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**Faculty of Education**  
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**BACHELOR THESIS**

*Patriarchy, Feminism and Representation of Women in Oyinkan Braithwaite's  
My Sister, the Serial Killer*

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**Declaration**

I declare that I have worked on this thesis, *Patriarchy, Feminism and Representation of Women in Oyinkan Braithwaite's My Sister, the Serial Killer*, individually using only the sources listed on the Works Cited page. I declare that I have not used this bachelor thesis to gain any other degree.

Prague, 9<sup>th</sup> July 2022

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Signature

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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate and interpret the ways in which the novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer* (2018), written by Oyinkan Braithwaite, a Nigerian-British novelist and writer born in Lagos, depicts patriarchy and oppression of women in Nigerian setting. Furthermore, it aims to interpret how the author uses a satirical and critical tone to subvert the reality of the oppressive and patriarchal Nigerian society. In addition, the novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer* can, in fact, be read as a piece of feminist fiction, which portrays the perpetual illegalities allowed by the patriarchal system, and can be ranked among the other outstanding works of Nigerian Feminist Novel. The predominant focus is put mainly on the examination of the patriarchal background the protagonists live in and the means of how they try to revolt against it. The theoretical part provides a context for this analysis drawing on the historical context of the development of patriarchy in Nigeria as well as contemporary studies of the position of women in contemporary Nigerian society, whilst pointing out the feminist tendencies and highlighting the role of emerging Nigerian feminist writers. The contribution of this thesis lies in the critical literary interpretation of the novel, considering the patriarchal background, feminism and the acts of revolt and defiance embodied in the two main protagonists in the novel.

## **KEY WORDS**

Oyinkan Braithwaite, patriarchy in Nigeria, *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, feminism in Nigeria, contemporary Nigerian society and culture, revolt

## **ABSTRAKT**

Účelem této bakalářské práce je demonstrovat a interpretovat ty způsoby, jimiž Oyinkan Braithwaite, nigerijsko-britská spisovatelka narozená v Lagos, ve svém románu *My Sister, the Serial Killer* (2018) vyobrazuje patriarchální útlak páchaný na ženách. Nadto se práce pokouší o interpretaci onoho satiricko-kritického podtónu, jehož autorka užívá, a sice s cílem tento opresivní, patriarchální model nigerijské společnosti rozvrátit. Román *My Sister, the Killer* je možno číst jakožto feministickou fikci znázorňující neutuchající protiprávní jednání, které patriarchát umožňuje, čímž jej lze považovat za další z mimořádných literárních počinů nigerijského feministického románu. Stěžejním bodem zájmu je průzkum patriarchálního prostředí, v němž protagonistky žijí a prostředků, s jejichž pomocí se proti němu snaží vzepřít. V rámci teoretické části je nastíněn kontext této analýzy, jenž je založený na historickém kontextu vývoje patriarchátu v Nigérii, jakož i na soudobých studiích postavení žen v dnešní nigerijské společnosti. Práce přitom poukazuje na feministické tendence a zdůrazňuje roli, kterou v tomto trendu sehrávají nově se objevující spisovatelky nigerijské feministické literatury. Přínos této bakalářské práce tkví v kritické literární interpretaci románu zohledňující patriarchální pozadí, feminismus i revoltu a vzdor ztělesněné dvěma hlavními postavami knihy.

## **KLÍČOVÁ SLOVA**

Oyinkan Braithwaite, patriarchát v Nigérii, *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, feminismus v Nigérii, současná nigerijská společnost a kultura, vzpoura

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## Introduction

Based on many authors and literary critics contemplating the modern Nigerian novel, the instances of feminist tendencies in Nigerian literature seem to be very prominent nowadays. The female authorship comes to the fore with exceptional authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Lola Shoneyin and Oyinkan Braithwaite. What is typical of the Nigerian feminist novel is that it is not narrated from the man's point of view, where women characters serve merely the function of accompanying individuals with no psychological depth (Akung). This was typical of novels of many Nigerian male authors - women were typically portrayed as peripheral and marginalized characters. Moreover, female characters were usually portrayed with typical social roles, sex roles and gender roles – primarily as obedient wives and dutiful mothers. Nowadays, predominantly female authors in Nigeria use their literary voice as their empowerment; they are no longer peripheral individuals supporting the plot but strong individuals with opinions, intellect and voice.

Oyinkan Braithwaite, the author of the novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer* (2018), may be regarded as one of the representatives of the contemporary Nigerian novel as she incorporates strong female characters and therefore shifts the focus on the concerns involving women. The novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer* is the most well-known work written by Oyinkan Braithwaite, which has received widespread recognition and been translated into thirty languages. Moreover, it was also shortlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction in 2019 and the *Goodreads Choice Awards 2019* in the Mystery & Thriller and Debut Novel categories.

Oyinkan Braithwaite indicated that she was unaware of the fact that her novel may be classified as an instance of a feminist novel (*BBC Africa*). However, after the first read of *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, I felt that the focus on female characters, the satirical portrayal of the Nigerian society in order to portray the everyday encounters with patriarchy and the dispute concerning the position of women in the Nigerian society is evident and highly prevalent. Therefore, in this thesis, I tend to interpret passages from the novel from a feministic perspective and, to some extent, support the assertion that, in fact, we can consider this novel to have female characters as the driving force of the novel.



Moreover, the incorporation of satire in the novel is observed as the literary technique that the author uses to comment and satirize contemporary Nigerian society and point out many deficiencies in the Nigerian patriarchal setting.

As a resident of Lagos, Braithwaite aims to portray the society she lives in and experiences on everyday basis. In *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, the plot revolves around two strong and, to some extent, independent women characters, sisters, who serve as the main focus of the novel - Ayoola and Korede. We follow the main characters, as they try to cover up the murders of men performed by Ayoola. The story is marked by a significant shift of power to women as the main protagonist is the one who performs violence and holds dominance. This might be the way in which she decided to fight the patriarchy and empower herself to some extent.

The principal objective of this thesis is to demonstrate and interpret the ways the novel, *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, depicts patriarchy and, moreover, interpret the ways in which the author uses the satirical and critical tone to subvert reality of the patriarchal Nigerian society. In addition, that the novel, *My Sister, the Serial Killer* can, in fact, be read as a piece of feminist fiction, which portrays the perpetual illegalities allowed by the patriarchal system and can be ranked among the other outstanding works of Nigerian Feminist Novel. I mainly aim to answer the question of what is the role of women in the patriarchal Nigerian society and how they seem to cope with it. To fulfil this aim adequately, the thesis introduces the nature of society in Nigeria, which is to a great extent patriarchal. Moreover, in my theoretical part, I aim to describe and examine the status of women in Contemporary Nigerian society from an economic, political, and educational point of view. Also, the topic of feminist tendencies in contemporary Nigeria and the emergence of the Nigerian Feminist Novel will be discussed in order to relate some elements of analysis from the practical part of this thesis.

Next, I will introduce many manifestations of the patriarchal mindset depicted in the novel, predominantly domestic violence, abuse, and the corruption of the system. In order to develop a successful analysis and better understand the factors affecting the emergence of patriarchy and its historical context, I incorporate the theoretical background of the historical development of patriarchy in Nigeria. Furthermore, the chapters considering the

aspects of violence, abuse, and marriage are integrated into the structure of this thesis as they provide the theoretical background for the literary interpretation of the novel.

The theoretical part of this thesis is mainly based on the contemporary studies of the position of women in Nigerian society and the patriarchal nature of Nigerian culture, such as the articles by Onige Otitu, Mojibol Olofinla Okome, Lorretta Ntoimo, Sefinatu Aliyu Dogo or Aje-Ori Agbese. Furthermore, the articles considering the Nigerian feminist novel and feminism in the Nigerian setting, such as the studies by Ada Uzoamaka Azodo, Carole Davies, Issa Omotosho Garuba and Jonas Egbudu Akung were also consulted in order to provide an examination of the Nigerian feminist novel.

As a result, the practical analysis of the novel, *My Sister, the Serial Killer* by Oyinkan Braithwaite, is divided into two even parts. The first one considers the manifestations of patriarchy as presented in the novel, such as tradition, sexualization of women, objectification, family or corruption. The latter one is focused on the means of the revolt of the female protagonists in the novel against patriarchy in their society; the mechanisms and strategies they use.

## **I THEORETICAL PART**

### **1 Patriarchy in Nigeria**

This chapter theoretically examines and defines the term patriarchy and further determines the patriarchy as implemented in the Nigerian context. Moreover, also some historical development of patriarchal society in African states with an emphasis on Nigeria is discussed. This historical context of the emergence and development of man-based society is essential for the understanding of how, when and why the patriarchy in Nigeria started and to what extent affected women through the centuries. The relevance of this chapter resides mainly in the importance of the theoretical background for the subsequent practical analysis of the novel by Oyinkan Braithwaite, *My Sister, the Serial Killer*. Furthermore, the theoretical background is needed to establish the fact that Nigeria is in fact a patriarchal nation with typical oppressive beliefs and convictions (Makama 116). The novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer* is set in Nigeria, and the patriarchy and marginalization of women is a large issue discussed in this novel and is considered the driving force behind the novel's plot. This chapter of my theoretical part is mainly based on the contemporary articles discussing the patriarchy and the status of women in Nigeria from a historical context such as articles by Abidemi Asiyanbola, Aje-Ori Agbese or Aliyu Sefinatu Dogo.

It is widely acknowledged and known that patriarchy in African cultures is widespread and still a pervading structure of life and society even nowadays, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Makama 117). According to Abidemi Asiyanbola, patriarchy can be defined as "a system of social stratification and differentiation on the basis of sex" (2). She further states and develops the idea of what patriarchy does as it is putting significant restrictions on women's position in society, their social standing and activities (2). This assertion shows that patriarchal thinking restricts women from choosing their path independently and instead clearly determines their roles in society as dutiful mothers and wives. Given this, women are oppressed by the male authority in political, social and economic institutions, which will be discussed to a greater extent in the following chapters. Sylvia Walby defines patriarchy as "a system of social structures, and

practises in which men dominate and exploit women" (214). As far as this definition is concerned, women are subordinate to men in Nigeria and dependent on husbands in their everyday lives. The hierarchy in Nigerian cultures is set with women being considered less important than men. Furthermore, Ntoimo also points out that being a woman in Nigeria means being inferior to their male counterpart, and also that being men considers his wife as something he can control in his possession (1991).

When we consider more closely the definition of male and female roles in the Nigerian context, we found out that it is clearly based and influenced by biological determinism (Ntoimo 1982). Therefore, the division and distribution of roles and structures in society are affected by gender. In the traditional African communities and cultures, women are bound and confined to being at home, they are bound to manage the domestic labour and chores, to bear and raise children, which is in sharp opposition to the role of men in Nigerian society. Men are seen to be adventurous and look outside the house for work and therefore provide for the family (Azodo 3).

This statement evidently shows us the different approaches to the status of gender-defined roles in society. This aforementioned assertion also applies to children. From the moment a child is born, these expectations of future life determine their future. In Nigeria, male children are preferred to female children (Ntoimo 1989). This fact can be explained by the male children being expected to carry the family name and inherit the family's property. Also, the male children are considered as stronger than the female ones, and therefore expected to take part in the labour and provision for the family. Adeoti Akintan's explanation, concerning the biological division from childhood, can be more or less applied to both the reality of urban and also rural areas in Nigeria:

The female child is expected to stay in the home, helping her mother with the household chores, learning how to keep a home, and helping to care for the younger siblings, while the male child accompanies his father to the farm or whatever profession his father is engaged in. He is taught to be a man and is rather sent on errands that require going outside the house, while the movement of the female child is well monitored (Akintan).

Furthermore, Ntoimo and Isiugo-Abanihe also comment on the different attitudes toward male and female children as they propose that the female ones are more susceptible to bias, prejudice, rejection or even abandonment (1989). Furthermore, also the chances of success in the sectors such as educational, economic or political are markedly different. All this binds back to the notion of biological determinism, which means that it is the individual's genetic structure that determines the behaviour or personality, therefore it is influenced by "nature rather than nurture" (Oxford Reference). This term can be seen as the driving force behind the differentiation of destiny as women are considered as the more submissive part of the society and men as dominant thanks to their physical strength, which is all based on their genetics. In this light, "they believed that these biological facts explain the differences in the behaviour of women and men, and also their abilities and capabilities and, therefore, justifies the social and political arrangements that existed in society" (Dogo 264). The fulfilment of these assigned gender roles revolves around people from early childhood; therefore, children grow up conforming to society's expectations. The expectations are predominantly based on the contrast between what is considered as feminine and masculine. Likewise, Chua and Fijino comment on this contrast that it is the patriarchal system and practises that restrict the activities, behaviour and characteristics being solely outlined as feminine and masculine (392).

As was the aim of this chapter, we described and showed that Nigeria is still considered a patriarchal state with a patriarchal system influencing the workplace, the determinism of societal roles and also the chances of female children versus the male ones. Inhabitants of Nigeria tend to distinguish between feminine and masculine characteristics, which further impact women's daily lives in Nigerian society.

## **1.1 Historical Development of Patriarchy in Nigeria**

The incorporation of this chapter in this thesis resides in the need for a more detailed explanation of how the patriarchal system in African cultures, primarily in Nigeria, originated and provide some theoretical and historical background to the practical part

of this thesis. I feel it is crucial to present some leading aspects of the historical evolution of patriarchy in Nigeria. It is also profoundly noteworthy to understand the concept of the present-day patriarchal system in Nigeria in relation to its past development. This chapter aims to rather compare the different eras of Nigerian history than evaluate each on its own to present and highlight the contrast which occurs between different periods.

As was mentioned in the preceding chapter, women in Nigeria are not treated equally to men. Therefore, they also do not have as many possibilities in their everyday life concerning social life or workplace as their male counterparts. The possibilities tend to differ between men and women in education, economic situation, politics and overall elemental rights. However, as many writers differ in their opinion on when and how patriarchy in Nigeria emerged the leading theories and opinions will be summarised. We can divide the evolution of the patriarchal system into three distinctive periods in Nigerian history, i.e. pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial. For example, Dogo argues that "African society was not always patriarchal, but it became patriarchal as a result of the introduction of external factors like the religions of Islam and Christianity, colonialism, education, Capitalism and others" (263). Additionally, he postulates that the patriarchal system was not as omnipresent in the pre-colonial era as it was in the colonial, and subsequently, the post-colonial period just further solidified this system (263).

As far as the pre-colonial period in Nigeria is concerned, it, to some extent, differs from the colonial and post-colonial periods. Some authors differ in their claims that the pre-colonial period was matriarchal, and some propose that patriarchy has been engraved in society from the earliest times. As Aje-Ori Agbese puts it:

Societies in pre-colonial Nigeria believed women and men complemented each other, and had characteristics, some of which still exist today, that determined women's and men's roles (...) Men were assigned the role of provider and disciplinarian, while women mastered all things domestic and performed "womanly" tasks like harvesting crops and trading in certain products.

This assertion above by Aje-Ori Agbese demonstrates that gender-based differences in the nature of work existed in the pre-colonial period. However, there was no such disparity in power and domination as there was throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods. Therefore, it is possible to admit that the division of labour began before the colonization, but without the patriarchal undervaluing of women.

With the start of the colonial period in Nigeria, society changed from the beliefs of the pre-colonial period. The colonial period made a shift in people's perception, and therefore their thinking imitated the thinking of the colonialists. During the colonial rule, the position and power of women were considerably weakened, also it marked the decline of freedom of participation in social, economic and political sectors as it was colonialism that secured and validated gender discrimination (Agbese). In contrast with the preceding era, women were subjugated even more as the colonial rule put the constraint on them. As Okome puts it, in other words, women were expected to stay in private, in their homes, and men were expected to be in the public sphere. Nigerian women under the British rule were envisioned to be silent, domestic and to stay out of public and political life.

There were also considerable differences between the south and north of Nigeria in the colonial period concerning the social position of women. For example, as far as the women's voting is concerned, in Northern Nigeria, it was not permitted until 1976, while in south Nigeria, women's voting was allowed from the year of 1954 (Agbese). As we put forward in the preceding paragraph, women were only seen as the carers of the home and as child-bearers. Women's response to this proposition was again different in the north and south of Nigeria. Agbese postulates that the southern women responded publicly while the northern women stayed silent. In the south, during the colonial rule, women took part in strikes, protest marches and also boycotts and rebellions.

This contrast in the women's response and their condition of life results from different socioeconomic indicators between the north and the south. Women in the south were much more vocal about their position in Nigerian society. To a more significant extent, they were revolting against the patriarchal system ruling the whole of Nigeria.

The move from the colonial period to the post-colonial period was also marked by the ongoing exclusion of women from the political and public sphere. The colonial mindset pervaded the male's minds and society's convictions. Okome states that Nigerian men kept the colonial mentality as well as the form of the British government. Therefore, as women were not visible during the colonial period, they were largely excluded from this sphere in the post-colonial period (Okome). The traditional gender-specific differentiation of work was also emphasized as women were seen as homemakers and mothers. This amplified the term of tradition which is used as a pretence to determine the future and behaviour of women in Nigeria (Agbese).



## 2 Women in Contemporary Nigeria

In addition to the previous chapter, I would like to state and examine the patriarchal system as implemented in contemporary Nigeria with emphasis on the rights of women, marriage, and also participation in political life. The plot of novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer* is set in contemporary and modern Nigeria and therefore it is of high importance to describe and discuss the current status and position of women and evaluate the context in which the protagonists live. This chapter is mainly based on the recent publication by Toyin Falola, *Modern Nigeria: Ethnicity, Democracy and Development*, published in 2021.

Nigeria is the most inhabited country in Africa nowadays, and almost half of the population comprises Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa-Fulani tribes. The most widespread religious belief in Nigeria is Islam and Christianity, and only a small part of the Nigerian population observes the Indigenous beliefs. Nowadays, the situation in Nigeria is slowly changing as far as the patriarchal system is concerned. Nigerian women still face many obstacles and problems concerning the economy, education, politics, marriage or violence daily, but they seem to revolt against them more successfully. Modern Nigerian women still face oppression under the guise of tradition and religion in many sectors of life, i.e., economic, social and political spheres.<sup>1</sup>

The role of tradition is still heavily emphasized in Nigeria. Therefore, the traditional roles of women as mothers and wives pervade society, as well as all the traditions connected to marriage and child-bearing. Considering the Nigerian colonial past and its patriarchal, cultural and theological beliefs, there are striking claims of persistent marginalization of women in various sectors of development (Falola 358-359). As can be seen in the previous chapter, the colonial history of Nigeria, to a great extent, diminished the power and the chance of participation of women in different spheres of life. Moreover, women were pushed to a marginalized position with an expectation to be silent and subordinate to men. Nevertheless, also, as Aliyu Sefinatu Dogo proposes in his article *The Nigerian Patriarchy: When and How* that it is obvious that the system implemented in contemporary Nigeria is certainly different from the system widespread

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<sup>1</sup> See chapters 2.1, 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4

in colonial and pre-colonial times. The main reasons for this change are the modernization of society and life and also its resultant attributes (274). However, Dogo also explains, on the other hand, that, unfortunately, the marginalization of women in society still continues, and it is mainly because of “the mindset of the Nigerian people is still moulded from the onset to view things through the lens of gender” (275). Therefore, the differentiation based on gender is still highly present in every facet of daily life.

## **2.1 Women and the Economic Situation in Contemporary Nigeria**

It is important to establish the economic conditions and contexts in which women in Nigeria operate every day. Economically speaking, it is also paramount to establish that in the pre-colonial period, women were, to some extent, seen as the complement of men and had more right to participate in the economic sector. It was during the colonial period that women started to be marginalized and dependent on their husbands, as Falola states that colonial rulers brought the differentiation of social roles for men and women and, therefore, also the imbalance in the economic sector (362). Through this colonial state of mind, the situation stays, to some extent, the same in Modern Nigeria. Falola illustrates the economic situation for women by in the notion of “the gender disparity in land ownership” (364). That is to say that women in Nigeria have a limited right to acquire land, which is seen as the prime form of economic growth in Nigeria.

These cultural practices allow excluding women from land ownership, which therefore makes it impossible for women to acquire lands for farming – a significant source of income for women in rural areas. It also makes it impossible for women to raise capital from the sale of valuable assets like land, and they also cannot provide collateral in the acquisition of loans for the initiation of businesses (Falola 364).

Moreover, in support of this argument, in their article *Women’s Marginalization in Nigeria and the Way Forward* published in 2018, Bako and Syed, also claim that land ownership and agricultural lending facilities are typically denied to women, despite the

fact that it is their primary source of income (428). As a result of this economic marginalization, women tend to have much worse conditions of life, as is displayed by Adegoke, Adegoke and Oyedele as cited by Bako and Syed. The claim that women's rights to land and property have been denied by the patriarchal system, leading to low income, unemployment, inadequate education and lack of access to credit facilities (428). This reality does not allow women to be independent and corroborates the economic oppression of women in Nigeria, which is still a pressing issue, despite the efforts of many organizations to reverse this. Furthermore, apart from this, women encounter plenty of other barriers to formal employment. Among these are the low income in comparison to males, low-quality professions, sexual harassment and assaults in the workplace and also rejection from retirement and pensions (Anugwom 131).

## **2.2 Women and the Political Participation in Contemporary Nigeria**

As far as the political situation of women in Nigeria is concerned, its state is not much different from the reality of the economic situation. A political sphere in Nigeria also sees women on the margins with very little participation in the decision-making.

The reality of women's political participation differs in the southern part of Nigeria and the northern part of Nigeria. This difference can also be portrayed by the recognition of women's right to vote, which was permitted in the northern part of Nigeria 22 years later than in the southern part of Nigeria. Toyin Falola, in his *Understanding Modern Nigeria: Ethnicity, Democracy, and Development* published in 2021, explains why this seclusion of women in the north happened. It was largely owing to the region's oppressive gender norms, which were aligned with colonial notions of women's isolation. As a result, the dominant party in the north, the Northern People's Congress (NPC), employed patriarchal and religious ideology to "manage" their women, which was in line with their religious beliefs (365).

Furthermore, one of the main factors affecting the side-lining of women in the political sphere is religion. The two most spread religions in Nigeria, Islam and Christianity, share the disagreement with women being in authoritative positions. Islam considers a

woman's leadership and power to be disrespectful, whereas Christianity promotes male dominance and female subjugation (Falola 366-367). Also, due to religious convictions, the gender and equality opportunities bill was rejected by the parliament "on the pretext that it was inconsistent with religious and cultural beliefs of Muslims and Christians" (Bako and Syed 434). Both these religions' ideologies propose that they would rather see women subjugated and secluded in the home rather than their engagement in political affairs. Furthermore, women seem to be nothing more than a tool for males to acquire political power. During the election time, male politicians usually sought their support, promising to fully incorporate them in the new administration and prioritize women's problems. Unfortunately, this is just a ruse and it is just a way in which men manifest their political power (Agbese).

Due to this, the situation of women in politics is on the same level nowadays as it was in the colonial period. Women are denied participation in politics, and also considering women fighting for their rights, the situation does not seem to be improving. The area of politics still stays as a profession exclusive to men, and women have little or no chance of being elected into any government offices. In Nigeria, only a few women have risen to the highest levels of the legislature, which is controlled by men (Oyinade, Daramola, and Lamidi 26).

### **2.3 Women and the Access Education in Contemporary Nigeria**

This chapter aims to establish access to education in relation to women in Nigeria. It is widely acknowledged that girls and women in Nigeria have inadequate and constrained access to education (Makama 120). Access to education is highly substantial in maintaining the rights and power as well as participating in the economic or political sphere. However, women still do not have full access to education and are also marginalized and excluded.

Girls and women in Nigeria are less likely to attend school than boys are, again with differences between the rural and urban parts of the country. However, this does not seem to be the most pressing issue in the Nigerian context; the participation in the educational

process does not necessarily mean a better quality of life. This problem is discussed by Dr. Uzoma Aja-Okorie who points out that women actually earn less than males at every educational level, and men with less schooling earn more than more educated female peers in some circumstances (274). It is shown that again it is the institutionalized patriarchal nature that does not allow women, even with school education, to have the same opportunities and approach than have men.

The factors that affect the enrolment of women into education include, for example, tradition, customs, ethics, motherhood and socio-economic and cultural values (Aja-Okorie 275). These factors and traditions contribute to the deeply rooted prejudice and bias against women in education. As for example, this disparity between the genders starts from an early age as families are more likely to invest in the education of their sons rather than in the education of their daughters because of the fact that women are less beneficial once educated (Aja-Okorie 275). The families are aware of this reality and they act in accordance with it. The principal causes of the high illiteracy rate among women include societal pressures such as early marriage and other external factors as well as the already mentioned inhibitive religious traditions in some regions in Nigeria, particularly in the north, where these practices are most prevalent (Makame 120-121).

Some authors point out that the marginalization of women in the educational sector started in the colonial period, as for example, according to Mojbol Olfnk Okome, colonial education concentrated on educating women for domestic responsibilities rather than teaching them for leadership and headship roles in society (42). Alternatively, for example, Dogo states that in the colonial period, "an educational system also fostered male dominance, which more men had the opportunity to obtain than women" (274). Unfortunately, as I stated at the beginning of this chapter, this enforcement of men and exclusion of women still pervades the patriarchal Nigerian society even nowadays.

## **2.4 Marriage in Contemporary Nigeria**

This chapter aims to examine the concept of marriage and the consequent right to divorce in contemporary Nigeria. The novel, *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, examined in the practical

part of this thesis incorporates the concept of marriage to a considerable extent. Therefore, it seems to be substantial to introduce certain fundamental notions surrounding marriage and divorce in Nigerian society. Furthermore, also the occurrence of child (arranged) marriage is briefly discussed. Marriage and also the family unit in contemporary Nigeria are, to a large extent, influenced by Western societies and mixed with the traditional Nigerian elements and customs.

Basically, and generally, we distinguish three types of marriage in contemporary Nigeria: traditional marriage, state marriage and Christian marriage (Otite 41). Traditional marriage involves Muslim marriage or generally any other form of indigenous marriage. However, the main difference between the traditional marriage and the other two forms is that the traditional one is polygamous. The state marriage mainly involves monogamy, and the man and the woman are permitted to divorce and remarry again. Lastly, the Christian marriage also involves an exclusively monogamous relationship. Another difference detected between these three types of marriage is in the perception of divorce. Although Christian marriage does not allow divorce as an ideal, the state and traditional forms of marriage do, with the traditional form being the only one that allows polygyny (Otite 41).

Additionally, as Kayode Olatunbosun Fayokun proposes, in Nigerian society and culture, the notion of arranged child (early) marriage is still prevalent (461). The child in the marriage is usually and predominantly a girl or woman. This is mainly due to socioeconomic standards and the inability to reject the desire of parents when such circumstance arises (Nnadi 35). The reason behind arranged child marriage is usually poverty and the lack of resources to support and nurture the child. The early arranged marriage is a manifestation of tradition and patriarchal nature:

Early marriage is one aspect of harmful traditional practice which is embedded in the traditional behaviour, attitudes, and or practices of the people, which adversely affects and violates the fundamental rights of women and girls. Other harmful traditional practices include harmful widowhood practices, denial of inheritance or succession rights or son preference (Nnadi 35).

Moreover, in relation to marriage in Nigeria, the marriage payment should be briefly mentioned. This marriage payment is the price paid by the groom and is determined and

agreed on between the families. As Nwoke explains, this marriage payment, also referred to as a “bridewealth”, pervades all the types of marriages in Nigeria and is seen as a type of symbolic gesture. By some, this payment may be seen as the act of purchasing the woman and that it is just another manifestation of patriarchal rights, but as Nwoke describes the payment just marks the completion of the marriage process and negotiations.

However, as Onigu Otite presents, this marriage payment is also to some extent related to the divorce procedure in a way that “the ability to refund a marriage payment may prolong formal divorce through the severing of conjugal services and jural ties” (Otite 42). As far as divorce is concerned, the women still do not have an easy way out of the marriage and are predominantly marginalized as well. Unfortunately, the laws related to divorce continue to be still biased and discriminatory against women (Falola 377-378). Although, divorce is not a preferred option for women even in the most critical situations such as violence against them or abuse, as will be described in the following chapter.

#### **2.4.1 Violence Against Women**

In connection to the nature and marriage and the stigmatization of divorce in Nigeria, it is equally substantial to address the problem of violence against women. The theme of violence and abuse is highly present in the novel, *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, mainly the violence perpetrated by the father on both his wife and his daughters. Subsequently, also the violence perpetrated by women is highly present in the novel. Ayoola appears to revolt against the aggressive nature of men in Nigeria and reacts as she considers appropriate and this marks the subversion of the traditionally assigned roles in the Nigerian society. Due to the novel’s high presence of violence, it is crucial to establish and describe the problem of domestic violence and also rape in Nigerian society.

The violence and abuse of women in Nigeria seems to be still a pressing issue. The Nigerian government fails to implement laws that would alleviate these sufferings of women. Moreover, such agencies in Nigeria, unfortunately, most of the time, do not take the abuse of women seriously.

Women experience diverse forms of violence, and as I discussed in the previous chapter, and unfortunately for many women in Nigerian society, it is not an impetus for filing for divorce. Women are being persuaded that staying in a violent and abusive marriage is still

better than experiencing divorce or separation (Ntoimo 1991). Although a law aimed to ensure the safety of women called “Violence against Women, Prevention, Protection and Prohibition Act” was passed in Nigeria, only Lagos State and three other states in Nigeria have adopted it. Domestic abuse is viewed as a private concern between husband and wife that should be resolved at home, which is dictated by cultural convictions, rendering this regulation ineffectual (Ntoimo 1991).

The statistical justification as described by Hadiza Iza Bazza shows that:

“an average of 300–350 women are killed every year by their husbands, former partners, boyfriends, or male relations. Most times, the incidences are considered family feuds, which should be treated within the family. Most police refuse to intervene and advise the victims to go back home and settle “family matters”” (Bazza 176).

Indeed, according to these statements, violence against women is substituted with the term “family matters” or “family feuds”, and police and other agencies in Nigeria refuse to resolve this issue.

Furthermore, in today’s Nigeria, rape is a fairly widespread phenomenon. Several alarming reports regarding the rise in rape are being published on a regular basis, and some are even referring to the present situation as a “rape epidemic” (Achunike and Kitause). Moreover, Achunike and Kitause conducted a research paper on the current upsurge of rape cases in Nigerian society. There they state that rape is becoming a pressing issue in modern Nigeria mainly as a result of several variables already present in the Nigerian community, but predominantly the modernizing influences and the culture of silence linked with rape (32). The culture of silence seems to be one of the most pressing issues concerning rape in research conducted by Akinade, Adewuyi and Sulaiman the findings show us that the vast majority of rape victims are scared to report these acts and they prefer to avoid taking legal and judicial proceedings in cases of rape (1762). However, unfortunately, even if the victims decide to report these crimes the police do not exhibit enough care or dedication when it comes to rape complaints (Akinade, Adewui and Sulaiman 1761). As a result, the streets of Nigerian cities and also other rural areas are unsafe for women, and the



government does not appear to be considering enacting any legislation to definitely condemn rape crimes.

### 3 Feminist Tendencies in Contemporary Nigeria

The aim of this chapter is to establish some feminist tendencies in contemporary Nigeria. Women tend to revolt against the patriarchal society in Nigeria, and this chapter will evaluate and summarize the leading tendencies of feminism incorporated in this culture. Additionally, the emergence and importance of the feminist novel in Nigeria are, to a great extent, discussed. The novel, *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, is considered as a feminist novel in the practical part of this thesis, therefore the description of the Nigerian feminist novel's development needs to be discussed. It is also vitally important for understanding the need of the emergence of the feminist novel in the Nigerian context, which puts forth the female voices and considers things from a female point of view, as opposed to traditional Nigerian novels written by male authors. The contemporary era in Nigeria sees many women authors who, in their works of literature, characterize and describe how women try to revolt daily against their subordination to their male counterpart.

Feminism is “non-existent without the so-called patriarchy which it seeks to undermine” (Garuba 106). Therefore, there is a direct link between the patriarchal nature in Nigeria and the need for feminism as a resource for women to revolt against the patriarchy.

As was mentioned before, feminism in Nigeria significantly differs from its western understanding, which tends to be much more radical. Moreover, as Akung describes there are many branches of feminism in Nigeria, such as womanism, motherism, or femalism. However, all these branches have the same unifying goal in common and that is the aim of women's liberation in Nigeria (27).

According to Ogini, the most widespread branch of feminism in the Nigerian context is the theory of womanism. Womanism, in contrast to the western understanding of feminism, does not assert the “no need for man”. Instead, it proposes the notion that man and woman should live in harmony and peace in the family (15). Moreover, as Issa Omotosho Garuba states in her article *African Feminism in the Nigerian Context: A House of Affirmations and Denials*: the term African womanism was coined by Clenora Hudson-Weems in the early 1987 and also later offers an explanation of what African womanism means as portrayed by Chickwenye Ogunyemi:

Womanism is black centred; it is accommodationist. It believes in the freedom and independence of women like feminism; unlike radical feminism, it wants meaningful union between black women and black men and black children and will see to it that men begin to change from their sexist stand (Ogunyemi 65).

Also, to further support the standpoint that womanism is black-centered, Ogunyemi proposes that black women require different needs from feminism, need to implement in the context of their daily life and therefore it substantially differs from the needs of a white woman (14). According to this, it can be claimed that African womanism was developed and aimed to establish a distinct concept for African women and women of African descent.

### **3.1 Nigerian Feminist Novel**

In relation to the chapter on feminism in contemporary Nigeria, it is equally paramount to establish the emergence of the Nigerian Feminist Novel. It can be said that the Nigerian feminist novel came as a reaction to those novels written by male authors, where the female voice is marginalized and stands only on the outskirts of the plot (Akung 28).

Women's issues throughout the historical development were given very little attention as the writers predominantly focused on the societal problems in Nigerian society. Many contemporary authors concerned with the theme of women's representation in literature have claimed that the literary world was exclusively made of male-oriented problems; as for example, Femi Osofisan, who states that: "the bulk of our literature is secretly a weapon of male propaganda, of an agenda to keep the female under perpetual dominance" (4).

As the society in African cultures also, African literature is considered to be influenced by the patriarchal nature and patriarchal beliefs of society. Because women's duties were limited to only being mothers and obedient wives, their creativity and their roles beyond the house were overlooked. Therefore, as Akung explains women were portrayed as voiceless, helpless and incapable beings (28).

Nowadays, on the contrary, there are many Nigerian female authors who try to reverse this patriarchal focus in the novel and shift it to the feminine and female consciousness. Also,

the rising recognition and perception of feminism led to a heightened awareness of women's predicament and the need to address their situation in patriarchal societies (Fwangyil 31). In relation to the emergence and nature of the Nigerian feminist novel, Jonas Egbugu Akung states that the feminist novel follows a woman's path from innocence and ignorance to wisdom and individuality. She is standing up for herself, she does not allow any man to dictate her life and her attitudes (Akung 28).

Women in modern contemporary novels started to function as the prominent voice and the main point of focus. Nigerian feminist novel observes the female opinions and burdens in everyday life and also tries to point out all the injustice perpetrated against them. Moreover, also, determines the structure of gender issues.

The criticism of the literary works was solely the area of male critics, the first ones made by European and American critics in about the 1950s and 1960s. It has to be noted that these critics have done an invaluable job for the African literary canon, but they preserved the Western critical approach to literary written works purely through the lens of masculine experience (Davies 121). Furthermore, Akung comments on the literary criticism of female literary works being done by male critics, and also that now is the time when there is a need to "women interpret their own stories and re-read the male texts, thereby giving the male story a gendered interpretation. It is also an attempt to outline feminist differences in textual reading (Akung 24).

### **3.1.1 Contemporary Feminist Writers in Nigeria**

As I stated in the preceding chapter, the literary world in African literature, with a focus on Nigerian literature, was always controlled by male authors and male critics. Today, however, there is a growing number of female authors and critics who focus on the feminist interpretation of the world around them. The works by male authors were predominantly chosen as the representative of the Nigerian literary world. This was decided by the institutions during the colonial times as they made the choices in education of males and females (Davies 120). Also, the notion that "the sex-role distinction common to many African societies supported the notion that western education was a barrier to a woman's role as wife and mother (ibid.).

Today, there are many emerging Nigerian female writers who tend to focus on the female protagonist, such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Lola Shoneyin, Ayobami Adebayo, Akwaeke Emezi, Sefi Atta or Oyinkan Braithwaite. Among these female authors stated above, the most influential and popular is Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, predominantly known for her novels *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006) or *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). In Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, she portrays the two female protagonists – Olanna and Kainene. Olanna is a strong and educated character, and Kainene is Olanna's twin sister, also with education and strong emotional defences against the world. Lola Shoneyin's debut novel, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* (2010), analyses the world of polygamy from a feministic point of view. Also worth mentioning is the novel *Freshwater* (2018) by Akwaeke Emezi, which to a great extent, deals with stories of mental illness and sexual violence.

It needs to be mentioned that the writers stated above are only a fraction of today's Nigerian female literary canon. It is still exponentially growing, which is the best way forward as far as the representation of women in contemporary literature is concerned.

## 4 Oyinkan Braithwaite: The Author of the Novel

This chapter introduces Oyinkan Braithwaite, the author of the novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer*. It provides Oyinkan Braithwaite's short biography and also mentions critical response to her debut novel.

Oyinkan Braithwaite was born as the first of four children on 21st March 1988 in Lagos, Nigeria. She spent her childhood in both Nigeria and the UK, where her family moved to Southgate in North London before Braithwaite started primary school. Consequently, in 2001 she and her family returned back to Lagos when her younger brother was born. She then attended the sixth form at a boarding school in Shropshire, and after that, Braithwaite studied law and creative writing at Surrey University and Kingston University before moving back to Lagos in 2012. There she worked as an assistant editor for the independent publisher Kachifo and as a production manager at her father's education and entertainment company, Ajapaworld (Oinkanbraithwaite.com).

As we mentioned before, Braithwaite has three siblings, a younger brother and two younger sisters. As Braithwaite mentioned in the article included in *The Guardian*, she and her younger sister Obafunke are "going through life together" (Braithwaite). This may have been the driving force behind writing her most successful novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, where the two main protagonists, Ayoola and Korede, also have this unique and powerful sister bond between them. She further mentioned that:

Sometimes we hate each other. Sometimes we are really not speaking, but I've noticed that when push comes to show, we can also band together quite tightly. You know that, whatever happens, that person will be there for you. (*The Guardian*)

This statement could also additionally confirm that the strength of the relationship and the sister bond of the novel's protagonists is the reflection of the author's own relationship with her sister.

Braithwaite's career as a writer started with her first publication of the short stories *The Driver* in 2010. In 2018 Braithwaite published her debut novel, *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, which gained her wide acclaim. For this novel, Braithwaite won the 2019 *LA Times Award* for Best Crime Thriller, the 2019 Morning News Tournament of Books, the 2019 Amazon

Publishing Reader's Award for Best Debut Novel, and the 2019 *Anthony Award* for Best First Novel. Among many others, the novel was also shortlisted for the Women's Prize for Fiction 2019 and was also shortlisted for the *Goodreads Choice Awards 2019* in the Mystery & Thriller and Debut Novel categories (Oyinkanbraithwaite.com).

*My Sister, the Serial Killer*, has been translated into thirty languages and has also been optioned for a movie adaptation; this corroborates the great success of Braithwaite's debut novel.

## 5 Characteristics of the Novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer*

This chapter provides a short synopsis of the novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer*. Marginally it touches upon the plot of the novel, the motivation of the author to set the story in Lagos and also a minor description of the central theme in the novel.

*My Sister, the Serial Killer* is the best-known novel by British-Nigeria author Oyinkan Braithwaite. As was mentioned in the preceding chapter, this novel gained a wide popular and critical acclaim.

In this novel, the setting of which is in Nigerian Lagos, the focus is on the two main women protagonists, Ayoola and Korede. The tone of the novel can be characterised as darkly satirical with elements of dark humour. As far as the plot of the novel is concerned, it is mainly focused on the two main protagonists, as I mentioned above. Korede is a nurse who works in a hospital in Lagos; her younger sister Ayoola, is described as a strikingly beautiful woman. Ayoola, unfortunately, serially murders men who admire her and her sister, Korede, feels the necessity to help her sister and cover up for the murders. As the author, Oyinkan Braithwaite said in her interview for *BBC Africa*: “people used to see stories about social crimes stories about men killing numerous women (...) it was nice to see a woman having that power and using it in the same sort of reckless way” (Braithwaite).

As I mentioned above, the novel is set in Lagos, Nigeria. The author selected this setting deliberately as she also wanted to portray the everyday life in Lagos. Braithwaite stated for the interview with Alice Cottrell that the motivation for setting the story in Lagos was based on the fact that it is quite simple to commit a crime and get away with it in Nigeria, so the author did not have to worry too much about the investigation scene. Also, because of the society she grew up in and knew, the level of corruption and the types of things that some individuals get away with (Braithwaite).

As far as the main themes of the novel are concerned, one of the major ones is undoubtedly the family obligation and the bond between the two sisters. Korede, the older sister, feels the obligation to help and cover up the murders because the murderer is her sister. This



need of Korede makes Ayoola lose her sense of personal responsibility as she concludes that whatever she does, her sister Korede will be available for the rescue.

## II PRACTICAL PART

The practical part provides the analysis of the novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer* by Oyinkan Braithwaite from the point of view of patriarchy and feminism. Predominantly, it focuses on the patriarchy as implemented in the novel, the oppressive background in Nigeria, the position of women in Nigerian society and the portrayal of the strong female character as presented in the novel. Furthermore, the means of revolt and defiance are examined and discussed with emphasis put on sisterhood and the concept of loyalty.

### 6 Female Oppression in the Novel, *My Sister, the Serial Killer*

The aim of this chapter is to analyse the occurrence and theme of patriarchy as developed in the novel, mainly mediated through the character of the father. As I indicated in the theoretical part of this thesis, the belief of the society in Nigeria is aimed toward the patriarchal nature, which oppresses and marginalises women. Therefore, also, the corruption of the Nigerian system, as portrayed in the novel, is considered.

#### 6.1 Patriarchy

The theme of patriarchy and women's oppression is omnipresent in *My Sister, the Serial Killer*. A broad portion of the theoretical part of this bachelor thesis is dedicated to theorizing the concept of patriarchy in the setting of Nigeria as well as the historical development of patriarchy through the different historical periods in Nigeria's development; pre-colonial Nigeria, colonial Nigeria and post-colonial Nigeria. An individual chapter is devoted to women in contemporary Nigeria and the examples of sectors in which women are still, nowadays, exploited and subjugated. The structure of the novel revolves around the men-dominated society and masterly portrays and draws attention to some aspects of the lives of women in Nigeria. The author of the novel stated that at the beginning of the writing process, she was not sure how the novel would work in the Nigerian setting, but after some time, she found out that the novel actually fits perfectly into the Nigerian, primarily due to the beliefs and conviction of society, the level of corruption, the domination of men and marginalization of women (*BBC Africa*). Eventually, this, in fact, seems to be the main point of view in the novel; the disclosure of the society that the author lives in and the need to speak publicly about it.

### 6.1.1 The Father

The patriarchal nature of the novel is expressed in numerous ways, which will be discussed later, but predominantly through the character of "the father". There are seven chapters entitled "Father" distributed throughout the whole structure of the novel and in which the author deliberately unfolds the trauma from the childhood from which both Korede and Ayoola suffer. It seems that the chapters, which tackle the oppressive problems, are distributed evenly throughout the novel. Therefore, the author reveals the source of the actions of the protagonist and the consequences of their trauma uniformly, which gives the reader time to make an opinion of his/her own.

The protagonists had a quite challenging relationship with the figure of the father; Korede even contemplates the concept of naming and thinking of him as a father as she argues: "We didn't call him Daddy. We never had. He was not a daddy, at least not in the way the word "daddy" denotes. One could hardly consider him a father. He was the law in our home" (Braithwaite 184). His figure served as the law and the source of rules in the family to which everyone must answer; the head of the family, the man in charge, as it is entirely typical in patriarchal families from the patriarchal background. Men dominate in the patriarchal society<sup>2</sup>, and they usually exploit women in their homes. The protagonist saw her father as an embodiment of oppression from an early childhood from which there was seemingly no way of escape. When the father died, Korede stated that "I am sure they are celebrating him in hell" (Braithwaite 81). Therefore, this confirms the fact that the women were aware of the repression perpetrated by the father and were also aware of the fact that this is how society functions in the given environment.

Further analysis also provides the fact of the abusiveness and violent nature of the father. This piece of literature has efficiently highlighted violence against women<sup>3</sup> as a current issue throughout the narrative arc, and it may also be considered as the driving force behind the plot of this novel. In chapter 2.4.1 in this thesis' theoretical part, I studied the dispute concerning the violence against women. In this chapter, as Bazza postulates, most of the time, these incidents of abuse of women are considered something that the family needs to resolve between themselves behind closed doors as it is referred to as "family

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter 1 *Patriarchy in Nigeria*

<sup>3</sup> See chapter 2.4.1 *Violence Against Women*

matters" or "family feuds". The father was not only abusive towards the mother: "Moments later he pulled our mother off her feet by her hair and slammed her against the wall. Then he struck her face" (Braithwaite 114). The role of the mother serves as the silent sufferer, attempting to endure abuse under the guise of tradition and cultural custom. She realized there is no way out, neither via divorce, which is still difficult to obtain in Nigeria due to women's status<sup>4</sup>, nor through reporting to the police<sup>5</sup>. Furthermore, the mother is aware of the family's financial dependency on the man<sup>6</sup>. Women in Nigerian culture are left to rely on their husbands because they are considered and regarded as the core of Nigerian society. This embrace of the tradition only for economic reasons is a significant consequence of women's confinement to their households as faithful wives and mothers. Similarly, Abidemi Asiyanbola explains that traditionally, men have not participated in household duties, such as child-raising, because such duties are considered the sole realm of women. In a nutshell, men were the breadwinners of their households and the sources of economic welfare for their families (2). The father is a businessman who supports financially for the family; this might be another explanation for the mother's silent approach in the face of violence in their house. She utilizes her silence as a barrier against her husband's constant mistreatment; she silently obeys his demands, needs and requests. Mother decided to take her own measures as a result of his severe behaviour; she surrendered to him by doing nothing but taking some medication for her psychological moderation.

Apart from being violent towards his wife, he was also violent towards his daughters, Ayoola and Korede: "He dragged her (Ayoola) out by her hair, screaming" (Braithwaite 39). Or, "one day he was towering over me (Korede), spitting pure hell" (Braithwaite 80). All this perpetual violence was shielded by the power bestowed on him by the patriarchal rights which are widespread in Nigerian society. Also, the description of the father's nature and personality as "he had a strong will and a strong desire to instil discipline" (Braithwaite 184) additionally corroborates that the father felt like the authoritative leader of the family, who needed to set the order in accordance to him.

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<sup>4</sup> See chapter 2.4 *Marriage in Contemporary Nigeria*

<sup>5</sup> See chapter 2.4.1 *Violence Against Women*

<sup>6</sup> See chapter 2.1 *Women and the Economic Situation in Contemporary Nigeria*

Furthermore, the father was also known for having other sexual relations, mostly with younger girls. Ntoimo discusses these inequalities between men and women in Nigerian society and proposes that men are allowed and able to have as many sexual partners as they desire, just supported by the reality that it is supposed to be in the nature of men to have these passions and it is considered as a vital part of their masculinity (1989). Whereas women do not have the free choice to have relations outside the marriage, and it is treated as a reason to ostracize them from society. It was known and acknowledged in the family that their father had relations with younger sexual partners, and they had to accept it and further respect it as the father is the head of the family (...) he had several girlfriends in various universities across Lagos. We had long since lost count" (Braithwaite 107). The author tries to portray the common afflictions of women in a patriarchal setting. The father was not even ashamed to bring his relation to the house and had an absolute disinterest in household response as it was his right to manifest his patriarchal rights without consideration of other opinions. Korede states that "he often came home late" (Braithwaite 113), which confirms the fact that he was probably known to have intimacies with other women, but further adds that "but I remember this night, because he wasn't alone. There was a yellow woman on his arm" (Braithwaite 113). It is the father's house; he considers it his property where he can demonstrate his needs. However, the mother tried to stand up to him with an outburst of screaming and disagreement with this behaviour, to which the response of the father was, "If you don't shut up now, I will deal with you," he informed her firmly" (Braithwaite 113). He was unprepared for the mother's frenzy and reacted to it with the patriarchal conviction; violence and abuse. Moreover, after the years of manifesting his power in an abusive way, he was not prepared for the revolt and disagreement from his wife because he thinks and is convinced that this is how society works and women have to endure these acts of infidelity just because being considered as something less.

### **6.1.2 Women perceived as “Objects”**

Apart from the father being the most visible and apparent representative of the patriarchy in the novel, there are other instances in which we can detect the subordination and

exploitation of women. These instances add another facet to the story and explain that patriarchy is not only one-dimensional. One of them is the apparent sexualisation of women present in the novel. Women are treated as sexual objects that serve a man with nothing else but a beautiful appearance. There are frequent descriptions of Ayoola's beauty in the novel, such as "hers is the body of a music video vixen, a scarlet woman, a succubus. It belies her angelic face" (Braithwaite 19). Alternatively, also the poem written by her third victim Femi which, celebrates her beauty without considering her inner qualities:

I dare you to find a flaw  
in her beauty;  
or to bring forth a woman  
who can stand beside  
her without wilting (Braithwaite 7).

Ayoola's suitors are all described as being in love with her solely because of her stunning appearance, and the inner qualities were often overlooked. Ayoola appears to detest men's shallowness; she embraces her beauty, but she does not want it to be the only criterion of her value. The female protagonists occasionally discuss the perception of beauty and the need for a man just to have a beautiful wife. One instance is the relationship with Tade, where Ayoola argues that: "Besides, he isn't all that different from the rest of them, you know." (...) "He isn't deep. All he wants is a pretty face. That's all they ever want" (Braithwaite 69). Ayoola argues that men want to treat women just as their property or as something to boast about in society. Korede ultimately questions this statement by defending Tade by saying that he is not like other men, which in the end is denied by Tade telling Korede that he likes her sister because she is unique with its denotation being "I mean, she is beautiful and perfect" (Braithwaite 164). This statement serves as the confirmation that even Tade, who was in Korede's eyes a flawless and ideal man, has the reasoning of the patriarchally based man who sees women only as their beautiful possession. Men's masculinity<sup>7</sup> and masculine supremacy allow them to regard women as

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<sup>7</sup> Brittan explains masculinism as a "masculine ideology that justifies and naturalises male domination. As such, it is the ideology of patriarchy" (4).

sexual objects and targets of sexism, misogyny and harassment. The concept of sexual objectification of women also constitutes as one of the major themes in the novel. The author depicts various situations in which women, more precisely Ayoola, endure objectification based on the appearance from their male counterparts. This serves as another layer of the portrayal of Nigerian society, specifically with a focus on female difficulties. The issue of sexualisation and objectification can be mostly identified with women as Bordo explains that in society, women are more appreciated for their appearance and body than males, and therefore women are primarily valued for how they look (Bordo 143). Moreover, this objectification of women can also seemingly be defined as another facet of the encouragement to kill men, as Ayoola describes them as shallow and only concentrated on the physical appearance of women.

### **6.1.3 Tradition**

Furthermore, in the second part of the novel, again through the chapters titled "Father", we observe the oppression disguised under the term of tradition, through which many acts of patriarchal nature are mediated. Tradition is the most cherished value in Nigerian culture.

The chief visits the family's household to sign a deal with the father. Korede, in the novel, said that:

Our maternal grandparents always kept us away from chiefs. Apparently, if a chief saw a girl he liked, he would reach out and touch her with his bejeweled cane, and she would become his bride, no matter how many wives the man already had, no matter if the girl in question wanted to be his wife or not. (Braithwaite 173)

This quotation shows us that under tradition, women may unwillingly become wives to the Chief if he thinks that she is beautiful enough. These strong and powerful men, such as Chiefs, believe that they can easily dominate any woman and use her as a sexual object by displaying their authority in society, which allows them to have this attitude. The novel also exposes the concept of arranged marriage. Following this, in the novel, there is also stated that Korede heard behind the doors, where the conversation between the father and the Chief was held, the words "contract, deal, girl" (Braithwaite 174). Again, the notion of treating women as property without free will arises when you hear words such as contract and girl in one sentence. The mere act of selling the daughter to a wealthy and respectable

guy in order to increase the family's fortune is an example of tyranny since the child becomes a victim of her kin and her uncertain future with her planned and predetermined husband. However, now it is not only men but also the generation of women who assimilated and adapted to these forms of traditions. This statement can be further solidified by the character of Aunt Taiwo, the father's sister. As a reaction to the proposal that Ayoola needs to meet the Chief alone to help her father sign the contract, she says: "Ayoola, it is important that you do this for your father. (...) you are not a child anymore. You have started menstruating. Many girls would be excited about this. This man will give you anything you want. Anything" (Braithwaite 215). This is associated with the reality that Ayoola, at the age of fourteen, should say "yes" to marriage to the Chief to do a service to her father and her family. Internalized tradition forces young women to marry at a very early age even despite the fact that The Child Rights Act was passed in 2003<sup>8</sup>. However, unfortunately, only twenty-three of Nigeria's states have adopted this act, which makes room in other states of Nigeria to marry girls from the age of twelve without their full consent.

## 6.2 Corruption

This chapter aims to analyse and portray the concept of corruption and, in relation to that, also the concept of bribery as presented in the novel. The disclosure of corruption in Lagos brings another crucial facet to the story. The author, apart from exposing patriarchal belief in the home, also introduced the failure of the system, which functions again as the revelation of a different attitude towards women than towards men. In the novel, *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, the corruption of the police officers and the officers from LASTMA<sup>9</sup> has its origin in a patriarchal setting. As is indicated in the *Corruption in Nigeria: Patterns and Trends* from December 2019, out of all citizens of Nigeria who had contact with at least one public official "in the last twelve months prior to 2019, 30,2 per cent paid a bribe to, or were asked to pay a bribe by, a public official" (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime

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<sup>8</sup> This information was retrieved from the web page [www.girlsnotbrides.org](http://www.girlsnotbrides.org), a global network that is committed to ending child marriage all across the world.

<sup>9</sup> The abbreviation LASTMA refers to Lagos State Traffic Management Authority and according to the novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, the protagonist, Korede, explains that their greatest task is generally "to chase down individuals who run a red light" (Braithwaite 27-28).



5). Moreover, in the report, there is stated that police officers are in the first place in the prevalence of bribery in the year that this research was conducted, 2019.

This notion of bribery and corruption is also present in the novel as experienced by Korede. When driving in her car, Korede is stopped by one of the officers of LASTMA and asked to get out of her car to inspect it further. In this situation, Korede comments: “Educated women anger men of his ilk, and so I try to adopt broken English, but I suspect my attempt betrays my upbringing even more” (Braithwaite 29). In order to avoid the suspicion of the officer, Korede tries to pass as a less educated individual by pretending to not properly know the English language. The reality of men being angered by educated women can be traced back to the chapter 2.3 in the theoretical part of my bachelor thesis. In this chapter, we presented that there is a significant disparity in the access to education between male and female inhabitants, which is fuelled by the institutionalised patriarchy. Moreover, women are marginalised in the educational sector, and the type of people to which Korede alludes would rather see women being useful at home. This by itself is evidence of the patriarchal nature of the officers that, as Korede presents, it is widely acknowledged that this type of people do not like women to be adequately educated. Later Korede offered the officer a bribe just to dodge the closer inspection of her car.

It would be much more efficient if the police officers focused on the safety on the streets of Lagos<sup>10</sup>, as they can be for a woman dangerous at all times of the day. Korede is aware of this, and she exposes the fact of bribery and the safety of everyday life of women: “Lagos police are not even half that efficient. The ones tasked with keeping our streets safe spend most of their time ferreting out money from the general public to bolster their meager salary” (Braithwaite 27). The sheer fact of the streets being a risky environment for women can be exemplified by the part: “Two packets of pocket tissue, one 30-centiliter bottle of water, one first aid kit, one packet of wipes, one wallet, one tube of hand cream, one lip balm, one phone, one tampon, one rape whistle. Basically, the essentials for every woman” (Braithwaite 72). Bringing the rape whistle is essential for every woman in the streets of Lagos, and that by itself is an alarming situation. This aforementioned quotation may alternatively be interpreted as an example of the author’s usage of a sarcastic undertone,

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<sup>10</sup> See chapter 2.4.1 *Violence Against Women*

which is prevalent throughout the whole novel. The author employs humour and sarcasm to explain and make evident all of the heinous practices in Nigeria and, moreover, to satirise the Nigerian patriarchal background. Also, as the author, Oyinkan Braithwaite, stated in an interview with Alice Cottrell about the use of sarcasm in her novel, she did not want to be “immersed in the darkness” (Braithwaite) throughout the whole plot of the novel.

## **7 Means of Revolt and Defiance Against Patriarchy**

This chapter is going to analyse the revolt against the patriarchal society embodied in the two main protagonists, Ayoola and Korede. The reality of the author making two women the central point of the novel's plot confirms the aim of the novel being told from the female perspective, where ironically, men are figuring as the marginal and peripheral characters with not much psychological depth. It is an example of the Nigerian Feminist Novel<sup>11</sup>, where women try to revolt against the constraints put on them and are both solid and liberated characters. Both of the main characters, Ayoola and Korede, are not defined by any man; instead, they define themselves and live for themselves. The employment of these strong, courageous and determined female characters, who appear to be stronger than their male counterparts, represents the strength and need for liberation and emancipation in the Nigerian context; evidence that there are many women who are not afraid to stand up for themselves and the need of the change in Nigerian society. Women in Nigerian society must overcome several challenges imposed by males or the culture in which they live. Nonetheless, they utilise different techniques to achieve their objectives, such as liberation, emancipation and the treatment of inequality between the sexes. Women in Nigeria were also strongly opposed to patriarchy, even in the colonial period; as Aje-Ori Agbese explains that women many times responded publicly, such as by participating in strikes, marches or boycotts. The novel can be indeed interpreted in many ways: as a humorous and ironic novel, crime story, thriller and also feminist novel, predominantly due to the employment of the powerful female voices and the behaviour of the female protagonists. Even the fact that the roles switched from man being the killer of beautiful young women to the beautiful young woman being the killer of men. The irony in the novel is highly prevalent as the author goes to rather extreme lengths to accomplish her aims, which include utterly subverting and satirising Nigerian culture and sarcastically illuminating the shift in daily life in a Nigerian context. The author frequently makes humorous and sarcastic comments on the topics of patriarchy, oppression and trauma in order to show and convey the message of the ongoing oppression of women.

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<sup>11</sup> See chapter 3.1 *Nigerian Feminist Novel*

As we explained in chapter 6.1, titled Patriarchy, the oppressive nature towards women was mainly expressed through the character of the father from whom the main protagonists, as was explained, suffer trauma from childhood. The father died at a relatively early age of the protagonists and symbolically in the act of violence against his daughters:

hitting his head against the glass coffee table as he fell to the floor. (...) Ayoola came out from behind the couch, where she'd been taking cover. We stood over him. For the first time, we were taller. We watched the life seep out of him. Eventually, I woke my mother up from her Ambien-induced sleep and told her it was over (Braithwaite 80).

With this, as Korede explains in the novel, they did not try to help him and just watched him slowly die. Korede then told her mother that it was all over. The patriarchy in the household died with him and it also marked the end of the father being head of the family. Korede also said that: "There used to be a chair at the head of the table, but I burnt it down to a crisp in a bonfire just outside our compound. We don't talk about that. We don't talk about him" (Braithwaite 57). She ritually burnt down the chair, which was at the head of the table, which symbolised the father's dominant role in the household and the subordination of the female in the house. The revolt itself lies in the fact that there was no attempt to rescue the abusive male character to avert death and save him, and it also symbolised the final liberation of the female characters from the acts of oppression, abuse and being forced to withhold their opinions or demonstrate their own will.

The character of Korede is a strong and opinionated person who is not afraid to express her beliefs and convictions. Therefore, we can mark her as the feminist embodiment and a strong type of woman in Nigerian society who is, to some extent, liberated and educated. She is not even afraid of the LASTMA police officers, who, as was described in the preceding chapter<sup>12</sup>, are patriarchally natured and open to bribery. "On a normal day, I would fight him. (...) Any other time, I would be able to call this man the criminal that he is" (Braithwaite 29). Just because being afraid of police officers finding some evidence of murder in her car, she refrained from opposition to the man. Following this, Korede

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<sup>12</sup> See chapter 6.2 *Corruption*

questions and contemplates her pride and her belief in the revolt against these acts of the man-led society: “I sigh. My pride waves me goodbye as I add another 2,000 to the money” (Braithwaite 30). It was against her nature and belief to agree to give a bribe, but there appeared to be no other option in this scenario.

On the one hand, Korede is traumatised and terrified of her sister being a serial killer; these events make it difficult for her to function in daily life since images of the dead corpses remain in her head. For instance, she has constant nightmares and thoughts about the dead men, or she is even afraid of her phone ringing when she sees Ayoola’s name on the screen. Ayoola’s behaviour, on the other hand, is quite different and serves as a direct contrast to Korede’s behaviour. In connection to her murders, she is described as reckless and selfish with no fear of the repercussions and consequences. “As if Ayoola lives by anyone’s rules but her own” (Braithwaite 24). Ayoola displays no grief over the acts she committed partly because she is highly aware of her beauty and flawless appearance, which she uses as a shield and protection against the consequences of committing a murder.

There is music blasting from Ayoola’s room. She is listening to Whitney Houston’s “I Wanna Dance with Somebody”. It would be more appropriate to play Brimo or Lorde, something solemn or yearning, rather than the musical equivalent of a packet of M&MS (Braithwaite 34).

This part confirms that Ayoola does not feel guilt over the murders she perpetrated. This choice of Oyinkan Braithwaite of employing a character that is aware of her beauty and therefore is able to get away with anything symbolises the nature of patriarchal society and objectification of women. Just because of her angelic appearance, society expects and is convinced that she would never be able to commit such acts. Ayoola uses her beauty as a weapon of revolt against the Nigerian patriarchal society and its shockingly superficial nature. Also, Korede realises the power her sister’s beauty has: “If you say anything about any of this, I will tell them that you attacked her. And who do you think they will believe. You or Ayoola?” (Braithwaite 201).

Ayoola does not want to be defined and bound to any man. She accepts the man as her partner since that is the conviction of African womanism<sup>13</sup>, but the wedding does not seem to be an option for her. For example, Tade is attempted to be stabbed after he proposed to her and confessed his desire for Ayoola to be his wife. She inverts and changes the notion of male dominance over female dominance; she now holds power and is using it for her own benefit. She claims that the killings occurred as a result of the man's previous assaults on her. But these abusive allegations were, however, never in fact seen or confirmed by Korede. "Is it mere coincidence that Ayoola has never had a mark on her, from any of these incidents with these men; not even a bruise" (Braithwaite 23)? Therefore, we can conclude that Ayoola made this up just for her own good. Ayoola uses the false accusations of abuse to excuse her actions in order to protect herself. She inverted the system that women in Nigeria face on daily basis, and she is using the harsh reality in her stride. Given the prevalence of violence against women in Nigerian society, there is no reason not to believe her. This verifies the author's claim that the novel fits perfectly to the Nigerian setting due to the amount of corruption, societal beliefs and the system which operates in Nigeria (Braithwaite). Moreover, as was indicated in the preceding paragraph, she utilises her attractiveness and beauty as means to convince people of her truth. Therefore, we can consider Ayoola's murders as a form of revolt and defiance against the patriarchal society, she employs all available resources of patriarchal and men-dominated society, in which she was brought up and is traumatised by, and twists tradition just to suit her and her needs. Additionally, we can draw a conclusion that her aggressiveness against men, in general, is actually retaliation for her abusive father and that it may be inferred that, in some way, it is the direct consequence of her traumatic and painful upbringing. Ayoola is now the man, the dominant figure, and the men are the victims, subjugated and killed. Ayoola has been held hostage by tradition and custom, and in order for her to be set free, she must challenge the tradition and conventions.

Furthermore, her mother's attempts to conceive a boy child were also thwarted by Ayoola's attractiveness and charm. As we discussed in the theoretical part of this thesis, in Nigeria, male descendants are favoured over female descendants<sup>14</sup>, mostly because male

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<sup>13</sup> See chapter 3 *Feminist Tendencies in Contemporary Nigeria*

<sup>14</sup> See chapter 1 *Patriarchy in Nigeria*

offspring would inherit the family name and property, as well as because having a son is seen as more desirable in society than having a girl. “She (mother) was so thankful that she forgot to keep trying for a boy” (Braithwaite 24). This is just another instance in which the patriarchal Nigerian society operates and thus instils in parents the assumption that male offspring are of more importance than female descendants.

Korede also seems to revolt against the patriarchal idea of marriage, constantly proposed and glorified by her mother and also Aunt Taiwo. ““(mother) It’s time you, the both of you, start thinking about settling down” “(Korede) Cause marriage worked so well for you ...”” (Braithwaite 131). Korede appears to be resistant to the thought of her getting married because she is aware that her mother and father’s marriage did not work out. Korede’s conviction might be established due to her upbringing in a toxic environment with an abusive and violent father and a subservient and obedient mother. Moreover, the circumstances and conditions under which the marriage is supposed to take place might also be a factor. The man being perceived as the dominant figure seems to be not appealing to Korede. This, in fact, can be again perceived as the consequence of her childhood and upbringing, which led to her overall animosity towards men in general. Similarly to Ayoola, Korede has the same problem, which lies in her trauma from the abusiveness of her father; she refuses to accept that men could have more power than herself and, in fact, revolts against it with her own ideas for her future life. The example is expressed by the advice and tips from aunt Taiwo, as she is convinced that marriage is supposed to be the pinnacle of a woman’s life.

You know, men are very fickle. Give them what they want, and they will do anything for you. Keep your hair long and glossy or invest in good weaves; cook for him and send the food to his home and his office. Stroke his ego in front of his friends and treat them well for his sake. (...) Do these things and he will put a ring on your finger, fast fast.” (...) Of course, neither of us listening (Braithwaite 82).

This section can also additionally confirm the fact that Korede and Ayoola are not interested in any guidance con their marriage. They want to approach it on their own terms, free of the constraints imposed by society and all the requirements necessary to attract a decent and affluent spouse. As a kind of defiance, they both refuse to listen.

## 7.1 The Knife

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the dominant symbol incorporated in the novel's plot. The knife appears to represent the transfer of patriarchal power from the father's hands to his younger daughter Ayoola. Furthermore, the knife might also symbolise the act of revolt, in which the right to violence was transferred from the hands of a man to the hands of a woman. The knife had formerly belonged to the father and was his most valued item. He looked after it and was immensely proud of it, even showing it off to his acquaintances. As previously stated, the father was an authoritative figure who represented the demand for discipline and respect in the family's household. Korede noted that even while he was a tough man, he behaved differently when it came to taking care of the knife:

This was the only time I ever witnessed tenderness from him. (...) When he got up to rinse the oil from the blade, I would take my leave. It was by no means the end of the cleaning regimen, but it seemed best to be gone before it was over, in case his mood shifted during the process (Braithwaite 38).

The knife serves as a metaphor for the power transfer in the plot. It was owned by the father, and therefore he held dominance over the whole family. After his death, Ayoola took the knife from his study, and as a result, she now feels the power of dominance and supremacy. "Ayoola inherited the knife from him (and by "inherited" I mean she took it from his possessions before his body was cold in the ground) (...) it was the thing he was most proud of" (Braithwaite 37). The patriarchal repression and oppression in the family structure died with the death of the father. As we saw in the previous chapters, his death marked the withdrawal of the patriarchal system in the household. As a result, we may assume that the knife represents the owner's authority and entitles him or her to employ violence to attain his or her objectives.

The knife is the weapon of choice for Ayoola in all of her killings. She treasures it and is proud to have it in her possession. The father's and Ayoola's approaches to the knife appear to be comparable in this regard. They both consider it to be something precious and significant to them. Furthermore, this closeness in attitude might indicate that the father and Ayoola share some traits. They both felt entitled to the acts of violence and were unconcerned about the ramifications. As a result, we may assume that the knife functions



as a badge that allows the owner to act as he or she pleases, regardless of the consequences.

Ayoola has a unique affinity and bond with the knife, expressing that she feels secure and protected when she has it in her hands. “The knife is important to me, Korede. It is all I have left of him” (Braithwaite 36). She does not want to get rid of it, and it appears that she does so primarily because she feels safe with it. Even though Korede never witnessed any traces of violence on her from any of her suitors<sup>16</sup>, Ayoola maintains that she uses the knife to defend herself from the violence perpetrated on her. The need for a weapon as a tool of self-defence stems from her upbringing in Nigeria, as well as trauma from her childhood, where violence was almost on the daily agenda. Furthermore, as previously said, Nigerian culture is not a secure environment for women since males believe they have the freedom to express their patriarchal views and principles. “The knife was her protection. You never knew with men, they wanted what they wanted when they wanted it. She didn’t mean to kill him; she wanted to warn him off, but he wasn’t scared of her weapon” (Braithwaite 8). This quotation encapsulates the nature of men in Nigeria, which has been discussed extensively in the prior chapters<sup>17</sup>. As a result of Ayoola’s fear of men’s intentions, we might conclude that society was the driving factor for her murders. The knife may be likened to Korede’s rape whistle. However, the fundamental distinction is that Korede does not utilise the rape whistle to commit murders for her personal purposes as Ayoola does. The convictions include vengeance for her traumatising upbringing as well as revenge for the Nigerian environment and culture in which she grew up.

After the murder of Femi, Ayoola’s previous boyfriend, Korede began to consider the possibility of the knife having its own consciousness. She does not want to believe that Ayoola is capable of committing such crimes out of nowhere; therefore, she tries to excuse the deeds (hypothetically). She considers the possibility that the knife Ayoola stole from her father is the driving mechanism behind the murders:

I cannot imagine her resorting to stabbing if that particular knife were not in her hand; almost as if it were the knife and not her that was doing the killing. (...) Who

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<sup>16</sup> See chapter 7 *Means of Revolt and Defiance Against Patriarchy*

<sup>17</sup> See chapter 1 *Patriarchy in Nigeria*

is to say that an object does not come with its own agenda? Or that the collective agenda of its previous owners does not direct its purpose still? (Braithwaite 36)

Korede speculates that the knife has a shared agenda of all its previous owners, including her father. She wonders whether the knife is loaded with all the violent convictions of the male owners before Ayoola, and that is the reason behind her committing all these killings. With the knife in Ayoola's hands, she becomes a person comparable to those who have held the knife before her; just as their father being an abusive and oppressive figure, Ayoola becomes a murderer of men.

We can also hypothetically presume that the incorporation of the knife as a symbol in the story marks the requirement and need for a new period in Nigerian history where women seize power, claim their liberation and rise from a position of marginalisation, oppression and subjugation to one of greater power, control and influence. The knife might, therefore, be also interpreted as a statement that women are just as competent, capable and valuable as males.

## **7.2 Sisterhood**

The liaison between Korede and Ayoola can also be considered as the driving force of this novel. Apart from the patriarchal concerns and violent abuses, the theme of sisterhood and sister bond seems to be substantially prominent in the story, and the incorporation of this powerful sister relationship serves the story in many ways. The author explores their relationship as sisters, as friends and also the powerful bond which holds them together. In this chapter, the tie between the two sisters is going to be explored and also what it symbolizes for the story of the novel. We can perceive Ayoola and Korede as the feminist sister unification, which can be understood in two dimensions; as sisters and also as the alliance of two powerful women.

Korede and Ayoola can be easily contrasted; their personalities and even their physical features are markedly different. As we described in the previous chapter, Ayoola is the embodiment of beauty in the novel, while her sister Korede is aware of not having such a beautiful appearance. Korede, as an older sister, was ready to protect Ayoola when entering school due to the fact that Korede was frequently the target of bullying because of

her appearance. She expected Ayoola to receive the same treatment and was expecting to be them “against the world” (Braithwaite 56). However, Ayoola, because of her angelic beauty, was asked out on the first day and experienced a completely different approach. In addition to this, the disparity in appearance also causes the different attitudes towards Ayoola and Korede. Ayoola and her beauty mean that people do not associate the heinous crimes with her personality. The difference in appearance is also apparent to their mother. Consequently, the mother’s inconsistency in behaviour is most noticeable when she is solely focused on marrying Ayoola off, which appears to be her primary objective. Both of the sisters are constantly compared and put into opposition which serves as a means of complementation. The qualities that are innate to Korede are remote to Ayoola, and this serves as a connection between them. Ayoola is free-spirited, child-like and irresponsible, while Korede is a perfect contradiction as she is responsible, efficient, and a very clean person. Therefore, they complement each other even in everyday life but also in the acts of murder.

The main reason for the unification of the sisters is loyalty and the fact that they share the secret of the murders committed by Ayoola. Korede as an older sister feels responsible for Ayoola to keep her safe and protected. Loyalty is one of the critical elements portrayed in the novel and is seen as the driving engine behind the development of the plot. To portray this obligation of the older sister to shield the younger sister from all the external traps, Korede states: “Ayoola is inconsiderate and selfish and reckless, but her welfare is and always has been my responsibility” (Braithwaite 122). However, Korede is aware of the many deficiencies of Ayoola; she is always prepared to come to the rescue. The author stated that the theme of sisterhood and faithfulness of the sisters was essential for her to be incorporated into the novel. The reason behind this might be the own experience of the author, who has a strong bond with her younger sister Obafunke. She comes from an environment where she is always responsible for the younger sister, and she comments that even when they often have misunderstandings and tension between them, the fact of them being sisters always comes first. In the novel, there is also stated that “big sisters look after little sisters” (Braithwaite 130). Visibly, this quotation is the rule by which mainly Korede operates on daily basis.

Furthermore, the loyalty as displayed by the character of Korede is also present in an instant with the perpetual beatings performed by the father. Korede decided that it was enough and she would no longer tolerate the abusive environment of their home and resolved to finally stand up to him. Consequently, Korede then contemplates her life choices and the devotion to her younger sister's needs as she feels that it is her most paramount responsibility. "You have to choose a side, and my lot was cast long ago. She will always have me and I will always have her; no one else matters" (Braithwaite 220). She feels that no matter who comes into her life, her younger sister's welfare will always be of the highest importance to her. This quotation occurs at the conclusion of the novel, and the author accomplished to portray the profound sister relationship and bond, which was one of the main themes attempted to portray.

We might infer that the two primary protagonists represent feminist unity and alliance, as indicated at the opening of this chapter. Their voices are strong, and they collaborate, while the male voices in the novel are not as solid with relatively shallow personalities. We can perceive them as two women, sisters that are going against the oppression that is natural to the Nigerian setting. From early childhood, they experienced the patriarchal environment of Nigeria, mainly through the figure of the father<sup>22</sup>, and they decided to reject this thinking together.

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<sup>22</sup> See chapter 6.1.1 *The Father*

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this thesis was to present a feminist interpretation of Oyinkan Braithwaite's novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer*. The primary focus was on the patriarchal system that exists in Nigeria and how it impacts women's lives. Under the guise of tradition, women are subjugated and marginalised in daily activities, such as in the economic sector, education, politics, etc. The thesis also outlined the methods employed by the novel's protagonists that are used for their liberation and as an act of revolt and defiance against the patriarchal system. Moreover, the novel also discusses the concept of beauty which acts as an important factor throughout the story. In this regard, the novel investigates the cases of sexism and objectification of women, focusing on men's superficial thinking and obsession with appearance rather than inner qualities.

The main objective of the thesis was to establish and prove that themes of patriarchy and feminism are omnipresent in the novel and cannot be overlooked. The issues concerning women can be identified as the driving force behind the novel's plot. The oppressive and repressive nature of the society operates daily and marginalise women on every level of their life.

In Merriam-Webster Dictionary, the word "patriarchy" is defined as a "social organisation marked by the supremacy of the father in the clan or family, the legal dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of descent and inheritance in the male line" (Merriam-webster.com). Alternatively, broadly speaking, a society that is controlled by men. We examined the patriarchal background and implementation of the patriarchal system in Nigerian culture, where it is the prevalent structure of society. The patriarchal system essentially controls the gender determinism of work. Women are seen as mothers and wives, while men are freely entitled to freely pursue their careers. This structure is mostly a product of Nigeria's colonial past under the British rule. Moreover, also Christianity, Islam and capitalism further contributed to the development of the patriarchal society and the post-colonial period only further solidified this structure.

The subjugation and oppression of women in sectors such as education, economic sector and politics arise from the patriarchal conviction. The exclusion of women from the right to own land, the bias and prejudice against women in education or also the rejection to

participate in political decisions are just some examples of women being underestimated in daily life. Furthermore, encounters with domestic abuse as well as violence against women on the streets are just another facet of the institutionalised patriarchy implemented in Nigerian society.

As a result, women decided to take a stance against these discriminatory practices. They participated in strikes, marches and rebellions in order to gain them their freedom and liberation from the men-controlled society. Moreover, the adoption of some feminist tendencies in the Nigerian context, such as African womanism, further marks the revolt against the structure of life in Nigeria.

Without a doubt, women in literature also decided to challenge patriarchal ideals, and the emergence of the Nigerian feminist novel is an example. The novel in which the women are no longer peripheral figures with shallow characteristics but rather protagonists with strong beliefs and opinions. In contemporary Nigerian novels, women function as the main point of focus, and it marks a shift of focus from the masculine to the feminine. This reality is bolstered by the emergence of a slew of outstanding female authors in Nigeria. Authors such as Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Sefi Atta and Oyinkan Braithwaite are part of Nigeria's rapidly expanding female literary canon.

Oyinkan Braithwaite, the author of the novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, employs strong female characters as the main focus of her novel. This fact, as well as a shift away from the conventional use of male protagonists, has led to a more feministic approach to fiction writing in Nigeria. The novel is full of examples and instances of patriarchal behaviour, most notably embodied in the violent and authoritative figure of the father. With chapters devoted to his violent and abusive behaviour towards both his wife and daughters, the father serves as the novel's main embodiment of patriarchy and law in the family's structure. Additionally, infidelity and having sexual partners outside the marriage can be certainly mentioned as other instances of patriarchal behaviour. Moreover, the objectification of women and categorising them just based on their appearance adds another facet to the patriarchal system in Nigeria. The tradition, marriage and arranged (child) marriage are also topics discussed in the novel through the characters of Korede and Ayoola.

However, the protagonists, Korede and Ayoola, seem to take revolt against this system. They possess a trauma from their childhood, and they reject being defined by a man. The trauma which affects both Ayoola and Korede springs from their abusive upbringing with constant acts of violence committed by their father. This, in fact, can serve as the consequence of the hostility, revolt and animosity against men, which can be seen in the characters of Korede and Ayoola. On the other hand, the novel also features the character of the mother, who serves as the silent sufferer just because of tradition, cultural custom and financial stability.

Ayoola is a serial killer who kills her suitors. This subversion of the typical plot of novels where men kill women can also be defined as the act of revolt against society. These two women are not afraid to stand up for themselves and show their dislike for the patriarchal system implemented in Nigeria. The author, Oyinkan Braithwaite, uses extreme measures, such as murder, to get back at men and uses irony and hyperbole to subvert the patriarchal nature of contemporary Nigeria. The author also draws a closer look at the corruption in Nigerian society. The police officers and LASTMA officers who are susceptible to bribes show us the failure of the system. Furthermore, the commentary on the superficial nature of men in Nigerian society is also highly present, as illustrated by Ayoola's beauty, which she uses to work in her favour.

Last but not least, the author contemplates the concept of sisterhood. The sisterhood of Ayoola and Korede serves the function of the feminist alliance of two women who are revolting against the repressive nature of Nigeria. Korede, as the older sister, feels that she is under the obligation to rescue and take care of her younger sister, even in the most extreme scenarios depicted in the novel. The loyalty and the bond between two sisters, women, therefore, serve as a reminder that the sisterhood is powerful and necessary.

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