

CHALLENGING THE CLASS-RIDDEN PATRIARCHAL SOCIETY: A MARXIST FEMINIST ANALYSIS OF MEDIE'S *HIS ONLY WIFE*

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Abstract

The present study aims to explore the effects of class differences, economy and domination of male in the context of Medie's His Only Wife in view of Friedrich Engels' the Origin, Private Property and Land (1884) as a model framework. The researchers seek to give a Marxist feminism interpretation of Medie's His Only Wife highlighting the role played by class and patriarchy in subjecting Ghanaian women in the post-colonial society. The novel revolves around the main character Afi, whose life was organized and forced into marriage by her family and society against her wishes, and the process of discovering her identity. Through the life experiences of Afi, Medie demonstrates how this oppressive authority is compounded by class systems, thus limiting women's freedoms. The present research study also adopts Marxist feminism perspective as the basis of the analysis of how the society's ability and power dynamics of the genders in the novel is determined by the economic factors. It further examines how the inequality between the classes legitimizes patrimonial authority that devalues women socially as well as economically. It also attempts to discover how 'resistance' operates in the context of the novel in terms of both gender and class oppression as is seen in Afi's gradual liberation process. Consequently, the study establishes the suitability of Marxist feminism in explaining multidimensionality of oppression in the postmodern African fiction.

1. Introduction

The present study aims to analyze the Medie's *His Only Wife* (2020) as a Marxist Feminist study by focusing the attention on the aspects of oppression on women living in patriarchal society. This study of feminism is a contemporary study linked to debates on women empowerment, patriarchy, oppression and class differences. In examining any of these terms the question of the feminine oppression becomes implicated. This novel expresses how females can lead their own lives by making themselves economically stable. Medie's *His only Wife* (2020) narrates the story of a young Ghanaian girl Afi, growing up in her small town of Ghana and facing the troubles of a male dominated society.

The aim of studying novel *His Only Wife* (2020) is to examine how the story in this novel shows the concept of a class ridden patriarchal society. The presented study is going to be conducted in perspectives of the Marxism- feminists theory, proposed by Engels (1942) describing the social bondage, work load and social riddles being imposed on the woman in *His Only Wife* (2020) novel is written by Peace Adzo Medie. This study will deal with the application of those Marxist Feminist ideals in the fictional works of Peace Adzo Medie in detail.

1.1 Statement of the Purpose

The present research aims to fill the gap by exploring how class and gender work in tandem to maintain patriarchal domination over women as depicted in the novel. Applying a Marxist feminist approach, the role of economics, material environment, and gender roles within social structure will elucidate the show and its protagonist's path to self-sufficiency. In illustrating the role played by class formations in sustaining patriarchal authority, this study seeks to further the analysis of a postcolonial novel in addressing the issues of economic injustice as well as gender domination in the newly independent African

societies. The question that needs to be answered is how structural misogyny compounded by class inequality persists in subordinating women and circumscribing their autonomy and options, and how this two-tier oppression is portrayed and combatted in the selected text.

1.2 Research Objectives

- To analyze how a woman can challenge in a patriarchal society.
- To highlight the issues of women in a patriarchal, class-ridden society and show a way forward to come out victorious from the troubles.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The present study reveals the plight of a woman in a society that at some point is almost overbearing in its espousal of patriarchal values and a society that is also stratified by class. In such a society, women are doubly victimized as they have to fight on two fronts and are also socially marginalized. The current study is significant in as much as it gives a hint to women on how to overcome the ordeal of this two-fold victimization but also how to triumph over this many-fold odds. The study aims at addressing challenges of women living in patriarchal societies where their gender and their economic status are leveraged to oppress the women.

2. Literature Review

Gender discrimination is mostly caused by patriarchy. The majority of African society is patriarchal. They value and assign positions to men far more than they do to women. Patriarchy, in its broadest definition refers to male dominance over women and children at home, as well as the growth of male power over women throughout society in general. Book *The Origins of the Family, Private Property, and the State*, by Friedrich Engels was published in 1884, provided a key explanation for patriarchy's origins.

Connell (1982) argued that as the influence of the women's liberation movement on Western socialism has grown in the last decade, there has been a lot of debate over how class and gender relations should be conceived. An extensive debate concerning the economic implications of housework has been one of the efforts to grasp the issue. Rosemarie Tong (2009) illustrated that classism in Marxist feminism is discussed as the origin of female oppression. It must be based on Marx's ideas, Engels, Lenin, and other nineteenth-century intellectuals' explanations of how traditional Marxist feminists' function within the conceptual terrain provided out by them. They believe that classism, the basis of women's oppression is not discrimination. In his book *Teori Sosial Sastra*, Ahyar Anwar (2012) outlines Marxist Feminism. Marxist feminism, he claims, asserts that social status or political structure has been at the foundation of women's inequalities. And the specific theme emphasized in Marxist feminism is women's economic independence. Women are capable of meeting their basic needs on their own.

Walby (1990) stated that patriarchy is made up of multiple interconnected elements which act as exploitation resources. Among these are the home, paid labor, the government, male-on-female harassing, homosexuality, and educational centers. The phrase "domestic" pertains to a family situation in which the housewife's position and contribution to the family's functioning is disregarded and ridiculed. The spouse is the expropriating class there in home. Full time employment applies to authoritarian workplace relations in which women being assigned to less desirable positions and are paid less than men for much the same effort. When it comes to incidents of injustice affecting women, the administration as a patriarch weapon denotes to the legislature's cooperation for patriarchy, race, or capitalist aims by declining to intervene or intervening slowly.

In general, patriarchal societies are marked by gender inequity, misogyny, and male dominance, among other things Smith (1990). As a result, these features have had a significant impact on a variety of institutions, including marriage and family Makama

(2013). The male head of the household is given authority in a patriarchal society. Engels (1942) examined the women's status in the background of various financial methods of production in the United States, Females are originally equal to males, if not more beneficial and influential in transmitted sorts of creation to matrilineal affiliations of family, according to the origin of Private Property and State. When reserved asserts emerge as a tool of production, female authority is lost. The legislative power of affiliation and the opportunity to generate an additional for men shifts the female-centric strategy to a male-centric one. Females, especially slaves, become the property of their husbands and fathers. The expansion of the capitalist system, which separates the family household from commodity productions, reinforces male dominance over females in the family.

Lerner (1986) Male dominance is the incarnation and administration of men over women over women and children with in family, as well as male superiority above women in society world at large, according to the author. Although sexism indicates that men hold dominance everywhere in general societal important industries, that was not the case. Lerner is careful to stress out that patriarchy does not entail that male's control all of society's important institutions. It will not suggest that women were absolutely powerless or but they have no rights, power, or capabilities. Male dominancy, on the other hand, is a societal structure in which all things masculine is prized and all things feminine are devalued. There are subgroups of bourgeois relationships and beliefs inside patriarchy that promote and sustain the patriarchy. One of these is sexism, which is defined as the "ideology of male supremacy, superiority, and supporting and sustaining ideas.

Lim (1997) commented that Patriarchy is the economic, social, and cultural system of male dominance and female subjugation, which now has comprised large part of mankind's life till now. Male domination systems as well as community relationships contribute to women having poor or secondary rank with in capitalist wages employment market. For women seeking skilled employment, the predominance of the family's division of roles seems to have a range of ramifications.

The gap in Marxist thought that ignores women's domestic labor is addressed in this research study. Household chores are termed unpaid labor by Marxist Feminism therefore it seeks to evaluate the value of such a task. Women are seen as the custodians of household duties, although receiving little compensation. Instead, women are subjected to physical punishment, treachery, and a high workload. Men, but at the other hand, maintain influence over recreational activities that produce revenue, allowing them to remain powerful and self-sufficient. Marxist thought discusses men's concerns at work in great detail while completely disregarding women's household responsibilities and roles, abandoning women. The research is important as it seeks to fill a gap in Marxist theoretical framework. The above finding opens up new opportunities towards subsequent Marxist literary scholars.

3. Research Methodology

The present study is qualitative and interpretative in its nature. The analytical textual analysis method is used to interpret and analyzed the selected novel "*His Only Wife*" (2020) from the perspective of Marxist Feminism by using tools of Friedrich Engels (The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State 1884). Close reading method is used to investigate the text *His Only Wife* (2020). The primary source of data collection is the text *His Only Wife* and secondary sources are journals, articles, internet etc. The present study investigates the sorrows of African women based on Frederick Engels' theory of Marxist Feminism. African women have been oppressed by men mostly owing to a lack of economic opportunities. Women can achieve a reasonable social reputation and also a respected family status if they have equal opportunity for advancement in terms of financial stability. According to Marxist Feminist theorists, money plays an important part in

matrimony. They set their sights on the household and social relationships between men and women. Women's social position impacts their importance in their domestic lives, particularly in their marriages. The Family's Early stages the transformation toward private property comprised a transformation from patriarchal culture to capitalism, so this was the foundation of female empowerment as well as suffering, as per a basic text in Marxist theory. Marxism primarily engaged with such a form of poverty which thus arises from either the class movements of society. In capitalist countries, class difference will be seen as the primary source of oppression. Feminism addresses a new kind of discrimination: women's issues. Thus, according to feminism, the main axis of oppression in patriarchy is institutional sexism. The goal of Marxist feminists is to free women from oppressive and exploitative situations.”

4. Textual Analysis

The textual instructions presented by Friedrich Engels on Marxist Feminism constitute the backbone of all this analysis in this section. Textual analysis is an important method for qualitative research inquiry that the researchers intend to use in the present research study. The theory the researchers proposed to use with the textual analysis method is Friedrich Engels' Marxist Feminism. Women can live their life independently when they have equal source of income.

“My story the marriage of a poor girl to a rich man whom she barely knew was better than any telenovelas or romance novel.” (Medie, 2020 p. 37)

Afi a seamstress poor young girl who lives with her mother receives an opportunity to marry a man who is rich in the town. The line from the text illustrates that the protagonist Afi who lives with her widowed mother on the mercy of Eli's mother cannot say no to the proposal offered by Aunt for her son. As aunt wants Afi to marry her son Eli whom Afi does not even know. Medie has showed the class difference here. Poor people have not even choice to say no to the decisions of people with high status. Even though they don't want to obey but they are forced to accept what their masters forces them to do. Same is the condition with Afi, who due to her poor circumstances and weak economic status fails to say no to the proposal.

“I thought of the peace of mind I would have when she left and also about how it would feel to live by myself. How it would feel to live by myself.” (Medie, 2020 p. 81)

The wish of to do something and to stand by own is being created in the protagonist as she faces the challenges after her marriage. She started to think to have her own life her own ways to live the life. The ultimate goal of Marxist Feminists is to liberate women from domestic servitude as well as reinstate their honor. In relation to family relationships, Engels examined both origins of discrimination and also the position of women inside of the family. Engels comments on the free living of women. He says that there is no gender discrimination as it is created by the society. Women are equal to men. Some people benefit from this class-based society in ways that persons from some of the other groups can just dream about. In the patriarchal society women do not enjoy high status and privilege.

You expect Elikem Ganyo to come here and beg you to come back home? You have forgotten who you are and where you come from. You have forgotten when you used to sit right here at this table with your old Singer sewing machine, praying that someone will bring you a dress to mend and pay you a few coins. You have forgotten when we used to stand on that verandah waiting for Aunt's driver to bring us a small sack of rice and a chicken so that we could also celebrate Christmas, so that we could also have something to eat, so that we would not have to go to other people's house to ask for food. You have forgotten all of that and you have decided to spit in her face. (Medie, 2020 p. 161)

In order to survive, the struggling lower class, which is essentially the lower class, must rely on the bourgeoisie's sources of production. When people have a high-class economic situation, they are labeled as ruling class. Low-class individuals, on the other hand, will be referred to as the proletariat as they're the bourgeoisie's slaves. Everything needed for survival, products needed in everyday situations, commodities used for satisfaction in reality, in anything from basic necessities to beautiful clothing, could only be bought with money, so economic prosperity and wealth is important. Economically stable families rule the depended families so is the case with Afi and her mother as they were living such a miserable life when they could not even afford food to eat and all these favors of providing food and shelters were given by Aunty. And from such strong family girl like Afi cannot accept an apology from her husband. Housework is as an unpaid labor which is characterized by Marxist Feminists because it is committed to women and they are not rewarded for performing laborious household activities. Men have a grip on the production sources which secure their security, whilst women continue to be disadvantaged owing to financial issues. Patriarchal society has influenced the lives of women in both of the family and community arenas due to its control over production sources.

“I had grown to love sewing and begun to see it as a career” (Medie, 2020 p. 55).

Afi was not well educated and due to poverty could not continue her studies, but excelled in sewing. By moving to Accra, she felt a change in herself as well as in her thoughts. If societal innovation is female dominance, female emancipation is also attainable through social change. Women are encouraged to participate in activities that empower them. The acquisition of money capabilities is vital. Engels in his theory, argued that the more relief and space the women will get in their homes, allow them to ponder more about their creative side. Afi performs all of her domestic duties but, she did not forget her dream of sewing. Living in the big city she sees her career of a boutique and to become a fashion designer. With this she continues to cook and washing clothes and to take care of the house and her husband.

“Well, like I said, find the job first” (Medie, 2020 p. 162).

Women can be independent only when she is economically strong and then she can take over the charge of her life. In the text Afi said to Mawusi to find her job before taking any decision of marriage. Women's position can only be strong in this way because economic prosperity promotes the enslavement of the women and make them independent. Women have to depend on male in the patriarchal society. She has to obey him. They can get emancipation only when they are economically strong and that's what Afi says to Evelyn. According to Frederick Engels' thesis of economic determinism, the economy is the driving force behind all other realities such as culture, class, creed, education, race, and religion.

I had always been comfortable with what I did; in fact, I had been proud that I was training with Sarah, a woman who had studied fashion design in London and sewed for the First Lady. But these people accomplishments made mine seem insignificant, even laughable, and I suddenly felt small (Medie, 2020 p. 92).

The protagonist Afi, was from a small town and was not educated is now trying to adjust herself in Accra, and with the people around her. Afi felt so embarrassed when the people around her were with higher posts and she felt herself small thinking of her accomplishments she made till now. Financially deprived individuals have difficulty surviving with self-esteem. Money is a major factor in determining the stability of human relationships. And that is about the influence of societal and economic influences on women's relationships. Engels comments in his book that material wealth was seen as the greatest value since it ensured females' power, authority, and position among their fellow humans. Engel concluded that the highest prize is money, which is valued and respected in the society.

“Isn’t it enough to know that Elikem Ganyo is your husband?” (Medie, 2020 p .44).

Afi is marrying into the Ganyos the town's wealthiest and most well-known family. Afi and her mother were spending a harder life. And then Alike Gaynor’s proposal came for Afi as a life changing opportunity. She was chosen to marry their son by the rich Ganyo family. She has to accept this and she is forced to say yes as this was the opportunity for her to pay back to Aunty’s favors and kindnesses which were upon her mother. Though she did not even saw her husband but only that thing was enough for her to be known as wife of Elikem Ganyo. That’s what her mother says to her when she seemed worried and asked about her future. Only replied she got was that is enough for you that you are chosen by Ganyo and you are known as the wife of Elikem so you don’t have to worry more.

“You have made me so proud. You have wiped away my tears, you have removed my shame. Because of you, those who laughed at me are now laughing with me.” (Medie, 2020 p. 15).

This quote supports how Afi marriage is not about her relationship with Eli, but this is about how it can benefit their families. While for the Ganyos, the relationship offers a solution to the problem of Mona and Eli’s relationship. For Afi and her mother it offers prosperity and financial freedom after struggling with poverty after her father's shocking death, which left her as well as her mother penniless and homeless dependent on the generosity of her relatives. And the mother of Afi, Olivia is extremely embarrassed by their lowered class after untimely death, and she is now the mother-in- law of Eli Ganyo. It restores her reputation and elevates her to an either higher class than she was when her husband was alive. Afi is part of a younger generation of Ghanians one that is more influenced by modern notions of marriage is based on romantic love. Her mother and Aunty are part of an older generation from a time where marriage was more about practicality, and for women, financial security. Engels argued that marriage should be taken as an affection of love in which consent of both are necessary. The marriage contract therefore must base on the love. Engels relates the lines in Afi’s favor he thinks that emancipation of women are possible when they start speaking of her rights.

“Ma, I don ’t know him; what if I don ’t like him?” (Medie, 2020 p. 32)

Unlike the majority of her family and friends, Afi refuses to settle for a second- best marriage. She aspires to be her husband's only wife, rather than one of two or even the first. Afi wants to be her husband's one and genuine love, and she is unwilling to settle for anything less, regardless of the wealth and prestige she gains from her marriage. This marriage was actually a power move to get Eli to leave the woman. Folks with great social prestige and sufficient capital are almost always compensated with incentives under capitalism-based social systems the most crucial of these is greater command over someone who enters their sphere of responsibility. Everything revolves around the desires of the powerful, and those who are helpless must submit to their masters in order to exist in society. Men maintained control over the means of production because it allowed them to achieve greater authority than they could. The gens system, which itself was focused on strong patriarchal lines, was developed. Within societies, men took over the role of women.

“You just got married; it is better that you spend time at home, getting to know your husband and taking care of him,” (Medie, 2020 p. 56).

Men are thought to have the right to pursue their desires, but women are expected to submit to those desires and decisions. Afi points out in this line. She wonders what would happen if the roles were reversed, and she concerns male privilege. Polygamy is a term used to describe having many other spouses at the very same moment. In some societies men are permitted for marrying many women and are referred to as being in a polygamous relationship. Engels supports those marriages are only meant for happiness and it must be based on the love if the partners fail to do so they should have right of separation. If there is

no respect and love in the contract of marriage, then there is no need to continue this contract.

Let them talk. Am I the first woman to ask for a divorce in this country? Women do it all the time and their lives don't come to an end. They continue to breathe and work and some of them even manage to find love again. Why should I be any different? I'm still young, my business is doing well, and I will work and take care of myself and my son (Medie, 2020 p. 238).

The most crucial thing for women to attain their liberation is to recognize and oppose patriarchy by standing up for them. The protagonist faces many challenges from the start of her life and from the first day of her marriage when her husband does not even come to his own wedding. She does not care while demanding for the divorce from her husband when he decides not to leave his Libertarian wife. Afi feels no hesitation rather she is determined and motivated to face all the problems. With divorce no one ends her or his life. This is what Afi thinks. She thinks greater as she is the owner of her business and she is not hesitant now to live alone with her son. Engels depicts that marriage is between two people and if they two cannot go with one another they must be separated.

"My brother, you don't have to choose; man wasn't made to be with one man. You are a lion and you have an entire pride!" (Medie, 2020 p. 130).

The lines from the text show the power of men. The significance of men is emphasized in these lines. In historical situations, the use of male-dominated vocabulary and one of several grounds of female humiliation and the development of patriarchy as either a societal pattern is verbal insults. In these lines when Eli is worried to choose between Afi and Muna then Chris one of his friends says that he should not be worry in choosing as the man is a lion and he owns everyone and everything. This depicts the male supremacy. Men take command over everything and every sphere of the life. Women's rights advocate Marxist Feminism considers injustice as a socially constructed and so thinks in the possibilities of freedom from patriarchal oppression and control. The first evidence of pairing marriage, according to Engels, came in homes where the husband already had principal wife and multiple subsidiary women.

5. Findings and conclusion

The present study illustrates the status of women in the society can only be strong if they have the equal opportunities as men. Women's social status impacts their worth in their domestic lives, particularly in their marriages. If a woman is poor and uneducated, she can be a victim of patriarchal society. Personal assets contribute to economic injustice and men and women's relationships with in domestic workplace and in community on the whole are unequal. If a woman does not possess property, she is considered worthless. Afi, the protagonist of the novel faces many challenges as she was poor, daughter of widowed woman, uneducated and therefore she is forced to marry a man she does not even know. But when she realizes her worth, she takes a stand for herself. The stories of every woman presented in the novel are so emotional. In this world of man only independent women can enjoy the equal rights. This study files Afi's portrayal of African women's lives. Patriarchy has shown itself to be seriously destructive to African-American women. The study examines the role of men, especially husbands, with in victimization of their women. Medie's female characters, have been victims of male supremacy in variety of ways. Financial ownership and superiority are significant aspects in each of these cases. The research assumes that if girls have equal opportunities, they will be able to achieve respectable positions not only locally but also socially. Women who are economically strong can live their lives according to their own way. Medie's *His Only Wife* (2020) mainly addresses the plight of Afro- American women. In one way or another, its female characters

suffer as a result of financial inequality. For the purpose of empowering her female characters, Medie draws on Marxist Feminist doctrine. Women can achieve social and domestic status if they have economic independence. Medie's *His Only Wife* (2020) is a fictional work, she builds traditional households in which men stay financially strong and socially influential while women remain destitute and doomed.

5.1 Future Recommendations

In the present day political setting this is well illustrated by the fact that money dictates the quality of the relation between people. Future researchers can consider this radical feminist movement and analyze the validity of the stated perspectives together with Liberal Feminist settings in this field. Liberal Feminism looks on gender norms that are formed due to ignorance. Future researchers may search for more evidence of this concept in literature that addresses the topic of oppression of women in the underdeveloped societies. In its crux, cultural feminism seeks to acknowledge positive aspects of femaleness that have always been suppressed by male domineering in most societies. Future researchers can use a corresponding perspective of Cultural Feminism as to towards the status of women of Africa who are harassed. Future research can explore the extent to which Marxist and Cultural Feminist theoretical frameworks hold and the distinctions in implementing them.

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