

Gender Politics and Patriarchal Subversion in Selected Nigerian Gynotexts

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Abstract

*Gender issues have gradually taken a central role in literary discourses over the past few decades. Although previous studies have examined women's oppression in African literature, little attention has been paid to the emerging trajectories of domestic patriarchy in recent Nigerian gynotexts. This study therefore examined the interplay of gender politics and patriarchal subversion in selected Nigerian gynotexts i.e. novels written by women and on women's experiences. Kate Miller's notion of Radical Feminism serves as the primary analytical framework. A qualitative approach is adopted in the textual analysis of *The Truth About Sadia* by Lola Akande and *Twisted Love* by Adetanwa Ibiro Odebiyi, essentially focusing on how female characters navigate cultural prescriptions, familial hierarchies, and emotional repression within patriarchal settings. Findings reveal that the protagonists of the novels, Sadia and Funmi, endure emotional suppression, identity conflict, and deep psychological strain as a result of entrenched family expectations and gender norms. The research explores and exposes the power structures that regulate women's lives and the approaches adopted by female characters in subverting the norms of patriarchy.*

Keywords: Gender politics, patriarchal subversion, radical feminism, Nigerian gynotexts.

Introduction

Gender politics and patriarchal subversion are rooted in feminist discourse. These concepts are social and ideological constructs that reflect the dominance, subjugation, or subordination of one gender by the other. The former, in particular, addresses the different ways in which gender influences and shapes power relations, policies, and societal norms. Invariably, it foregrounds the struggles and negotiations over gender roles, rights, and responsibilities within various socio-political and socio-economic contexts. Perlego (2023) reveals that "gender politics refers to how power dynamics, social norms, and institutions intersect with gender identity and expression." In

this study, gender politics are viewed through the lens of power dynamics, which involves the differential treatment of men and women, thereby impacting power relations, status, and authority. The antecedents to gender power dynamics are multifaceted and deeply rooted in historical, cultural, social, economic, and political contexts. Duflo (2012:14) asserts that “the historical roots of gender power dynamics are deeply embedded in the patriarchal structures of ancient civilisations”. Understanding this antecedent is essential for addressing contemporary gender inequalities and working towards greater gender complementarity. By examining the historical foundations, cultural norms, economic factors, political structures, socialisation processes, colonial and post-colonial influences, one gains a comprehensive understanding of the forces that shape the gender power tussle. Most societies have been characterised by systems where men hold primary power and dominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property. Simone de Beauvoir (2011:7) submits that “those who made and compiled the laws, being men, favoured their own sex.” Gender politics is often portrayed in terms of societal roles and stereotypes, economic disparities, sexual and reproductive rights biases, gender-based violence, sexual and political biases, among others.

The above assertion underscores the notion that gender politics is rooted in patriarchy - a system of male domination and oppression of women through its social, political and economic institutions. This aligns with Kamarae’s (1992:3) submission that “in the past two decades, patriarchy has been recreated to analyse the origins and conditions of men’s oppression of women”. In a similar vein, Igbuzor (2012) views patriarchy as a social construct in which men hold authority over women, children, and property. Patriarchy is a term used to signify the concept that male dominance is a universal organising principle in all societies (Payne and Jessica 2010: 523). It constitutes a systemic structure that perpetuates women's economic dependence, exposes them to various forms of violence, restricts their roles predominantly to domestic spheres, and limits their involvement in decision-making. Carole Pateman (1988:12) observes that, "the patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity is the political difference between freedom and subjection”. Patriarchal ideologists often exaggerate the biological distinctions between men and women, asserting that men have the masculine, dominant, and therefore inherently occupy roles characterised by masculinity, dominance, and superiority. In contrast, women are relegated to subordinate roles. Therefore, any system that operationalises an order that accords men undue advantage over women is considered patriarchal.

Akinsete (2022:37) avers that “the representation of women in African literature has been largely pessimistic and disparaging” as prevalent in several African novels “such as Nawal El Saadawi’s (1975) *Woman at point zero*, Buchi Emecheta’s (1979) *The joys of motherhood*, Mariama Bâ’s (1979) *So long a letter*, and Chimamanda Adichie’s (2004) *Purple Hibiscus*”. He argues that just as witnessed among child characters in contemporary African novels (Akinsete, 2023:504), women characters are usually portrayed as victims of social injustice, oppression, violence, sexual abuse and environmental degradation. Therefore, literature in its dual capacity, as a mirror of society and a catalyst for change, remains a vital field for understanding and confronting gender power dynamics. It reflects and critiques the dogmatic social norms against women, and offers a distinctive perspective through which the pervasive influence of patriarchal structures can be examined. Akinsete (2022:37), however, submits that "African literature frequently explores these interactions to critique how family and gender structures maintain patriarchal norms, often positioning women within subordinate roles".

Within African prose, the intersection of gender dynamics and patriarchal subversion reveals that female gender challenge restrictive social norms through unity and self-assertion. Characters in works like Nawal El Saadawi’s *Woman at Point Zero* and Mariama Bâ’s *So Long a Letter* navigate complex family structures that both constrain and motivate them to assert autonomy (Bâ, 1979; Saadawi, 1975). This theme is critically examined in novels like *Oil Cemetery*, where Nwoye uses the character of Rita to symbolise the agency of women within oppressive family and social contexts, depicting her growth as she assumes responsibility within her community (Nwoye, 2015:49). Such works depict gender roles as evolving constructs, reflective of the broader social shifts within African societies, and suggest that family dynamics, while often steeped in tradition, are also spaces of resistance and transformation (Akinsete, 2022:39; Oyěwùmí, 1997). Therefore, this study seeks to examine gender politics and patriarchal subversion in selected contemporary Nigerian gynotexts.

Engaging Feminism as a Theoretical Framework

Feminism encompasses a diverse range of ideologies, movements and theories aimed at advocating for women’s rights and gender equality. It challenges the patriarchal structures that enforce gender-based discrimination and seeks to dismantle the systems that marginalise women (hooks, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991). According to bell hooks, feminism is “a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression”, emphasising the need for inclusive and intersectional approaches to

address various forms of oppression (hooks, 2000). First coined in 1837 by the French philosopher Charles Fourier, the concept primarily focused on advocating for women's rights and equality. (Jaggar, 1983:21) Over time, it has evolved into a diverse global movement, aiming to dismantle intersecting systems of oppression like patriarchy, sexism, classism and so on (hooks, 2000: 4)

The feminist movement can broadly be divided into four historical waves. The first wave emerging in the late 19th and early 20th centuries focused on legal rights, particularly women's suffrage. The second wave, which gained momentum in the 1960s, addressed broader social issues, such as reproductive rights, workplace discrimination and sexual freedom (Jaggar, 1983). The third wave, beginning in the 1990s sought to address the perceived shortcomings of the second wave by embracing the plurality of experiences and identities, promoting diversity within the feminist movement (Crenshaw, 1991; Butler, 1990). The last wave, kick-started in the early 21st Century, is a political feminist movement driven largely by digital activism and protest on societal deformities on women, such as sexual harassment, body autonomy, assault and so on.

Feminism has different meanings and interpretations, and diverse feminists define this theory based on their social, political, cultural and religious worldviews. Feminist thought has evolved into various strands, each focusing on different aspects of gender inequality. For instance, liberal feminism advocates for equal opportunities under the law and emphasises reform within existing structures (hooks, 2000). Socialist and Marxist feminism focus on class oppression and the ways economic factors contribute to women's subordination, emphasising the use of capitalism in perpetuating gender inequality (Willis, 1984:44; Jaggar, 1983). Intersectional feminism highlights how gender intersects with race, class, sexuality, and other social categories to shape diverse lived experiences (Crenshaw, 1991: 1251). Transactional and postcolonial feminists address issues of gendered racial capitalism, imperialism, and environmental activism, reflecting struggles beyond Western contexts (Monhanty, 2003; Davis, 1981).

Radical feminism is particularly pertinent to this study, which argues the view that the family is a fundamental institution of patriarchy, where male dominance is maintained and reinforced through traditional gender roles. (Willis, 1984). The proponents, such as Kate Millet, Catharine MacKinnon, and Andrea Dworkin, contend that patriarchal systems are deeply embedded in social, economic and cultural structures, asserting that true gender equality can be achieved by dismantling these systems (Tong, 2009). Her seminal work, entitled *Sexual Politics* (1970) forms the foundation for the concept of radical feminism. This type of feminism identifies patriarchy as

a pervasive system of oppression that permeates all aspects of society, particularly through the family unit (Tong, 2009). Radical feminists argue that traditional family structures perpetuate male dominance by reinforcing conventional gender roles that confine women to subordinate positions. Women are often considered weak and unproductive, and are confined to the homestead in their traditional functions as wives and mothers (Akinsete, 2022:42). This confinement limits their autonomy and dictates their behaviour.

Millet's ideology on radical feminism describes how the selected gynotexts, Lola Akande's *The Truth About Sadia* and Adetanwa Odebiyi's *Twisted Love*, showcase the entrenched patriarchal norms that dictate family dynamics and gender roles. Akinsete and Ojo (2021) submit to calling attention to societal regeneration through literary works of Nigerian authors. Based on this perspective, this study reveals how these texts reflect the struggles of female characters against patriarchal constraints while advocating for social change regarding women's rights and empowerment in Nigeria.

Patriarchy and Gender Politics in *The Truth About Sadia*

Family plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's identity, especially in societies where traditional values and hierarchies dictate relationships. In *The Truth About Sadia*, the family structure establishes a rigid order that prioritises male authority and limits female agency, a dynamic that aligns with radical feminist arguments that the family operates as a foundational institution of patriarchy. Sadia's experiences within her family illustrate how these structures reinforce control, dictate expectations, and suppress individual aspirations. From childhood, Sadia's place in the family is defined by obligation rather than choice, reflecting a systemic erasure of female autonomy. Her elder brother, Akin, assumes authority over her future, a role that stems from their father's expectations. In a moment of reflection, their father reminds Akin of his responsibility: "you are my only son, and your responsibility is enormous. My desire is to educate all three of you... but look at me. See what I am reduced to" (p. 17). This passing of patriarchal power from father to son reinforces the intergenerational continuity of male dominance, a pattern radical feminists identify as core to women's subordination within familial systems.

This dynamic becomes even more apparent in Akin's resentment towards Sadia's education. While their elder sister, Atinuke, remains uneducated and follows the expected path of early marriage, Sadia pursues higher learning, an act Akin perceives as a threat. His frustration is not simply about missed opportunities, but rather it is about maintaining hierarchy. In his eyes, education is a source

of power, and Sadia's pursuit of it challenges the symbolic order that privileges male authority, a conflict that also speaks to Freudian notions of rivalry and suppressed desire to dominate.

Now he knew why he ought to have privileged higher education over a bank job... If there was anyone who deserved a university education among his siblings, it was he, not his kid sister ...part of it was to nudge her into a teaching career... he knew teachers were poorly paid. There was almost no chance of achieving financial success as one (p. 18,20).

By allowing Sadia access, he fears that she may surpass him. Akin's control extends beyond her education to her career and personal life. He deliberately steers her away from law, guiding her instead toward teaching, a profession he deems financially limiting. This redirection aligns with radical feminist concerns about the systemic restriction of women's economic empowerment as a means of sustaining male dominance. His interference ensures that Sadia's future remains within his control, preventing her from achieving full independence.

Akin's treatment of Sadia stands in stark contrast to his relationship with Atinuke, who conforms to traditional expectations. Atinuke's early marriage and financial dependency on Akin make her more acceptable within the family's structure. "Atinuke, that is Sadia's immediate elder sister, remained uneducated but got married to a fairly educated man" (p. 19). Her passivity affirms the patriarchal ideal of the compliant woman, reinforcing the notion that women who do not disrupt male authority are rewarded with protection and approval. Because she does not challenge societal norms, she is not seen as a threat, unlike Sadia, who constantly resists imposed limitations. This contrast is evident in a conversation between Akin and Atinuke, where he asserts his control over Sadia: "Tell me, why aren't you like her?" (p.232). This exchange underscores the different expectations placed on women based on their willingness to conform. Atinuke's compliance earns her a place of favour and protection, while Sadia's resistance leads to resentment and conflict.

Conflict within the family unit is central to *The Truth About Sadia*, shaping not only the protagonist's experiences but also reinforcing broader themes of power, control, and resistance. The novel highlights the tensions that arise from patriarchal dominance, sibling rivalry, and parental influence, all of which determine the course of Sadia's life. While Akin's dominance over Sadia is explicit, their father also plays a subtle but crucial role in shaping the dynamics of their family. By entrusting Akin with the responsibility of caring for his younger sisters, their father unknowingly places Sadia under her brother's lifelong authority. His words reflect the burden of traditional male responsibility, which in turn fuels Akin's belief that he has the right to dictate

Sadia's future: "You are my only son, and your responsibility is enormous." (p.17). Even though their father intended to provide support and structure, his decision ultimately led to Akin's unchecked control, making it difficult for Sadia to establish true independence.

The most significant familial conflict in the novel exists between Sadia and her elder brother, Akin. His resentment toward her is deeply rooted in the belief that her education and potential success threaten his authority. Unlike Atinuke, who remains dependent on him, Sadia's ambition makes her difficult to control. His thoughts reveal his intention to suppress her success, "He more or less owned her. For purposes of self-preservation, it was only fair that he took all precautions towards ensuring Sadia wouldn't have a chance to outshine him in life (p.20). Akin sees himself as the head of the family, and by extension, the one who determines how far Sadia can go in life. His actions, forcing her into teaching instead of law, attempting to control her marriage choices, and later punishing her for seeking independence, demonstrate how familial control is not just about care but about maintaining dominance. When Sadia informs Akin that she has enrolled in a master's program, his reaction is filled with anger and betrayal:

Wasn't it you who came here the other time begging me to forgive your infractions? And to think I actually thought you'd learned your lessons? Look at you, look what you've done. You couldn't even wait a while before showing your characteristic obstinacy again. (p. 264).

This moment encapsulates the core of their conflict. Akin believes that Sadia must always seek his approval for her life decisions. When she defies his expectations, he sees it as an act of rebellion rather than personal growth. Such a reaction reveals a deep internalisation of patriarchal norms, where control over female autonomy is seen as both a right and a symbol of masculine stability. Akin's wounded ego responds not to Sadia's independence, but to the collapse of the symbolic order that places him above her.

Similarly, Sadia's marital struggles are mirrored in Mofeoluwa's own family, where patterns of gendered conflict emerge. His relationship with his elder brother, Aremo, mirrors the same tension seen between Sadia and Akin. In the novel, Aremo, Mofe's elder brother, embodies the traditional patriarchal figure who enjoys the privileges of male dominance without fulfilling the responsibilities that such a role demands. Despite being the head of his household, Aremo is portrayed as idle and unmotivated, choosing to live off his late father's rental property and his hardworking wife's earnings. Auntie Bumi, his wife, juggles a full-time nursing job with petty trading just to sustain the family's needs. Yet, rather than acknowledging her sacrifice, Aremo

maintains a dismissive, authoritarian attitude toward her, treating her with the same patriarchal entitlement expected of a sole provider.

This inversion of responsibility reflects radical feminist concerns about structural male privilege: even when women take on the burden of survival, men retain control, protected by cultural expectations rather than merit. His failure to assume the expected financial and emotional responsibility as a husband and father not only strained his marriage but also unsettled his younger brother, Mofe, who found it morally unacceptable that a man would watch his wife struggle alone while demanding obedience and respect. Mofe's decision to confront Aremo about his irresponsibility leads to serious consequences, revealing how family conflict is often shaped by power struggles between siblings. Mofe recalls the moment he challenged his brother

I decided to talk to him. I told him, point blank, that he needed to rise to his responsibilities... I told him everybody would have their own families eventually and would not be able to combine their responsibilities with his own. He was livid. He said I had disrespected him. (p. 196).

This passage highlights a recurring theme in the novel: younger siblings who challenge authority figures are met with hostility, resentment, and punishment. Just as Akin resents Sadia's success, Aremo resents Mofe's attempt to hold him accountable. As a result, Aremo retaliates by introducing Mofe to substance abuse, mirroring how familial conflict has long-term consequences on individual lives. This act of sabotage underscores how family structures, rather than nurturing growth, often reinforce dependency and destruction.

In *The Truth About Sadia*, the intersection of family dynamics and gender roles is most vividly illustrated through the experiences of three central women: Auntie Bumi, Atinuke, and Sadia. Although each of them navigates patriarchal structures differently, their stories collectively highlight recurring themes of subjugation, endurance, and sacrifice. Their varied responses to financial dependence, marital expectations, and male authority reveal how women are positioned along a spectrum between total conformity and subtle resistance within the framework of patriarchal family life. This contrast reinforces the radical feminist view that even within the same cultural and domestic system, women internalise and respond to male dominance in complex and often painful ways.

Auntie Bumi is portrayed as a provider who remains subjugated. Her experience exposes a striking paradox in gender roles. Despite being the primary provider in her marriage, she remains subjugated by her husband, Aremo. This reversal of economic dependence challenges the

assumption that financial power equates to autonomy, particularly for women in patriarchal societies. Unlike traditional setups where men financially support their households, Auntie Bumi works tirelessly to sustain her family. Yet, her financial contributions do not translate into authority or respect. Instead, Aremo continues to assert dominance over her, reinforcing the idea that a woman's role is to submit regardless of her economic relevance. Mofe recounts how his elder brother, Aremo, depended entirely on his wife but still controlled her

Auntie Bumi was a nurse; she was very hardworking Brother Aremo was a Grade 2 teacher of old... Although his profession meant he earned less than his wife he was also lazy. He was without initiative and lacked the drive that a married man with three children ought to have in order to provide for his family. (p. 196).

Despite Auntie Bumi's ability to sustain the household, Aremo remains the head of the family. His lack of financial contribution does not diminish his authority. This suggests that gender roles are not just about economic power but about cultural conditioning. When Mofe advises him to take responsibility, Aremo interprets it as an attack on his masculinity rather than constructive criticism (p. 196). This leads to severe consequences, as he later retaliates by introducing Mofe to substance abuse, a move that reflects how male pride and gender expectations drive destructive decisions within families. Furthermore, Auntie Bumi's reaction to Sadia's marital troubles further reinforces the idea that women must endure in silence. When Sadia seeks her advice about Mofe's behaviour, Auntie Bumi dismisses her concerns, "Men are like that. You guide them and they run from your grasp. You try to plan everything and nothing happens in the way that you expected." (p. 29). This response reflects internalised gender norms. Auntie Bumi, despite her struggles, has accepted that men will always exercise authority, and women must simply learn to cope.

Similarly, Atinuke is projected as a woman who fully conforms to traditional gender roles. Her life serves as a direct contrast to Sadia's resistance. Unlike Sadia, who seeks education and self-sufficiency, Atinuke follows the traditional path of marriage, dependence, and submission. The novel describes her as uneducated but married to a "fairly educated man," (p.19), positioning her as a conventional example of what society expects from women. Atinuke's financial dependence on Akin ensures that she never poses a threat to his authority. Unlike Sadia, whose ambitions make her a target of Akin's control, Atinuke remains passive and compliant, making her more acceptable within the family structure (p. 232). Akin's preference for obedient women reflects the deep-rooted belief that female submission is a virtue. Atinuke's decision to accept financial dependence shields

her from the kind of mistreatment Sadia faces. However, this comes at the cost of her autonomy, as she remains trapped in a cycle of economic reliance and limited choices.

Sadia, unlike Auntie Bumi and Atinuke, actively challenges the gender roles imposed on her. She seeks education, financial stability, and autonomy, yet finds herself trapped by the same patriarchal expectations that confined the other women in her family. A defining moment of Sadia's struggle comes when she realises that marriage, rather than providing liberation, has placed her in another form of subjugation. Despite being deceived by Mofe, she convinces herself that marriage is her ultimate refuge "for the first time in my life, I had a home I could truly call my own." (p. 27). This reflects the societal conditioning that pushes women to equate stability with marriage, even when the reality of that marriage is far from ideal. Eventually, her internal struggle becomes evident when she makes the ultimate sacrifice for her marriage: "I'd live for our son. If you can stay focused and with your family, I shall be your furniture, I shall be the carpet under your feet." (p. 133). This moment significantly demonstrates how even a woman who resists societal norms can still succumb to the pressure of endurance.

Altogether, the lives of Auntie Bumi, Atinuke, and Sadia collectively reveal the different ways women experience and respond to gender roles within family structures. Auntie Bumi, despite being a provider, remains submissive. Atinuke, by fully embracing traditional roles, ensures male protection but sacrifices her autonomy. Sadia, the one who resists, ultimately suffers the most criticism and emotional turmoil. This explains why Charles Akinsete (2022) submits that "women characters are usually portrayed as victims of social injustice, oppression, violence, sexual abuse and environmental degradation. Such representation of women must be interpreted against the continued marginalisation of women in Africa (37). Through these contrasting characters, *The Truth About Sadia* highlights the inescapable pressure on women to conform to patriarchal expectations, demonstrating how family dynamics reinforce submission, endurance, and sacrifice as the defining virtues of womanhood.

Subverting Patriarchy: Resistance And Self-Assertion in *The Truth About Sadia*

Sadia's characterisation from the beginning exhibits a subtle defiance that sets her apart from other women around her. Unlike Atinuke, who is moulded by her brother and aligns herself with patriarchal expectations, Sadia radiates a promising aura even from childhood; a sense of strength and individuality that Akin, her elder brother, found threatening. "He detested it and wanted to smash it" (p.83). This early inclination toward resistance foreshadowed her later choices. Although

she was subjected to emotional manipulation, societal pressure, and spiritual interference orchestrated by her brother to deter her from marriage, Sadia persisted. Her resilience was neither loud nor confrontational; it was internal, steady, and ultimately transformative.

Sadia's transition into marital life (p.21) marks her first breakthrough against Akin's overbearing control; the very act of getting married defied his wishes and marked a significant personal victory. However, that marriage was anything but idyllic. Mofe, the man she married, concealed truths, battled substance abuse, and grew increasingly violent. Despite these trials, Sadia stayed, driven partly by social expectations that idealised female endurance. Her husband's deterioration into mental instability eventually became a threat to both her and their son, compelling her to leave the home for safety (p.102). In time, Sadia began rebuilding her life. She moved from squatting with a friend to renting her own modest one-room apartment, which she cherished "This was just a one-room apartment with practically nothing, but it felt like paradise. It was hers. She had paid for it. She had her own key" (p.121).

Despite the loneliness that trailed her years of separation, she remained resolute, even rejecting romantic advances "I made up my mind after Mofe's death never to be involved with a man again" (p.258). These choices were not signs of weakness, but declarations of autonomy. She focused her energy on raising her son, furthering her education, and reclaiming her sense of self. The closing chapters of the novel present a woman who, though alone, stands accomplished and fulfilled. Her son, Sesan, matured into a successful, responsible man "She led a quiet, exemplary life... She devoted herself entirely to him" (p.296). Sadia's life may have been marked by pain and loss, but her journey is ultimately one of strength and survival. Against the backdrop of familial betrayal, societal judgment, and patriarchal pressures, she emerged not unscarred, but undefeated. Her resistance is evident in every choice she made to live, to heal, and to persist on her own terms.

Basically, *The Truth About Sadia* presents a multifaceted portrayal of gender politics in the home and a fight for freedom in a patriarchal Nigerian society. The novel illustrates how traditional family structures marked by the authoritative control of male figures such as Akin shape the identity and limit the autonomy of women like Sadia. Through the experiences of Sadia, Auntie Bumi, and Atinuke, the narrative exposes the deep-seated expectations imposed on women, where obedience and endurance are valued over personal ambition and self-actualisation. Sadia's internal struggle is compounded by conflicting pressures from both her family and society. Her desire for independence and personal fulfilment is constantly undermined by the legacy of male dominance

whether through the deliberate truncation of her education and career choices or through the emotional manipulation that reinforces her dependency. Similarly, the pressures within her marriage force her to reconcile love with sacrifice, highlighting the emotional cost of adhering to traditional gender roles.

Patriarchy and Gender Politics: Structures of Marginalisation, Subservience and Subjugation in *Twisted Love*

Parental influence plays a fundamental role in shaping the identities and futures of Funmi and Ronke in *Twisted Love*. Their father, Mr Adeoti, though unconsciously, serves as the primary enforcer of patriarchal norms within the household, instilling traditional values that define gender roles and reinforce family hierarchy. His role reflects the internalisation of patriarchal ideology, where male authority is regulated and rarely questioned within the family structure. His expectations for his daughters, particularly in terms of education, marriage, and subservience, dictate their lives in ways that shape their aspirations, limitations, and conflicts. This positions Mr Adeoti as both a symbolic and literal representative of societal control over female agency. Through his actions and ideology, *Twisted Love* highlights how patriarchal family structures function as a microcosm of larger societal expectations placed on women.

One of the earliest depictions of gender-based conditioning occurs when the girls travel with their parents to Bauchi, where they encounter young girls selling *fura de nunu*. Curious about why these girls were not in school, Funmi and Ronke ask their father for an explanation. He responds by reinforcing a cultural belief that education for women is largely unnecessary in the Northern part of Nigeria; his casual acceptance of this belief underscores how deeply rooted gender bias becomes naturalised through generational discourse, shaping the girls' understanding of their roles long before they begin to question them.

Female education was frowned upon in many parts of the North because it was believed that educating a girl would not only make it difficult for her to get a husband, but even if she did get married it was perceived as a wasteful investment by her family (p.20).

This moment is pivotal in showing how societal structures, often enforced through parental figures, directly contribute to the suppression of female independence. Mr Adeoti's response unconsciously normalises the idea that a woman's value lies in her marital prospects rather than in her intellectual or career pursuits. By framing limited ambition as cultural wisdom, he perpetuates a gendered worldview in which women's potential is consciously stifled and unconsciously

inherited. Although Funmi and Ronke are being raised in a relatively educated home, their exposure to these ideas at an early age shapes their perception of gender roles, subtly reinforcing limitations on what they should or should not aspire to.

In addition to enforcing patriarchal norms, Mr Adeoti exhibits authoritarian control over his household, often resorting to violence to assert dominance. His physical abuse of his wife serves as an early lesson for Funmi and Ronke about the power imbalance in marriage. When their mother reveals that she was beaten for questioning his late nights, Ronke reacts with anger: “Was it right for him to beat Mommy like he beats us?” (p. 10). Ronke’s defiant questioning starkly contrasts with Funmi’s reaction, which reveals the internalisation of patriarchal ideology: “Mommy, did you shout at him as if you had the right to question him?” (p. 11). Here, we see the divergence in how each girl processes violence. Ronke is resisting the symbolic order that privileges the father, while Funmi’s response reflects a superego already shaped by submission. Their mother’s resigned response further cements the expectation that women must endure suffering in marriage, normalising emotional and physical sacrifice as essential to womanhood

Forget that I spoke to you about your daddy. He is only being a man Men lord it over their wives in the culture and get away with it. I hope you learn from this. You never comment about your husband's movements if you want peace (p. 11).

This exchange is significant in demonstrating how patriarchal conditioning begins in childhood, with mothers passing down submissive behaviour to their daughters. The fact that Funmi is quick to defend her father while Ronke questions his actions highlight how women either conform to or resist gender expectations based on their personalities and upbringing. Such early differentiation in response reflects the initial stages of gendered identity formation, where young girls adopt societal cues on what is acceptable female behaviour, either absorbing or rejecting them based on perceived authority.

Mr Adeoti’s influence extends beyond his daughters’ perception of gender roles; it also affects their educational experiences and self-worth. While Funmi excels academically, her achievements do not shield her from gendered expectations. When she enters university, she quickly realises the systemic barriers placed before women. The gender disparity is made evident in the number of residential halls allocated to male versus female students:

There were five presidential halls for males and only two for females. This was understandable because only very few

women were making it to the university level at that time due to lack of societal support (p.55).

This structural imbalance reflects the larger social reality that women are not given the same access to education as men, further reinforcing the idea that their primary roles should revolve around domestic life rather than intellectual pursuit. Here, the symbolic order of the university mirrors the broader patriarchal structure, reminding Funmi that even in spaces of progress, the system remains tilted towards male dominance.

Furthermore, patriarchal attitudes persist in Funmi's personal relationships. When she meets Kunle in university, his initial assumption about her academic background reveals his gender bias: "You must be in one of the science departments," he remarked, assuming that a female student could not be studying medicine (p. 60). His reaction reflects how gendered stereotypes pervade all aspects of society, with women constantly needing to prove themselves in male-dominated fields. Funmi's smug response in revealing that she is also a medical student shows her defiance of societal norms, but it also sets the stage for future conflicts where her intelligence and ambition will be seen as a threat rather than an asset. This marks the beginning of a deeper psycho-social tension where women's success destabilises the traditional gender dynamic and triggers resistance in men accustomed to dominance.

Through these instances, *Twisted Love* portrays how parental and societal structures transmit patriarchal values that shape a woman's identity, aspirations, and struggles. Funmi and Ronke grow up absorbing contrasting lessons, one of compliance, and the other of rebellion, yet both paths are deeply affected by their father's expectations and their mother's submission. This underscores the radical feminist argument that the family is the first site of gendered indoctrination, where identity and value are assigned based on adherence to roles defined by male control. These early lessons continue to influence women's experiences in marriage, career, and personal agency. Furthermore, societal expectations play a crucial role in shaping the lives of female characters in the novel. Women are expected to be submissive, prioritise their husbands and families above personal ambitions, and endure marital hardships without complaint. The novel critiques how patriarchal norms limit women's autonomy, showing how female characters navigate these pressures in different ways. While Funmi and Ronke are the primary focus of the novel, other female characters, including their mother, Mama Ekiti, Stella, and Bisi, also illustrate the varying responses to gendered expectations. These women navigate societal norms in different ways, some

conforming, some resisting, and others trapped in the cycle of endurance. This section explores how these female characters reinforce or challenge patriarchal values and how their experiences shed light on the complex relationship between family structures and gender roles.

From an early age, Funmi internalises societal ideals about what it means to be a good woman. When she enters the university, she encounters gender-based assumptions that undermine her intelligence and abilities. When she introduces herself to Kunle, his immediate response is dismissive: “You must be in one of the science departments” (p. 60). This assumption reveals a deep-seated belief that certain academic fields, particularly medicine, are not for women. Kunle’s condescending remark underscores how women are often underestimated in professional spaces, a pattern that continues in Funmi’s life even after she excels in her career. This moment reflects a broader symbolic structure in which male superiority in intellectual spaces is assumed, while women must continually prove their worth.

Despite her professional success, Funmi remains bound by traditional gender expectations in her marriage. She takes on the role of the devoted wife, prioritising Kunle’s needs and sacrificing her own desires for the sake of maintaining a happy home. However, her reality is far from the fairy tale she envisioned. Kunle begins cheating on her openly, developing relationships with various women while she remains at home, heavily pregnant (p. 97). This captures a common societal double standard: while men are free to explore extramarital affairs, women are expected to remain faithful and dedicated to their marriage regardless of mistreatment. This double bind reflects the patriarchal bargain women are forced into: emotional endurance in exchange for the illusion of stability.

In addition, Funmi is also pressured by her in-laws to endure Kunle’s infidelity rather than leave the marriage. When she discovers his affair, Mama Ekiti, Kunle’s mother, advises her to stay: “Mama Ekiti took Funmi into her room and appealed to her to give Kunle another chance” (p. 111). By persuading Funmi to endure the humiliation, Mama Ekiti reinforces the patriarchal notion that a woman’s duty is to keep her marriage intact at all costs. This intergenerational reinforcement of silence and endurance reveals how gender oppression is recycled and disguised as tradition. The expectation that a woman must tolerate suffering in silence is a recurring theme in *Twisted Love*, as Funmi’s mother had previously given similar advice about never questioning a husband’s whereabouts (p. 11). These generational lessons illustrate how societal norms are perpetuated within families, passing restrictive gender roles from one generation to the next. The ideology of

not 'questioning a man' manifests in Funmi's marriage after experiencing abuse and betrayal; Funmi struggles to detach herself from Kunle emotionally. When he becomes physically abusive, slapping her for questioning his whereabouts, she is stunned but does not leave. This paralysis speaks to the psychoanalytic reality of emotional repression: the internalised fear of failure, shame, and rejection overrides the instinct for self-preservation

On one occasion, when she demanded an explanation on the smell of female perfume on his shirt, he slapped her. Things had never degenerated to this level before. Don't you ever question me about my movements again. Do you want to control my life? (p.145).

This moment highlights the deep psychological conditioning that prevents many women from walking away from toxic marriages. Funmi came to the realisation and questions herself, "would she have to experience the belt at this stage of her life?" (p.145). Funmi's endurance mirrors the reality of many women who remain in unhealthy relationships due to societal pressure, fear of judgment, and the belief that they must fight to "save" their marriage. While Funmi submits to traditional gender roles, Ronke takes a different path. Resentful of being constantly compared to her successful sister, she finds her own way of asserting control through seduction and destruction. Unlike Funmi, who believes in love and commitment, Ronke sees relationships as opportunities to exert power. Ronke's defining moment of rebellion comes when she deliberately introduces her friend Dolapo to Kunle, knowing it will contribute to the collapse of her sister's marriage. This action is not driven by a desire for love but by deep-seated envy and resentment. Ronke's betrayal is a culmination of years of sibling rivalry fuelled by parental favouritism and societal pressure. Her actions reflect a psychological response shaped by longstanding exclusion and emotional neglect, where sabotage becomes a form of reclaiming power.

However, both sisters remain trapped within the structures that dictate a woman's role in relation to men. Funmi's resilience in her marriage highlights how societal conditioning prevents women from walking away from toxic relationships. When she realises Kunle is unfaithful, she seeks help from his parents rather than making an independent decision, "Kunle's parents encouraged Funmi to stay calm. They assured her that he would soon come back to his senses. There was nothing else they could do" (p. 153). This moment illustrates how family structures reinforce the idea that a woman's duty is to endure, even at the cost of her emotional well-being. Funmi internalises this belief, choosing to focus on her children and career rather than confronting her marital problems directly. Ronke, on the other hand, refuses to submit to traditional roles, but her actions are not

rooted in empowerment. Instead, she seeks validation through competition with Funmi, culminating in her seduction of Kunle. Her decision to engage in an affair with her sister's husband is less about love and more about proving dominance "He told her several times that she was better than her sister in bed. Ronke wished she could get this across to her sister who thought she was best in everything" (p. 196). Ronke's actions demonstrate how internalised misogyny can drive women to turn against each other rather than challenge the societal structures that oppress them. Moreover, Funmi and Ronke's mother, Mrs Adeoti, plays a significant role in shaping their understanding of gender roles. Despite experiencing domestic abuse, she upholds the belief that women must be submissive to their husbands. When the girls confront her about their father's violence, she dismisses their concerns

Girls forget that I spoke to you about your daddy. He is only being a man. Men lord it over their wives in our culture and get away with it. I hope you learn from this. You never comment about your husband's movement if you want peace (p.11).

This response reflects a generational cycle where women are taught to accept male dominance as a fact of life. Mrs Adeoti's words echo the internalised logic of patriarchy, in which male authority is naturalized and female subjugation is moralised as endurance. By normalising domestic violence, she conditions her daughters to tolerate mistreatment in their own relationships. This kind of maternal transmission serves as a mechanism through which patriarchal ideology reproduces itself, embedding itself into the psyche before resistance can even form. Funmi internalises this lesson, enduring Kunle's emotional and physical abuse, while Ronke, despite rejecting traditional roles, still operates within a framework that centres her worth around male validation. In both cases, the mother's belief system becomes a blueprint for how each daughter negotiates gendered power, either through submission or subversive rivalry.

Mama Ekiti, Kunle's mother, represents another pillar of patriarchal reinforcement. Although she is objective in judgment and chastises her son for his infidelity (p. 106), she urges Funmi to remain committed to the marriage: "Mama Ekiti took Funmi into her own room and appealed to her to give Kunle another chance" (p. 111). Her words reflect the societal expectation that women must preserve their marriages at all costs. Even when acknowledging a man's fault, the burden of restoration is still placed on the woman, revealing how deeply entrenched patriarchal norms shift accountability away from men. The notion that a woman must "see beyond" her husband's faults, rather than challenge them, is a recurring theme in *Twisted Love*. This expectation functions as a

psychological constraint, where endurance is coded as virtue, and protest as failure. Even when Kunle's actions escalate into physical abuse, Funmi is encouraged to endure rather than seek independence, illustrating how emotional repression and social conditioning work together to silence women's suffering in the name of family honour. Similarly, Funmi's friends Stella and Bisi's experiences further illustrate the pervasive influence of patriarchal family structures. Both women face professional limitations imposed by their husbands, reinforcing the idea that a woman's success must be secondary to a man's. Stella, once an ambitious and intelligent woman, finds her career ambitions stifled by her husband's insecurity

It is just that some men cannot see a future where there would be 2 professors in the home, he actually told me so and compelled me to stay in the polytechnic, where the limit one can attain is the post of senior principal lecturer (p. 169).

Her husband's fear of being overshadowed leads him to restrict her professional growth, ensuring that she remains beneath him in status. This fear reflects a gendered anxiety where the husband's identity is bound to superiority, and any disruption threatens the fragile balance of power within the domestic order. Similarly, Bisi faces controlling behaviour from her husband, who imposes strict rules on her career

It is a problem with African men. They want to have total control over their women. Some even go as far as to control what she wears and insist that she must not wear any make up whereas the ones they flirt with outside wear heavy make-up...He neither encouraged me nor supported my progress in any way, it was as if he wanted me stuck on the same spot. He gave me house rules...I was not to bring home any office work or paper in progress (p. 171).

Subverting Patriarchy: Resistance And Self-Assertion in *Twisted Love*

Funmi's journey in *Twisted Love* does not end in despair. Rather, it evolves into a profound process of healing and self-reinvention. The years of emotional neglect, betrayal, and repression gradually give way to a period of awakening, one initiated by an unexpected encounter that shifts her perspective. After meeting a woman who had gone through similar marital challenges yet appeared happy, composed, and thriving, Funmi is struck by the possibility that survival need not be silent or joyless. This moment becomes a catalyst for change, marking a clear departure from self-pity to self-empowerment. Psychologically, this signals a move from emotional paralysis to agency, a reclaiming of her self-concept beyond the role of the wounded wife.

That was a turning point for Funmi. She changed her car and gave the Volkswagen to her assistant in the parks and gardens project. She changed her wardrobe, hairstyle, and her looks... She even chastised herself for all the suffering she had gone through in the past. How could I have tied my happiness to a man who was no longer interested in me? she kept on asking herself again and again. (p.156)

This transformation is deeply symbolic. Her shift in appearance, attitude, and priorities is more than a lifestyle change; it represents a redefinition of selfhood. No longer seeking validation from a disinterested spouse, she begins to reconnect with her own desires, ambitions, and self-worth. From a feminist lens, this marks a critical turning point where a woman shifts from internalising subjugation to active resistance. Funmi's professional growth mirrors her internal shift. Her landscaping and gardens business, once a source of side income, becomes a channel for emotional restoration and financial independence. The act of gardening becomes metaphorical—she is no longer surviving but cultivating. The joy that returns to her household, especially with her children, reflects the far-reaching effects of a woman's emotional liberation. A pivotal moment at the mall, where she encounters Kunle and simultaneously receives news of her academic promotion, underscores the full circle of her transformation

Ha ha, Dr. Ojo, the woman I have been wanting to see all morning. Congratulations! We took your case this morning at the appointment and promotions committee meeting and you are now an associate professor. Well done! your CV is very impressive and the assessors comments were also very good...She was happy, and most especially that Kunle heard the news first-hand. (p.157)

This moment marks a significant reversal of roles. Kunle, once the emotional and psychological centre of her life, now becomes an external spectator. This public recognition operates as a form of reparation: a moment of restored self-worth that neutralises past humiliation and affirms her reconstituted identity. Funmi does not gloat or seek revenge; her power lies in having moved beyond the need for either. Her reinvention is further emphasised through her renewed relationship with her children, her deliberate redirection of energy toward meaningful work, and her rejection of past self-blame. She no longer defines herself through sacrifice but through self-creation, a refusal to let suffering dictate the rest of her story.

Ultimately, *Twisted Love* portrays resilience not as an easy triumph over adversity, but as a hard-won transformation born out of years of silent endurance, emotional conflict, and eventual self-clarity. Funmi's evolution from submission to self-assertion reflects the complex reality of many

women navigating patriarchal structures. Through a feminist and psychoanalytic lens, her story reveals that autonomy is not given but reclaimed and often at great emotional cost. Her final chapter is not just about breaking free from a man, but about breaking free from the idea that a woman's identity must always orbit around him.

Conclusion

This study extends on the interplay of gender politics in literature while examining how power structures regulate the lives of female characters. It further foregrounds the reactionary approaches adopted by these characters in subverting patriarchal norms. The selected gynotexts, *The Truth About Sadia* and *Twisted Love*, portray women's subjugated experiences in patriarchal Nigerian society. There is the revelation of oppressive structures with vivid illustrations of the emotional and psychological consequences of living within patriarchal society. Also, there is an open-ended question about the possibility of true emancipation within a system that conditions women to compete for the sparse rewards of patriarchal recognition. This duality of resilience and subversion of power, which are salient aspects of the theory of radical feminism, provokes further interrogation of how re-imagined familial and societal structures might foster not just survival but genuine female emancipation and empowerment. This no doubt aligns with the ongoing discourse on the role of literature in critiquing, and potentially reshaping societal views on women's roles and self-recognition in male-dominated African settings.

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