towards their children. Contrary to this, Eugene is depicted as strategically ferocious as he continues to kick, slap and beat Kambili. The reader experiences a sense of vexation towards Eugene and a sense of solicitousness towards Kambili because of the severity of this episode. In this extract, Kambili compares Eugene’s metal buckle to a giant mosquito which reinforces the perception that Eugene is drawing out the essential blood in her and inflicting pain on her. The imagery of the mosquito bites also emphasises the implications of Eugene’s abuse as both result in sore blemishes on the skin.

The above extract also reveals Eugene’s punitive version of religion which can be connected to the “dark triad” of psychological traits. Hannah Carton and Vincent Egan note that there is a “significant association between psychopathy and the use of dominance/intimidation, and between Machiavellianism and narcissism and the use of restrictive engulfment” (2017:12). In the above extract, Eugene unveils his callousness as he lacks cognitive empathy and the ability to discern Kambili’s emotional state. His objective of punishing Kambili is achieved through a relentless and immoral pursuit of power. He strategically kicks and slaps her while ignoring the harm he is inflicting. Furthermore, he continuously pronounces religious terms as a manipulative device to justify his punitive behaviour. When Eugene performs brutal acts, he does so with personal pain as it hurts him to hurt his children and wife. However, he believes that he is eliminating the sin out of their lives. He is “like a fly blindly following a corpse into the grave” (Adichie 2013 [2003]:70). During this violent encounter, Kambili is left wounded and traumatised by her father’s ruthlessness.

Machiavellianism is a concept used to refer to “interpersonal strategies that advocate self-interest, deception and manipulation” (Jakobwitz & Egan 2006:332). In *Purple Hibiscus*, Eugene exhibits the above psychological trait as he uses qualities such as deceit and emotional detachment to manipulate social and personal interactions. Kambili and Jaja are forbidden from visiting their grandfather as Eugene regards him as a pagan and idol worshipper. Eugene dissociates himself from those who remain loyal to their Igbo culture as he believes he is turning away from primitivism and paganism. Eugene’s disassociation from his father is symbolic of Machiavellianism as “persons high in MACH are likely to exploit others and less likely to be concerned about other people beyond their own self-interest” (332). Eugene orders his children not to eat or drink in their grandfather’s house as they will “desecrate their Christian tongue” (Adichie 2013 [2003]:69). The children are also instructed not to stay longer than fifteen minutes. Eugene says, “I do not like to send you to the home of a heathen, but God will protect you” (62). This is ironic as Jaja and Kambili need protection from Eugene but acquire comfort and reprieve from their grandfather.

Patriarchy is reinforced in the text when Papa-Nnukwu recites a folk tale about why the tortoise has a cracked shell. In the story, there is a severe famine in the land and many animals are killed. Even though the crisis affects all animals, it is only the male animals that meet to decide a solution to their problems. The solution involves killing mothers and eating them as “mothers did not mind being sacrificed” (158). The animals only consider the “sweetness of their mothers’ breast milk” instead of the important role mothers play in their lives (158). The folk story alludes to the stereotypical attitudes in Nigerian society. Papa-Nnukwu also sheds light on the sexist stereotypes in Nigeria when he says to Ifeoma, “You are a woman. You do not count” (83). Papa-Nnukwu is aware that Ifeoma plays a significant role in his life; nonetheless, he humours Ifeoma and the children with his conventional comments that have been passed on from generation to generation. Chauvinistic views of women are further presented when Jaja says something naïve about Igbo religious customs; Papa-Nnukwu tells him, “do not speak like a woman” (87). This comment highlights that women are stereotypically seen as insignificant individuals who are ignorant while men are stereotyped as speaking intelligently. The unequal relations between men and women are also reinforced when Ifeoma explains that marriage prevents women from living their own life as their “husbands own them and their degrees” (75). Women are also prohibited from acquiring specific knowledge, for example the *ima mmuo*, as it is regarded as the first step towards the initiation into manhood. In addition, strong, independent women are disrespected

and looked down upon. This is echoed through Ifeoma who independently manages her household; however, Papa-Nnukwu still believes that she needs a good man to take care of her and her children.

The Achike home in Enugu is the embodiment of patriarchy and oppressiveness because of the leadership of Eugene who exhibits the “dark triad” personality traits. His negative disposition results in him manipulating his family for his personal advantage. In addition, he lacks empathy and exhibits control masquerading as love which has negative repercussions as discussed above. The patriarchal order reigns supreme in the Achike home, and Beatrice and the children are left in a state of submissiveness and subjection. There are many boundaries suffocating them and restricting and limiting their development in their home in Enugu. In addition to the patriarchal representation of Eugene, Adichie exposes the sexist stereotypes and chauvinistic views of women through Papa-Nnukwu whose folk tales and conventional beliefs allude to the patriarchal views in post-colonial Nigeria.

Home is an Escape to Nsukka

Since *Purple Hibiscus* is categorised as a *Bildungsroman*, I explore the formation of Kambili’s and Jaja’s self-discovery and self-realisation during their journey to Nsukka. This journey is a “movement from physical and psychological violence to laughter and freedom” (Ouma 2009:168). My analysis also focuses on the roles Aunty Ifeoma, Amaka, Obiora, Papa-Nnukwu and Father Amadi play in relation to Jaja and Kambili’s development. In addition, I explore how the young siblings become aware of their potential for social, cultural and psychological freedom. In Enugu, Jaja and Kambili retreat into silence, passivity and distress. However, in Nsukka, which provides a less repressive environment, Kambili learns to speak again, to engage with others and to even question her father’s distorted values. She develops positive emotions, connections, and romantic relationships, as well as life satisfaction and admiration in Enugu. Furthermore, she acquires psychological traits of grit, self-efficacy and autonomy. Both Jaja and Kambili also discover mature coping styles and self-transcendence. The tongue-tied children become aware of the beauty of freedom and speech. Kambili exclaims that in Ifeoma’s house, “the air was free for you to breathe as you wished” (Adichie 2013 [2003]:120).

Ifeoma, Eugene's sister and a widowed university professor, is represented counter-hegemonically as she stands in opposition to the patriarchal view of women. In the novel, Kambili connects Ifeoma to "a proud ancient forebear, walking miles to fetch water in homemade clay pots, nursing babies until they walked and talked, fighting wars with machetes sharpened on sun-warmed stone" (80). From the above portrait, the reader can fathom that Kambili feels deep admiration for Ifeoma and has a high opinion of her. Kambili's description of Ifeoma as a "proud ancient forebear" signposts women's role in lineage. Furthermore, it is a counter-hegemonic literary technique as males are usually associated as forebears. In the novel, Ifeoma is the matriarch of her household as she is a professional woman who is self-reliant, as her husband is deceased, therefore she stands in opposition to the patriarchal view that women must be assigned to the domestic sphere and remain uneducated. In addition, the portrayal of Ifeoma as "forebear" connects her to her ancestral lineage but also reveals her reverence for Igbo culture. Furthermore, from the above quotation, the reader can note that Kambili idealises traditional women who had the responsibility of fetching water, nursing babies and even fighting wars. Through this account, Kambili reflects admiration for the benevolent but brave women who exhibit both feminine and masculine characteristics. The forebear Kambili illustrates is one who has nurturing attributes but also one who has the ability to fight wars with machetes, as in the case of Ifeoma who balances her professional and familial roles. Moreover, Ifeoma has the strength to resist patriarchy and challenge political systems.

Despite the emotional and psychological trauma Ifeoma experiences, she chooses to be resilient and overcome the accusations and maltreatment she receives. Ifeoma is characterised as a highly educated, freethinking, resilient and independent woman who disallows anything or anyone to deter her from achieving her established goals. In the novel, she is described as a "tall, exuberant, fearless, loud, larger than life" persona (95). Ifeoma is a dynamic and robust individual who uses her education and rational reasoning to deal with difficult situations as she "knew where she was going and what she was going to do" (Adichie 2013 [2003]:71). She is a quintessential mother whose relatively laudable parenting style is in contrast to Kambili's oppressing father and submissive mother. She teaches her children good values and faith, but they are also encouraged to be academically innovative by raising questions about authority. Ifeoma exhibits fearlessness and she is empowered to assert her rights and defend her children against patriarchal intrusions. She explains that she is not paid to be loyal, hence she speaks out against oppression and tyranny. Ifeoma embodies and inspires

participation, dignity and respect. She is a role model to Jaja and Kambili and she offers them a different kind of lifestyle where there is happiness, love and unity. Ifeoma's laughter floats into the air and she fills a room with her boldness and confidence.

Jaja and Kambili are attracted to this type of life in Nsukka because it is an escape from their repressive life in Enugu. Ifeoma respectfully encourages her children to learn from their behaviour and mistakes so that each punishment can be a learning opportunity. Ifeoma continues setting higher and higher jumps for her children so that they can ascend above any challenge. This is in contrast to the atrocious, inhumane treatment Kambili and Jaja face at home in Enugu when getting beaten with sticks or standing in boiling water. These punishments result in the Achike children feeling terrified to attempt any challenges as they do not have any belief or confidence in themselves. Ifeoma represents the University which aims "to restore the dignity of a man" (Adichie 2013 [2003]:132). She believes that each individual in society has to fully embrace his or her talents, skills and knowledge. Thus, she strives to empower her students and children to speak out against oppression and dictatorship. She also allows them to discover their full abilities, strengths and potential. Ifeoma symbolically restores the dignity of Kambili and Jaja. She takes away their schedules and allows them to do things liberally and independently. She also provides them with an opportunity to get involved in household activities, for example Kambili learns how to cook and Jaja kills a chicken for the first time. Ifeoma is aware that education can allow women many opportunities. Women do not have to resort to marriage and become the commodity of their husbands. Even though she is aware that society regards women as insignificant, she is still able to liberate herself. She needs necessities for her house. Nevertheless, she will not comply with Eugene's demands and prohibitions by "lick[ing] his buttocks to get things" (95).

Kambili is brainwashed by Eugene to reject any African tradition. In the beginning of the novel when Kambili visits Papa-Nnukwu, she looks at her grandfather and searches for signs of difference and of godlessness; however, she does not find any. Nonetheless, she proceeds to assure herself that he must be different because he is not Catholic. However, during her stay in Nsukka, she discovers Papa-Nnukwu's sense of pantheism when she observes him praying. This pivotal event proves that her grandfather is a better believer than her father, as Papa-Nnukwu "understands the intricate arithmetic of religion" (Okuyade 2009:252). Papa-Nnukwu's death plays a fundamental role in allowing Kambili and Jaja to approach

adulthood as well as acquire a greater understanding of themselves and a wider appreciation for familial and cultural contexts. Kambili is captivated by Papa-Nnukwu's religious practices which are based on strong morals and values. Principles are not defined by any religion, gender or class. Papa-Nnukwu shows love, warmth and forgiveness by praying for Eugene. Papa-Nnukwu and Eugene do not share any relationship; however, Papa-Nnukwu still prays and asks Chineke to bless his son. He says, "Let the sun not set on his prosperity. Lift the curse they have put on him" (Adichie 2013 [2003]:168). On the other hand, Eugene totally disregards his father and does not even lend a helping hand to him because he considers Papa-Nnukwu to be a "heathen". Eugene is in actual fact a hypocrite as he displays a Catholicism that lacks humanity. He ignores the commandments of "love your neighbour as yourself" and "honour your father and mother". In addition, he does not practise vital Catholic values of forgiveness, love and grace. He believes that those who are not of the Catholic faith will be damned to the everlasting torment of hellfire where the flames are eternal, raging and fierce. Consequently, Papa-Nnukwu's traditional religious beliefs are more generous and forgiving, therefore they can be admired compared to Eugene's oppressive religious fanaticism.

Father Amadi is characterised in a positive light as he embraces elements of the Igbo culture, therefore he stands in contrast to Father Benedict who rejects traditionalism. Father Amadi represents the new generation priest who is youthful, indigenous and knowledgeable in contemporary life. This is revealed in his attempts to make Catholicism pertinent for contemporary Nigeria through his incorporation of Igbo language and songs. Through Father Amadi, Kambili "discovers a new brand of Catholicism which is not dictatorial but lithe" (Okuyade 2009:252). Father Amadi shows Kambili that faith is a living thing where God can be honoured through enjoying life and valuing others. Father Amadi explains that he sees Christ in the faces of the local African boys. He also says, "I do not believe we have to go to Aokpe or anywhere else to find [the Virgin Mary]. She is here, within us, leading us to her son" (Adichie 2013 [2003]:138).

Amaka is a role model for Kambili as she is astute and knowledgeable about contemporary politics and culture. She "had quizzical eyes, eyes that asked many questions and did not accept many answers" (78). The reference to Amaka's eyes is denotative of her counter-hegemonic disposition as she is incisive, perceptive and challenges viewpoints. In addition, she listens to Western and traditional African musicians who are culturally conscious.

Amaka's incomplete painting of Papa-Nnukwu represents for Kambili something she desires but cannot have. The painting symbolises the growth of Kambili's world to include Papa-Nnukwu, Ifeoma, her cousins and Father Amadi (Hewett 2005:83). The painting is a link between her suffocating home in Enugu and her liberating world in Nsukka. The painting is also a reminder of the limitations Eugene places on them in Enugu and a memento of the freedom Kambili acquires in Nsukka. Kambili refuses to allow her father to destroy something sacred to her so she curls herself around the pieces of the painting. Her retreat becomes a source of strength. When Kambili defies Eugene by trying to save the portrait of her grandfather, it is "a potent statement of her assertion of her identity and an indication that she has [... transcended] her limitations; at this point she is no longer a victim but an actor" (Okuyade 2009:253).

Ifeoma and her family are Catholic; however, they practise a different form of Catholicism from Eugene's. Ifeoma prays to God and the Virgin Mary and her prayers allow Kambili to see a successful godly way of living that is not frightening and allows for variation. Ifeoma introduces Kambili to a religion that stretches a healing hand to those in need, hence she discovers a Catholicism that embraces all individuals regardless of whether one is a heathen or not. Ifeoma explains that Papa-Nnukwu is a traditionalist and that sometimes "what is different is just as good as what is familiar" (Adichie 2013 [2003]:166). Ifeoma's prayers are full of joy, love and hope while Eugene's prayers are unfathomable as they are focused on eternal damnation as his speech is continuously characterised by sin and hellfire. Weigel argues that the primary mission of Catholic churches is to "propose to the world: 'You are far, far greater than you imagine'" (2001:40). Eugene does not teach his family about God's grace which is unmerited favour and love. In Nsukka, Jaja and Kambili develop a profound understanding of God. Ifeoma family's "prayers were always peppered with songs, Igbo praise songs that usually called for hand clapping" (140). Adichie affirms another version of Catholicism that values traditional language and culture (Wallace 2012:474).

Nsukka is an escape from the patriarchal oppression in the Achike home in Enugu. The lifestyle in Nsukka provides the central characters with a space to exercise independence and to develop their own sense of identity. Kambili explains that "Nsukka could free something deep inside your belly that would rise up to your throat and come out as a freedom song" (299). Jaja and Kambili also attain hope and joy through the discovery of an alternate Catholicism which encompasses traditional aspects. This syncretic religion plays a significant

role in their empowerment, defiance and liberation.

Religion used as an Instrument for Oppression

Structures in society, for example religion, education, philosophy and law, facilitate the system of patriarchy. Religion plays a central role in *Purple Hibiscus* and the text is structured around Catholicism in Nigeria. Religion in Nigeria plays a significant role as many citizens in the country are of the Catholic faith. According to studies from the Pew Research Centre, Catholicism is rapidly growing in Africa as missionaries have played a large role in converting individuals, as “Nigeria, the most populous country in all of Africa, has the largest number of [...] Christians in the region” (Pew Research Center Forum on Religion and Public Life 2010:20). Furthermore, in 2019, Nigeria had the sixth-largest Christian population in the world (87 million) (Diamant 2019). According to the 2010 Pew Report which focuses on a comparative analysis of Christianity and Traditional African religions, 46% of the Nigerian population were Christian while only 1% belonged to Traditional African religions. The Report also showed that Nigeria has the second lowest percentage of individuals in Africa who exhibit traditional African religious beliefs and practices. The Pew Research Center Forum on Religion and Public Life also reveals that a large number of individuals who were surveyed expressed their “concern over religious extremism” in Nigeria (37).

Catholicism may be regarded as an instrument that is used to preserve patriarchal power relations by sanctifying traditional notions of family (Chen 2005:341). In this section, I argue that religion is used as an instrument for oppressing individuals. My discussion centres on how Catholic theology has been used to indoctrinate individuals as well as the religious oppression and exploitation exposed in the novel. A key theorist for this chapter, George Weigel, argues: “The morality of Christian freedom is a morality of attraction, not simply of obligation” (2001:80). Drawing from Weigel’s argument in *The Truth of Catholicism*, I analyse how Eugene’s form of archaic Catholicism is in opposition to the contemporary view of Catholicism which endorses freedom and humanity for all individuals. In my analysis, I explore the changes in policy in Catholicism, which are consistent with the notions of freedom, by referring to provisions from the Second Vatican council and interviews with Pope Francis.

The Second Vatican council was a historic deputation that enforced major doctrinal changes in Catholicism, particularly the Declaration of Religious Liberty which expresses that people are free to worship as they please. Pedro de Achútegui describes Vatican II as an ecumenical

council initiated “in the hope that the Council will bring home [...] a deeper sense of the Church as instituted by Christ” (1962:519-520). Vatican II aimed at fostering Catholic faith through a renewal of Christian morals and interpreting the ecclesiastical discipline to adapt to contemporary society (523). Pope Francis, an ecumenical leader and Jesuit pope, promotes unity as he proclaims, “We must walk united with our differences: there is no other way to become one” (Pope Francis & Spadaro 2013:269).

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, Eugene practises a repellent and patriarchal form of Catholicism which is not only bigoted but encompasses an endless chain of prohibitions. This archaic form of Catholicism is what the Second Vatican council and Pope Francis have engaged in reforming. Eugene’s fervent worship is epitomised during his altar worship as “He would hold his eyes shut so hard that his face tightened into a grimace, and then he would stick his tongue out as far as it could go” (Adichie 2013 [2003]:4). The description of Eugene’s face as a grimace emphasises his distorted facial expression which usually suggests pain and disgust. This caricature is symbolic of contemporary antipathy towards archaic Catholicism which contains customs that initiate more harm rather than impart peace. In the text, Adichie divulges the excessive traditions and customs of Eugene’s religious fanaticism to Catholicism as he believes that “a woman’s hair must be covered in the house of God, and a woman must not wear a man’s clothes, especially in the house of God” (240). These prohibitions reflect the Catholic Church as an “irascible, arbitrary nanny, constantly dunning her charges with impossible proscriptions” (Weigel 2001:72). Furthermore, it “is easily labeled authoritarian and dismissed as an encroachment on [...] freedom” (73). Adichie highlights that the above doctrines have been enforced by patriarchal societies, and adhering to archaic, stereotypical beliefs is not the only way Catholicism can be practised, as individuals in St Peter’s church do not follow these doctrines. The women in St Peter’s dress freely as they do not tie their scarves to completely cover their hair. This is illustrative of the policy from the Vatican II council which promotes religious freedom and sanctions that women do not have to conceal their hair in the church. St Peter’s church is representative of the contemporary viewpoint which is understood as follows:

the moral life is fundamentally a question of *goodness*, of becoming a good person. The point of being a good person equips us to enjoy eternal life. It takes a certain kind of person to be able to enjoy God’s life, with God, forever. We have to grow into that kind of people who can do that. That growth takes place through

our freedom. The prescriptions and proscriptions of the moral law are boundaries for exercising our freedom. (Weigel 2001:74)

Archaic adherence to Catholicism is characterised by stringent rules which infringe on individuals' freedom. Augustin Ainamon and Caroline Bodjrenou (2014:26) highlight that religion may be regarded as a cause for underdevelopment in Africa. Religion is considered a way of life as it controls one's entire existence. Religion is "embedded in the psyche of Africans right from the womb of their mother" (26). Catholic theology has been used to indoctrinate individuals. Through colonialism, evangelists have influenced Africans to reject traditional African customs and adopt Catholicism. Many individuals struggle with this conversion, for example Eugene. He believes that anything that he does not believe in is an act of sin. Weigel notes, "Sin, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches, is an 'abuse of freedom'. It is a slavish habit that weakens our capacity to love others and to love God" (2001:83).

Eugene's restricted view of love is epitomised in his charitable acts. He is only charitable to Catholics in Abba as he forcefully sends out a traditionalist saying, "What is a worshipper of idols doing in my house? Leave my house" (Adichie 2013 [2003]:70). This scene is symbolic of the "Good Samaritan" parable in the Bible. The parable narrates how a priest and Levite do not show compassion to a wounded Jewish man even though the fulfilment of the Christian law is to love your neighbour as yourself. Pope Francis explains, "The church's ministers must be merciful, take responsibility for the people and accompany them like the good Samaritan, who washes, cleans and raises up his neighbour" (Pope Francis & Spadaro 2013:266). Pope Francis's reference to the Samaritans, who were pagan worshippers, highlights that Christianity commands one to show love and compassion to one's neighbour irrespective of their beliefs or cultures. Therefore, Eugene's rejection of relationships with "idol worshippers" is not justifiable in modern Catholicism as one is expected to give a helping hand to others. Furthermore, Eugene believes that idol worshippers do not know anything about Christmas. This is significant as Christmas is a time to thank God and for family gatherings. During the Christmas lunch, Eugene toasts to the spirit of Christmas and glory of God; however, he does not acknowledge his family. Ironically, Ifeoma, whom Eugene regards as an idol worshipper, toasts to the spirit of family. Eugene also refuses to help Papa-Nnukwu who is struggling as he is not willing to convert to Catholicism. The

above actions reveal Eugene's lack of compassion and his inability to see the true measure of humanity.

Eugene also believes that ““because God has given you so much, he expects much from you. He expects perfection”” (47). Hence, when Beatrice feels unwell and objects to visiting Father Benedict, who is seen as a disciple of God, Eugene believes that she is thwarting God's will. Eugene also disfigures Jaja's finger for failing two questions in his catechism test and not being named the best in his first Holy Communion class. He also beats Kambili for breaking the Eucharist fast which mandates that the faithful should not eat solid food an hour before Mass. Eugene believes that desecrating the fast is performing errands for the devil. From the above episodes, it can be noted that the Catholicism Eugene practises is one that enslaves its followers. Eugene's belief that God expects “perfection” is false as everyone fails from time to time. True Catholicism and its corresponding law only “bind[s] us in order to liberate us for goodness and for love” (Weigel 2001:82). Changes in policy in Catholicism have resulted in the transformation of customs, rites and ceremonies; however, many individuals, for example Eugene, try to preserve the old liturgy.

Exploited Christianity affects relationships between parents and their children, and this may lead to filial and familial alienation. The book containing the texts used in the Catholic Mass is referred to as a “heavy missal”, hence it becomes a weapon. Cynthia Wallace states that this literalises the power of religious texts within the domestic sphere as well as connects religion with Eugene's violence (2012:470). It is ironic that a religious man uses a religious text which contains the readings for all three cycles of the church year. A Missal (or Bible) is a sacred book that contains God's word. John 1:1 says “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God”. Consequently, using the Missal to commit violence is disrespecting the word of God as well as God himself. Eugene also uses the same table that the Missal stays on to strike Beatrice, which results in another miscarriage. This reinforces the idea that Eugene does not respect God and he does not understand the importance of sacredness. Furthermore, it is ironic that Eugene prays to “Our Lady, Shield of the Nigerian People” but abuses his wife at home (11).

Purple Hibiscus also reveals the oppressive nature of religious leaders. Kambili notes that Father Benedict “usually referred to the pope, Papa, and Jesus – in that order” (4). This shows that man is given more importance than God. This is against Catholicism which dictates that

“there is one high priest, Jesus Christ [...] and the ordained priest is an icon of Christ the high priest. The ordained priest is an ordinary man” (Weigel 2001:66). Furthermore, “Vatican II changed the way the Church understood itself, as its identity went from being a hierarchical authority to a church conceived of as the people of God” (Wilde 2007:1). However, the church congregation in *Purple Hibiscus* exhibit this hierarchical authority as they wave at Eugene and reach out to touch his tunic “as if touching him would heal them of an illness” (Adichie 2013[2003]:91). This alludes to Jesus performing miracles in the New Testament. Eugene is seen as a god who can perform miracles by healing the sick. In addition, when Kambili asks for forgiveness, she begs for pardon from the hands of Father Benedict first and then from the hands of God. These practices are against the Bible as no individual should be seen as more powerful than God or Jesus. Father Benedict has been in the church for seven years; however, he is still referred to as the new priest because he is white. Kambili states that he “had not been tanned at all” (4). This metaphorically explains that Father Benedict has not embraced any of the Nigerian traditions as he regards them as native. Father Benedict instructs that speaking in Igbo is not acceptable, hand clapping is to be kept at a minimum, and the credo and kyrie are only to be recited in Latin. Among the noteworthy changes in Catholicism from Vatican II were those that changed the way the Catholic church worshipped. The *Inter Oecumenici* was a document from the Vatican II instructing that “altars should be located to allow the priest to say Mass facing the people; that the high altar should be the focus of the church, while side altars should be few and discretely placed; and it allowed the siting of the tabernacle away from the altar, a provision that was only permitted previously for cathedrals” (Proctor 2005:295). The change of the altar promoted active participation and projected the importance of individuals instead of religious leaders only. In addition, this new communal nature of worship promoted dialogue in one’s own language as Mass was changed to be articulated in the vernacular instead of Latin. Melissa Wilde notes that post Vatican II, “Not only did parishioners find themselves responding to the priest in words they spoke out every day, but they spoke more often than they had at any Catholic service they had ever attended” (2007:1).

Adichie exposes the double standard of religion and religious leaders. Father Benedict represents the oppression of colonial power. During Mass, “the priest did not talk about the gospel during the sermon. Instead he talks about ‘zinc and cement’ so that he can raise money to build a new house” (90). This reveals that these priests focus more on self-indulgence and gaining wealth than sharing the word of God. Once again, we see how Catholicism is

incorrectly adhered to, as “The ordained priesthood exists not as a caste for its own sake, but for service of the common priesthood of all the people of God” (Weigel 2001:66) Eugene is aware of Father Benedict’s negative endeavours and expresses the opinion that “our priorities were wrong; we cared too much about huge church buildings and mighty statues” (Adichie 2013 [2003]:104). In an interview in 2013, Pope Francis asserts: “The ministers of the Gospel must be people who can warm the hearts of the people, who walk through the dark night with them, who know how to dialogue and to descend themselves into their people’s night, into the darkness, but without getting lost” (266). The priests in the novel, with the exception of Father Amadi, are reflected as the antithesis of the ministers Pope Francis describes, as the former are hedonistic.

Religion is also used as a form of indoctrination to persuade individuals to deride their own customs and traditions. African religions are looked down upon and those who practise them are deemed pariahs. Adichie condemns the practice of African converts losing their African identity and adopting a European identity. A name personifies character, destiny and heritage; therefore, individuals should hold onto their indigenous names. Amaka challenges the practice that English names must be given in order for a confirmation to be valid. She says that the names Chimaka, Chima and Chiebuka all glorify God just as much as the names Paul, Peter and Simon. Eugene dismisses his Igbo heritage and background as primitive and refuses to allow his children to speak the Igbo language in their home. He moulds himself to a Western ideal and praises only Western traits. Ifeoma says that Eugene “was too much of a colonial product” (13). Eugene asserts that Jaja and Kambili have to speak in English so that they sound civilised. Eugene views the Igbo language as traditional and obsolete, therefore he believes it needs to be replaced by a modern, developed language like English. Eugene likes it when the villagers speak in English as “it showed they had a good sense” (Adichie 2013 [2003]:26).

Greetings are integral to African cultural practice and are perpetuated through generations (Ainamon & Bodjrenou 2014:31). The cultural tradition proclaims that when greeting other individuals, handshaking is not allowed, especially when acknowledging elders or chiefs, for example the Igwe. Africans must bend down and allow the elder to bless them on their head, which symbolises a sign of respect and deference. Eugene regards this African custom as pagan and chides his wife for bowing to an Igwe individual as he regards it as an ungodly tradition. However, Eugene admonishes Kambili for not bowing to a Catholic priest as he

says the bishop “was a man of God; the Igwe was merely a traditional healer” (Adichie 2013 [2003]:94). This shows the double standards of Catholicism and also the struggles the Achike family have as they are caught between tradition and Catholicism. Moreover, this reinforces the idea that religious leaders may be oppressive as they regard themselves as superior to other members in society, hence they believe that they must be respected and worshipped as if they are God. Eugene disregards any custom of traditional Africans as pagan; however, he follows Catholic customs unquestioningly.

Representations and symbolism attached to religion in *Purple Hibiscus* highlight that religion is associated with pain, horror and abuse. The colour red plays a significant role in the novel as it metaphorically describes the negative effects of religion. Kambili says that red is the colour of Pentecost, the visiting priest says Mass in a red robe that seemed too short for him, and Father John’s face is red like palm oil. Eugene also stands by the red hibiscuses giving directions to his children. Kambili asserts that all their memories started “when all the hibiscuses in our front yard were a startling red” (16). The red refers to the physical and emotional abuse in the home. Beatrice uses the red hibiscus flowers to decorate the church altar. Even though she constantly cuts them off, “they seemed to bloom so fast” (9). This emphasises the constant abuse that the family goes through despite trying to escape. Kambili observes that the altar is decorated in the same shade of red as Mama’s wrapper and she refers to the baby as a “red blur” (53). This emphasises that religion is connected to the violence and the loss of the baby. When Kambili sees a woman lying on the ground she wishes she could clean the “red mud from her wrapper” (44). She also connects a beggar to the woman as she says, “there was a helplessness to his joy, the same kind of helplessness as in that woman’s despair” (45). In addition, when Kambili sees a snail trying to escape out from the basket, she is determined to buy the entire basket so that she can set the one snail free. This emphasises her desire for freedom and to save those in the same position as her family.

The image of the snail within the Nigerian context is also pertinent for discussion in relation to feminism. As discussed in the Introduction of this thesis, Akachi Ezeigbo’s “snail-sense feminism” is a model that adopts the habits of snails to describe women’s strategies of survival in the deeply patriarchal cultural terrain of Nigeria (Nkealah 2017:121). The snail “does not *confront* objects but *negotiates* its way past any obstacle. The snail-sense feminism rejects transgressive female behaviour, but rather advocates survival through acceptance and

perseverance” (122). Beatrice’s survival strategy can be attributed to those found in the above model as she survives the patriarchal environment by adapting to it and tolerating Eugene’s actions. Throughout the novel, she is passive and does not challenge Eugene’s oppressive behaviour. She tolerates his violence and conceals the domestic violence that prevails within their household. She also remains in the marriage out of obligation. Nkealah critiques this model as she argues that this feminist mode “seems to operate on the assumption that obstacles within patriarchal institutions – family, religion and culture – will always exist and that women should learn to live with these obstacles” (122). As previously discussed, Nkealah offers an alternative model of “cameline agency” that is premised on “enforce[ing] change within the environment women operate in” (122). Nkealah argues: “Where the snail can easily be crushed because it is too small to be seen or too delicate to withstand the pressure from human feet, the camel uses its tail to swat flies and mosquitoes that interfere with its tranquillity” (122). At the end of the text, Beatrice embodies “cameline agency” as she acts decisively to change her family’s circumstances and take control of their lives, which is discussed later in this chapter in the section “Defiance is like Marijuana”.

The above discussion reveals how Catholicism may be viewed as a restrictive and a rule-bound paradigm that condemns all non-Catholics and sinners to eternal damnation. The Catholicism Eugene practises is represented in the text as an oppressive institution that is characterised by a long list of prohibitions. Furthermore, this form of Catholicism has been utilised as an instrument for the indoctrination and exploitation of vulnerable individuals in society. However, this repellent and patriarchal form of Catholicism contrasts with the viewpoints of contemporary Catholicism which endorses notions of freedom and moral certitudes.

Religion used as an Instrument for Liberation

Religion is used to oppress the main characters in the text. However, it is also a means of comfort and hope in times of trouble as religion can also be used to challenge patriarchal understandings. This section explores how biblical scriptures provide a source of assurance for the oppressed characters. In addition to the Bible, Mary is an important symbol in Catholicism as she is regarded as an “ally of the oppressed” (Gebara & Bingemer 1989:xi). In this analysis, I discuss the role Catholic feminism has in asserting the characters’ identities and enabling them to transgress oppressive patriarchal regimes. I also deliberate on the

significance of Kambili's observation of the apparition of the Virgin Mary in relation to the themes of oppression and feminism.

The Bible is an important symbol in Christianity, particularly for the oppressed, as various scriptures provide hope and inspiration, and are a reminder that God is a refuge for the oppressed. Kambili is reading James Chapter 5 when Eugene brutally abuses Beatrice and she miscarries her baby. This scripture focuses on oppression, which is a great sin in the eyes of God. Eugene's oppressive abuse is a sin and Kambili is encouraged by the scripture to be patient, for their trials and suffering will end. God will also bring punishment to Eugene for oppressing and persecuting his own family members. The Bible provides assurance to the characters that they will receive peace at the end. Despite the physical and emotional abuse Beatrice encounters, she continues to wear a t-shirt every day with the words "God is Love" (Adichie 2013 [2003]:7). This is a reminder that there are also positive aspects to religion and that it is not only a weapon of destruction, as discussed previously. The characters believe that "none of those who trust in [God] shall be left desolate" (38). Consequently, religion is also a source of liberation. Religion is used to oppress the main characters in the text. However, it is also a means of comfort and hope in times of trouble as religion can also be used to challenge patriarchal understandings.

In addition to the Bible, Mary is an important religious symbol, predominantly in feminist liberation theology. From a feminist anthropology perspective, Mary is an "expression of the awakening of the other half of humankind, the women's half, to living realities from which they have been alienated" (Gebara & Bingemer 1989:14) During Kambili's pilgrimage to see an apparition of the Virgin Mary, she discovers a religion that is marked by love and joy rather than fear and pain. This discovery is a rejection of patriarchal religious structures and an awareness of the stifling restrictions in her life. Kambili has a sudden realisation of a spiritual nature when she sees the Virgin Mary in a natural setting that is part of the Nigerian landscape, hence this is a fully Africanised Mary. This results in her seeing Mary in the African sun, in the Nigerian people, on her hand and in her own body. Gebara and Bingemer argue that Mary is perceived as "full of affection and power" (126). Kambili perceives Mary in the form of an embodied African girl who is a powerful agent of change. Consequently, Kambili views herself as an empowered subject who acts without surrendering her own sovereignty. This apparition provides her with the confidence to speak up against her oppressive religious father. Cheryl Stobie highlights that the Virgin Mary symbolises love,

hope and protection for the suffering and oppressed (2010:430). The apparition of the Virgin Mary at Aokpe is a discovery that Kambili as a woman does not have to be passive. Instead she has the power and agency to reform her life by taking control. She realises that religion can be used as an instrument to liberate her.

The apparition of Virgin Mary is the most transcendental spiritual image in the text and is narrated as follows:

We stood underneath a huge flame-of-the-forest tree. It was in bloom, its flowers fanning out on wide branches and the ground underneath covered with petals the color of fire. When the young girl was led out, the flame-of-the-forest swayed and flowers rained down. The girl was slight and solemn, dressed in white, and strong-looking men stood around her so she would not be trampled. She had hardly passed us when other trees nearby started to quiver with a frightening vigor, as if someone were shaking them. The ribbons that cordoned off the apparition area shook, too. Yet there was no wind. The sun turned white, the color and shape of the host. And then I saw her, the Blessed Virgin: an image in the pale sun, a red glow on the back of my hand, a smile on the face of the rosary-bedecked man whose arm rubbed against mine. She was everywhere. [. . .] “I felt the Blessed Virgin there. I felt her”, I blurted out. (Adichie 2013[2003]:274-275).

The above narration by Kambili provides a detailed description of her experiences of the Virgin Mary apparition in Aokpe. In this scene, Kambili describes a “huge flame-of-the-forest tree” which refers to a type of sacred tree that is usually distinguished for its fast growth. This reference to the tree is apposite as the journey to Aokpe and the apparition of Mary are instrumental in Kambili’s growth, both spiritually and psychologically. Kambili also notes that the tree was in bloom, which foregrounds her blooming during this experience as she discovers God’s unconditional love as well as her God-given poise. Figuratively, the word “bloom” signifies that this apparition is the peak or sovereign moment for Kambili’s transformation in character. In addition, the above description accentuates Kambili’s cognisance of her surroundings and signposts her connection to nature. During this encounter, Kambili becomes one with nature and sees the power of God reflected through nature. Previously, her understanding of religion was only connected to sin and eternal damnation. Furthermore, she was instructed to live in accordance to God’s will and to not engage in any mortal sin so that she can go to heaven. Hence, Eugene constantly reminds Kambili that God expects perfection from her. However, in this scene, Kambili experiences a type of heaven on earth through a spiritual encounter of God’s creation. This is representative of the atmospheric heaven which includes humans’ immediate surroundings or “troposphere”.

During this encounter, Kambili is awe-struck by an unearthly wind and a mystical image in the sun which are signs of God's presence in the world. This encounter is also symbolic of God's unconditional love as love is the very essence of who he is, and his love is not based on perfection or conditions.

Contrary to the Catholic belief that God grants salvation through the medium of the church and that there is no salvation outside the church, Kambili's spiritual encounter occurs in a natural setting, outside the church. The mystical image of the adolescent black girl during the apparition acts as a catalyst for Kambili's feminist and spiritual awakening. This image is portrayed as a reformist vision of a female form of the Christian deity. During this epiphany of the Virgin Mary, Kambili has a personal encounter of a spiritual nature as she proclaims: "I felt the Blessed Virgin there". The repetition of the word "Blessed" emphasises the sacredness, holiness and reverence of this experience. Moreover, Kambili notes that the "flowers rained down". This is a metaphoric image to denote her spiritual consecration as rain is symbolised as a blessing from God. During the apparition, Kambili ascertains a spirituality which has an all-encompassing love, kindness and hope. This is contrasted with her previous spiritual encounters that are characterised by decrees, bigotry and narcissism.

Adichie promotes an innovative form of Christianity that assimilates African cultural values and displays love, compassion and unity (Ainamon & Bodjrenou 2014:29). Adichie presents a subtle version of Igbo-Christian faith which is a source of healing and hope for the characters. Ifeoma and Father Amadi represent an alternative mode of Catholicism as they embody syncretism and inculturation. Ifeoma finds similarities between traditionalism and Catholicism. Ifeoma declares that Papa-Nnukwu's *itu-nzu* is equivalent to Catholics saying the rosary. Kambili also recognises that Papa-Nnukwu's shrine with the dried palm fronds looks "like the grotto behind St. Agnes, the one dedicated to Our Lady of Lourdes" (Adichie 2013 [2003]:67). Hence, she finds a connection between Catholicism and the Igbo culture. Kambili discovers that she can practise Catholicism by also singing traditional songs and clapping her hands, which brings joy and pleasure to her. As she embraces both cultures, she finds a happiness within herself. Jaja also connects himself to the traditional African culture when he defiantly tells Eugene, "I have Papa-Nnukwu's arms" (209). Jaja sees himself as a descendant of African tradition, hence he cannot ignore his identity.

At Daughters of the Immaculate Heart Secondary School, Kambili is exposed to biblical scriptures, for example Matthew Chapter 5:1-11. Adichie cites this scripture as it centres on encouragement, hope and baptism. Therefore, through this positive reference to the Bible, Adichie highlights that religion is also a means of freedom and encouragement. The Bible encourages those who are mourning to endure as their suffering will not last forever, as God himself will do the comforting. Jesus and Jaja suffered and had to sacrifice their lives; however, there is a sense of hope that as Jesus rose again so will Jaja as he is released from jail. Jaja will also be free and no longer held in captivity.

Religion, tradition and spirituality play an important role in the main characters' lives in *Purple Hibiscus*. Stewart and Shaw state: "Syncretism has presumably always been part of the negotiation of identities and hegemonies" (1994:18). Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili discover that syncretic religion can be used to empower themselves. Ifeoma embodies hybridity as she adheres to Catholic decrees and traditional practices but not at the expense of compromising her freedom and traditional beliefs. Through an awakening of Kambili's consciousness, she discovers that she can create spaces of independence and freedom for herself without resisting biblical gender norms. Patriarchy existed in ancient biblical times; however, societies have transformed radically. Equality and unity between men and women are encouraged. Hence, the Bible has also been interpreted to encourage women to be assertive rather than submissive.

"Defiance is like Marijuana"

In *Purple Hibiscus*, defiance emerges as the driving force behind the rebellion of the central characters as Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili attain liberation and empowerment through defiance. Empowerment involves developing a mental attribute which progresses into a physical accomplishment (Adeniji 2015:32). The main characters in the novel undergo a radical transformation which is noticeable in their conduct. This is achieved by exposure to other characters in the novel. Jaja's and Kambili's growth is catalysed by the time spent in Nsukka within Ifeoma's household and Father Amadi's spiritual guidance. After their holiday, "things were destined to not be the same, to not be in their original order" (Adichie 2013 [2003]:209). This section focuses on an examination of Catholic liberation theology in relation to the main characters' defiance. In addition, my analysis centres on a study of how through their experiences, escapades and spiritual encounters, Jaja and Kambili discover that

they have the strength and power to liberate themselves, which leads to defying the religious patriarchal order. I also explore how Kambili's characterisation may be correlated with the "light triad" traits.

Weigel comments on freedom, saying:

We need to be educated in freedom. In that education we learn to be attracted to what is truly good, beautiful, and conducive to our happiness. The morality of Christian freedom is a morality of attraction, not simply of obligation. "One becomes free only by becoming better", according to an old Catholic maxim. We become better by developing that interior voice, that conscience, by which we are attracted to the good and the beautiful – to what is truly worthy of our love and commitment. (2001:80)

Kambili develops a mental attribute as she realises that she must discover her own ambitions, preferences and feelings. She understands that the values and lessons she was taught at home are not the only possibilities in life. She also discovers the feminism within herself. Initially she was attracted to everything Eugene said and did. However, Kambili realises that she has been silenced by her zealous, authoritarian and patriarchal father. She also discovers that he is actually not infallible and that he could die even though "he had seemed immortal" (Adichie 2013 [2003]:287). Kambili reaches maturity when she develops her voice and acknowledges that her father is her abuser saying, "Yes. It was him" (220). The silence in her life is broken and she moves forward towards her autonomy. Kambili's name means "That I too may live" (Udumukwu 2011:184).

At the end of the novel, Kambili personifies "light triad" traits as she attains maturity, affinity, self-awareness and individuality. Research from Kaufman et al. (2019:12) shows that the "Light Triad was positively correlated with the satisfaction of the needs for relatedness, competence, and autonomy"; furthermore, it was positively correlated with the Cognitive Triad and all of its facets (Positive View of Self, Positive View of the World, and Positive View of the Future)" (2019:15). In the text, Kambili embodies progression, confidence and self-transcendence, and her character stands in opposition to Eugene who is oppressive and vindictive. In contrast, Kambili is benevolent and displays a positive form of spirituality that promotes love and harmony. Moreover, she succeeds in creating her own sense of space and freedom by developing her own identity.

When Eugene finds the painting of Papa-Nnukwu, he believes that Jaja and Kambili have converted to heathen ways. However, it is not a conversion but a syncretism of traditional African and Catholic beliefs. Kambili protects her grandfather's painting as she wants to be a part of the African tradition that he represents. Beattie states "it has become necessary for women to carve out a space of autonomy in resistance to relationships of subordination, ownership and control" (2006:47). During the above violent encounter, Kambili is able to challenge her dominant Papa Eugene by rising up from the floor despite his disapproval of this. Her physical and psychological development has given her the strength to acknowledge that her father's behaviour is more inhumane than religious and constructive. The connection between them is also broken because she can no longer feel his beating.

At the end of the text, Beatrice also empowers herself by developing "cameline agency" as she resorts to equally violent mechanisms (as her violator) to liberate herself and her children. Murder should not be endorsed; nonetheless, Beatrice's decision to kill Eugene is directly affected by her decision to independently control her family's and her own well-being and future. This resonates with "cameline agency" as "The camel has a propensity for protesting against unfair treatment by attacking its owners and even killing them" (Nkealah 2017:124). This violence is "a way of asserting their right to more dignified treatment" (124). Similarly, in the novel, Beatrice resorts to violence as means of challenging her violator as well as a strategy she employs for self-preservation. In 2019, three teen sisters from Russia murdered their father in an attempt to escape his severe physical and sexual abuse (Armenpress 2019). The case in Russia is similar to Beatrice's desire to escape abuse. Her act of murder is an attainment of liberation. She acquires the power to actualise her dreams and be who she aspires to be without Eugene as an oppressive individual.

Jaja refuses to continue in his father's patriarchal ways. He undergoes a transformation as he can express himself and he is no longer afraid of Eugene. His nickname is taken after Jaja of Opobo, a defiant king, who refused to allow the British to control trade and "did not sell his soul for a bit of gunpowder like the other kings did" (Adichie 2013 [2003]:144). Jaja's defiance stems from his resentment against his father and determination to be the alternative male in the house. He aims to protect his mother, sister and the unborn brother whom he loved and swore to protect even before the baby was born. Jaja acknowledges that he did not do enough for Beatrice. This is displayed when Jaja observes the strong support that Obiora gives his mother after the father's demise, as he tells Kambili: "I should have taken care of

Mama. Look at how Obiora balances Auntie Ifeoma's family on his head, and I am older than he is. I should have taken care of Mama" (289). As a result, at the end of the novel Jaja sacrifices himself to save his mother by claiming that he poisoned Eugene. Masculinity is viewed as the expectations and qualities that are expected from men and also what men think will make them men. Jaja's sacrifice reveals the pressures of masculinity as sacrifice is viewed as a masculine quality as men are expected to be the protectors of their family.

At the end of the novel, the main characters acquire personal autonomy and the freedom to dictate all areas of their lives. They are no longer passive, docile and insignificant; instead, they transform into assertive, strong-willed and courageous individuals who are equipped and prepared to control their own destiny and determine their own fate. The purple hibiscus flower is a symbol of Kambili's and Jaja's blossoming and it also embodies the sense of serenity that the two adolescents acquire in Nsukka. The purple hibiscus flower serves as a symbol of the burgeoning freedom of Beatrice, Kambili and Jaja. Koboré (2013:36) states that "Jaja builds up his courage slowly in the same rhythm as the purple hibiscus he planted takes its time to grow". When the purple hibiscuses are about to bloom, Jaja also starts blooming by becoming defiant against the tyranny in his home. Koboré (36) adds that the hibiscuses' changing colour is a reflection of the changes in the Achike home. The purple hibiscuses represent freedom and hybridity. The hibiscuses are exotic plants to Nigeria. In addition, the plants combine two primary colours (which are red and blue) and they can thrive in warm or cold conditions. Adichie emphasises the importance of hybridity between masculinity/femininity, adulthood/childhood and Catholicism/traditionalism. By the end of the novel the protagonist, Kambili, has made the transition from childhood to adulthood. Furthermore, Eugene is dead and the patriarchal order has been dethroned. Lastly, Kambili practises a syncretic form of religion that embodies traditional and Catholic values.

The text as a whole is a narrative of Kambili's physical and psychological abuse. However, the novel ends with the main characters able to live in the present and look towards the future. The characters learn that "being defiant can be a good thing sometimes [and] defiance is like marijuana – it is not a bad thing when it is used right" (Adichie 2013 [2003]:144). Kambili is trapped in a liminal space between childhood and adulthood. However, by the end of the novel, she emerges into adulthood and practises a hybridity of Catholicism and traditional Igbo culture. Anthony Chennells states: "the eponymous purple hibiscus differs from the ubiquitous red hibiscus" (2009:24). The characters journey away from the red

hibiscuses that stereotypically refer to violence and acquire the blossoming freedom of the purple hibiscuses. A compelling feature in *Purple Hibiscus* is freedom from tyranny. Beatrice, Jaja and Kambili escape from the oppressive patriarchy which is symbolised by the red hibiscuses and they acquire freedom which is represented by the purple hibiscuses. The central characters discover a “freedom to be [and] to do” (16).

Conclusion

Patriarchy is an alarming cause of the woes of women and children as it disempowers individuals and impedes females from attaining their maximum potentials, goals and objectives. In *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie exposes how patriarchy and religion can be manipulated to exploit and suppress individuals, particularly in a familial context, through the characterisation of the patriarch, Eugene who is negatively associated with malevolent traits of Machiavellianism, narcissism and psychopathy. Adichie explains: “The tyrants continue to reign because the weak cannot resist” (2013 [2003]:244). Through the characterisation of Beatrice and Ifeoma, Adichie highlights that women need to rise above the traditional ideologies, fully understand themselves and voice their experiences. Self-knowledge and self-expression are crucial for demystifying patriarchal authority and oppression (Udumukwu 2011:184).

Religion can also be used as a catalyst for transformation as it encourages individuals to liberate themselves. Syncretic religion is represented in the novel as a moral anchor for Kambili’s defiance and liberation from patriarchal dominance. In addition, Mary is a central feminine religious symbol in feminist liberation theology who is associated with equality and freedom. Mary as a feminist theological symbol provides a deconstruction of patriarchal hegemonic ideologies. Kambili’s representation of the apparition of Mary results in her spiritual and psychological awakening. After this encounter, Kambili is able to assert her identity and autonomy independent from patriarchal constraints. Through Kambili’s identity formation, Adichie highlights that identity should not be prescribed to an individual and that individuals do have the power to show resistance and overcome the oppression they face.

CHAPTER FOUR

“THE SOUL CANNOT BE COERCED”: AYAAN HIRSI ALI’S REJECTION OF “SUBORDINATION AND ABUSE BECAUSE ALLAH WILLED IT”, IN HER AUTOBIOGRAPHY, *INFIDEL: MY LIFE*

“To accept subordination and abuse because Allah willed it – that, for me, would be self-hatred.”

(Ali 2007 [2006]:348)

Introduction

In the above statement by Ayaan Hirsi Ali in her autobiography,⁸ *Infidel: My Life*, she exposes her criticism of Islam because of its sanctioning of women’s subordination. Her contention: “because Allah willed it” implies that Islam condones the submission and oppression of women; therefore it is incompatible with human rights and freedom. Ali’s criticism of Islam as a religion concomitant with oppression has been associated with Orientalism.⁹

⁸ For the purposes of this chapter, I have employed Leigh Gilmore’s definition of autobiography, which reads: “writing an autobiography can be a political act because it asserts a right to speak rather than to be spoken for” (1994:40). Gilmore also explores the relationship between autobiography and trauma and notes: Trauma, from the Greek meaning “wound,” refers to the self-altering, even self-shattering experiences of violence, injury, and harm. [...] [L]anguage about trauma is theorized as an impossibility, language is pressed forward as that which can heal the survivor of trauma” (2001:6). In *Infidel*, Ali uses her autobiography as a platform to testify about the trauma she experiences.

⁹ Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1995) is a term used to describe the way in which the West has established its hegemonic views on perceptions of the Eastern “Other”.

Ali's critique of mainstream Islam and radical ideological viewpoints have been subjected to criticism, which in my view is unsympathetic to the text and inaccurate. One of the strongest proponents of this critical viewpoint, Dutch historian and biographer, Mineke Bosch, analyses Ali's autobiography "in the perspective of a long autobiographical tradition and strong feminist counter tradition with distinctive narrative lines, plots and counterplots" (2008:138). She contends that *Infidel* bears a resemblance to the classic standard (male, liberal) autobiographical plot wherein the individual's personal success is the measure of willpower and autonomy (142). She claims that Ali's life is depicted as an odyssey from Africa, which is characterised by chaos, binding conventions, authoritarian modes of upbringing, arranged marriages and superstitions; to a world of order, freedom of choice, "anti-authoritarian households", relationships based on love and a world embodied by knowledge and truth (142). As a result of this dualistic nature and stark contrast of the two worlds in which Ali diametrically opposes life in Africa, as well as her "tendency to exoticize and Islamicize the 'other world of her childhood'", Bosch argues that the text is imbued in a kind of "feminist orientalism" (142). Ali plays a central feminine role in projecting "barbaric practices" from the East, such as female genital mutilation, forced marriages, polygyny, harem life, veiling, honour killings or suttee in orientalist discourse (144). Through these projections in the text, Ali reveals that women are not only victims of these practices but also strongholds of "backward religion", and therefore perpetrators of such acts. As a result of these depictions, Bosch debates that the autobiography may be labelled as "an orientalist, and even anti-Islam story, addressed to a Western audience" (144). Furthermore, Bosch argues: "This autobiography was meant first and foremost to serve Ayaan Hirsi Ali herself" (145).

My argument in this chapter is that even though Ali claims that "Africa" perpetrates "barbaric practices", she does so with the intention of speaking out against customs that oppress women. Furthermore, I do not agree with Bosch's assertion about *Infidel* being masculine in form because the autobiography may be categorised as feminist literature as Ali emerges as a "speaking subject" who writes about issues around the intersection of gender, religion and post-colonialism. In addition, *Infidel*, shifts away from the duality of "self" and "other" and centres on themes of interaction, interconnection and interdependence. The story of Ali's life shifts from the focus on her "self" to a story that is constructed on the history of relationships with those around her. Moreover, through her revelations of personal experiences, she references structures of power in society in which the self finds itself.

Ali, as a political activist and advocate for human rights, is critical of gender relations in Islam as she expresses in her autobiography: “What matters is abuse, and how it is anchored in a religion that denies women their rights as humans” (Ali 2007 [2006]:309). The purpose of this chapter is not to debate whether Islam is a religion of peace and endorses democratic values of freedom and equality or whether it is a religion associated with intolerance and inconsistent with human rights. In contrast, the primary objective of this chapter is to perform a textual analysis of Ali’s autobiography which she constructs as a testimonial of the gendered oppressions in specific Muslim societies. The intention of this chapter is not to generalise about *all* Muslim women based on a single image as recounted by Ali; however, my aim is to explore the concept of suffering in relation to various individuals in the text. My focus is on the ontological and axiological analysis of suffering in Islam as represented in Ali’s autobiography.

“It goes without saying that Islam considers the material world and living therein as unworthy of man’s ultimate perfection, since the eternal world is to follow the present and transient one, and man is worthier than becoming the prisoner of this world”, claim Zahra Akbari and Bahman Akbari, key Islamic scholars (2017:29). Furthermore, Islamic sources define the world as a dwelling characterised by pain and suffering (28). This interpretation of suffering correlates with the ontological view of suffering, which dictates that the world is filled with evil, and therefore the individual plunges into suffering and despair. Conversely, the only way to achieve salvation is to live according to God’s will on earth in order to enjoy life in the Hereafter. In *Infidel*, Ali is critical of this view of suffering and life in general as she compares Muslim countries that focus on purity and sinning to Western values of freedom and the individual. Ali notes that life is valued in the here and now in the West as opposed to Muslim countries where individuals endure suffering to enjoy life in the Hereafter. Furthermore, she is in awe of the West because she believes that individuals enjoy rights and freedoms that are recognised and protected by the State. This way of life stands in contrast to life in clan-based Somalia, as depicted in the text, which is characterised by a male-dominated, patriarchal and hierarchical clan system that ensues in the suffering of women. Z Akbari and B Akbari further note:

In the axiological perspective of Islam, suffering is divided into two categories: sacred suffering and profane suffering. Sacred suffering is unintentional and is due to the very nature of the universe. On the contrary, profane suffering is intentional and manmade, and is the result of tyranny and the ignorance of tyrant

and ignorant systems. Nevertheless, there are other types of sacred suffering that result from the volition of humans. These are sufferings that either result from performing religious duties, observance of social responsibilities, or the empathy for the suffering of other humans. (31)

In *Infidel*, Ali draws attention to “sacred suffering” through her portrayal of Islam as a religion that is intrinsically oppressive and detrimental to women through a criticism of various Islamic practices. In this chapter, my analysis centres on the suffering Ali and Haweya (Ali’s younger sister) are subjected to as a result of FGM, which is viewed as a customary tradition in Somalia and is a means of controlling sexuality, preservation of chastity and is regarded as protection from rape. Despite the health risks and painful experiences, female circumcision is believed to be a religious edict and beneficial tradition. In addition to paying attention to FGM, I explore other religiously legitimised atrocities Ali reveals in her autobiography, namely: forced marriages and violence which result in the suffering and suppression of abused individuals.

Tanelle Boni’s article entitled “Wounded Bodies, Recovered Bodies: Discourses Around Female Sexual Mutilations” explores the discourses on excision and analyses the notions of bodily integrity, individual freedom and sexual equality in relation to the former. Boni argues that excision is “truly a ‘wound’ inflicted on a woman’s body in the most intimate, personal, and hidden area” (2010:224). The practice of excision also “reinforces sexual differentiation and the hierarchy of sexes” (224). In the autobiography, excision is represented as a practice used to preserve women’s chastity by controlling their sexuality. Through the discussion of Haweya’s circumcision, Ali points out the physical, psychological and moral violence inflicted through the process of excision.

This chapter is invested in post-colonial feminist religious studies as I interrogate the oppressions and suffering women are subjected to as a result of various forms of social and cultural violence in *Infidel*. My analysis centres on Ali’s “awakening” to the significance of her life experiences, relationships, and the connection between her life and the world around her. Thomas DeGloma in “Awakenings: Autobiography, Memory, and the Social Logic of Personal Discovery” notes: “As awakeners account for their lives, they explicitly redefine important experiences, events, perceptions, and relationships of the past, contrasting their past and present mindsets in order to describe a personal discovery of ‘truth’” (2010:527). Given

that the text is an autobiography, an exploration of Ali's account of her memories of childhood is essential.

My textual analysis begins with a discussion of Ali's account of the social control and gendered violence in tribal communities in Somalia. This is followed by an analysis of the importance of circumcision in Somalia, the discourse of FGM in Islam, and Ali's experiences of FGM as narrated in *Infidel*. Subsequently, I investigate the physical and physiological ramifications of FGM through a discussion of Haweya, Ali's sister. The next part of the textual analysis centres on an exploration of the mental state of Asha (Ali's mother) as a result of the polygynous family structure and the abuse she inflicts on her children, particularly her daughters, to instil obedience and responsibility. Drawing on the theme of violence and oppression, I explore the violent episode inflicted by an Islamic religious figure because of Ali's defiance of religious instructions. In addition to this, I investigate the misogynistic and androcentric practices in Islam that Ali highlights in *Infidel* through a discussion of Ali's experiences in Saudi Arabia, as well as the role of the hijab and the patriarchal rules for women that force them into submission. The final section of my analysis centres on an exploration of Ali's renunciation of her Islamic faith, in relation to which I reference poststructuralist feminist atheism.

Ali is a Dutch/American-Somali diasporic writer whose autobiography documents her journey and experiences in Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Kenya, Netherlands, and the United States of America. Autobiography is a literary genre used to describe texts that are self-written accounts of one's life. Furthermore, autobiographies are devised through an amalgamation of imagination, memory, creativity and biographical facts. Paul John Eakin, a prominent scholar in studies of the art of self-invention, explains: "Autobiography offers an individual an opportunity to reify, to constitute, to create an identity precisely because referentiality is the *sine qua non* of such texts" (1985:26). Eakin further adds:

The presence of fiction in autobiography is not something to wish away, to rationalize, to apologize for, as so many writers and readers of autobiography persist in suggesting, for it is reasonable to assume that all autobiography has some fiction in it as it is to recognize that all fiction is in some sense necessarily autobiographical. (10)

In the book, *The Culture of Autobiography*, Robert Folkenflik (1993:1) explains that in 1786, the term "autobiography" was published for the first time by Anne Yearsley. He further adds

that “Autobiographies are generally narratives about the past of the writer” (15). Within this thesis, one of the texts for discussion, *Infidel*, is an autobiography of Ayaan Hirsi Ali. In the text, Ali narrates her life story and history of migration and journey of developing into an activist and politician. Leigh Gilmore, a distinguished professor of women’s and gender studies, explains that “writing an autobiography can be a political act because it asserts a right to speak rather than to be spoken for” (1994:40). Ali uses the platform of autobiography to illustrate her political views and draw attention to issues of Islamic extremism, patriarchal socio-cultural practices, civil war, female genital mutilation, violence, and abuse and political instability.

In this autobiography, through self-examination and confession, Ali narrates her transformation from a devout Islamist to an apostate. As a feminist atheist, Ali speaks out against religious oppression and articulates how many individuals, including herself, suffer under oppressive Islamic religious and political doctrines. Ali’s autobiography is a subjective record in which she narrates the story of her life and her personal memories. Bosch claims that autobiography is “pre-eminently a genre of suggestive veracity. Someone who writes an autobiography undertakes to tell the truth in all its diverse forms, from vulnerable personal detail to public persona” (2008:141). Ali posits the veracity of her narrative by claiming authority through inside knowledge and victimhood. She identifies herself as a critical insider because she is of Somali descent and was raised as a Muslim.

The first part of the autobiography is an illumination of Ali’s personal life in Somalia under the dictatorship of Siad Barre as well as her experiences in Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia, and Kenya through cross-border and cross-cultural migration. The second part of the autobiography centres on Ali’s counter-hegemonic liberation as she escapes an arranged marriage and flees to the Netherlands. While working as a Somali-Dutch interpreter, Ali discovers that Somali cultural practices such as wife beating, FGM and honour killings are also prevalent in the Netherlands.³ Post 9/11, Ali expresses her opinions about Islam as a religion that justifies violence as well as oppresses women. Furthermore, she criticises Dutch society and its multiculturalism because it allows immigrants to practise their own traditions

¹⁰ In the Netherlands, Ali works as a Somali interpreter in police stations, prisons, abortion clinics, penal courts, unemployment offices and women’s shelters (for battered women) where she is confronted with many cases. Later in the text, when Ali is involved with Dutch politics, she collaborates with the Labor Party, imploring Parliament to pass a motion that requires the police to register the number of honour killings that occur in Holland each year. During a “pilot project” in two police regions, “Between October 2004 and May 2005, eleven Muslim girls were killed by their families in just those two regions (there are twenty-five such regions in Holland)” (Ali 2007 [2006]:309).

even though they are contradicted by Dutch laws.

I have elected to engage in a textual analysis of *Infidel* as it was a *New York Times* best seller. Furthermore, as a prominent Somali-born author and activist, in 2005, Ali was named one of *Time Magazine's* 100 Most Influential People. David Schafer and Michelle Koth maintain that Ali is one of the most discussed and controversial humanists whose autobiography is critically praised and widely read (2008:19). Schafer and Koth argue: “A major factor contributing to her notoriety is the uncompromising and seemingly fearless manner in which she speaks her mind, evoking a wide range of reactions: from adulation to loathing among her non-Muslim readers and mostly resentment and anger among Muslims” (19). Dobrota Pucherova maintains that both Nuruddin Farah and Ayaan Hirsi Ali are diasporic Somali intellectuals whose writings may be categorised as “engaged literature” as they seek positive change for their troubled country, Somalia (2016:27). Farah has been described as a “spokesperson” in the West for Somalia; however, Ali’s works have been received with world-wide controversy because of her radical criticism (28). As an apostate and reform-minded Muslim, Ali’s life is at risk because of her criticism of the Islamic religion, the Qur’an and Allah.

Despite Ali being extremely provocative, which has resulted in her being criticised by post-colonial feminists, Kiran Grewal argues that critical engagement with Ali is necessary and useful as she “opens up interesting sites of rejuvenation for postcolonial feminism and a means of developing a more nuanced and truly decolonized anti-racist, feminist politics” (2012:569). Grewal states: “I see a need for postcolonial feminism to demonstrate an ability to engage with a diversity of women’s voices in a constructive way rather than avoiding, ignoring, or simply dismissing those messages that are politically unpalatable” (571). The primary objective of my thesis is to explore patriarchal and religious oppression within particular religious cultures, in this case Islamic cultures. Therefore, engagement with Ali’s autobiography, which centres on issues of misogyny in radical Muslim regimes and the subjugation of women in the name of religion and tradition, is imperative. Grewal notes:

It would be facile and indeed counterintuitive to attack Hirsi Ali’s right to speak when the very political imperative of postcolonial studies, critical race studies, subaltern studies – however else they may differ – has been to create space for alternate perspectives and voices as counterbalances to dominant white colonial forms of knowledge. (2012:583)

As a political and feminist activist, Ali focuses on debates related to the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, the subjectivity of the female body, religion and human rights. Ali emancipated herself from the concept of God and religion because of the oppressive and dehumanising beliefs and practices typified in Islam. In the text, Ali argues that Islamic law (Shariah law) mandates institutionalised discrimination against women. She notes that religious contents in Islamic law promote inequality between men and women as patriarchal masculinity is espoused within Islam, resulting in the subordination of women. Through the advocacy of patriarchy, women are subordinated. In addition to this, the sanctioning of the control of the female body through practices such as arranged marriages, circumcision and FGM are also mandated in patriarchal societies. The female body is viewed as a site of impurity and temptation; therefore girls are required to cover their bodies or practise *hijab* at the onset of puberty. In addition to the “veiling” of women, they have the responsibility of maintaining the family’s honour by protecting their virginity.

Ali opposes violence and the justification of violence that are explicitly sanctioned in sacred texts of Islam. She is critical of fundamentalists within Islam who envisage a society based on Shariah (2015). She labels this Islamic fundamentalist group as “Medina Muslims” because “they see the forcible imposition of Shariah as their religious duty. They aim not just to obey Mohammed’s teaching but also to emulate his warlike conduct after his move to Medina” (2015). Not all “Medina Muslims” engage in violent acts, but they condone it (2015).

Furthermore, they prescribe the death penalty for crimes of apostasy, the punishment of being stoned to death for adultery and hanging for homosexuality (2015). This group of Muslims also sanctions the domestication and veiling of women as well as the punishment of beating for disobedience and non-compliance. Daniel O’Gorman states:

There is no doubt that the violence she describes is real, and, as she correctly argues, it would be wrong to turn a blind eye to it. Nonetheless, her diagnosis that this violence is fundamentally rooted in ‘true Islam’ is a clear case of mistaking correlation for causation: she repeatedly makes broad, sweeping claims based on observations that occasionally have impact as personal testimony, but are rarely backed up by any secondary research. (2018:146)

Ali’s autobiography expresses a degree of truth about Muslim women’s oppression; however, she falls into the trap of reinforcing orientalist discourse as a result of her lack of context, generalisations and selectivity. O’Gorman is critical of Ali’s lack of context to her claims in

respect of violence and the repression of women in Islam. Ali's claims about violence being driven by "true Islam" are questionable. However, Grewal points out that Ali's assertions in respect of the "oppression of women in various parts of the Muslim world are not without some basis" (2012:574). In 2007, a 20-year-old woman in Saudi Arabia reported that she was abducted by several men and repeatedly raped (Ali 2008:46). However, the judges (basing their judgement on Shariah law) found the woman guilty of the crime of "mingling" because when she was abducted, she was in a car with a man not related to her by blood or marriage (46). The woman was sentenced to six months' imprisonment and 200 lashes with a bamboo cane (46). Ali is critical of these injustices in society which are not only bigoted but inhumane. In *Infidel*, she draws attention to the discriminatory laws in Saudi Arabia which prevent women from being alone in public spaces.

Grewal believes that Ali's statements in *Infidel* are hyperbolic and sensationalist; nonetheless, "the scenarios she describes are not completely fictional" (2012:574-575). Post 9/11, the debate about Islamic fundamentalism came to the fore as well as the need for reformation in Islam. Ali's text "stems from the mission that she undertook after 9/11, which involved total dedication to the truth, rejecting the hypocrisy she believed had begun to compromise her faith, breaking with taboos and increasing the public's awareness of the way Islam was affecting Dutch society" (Bosch 2008:141). Ali has denounced Islam as her religion because of its inherently discriminatory attitude towards women.

Ali, as a Muslim dissident, has been forced by experiences to conclude that she no longer believes in Allah or Islam because of its compatibility with injustices. However, she remains deeply engaged in the reformation of Islam. Extremists within the Muslim society ostracise her because of her rejection of Islam. She declares: "for a Muslim to cease believing in Allah is a lethal offence. Apostates merit death: on that, the Quran and the *hadith* are clear. For a Muslim woman to abjure her faith is the worst kind of disobedience to God, because it comes from the lowest, most impure element in society" (Ali 2007 [2006]:309). Apostasy, a religious term used to refer to individuals who leave their faith, is a contested subject within diverse religions and Islam is no exception (Vliek 2019:2). Radical Islamists claim that Ali must receive the death penalty for her apostasy. However, Ben Clarke maintains that after close examination of the Qur'an and Hadith, the punishment of apostasy is not as clear-cut in Islamic law as traditionalists cite (2009:11). Even though the Qur'an denounces apostasy as a sin, it does not mandate an earthly penalty (11).

As a result of her apostasy, Ali's autobiography is labelled as a deconversion narrative. Maria Vlieg argues: "The transformation that people undergo when finding new existential convictions, be it in belief or unbelief, captures something in our minds that we can relate to, admire, or abhor" (2019:2). Furthermore, the voices within deconversion literature "have been critical of religion and hailed presumed liberal values" (2019:2). In this chapter, I perform an analysis of Ali's dissidence from Islamic tradition and undertake an exploration of the reconstruction of her identity in light of newly found convictions and values. Poststructural feminist atheism is pertinent for my analysis as it seeks to explore relationships between language, subjectivity, power-relations, freedom and resistance as they impact upon gender. Ali, as a poststructural feminist atheist, seeks to inculcate how Islam has promoted inequitable power relations. Her atheism directly informs her feminism as she rebels against women's traditional subjugation and critiques the unfairness of the rules for women in Islam. Furthermore, Ali uses language as an expression for her subjectivity as she no longer lives by the dictates enforced by religion. Poststructural feminist atheism is a background marker through which her subjectivity is enacted in everyday life.

Part II of the autobiography centres on Ali's subjectivity as she escapes patriarchal constraints. In the Netherlands, Ali acquires a feeling of freedom and power as she finally receives independence and the ability to live her life according to her own terms and not the life that was preordained for her. She describes Friday, July 24, 1992, as her real birthday as it was the birth of her as a new person, one who is free and has the opportunity to make her own decisions about her life. She counters the stereotype that women on their own end up in prostitution, working as a maid or marrying a man beneath one's status who will exploit one (Ali 2007 [2006]:191).

Ali counter-hegemonically uses grandiloquent language which is not expected from a woman when she defiantly proclaims: "The soul cannot be coerced" (208). She also declares: "Islam was like a mental cage. At first, when you open the door, the caged bird stays inside: it is frightened. It has internalized its imprisonment. It takes time for the bird to escape, even after someone has opened the doors to its cage" (309). This is a reference to the increased socio-political rights that are granted to women; however, many women within religious and patriarchal societies are still conditioned to accept their subordination. She argues that oppressed women will never become fully liberated until they are seen as equal to men in the sight of God. Ali positions herself as "liberated" Muslim woman. In addition to her criticism

of the oppression of women and her aim to reform aspects of Islam, she is also critical of peaceful and law-abiding Muslims who are disinclined to acknowledge and repudiate the violence and oppression embedded in Islam. She claims: “We need to hold Islam accountable for the acts of its most violent adherents and to demand that it reform or disavow the key beliefs that are used to justify those acts” (Ali 2015:2).

Ayaan Hirsi Ali’s Background and Establishment as Emancipator for Women

Ayaan Hirsi Ali was born in 1969 in Mogadishu, Somalia, as Ayaan Hirsi Magan. She is author of *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam* (2004), *Infidel* (2007 [2006]), *Nomad: From Islam to America: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations* (2010), *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation* (2015) and *Prey: Immigration, Islam, and the Erosion of Women’s Rights* (2020).

Ali is the script writer and co-author of the film *Submission: Part One* (2004), which exposes the physical, sexual and psychological violence perpetrated against women in Islamic societies. *Submission* “is first and foremost about the relation of the individual with Allah. [...] To Muslims, worship of God means total obedience to Allah’s rules and total abstinence from the thoughts and deeds that He has declared forbidden in the Qur’an” Ali (2007 [2006]:313). The film projects four fictional women, depicted with restrictive verses from the Qur’an on their bodies, as an act of defiance to reflect how Muslim women have been abused in several ways and how the Qur’an justifies their abuse. Following the broadcasting of *Submission*, filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered by a Muslim radical, Muhammed Bouyeri. Van Gogh was found shot, had a slit throat and a knife stuck into his mutilated chest which staked a letter addressed to Ali. The letter was structured like a *fatwa*, a religious verdict, with a summary of all the “acts of crime” she had committed against Islam. Following this death threat, Ali was requested to leave the Netherlands. In 2006, Ali moved to the United States of America where she became a citizen in 2013 (Gorlinski 2020). In the United States, Ali was “welcomed as a resident fellow by the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) for Public Policy Research, a conservative think tank, where she continued to study the relationship between Islam and the West and to condemn culturally and religiously rationalized violence against women” (2020).

Ali is committed to the emancipation of Muslim women and the integration of immigrants in Dutch society. She is one who believes in the “combat of action” as she aims to expose the oppression of women to individuals in power and “make sure that existing laws demanding equality between the sexes [are] applied” (Ali 2007 [2006]:348). She positions herself as an emancipator of Muslim women.

Synopsis

Infidel was simultaneously published in Dutch and German in 2006, while the English version was published in 2007. Ali’s text was not written by herself, but with the assistance of an experienced ghost writer, as her initial attempts to publish the autobiography failed until she contracted the ghost writer (Bosch 2008:140).

Infidel chronicles Ali’s life experiences and personal journey. After her birth in Somalia, she is raised by her mother and grandmother in the absence of her father (Hirsi Magan), who is imprisoned (when Ali is two years old) because of his political actions and opposition to the Siad Barre regime. After Hirsi Magan’s escape from prison, Ali and her family move to Saudi Arabia, where they experience a different form of Islam. The family then travel from Saudi Arabia to Ethiopia and finally Kenya, where Ali resides for 12 years.

In order to escape a forced marriage (orchestrated by her father) to a distant relative living in Canada, Ali flees to the Netherlands, where she is granted political asylum and receives permanent residency. Ali discovers that traditional Somali practices also occur in Dutch society. After the completion of her Master’s degree in political science, she is offered a job as a fellow for the think tank of the Dutch Labour Party. Her first assignment is to investigate why Muslim immigrants are unable to integrate into Dutch society and the threats this poses to the country’s welfare state. Following her public criticism of Islam and Dutch society’s multiculturalism, Ali switches from the Labour Party to the VVD Party (People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy, which is also known as the Liberal Party). Within the Dutch parliament, Ali continues her public criticism of Islam and its mistreatment of women. As a result of her atheism and the broadcasting of *Submission*, Ali receives death threats and is forced into exile after the death of van Gogh, who refused any protection. Ali then moves to the United States of America to become a research fellow.

Social Control and Gendered Violence in Clan-based Somalia

In *Infidel*, Ali introduces the reader to the traditional structures in her home country, Somalia. Somaliland is characterised by kinships that are based on an agnatic patrilineal lineage type, which is known as clans (Gundel 2006:4). Kinships or genealogies are used to define the identities of kin. Furthermore, the tenure of rights depends on the ability to protect the honour of the clan. In her autobiography, Ali reveals the importance of clan self-identification and belonging within Somali society as one's family lineage and clan provenance define one's identity. Furthermore, Ali brings to light the customary laws (*xeer*) that regulate aspects of the lives of Somalians, in particular, women. This section is dedicated to an analysis of the social control and gendered violence in tribal communities in Somalia through a discussion of sexual exploitation, forced marriages, and the subordination of women. My analysis commences with a discussion of the clan systems in Somalia and I also explore the importance of honour in clans, particularly on the identities of women who have a duty to maintain their honour in the face of predatory men. This is followed by an exploration of gender inequality and the precarious position of women in patriarchal and tribal Somalia.

In Chapter One of the autobiography, titled "Bloodlines", Ali highlights the importance of ancestral lineage in Somalia because of the existence of clans. Ali's grandmother explains: "The names will make you strong. They are your bloodline. If you honor them they will keep you alive. If you dishonor them you will be forsaken. You will be nothing. You will live a wretched life and die alone" (Ali 2007 [2006]:3). Ali's grandmother's statement signposts the important role clan-based systems play in terms of identity formation as well as the regulating of customary law and jurisprudence in Somaliland. Joakim Gundel, director and senior analyst at Katuni Consult, compiled a final report entitled: "The Predicament of the 'Oday': The Role of Traditional Structures in Security, Rights, Law and Development in Somalia". In this report, he asserts: "The segmentary lineage system or clan structure remains the bedrock foundation of the pastoral Somali society, and the primacy of clan interests is its natural divisive reflection at the political level" (2006:ii). Within tribal Somalia, rights and responsibilities are perceived along with the collective rather than individual terms (iii). In the text, Ali draws attention to young Somali women who are controlled by patriarchal clan-based systems within the context of maintaining the honour of the male-based clans. The compulsion to guard their honour and remain virtuous is embodied in the persona of Asha Artan, Ali's mother. Asha refuses to take a bus or taxi in fear of sitting next to a strange man.

In addition, she wears a veil which “protected her from leering men, and from the feeling of vileness it gave her to be looked at that way. Her veil was an emblem of her belief. To be beloved of God, you had to be modest” (11). The above image implicitly indicates the precarious position of women in patriarchal Somalia who are preyed upon and subjected to sexual exploitation.

Findings from the Minority Rights Group International and IIDA Women’s Development Organisation reveal that women in Somalia face double discrimination as a result of the country’s male-dominated, patriarchal, and hierarchical clan system (2015:4). Not only do Somali women face challenges of exclusion and entrenched poverty but they are particularly vulnerable to crimes of sexual assault, rape and other forms of exploitation (4). In *Infidel*, Ali lucidly describes the position of women by adopting the metaphor of women as a piece of sheep fat in the sun, as “Everything will come and feed on that fat. Before you know it, the ants and insects are crawling all over it, until there is nothing left but a smear of grease” (9). The word “smear” cynically denotes that women are viewed as obnoxious objects or residue who are disposed of after being physically and/or sexually exploited. Moreover, as the word “smear” is also an epithet used to degrade individuals, Ali’s adoption of this metaphor signposts the double discrimination African women and girls are subjected to in patriarchal clans. Furthermore, the above metaphor of women being objectified and reduced to a “smear” suggests the high sexual assault prevalent in Somali society as women are preyed upon in male-dominated clans.

Gundel notes that in Somalia, “The extent to which the rights of women are followed were more difficult to determine” (2006:21). However, he further notes that numerous men will consider that women who are subjected to crimes “outside” their home do not have any right to justice (21-22). This correlates with Ali’s viewpoint in the text as she reveals that women are regarded as easy prey; however, if they are attacked, it is regarded as their fault. In *Infidel*, being raped is described as far worse than dying because it tarnishes a family’s honour. Ali maintains: “if a girl’s virginity is despoiled, she not only obliterates her honor, she also damages the honor of her father, uncles, brothers, male cousins. There is nothing worse than to be the agent of such a catastrophe” (Ali 2007 [2006]:6). This is indicative of women’s vulnerability because of the lack of clan protection as well as limited access to justice or legal compensation. Furthermore, it reveals that chastity defines young women’s identities prior to marriage, and the status of a “virgin” elevates their social ranking.

Ali critiques tribalism in Somalia because of its promotion of gender inequality which has fuelled the domination over women and forced women into a position of subordination within patriarchal clan systems. In the text, Asha exhibits respect, obedience, and submission. She responds with silence when her father accepts a marriage proposal for her, as “A virgin’s silence is the proper answer to a marriage proposal; it signifies a dignified consent” (11). Asha’s silence and subordination are reflective of entrenched tribal beliefs which position women into a place of passivity. Furthermore, Asha explains that she has no right to divorce under Muslim law, and “The only way she could have claimed one was if her husband had been impotent or left her completely indigent” (12). Moreover, a divorced woman is regarded as “used goods” and is not given the title of *baari*. Ali describes *baari* as follows:

A woman who is *baari* is like a pious slave. She honors her husband’s family and feeds them without question or complaint. She never whines or makes demands of any kind. She is strong in service, but her head is bowed. If her husband is cruel, if he rapes her and then taunts her about it, if he decides to take another wife, or beats her, she lowers her gaze and hides her tears. And works hard, faultlessly. She is a devoted, welcoming, well-trained animal. This is *baari*. [...]

If in the process of being *baari* you feel grief, humiliation, fatigue, or a sense of everlasting exploitation, you hide it. If you long for love and comfort, you pray in silence to Allah to make your husband more bearable. Prayer is your strength. Nomadic mothers must try to give their daughters this skill and strength called *baari*. (Ali 2007 [2006]:12)

The above extract reveals how the identities of women are subverted in patriarchal societies as women are obligated to remain silent and not question or protest during their domestic chores. Furthermore, they are instructed not to challenge their husband’s demands. Instead, they are to follow their responsibilities in submission with their head bowed, which is symbolic of their reverence to their husbands. Ali is in opposition to this principle as she describes this type of woman as a “pious slave”, emphasising the inequitable and oppressive nature of this practice as women are under the domination of their husbands. The “*baari*” woman described in the above extract may be understood in terms of Z Akbari’s and B Akbari’s views of suffering. Even though these women descend into suffering and grief, the only way to achieve salvation is through prayer. Furthermore, they have to conceal their emotions like a “well-trained animal” and remain devoted.

As mentioned in Chapter One of the thesis, “Somalia is a country deeply steeped in the culture of Islam” (Pucherova 2016:27). Somali traditional culture within clan-based societies

is predominantly established on nomadic pastoral traditions and Islamic teachings. Pucherova asserts: “In the light of the fact that Somalia has declared Sharia Law as its main legal code in the new 2012 constitution, which prohibits any religion apart from Islam being preached on Somali soil, the question of Islam’s role in Somali culture and politics seems ever more relevant” (2016:28). This is noteworthy as even though there are aspects of *xeer* that discriminate against women, Shariah law is deemed more progressive than the Somali customary law as it grants women more rights in terms of ownership, inheritance, and settling a divorce. However, key thinkers like Robert Spencer and Phyllis Chesler believe that Shariah law mandates institutionalised discrimination against women, therefore this remains a highly contested arena (2007:6).

The quagmire of discrimination and violence against women within the public and private spaces as a result of patrilineal clan systems in Somalia curtails women’s development. In the above analysis, I explored how honour and sexual exploitation remain sources of gender inequality in Somalia. Furthermore, I discussed the precarious position of women within patriarchal societies who are subjected to forced marriages, sexual assault, and submission to their husbands. In *Infidel*, Ali highlights the close relation between family and society in clan-based Somalia, thereby emphasising the need for women’s rights to be scrutinised within the context of the family in Islamic Somali society and the rights and responsibilities of each member of society.

Wounding and Mutilation of the Female Body

As previously discussed, FGM is a cultural practice that is detrimental to women. In both *From a Crooked Rib* and *God Dies by the Nile*, the selected authors represent FGM as an immutable traditional practice that results in physical and psychological harm as the female body is wounded and scarred. Furthermore, as discussed in my textual analysis of the two novels mentioned above, FGM is not a religious practice but a cultural one that predates the arrival of Islam in Africa. Ali is of a similar viewpoint as she proclaims: “In Somalia, like many countries across Africa and the Middle East, girls are made ‘pure’ by having their genitals cut. [...] Female genital mutilation predates Islam. Not all Muslims do this” (31). Ali’s account in *Infidel* demonstrates that women in the Arab-Muslim world have been subjected to FGM over a long period of time. While Islamic religious texts do not command this practice, it has been adapted into Islam as a cultural mandate. Pierette Herzberger-Fofana

is of a similar viewpoint as she states: “Shari’a does not order excision but recognizes its value. From a social viewpoint, it confers a mark of honour on women. No surah of the Quran recommends or demands excision. Those who practise it are not following a ‘hadith’ precept or a ‘sunna’ command, but a simple tradition” (2000). The practice of excision is of pagan origin and developed before the “appearance of revealed religions, monotheists” (2000). Despite the fact that circumcision can be traced to pre-Islamic societies, FGM is commonly associated with Islam. The purpose of this section is to explore the importance of circumcision in Somalia. In the first part, I explore the role that the discourse of FGM has in Islam. This is followed by an analysis of Ali’s experiences of FGM, as narrated in *Infidel*.

In the autobiography, Ali notes: “in Somalia, where virtually every girl is excised, the practice is always justified in the name of Islam. Furthermore, patriarchal stereotypes and myths promote the beliefs that women must undergo this practice in order to be cleansed. Boni notes: “The female sex is seen not only as weak or inferior to its male counterpart but also as ‘strange’, ‘amorphous’, ‘ugly’, ‘dirty’, ‘soiled’, ‘incomplete’, ‘impure’” (2010:17). Therefore, FGM is viewed as a practice to purify women. In addition to this, the illusion that is fabricated in Somali society is that uncircumcised girls will be possessed by devils, fall into vice and perdition and become whores (Ali 2007 [2006]:31). Although the Islamic religion offers little support and justification for FGM, in traditional Somalian societies, FGM is performed and perpetuated because of cultural and social beliefs.

In *Infidel*, Ali draws attention to the psychological barriers and prejudices that characterise the lives of uncircumcised girls. In madrassah, she recalls, “One girl, who was about eight years old, [the children] called *kintirleey*, ‘she with the clitoris’” (Ali 2007 [2006]:30). The children “didn’t even want to be seen with this girl. They spat on her and pinched her, they rubbed sand in her eyes, and once they caught her and tried to bury her in the sand behind the school. The madrassah teacher didn’t help. Once in a while, he called her *dammin*, dunce, and *kintirleey*, too” (Ali 2007 [2006]:30).

In the autobiography, Ali’s grandmother is the transmitter of old traditions as she believes that circumcision is the “necessary and proper dignity of purification” (31). She symbolises archaic adherence to ancestral tradition/religion and the belief in superstitions. She imagines that she is acting in the best interests of her grandchildren and that this process will facilitate the social integration of the children as they will be “cleansed”. This is noteworthy as Ali’s

father opposes FGM, and the procedure is performed in Ali's parents' absence. The process is described as follows:

Then the scissors went down between my legs and the man cut off my inner labia and clitoris. I heard it, like a butcher snipping the fat off a piece of meat. A piercing pain shot up between my legs, indescribable, and I howled. Then came the sewing; the long, blunt needle clumsily pushed into my bleeding outer labia, my loud and anguished protests, Grandma's words of comfort and encouragement. "It's just this once in your life, Ali. Be brave, he's almost finished." When the sewing was finished, the man cut the thread off with his teeth. (Ali 2007 [2006]:32)

The above description by Ali is very candid as she narrates her experiences of FGM under the hands of an unqualified practitioner who performs the process under unhygienic conditions as he uses incorrect and unsterile equipment. Furthermore, Ali is subject to excruciating pain as no anesthetic is used. Seeing that there is no anesthetic, Ali is cognisant of her surroundings and the entire procedure. In the extract, senses are deployed as Ali notes she "heard" the cutting of her inner labia and clitoris. This is significant as there is a deferral before the sensation hits. The sound transforms to "pain" and Ali responds by howling. The description of her cries as howling is noteworthy as animals howl. Through this imagery, Ali reveals how women are objectified and reduced to animal status. Moreover, the description of her cries as howling emphasises Ali's prolonged and mournful cry as a result of the distressing and painful encounter.

Ali compares the man performing the procedure to a butcher "snipping the fat off a piece of meat". Once more, Ali employs the metaphor of women likened to fat on a piece of meat. Fat is usually regarded as the excess substance on a piece of meat which is undesirable and therefore, discarded. Hence, Ali's likening of her labia/clitoris to fat reveals that these parts of women's bodies are seen as befouled and are therefore manipulated and cut off as emblems of purification. Linked to the former statement, the vagina and uterus can be viewed as the "meat", which is desirable and purified for men's sexual pleasures. Furthermore, this indicates that women's bodily autonomies have to be injured and mutilated in order to be "purified" as well as for men to gain a portal into women's bodies.

In the above passage, the image of a "butcher" signifies the slaughtering of Ali's body, sexuality, and identity. Furthermore, it signposts the violent nature of the episode as the man performing the procedure does not show any sensitivity or precision. This is reinforced when

Ali notes that “the man cut the thread off with his teeth”, further emphasising his lack of hygiene and meticulousness. In this scenario, we see how males enter the private space of women and execute indecent attacks on women’s bodies. Ali’s grandmother stands by and watches as the man puts his teeth (and by implication his entire mouth) on Ali’s vulva, thereby violating her personal space. In the above extract, Ali’s indescribable pain and suffering are juxtaposed with the man’s inept and unsympathetic actions. In addition, Ali is mindful of the fact that no one explained to her and her siblings why they were required to undergo this procedure or what the justifications for it were. However, her grandmother’s encouragement signposts that the procedure affords status and prestige to women who have undergone the procedure.

After the procedure, Ali explains: “the whole area is often sewn up, so that a thick band of tissue forms a chastity belt made of the girl’s own scarred flesh. A small hole is carefully situated to permit a thin flow of pee. Only great force can tear the scar tissue wider, for sex” (Ali 2007 [2006]:31). The statement described above reveals that for some women who are tightly sewn up, their first sexual intercourse is extremely painful. Hence, sexual intercourse is viewed as a painful obligation for women after marriage, lacking in pleasure, unlike men’s experience of the sex act.

FGM is a socio-cultural tradition that has negative and harmful consequences on the lives of women who are forced to undergo it. However, it is justified by myths and half-truths. Ali views the procedure as a form of torture used to suppress women’s sexuality and render them chattels in patriarchal societies for male pleasure.

Physical and Psychological Ramifications of FGM

In Dan Reisel’s and Sarah Creighton’s article, “Long Term Health Consequences of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)”, they argue that the aforementioned procedure has no health benefits and is “recognised to cause severe short and long term damage to both physical and psychological health” (2014:48). Noemí Pereda, Mila Arch, and Alba Pérez-González are of a similar view as they argue that FGM “can have deleterious consequences for the physical, psychological and sexual lives of its victims” (2012:560). In *Infidel*, Ali draws attention to the physical and physiological ramifications of FGM through her account of Haweya.

During the procedure, Ali recalls Haweya's "bloodcurdling howls" and she notes, "The entire procedure was torture for all of us, but undoubtedly the one who suffered the most was Haweya" (Ali 2007 [2006]:33). Haweya is subjected to further "torture" as she had to be re-sewn as she had torn her wound. Ali reveals the subsequent psychological damage to Haweya as "She carried the scars of [the circumcision] her whole life" (Ali 2007 [2006]:33). Ali recounts:

Haweya was never the same afterward. She became ill with a fever for several weeks and lost a lot of weight. She had horrible nightmares, and during the day began stomping off to be alone. My once cheerful, playful little sister changed. Sometimes she just stared vacantly at nothing for hours. We all started wetting our beds after the circumcision. (Ali 2007 [2006]:33-34)

From the above extract, it can be noted that Haweya's FGM procedure has long and traumatic effects on her, as she experiences horrible nightmares. Furthermore, the fever she suffers from points to the immediate health risks of the procedure. However, Ali further elucidates that the fever lasted several weeks. Haweya also suffers from psychological stress as the procedure triggers behavioural disturbances in her.⁴ She has nightmares and mental health problems which are reflected in her disposition as she "began stomping off to be alone" and "she just stared vacantly at nothing for hours". Later in the text, when Haweya visits Ali in the Netherlands, Ali describes her as "dreamy, absent-minded, unfocused. She couldn't sleep" (227). Even though they share happy moments, "Haweya didn't seem to want to be anywhere", "she had bouts of crying" and "she tramped off on long walks on her own" (227). From the above descriptions, one can note that there is a pattern between Haweya's behaviour after the FGM and years later, when she is in the Netherlands, revealing that her

¹¹ The burden of conforming to patriarchal socio-cultural rules and misogynistic laws is epitomised by an Iranian woman who protested against the Islamic Republic's oppression against women. In an article entitled: "Iranian woman sets herself on fire outside Tehran courthouse after being charged with illegally attending a football match dressed as a man", a woman known as Sahar Khodayari (Blue Girl) set herself on fire in September 2019 after leaving the courthouse where she was told that she could be imprisoned for up to six months for the charges of "insulting the public by defying the dress code for women" and resisting arrest (Nikolic 2019). Her actions were a form of defiance against the country's Islamic government policy that prevents women from attending sporting events. This policy is indicative of the discriminatory laws in Iran and the limitations set for women.

According to Sahar's sister, Sahar was diagnosed as bipolar. Sahar's bipolar condition can be compared to Haweya's behaviour in the text, as Ali notes that Haweya "could be charming, sharp, funny, stylish. But then she would slump again and stop looking after her clothes and her hair" (Ali 2007 [2006]:228). Ali explains Haweya's "memories, her feelings about religion as a little child, her recollections of school and our parents were all swirling around inside her, mixing into her adult life as if they were real" (253). Haweya's mental illness and death are reflective of the psychological ramifications of FGM as well as the pressures on women to conform to societal and cultural expectations. Blue Girl is a symbol of the Islamic Republic's restrictive laws governing women in contemporary society and women's compulsion to protest against these oppressions.

trauma remains harrowing.

In *Infidel*, Ali represents FGM as a dehumanising traditional African and Middle Eastern practice that is not only harmful but life-threatening as it has both short and long-term complications that affect all areas of women's lives. In the text, Ali draws attention to the variety of long-term complications of FGM that affect women's physical, mental, emotional and sexual health and well-being throughout their life.

Psychological and Social Functioning within Polygynous Family Structures

The separation between spouses can be a distressing event in the life of an individual, as reflected in Ali's mother, Asha. Asha's life changes in many ways after her husband remarries, and this negatively affects her psychological well-being. She has the responsibility of being the main custodian of her three children and she experiences a task overload. My exploration in this segment centres on Asha's mental state as a result of the polygynous family structure and the abuse she inflicts on her children, particularly her daughters, to instil obedience and responsibility.

A polygynous family structure has an impact on wives' and children's psychological and social functioning (Al-Krenawi & Graham 2006:5). Findings from Alean Al-Krenawi's and John Graham's research reveals that women in polygynous marriages experience more difficulties in marital, familial, psychological, and life satisfaction dimensions as opposed to women in monogamous family structures (10). Their research also found that there is a myriad of psychological and social issues associated with polygyny, as women are more prone to be subjected to marital distress which ensues in a reduced level of caring, as well as withdrawal, depression and hostility (12-13).

The above effects are reflected through Asha, who "remained completely dependent. She nursed grievances; she was resentful; she was often violent; and she was always depressed" (Ali 2007[2006]:67). Ali narrates:

She developed great whirlwinds of sudden, random anger. She smashed furniture and plates. She broke two charcoal braziers because they wouldn't light. Where she had been merely distant, and occasionally even kind, she began to beat us for the slightest misdemeanour, grabbing our hair, hitting us until she couldn't lift her hand anymore. She was tyrannical, unreasonable; she screamed a lifetime of

frustration in our faces.

I knew it was not hatred for us but because she was so unhappy, and I pitied her. Our mother had been abandoned in a foreign country that she scorned, with three children to guide and no man to act as her anchor. Her daily life in no way resembled the life to which she aspired and that she felt she deserved. My mother saw herself as a victim. Once upon a time she had shaped her future and made decisions – she had left Somalia for Aden, divorced her first husband and chosen my father – but at some point, it seemed, she lost hope. (67)

Asha is a victim of circumstances and has no control over her life. She absorbs the Arab attitude that pious women should not work, therefore she does not make any attempt to work or create a life for herself. In addition to her unemployment, she has limited economic resources as a result of her husband's commensurately apportioned resources as a result of the polygynous marriage. Furthermore, she represents the emotional damage to women as a result of polygyny as she "developed great whirlwinds of sudden, random anger". Ali's comparison of Asha's behaviour to a whirlwind emphasises Asha's violence and the physical damage she inflicts during her sudden and rapid outbreaks. She is triggered by minor tribulations, for example, the charcoal braziers not lighting or the "slightest misdemeanors" by her children.

Research also shows: "Women in polygamous marriages scored significantly higher ratings in all psychological dimensions in the BSI [Brief Symptom Inventory]: somatisation, interpersonal sensitivity, depression, anxiety, phobic anxiety, paranoid ideation, psychoticism and GSI [Global Severity Index]" (Al-Krenawi & Graham 2006:13). Asha's somatisation is exhibited in her negative attitude and violent behaviour. In the above extract, she is characterised as erratic as she suppresses her emotions and then explodes with pain and violence. She is described as "tyrannical, unreasonable; she screamed a lifetime of frustration in our faces" (Ali 2007[2006]:67).

Even though Ali transforms her life and acquires freedom and autonomy, Ali's mother does not have the same fate. Ali notes that Asha's "daily life in no way resembled the life to which she aspired and that she felt she deserved" (67). Initially, Asha is an agent of her life, as she makes the decision to go to Aden and she also exhibits courage when she divorces her first husband. However, given her situation of no financial income or personal freedom, Asha sinks into an abyss of dismay. Through the characterisation of Asha, Ali reveals how culture not only shapes what individuals think but also how they think of themselves.

Religious and Patriarchal Abuses in Islam

“Until the present time, the Islamic tradition and Muslim culture remain overwhelmingly patriarchal”, declares Islamic feminist author, Riffat Hassan (1999:250). A discussion of the misogynistic and androcentric practices in Islam that Ali highlights in *Infidel* is pivotal in relation to the objective of this chapter. My discussion centres on Ali’s experiences in Saudi Arabia, as well as the role of the hijab and the patriarchal rules for women that force them into submission by analysing Ali’s view of submission in Islam. In addition, I explore the violent episode inflicted by the *ma’alim* because of Ali’s defiance of religious instructions, which results in her having a fractured skull.

Ali’s dissent from Islam begins during her experiences in Saudi Arabia, which Ali describes as an “Islam originated country” governed strictly by scriptures from the Qur’an. Even though Islam is a source of solace, and provides hope and provides a sense of identity for individuals across the globe, there are verses in the Qur’an that feminists, such as Riffat Hassan (1995), Miriam Cooke (2002) and Haleh Afshar (2008) label misogynistic because they are inconsistent with the modern rights of women. In *Infidel*, Saudi Arabia is described as “God’s country, the homeland of the Prophet Muhammad. A truly Muslim country, it was resonant with Allah, the most suitable place to bring up your children” (Ali 2007 [2006]:37). This is noteworthy as Islam plays a central role in Saudi Arabia and Islamic law is a dominant factor in public life. However, Ali reflects Saudi Arabia in a negative light because of the oppression of women. She notes that by law in Saudi Arabia, women must be in the care of a man, therefore Ali’s mother faces challenges on her arrival to the country as she cannot leave the airport or be accepted in a taxi without a man. Furthermore, she is not allowed to go out into public without a male guardian. In order to make a phone call, she has to take her ten-year-old son to act as her “protective male”. This is one example of Saudi Arabia’s discriminatory policies towards women.

Studies from the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women reveal that “The 1992 Basic Law of Saudi Arabia does not guarantee gender equality. Article 8 requires that the government be premised on equality in accordance with Shari’ah law, but under Shari’ah law, women are considered to be legal minors, under the control of their guardian” (UN Women 2015). Due to the strict interpretation and application of Shariah law in Saudi Arabia, gender inequality in the country is one of the highest in the

world. The World Economic Forum's 2020 Global Gender Gap Report ranked Saudi Arabia 146 out of 153 countries for gender parity (2019).

In Saudi Arabia, Ali is subjected to double discrimination because of the intersectionality of race and gender. She recalls: "They called Haweya and I *Abid*, which means slaves. Being called a slave – the racial prejudice this term conveyed – was being part of what I hated in Saudi Arabia" (Ali 2007 [2006]:42). She further claims: "To be a woman out on her own was bad enough. To be a foreigner, and moreover a black foreigner, meant you were barely human, unprotected: fair game" (Ali 2007 [2006]:48). Ali's statement points to the victimisation of women within patriarchal Muslim societies where women are subjected to physical and emotional confinement. Furthermore, they are vulnerable to atrocities of physical and sexual assault.

Since the 1970s, women have begun to realise that "religion is being used as an instrument of oppression rather than a means of liberation from unjust social structures and systems of thought and conduct" (Hassan 1999:251). The theological inferiority of women within patriarchal Muslim societies is depicted in Ali's description of the status of women in Islam:

A Muslim woman must not feel wild, or free, or any of the other emotions and longings [...]. A Muslim girl does not make her own decisions or seek control. She is trained to be docile. If you are a Muslim girl, you disappear, until there is almost no you inside you. In Islam, becoming an individual is not necessary development; many people, especially women, never develop a clear individual will. You submit: that is the literal meaning of *islam*: submission. The goal is to become quiet inside, so that you never raise your eyes, not even inside your mind. (Ali 2007 [2006]:94)

The above extract describes the "ideal Muslim woman" who is depicted as a passive and agentless victim who has to conceal her "emotions or longings". Furthermore, these women have to "disappear", which signposts the segregation of men and women within the "private" and "public" spaces within traditional societies. Women within patriarchal societies are confined to the "private", which is the home, and prescribed the roles of domestic chores, while the "public" spaces which are anywhere out of the home are regarded as the domain of men. The intrusion of women into "public" spaces is viewed as a disruption/destruction of the order of things (Hassan 1992:252). Furthermore, if women enter into "public" spaces, they must make themselves "faceless", which is achieved through veiling (252). However, it must be noted that the Qur'an does not confine women to the "private" space, as "confinement to

the home is prescribed as a punishment for unchaste women” (274). In addition, the above interpretation of a Muslim woman as “docile” is misogynistic and perpetuates male dominance. The restrictions for women prevented from making decisions point to the theological assumption that women are secondary, subordinate and responsible for the fall of man. This is because women are believed to have been created from man’s rib and are therefore derivative and secondary ontologically (254). Furthermore, as a result of Eve’s deception within the Garden of Eden, women are perceived with “hatred, suspicion and contempt” (254).

Even though the Qur’an does not create a hierarchy between men and women, women are forced to subscribe to patriarchal religious instructions that restrict their identities. Patriarchal interpretations of the word “*qawwamun*” in the Qur’an has supported the belief that men have the right to rule over women and even to beat them (263). These patriarchal interpretations have forced some women into submission and prevented them from questioning unequal power relations. In *Infidel*, Ali also makes reference to numerous *ahadith* that mandate that women must not refuse to have sexual relations with their husbands. As mentioned above, pleasing one’s husband is seen as more important than pleasing God, because “most Muslims believe that a woman cannot please God except through pleasing her husband” (268). In addition to these rules, Ali notes that women are instructed to shave their underarms and pubic hair to make themselves pure, as “Womanhood was both irresistibly desirable and essentially filthy, and all these interventions were necessary to earn Allah’s pleasure” (Ali 2007 [2006]:84).

Muslim women are also mandated to wear the hijab because of the belief that Allah instructs women to cover their faces and hands. Hence, wearing the hijab is an act of obedience to Allah. As discussed in the Introduction of the thesis, the hijab is a symbol of political Islam and cultural identity; however, it is also a symbol of Muslim women’s oppression as it is viewed as a means to control women’s behaviour and sexuality. The hijab is a controversial issue as it can be understood in a variety of ways. The concept of the hijab can refer to the wearing of a headscarf or the total covering of the body from head to foot. In addition, the hijab has functioned as a symbol of Muslim women’s oppression; however, it is also viewed by some as an emblem of women’s political, economic and socio-cultural emancipation as well as a means of asserting their identities. Muslim women across the globe wear the headscarf as an act of free choice; hence this is not viewed as a restriction of their autonomy.

However, Hassan argues: “total veiling of the body, especially if it is imposed externally, certainly constitutes a serious deterrent to the full and healthy development of Muslim women” (1999:274). In the text, Ali brings to light how the hijab is a means of controlling women’s sexuality. She notes that one of the seductions of Satan is “the desire to look beautiful and attract men” (Ali 2007 [2006]: 83). Hence, women are compelled to cover themselves from head to foot. Hassan comments: “If, for instance, the Qur’an had intended for women to be completely veiled, why would it have required Muslim men to lower their gaze when looking at them?” (1999:275).

In *Infidel*, Ali is also critical of the hijab in Saudi Arabia as she describes the Muslim women as “shapes”. She narrates this scene as follows:

all the women in this country were covered in black. They were humanlike shapes. The front of them was black and back of them was black, too. You could see which way they were looking only by the direction their shoes pointed. We could tell they were women because the lady who was holding our hands tightly to prevent us from wandering off was covered in black, too. You could see her face, because she was Somali. Saudi women had no faces. (Ali 2007 [2006]:40)

In the above extract, Ali exposes her ignorance of the veil as veiling is foreign in her clan. However, later in the autobiography, she explains that this form of veiling has now spread among the Somali fundamentalists. In the above scene, Ali draws attention to the form of veiling in which there is a total covering of the body from the head to foot. This is signified when Ali notes after close inspection of the “black shapes” to determine where their eyes could be, Ali and her siblings shriek in mockery after discovering, “They have hands!” (40). Ali acknowledges, “We were truly awful, but what we were seeing was so alien, so sinister, that we were trying to tame it, make it less awful” (40).

Contrary to the passive and agentless victimised women depicted by Ali, Rami Mustafa and Salah Troudi have found that the Saudi women they worked with exercised subjectivity and agency (2019:135). From the women interviewed in their research, Mustafa and Troudi also found that not only did the women have the ability to make choices and pursue their goals as individuals, but they also had the opportunity to pursue education overseas and seek employment opportunities (135). Mustafa and Troudi further note that examples of Saudi women in top tiers in governments include

the historical appointment of 30 Saudi women to the Shura Council (similar to the US Congress) in 2013, and the 20 Saudi women winning municipal elections in 2015. The year 2017 was of Saudi women for it witnessed the appointment of Princess Rima to head the Multi-Sport Federation, the naming of Fatima Baeshen as the spokesperson for the Saudi embassy in Washington, DC, choosing Hind Al-Zahid as the executive director of Dammam airport, and naming Sarah Al Suhaimi as head of the Saudi stock market. (135)

Since the publication of *Infidel*, there has been a significant shift in respect of the issue of female empowerment in Saudi Arabia. Mustafa's and Troudi's research reveal that from 2013 Saudi women have come to occupy senior and competitive positions in both the private and public sectors. The Saudi Arabia that Ali experiences in her childhood has transformed and become more progressive as Saudi women are attaining power and leadership roles within the country. In addition to this, Saudi women have become more liberated in the last few years (as compared to the years prior) because they are now able to run and vote in elections and have the choice to drive. Despite these social reforms, a large population of Saudi women remain "second-class citizens" because of the myriad of restrictions that mandate them into a position of inferiority. With that being said, more and more Saudi women are showing radical resistance to oppressive restrictions.

Even though Ali only becomes a distinguished member of the Dutch government later in her life, she exhibits subjectivity and agency from a young age. In *Infidel*, Ali and Haweya reject religious exploitation and challenge the *ma'alim's* religious authority. Ali and Haweya display agency and insolence when they reject Qur'anic teachings from the *ma'alim* as in defiance they tell him, "You're primitive. You don't teach us religion properly" (74). The *ma'alim's* reaction to this situation is that the children need discipline, and he takes it into his own hands to do so. This scene is described thus:

They dragged me inside and the *ma'alim* blinded me with a cloth and started to hit me with all his strength with a sharp stick, to teach me a lesson.

Because I had been washing the floor I was wearing only an undershirt and skirt; my arms and legs were bare, and the lashes were really painful. Suddenly I felt a surge of rage. I took off the blindfold and glared at the *ma'alim*. I really wanted to stand up to this man. He grabbed my braided hair and pulled my hair back, and then shoved it against the wall. I distinctly heard a cracking noise. Then he stopped. (75)

In the above extract, we see how religious abuse is administered under the guise of religious teachings/discipline. Ali vividly describes how they "dragged" her inside and blindfolded her.

Furthermore, she notes that the *ma'alim* hit her with all his strength using a “sharp stick”. The above descriptions reveal the abuse of religion by religious authorities for egotistical ends as the *ma'alim* reacts in this manner because of Ali’s defiance against Qur’anic teachings from him. He employs force and violence to exert his power and authority over Ali. Furthermore, Ali is humiliated during this encounter as she is “wearing only an undershirt and skirt”. Ali further testifies that the *ma'alim* shoved her head against the wall and only stopped after the cracking noise. Not only is this an example of child abuse but Ali claims that she was almost killed during this incident as a result of her fractured skull. In this scene, there is an emotional detachment between Ali and the *ma'alim*, as in the beginning of the extract, she refers to him as the *ma'alim*; however, this changes by the end as she refers to him as “this man”. This denotes her disassociation and disconnection from religious authority.

In the above passage, Ali’s will power is foregrounded. During the *ma'alim*’s administration of the lashes, Ali develops a “surge of rage”, emphasising her anger and fury directed at the *ma'alim* for his inhumane actions. Ali responds by taking off her blindfold and glaring at the *ma'alim*. This glare is a symbol of Ali’s strength, ferocity as well as defiance as women are expected to lower their gaze within patriarchal Islamic societies.

Ali’s dissent from Islam originates from her belief that Islam is characterised by androcentric and misogynistic practices which force women into submission. Some of these practices, as discussed above, include: the supervision of women by male relatives, the mandate for women to remain passive, confined to the “private” sphere, and to become “faceless”, as well as religious abuse under the guise of religious teachings. Contrary to the decree that women remain passive and docile, Ali exhibits agency and resilience, and challenges oppressive religious forces.

Poststructural Feminist Atheism

Even though negative associations have debased atheism, it is regarded as a respectable philosophical tradition. “[I]f atheism is understood to consist in a denial of God, one first has to ask precisely what God is being denied”, notes Gavin Hyman, a key scholar in religion, politics and philosophy. (2010:5). This question is paramount in relation to understanding Ali’s views and her identity as an “infidel”. As cited in the epigraph, Ali asserts: “To accept subordination and abuse because Allah willed it – that, for me, would be self-hatred” (Ali

2007 [2006]:348). Ali has renounced her Islamic religion because of her belief that Islam supports the suppression of and injustices against women.

A key theorist for this section, Donovan Schaefer, calls for a refreshed atheism that integrates feminist and poststructural convergent streams. Schaefer's article entitled "Embodied Disbelief: Poststructural Feminist Atheism" examines the three domains of feminist scholarship, namely: epistemology, relationality, and affect (2014:375). My argument in this section is that Ali may be identified as a poststructural feminist atheist because of her focus on the oppression of Muslim women at the hands of extremist visions of the Islamic religion and her embodied disbelief in God. Building on this argument, I explore how Ali's atheism may be correlated with Schaefer's three domains. In order to achieve this, I explore Ali's internal rebellion against women's traditional subjugation and her critique of the unfairness of the rules for women when God is conceived as a just God.

After identifying the flaws in her belief structure and being unable to comprehend the injustices in Islam, Ali identifies herself as an atheist. Schaefer asserts that the requirements for a feminist epistemology for an embodied disbelief are a "sinuous and compelling call for epistemological humility, a recognition of how knowledge is constituted through embodied circumstances" (376). Subsequent to renouncing her religion, Ali believes that she can navigate through life based on her own reason and self-respect as her moral compass is within herself and no longer in the pages of the Qur'an. Schaefer adds, "Poststructural feminist atheism is about finding constructive ways to engage with alternate epistemological vocabularies – without feeling the need to dominate, eliminate, or clarify them according to an atheist logic" (377). Ali resorts to reading books from thinkers dated from the Enlightenment period to contemporary society, including Spinoza, Locke, Kant, Mill, Voltaire, Russell, and Popper, for moral support. These books are an indication of Ali's focus on philosophy and rationality rather than spiritual belief.

Relationality as the second dimension of poststructural feminist atheism illustrates that it "is a new set of relational practices that emerges in a living conversation between believers and nonbelievers" (379). Thus, Ali has conversations with Ellen, a firm believer in Christianity, in which she confesses her doubts about the existence of God. Even though Ellen is disappointed about Ali's views on God, she is understanding and supportive of Ali. Schaefer further claims that bodies are connected to individuals in society, and there is an embodied

need for community. Hence, Ali feels isolated from her family and those of Islamic faith because she is alienated due to her atheist beliefs. She is disowned and shunned by her family and is regarded as an “infidel”. In the autobiography, Ali articulates her feelings of living in exile.

The third dimension of poststructural feminist atheism is emotion which serves as a register for knowledge-production as emotions shape, direct and define one’s observations. In other words, emotions are the mechanism for the fortification of the us/them divide. Thus, Ali’s defiance is instigated by the unequal male/female dichotomy in Islam. As a result of affective forces, Ali attacks misogynistic beliefs of women as well as the unequal views of women in Islam.

Even as a child, I could never comprehend the downright unfairness of the rules, especially for women. How could a just God – a God so just that almost every page of the Quran praises His fairness – desire that women be treated so unfairly? When the *ma’alim* told us that a woman’s testimony is worth half of a man’s, I would think, *Why?* If God was merciful, why did He demand that His creatures be hanged in public? If He was compassionate, why did unbelievers have to go to Hell? If Allah was almighty and powerful, why didn’t He just make believers out of the unbelievers and have them all go to Paradise? (94)

The above passage draws attention primarily to the oppressive beliefs and practices present in Islam. Ali criticises Islam for being a religion that is oppressive towards women because it supports the inferior position of women in society. She argues that Islam is characterised by unfairness because of the misogynistic rules against women that are premised on male dominance. As mentioned in the Introduction of the thesis, male dominance is reinforced through the legitimacy of God/Allah or religion. Hassan has also challenged the presence of patriarchal scriptures within Islamic sources. Hassan is also critical of the views used to advocate gender inequality within Islam, namely that men are “rulers” in relation to women or that the witness of one man is equal to that of two women (1998:143). In addition to the above patriarchal beliefs, Ali argues in the text that wives are expected to show total obedience to their husbands, and if they disobey them, husbands are allowed to beat their wives. This reinforcement of women’s physical abuse is viewed as a limitation for women’s individuality.

In addition to the misogynistic laws, Ali is critical of radical Islamist extremists and the justification of violence by Islamic sources. As a political activist, she challenges the

interpretation and application of Islamic law that justifies extra-judicial violence. Ali juxtaposes life in the Grand Mosque with life outside the mosque. The Grand Mosque serves as a unifying sacred space where inequalities of race, gender, class and nationality disappear and where there is no oppression or malice. Ali positively refers to sacred symbols in Islam, for example the Grand Mosque, which is described in the text as a source of divinity. Asha finds “comfort in the vastness and beauty of the Grand Mosque, and it seemed to give her hope and a sense of peace” (Ali 2007 [2006]:43). In other words, the Mosque serves as a psychological resource for Asha in Saudi Arabia. Within this context, Asha can be regarded as an epitome of the many Muslims who therapeutically draw from religious spaces. In addition, in the Grand Mosque, there is a communal ambiance as the individuals are patient with each other and show no prejudice. Hence, it is characterised as a place of belonging and one that has a unifying effect. In this Grand Mosque, which is described as beautiful, having a quality of timelessness and full of kindness, Ali feels peaceful. However, she notes: “But as soon as we left the mosque, Saudi Arabia meant intense heat and filth and cruelty” (43). This is a reference to Saudi Arabia’s inhumane laws that execute citizens or where hands are cut off, men beaten, and women stoned. The violent attacks against civilians are a threat to human security and the causes of such violence have been justified by Islamic law (Clarke 2009:1). Radical Islamists propagate this justification and violent ideologies. In Pakistan, any statement condemning the Prophet or Islam is labelled as sacrilege, and the individual is liable to be punished by death (Ali 2015:1).

Even though the Islamic religion has been perceived as a conservative force because it inhibits women’s rights and freedom, it is also regarded as progressive because it is a resource for social change. Firouzeh Ameri states in “Sacred Spaces in Contemporary English Literature: Muslim Contributions” that a number of novels have been written by women authors who tell a different story about Muslim women (2006:1). These novels centre on the spiritual dimensions of Islam and portray the deeply devotional relationship between the female protagonist and the Islamic religion (1). Ameri’s article explores four novels, namely: *Sweetness in the Belly* (2005) by Camilla Gibb, *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* (2006) by Mohja Kahf, and *The Translator* (1999) and *Minaret* (2005) by Leila Aboulela, discussing the theme of spirituality in relation to the lives of Muslim women characters. After the loss of her family and financial support, the protagonist in *Minaret* acquires a sense of belonging after turning to her Islamic religion (Ameri 2006:4). Similar to Ali, the protagonist in *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf* starts to doubt her religious community and her religious

faith; however, unlike Ali, she embarks on a spiritual journey which culminates in a deeper faith (5).

Patriarchal interpretations of the Qur'an and other Islamic sources have been a major source contributing to and supporting the unequal power relations between men and women. Ali is affiliated with the New Atheists, a feminist atheist group, who employ an abolitionist approach to religion (Schaefer 2014:374). She challenges Islamic sources and the Islamic religion as a whole because of its role in subordinating and suppressing women because of its biased content. She claims that government institutions need to engage more in debates about religious freedom and gender equality. However, contrary to Ali's negative representations of the Islamic religion, there are a number of novels that offer an alternative to the dominant negative paradigms of Islam and Muslim women. These novels depict Islam as a religion characterised by sacredness and is a source of solace and empowerment for women who take refuge in it.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have undertaken a textual analysis of Ali's autobiography and explored her personal experiences to demonstrate how religion and patriarchy can be used to suppress women's identities. Ali's autobiography exposes how traditional patriarchal practices locate the place of women in a subordinate position. In addition to this, Ali points out that Islamic extremists manipulate the precepts of Islam to oppress and suppress women. *Infidel* expresses a degree of truth about Muslim women's oppression; however, Ali has fallen into the trap of reinforcing orientalist discourse as a result of her lack of context, generalisations and selectivity. She states: "The message of this book, if it must have a message, is that we in the West would be wrong to prolong the pain of that transition [to modernity] unnecessarily, by elevating cultures full of bigotry and hatred toward women to the stature of respectable alternative ways of life" (2007 [2006]:348). Ali's identification with the West reinforces the "us" versus "them" stereotype. Furthermore, she posits the West as a utopian society. Nonetheless, as a feminist and political activist, Ali challenges sexism, sexist exploitation, the oppression of women and religious patriarchal beliefs. However, it must be noted that Ali's autobiography, which is sub-titled *My Life*, is a personal account and her views on Islam are expressions of her personal life and experiences and are, therefore, subjective representations of Islam.

My analysis in this chapter centred on an investigation of Ali's struggle for freedom, equality and justice, and her critique of traditional African and Islamic oppressions of African women. I also analysed how she uses her autobiography to challenge Muslim fundamentalism and explored the significant events in her life where patriarchal and religious oppression thwart her personal development. In the autobiography, Ali offers pertinent examples of gender inequalities that are legitimised and endorsed by patriarchal readings of Islamic sources. Through these examples, Ali seeks to highlight the deeply rooted theological inferiority of women within patriarchal Muslim societies and encourages a critique of the patriarchal interpretations of Islamic teachings based on Islamic sources.

Ali criticises patriarchal Islamic gender ideologies by drawing attention to social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit Muslim women. Through the description of her personal experiences she reveals how the patriarchal system cedes more power and status to men. Traditionally, males are often placed in a powerful position in relation to women due to patriarchy and practices such as polygyny, FGM, forced marriages, and Shariah law where women inherently hold a subordinate position to men. However, as a feminist atheist, Ali challenges misogynistic religious beliefs and argues that men and women should be accorded equal rights and that men and women are equal in life. Ali's autobiography narrates her struggle for self-reliance and dignity in a patriarchal environment fraught with numerous obstacles to freedom and individuality. She challenges prescribed roles imposed on her by dominant traditional and religious discourses and creates an alternate identity.

Ali has had the opportunity to make autonomous choices to earn an income and escape pressures of forced marriages because of globalisation, which has resulted in the spread of human rights laws and internationalisation of laws protecting women and children. However, the implementation of laws does not necessarily result in the application of laws. In January 2020, police in Egypt arrested the parents and aunt of a 17-year-old girl who died while undergoing FGM (BBC News 2020). Even though FGM was banned in Egypt in 2008, "the country still has one of the highest rates of the practice in the world", as Egyptians believe that FGM is a religious requirement (2020). In this article from BBC News, campaigners against FGM are fearful of more disasters as many young girls are at risk of FGM as it is performed in the name of promoting chastity and individuals wrongfully see it as a religious duty. The article and video from BBC news aim to change the views of FGM and the mindset

of individuals who believe in this practice. Campaigners against FGM and the oppression of women and girls particularly place emphasis on the role of education and activism. Ali has a similar viewpoint as she employs her literary texts as sources of education for liberation. Ali's didacticism and activism are exemplified in *Infidel* as she challenges the reader to reflect on issues such as the denial of education for girls, FGM, forced marriages, honour killings and the abuse of religion. She also challenges the reader to ruminate on the definition of religious tolerance by illustrating how the Qur'an mandates the suppression and oppression of women.

As an emancipator for women, Ali speaks out against violence against women and religious/cultural extremism, particularly within Africa but also in the West. Ali's non-profit AHA (Ayaan Hirsi Ali) Foundation aims to challenge religiously endorsed forms of violence against women and promote women's rights.

CHAPTER FIVE

“DRIVEN BY AND BLINDED BY OUR DESPERATION”: RELIGIOUS EXPLOITATION OF VULNERABLE WOMEN IN AMMA DARKO’S *NOT WITHOUT FLOWERS*

People testified so positively about the many healings that had occurred there. One thought was to simply try it out and see. If it worked, fine. If it didn't, we would simply take her away. And we were given the impression there would be no complications. We decided unanimously. We may have also been driven by and blinded by our desperation. Or maybe too, deep down, we suspected and were afraid of some answers that might have come up if we probed too much. Answers that would have given us good cause not to bring her here. But we were at our wits end and unprepared for any reason not to try it out. Our options were too few for us to start cancelling some even before we tried them out.

(Darko 2007:36)

Introduction

This chapter is an analysis of the representation of religion in the novel, *Not without Flowers* (2007) showing exploitation and resistance, and briefly comparing this analysis with the representation of the character, Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* (2013), a novel set in Zimbabwe. The fictional representations of religious exploitation by the prophets in the two novels are reflective of the unacceptable behaviour by certain disreputable religious leaders in society who abuse people's vulnerability and endanger their lives.

The quotation used as the title of this chapter, “Driven by and blinded by our desperation”, clearly expresses one justification individuals have for the predisposition to be dependent on

religious and traditional healing to meet the needs of curing various ailments. The situation described in the quotation refers to a family's hopes of finding a miracle cure in a religious camp for their mother's mental anguish. While this is a specific situation, it is emblematic of people's desires to invoke spiritual aid in solving physical and psychological problems. In contemplating the above extract from Darko's novel, it may be pertinent to reflect on the global pandemic, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), commonly known as Coronavirus or Covid-19. In the midst of the Coronavirus outbreak, in South Africa and across the globe, one spotlight is on religion and religious organisations as religious leaders occupy a position of authority, influence, and impact in society. But one may ask: what is the connection between the Covid-19 pandemic and Darko's novel, *Not without Flowers*?

My argument in this chapter is that the fear and anxiety surrounding mental illness, HIV/Aids, or other illnesses become a fertile ground for religious exploitation and oppression and/or stigmatisation of vulnerable women as represented in Darko's novel, which portrays issues similar to those faced during the current global crisis. In this discussion, I examine how Darko illustrates in *Not without Flowers* how cultural norms and religious institutions sometimes tend to disparage illnesses, associate symptoms with religious or spiritual causes, or simply dismiss their existence as a health condition requiring biomedical treatment. Drawing on instances from the epidemic, I also reveal the importance and pertinence of Darko's text as she sheds light on the spiritualisation of illnesses and crises, which may prove detrimental to the health and well-being of individuals.

As mentioned in the Introduction of the thesis, religion is defined as "what people believe in; their spirituality and how this shapes people's relationships with each other and with God – the Almighty" (Rwafa 2016:43). Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi and Michael Argyle in "The Psychology of Religious Behaviour, Belief, and Experience" explain, "The term 'religion' brings to mind countless baffling scenes and images, from saintliness to cruelty" (1997:1). In other words, religion is a source of spiritual parity and ethical guidance but also an instrument of oppression, as discussed throughout this study. Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle also study the personality between men and women and have noted that these gender differences are relevant to women's religiosity (142). Drawing from Beit-Hallahmi's and Argyle's research, I explore why women are the predominant followers of religious leaders and the exploitation that women are subjected to due to patriarchal socialisation. This is

according to my argument in this thesis that there is a direct link between religion and patriarchy as religion may be regarded as an instrument that is used to preserve patriarchal power relations.

Feminist social philosophy is critical of patriarchy as it deems it an obstacle for women as it promotes male dominance and female subservience. Raphael Tayol, a key scholar in language, discourse, and society, uses social theory as a theoretical bearing, in his paper “Social Commitment in Amma Darko’s *The Housemaid* and *Faceless*”, to discuss how Darko “is socially committed to shaping the moral conscience of contemporary African society” (2019:153). Tayol notes: “The publication of a literary work is essentially an act of commitment through which the writer seeks to present ideas relating to perceptions about life visible in that society” (154). Drawing from Tayol’s paper, this chapter centres on an exploration of how Darko, as a feminist writer for social justice, exposes the injustices in Ghanaian society in *Not without Flowers*.

In the novel, Darko reveals how religious leaders and institutions exploit vulnerable women through controversial worldviews that promote the authority of charismatic Christian leaders’ prophecies. This resonates with the recent Covid-19 pandemic in which unscrupulous Christian leaders across the globe exerted their power and influence, and prophesied that the virus “is a curse for the spirit of ingratitude to God” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2020). Furthermore, the virus was considered to be “spiritual warfare” as “Many Pentecostal Christians, in Africa as well as other continents, portray the coronavirus as a ‘spiritual force of evil’ rather than as a biomedical disease” (Kirby, Taru & Chimbidzikai 2020). The reference to ailments and illnesses as “spiritual” is not a new phenomenon, as “Evil spirits are believed to be the root cause of many problems people face [...]. The spirits are classified into categories. There are many spirits of poverty, diseases, death or infertility” (Mahohoma 2017:8). This is represented in the text through the exposition of mental illness and HIV/Aids in Ghana.

In *Not without Flowers*, Darko “develops her thematic by representing many growing social issues in African postcolonial countries”, and she portrays Africa’s decaying morality and decency (Gbaguidi & Djossou 2018:130, 131). Critical scholars in research on Africa and the African diaspora, Célestin Gbaguidi and Koumagnon Alfred Djossou (2018), explore the phenomenon of sugar-daddies and sugar-mummies in *Not without Flowers*. In addition to this, they highlight the underlying causes of this phenomenon, namely: “poverty, sexual

fantasies, lust, and money-guided love affairs” (131). A number of articles have been published which focus on how Darko challenges the prevailing traditional views of patriarchy and how she projects her female characters as survivors of patriarchal oppression (Adjei 2009, Umezurike 2015, Ofofu 2013, Allagbé 2016, Gbaguidi & Djossou 2018). Even though patriarchy and patriarchal oppression are pertinent areas for my thesis, I divert from a general analysis of the patriarchal and feminist issues of polygyny, prostitution and childlessness; instead, I explore how these issues become avenues for religious institutions and leaders to exploit women. Research shows that “significantly more women than men are particularly vulnerable to [religious leaders’] services. This is partly because of cultural expectations shaped by the patriarchal nature of the society” (Agazue 2016:7). In this chapter, I explore from a feminist lens how religion is one social ill in African countries as religious leaders have become a source of “decaying morality and decency”.

Juliana Ofofu, a literary critic, “identifies how Darko uses prose fiction as a vehicle to cross-examine the complexities of the Ghanaian woman’s life in relation to culture and gender” (2013:178). Ofofu’s paper draws on Womanist literary theory and African feminist perspectives, and explains: “The feminist voice in [the] paper concedes the aim of feminism as an advocacy for the rights of women, and African feminism as a call for looking at issues bothering them with an African eye” (178). In this textual analysis of *Not without Flowers*, I explore how Darko uses prose fiction to deconstruct the patriarchal status quo through the use of various literary techniques such as narration, critical discourse, characterisation, and character naming.

The title of the novel is significant as it relates to the context of the literary text. The title encapsulates and affirms the plot of the novel, which revolves around the story of three desperate siblings (Kweku, Cora, and Randa) and the mental instability of their mother (Ma). Cora has recurrent nightmares about her mother’s funeral, which is commemorated with flowers. However, her mother loathes flowers and destroys all the flowers in her house during her mental breakdown. The reader learns that the mother’s hatred of flowers results from her husband’s extramarital affair with a young woman (Aggie) whom he nicknames “Flower”. After the failed attempts for the mother to be cured at psychiatric hospitals and prayer camps, the siblings are determined to seek vengeance against “Flower”. They achieve this through Randa having an affair with Idan (Aggie’s husband) and Cora posing as a researcher in order to attempt to dismantle the polygynous marriage of Ntifor (Aggie’s father) under the pretence

that this is the only way to heal his boil ailment. The novel ends on a reconciliatory note as the siblings are able to generate pain and suffering for Aggie, and their mother wishes to “smell the delightful perfume of a bunch of beautiful yellow roses” (Darko 2007:369).

It is noteworthy that the mother suffers from a mental illness, as feminists suggest that mental illness in women is a consequence of the oppression they face (Busfield 1988:521). There are also higher levels of mental illness observed in women as compared to men in terms of admission to psychiatric beds or consultations with medical practitioners, as represented in the “We Conquer Satan”/“Whip to Conquer Satan” (WCS) prayer camp as there are only women sufferers there (521). Mental illness is viewed by feminists as “a condition which reflects the inequalities and exploitation that exist in contemporary society and the oppression of women in particular: it is a product of women’s disadvantageous social situation, and, indeed, a measure of it” (522). The above stance is represented in *Not without Flowers* as the mother’s mental illness is triggered by her husband’s infidelity with “Flower”. The mother’s obsession with her husband’s extramarital affair “triggers voices, nightmares and paranoia with flora” (Darko 2007:14). Through this depiction, Darko highlights how patriarchy and gender roles contribute to mental health issues in some women. Mental illness is also associated with patriarchal power and “the powerlessness of women in the face of male authority” (Busfield 521). Throughout the novel, the mother is depicted as powerless and a victim of circumstances. However, given that the novel ends on a reconciliatory note, Darko characterises the mother as a survivor of the vicissitudes of patriarchy, as through the assistance of her three children, they achieve revenge against “Flower” and the mother’s mental health is restored.

This chapter’s critical analysis of *Not without Flowers* begins with section one, “WCS Prayer Camp”, in which I explore how human rights violations occur in prayer camps. “Whip to Conquer Satan” is the next section that explores how mental illness is deemed to be caused by a spiritual force or demonic possession. My analysis also centres on a discussion of the techniques used to deal with the above-mentioned illness. Following my review of the prayer camp, a discussion of the role of religious institutions and leaders is pertinent. The next sections centre on an exploration of Prophet Abednego, who is representative of the many unscrupulous prophets emerging in society to acquire status, power, and financial gain. I also analyse and compare the representation of Prophet Abednego in *Not without Flowers* to Prophet Mboro, as well as Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro in NoViolet Bulawayo’s

We Need New Names,¹² a novel set in Zimbabwe. In the next section, I embark on an examination of the stigma associated with HIV/Aids and how peddlers of counterfeit cures prey on the desperation of infected individuals who are seeking treatments for the above illness. The final analytical section centres on Darko's deconstruction of patriarchal structures and its underlying sexist and/or androcentric ideologies, as well as her redefinition of women's situations.

Given that "more than eight-in-ten people identify with a religious group", religion and spirituality are primary influences upon health care beliefs and behaviour of people (Pew Research Center 2012). While there are many religions across the globe, the main focus of this study is on Christianity as "Christians remain the world's largest religious group" and is one the most widely practised religions in Africa (along with Islam) (Pew Research Center 2017). In light of the above comments, it is noteworthy to see how religious institutions and leaders responded to the global pandemic of Covid-19. Religious organisations offered support and guidance to congregants. They also shared information about the virus and aided in strengthening the mental and spiritual health of their congregants as spiritual care is an important component of health management, especially during a crisis as individuals seek solace in religion. Religious beliefs and practices are also a transcendent coping mechanism for many believers. These faith-based organisations also played a major role in saving lives and reducing illnesses related to Covid-19 as they convened gatherings based on a risk assessment in line with guidance from national legislation.

In contemporary society, the need for a "decolonising attitude" towards healthcare is imperative to disrupt the legacy of patriarchal colonisation of medicine. Traditional healing systems, medical pluralism and cultural humility combined with biomedical care all contribute to addressing unequal power imbalances in health as well as the improvement of person-centred care. Inclusivity of biomedical care and traditional healing improves diagnosis, treatment, management and quality of care. As mentioned above, spirituality is a component of health management and helps in coping with illnesses and personal adversity. During the pandemic, religion plays a direct role in healthcare as it promotes coping

¹² Darko and Bulawayo are both feminist authors who expose how their home countries have become places of decadence and exploitation of vulnerable citizens. *Not without Flowers* and *We Need New Names* are both post-colonial novels which highlight the proliferation of unscrupulous religious leaders who debauch desperate women who seek spiritual assistance. Both novels also explore how poverty, lack of education, and the deterioration of health care systems in two African countries, Ghana and Zimbabwe, become a fertile ground for the exploitation of vulnerable women by immoral religious leaders.

mechanisms, recovery and resilience. However, amidst the exemplary positive outcomes of traditional healing, several religious leaders have negatively contributed to traditional healing.

In *Not without Flowers*, Darko sheds light on unscrupulous prophets, mainly through the depiction of Prophet Abednego, who is a “false” prophet who claims the gift of prophecy, miracles, and the ability to speak to and hear God’s voice. Further, he asserts that he has “Special prayers for infertility; special prayers for prosperity and special prayers for visa. And with the visa, there are extra special prayers for American, British and German visas” (Darko 2007:363). These “special prayers” point to the vulnerability and despondency of individuals who have run out of options and turn to churches and prophets for help. However, they are exploited and manipulated by these religious institutions.

While many Christians across the globe have turned to prayer during the Covid-19 pandemic and even commissioned religious acronyms for the virus, for example, “Christ over Viruses and Infectious Diseases”, many religious figures have used this outbreak to gain fame and exploit individuals. South Africa Prophet/Pastor Paseka Mboro Motsoeneng (known as Mboro) of Incredible Happenings Ministry church claimed that he previously received prophecies from God, who showed him that 2020 is going to be a bad year for medical science because of many “incurable” illnesses. Whether or not Mboro received the prophecy in 2019 is questionable, as this is also the same person who “claimed on Facebook that he went to hell and rid the world of its evils by killing the main man himself, Lucifer” (Francke 2017). Despite his bizarre allegations and various controversies (a report also shows that he allegedly removed demons by inserting his hands into female congregants’ vaginas), Prophet Mboro has numerous followers (Naik 2011).

The above instances depict the relationship between religion, violence and patriarchy. René Girard, literary theorist and philosopher of social sciences, analyses the relationship between religion and violence and argues that violence is not foreign in Christianity (1986:35). Religion constitutes an inextricable part of African society, and Christianity is viewed as one major factor contributing to the underdevelopment in Africa (Ainamon and Bodjrenou 2014:1). Susan Rakoczy, a professor of spirituality, religion, philosophy, and classics, explores “the insidious links between patriarchy, violence and Christianity” in “Religion and Violence: The Suffering of Women” (2004:29). Rakoczy’s article explores how patriarchy “is

in itself a form of violence because of its effects on women's dignity and place in society" (29). Christianity is criticised as a patriarchal religion because it "does violence to women through its preponderant use of male language for God, its traditional teaching on women's inferiority, the Household Codes in the New Testament which mandate the subordination of women, and its hierarchical structure" (29). Drawing on Girard's argument, Rakoczy claims: "Violence is symbolic language. It says and does more than it realises as it harms and/or destroys its victim. [...] Christianity has used certain symbols to justify violence, for example, the phrase 'God wills it'" (31). In *Not without Flowers*, Darko exposes how religious language is used by religious leaders to defend their oppression of women by claiming that their actions are "God's will", and this language traps women of faith. One of the strategies certain prophets employ to physically, economically or sexually exploit women is the promise of "spiritual cleansing" or granting of unanswered prayers. In many churches, "women's fear of demons or evil spirits or failing to fulfil the 'will of God' and their faith and trust in the prophets cause them to deliver their bodies to their prophets to handle as they wish" (Agazue 2016:2). Another form of exploitation occurs through prophets/pastors employing several techniques to make money through adherents, such as exorcisms, conventions and vigils. Furthermore, they sell "spiritual materials" to desperate devotees "who are convinced that their problems, such as sickness, impotency, poverty, and many more, will cease after purchasing and using these products" (4).

Amma Darko's Background and Feminist Representations

Amma Darko was born in 1956 in Ghana. Having a transcultural identity, Darko spends her time between Africa and Europe. After graduating with a degree in Industrial Design and working for a year in a centre for technological counselling at the University of Kumasi, Darko moved to Germany, where she resided from 1981 to 1987 (Darko 2006). After returning to Ghana, she worked as a tax collector but has since retired (2006). In 1998/1999, she was appointed by J. M. Coetzee for the Akademie Schloss Solitude Scholarship, as a result of which she contributed to the following publications: *Lexikon der sperrigen Wörter* (2010) and *Solitude Atlas* (2015) (2006).

Darko is the author of *Beyond the Horizon* (1995), *The Housemaid* (1998), *Faceless* (2003), *Not without Flowers* (2007), and *Between Two Worlds* (2015). Each text "typically

approaches and addresses the concerns of women and children, seeking to articulate underclass, working-class, and middle-class experiences and conflicts, homing in especially on the burdens of violence and exploitation shouldered by Ghanaian women” (Arnett 2016:85).

Darko’s texts are characterised as feminist literature as a result of her highly subjective female viewpoint as well as her representations of female characters as active subjects who are expressive and represented as survivors of vicissitudes of patriarchal oppression. Darko presents and contests the culture of patriarchy through her depictions of women as victims of rape, battery, betrayal, polygyny, economic exploitation, and harmful traditional practices. Through these depictions, she reveals how patriarchal and religious traditions are used to exploit women and foster gender inequality in society. However, she also challenges patriarchal oppression through her representations of female characters who reconstitute their subjectivity/agency from positions of oppression and subjugation. She creates “assertive female protagonists who defy male dominance in words and deeds” (48).

Synopsis

Not without Flowers was first published in 2006 in German, under the title *Das Lächeln der Nemesis*.

Not without Flowers revolves around the story of three desperate siblings, Kweku, Cora, and Randa, and the mental instability of their mother. The siblings resort to extreme lengths by sending their mother to a dubious prayer camp in the hope of her being cured of her mental illness. The mother’s mental illness is triggered by their father’s promiscuity and his suicide that ensues.

The reader discovers that the prayer camp is equivalent to a torture chamber for women suffering from psychological problems as the women are exposed to inhumane conditions and subjected to whipping. This is representative of the mental facilities and prayer camps that expose patients to deplorable conditions and, in turn, result in the violation of rights of the patients. With the assistance of a farmer and his son and an investigative journalist (Beam), the siblings secretly and illegally extract their mother out of the institution. After the release of their mother from the prayer camp, the siblings embark on a plan to seek revenge

against Aggie who had an affair with their father. The siblings achieve their goal through the assistance of Prophet Abednego (Raja Hey), who is representative of the proliferation of unscrupulous prophets in Africa who deceive vulnerable individuals with outlandish miracles and prophecies.

Not without Flowers fictionalises the plight of women and girls in contemporary Ghana through Darko's representations of "the perils of apathy in life and infidelity in relationships, the contribution of women to this and the effect on women" (Ofosu 2013:178). Through philosophical reflections of existential problems such as polygyny, motherhood and childlessness, Darko also raises the concomitant effects, which include mental illness, infertility and HIV/Aids.

Human Rights Violations in the WCS Prayer Camp

As a feminist writer, Darko goes beyond gender issues to discuss the realities of her society as she exposes the social ills and challenges within Ghanaian society. Molaria Ogundipe-Leslie, a feminist activist, notes: "Feminists have posited that the woman writer has these two major responsibilities: first, to tell about being a woman; secondly, to describe reality from a woman's view, a woman's perspective" (1987:8). In *Not without Flowers*, Darko writes about the predicament and experiences of Ghanaian women, in particular those suffering from mental illness, as well as the human rights violations they are subjected to.

According to a 2007 report by the World Health Organisation, there are approximately 650 000 Ghanaians out of the 21.6 million population in Ghana who suffer from a severe mental disorder and a further 2 166 000 Ghanaians who suffer from a moderate to mild mental disorder. Hugh Bartlett's article titled "Mental Health and Religious Beliefs in Ghana: An Intersection between Faith and Science" explores the critical roles religion and spirituality play in relation to mental illness in Ghana. Not only are religion and spirituality viewed as the cause of mental illnesses, but religious/spiritual leaders are also directly involved in the treatment of the illness (2016:29). This derives from the beliefs and perceptions that "mental illness is heavily steeped in ideas of spirituality and divine intervention; many people will seek treatment from religious leaders or spiritual healers instead of, or concurrently with, biomedical treatment" (29). In addition to Ghanaians' strong religious beliefs, the inadequate

access to mental health services and lack of resources (both human and financial) are key contributing factors to an individual's tendency to rely on religious institutions.

Studies on Ghana's mental health services reveal that there are severe gaps in the treatment of the mentally ill: "If you are a Ghanaian with a mental illness, there is only a two percent chance you'll receive any treatment. Local mental health services simply don't exist for most people" (Bartlett 2016:29). As in the scenario in the novel, the three siblings are "driven by and blinded by [...] desperation," so the characters seek relief for their mother's mental health disorder at a prayer camp. An analysis of the WCS Prayer Camp illustrates the various human rights violations that occur in the camp.

Christian (predominantly Pentecostal or non-denominational) prayer camps regulated by self-proclaimed prophets started to emerge in the 1920s with the intention of treating physical and mental ailments (30). The prayer camps are independent institutions operated without any supervision from medical representatives or the government. Despite the absence of biomedical staff, patients are treated with pharmaceutical medication, which is a dangerous practice "because of the possibility of harmful drug interactions, overdoses, allergic reactions, and other complications" (31). In addition to this, prayer camps have been criticised for human rights abuses, which have been documented by international organisations such as the Human Rights Watch. "'Like a death sentence': Abuses Against Persons with Mental Disabilities in Ghana 2012" is a report detailing the research carried out by Human Rights Watch in terms of the abuse of people with mental disabilities in Ghana. Some of the human rights abuses that occur include but are not limited to:

involuntary admission and arbitrary detention, prolonged detention, overcrowding, and poor hygiene, chained, forced seclusion, lack of shelter, denial of food, denial of adequate health care, involuntary treatment, stigma and its consequences, physical and verbal abuse, electroconvulsive therapy, and violations against children with disabilities. (2012)

In *Not without Flowers*, Darko elucidates such conditions through the representation of the WCS Prayer Camp. In the prologue of the novel, Kweku, a 62-year-old farmer, the farmer's son, and an investigative reporter (Beam) are on an expedition to the top of the hill. At this point, the reader is unaware of the situation surrounding the expedition. However, the first suggestion surrounding the motive for the journey is revealed through the old farmer who

acknowledges that he “felt obliged to right a wrong being committed in the Almighty God’s name” (Darko 2007:24). This is the first signal that the expedition is related to a religious activity.

After entering a compound, labelled “WCS Prayer Camp” and staring at something, not yet revealed to the reader, Kweku ruminates briefly on the expedition:

Kweku knew what to expect inside the camp. The old woman gave him some information. But the reality offered its own blow. On the floor, where the farmer’s son had pointed, was a figure. She was frail and huddled on a mat on the bare floor, fast asleep. There was no pillow for her head. Kweku shone the torchlight on her face. She was about sixty, with skeletal features, and completely bald, the hair on her head having been shaved off. Around each of her ankles, was an iron ring linked to a thick iron chain. Kweku’s eyes followed the length of the chain to its opposite end. It was hooked through a hole in a huge blunt iron rod buried halfway into the concrete floor in the center of the hut. There were other metal hooks in the hole from other chained ankles. [...]

The frail old woman stank of stale urine. She must have wet herself several times while chained. [...] They tiptoed to the next figure, also bald and huddled on a mat with no pillow. The ankle was also chained. Again Kweku shook his head. They moved on to the next figure, and the next, all women, all old and bald, all frail and chained, all haggard and stinking.

The ninth figure was asleep in a fetal position; as if subconsciously yearning for the warmth and security of a womb, having received too much lashing in the world. [...] Her kaba blouse, old and torn, hung loosely on her frail body. [...] Mission accomplished. He lifted the U-shaped bar and pivoted it to one side to remove the padlock. The figure’s ankles came free from its iron bondage. (27-28)

In the above passage, the reader is alerted to the sinister exploits that occur in the WCS Prayer Camp. Through Darko’s descriptive diction, she highlights the exploitation of women in mental institutions. Old women are subjected to inhumane conditions as they are forced to sleep “huddled on a mat on the bare floor” with no pillows. The word “huddled” reveals that the women are confined in a disorderly manner within a small space in the compound. Furthermore, they are deprived of food and nutrition, which results in their “skeletal features”. Not only are they deprived of nourishment, but they also lack basic hygiene and sanitation, as the women “stank of stale urine”. They also have their hair shaved off, and their ankles are chained “to a thick iron chain”, which is “hooked through a hole in a huge blunt iron rod”. In the above image, the old, frail, and skeletal women are juxtaposed with heavy-duty iron equipment. Darko employs the repetition of the word “iron” to emphasise the

indestructible quality of the equipment. In addition, she creates a negative, dispiriting and dehumanising environment through her use of adjectives such as “thick”, “huge” and “blunt”, which reinforce the inhumane treatment the women are subjected to.

The women in the above extract are also reduced to “figures” and “babies”. The word “figures” derogatively signposts the women’s lack of identities as they lack emotion, character, and a sense of being. They are merely reduced to physical presences rather than human beings as a result of the inhumane conditions they are subjected to. In addition to this, the women are depicted as “babies” because of their vulnerability and inability to care for themselves. The image of the women as “babies” is reinforced later in the text when Kweku carries the woman and observes: “She was so emaciated that she felt like a baby in his arms” (29). This is ironic (as the reader discovers that the ninth woman is Kweku’s mother) because there is a reversal of roles.

The “expedition team” rescues Kweku’s mother from the WCS Prayer camp through “irregular ways” because she is subjected to abuse and inhumane treatment within the parameters of the compound. Furthermore, the perpetrators of the atrocities repudiate the discharge of the patients, so the families have no other option except to enter illegally into the compound and rescue the patients. This resonates with the Ghanaian prayer camps, which are administrated by a prophet who has the responsibilities of assessing spiritual problems, prescribing treatments (such as fasting), and determining when the patient is fully recovered. In the novel, Darko accentuates these potentially life-threatening conditions that patients are exposed to within the prayer camps. Investigations into the circumstances of Ghanaian prayer camps reveal that there the “camps are under-resourced, lacking adequate shelters, bedding, mosquito nets, cleaning supplies, and improved sanitation facilities” (Arias, Taylor, Ofori-Atta & Bradley 2016:3). Furthermore, the use of chains serves practical purposes as it prevents patients from running away and causing harm to themselves or others (9). In other words, chains provided a low-cost means of ensuring that patients cannot escape (9). Investigations of prayer camps show: “Chains were generally anchored to cement and were often typically attached to an individual’s leg, around the ankle. At one camp, socks were used to provide padding on the chains; in general, however, most chains were bare against the legs of patients, causing observable bruising and lacerations” (11).

In *Not without Flowers*, through Darko's narrative technique of vivid details, she describes the oppression and injustice perpetrated against women in religious institutions. Her diction of the WCS prayer camp is very descriptive, which enables the readers to visualise the realities on the ground. Through her language and evocation of powerful images of the exploited women and the deplorable nature of the camp, she also exposes the human rights violations of women suffering from mental disorders. Darko's representations of oppressed women by religious leaders reveal her commitment to writing about gender issues as well as broader issues in Ghanaian society.

Whip to Conquer Satan

Mental illness is believed to be caused by a spiritual force or demonic possession. A prophet from a prayer camp in Ghana explains the following in an interview:

In mental illness, 98% of the time it is spiritual. There is a verse from the Bible, Ephesians 6:12. "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." That is our philosophy [about] mental illness. (6)

The above expression from the Ghanaian prophet relates to the prevailing viewpoint of Ghanaians who believe that mental illness is directly rooted in demonic forces. There are no facts to support these claims; however, this unmerited belief is viewed as a fact and is also the main purpose for the establishment of the camps. Demonic possession is commonly viewed as a result of ancestral curses (7). However, medical staff reveal that mental illnesses arise from physical and not spiritual causes. Nonetheless, individuals from the prayer camps address the illness as one of a religious nature only.

After the expedition to the prayer camp, Beam questions what the initials WCS stand for, and the farmer's son responds: "Whip to Conquer Satan!" (Darko 2007:29). This is noteworthy as the farmer's son explains that the technique used to "deal with Satan" is to whip the frail old women. In an alarming response, Beam says: "Kweku, you didn't talk about suspecting your old woman of being a witch. Didn't you say she was mentally ill?" (29). From Beam's response, the reader learns at that stage that the expedition was to rescue Kweku's mother. In addition to this, whipping is a common technique employed on witches, as Beam automatically assumes this is the case for Kweku's mother.

The reader soon learns that a common viewpoint of the people from the hill (prophets and prophetesses as referred to in the text) is that “mental illness means possession by evil spirits” (30). Beam’s response to this viewpoint is: “we haven’t come far from the stone age at all have we? [...] When holes were drilled into the skull of the mentally sick to supposedly allow the evil spirit possessing the subject to depart” (30). Beam’s comparison emphasises the unsophisticated treatments employed by these institutions in the 21st century, which are paralleled to practices in the Stone Age.

In the WCS prayer camps:

“They employ prayers and the recitation of verses to try to coax the evil spirit or talk it out of the person. Something like how the police might employ the strategy of talking a hijacker into freeing his hostages and giving himself up. It is when that fails that the police storm the place where the hostages are held.” [...]

“To them, the evil spirit has sought refuge in the body of the supposed possessed person, who is probably only mentally sick. And the evil spirit is in there because it feels comfortable ...” [...]

“So the idea of subjecting the person to the entire whipping is to make the physical body an uncomfortable abode for the evil spirit to continue its occupation. Which, it is hoped, will force it out.” (30-31)

The above extract reveals how prayer and the recital of verses are used as “medication” to combat the illnesses of patients who are considered to be possessed by evil spirits. Darko compares this process to the strategies employed by police officers during a hostage rescue. This is an image redolent of an unequal balance of powers as hijackers are associated with crime, illegal acts, and seizing/stealing goods. Hostages, who are forcefully held captive, are viewed as vulnerable, defenceless and endangered. This is a vivid image as it correlates with the imagery in the above section, which juxtaposes the frail women with the iron rods. Once again, through the imagery of the hijackers and hostages, Darko reinforces the vulnerability of the frail old women who are held captive in the prayer camps. Furthermore, they are defenceless, as they are chained, and robbed of their dignity, freedom, and fundamental human rights.

Linked to the above image, Darko’s comparison of the strategies employed by police officers during a hostage rescue denotes how staff members in the prayer camps deal with patients. The word “strategies” underlines the planned action individuals within the camp employ as a

means to achieve their goals. Strategies are also associated with military operations; therefore, this further reinforces the brutality used to “heal” the patients. In the same way that police officers “storm the place”, executors in the camp whip the physical body to remove the evil spirits. The connotations of a storm are danger, violence, chaos, and foreboding omens. In the same way police use violence to remove hijackers and save hostages, the staff in the prayer camps use whipping to remove the evil spirits and protect the patient. This is ironic as the transgressors are causing more physical, emotional, and psychological harm to the patients.

After Beam questions why individuals would send their family members to a “Whip to Conquer Satan” prayer camp, the reader discovers that only the inner sign reveals how Satan is conquered. All the boards leading to the camp have the same acronym, but it reads “We Conquer Satan”. Furthermore, public relations officers for the WCS operate around psychiatric hospitals, convincing individuals not to waste their money at hospitals and recommending the camp as an alternative. Family members are instructed to pay monthly remittances during the patient’s stay. Patients of poor relations who are unable to pay are declared incurable and thrust out of the camp. Furthermore, the farmer’s son notes: “In one such case, it was alleged that the evil spirits possessing the person could multiply and transfer to add to less harmful ones and exasperate the possessions of others previously possessed by milder evil spirits” (32). The relations of patients (“Especially if the relative seems quite well off and have been regular in the payment of the monthly upkeep fees”) cannot request the discharge of a patient as they are met with the response that it is a “premature discharge [and] is an interference in God’s work and a sin” (32, 33).

Through the depiction of WCS, Darko sheds light on a number of mental institutions and prayer camps in Ghana that are founded on the belief that that mental illness is caused by spiritual powers or demonic possession. As a result of these beliefs, individuals in prayer camps resort to violence and whipping to remove the demon from the host. While fasting and the beating of patients are conventional techniques enforced in a number of prayer camps, these practices are not implemented in all Ghanaian prayer camps.

Prophet Abednego

Kofi Poku, alias Raja Hey, alias Who Killed Lucy, alias Pardon Me, alias Forever Young, alias Prophet Abednego, cursed under his breath. He needed sleep urgently. He had been up throughout the night till dawn, preaching the word of God, as he knew best and screaming the need for repentance in the name of the Lord to sleeping ears. (237)

Character naming is one characteristic feature in literature. Darko artistically employs character naming to serve a symbolic function in *Not without Flowers*. My discussion in this section centres on Darko's naming of the character, Prophet Zechariah Abednego, in relation to his roles and activities within the narrative. Prophet Abednego is given the name Kofi Poku at birth, Who Killed Lucy for watching a video of the same title ten times, Pardon Me for his attempts to entice a girl with an American accent and uttering the aforementioned phrase and Forever Young for a reason he is unaware of. Through the naming of the above character, Darko reveals that the title of Prophet Abednego is simply employed as a process to claim the gift of prophecy and divine inspiration. He anoints himself with the title of Prophet Zechariah Abednego with all its wealth of associations. The names "Abednego" and "Zechariah" have biblical connotations as opposed to the other names which are bestowed on him by others. Abednego is a biblical name which means "servant of Nebo or servant of light" (Lockyer 1958:22). This is ironic as Prophet Abednego has no theological training or connection with God. Furthermore, he is represented as a dark figure in the novel as he is self-indulgent and only claims to assist others for his personal prosperity and pleasure. Despite his disconnection from God and religion, Kofi Poku is wily, so he employs biblical names to catch the attention of individuals and create the impression that he is a servant of God. Abednego, in the Bible, is "one of the three faithful Jews delivered from the fiery furnace" (22). Therefore, through the appropriation of this name, Prophet Abednego creates the impression that he is an honourable and faithful servant of God. He reinforces his title through the adoption of the middle name "Zechariah". In the Bible, Zechariah (and Isaiah both) carry the most frequent prophecies of the Messiah (344). Hence, Prophet Abednego is able to easily deceive individuals through his false prophecies as individuals believe that he has been chosen and called by God to prophesy as he is associated with both Zechariah and Abednego from the Bible.

Darko consciously creates an ideological effect through the naming of the above character, and the reader is immediately cognisant of his continuous transformations and scandalous behaviours. She employs character naming to reflect her attitudes, perceptions, and biases towards Prophet Abednego. After failing in his job of selling dog chains and losing his job pounding fufu at a chop bar, Raja Hey (aka Prophet Abednego) is employed by “connection men” to do specific jobs, for example, “unscrupulous pastors of little known churches of dubious shades and colours would come and hire people” to enact false miracles¹³ (243).

In “Fake Prophets and Evangile for Sale in Amma Darko’s *Not without Flowers*”, Koumagnon Agboadannon and Ashani Dossoumou explain: “Christianity’s armed wing is evangelization. Unfortunately, some hungry and brash people in search of money, power, greatness, and majesty hijacked evangelization’s aim” (2018:15). Prophet Abednego is representative of “new prophets” who “sprout, spread and proliferate along with crisis outbreak in the country. [...] Their strategies are used to gain followers for their weekly masses and then use these followers as their own machine of fortune” (35). One of Raja Hey’s jobs, which also was the core purpose in his establishment as a prophet, was to be an assistant of a local preacher. From this preacher, Raja Hey studied all the preacher’s techniques such as “the varying pictures of his voice, the movement of his hands and the positioning of his feet” (Darko 2007:245). After learning these techniques, Raja Hey started “practicing the art of fiery prayers and preaching” in the outskirts of Accra (245). The above description reveals how easy it is for individuals to arise as high-profile charismatic leaders who claim to be messengers of God, preaching his word and pretending to have visions and revelations from God. Raja Hey studies a local preacher and transforms his persona to Prophet Abednego.

Prophet Abednego dramatically appears on the scene to meet Sylv at Harvest FM under the guise of being “sent by God” with a “message from the very Almighty One” (139, 140). When the prophet offers his hand as a sign of greeting, Sylv is prompted by the following image: “A picture flashed through Sylv’s mind of a murderer who pretended to be friendly and ordered his intended victim his hand only to pull the victim through the window to this

¹³ One false miracle was enacted in 2019 in South Africa when charismatic Pastor Alph Lukau (from Alleluia Ministries) claimed to raise a man from the dead. A video of his “miracle” in which he performs a “resurrection of a man” sparked social media but his false spiritual claim has since been ridiculed and condemned after the funeral services distanced themselves from the stunt and verified that the ferry was hired by the allegedly deceased person’s family and that the body was not kept in the mortuary (SABC News 2019). This hoax is just one of the many recent high-profile debacles from religious leaders.

death” (141). This is a vivid image of a typical murder/victim scenario in which power is in the hands of the murderer.

Sylv is initially suspicious of the prophet’s motives. He asserts: ““Look Prophet, let’s talk mortal to mortal. Tell me, do you have a problem with this person? A score to settle with him? Are you hoping to use me for your own ends? Free of charge? While leaving me to think that I have done some good in the eyes of God?”” (145). Given Sylv’s rationality and level-headedness, he provokes the prophet to speak “mortal to mortal” so that the prophet’s motives are not hidden behind a “spiritual masquerade”. This signposts the common practice whereby religious leaders manipulate individuals and situations for their personal gain. Prophet Abednego immediately responds to Sylv’s interrogation by eliciting his title of being a “prophet” and religious authority by asserting that he has ears that can hear God’s voice. He becomes angered with Sylv for questioning his motives and responds by saying: “I don’t question God’s way. How dare you question God’s ways?” (146). This statement is a common tactic used by specific religious leaders to weaken the other party and make them feel as if they are committing a sin and that it is a direct disobedience against God himself, since prophets are perceived as representatives and messengers of God.

Prophet Abednego accepts the “contract” to assist the siblings because he has a hidden agenda of gaining popularity through the radio station as he plans to establish the “Blood of Hope Miracle Prosperity and Wonders Church”. He aims to acquire “sheep of his church-in-progress” through his false prophecies as “The way Ghanaians loved miracles, he would have been declared a strong and powerful Man of God and they would have flocked to him like sheep” (238, 239). Within the biblical context, sheep are referred to as God’s people; however, this image also points to the vulnerability and gullibility of individuals who follow leaders blindly. Certain religious leaders manipulate the proverb “Seeing is Believing” as an open window to gain prominence as a “Man of God”. This is not only ironic but sacrilegious as these religious leaders are the antithesis of God as they are not only disobeying God’s commandments but also behaving in an ungodly manner.

“At the social and communal level, religion has served as the inspiration to the heights of altruism and devotion, while being also the declared source of cruelty and moral depravity”, explain Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle (1997:1-2). Darko lists various instances in which religious leaders stage “miracles” by hiring individuals “to go and pretend to be deaf and dumb or

blind and receive instant miraculous healing at their church services to swell the members of their congregation” (243). Many self-made prophets, like Prophet Abednego, arise and establish churches as a means of gaining fame and wealth. Prophet Abednego goes against rules and regulations by not registering his church and defying governmental laws. He does this under the spiritual masquerade that God is higher than the government hierarchy; therefore, he claims: “I don’t need man’s paper acknowledgment of my church to do God’s work” (249). This is similar commentary used during the Covid-19 pandemic whereby religious leaders defy laws under the guise of performing God’s work.

Religion as an Instrument to Oppress Women

Chima Agazue, key scholar in the proliferation of religious-commercial pastors in Nigeria, notes: “Women are the predominant followers of these male religious leaders, and sexual exploitation of vulnerable women by these religious leaders is common” (2016:1). In *Not without Flowers*, Darko illustrates how religious leaders exploit women through the depiction of Prophet Abednego, who preys on the vulnerability of a woman who is desperate to acquire her visa. In this discussion, I explore how Prophet Abednego, as a “false” prophet with sinister motives, is exploitative and oppressive towards a woman in the novel. My study also focuses on an analysis and comparison of Prophet Abednego to Prophet Mboro. In addition to this, I perform a comparative analysis of Prophet Abednego with Prophet Bitchington Mborro in NoViolet Bulawayo’s *We Need New Names*.

Following his miraculous prophecy, Prophet Abednego uses the radio station to acquire followers and to use their resources (a building/ground) so that they all can congregate. He achieves this as a woman who is trying to reunite with her brother in Germany offers her brother’s uncompleted building for Prophet Abednego to use as his church. This woman is charmed by Prophet Abednego’s prophecy and believes that he is the only one who can assist her in obtaining her visa. This follows after her three failed attempts with various “connection men” who tricked her. One pastor alleged that he had a revelation that a witch stamped her visa, therefore, the embassy did not see her as a human being, but her “face turn[ed] into worms and cockroaches” when they look[ed] at her (252). For the German embassy to see her “face”, she was advised to pray, fast, and wash her face three times with holy water. Seeing that the pastor’s remedies did not work, she concluded that the pastor was not strong enough. She, therefore, turned to Prophet Abednego, whom she considered to be more faithful and

more powerful and able to “tie up the feet of that witch so that the present ongoing arrangements will go through successfully for [her] to get [her] visa for Germany” (253). The following passage is a telephonic exchange between the woman and her brother:

The woman was overwhelmingly excited. She was on the phone with her brother in Germany. “Oh Bro,” she sang, “the way this Prophet Abednego is going about things, I swear Bro, my visa will go through this time. [...] Do you know how long he fasted? Two weeks Bro. Two whole weeks. And dry oh! Dry fasting. No food, no water. Now it’s like the final stages...”

“Of what?” her brother sniped.

“The special prayers. He has different special prayers. Special prayers for infertility; special prayers for prosperity and special prayers for visa. And with the visa, there are extra special prayers for American, British and German visa.”

“All with corresponding charges I guess!” the brother spat sarcastically.

“Oh Bro, but that is how it should be! But with me, because he is living in your uncompleted house, which is where he also has his powerful church, he charged me very little. [...]

“Oh Bro, why don’t you like the prophet? He is a man of God oh. You wait, as soon as I send the candles for the final prayers, you will begin to see the manifestation of his powers.”

“What candles?”

“Oh, just a few candles for the final prayers. Twelve black, six red and six yellow. Then the holy bath.”

“The holy what?” the brother yelled.

“Bath Bro. Sunday midnight, he will go with me to the beach and bath me in the sea. It is called cleansing.”

[...]

“Bro, he said if I am shy, I could wear a G-string.”

“G-string?” the brother screeched, “The prophet knows G-string? And asked you to wear a G-string for a spiritual bath of cleansing in the sea at midnight alone with you?” (363-364)

The above exchange reveals how prophets (and religious leaders) prey upon the vulnerability of women, who are generally more devout than men. Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle conclude that there is greater religiosity of women as opposed to men, which is due to gender differences in

personality or differences in employment status (1997:142). Due to patriarchy and socialisation, women are encouraged to be more submissive, passive, sensitive, susceptible to anxiety, and dependent as opposed to men who are socialised into being aggressive, dominant, competitive, and less nurturant and less emotionally expressive (142, 143). In other words, the “permanent inequality of women in social relationships” as well as “the relational self which is the core of self-structure in women and so they assume more responsibility for relationship maintenance and support” are key contributors to women’s religiosity (143). The woman in the above passage is desperate to acquire her visa, and after failed attempts with other religious leaders, she reaches out to Prophet Abednego for spiritual intervention. Her various attempts at different religious figures reveal her intense devotion and fanatical belief in religion. Despite being conned three times, she fervently believes in Prophet Abednego, which is reflected in her enthusiasm as she speaks to her brother about Prophet Abednego and the methods and special prayers he employs. While her brother is critical of Prophet Abednego, she exhibits no signs of distrust as she confidently says: “He is a man of God”. Moreover, she does not question any of Prophet Abednego’s requests, even the financial ones, as she is convinced that he is acting in her best interests and believes that he is also giving her a discount.

The woman is confident that everyone will see the “manifestation of [Prophet Abednego’s] powers”; however, the reader (and her brother) are cognisant that she is once again being deceived by another dishonest religious leader. Moreover, Prophet Abednego has additional intentions as he uses the Christian belief in baptism to sexually exploit the woman. Even though Prophet Abednego makes a preposterous request for her to bathe alone at midnight, naked (or with a G-string), she does not challenge his request as she believes that he is a “man of God”. The woman further believes that after the “cleansing holy bath”, the visa officer at the German embassy will no longer see her face as worms. Therefore, she is willing to go to any extent to listen to Prophet Abednego who is viewed as a messenger of God. Prophet Abednego (and many other charismatic leaders) are aware of women’s desperation and manipulate this for their personal interests.

Like Ghana, in Zimbabwe “the issue of wealth accumulation by some leaders of neo-prophetic movements is a burning issue” (Mahohoma 2017:1). Darko and Bulawayo are both critical of religious leaders who use the name of God to amass wealth for themselves. In *Not without Flowers* and *We Need New Names*, through the characterisation of Prophet Abednego

and Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro, Darko and Bulawayo reveal how poverty, lack of education and the poor medical facilities in both countries become a fertile ground for the exploitation of vulnerable women. Prophet Abednego's exploitative actions can be compared to the character of Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro in NoViolet Bulawayo's *We Need New Names* as both prophets claim to perform miraculous healing in terms of spiritual healing and socio-economic challenges. In addition to this, both prophets profess to have the gift of prophecy and revelation as they claim to receive special visions from God. Moreover, their divine authority of prophecy is not challenged by their supporters. Consequently, they engage in exploitative acts under the guise that it is God's will.

In *We Need New Names*, Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro, a prophet at the Holy Chariot Church of Christ, exerts excessive power over his church congregants who are mostly oppressed, impoverished women. He is characterised as an unscrupulous prophet who uses his authority to satisfy his personal desires and sexually abuse women in the church. The abuse of power is highlighted in the scene in which the prophet tells his congregation that God told him that the devil is coming. He explains: "the devil is a woman in a purple dress that's riding up her thighs" (Bulawayo 2013:40). Even though he physically and sexually abuses a woman in public, no one in his congregation views it as abuse of his position in the church. Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro manipulates religion to exonerate his behaviour as he uses the guise that a woman is possessed to take advantage of her.

Both Darko and Bulawayo, as writers for social justice, expose the abuse of power of religious leaders who, under the guise of religion, oppress women for their financial gain and sexual desires. Both Prophet Abednego and Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro are portrayed in the two novels as unscrupulous prophets who manipulate Christianity and Christian doctrines of prayer, fasting, cleansing, and healing to gain women's trust and thereafter subdue them. Furthermore, both prophets prey on vulnerable women as Prophet Abednego's recipients are women from the markets. Similarly, Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro¹⁴ beneficiaries are poverty-stricken women from Paradise.

Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle state: "History and current events show us that religion, or at least religious claims and identities, are involved in large-scale violence" (1997:2) In *Not without Flowers*, Darko creates awareness of the socio-economic and political conditions for women in Ghana, which, by implication, resonates with other African countries. In addition to this,

she advocates for the transformation of societies in which religious exploitation occurs. Through the depiction of Prophet Abednego whose character replicates other religious characters in other novels such as Prophet Revelations Bitchington Mborro in *We Need New Names*, Darko and other authors (for example Bulawayo) reveal how religion can be used as an instrument for the exploitation of women. Through an analysis of these characters, one learns how religion can be misused to condone abusive behaviour. The abuse of women in Christianity is a topical issue as a number of women are abused by religious leaders whom they trust and seek assistance from. As in the above discussion, religious figures take advantage of women's situations and begin to sexually harass them under the guise of healing or following God's instructions.

False Cures and Stigmatisation of Aids

In *Not without Flowers*, Darko draws attention to the use of medicinal plants as a central component of African traditional healing. Even though many traditional healers offer immunities for various illnesses and are also able to treat severe symptoms of HIV/Aids, a number of traditional healers have offered bogus cures for the above-mentioned virus. Peddlers of counterfeit cures prey on the desperation of infected individuals who are

“In the absence of an effective medical antidote for the virus, traditional advice and folk-based practices” are employed in Ghana, South Africa, and many other African countries (Craffert 2010:292). In 1997, Thabo Mbeki announced the Virodene medicine (which was hailed the medicine developed in Africa for Africa) for HIV; however, it failed to comply with the protocols of the Medicines Control Council (297). Another “untested remedy is Umbimbi which at a cost of R2000 for a three-hour session, was presented to eradicate the HI virus and to restore HIV positive people's immune systems” (298). In addition to the above remedies, individuals have promoted other remedies such as “a concoction of African potato, olive oil, garlic and a liquid called African solution” and herbal treatments to cure the virus (298).

Another myth in South Africa is the virgin cleansing myth whereby it is believed that having sex with a virgin girl can cure a man who is infected with HIV/Aids. This has resulted in an increase in the number of rape cases by infected males who sexually exploit innocent children. In *Not without Flowers*, Darko illustrates one myth in Ghana:

A man claiming to be a herbalist, from God knows where, came knocking on the gate of the mansion one dawn claiming to have a cure for AIDS. He had run out of the herbs for the potion, he claimed. The herbs could only be obtained in a forest reserve in the Congo. If he was given the money, he was willing to travel to the Congo to obtain the herbs to cure the four widows.

A fetish priest claiming to have had some training in South Africa also came knocking. His was the most bizarre of all the remedies. The four widows should be made to sleep with a black male pig, he ordered. He went on rather audaciously to compare his ritual to the casting out of the demons into a horde of pigs by Jesus. According to him, after the four widows had slept with the black pig, the evil spirit of the AIDS virus would leave their bodies and enter that of the pig. (Darko 2007:267-268)

The above passage resonates with the practices/beliefs of a number of religious, spiritual and traditional healers who sell a variety of products, for example, herbs from the Congo to cure HIV/Aids. In addition to this, religious leaders, such as the fetish priest, develop “cures” by manipulating biblical parables such as Jesus casting out demons into a horde of pigs. Consequently, the priest orders the four widows to sleep with a “black, male pig” so that “the evil spirit of the Aids virus would leave their bodies”. Once again, we see how illnesses are directly linked to spiritual causes. Not only is the virus viewed as a punishment from God but also the work of the devil through an evil spirit. In the above scenario, the priest uses the widows’ vulnerable situation to advocate the physical and sexual exploitation of the women.

Darko also draws attention to the stigmatisation of AIDS in Ghana. Despite the high prevalence rate of infections in the country, the “use of a condom was the man’s prerogative” (264). This not only points to the gender inequality that characterises Ghanaian society but also the lack of knowledge on the spread of the Aids virus. In the novel, Darko points out that “the fear of the disease was more destructive than the disease itself” (267). The four wives who test positive for HIV are banished from their home and are left to isolate in the servant quarters. Their confinement is labelled as a duty of the purification rites; however, the wives are aware that this is a drastic and vicious motion to keep them away from society. The second wife is subjected to further stigmatisation as the news of her HIV status drives her customers away from her shop. It appeared as “if her goods had also been infected or that the virus could be transmitted to them by their sheer entry into her shop” (277). In addition to this, her former sales girls are refused employment in other shops.

Darko’s naming of Pesewa’s wives as first, second, third, fourth, and fifth wife is a literary technique used to highlight that HIV/Aids is a universal problem. Through this naming

technique, Darko reveals that the virus is no respecter of persons and that these women can be anyone, irrespective of age, ethnicity or nationality. Furthermore, through the characterisation of Pesewa, Darko reveals the poison of polygyny, “If [Pesewa] wants a woman, he simply makes her his wife and this continues up to five wives because African society condones this male attitude of a man’s taking on several wives, but condemns it if it comes from women” (Gbaguidi & Djossou 2018:133). One counter-hegemonic technique to challenge this prevailing stereotype is through the characterisation of the second wife who is depicted as a “rebel, a prostitute being here considered as an individual who does not want to follow the society’s rules and regulations in terms of sexual morality and corporeal decency” (136). After her husband’s marital infidelity (third marriage), the second wife seeks vengeance by exchanging money for sexual intercourse with a male prostitute. Through this affair, there is a reversal of roles as power lies in the hands of the second wife who controls Dan as he is in need of financial assistance. The practice of men providing sexual services in return for money is rare in literature; however, through the depiction of Dan as a male prostitute, Darko challenges the status quo. The second wife enters into a relationship with Dan “because she wants to gain more influence in her business and fulfil her sexual expectations with her lovers as a tool of domination [... and] she wants a male body at her slightest disposal” (140).

Through this extramarital relationship, the second wife contracts HIV which she passes to Pesewa and in turn the other wives as the use of condoms is frowned upon in patriarchal societies. All four wives are infected, except the fifth wife, who is also counter-hegemonically portrayed, as she has control over her body and commands the use of condoms during their sexual intercourse. Alternatively, the four other wives “are less able to ask for protection [...] because of their educational, economic or social level” (141). The characterisation of the fifth wife is a feminist literary technique used by Darko to reflect that women should be “able to claim for their rights, for protection and life. The fifth wife’s attitude connotes all African women’s ability to stand against marital subjugation in a patriarchal setting” (141).

In *Not without Flowers*, Darko deconstructs the patriarchal status quo through her negative projection of Pesewa’s character, roles and activities. His polygynous marriage is presented as a spectacle of lust and his egotistical control of women. Darko also criticises male characters’ sexual escapades as the penis is epitomised “not only as a body part which generates life and the power to create a posterity, but also yields eternal trouble for [...]

families” (138). Pesewa’s polygynous marriage and his refusal to use condoms results in the familial breakdown. Furthermore, he is depicted as weak as he resorts to committing suicide because of the reasoning: “I cannot wait for the disease to defeat me, take over and claim my body” (Darko 2007:64). Pesewa’s rationale is based on the fear of society’s stigmatisation of the HI virus.

As a result of the stigmatisation of HIV/Aids, individuals are subjected to cultural and religious prejudices. Hence, they turn to religious and traditional leaders for cures. As mentioned above, patients rely more on traditional and spiritual healing/treatment, which results in them defaulting on their prescribed medication from biomedical facilities, thereby putting their lives at a higher risk. Furthermore, following the spread of HIV/Aids, several individuals have falsely promoted treatments to cure the virus. This is strengthened by beliefs and myths that HIV/Aids is rooted in spiritual causes. Hence, many individuals believe that the only treatment/solution is from traditional or religious figures. In addition, resulting from the uncertainty, stigmatisation and fear engendered by the incurable, stigmatising and life-threatening disease, infected patients are more prone to falling prey to counterfeit cures. During a crisis, as in the case of the Coronavirus pandemic, fraudsters continue to act as concierges of remedies even though they are false. The sale of treatment/cures for HIV/Aids and other illnesses is a profitable business for many individuals; therefore, they continue to prey on the desperation of vulnerable beings.

“Breaking the Silence”

Feminist writers “have committed themselves to ‘breaking the silence’ by claiming, through their artefacts, equal rights and equal treatments for men and women” (Allagbé & Amoussou 2020:14). In addition to this, they “use their literary oeuvres to create awareness on social actions (or ‘social practices’) with a view to deconstructing patriarchy and its underlying sexist and/or androcentric ideologies, on the one hand and redefining or rehabilitating women’s identity, or image, on the other” (16). Darko is one contemporary feminist writer whose literary works focus on the multifaceted social, economic and political challenges confronting women. In *Not without Flowers*, Darko provides a deconstruction of patriarchal structures and criticism of conjugal infidelity. Furthermore, she redefines the feminist situation of women by raising consciousness on societal ills.

One issue Darko draws attention to is polygyny, which is a traditionally and religiously acceptable practice in many African societies. Darko presents both the advantages and disadvantages of polygynous marriages through the representations of Pesewa's and Ntifor's families. Polygynous marriages warrant the equal share of resources and treatment for all wives within the marriage; however, this is a difficult task for many, as in the case of Pesewa, who shows preferential treatment to his fifth wife. This inequality and unfairness are sources of conflict and rivalry within the Pesewa household. Contrary to this, Ntifor's polygynous marriage solves the issue of childlessness in his monogamous marriage. Even though the first wife, Penyin, harbours pain and jealousy for decades because of her inability to procreate, the co-wife is able to grant them both motherhood, and they share an intimate bond.

Through the polygynous marriage of Pesewa, Darko highlights how resistance is complex. Sarojini Nadar and Cheryl Potgieter coined the term "formenism" to describe the phenomenon whereby women support and perpetuate patriarchy (2010). As mentioned above, the second's wife promiscuous actions promulgate the spread of HIV/Aids to all involved in the polygynous marriage. The second wife is also responsible for the dismantling of her best friend's monogamous marriage. Through this representation, Darko depicts a counter-intuitive situation where a woman impedes the advancement of another woman's rights. This is representative of the many women who "directly or indirectly support systems and practices that subjugate them or oppose efforts to end such systems and practices" (Le Roux 2019:5).

In addition to infidelity in polygynous marriages, Darko criticises conjugal infidelity and the "sugar-daddy" syndrome. Through the representation of Pa, Darko reveals the "power of sex to enslave, and when a young woman's sex enslaves an older man and gains absolute ownership of his emotions, it punches holes the size of valleys, into rationale which consumes his conscience" (Darko 2007:82). Pa becomes like a "puppet" or "zombie" as he is controlled by his sexual urges and his obsession with "Flower". In addition to Pa's demise, through the representation of the mother's mental instability, Darko implies that an accumulation of gender-based inequality, male sexual insatiability and marital stress result in the psychological breakdown of woman in patriarchal homes. However, Ma's mental illness is also viewed as a counter-hegemonic technique, as Gbaguidi and Djossou note: "Mental illness is certainly the status where the sufferer feels no physical and psychological pain. It is a state where the victim can laugh when there is no laughing matter, dance when there is no

music, cry when the neighbourhood is laughing or talk to invisible people” (2018:138). Furthermore, the reconciliatory ending of the novel and the mother’s restoration of her mental health are also literary techniques used to reveal the strength and resilience of women. The novel ends with Ma saying: “Tell my children I want to smell some flowers. Tell Kweku to bring me some flowers. I want to smell the delightful perfume of a bunch of yellow roses” (Darko 2007:369). In these final lines, Darko employs verbs and repetition thereof to emphasise Ma’s triumph over her psychological breakdown instigated by the patriarch. Through this triumph, there is an implicit deconstruction of patriarchy and its misogynistic views that women are weak and despondent.

Gerda Lerner, a key theorist for this thesis comments on the functioning of the system of patriarchy:

The system of patriarchy can function only with the cooperation of women. This cooperation is secured by a variety of means: gender indoctrination; educational deprivation; the denial to women of knowledge of their history; the dividing of women, one from the other, by defining “respectability” and “deviance” according to women’s sexual activities; by restraints and outright coercion; by discrimination in access to economic resources and political power; and by awarding class privileges to conforming women. (1986:271)

Patriarchy is linked to headship as well as misogyny. Patriarchy and misogyny both reveal the discriminatory attitude that women are subordinate to men. Traditional practices and beliefs socialise women into accepting the system of patriarchy. There are also strict ideologies about men’s and women’s roles, which are regarded as mandatory for the construction of identities. Women have to adhere to strict feminine characteristics that are culturally and historically located. The concept of patriarchy is useful to unveil culturally and historically distinct arrangements between genders (Kandiyoti 1988:275-275).

In *Not without Flowers*, women are blamed for the adulterous relations of men. Wives are considered to be the root cause of their husbands’ sexual fantasies because of the “energy” the wife lacks, as “She is probably [...] at home occupied daily with household chores and the children” (Darko 2007:81). As in the case of Ma, after the birth of their third child, there “came a shift in Ma’s attention and focus” and “Pa’s frustration gradually developed into a tension that was waiting to erupt” (329, 330). Pa’s response to his adulterous relations is to “make [Ma] understand the normalcy of it, that as a man functioning fully and denied nurturing and intimacy, he would crave for it and go looking for it elsewhere” (331). Pa’s

response connotes males' views of infidelity as a means to satisfy sexual urges, with no connection of intimacy. Alternatively, "women equate respectability with 'clean' thoughts about sex [...] Because that is what their mothers taught them to think" (331). These two alternate views signpost the notable gender gaps that exist in how men and women view extramarital affairs, sex and infidelity. The assumption is that men's sexualised natures drive them to engage in adulterous acts. However, women are socialised into the domestic virtue of chastity which is a woman's "crowning glory". Men and women are also not judged by the same moral code as in the case of Pa/Idan and Flower. The "home-wrecker" (Flower) is blamed while the adulterous man (Pa) is relatively exonerated. Flower's misconduct is considered to be worse because it violates the social sexual mores for women. Furthermore, she is shunned as a result of her adultery, while Idan's extramarital affair is celebrated because she is barren and through this affair, Idan can procreate.

Even though Pa's extramarital affair causes Ma great distress and heartache, she "fuses with Pa on stage. Ma began to feel Pa's pains and aches and anxieties. But she failed to become obsessed with Flower as Pa was" (344). Ma's actions can be attributed to what Elisabet Le Roux describes as a type of compliance which "can be understood as limited or even as faked. In this understanding, the subjugated is said to develop clear strategies through which they counter the dominant order; they create mechanisms that protect them, even if only a little" (2019:7). Ma's compliance can be viewed as a form of resistance in which she is a tactical and strategic actor on stage with Pa. Through this act, she acquires strength to overcome her heartache and dissembles in order to endure the pain.

Darko "confronts patriarchy and other forms of marginalisation of African women in her works. She creates female characters who are actively engaged in the production of oppositional ideologies to counter the overriding patriarchal principles" (Gbaguidi & Djossou 2018:132). One established organisation in the text that is committed to "breaking the silence" is MUTE, a Non-Governmental Organisation whose founder (Dina) "chose that name to reflect the silence of society" (Darko 2007:68). The four female characters who work in the organisation are actively involving in challenging patriarchal structures and oppressive forces, for example; MUTE investigates a case of a woman and her husband, who belong to a religious sect, and the woman is completely subservient to her husband. Furthermore, she gives birth eight times, and all the children are taken from her. Through this female networking, Darko reveals the power of women to stand up to injustices and shield other

women who are subjected to oppression.

Through the female networking of Cora and Randa, they are able to seek vengeance against “Flower” and restore the mental state of their mother. Even though all three siblings are involved in the revenge plan, after the rescue of the mother, Kweku takes backstage, and the two sisters are at the forefront, actively involved in the progression of the revenge. The two sisters are the role-players who forge relationships with Aggie’s husband and parents. Darko’s characterisation of Cora and Randa foregrounds the strength and resourcefulness of female characters.

In *Not without Flowers*, “The feminist voice protests society’s bias against women and criticizes it for seeing very little wrong with adulterous men whilst strongly kicking against adulterous women” (Ofosu 2013:181). Darko also attacks the dual morality that creates different moral codes for men and women. In addition, she criticises adulterous women and those who inflict pain on other women through the depiction of “Flower” and the second wife of Pesewa. Furthermore, she advocates for conjugal fidelity in monogamous and polygynous marriages and encourages women to support each other.

Conclusion

Amma Darko’s fiction “gives us an insight about the rapid growing of demography, modernization and urbanization in Africa and shows its consequences on families and the society men create with their own hands, a society which is bankrupted, morally corrupt, and in serious deliquescence” (Gbaguidi & Djossou 2018:137). In *Not without Flowers*, Darko takes a political stand by criticising gender relations, power, and inequality, as well as the exploitation of African and religious cultural beliefs. In addition to this, she reveals the human rights violations by traditional and religious communities, which are representative of the many churches in societies in Ghana, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and across the globe. Darko is critical of many churches that are run like businesses (not even registered as in the case of Prophet Abednego’s church) and established for commercial purposes where the poor are exploited physically, financially, and sexually.

Following the high surge in the number of national and international religious leaders, there has been an increase in the abuse of belief systems and the manipulation of God’s healing

power. As a result of this, there is also an increase in the number of Christian believers defaulting on biomedical treatment and using faith products as an alternative, which are not only dangerous but life-threatening.

Darko is critical of the abuse of individuals' belief systems by unscrupulous religious leaders, particularly vulnerable women who are oppressed and exploited at the hands of charismatic leaders who commit sexual offenses under the guise of freedom of religious belief. Vulnerable women in the novel who are zealously devoted to religion turn to religious institutions in times of desperation for financial, health, and social intervention. However, they are exploited by immoral pastors/prophets who establish dominance through power. Furthermore, they employ religious symbols and language to justify their heinous actions, such as fear of evil spirits or demons alleged to possess women. In other cases, women are convinced that they have to engage in sexual activities to fulfil the "will of God".

As previously discussed, research shows that women are the predominant followers of religious leaders. This is a direct consequence of women experiencing patriarchal oppression, economic hardship, or other societal challenges. Social ills prompt vulnerable women to seek divine intervention, which religious leaders claim to guarantee them. Mental illness in women, which reflects the inequalities and oppression of women, is also a major precipitator for violence and sexual abuse of women. Violence against women cuts across social and economic situations and is deeply rooted in patriarchal cultures across the globe.

Women are viewed as marginalised and victimised beings in society; however, they are also both subjects and agents. While women play a role in accepting men's dominance, as agents, women have the ability to acquire freedom from oppressive paternalistic dominance imposed by biological and social restraints.

CONCLUSION

Feminist criticism seeks to uncover the ideology of patriarchal society in works of art. It reads literary texts for their representation of women, and argues that these representations mask socio-political oppression of the category of women by justifying this oppression and naturalizing it. For feminists, the text is a battleground where actual power relations between men and women are played out.

(Nayar 2002:82)

This thesis has highlighted and analysed the representations of wifely submission and filial obedience in five selected texts set in Africa. It also examined the relationship between religion within various social and political contexts, and the depiction of patriarchal oppression in the literary texts. This was achieved by exploring the patterns of patriarchy and religious oppression within particular Islamic, Christian and traditional cultures in Africa. Within the framework of post-colonial feminist theology, this research focused particularly on the representations of female characters who are subjected to patriarchal subjugation and who experience systemic discrimination. The oppression of women is portrayed by all five writers, even though the manifestations of this oppression varies at different stages for each protagonist.

Throughout this study, I examined how the oppression of women is linked to the ideology and practice of patriarchy, which has been shown to be a social system that subjugates women at various levels – political, economic, social and religious. Drawing from the view that “in Africa, female subordination takes intricate forms grounded in traditional culture, particularly in the ‘corporate’ and ‘dual-sex’ patterns that Africans have generated throughout their history”, in my analysis, I discussed the various patterns of disadvantage that characterise the lives of female characters (Mikell 1997:9). My analysis centred on how the patriarchal system imposes masculine and feminine roles in society, which strengthen the ubiquitous and iniquitous power relations between men and women.

The selected feminist writers have drawn attention to the relation between men and women in their respective works by exposing the unfairness, injustice and oppression women are subjected to as a result of their gender. In both *From a Crooked Rib* and *God Dies by the*

Nile, women are oppressed by patriarchal canons and the presence of patriarchal class systems, which render them chattels in society. Another similarity between these novels, which is also featured in *Infidel*, is the relationship between patriarchy as a system and religion as an ideology used to support patriarchy.

In this thesis, I argued that there is a direct link between religion and patriarchy, as religion has been manipulated to promote the subservience of women and preserve patriarchal power relations. Furthermore, this study raises the issue of the inherent misogyny in Abrahamic religions. Patriarchy features throughout the Bible and Qur'an as it was an established practice in ancient societies. The patriarchal perspective on women in religion is dominated by the creation story and is developed throughout the Bible and Qur'an.

As mentioned above, the focus of my study is on Christianity and Islam, as apart from indigenous religions of Africa, these are the two major religions in Africa. Throughout this study, I have discussed how religion is a source of spiritual parity and ethical guidance but also an instrument for oppression. Religion has both positive and negative dimensions, progressive and retrogressive manifestations, as it can liberate individuals, but also oppress others. Religious beliefs and practices are manipulated by both men and women, as notions of femininity, masculinity, sex and/or gender are defined by religious interpretations.

Religion is viewed as a double-edged sword, as it is a positive source of value and morals, and it is also rooted in identity; however, religion is also deemed an androcentric and oppressive institution. Different biblical/qur'anic interpretations have a role in either aiding liberation or maintaining oppression. The Bible and the Qur'an have been manipulated to support the oppression of women through male, subjective interpretations of innumerable scriptures. Women are regarded as the cause of sin and the reason behind the downfall of man.

Farah and Ali are both distinguished feminist writers who challenge Somali's conservative culture, which forces them into exile. In *From a Crooked Rib* and *Infidel*, Farah and Ali draw attention to the patriarchal inequalities in traditional Somali society. Both the novels centre on issues of civil war, dictatorship, poverty, patriarchal clannish attitudes, forced marriages, FGM and violence of women. The similarities depicted in these novels reveal how little has changed over the time of writing in terms of patriarchal oppression prevalent in Somalia.

However, a significant difference between the two novels is human development, partly as a result of globalisation. In *Infidel*, the reader is cognisant of the effects of globalisation on Somalians as cross-border travel is more apparent. Ali is able to travel within and out of Africa and through this international travel, she is also able to triumph over adversity. Through this cross-border travel, she also acquires education and emerges as a political activist.

While both Somali-born authors disparage patriarchy and totalitarianism, Farah does not directly link Islam to violence and oppression, as Ali does. Even though Farah demonstrates in his writings that there is a connection between Islam and violence against women, he also highlights the positive ideals in Islam, such as altruism, justice and humanity. In addition, unlike Farah who is still a Muslim, Ali has renounced Islam and identifies with poststructuralist feminist atheism.

Adichie's text, *Purple Hibiscus*, also centres on religion as she reveals the clash of African indigenous religion with Christianity. Adichie's novel also exposes how patriarchal and religious ideologies are used to institutionalise unequal power relations. There are several social controls on women and children that have roots in tradition, culture and religion. Various religious functionaries manipulate religious notions as an ideology to demean and intimidate women and children. Those in support of patriarchy treat proverbs, beliefs and myths of origins as containing divine injunctions for the controlling of women and children. Metaphors in religious sources have become models for upholding patriarchal relations that have negative impacts on both women and children, as in the case of Eugene, who believes that he is performing acts of restoration, but he is actually inflicting physical and psychological harm on his wife and children.

Sexual exploitation of female characters is represented in *From a Crooked Rib*, *God Dies by the Nile* and *Not without Flowers*, as both Ebla and Zeinab are raped. Furthermore, in *Not without Flowers*, Darko reveals how a religious leader with sinister motives tries to sexually exploit a woman under the guise that he is performing a religious act (baptism). While no characters are raped in *Infidel*, Ali implicitly in the memoir, condemns crimes against women, such as sexual assault, rape and exploitation.

Women and children are subject to diverse forms of oppression. Patriarchal societies mandate strict codes of behaviour for women and children in different cultures, and women and children are expected to comply unquestioningly with them, even though such compliance may be detrimental to them. *From a Crooked Rib*, *God Dies by the Nile* and *Infidel* all centre on the oppression of Muslim women as a result of patriarchal Islamic tenets. The selected authors of these texts condemn the practices of forced marriage, FGM, and the physical and sexual exploitation of women. Even though *Purple Hibiscus* and *Not without Flowers* do not focus on forced marriages and FGM, the theme of the “body in pain” is featured in the texts. In all five novels, the female body is represented as wounded, abused and violated by patriarchal intrusions. Corporeality, embodiment and sexuality are themes that feature in all the novels, as all five authors decode the female body, by critiquing its representation and liberating it from hegemonic, patriarchal constructions.

This thesis has also focused on an analysis of the effects of domestic and family violence, as well as religious oppression, on women’s and children’s lives. This violence and abuse have not been adequately addressed and religion has been used to support the oppression of women and children. The issue of domestic violence is ignored because of the belief that the familial unit provides security and love. Many believe that violence in homes does not occur or should not occur. Furthermore, the gravity and seriousness of the issue is ignored. The five texts deal with the materiality of home as the authors draw attention to the boundaries around the home that declare it a private and confined space. However, the boundaries disintegrate, and the characters reject the notion of home as an inclusive, familial space. Ebla and Ali both run away from her home to escape forced marriages, while Kambili acquires temporary escape from her home while in Nsukka. The uncanny patriarchal figure in *Purple Hibiscus* uses violence as a means of coercive control to uphold his power within the home. Similar to the outbreaks of violence that Adichie reveals in *Purple Hibiscus*, Ali alerts the reader to the severe punishment inflicted on her and her siblings as a form of discipline. However, in this case, the perpetrator is the matriarch, who is a victim of a polygynous marriage which causes her mental instability and violent outbreaks. Through the representation of Asha, Ali reveals how the exercise of power is inherently unjust. The selected authors employ the setting of the household, which is an intimate and private space, to reflect the relationship between gender, status and power.

Sexism or gender discrimination is an ideological and social construction that has endorsed the subordination of women and under this pretext has subjected them to oppression and exploitation. In my analysis, I have reflected on how women are victims of violence, sexual assault, polygyny, bartering and female circumcision, as a result of abusive patriarchal customs and practices. Various religious, economic and political processes operate directly and indirectly to support patriarchy and the use of violence against women and children. Within the male-dominated society, women's identities are characterised by subordination as a result of gender and cultural/religious patterns, hegemonic ideology, circumscribed social roles, paternalistic dominance, lack of resources, poverty, unemployment and lack of knowledge on the emancipation of women. In traditional societies, patriarchal religion remains a primary tool for determining the politics, ethics and values of that society.

The selected authors examine the intricate roles and symbolic parameters of women as daughter, wife and mother. These identities are prescribed to women and departure from those identities is prohibited. However, as feminist writers, the authors have endeavoured to liberate the female characters from structures that have marginalised them. In the five main texts, the protagonists are represented as resilient, efficacious and instrumental women, who are actively involved in areas of social development. In addition, the selected authors seek to correct the misogynistic stereotypical roles given to women within patriarchal societies. The texts draw attention to how female protagonists react to patriarchal oppression in all its materialisations, both physical and psychological. Even though the protagonists are restrained by a patriarchal and religion-bound society that marginalise them, they acquire strategies to resist patriarchal oppression. The protagonist in *From a Crooked Rib*, transcends the boundaries of traditional female roles to venture into areas of control, as she decides not to marry the suitors whom family members choose for her. Farah aims to create spaces of female power in social and religious spheres within his text, thereby transgressing patriarchal boundaries designed to marginalise women. Furthermore, Saadawi employs the title *God Dies by the Nile* to advocate the termination of religious patriarchal systems so that women can be liberated from oppression.

All five authors are geared towards fighting oppression and gender inequality in society. Farah, Saadawi and Ali have been forced into exile because of their writings that expose injustices within their home countries. Farah's text provides a critique of Somali's traditions, customs and beliefs. In my analysis, I explored how the novel may be regarded as a counter-

hegemonic text through an analysis of how Farah critiques the deeply entrenched cultural convictions of male dominance and female subjugation and his promotion of equality and justice. In my exploration of Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile*, I discussed how this text challenges the systematic abuse of women's rights under patriarchy. Saadawi also exposes how systematic abuse and patriarchal oppression are detrimental to the wholeness of humanity.

Infidel is the only autobiographical text, as compared to the four other novels which are fictional representations of social realities. Ali posits herself as a critical insider, spokesperson and emancipator for Muslim women. "Women speak out against a literal interpretation of the Qur'an, challenge Islamic conservatism or command a separation of religion and state frequently face anger, hate and death threats", explains King (2009:295). As a feminist Islamic modernist, Ali criticises the patriarchal image of women in the Qur'an and denies the doctrinal validity of the Hadith, which contains misogynistic scriptures. The selected writers have emerged as gender critics who attempt to re-conceptualise gender and gendered roles within Africa in particular, but also across the globe, through their fictional works. Myths, proverbs, customs and beliefs have played a significant role in shaping gender roles and the mindsets of both men and women. Hence, the interpretation of these myths, proverbs, customs and beliefs are areas of paternalistic dominance that need to be contested. The selected authors advocate for feminist understandings of religion and culture.

Although the five authors are of different genders, nationalities and generations, they all critique the androcentric organisation of patriarchal African societies, where women are subjected to patriarchal control, gender discrimination and oppression. In *Infidel*, Ali recounts how FGM and the polygynous family structure are root causes for the degeneration of Haweya's and Asha's mental states. As previously discussed, gender is a critical determinant of mental illness as "Gender determines the differential power and control men and women have over the socioeconomic determinants of their mental health and lives, their social position, status and treatment in society and their susceptibility and exposure to specific mental health risks" (WHO 2020). Furthermore, depression, anxiety, psychological distress, somatic complaints, sexual violence and domestic violence all combine to account for women's poor mental health. Through the portrayal of mental illness in the characters, the selected authors highlight the magnitude of mental health problems in women as well as the need for protective factors against the development of these problems. Furthermore, through

the representations of Zakeya and Ma, who succumb to mental illness, Saadawi and Farah reveal how the oppressed woman's condition degenerates and how her sanity is threatened, if the oppression is left unattended. As previously mentioned, mental illness is also a counter-hegemonic technique used to reflect the exploitation women are subjected to within patriarchal societies.

Even though the Qur'an and Bible do not explicitly and evocatively discriminate against women's sexuality, misogynists have manipulated scriptures that provide safeguards for protecting women's sexual/biological functions to support restrictions on women's sexuality. In both religions, women's sexuality is something to be concealed, ashamed of and protected at all costs. Furthermore, in patriarchal societies, honour is more important than a woman's life; hence fathers are willing to kill their daughters if there is a possibility of their loss of chastity or suspicion of sexual misconduct. Both Farah and Darko employ the portrait of the prostitute as a literary technique to challenge patriarchal views that women must be chaste and that their bodies must be subjected to external social controls. Ebla and the second wife resort to engaging in sexual activities to seek vengeance against their husbands and to use their body to revolt against patriarchal attitudes. Their decisions to engage in sexual activities also reflect their strength and rebellion. However, Ebla engages in these sexual acts to acquire money, while the second wife pays the male prostitute. In both novels, prostitution is a strategy adopted to counter male dominance and is also employed to reflect antagonistic gender relations.

Post-colonial African feminism offers the lenses through which female characters are represented as intrepid women who oppose the existing patriarchal status quo and dismantle hegemonic power. As feminist authors, in their literary works, the selected authors characterise their female characters as those in roles sustaining their humanity and pursuing their autonomy. *Purple Hibiscus* and *From a Crooked Rib*, as *Bildungsromane*, narrate the growth of the protagonists who defy patriarchal structures and create autonomous identities. At the end of *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili attains maturity and individuality as she develops her own voice. Furthermore, at the end of *From a Crooked Rib*, Ebla is autonomous, displays strength of will and is "master" of herself.

In *Not without Flowers*, Darko provides a deconstruction of patriarchal structures and its underlying sexist and/or androcentric ideologies. Misogyny plays a direct role in giving

precedence to men's needs, priorities and values while relegating women to the periphery. Furthermore, masculinity is viewed as more "ideal" as compared to femininity. However, in the novel, Darko challenges these views by classifying her male characters in secondary roles, as well as representing them as passive and weak characters who succumb to suicide, as in the case of Pa and Pesewa. Darko also focuses on redefining women's identities. In the main text, Cora and Randa are represented as ingenious, as they seek revenge against "Flower". In addition, through the characterisation of Ma, Darko highlights the triumph over mental illness which is an implicit deconstruction of patriarchy and its stereotypical views that women are weak.

The view that resistance is complex is represented in *God Dies by the Nile* as well as *Purple Hibiscus*, as murder is used to dethrone the patriarchs. In the above texts, Zakeya kills the mayor by crushing his head with a hoe, while Beatrice kills Eugene by poisoning him. As previously mentioned, murder should not be endorsed; nonetheless, in both novels, Beatrice and Zakeya believe that their abuse will not end until the patriarch is dead. Their criminal acts can be viewed as a form of self-defence owing to their life-shattering abusive history in the hands of oppressive patriarchs. In both instances, Adichie and Saadawi also reflect the deleterious impact of violence on victims (who are not only traumatised but transform from victim to murderer), as well as the inability to rely on law officials. In the case of Beatrice, she is unable to vocalise her abuse as a result of the fear of retaliation from Eugene. On the other hand, in the case of Zakeya, the oppressor is the mayor, an official of the legal order and one who manipulates the law to serve himself.

In this thesis, I have explored how resistance to oppression has increased partly as a result of globalisation. Within the past two decades, globalisation has created an instantaneous change in the lives of women and children. In the first two novels, *From a Crooked Rib* and *God Dies by the Nile* which were published in 1970 and 1985 respectively, the reader is cognisant of the disadvantages that characterise the lives of the characters, including those related to education, employment, health and human rights. As peasants, Ebla and Zakeya are unable to escape patriarchal constraints and their homeland. There are no job opportunities for women, hence Ebla resorts to prostitution to earn an income while the women inhabitants in *God Dies by the Nile* are forced to work for the Mayor who sexually exploits them. In both of the above-mentioned novels, agricultural production is the main source of income. In the last three texts published between 2003 and 2007, we see how women's employment opportunities have

increased. Along with financial independence, women's social and life choices have also increased. This results in boosted self-confidence and morale. Through the representation of Ifeoma in *Purple Hibiscus*, Adichie highlights how some women's roles have changed as they are able to gain more autonomy and a feeling of independence.

Despite patriarchal constraints, Ali is able to cross international borders as a result of globalisation. Furthermore, she establishes herself as a political figure promoting the advancement of the rights of women as well as summoning the removal of all forms of the inequality and the oppression of women. In *Not without Flowers*, the women in the fictional MUTE organisation have a similar goal as they are involved in challenges to oppressive patriarchal structures as well as the protection of women's rights.

In the five texts, patriarchy is represented by the authors as a hegemonic system that prevents women and children from attaining personal development. However, the counter-hegemonic characters represented in the novels are in search of their emancipation, as they defy tradition and oppose patriarchal tyranny. The characters move across domestic, national and internal borders as well as religious, cultural and ethnic divides, as they journey on a quest for equality and emancipation. In addition, the selected authors reflect how religion can also be used to challenge patriarchal understandings. For example, in *Purple Hibiscus*, religion, tradition and spirituality play an important role in the main characters' lives, as they discover that syncretic religion can be used to empower themselves. Adichie cites biblical scriptures in the novel, for example, Matthew Chapter 5:1-11 which reads:

Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down.
His disciples came to him,² and he began to teach them.

He said:

³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

⁴ Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.

⁵ Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.

⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.

⁷ Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.

⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.

⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

¹¹ “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all
kinds of evil against you because of me. (Holy Bible: New International Version).

This is a scripture of encouragement, hope and baptism. Adichie cites these scriptures to emphasise that religion is also a means of freedom and encouragement to those who are weak and in mourning.

In *Not without Flowers*, when the four wives are in isolation (after testing positive for HIV), the first wife seeks solace and strength in the Bible. The scriptures she reads invigorates her and she uses this renewed energy to try to comfort the other wives who are in a state of disarray. This is not the first time that the first wife seeks solace in God. When her husband opts for a second wife, she cries to God and asks him to show mercy on her and to kill the pain inside of her. She also prays for God to expand her vessel of endurance and to help her to endure the loss of her monogamous marriage, without tears. In addition to this, when the siblings’ mother feels debased and degraded (after her husband’s affair), she seeks refuge in prayer, by asking God to ease the pain in her heart, and also for the survival of her mental faculties. Furthermore, Darko also reveals how religion is a source of strength for some women in polygynous marriages. The first wife of Pesewa prays to God and asks him to also expand her vessel of endurance. It was also “her faith that gave her strength to promise to care for her co-wife if she should fall sick and make the children that her co-wife would bear with their husband hers as well” (Darko 2007:273).

As previously discussed, religion is a central factor in individual’s lives as it shapes one’s identity, character, culture, morals and beliefs. Religious leaders also have the power to raise awareness, and influence beliefs, attitudes and practices. In *Not without Flowers*, Darko sheds light on how the true nature of religion is distorted by unscrupulous religious leaders, through the characterisation of Prophet Abednego, an unscrupulous prophet who is exploitative towards women. The character of Father Amadi in *Purple Hibiscus* stands in opposition to Prophet Abednego, as Father Amadi is not oppressive and offers sincere spiritual guidance. Furthermore, he plays an instrumental part in Kambili’s transformation, as through him, she discovers a syncretic religion, while plays a direct role in Kambili’s empowerment and liberation.

In conclusion, the five selected authors highlight how religious, social and political spheres are used to support the patriarchal system, which subsequently results in the oppression of women and children, in their literary works. The chronological review of the primary texts highlights the changes that have occurred in the time span surveyed. In contemporary society, women have more rights than they did in 1970. The texts also reveal how women have increased opportunities in the labour force, health and education. Nonetheless, women still face significant challenges relative to men.

The five main texts form a corpus of feminist literature that depicts the struggles of African women and children over the last four decades. The texts suggest that gender inequalities exist in both public and private spheres. Furthermore, these gender inequalities are entrenched and prevalent over a span of time, places and cultures. However, as represented in the texts, gender inequality has declined as more women are challenging patriarchal structures and more organisations are committed to the advancement of women. In contemporary society, gender roles are less rigid, which has resulted in the rise in the status of women and girls. Four decades ago, (in *From a Crooked Rib*) girls were considered unworthy of continuing their education and were bartered and forced into early marriages; however, women have become more empowered during the span of writing and we see independent women with degrees and who are working in prestigious positions (in *Not without Flowers*). During the time span surveyed, women have become more empowered to take on roles that were once beyond reach. Furthermore, issues on child marriage and FGM have also declined. With that being said, there are still overwhelming statistics of violence, assault, rape and sex trafficking of women and children. However, the development in gender matters over time is a beacon of hope for many individuals across the globe as there is an increased focus on issues of structural gendered power relations, oppression and inequality.

As reflected in the chronological review of the texts, women are still subjected to patriarchal and religious oppression; however, more women are becoming empowered in society and showing resistance to patriarchal intrusions. There is an increasing number of organisations also being established to provide a platform for the economic empowerment of women as well as the advancement of women's self-autonomy and identities. The development surveyed over these four decades is an optimistic reflection that the lives of women will continue to improve over the next few decades.

As feminist writers and political advocates, the authors use their literature as an instrument to make people aware of the problems in society and also indirectly persuade readers to become involved in the reformation or regeneration of that same society. In other words, the literary texts are also used for advancing environmental awareness, addressing societal challenges, and empowering individual and communal aspirations for social justice and transformation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aboulela, L. 2005. *Minaret*. New York: Black Cat.

Achebe, C. 1959. *Things Fall Apart*. New York: Fawcett Crest.

Adeniji, A. 2015. Patriarchal Structures and Female Empowerment in Nigerian and Taiwanese Novels: A Study of Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Li Ang's *The Butcher's Wife*. *Ihafa: A Journal of African Studies*. 7(1):21-39. Available: Google Scholar.

Adjei, M. 2009. Male-bashing and Narrative Subjectivity in Amma Darko's First Three Novels. *SKASE Journal of Literary Studies*. 1(1):47-61.

Available: http://www.skase.sk/Volumes/JLS01/pdf_doc/04.pdf [2020, March 31].

Adichie, C. N. 2006. *Half of a Yellow Sun*. London: Fourth Estate.

Adichie, C. N. 2009a. *The Thing Around Your Neck*. London: Fourth Estate.

Adichie, C. N. 2009b. The Danger of a Single Story. TED Conferences. October 2009. Available: https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript [2018, October 24].

Adichie, C. N. 2012. We Should All Be Feminists. TED Conferences. December 2012. Available: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hg3umXU_qWc [2019, October 6].

Adichie, C. N. 2013 [2003]. *Purple Hibiscus*. 4th ed. London: Fourth Estate. Adichie, C. N. 2013. *Americanah*. London: Fourth Estate.

Adichie, C. N. 2017. *Dear Ijeawele, or a Feminist Manifesto in Fifteen Suggestions*. London: Fourth Estate.

- Afshar, H. 2008. Can I See Your Hair? Choice, Agency and Attitudes: The Dilemma of Faith and Feminism for Muslim Women who Cover. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 31(2):411-427. DOI: 10.1080/01419870701710930
- Agazue, C. 2016. "He Told Me that My Waist and Privates Parts have been Ravaged by Demons": Sexual Exploitation of Female Church Members by "Prophets" in Nigeria. *Dignity: A Journal on Sexual Exploitation and Violence*. 1(1):1-16. DOI: 10.23860/dignity.2016.01.01.10
- Agboadannon, K. A. D., and Dossoumou, A. M. 2018. Fake Prophets and Evangile for Sale in Amma Darko's *Not Without Flowers*. *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature*. 6(6):15-29. DOI: 10.20431/2347-3134.0606003
- Ahmed, L. 1992. *Women and Gender in Islam*. London: Yale University Press.
- Ainamon, A., and Bodjrenou, C. F. 2014. Christianity and Africa's Underdevelopment in *Swallows, News from Home* (Sefi Atta), *Not Without Flowers* (Amma Darko), *Purple Hibiscus* and *The Thing around Your Neck* (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie). *Revue du Cames*. 1(2):25-35. Available: Google Scholar.
- Ajiambo, D. 2019. Somali Sheikh Leads a Seven-year Campaign to End Female Genital Mutilation. *Religion News*. 27 February. Available: <https://religionnews.com/2019/02/27/somali-sheikh-leads-a-seven-year-campaign-to-end-female-genital-mutilation/>[2019, May 10].
- Akbari, Z., and Akbari, B. 2017. Sacred and Profane Suffering in Islam and Buddhism. *Islamic Perspective*. 17(1):25-38. Available: Google Scholar.
- Akintunde, D. O 2007. Female Genital Mutilation: A Socio-Cultural Gang Up Against Womanhood. In *Women in Religion in Culture: Essays in Honour of Constance Buchanan*. M. A. Oduyoye (Ed). Ibadan: Sefer. 88-111.

- Ali, A. H. 2004. *The Caged Virgin: An Emancipation Proclamation for Women and Islam*. London: Free Press.
- Ali, A. H. 2007 [2006]. *Infidel: My Life*. London: Pocket Books.
- Ali, A. H. 2008. Where are the Muslim Moderates? *New Perspectives Quarterly*. 25(2):46-47. Available: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5842.2008.00975.x> [2019, November 7].
- Ali, A. H. 2010. *Nomad: From Islam to America: A Personal Journey Through the Clash of Civilizations*. London: Free Press.
- Ali, A. H. 2015. *Heretic: Why Islam Needs a Reformation*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Ali, A. H. 2015. Why Islam Needs a Reformation? *The Wall Street Journal*. 21 March. Available: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-reformation-for-islam-1426859626> [2019, November 7].
- Ali, A. H. 2020. *Prey: Immigration, Islam, and the Erosion of Women's Rights*. New York: HarperCollins.
- Ali, S. K. 2012. *Lessons in Husbandry*. Cape Town: Umuzi.
- Al-Joulani, N. 2007. The Stylistics of Repetition: Gender and Class in Nawal El Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile*. *Al-Manarah*. 13(4):71-88. Available: Google Scholar.
- Al-Krenawi, A., and Graham, J. 2006. A Comparison of Family Functioning, Life and Marital Satisfaction, and Mental Health of Women in Polygamous and Monogamous Marriages. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*. 52(1):5-17. DOI: 10.1177/00207640060061245
- Allagbé, A. A. 2016. Character Naming and Authorial Attitudes in Contemporary African Literature. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. 6(4):20-28. Available: Google Scholar.

- Allagbé, A. A., and Amoussou, F. 2020. Patriarchal Ideologies and Female Un-Femininities in a Contemporary Feminist Writing: A Gender-Oriented and critical Discourse Analysis Perspective. *International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies (LALIGENS)*. 9(1):13-27. DOI: 10.4314/laligens.v9i1.2
- Alonge, S. 2018. Why are African Women More at Risk of Violence? Nigeria Tells a Patriarchal Tale. *The Guardian*. 26 November. Available: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2018/nov/26/african-women-risk-violence-nigeria-abuse>
- Ameri, F. 2006. *Sacred Spaces in Contemporary English Literature: Muslim Contributions*. Murdoch University, sd. Available: Google Scholar.
- Arias, D., Taylor, L., Ofori-Atta., and Bradley, E. A. 2016. Prayer Camps and Biomedical Care in Ghana: Is Collaboration in Mental Health Care Possible? *PLOS ONE*. 11(9):1-16. DOI: journal.pone.0162305
- Armenpress. 2019. Khachaturyan Sisters Might Get Self-Defence Ruling in High-Profile Patricide Case. *Armenpress*. 21 August. Available: <https://www.armenpress.am/eng/> [2020, January 25].
- Arnett, J. 2016. “Everything Captured; Capture Everything: Amma Darko’s Alternative Library, Information Circulation, and Urban Re-Memory- An Interview with Amma Darko. *Africa Today*. 64(4):85-99. DOI: 10.2979/africatoday.65.4.06
- Asamoah-Gyadu, J. K. 2020. Dealing with a Spiritual Virus: Whither the Prophetic? *Religious Matters*. 13 April. Available: <https://religiousmatters.nl/dealing-with-a-spiritual-virus-whither-the-prophetic/> [2020, May 11].
- Attoh, F. 2017. Gender, Religion and Patriarchy: A Sociological Analysis of Catholicism and Pentecostalism in Nigeria. *Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal*. 4(14):158-170. DOI:10.14738/assrj.414.33482.

Bartlett, H. 2016. Mental Health and Religious Beliefs in Ghana. An Intersection Between Faith and Science. *Lehigh Preserve*. 24(17):28-34. Available: Google Scholar.

BBC News. 2020. *Female Genital Mutilation: Parents Arrested After Death of Girl in Egypt*. 31 January. Available: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-51332011> [2020, February 6].

Beattie, T. 2006. *New Catholic Feminism*. New York: Routledge.

Bedana, L., Laishram, S., and Singh, M. P. 2016. Impact of Christianity on African Women in Buchi Emecheta's Novels. *Preprints*. 1(1):1-15. DOI:10.20944/preprints201607.0082.v1

Begum, S. H. 2006. Against All Odds: African Womanhood in Post-Colonial African Women Writing. *Marang*. 16(1): 103-120. Available: Google Scholar.

Beit-Hallahmi, B., and Argyle, M. 1997. *The Psychology of Religious Behaviour and Experiences*. London: Routledge.

Belsey, C. 2013. Textual Analysis as a Research Method. In *Research Methods for English Studies*. G. Griffin, Ed. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 160-178

Bendixen, J. 2017. Meet Five Men Who All Think They're the Messiah. *National Geographic*. August. Available: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/magazine/2017/08/new-messiahs-jesus-christ-second-coming-photos/> [2020, April 7].

Bicker, L. 2020. Coronavirus: South Korea Sect Leader to Face Probe over Deaths. *BBC News*. 2 March. Available: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-51695649> [2020, April 3].

Boni, T. 2010. Wounded Bodies, Recovered Bodies: Discourses Around Female Sexual Mutilations. *Diogenes*. 225(1):15-29. DOI: 10.1177/0392192110369311

Bosch, M. 2008. Telling Stories Creating (and Saving) her Life. *Women's Studies International Forum*. 31(2):138-147. DOI: 10.1016/j.wsif.2008.03.006

Brown, G. 2010. The Two Bodies of Christ: Communion Frequency and Ecclesiastical Discourse in Pre-Vatican II Australian Catholicism. *Church History*. 79(2):359-409. Available: Google Scholar.

Bulawayo, N. 2013. *We Need New Names*. London: Chatto and Windus.

Busfield, J. 1988. Mental Illness as Social Product or Social Construct: A Contradiction in Feminists' Arguments? *Sociology of Health and Illness*. 10(4):521-542. Available: Google Scholar.

Carton, H., and Egan, V. 2017. The Dark Triad and Intimate Partner Violence. *Personality and Individual Differences*. 105(1):1-24. DOI: 10.1016/j.paid.2016.09.040

Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists. 2006. Available: <http://www.africanfeministforum.com/the-charterof-feminist-principles-for-african-feminists/>[2020, October 18].

Chen, C. 2005. Taiwanese Immigrant Women and Religious Conversion. *Gender and Society*. 19(3):336-357. Available: Google Scholar.

Chennells, A. 2009. Inculturated Catholicisms in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. *English Academy Review*. 26(1):15-26. Available: Google Scholar.

Clarke, B. 2009. Law, Religion and Violence: The Importance of Islamic Law as a Tool for Refuting the Ideology of Violent Extremists. *ANZSIL-ISIL Conference*. 5-6 December. Available: https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/law_conference [2020, January 8].

Craffert, P. F. 2010. Beetroot, Garlic, Lemon and Jesus in the Fight Against HIV/AIDS: Historical Jesus Research as an Antidote for Religious and Folk Exploitation. *Neotestamentica*. 44(2):292-306. Available: JSTOR [2020, April 11].

- Darko, A. 1995. *Beyond the Horizon*. London. Heinemann.
- Darko, A. 1998. *The Housemaid*. London: Heinemann. Darko, A. 2003. *Faceless*. Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers.
- Darko, A. 2006. *Official Website: Amma Darko*. Available: ammadarko.de [2020, March 31].
- Darko, A. 2007. *Not without Flowers*. Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers.
- Darko, A. 2015. *Between Two Worlds*. Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers.
- DeGloma, T. 2010. Awakenings: Autobiography, Memory, and the Social Logic of Personal Discovery. *Sociological Forum*. 25(3):519-540.
DOI: 10.1111/j.1573-7861.2010.01194.x
- DeWaard, E. 2014. Patriarchy: The Missing Link in Understanding Globalization's Impact upon Women. *Women and Politics*. 1(1):1-13.
Available:
<https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://www.google.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1503&context=ngresearchconf> [2020, January 5].
- de Achútegui, P. S. 1962. The Second Vatican Council. *Philippine Studies*. 10(4):517-549.
Available: JSTOR.
- Diamant, J. 2019. The Countries with the 10 Largest Christian Populations and the 10 Largest Muslim Populations. *Pew Research Center*. 1 April.
Available: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/01/the-countries-with-the-10-largest-christian-populations-and-the-10-largest-muslim-populations/> [2019, October 2].
- Dickson, A. A., and Mbosowo, M. D. 2014. African Proverbs about Women: Semantic Import and Impact in African Societies. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. 5(9):632- 641. DOI:10.5901/mjss.2014.v5n9p632

- Dobash, R. E., and Dobash. R. P. 1980. *Violence against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy*. London. Open Books.
- Dreyer, Y. 2011. Women's Spirituality and Feminist Theology: A Hermeneutic of Suspicion Applied to "Patriarchal Marriages". *Theological Studies*. 67(3):1-5.
DOI: 10.4102/hts.v67i3.1104
- Dube, M. W. S. 2008. *Postcolonial Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*. Missouri: Chalice Press.
- Eakin, P. J. 1985. *Fictions in Autobiography: Studies in the Art of Self-Invention*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Emenyonu, E. N. 2017. Introduction. In *A Companion to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*. E. N. Emenyonu (Ed). New York: James Currey.
- Eze, C. 2015. Feminist Empathy: Unsettling African Cultural Norms in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*. *African Studies*. 74(3):310-326. DOI:10.1080/00020184.2015.1067996
- Ezeigbo, A. 2012. *Snail-sense Feminism: Building on an Indigenous Model*. Lagos: University of Lagos.
- Farag, A. A. F. 2017. How Does Shari'a Define an Illegitimate Child? *About Islam*. 20 February. Available: <http://aboutislam.net/counseling/ask-about-islam/how-does-sharia-define-an-illegitimate-child/> [2019, May 27].
- Farah, N. 1976. *A Naked Needle*. London: Heinemann.
- Farah, N. 1979. *Sweet and Sour Milk*. London: Allison and Busby.
- Farah, N. 1981. *Sardines*. London: Allison and Busby.
- Farah, N. 1983. *Close Sesame*. London: Allison and Busby.

Farah, N. 1986. *Maps*. London: Pan.

Farah, N. 1992. *Gifts*. New York: Arcade.

Farah, N. 1998. *Secrets*. New York: Arcade.

Farah, N. 2003. *Links*. New York: Penguin Books.

Farah, N. 2006. *Knots*. New York: Penguin Books.

Farah, N. 2006 [1970]. *From a Crooked Rib*. New York: Penguin Books.

Farah, N. 2011. *Crossbones*. New York: Penguin Books.

Farah, N. 2014. *Hiding in Plain Sight*. New York: Riverhead Books

Farah, N. 2018. *North of Dawn*. New York: Riverhead Books.

Folkenflik, R. 1993. Introduction. In *The Culture of Autobiography: Constructions of Self-Representation*. R. Folkenflik (Ed). Stanford: Stanford University Press. 1-20.

Francke, RL. 2017. Pastor Mboro has Gone and Done it, “He Killed Satan”. *IOL*. 3 July.
Available: <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gauteng/pastor-mboro-has-gone-and-done-it-he-killed-satan-10105214> [2020, April 9]

Gagiano, A. 2006. Surveying the Contours of a “Country in Exile”: Nuruddin Farah’s Somalia. *African Identities*. 4(2):251-268. DOI:10.1080/14725840600761195

Ganyi, F. M. 2013. Tragic Heroes and Unholy Alliances: A Reading of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and Mariama Ba’s *So Long a Letter*. *Global Journal of Arts Humanities and Social Sciences*. 1(2):1-9. Available: Google Scholar.

- Gbaguidi, C., and Djossou, K. A. 2018 . The Syndrome of Sugar-Daddy and Sugar-Mummy: An Exploration in Amma Darko's *Not without Flowers*. *International Journal of Recent Innovations in Academic Research*. 2(6):130-143. Available: Google Scholar.
- Gebara, I., and Bingemer, M. C. 1989. *Mary: Mother of God, Mother of the Poor*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers.
- George, R. M. 1996. *The Politics of Home: Postcolonial Relocations and Twentieth-Century Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gibb, C. 2005. *Sweetness in the Belly*. London: Vintage Books.
- Gikandi, S. 1998. Nuruddin Farah and Postcolonial Textuality. *World Literature Today*. 72(4):753. DOI: 10.2307/40154266
- Gilmore, L. 1994. *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self-Representation*. London: Cornell University Press.
- Gilmore, L. 2001. *Limits of Autobiography*. London: Cornell University Press.
- Girard, R. 1986. *The Scapegoat*. Translated by Y. Freccero. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Gorlinski, V. 2020. Ayaan Hirsi Ali: Dutch Politician. *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Available: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/human-rights> [2020, February 28].
- Grewal, K. 2012. Reclaiming the Voice of the "Third World Woman". *Interventions*. 14(4):569-590. DOI: 10.1080/1369801X.2012.730861
- Gross, R. M. 1996. *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Grosz, E. 1999. Psychoanalysis and the Body. In *Feminist Theory and the Body: A Reader*. J Price and M. Shildrick (Eds). Cambridge: Edinburgh University Press. 267-271.

Gundel, J. 2006. The Predicament of the “Oday”: The Role of Traditional Structures in Security, Rights, Law and Development in Somalia. Report for Danish Refugee Council and Novib/Oxfam (November 2006). Nairobi: *Oxfam Novib*. Available: https://logcluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/Gundel_The%2520role%2520of%2520traditional%2520structures.pdf [2019, November 18].

Hamington, M. 1995. *Hail Mary? The Struggle for Ultimate Womanhood in Catholicism*. New York: Routledge.

Hassan, R. 1995. The Development of Feminist Theology as a Means of Combating Injustice Toward Women in Muslim Communities/Culture. *European Judaism: A Journal for the New Europe*. 28(2):80-90. Available: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41444468> [2018, August 21].

Hassan, R. 1998. Conservatism in its Various Forms. In *Women and Religion*. Sr. M. J. Mananzan (Ed). Phillipines: St Scholastica College. 140-152.

Hassan, R. 1999. Feminism in Islam. In *Feminism and World Religions*. Eds A. Sharma & K. K. Young. Albany: State University of New York Press. 248-278.

Herzberger-Fofana, P. 2000. *Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)*. Available: <http://www.arts.uwa.edu.au/AFLIT/MGF1.html> [2019, November 14].

Hewett, H. 2005. Coming of Age: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and the Voice of the Third Generation. *English in Africa*. 32(1):73-97. Available: Google Scholar.

Holy Bible: New American Standard Bible. Chicago: Foundation Publications.

Holy Bible: Contemporary English Version. New York: American Bible Society.

Holy Bible: GOD’s WORD Translation. Michigan: Baker Publishing Group.

Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Bible. Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers.

Holy Bible: New International Version. Cape Town: International Bible Society.

Howard-Hassmann, R. E. 2011. Universal Women's Rights Since 1970: The Centrality of Autonomy and Agency. *Journal of Human Rights*. 10(4):433-449. DOI: 10.1080/14754835.2011.619398

Human Rights Watch. 2012. "Like a Death Sentence": Abuses Against Persons with Mental Disabilities in Ghana. *Human Rights Watch*. 2 October. Available: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2012/10/02/death-sentence/abuses-against-persons-mental-disabilities-ghana> [2020, April 10].

Hyman, G. 2010. *A Short History of Atheism*. London and New York: I. B. Tauris Press.

Jaggi, M., and Farah, N. 1989. Nuruddin Farah: A Combining of Gifts: An Interview. *ThirdWorld Quarterly*. 11(3):171-187. Available: www.jstor.org/stable/3992624 [2019, May 2].

Jakobwitz, S., and Egan, V. 2006. The Dark Triad and Normal Personality Traits. *Personality and Individual Differences*. 40(1):331-339. DOI: 10.1016/j.paid.2005.07.006

Jonas, M. 1998. An Interview with Nuruddin Farah. *Journal of Refugee Studies*. 1(1):74-77. Available: Google Scholar.

Jonason, P. K., and Davis, M. D. 2018. A Gender Role View of the Dark Triad Traits. *Personality and Individual Differences*. 125(1):102-105. DOI: 10.1016/j.paid.2018.01.004

Juraga, D. 1997. Nuruddin Farah's Variations on the *Theme of an African Dictatorship: Patriarchy, Gender, and Political Oppression in Somalia*. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*. 38(3):205-220. DOI: 10.1080/00111619.1997.10543176

Kahf, M. 2006. *The Girl in the Tangerine Scarf*. New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers.

- Kandiyoti, D. 1988. Bargaining with Patriarchy. *Gender and Society*. 2(3):274-290. Available: Google Scholar.
- Kaufman, S. B., Yaden, D. B., Hyde, E., and Tsukayama, E. 2019. The Light vs. Dark Triad of Personality: Contrasting Two Very Different Profiles of Human Nature. *Frontiers in Psychology*. 10(1):1-26. DOI: doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00467
- Kirby, B., Taru, J., and Chimbizikai, T. 2020. Pentecostals are in a “Spiritual War” Against Coronavirus in Africa – As are Some Political Leaders. *Quartz Africa*. 1 May. Available: <https://qz.com/africa/1849315/pentecostal-churches-are-in-spiritual-war-vs-coronavirus-covid19/> [2020, May 5].
- King, A. 2009. Islam, Women and Violence. *Feminist Theology*. 17(3):292-328. DOI: 10.1177/0966735009102361
- Kulshrestha, K. J. 2013. A Pagan-Christian Discourse: A Comparative Study of Aeschylean Play *Agamemnon* and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*. *Raaso*. 6(3-4):1-9. Available: Google Scholar [2018, September 25].
- Kwok Pui-lan. 2005. Mending of Creation: Women, Nature, and Hope. In *Postcolonial Imagination and Feminist Theology*. K. Pui-lan. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press. 209-231.
- Labeodan, K. 2007. Are Women their own Enemies? In *Women in Religion and Culture: Essays in Honour of Constance Buchanan*. M. A. Oduyoye (Ed). Ibadan: Sefer. 112-127.
- Lerner, G. 1986. *The Creation of Patriarchy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Le Roux, E. 2019. Can Religious Women Choose? Holding the Tension between Complicity and Agency. *The African Journal of Gender and Religion*. 25(1):1-19. Available: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2164-1774> [2020, July 1].
- Lockyer, H. 1958. *All the Men in the Bible*. Michigan: Zondervan.

- Mahohoma, T. C. 2017. A Theological Evaluation of God Business. A Case Study of Prophetic Healing and Deliverance Ministries of Zimbabwe. *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies*. 73(2):1-11. DOI: 10.4102/hts.v73i2.4529
- Makhoba, N. 2019. Lukau's Allies Turn Against Him. *City Press*. 2 February. Available: <https://city-press.news24.com/News/lukaus-allies-turn-against-him-20190302> [2019, March 5].
- Marah, J. K. 2013. Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Transformative Feminism in Africa. *International Journal of Liberal Arts and Social Science*. 1(4):31-36. Available: <http://www.ijlass.org> [2018, September 28].
- Mazrui, A. M., and Abala, J. I. 1997. Sex and Patriarchy: Gender Relations in "Mawt al-rajul al-wahid 'ala' al-ard (God Dies by the Nile)". *Research in African Literatures*. 28(3):17-32. Available: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3820990> [2018, 26 July].
- Meriem, H. B. 2016. (Re) claiming the Body of the Somali Woman in Nuruddin Farah's *From a Crooked Rib*. *Bildhaan: An International Journal of Somali Studies*. 15(1):83-105. Available: Google Scholar [2018, July 17].
- Mernissi, F. 1985. *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*. Rev ed. London: Al Saqi Books.
- Mikell, G. 1997. *African Feminism: The politics of Sub-Saharan Africa*. Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania.
- Minority Rights Group International and IIDA. 2015. *Looma Ooyaan – No One Cries For Them: The Predicament Facing Somalia's Minority Women*. Report. Available: https://minorityrights.org/wpcontent/uploads/oldsitedownloads/mrg_report_somalia_jan_2015.pdf [2020, January 6].
- Musolf, G. R. 2017. Introduction. In *Oppression and Resistance: Structure, Agency, Transformation*. G. R. Musolf (Ed). Bingley: Emerald Publishing. xi-xiv.

- Mustafa, R. F., and Troudi, S. 2019. Saudi Arabia and Saudi Women in Research Literature: A Critical Look. *Asian Social Science*. 15(2):133-141. DOI: 10.5539/ass.v15n2p133
- Nadar, S., and Potgieter, C. 2010. Living it Out: Liberated through Submission? The Worthy Woman's Conference as a Case Study of Foramenism. *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*. 26(1):141-151. Available: Google Scholar.
- Naik, S. 2011. More Like Porn than Religion. *IOL*. 30 April. Available: <https://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/gaunteng/more-like-porn-than-religion-1062898> [2020, April 9].
- Nayar, P. K. 2002. *Literary Theory Today*. New Delhi: Prestige.
- Nkealah, N. 2006. Conceptualising Feminism(s) in Africa: The Challenges Facing African Women Writers and Critics. *English Academy Review*. 23(1):133-141.
- Nkealah, N. 2016. (West) African Feminisms and Their Challenges. *Journal of Literary Studies*. 32(2):61-74.
- Nkealah, N. 2017. Cameline Agency: A New Agenda for Social Transformation in South African Women's Writing 2012–2014. *Current Writing*. 29(2):121-130.
- Nwahunanya, C. 2012. *Literary Criticism, Critical Theory and Post-colonial African Literature*. 3rd ed. New Owerri: Springfield Publishers.
- Nyambi, O., Makombe, R., and Motahane, N. 2019. Some Kinds of Home: Home Transnationality and Belonging in NoViolet Bulwayo's *We Need New Names*. *Forum for Modern Language Studies*. 56(1):78-95. DOI: 10.1093/fmls/cqz059
- Nyongesa, A. 2017. The African Woman, "The prey to the Male Predator": A Deconstruction of Feminism in Nawal El Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile*, Tsitsi Ndagarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Margaret Ogola's *The River and the Source*. *Nairobi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. 1(9):1-17.
Available: <http://www.theroyallitejournal.com> [2018, September 27].

- Oduyoye, M. A. 2007. Culture and Religion as Factors in Promoting Justice for Women. In *Women in Religion in Culture: Essays in Honour of Constance Buchanan*. M. A. Oduyoye, Ed. Ibadan: Sefer. 1-17.
- Ofosu, J. D. 2013. The Feminist Voice in Contemporary Ghanaian Female Fiction: A Textual Analysis of Amma Darko's *Faceless* and *Not Without Flowers*. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. 3(1):178-188. Available: www.iiste.org [2018, September 28].
- Ogundipe-Leslie, M. 1987. The Female Writer and Her Commitment. *African Literature Today*. 15(1):5-14. Available: Google Scholar.
- O'Gorman, D. 2018. Speaking for the Muslim World: Popular Memoir and the "War on Terror". *European Journal of English Studies*. 22(2):142-153).
DOI: 10.1080/13825577.2018.1478257
- Okonkwo, J. I. 1984. Nuruddin Farah and the Changing Roles of Women. *World Literature Today*. 58(2): 215-221. Available: Google Scholar.
- Okuyade, O. 2009. Changing Borders and Creating Voices: Silence as Character in Chimamanda Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*. 4(2):245-259. Available: Google Scholar.
- Olajubu, O. 2007. Women and the Politics of Church Leadership. In *Women in Religion in Culture: Essays in Honour of Constance Buchanan*. M. A. Oduyoye Ed. Ibadan: Sefer. 128-145.
- Ouma, C. E. W. 2009. Childhood(s) in *Purple Hibiscus*. *English Academy Review*. 26(2):48-59. Available: Google Scholar.
- Pakri, M. R., and Anandan, R. D. 2015. A Feminist-Postcolonial Analysis of Power and Ideology in Ayaan Hirsi Ali's *Infidel*. *Procedia: Social and Behavioural Sciences*. 208(1):197-202. DOI: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.196

- Paulhus, D. L., and Williams, K. M. 2002. The Dark Triad of Personality: Narcissism, Machiavellianism, and Psychopathy. *Journal of Research in Personality*. 36(1):556-563. DOI: 10.1016/S0092-6566(02)00506-6
- Pereda, N., Arch, M., and Pérez-González, A. 2012. A Case Study Perspective on Psychological Outcomes After Female Genital Mutilation. *Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology*. 32(6):560-565. DOI: 10.3109/01443615.2012.689893
- Petersen, K. H. 1981. The Personal and The Political: The Case of Nuruddin Farah. *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*. 12(3): 93-101. Available: Google Scholar [2019, May 3].
- Petersen, K. H. 1984. First Things First: Problems of a Feminist Approach to African Literature. *Kunapipi*. 6(3):35-47.
Available: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol6/iss3/9> [2019, May 8].
- Pew Research Center Forum on Religion and Public Life. 2010. *Tolerance and Tension: Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Washington DC: Pew Research Center.
- Pew Research Center. 2012. The Global Religious Landscape. *Pew Research Center*. December 18. Available: <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/global-religious-landscape-exec/> [2020, April 7].
- Pew Research Center. 2017. Christians remain World's Largest Religious Group, but They are Declining in Europe. *Pew Research Center*. April 5. Available: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/05/christians-remain-worlds-largest-religious-group-but-they-are-declining-in-europe/> [2020, April 7].
- Phiri, I. 2004. African Women's Theologies in the New Millennium. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*. 61(1):16-24. Available: JSTOR.
- Plan Evaluation. 2020. Girls in Somalia Subjected to Door-to-Door FGM. *Plan International*. 18 May. Available: <https://plan-international.org/news/2020-05-18-girls-somalia-subjected-door-door-fgm> [2021, March 1].

- Plumwood, V. 1993. *Feminism and the Mastery of Nature*. New York: Routledge.
- Pope Francis., and Spadaro, A. 2013. The Heart of a Jesuit Pope: Interview with Pope Francis. *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*. 42(107):255-278. Available: JSTOR.
- Powell, A. 2010. *Sex, Power and Consent: Youth Culture and the Unwritten Rules*. Sydney: Cambridge University Press.
- Proctor, R. 2005. Churches for a Changing Liturgy: Gillespie, Kidd and Coia and the Second Vatican Council. *Architectural History*. 48(1):291-322. Available: JSTOR.
- Pucherova, D. 2016. Islam, Tradition and Modernity in the Work of Two Somali Writers: Nuruddin Farah and Ayaan Hirsi Ali. *English Studies in Africa*. 59(2):27-40. DOI:10.1080/00138398.2016.1239416
- Rahman, A., and Toubia, N. 2000. *Female Genital Mutilation: A Guide to Laws and Policies Worldwide*. London: Zed Books.
- Rakoczy, S. 2004. Religion and Violence: The Suffering of Women. *Agenda: Empowering Women for Gender Equity*. 61(1):29-35.
- Reisel, D., and Creighton, S. 2014. Long Term Health Consequences of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). *Maturitas - Elsevier*. 80(1):48-51. Available: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2014.10.009> [2019, November 28].
- Reuters. 2013. Egypt is Worst State in Arab World to be a Woman, Survey Says. *Haaretz*. 12 November. Available: <https://www.haaretz.com/egypt-worst-arab-state-for-women-1.5289452> [2019, June 28].
- Robinson, K. 2020. How are Major Religions Responding to the Coronavirus? *Council on Foreign Relations*. 13 March. Available: <https://www.cfr.org/news-releases/coronavirus-covid-19-statement-cfr> [2020, April 3].

Ruether, R. R. 2008. Religion, Reproduction and Violence Against Women. In *Weep Not for Your Children: Essays on Religion and Violence*. R. R. Ruether and L. Isherwood (Eds). London: Equinox. 6-20.

Rwafa, R. 2016. Culture and Religion as Sources of Gender Inequality: Rethinking Challenges Women Face in Contemporary Africa. *Journal of Literary Studies*. 32(1): 43-52. DOI: 10.1080/02564718.2016.1158983

Saadawi, N. E. 1977 [1972]. *Women and Sex*. London: Zed Books.

Saadawi, N. E. 1991. *Searching*. London: Zed Books.

Saadawi, N. E. 1994 [1986]. *Memoirs from the Women's Prison*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Saadawi, N. E. 2005. Women, Religion, and Postmodernism. In *Engendering Human Rights: Cultural and Socioeconomic Realities in Africa*. O. Nnaemeka, and J. N. Ezeilo, Eds. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 27-36.

Saadawi, N. E. 2007 [1975]. *Woman at Point Zero*. London: Zed Books.

Saadawi, N. E. 2008. *Zeina*. London: Saqi Books.

Saadawi, N. E. 2015 [1977]. *The Hidden face of Eve*. London: Zed Books.

Saadawi, N. E. 2015 [1985]. *God Dies by the Nile and Other Novels*. London: Zed Books.

Saadawi, N. E. 2019. *Off Limits: New Writings on Fear and Sin*. London: Gingko Library.

SABC News. 2019. Pastor Raising Man from the Dead a Hoax – Funeral Parlour. *SABC News*. 26 February. Available: <https://www.sabcnews.com/sabcnews/pastor-raising-man-from-the-dead-a-hoax-funeral-service> [2020, April 8].

- Scarry, E. 1985. *The Body in Pain: The Making an Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Schaefer, D. O. 2014. Embodied Disbelief: Poststructural Feminist Atheism. *Hypatia*. 29(2):371-386. Available: Google Scholar.
- Schafer, D., and Koth, M. 2008. Absolute Infidel: The Evolution of Ayaan Hirsi Ali. *The Humanist*. 1(1):19-35. Available: Google Scholar.
- Schraeder, P. J. 1988. The Novels of Nuruddin Farah: The Sociopolitical Evolution of a Somali Writer. *Northeast African Studies*. 10(2/3):15-26. Available: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43661181> [2018, September 6].
- Shihada, I. M. 2007. The Patriarchal Class System in Nawal El Saadawi's *God Dies by the Nile*. *Nebula*. 4(2):162-182. Available: Google Scholar.
- Showalter, E. 1985. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830 - 1980*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Singh, K. 2020. A Coronavirus Cure will Come if Government Allows Church to do its Work. *News 24*. 23 March. Available: <https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/a-coronavirus-cure-will-come-if-govt-allows-church-to-do-its-work-kzn-pastor-20200323> [2020, April 12].
- Sowetan Live. 2014. Pastor Allegedly Asks Women to Strip Butt Naked. *Sowetan Live*. 20 November. Available: <https://www.sowetanlive.co.za/news/2014-11-20-pastor-allegedly-asks-women-to-strip-butt-naked/> [2019, March 15].
- Spencer, R., and Chesler, P. 2007. *The Violent Oppression of Women in Islam*. Los Angeles: David Horowitz Freedom Center.
- Stewart, C. and Shaw, R. 1994. Introduction: Problematising Syncretism. In *Syncretism/ Anti-syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*. C. Stewart and R. Shaw (Eds). London: Routledge. 1-24.

- Stobie, C. 2010. Dethroning the Infallible Father: Religion, Patriarchy and Politics in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*. *Literature and Theology*. 24(4):421-435. Available: Google Scholar [2019, August 9].
- Stratton, F. 1994. *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*. London: Routledge.
- Submission*. 2004. Produced/ Directed by T. Van Gogh. and Written by A. H. Ali. Netherlands.
- Tayol, R. T. 2019. Social Commitment in Amma Darko's *The Housemaid* and *Faceless*. *Language, Discourse and Society*. 7(1):153-162. Available: Google Scholar.
- Tiamiyu, M. F. 2005. Prevalence of Wife Battering Among Workers in a Nigerian University: Issues in Women's Rights. In *Engendering Human Rights: Cultural and Socioeconomic Realities in Africa*. O. Nnaemeka, and J. N. Ezeilo (Eds). New York: Palgrave Macmillan. 261-283.
- Udumukwu, O. 2011. Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Issues of Ideology in the Constitution of the Nigerian Novel. *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde*. 48(1):184-204. Available: Google Scholar.
- Umezurike, U. P. 2015. Resistance in Amma Darko's *Beyond the Horizon* and Chika Unigwe's *On Black Sisters' Street*. *An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies (LALIGENS)*. 4(2): 152-163: DOI: 10.4314/laligens.v4i2.11
- United Nations. 2021. *Gender Equality*. Available: <https://www.un.org/en/sections/issues-depth/gender-equality/> [2021, February 25].
- United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). 2015. *Spring Forward For Women Programme*. Available: <https://spring-forward.unwomen.org/en/countries/saudi-arabia> [2020, February 28].

- United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF). 2019. *Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)*. Available: <https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-protection/female-genital-mutilation/> [2019, July 21].
- Vliek, M. 2019. “Speaking Out Would Be a Step Beyond Just Not Believing” – On the Performativity of Testimony When Moving Out of Islam. *Religions*. 10(563):2-20. DOI: 10.3390/rel10100563
- Wallace, C. R. 2012: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* and the Paradoxes of Postcolonial Redemption. *Christianity and Literature*. 61(3):465-483. Available: Google Scholar.
- Weigel, G. 2001. *The Truth of Catholicism: Ten Controversies Explored*. New York: Cliff Street Books.
- West, G. 1993. *Contextual Bible Study*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications.
- Wilde, M. J. 2007. *Vatican II: A Sociological Analysis of Religious Change*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- World Economic Forum. 2019. *Global Gender Gap Report 2020*. Available: http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf [2020, February 28].
- World Health Organisation. 2007. *Mental Health: Ghana*. Available: https://www.who.int/mental_health/policy/country/ghana/en/ [2020, April 7].
- World Health Organisation. 2020. *Gender and Women’s Health*. Available: https://www.who.int/mental_health/prevention/genderwomen/en/ [2020, August 4].
- Worsfold, B. 2010. Peeking Behind the Veil: Migratory Women in Africa in Nuruddin Farah’s *From a Crooked Rib* (1970), *A Naked Needle* (1976) and *Knots* (2007), and Nadine Gordimer’s *The Pickup* (2001). *Journal of English Studies*. 8(1):159-173. Available: Google Scholar [2018, July 18].

Wright, D. 1990. Somali Powerscapes: Mapping Farah's Fiction. *Research in African Literatures*. 21(2):21-34. Available: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3819277> [2018, July 16].

Yount, K. M., and Li, L. 2010. Domestic Violence Against Married Women in Egypt. *SexRoles*. 63(1):332-347. DOI: 10.1007/s11199-010-9793-3

Zaidi, S., Ramarajan, A., Qiu, R., Raucher, M., Chadwick, R., and Nossier, A. 2009. Sexual Rights and Gender Roles in a Religious Context. *International Journal of Gynaecology and Obstetrics*. 106(1):151-155. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijgo.2009.03.029