
America's Patriarchal Society

A patriarchal society can be defined as a general structure in which men have power over women. It consists of a male-dominated power structure throughout organised society and in individual relationships. Hillary Clinton, a presidential campaign candidate and former first lady, acknowledges that 'too many women in too many countries speak the same language — of silence' to emphasise the submissive and compliant nature of women and that the patriarchal society victimises them from the pursuit of happiness and independence. Throughout literature, women are often presented as decorative figures of seemingly fragile beauty, self-destructive and incapable of idealism. I argue that both 'The Great Gatsby' and 'Behold the Dreamers' highlight the subordination of women as they are regarded as inferior to their male counterparts, yet desire to hand down a better life to their children. In 'The Great Gatsby' which is set in the 1920s, Daisy highlights with a cynical superlative that 'the best thing in this world a girl can be is a beautiful little fool', to emphasise that women were objectified by men and only valued for their looks. This therefore excluded women from the pursuit of happiness as during this time, women had a very stereotypical role in society. If married, they would stay at home, looking after the children and managing the house, while their husband was the weekly wage earner. If single, they were usually involved in some form of service or have a secretarial role like Leah in 'Behold the Dreamers'. Despite the establishment of Flappers and the opportunities that they bought for women, many young women were simply expected to get married and have children as their only means of escaping parental control. Similarly, in 'Behold the Dreamers' Neni states that Jende is 'a good man, but still a man' which epitomises that a patriarchal society is still current in the Twenty-First century and that there has been a surprising lack of progression in the treatment that women are subject to in both novels in spite of the strides made in Feminism in the 1920s.

In 'The Great Gatsby', the patriarchal society that exists becomes imminent as it victimises women into believing that they are of a lower worth and value than their male counterparts. I believe that Daisy is a victim of a patriarchal society due to her husband's infidelity and the expectation of her to allow his affairs to continue unchallenged. At the start of the novel, Nick depicts the Buchanan household as a warm, and comforting environment which is evident in the colour symbolism that the French windows are glowing 'gold' and that they eat on a 'rosy-coloured space'. This emphasises the impression of extravagance and luxury that Nick is faced with as he enters this elaborate house and the romantic setting which is associated with it. However, this happiness can be viewed as a mere fallacy as Tom is called away to the telephone to speak with his mistress, Myrtle. The light imagery 'the glow faded, each light deserting her with lingering regret' employs a sorrowful tone to highlight Daisy's despair at her husband's infidelity. Thus, the patriarchal society victimises women by excluding them from the pursuit of happiness and independence as while it may seem that the women are the ones who take the advantage from the patriarchal system, according to liberal feminism, they do not even realise that they are oppressed by their husband. For instance, even though Daisy knows about the affair between her husband and Myrtle, she chooses not to make a scene in order to emerge as a welcoming hostess to Nick. As Daisy appears to have a 'deep gloom', the narration of Nick criticises her for 'basic insincerity' as he feels a sense of discomfort during his visit. I believe that women are unable to voice their rights because they are portrayed as weak and are conditioned to submit to their husbands. The visual metaphor of her 'shaking her head

decisively' at Tom highlights that Daisy wants to create clear boundaries for his behaviour. She underscores that she will not be humiliated for his infidelity, yet the short sentence that 'her face was sad' epitomises the feelings and emotions of all women during the 1920s as this patriarchal society excludes them from the pursuit of happiness and independence. Many men were unfaithful to their wives, yet women were too weak and morally unable to stand up to their husbands. This is emphasised in the satiric adaptation of the proverb 'the world and his wife' to 'the world and his mistress' to capture that the elite and upper class of East Egg and West Egg would be the only ones in attendance of Gatsby's party.

Congruently, I strongly argue that Myrtle Wilson is also victimised by a patriarchal society which excludes her from the pursuit of happiness and independence. I believe this to be true as despite her affair with Tom, he asserts his dominance over her and emotionally and physically abuses her when she speaks Daisy's name. This is cultivated in the harsh verb that Tom 'broke her nose with his open hand' which captures visually the supremacy and governance of males in 1920s America. The way that Tom views Myrtle strongly juxtaposes the way that he views Daisy. Although he victimises Daisy by being unfaithful, Fitzgerald characterises Tom as an elitist, who treats Daisy with much higher worth and value than Myrtle, who is of a lower social class and is relatively poor. Daisy is indispensable to him while Myrtle is very much replaceable.

This becomes imminent as in the first chapter, Tom accidentally injures Daisy's hand, depicted in the adjectives that Daisy's 'knuckle was black and blue'. Tom's accidental hurting of Daisy juxtaposes starkly to his deliberate hitting of Myrtle which leaves her 'face bruised and nose swollen.' By Tom striking her, he highlights that Myrtle does not deserve any of his respect as socially, she is so far beneath him. Similarly, the colour imagery of the 'bloody towels' emphasise the pain that Tom has subject Myrtle to and the extent of blood that his violent actions have caused. Furthermore, Tom is portrayed as an egotistical and domineering character by Nick which is imbued in the personification and light imagery that he has 'two shining arrogant eyes'. Nick's first impression of Tom creates a foreboding atmosphere to emphasise his power and control that he has over others. The harsh adjectives that Tom has a 'cruel body' and 'enormous power' cultivates the impression that he is always on edge and ready to fight. His physical appearance suggests a man who is capable of mighty strength, hostility and also menace. Thus, I argue that the patriarchal society in 'The Great Gatsby' victimises women by excluding them from the pursuit of happiness and independence as Tom's menacing presence and domineering structure bodes ill for Myrtle as she is physically beaten by this man, yet Tom's wealth and status insulates him from blame and guilt as Myrtle has no importance to him.

Similar to Myrtle, in 'Behold the Dreamers' Neni emerges as a victim of the patriarchal society due to the physical abuse that she is subject to by Jende. The patriarchal society throughout 'Behold the Dreamers' becomes evident in the antithesis between Jende and Neni's relationship at the beginning, to what it has become. At the beginning of the novel, the visual metaphor of the 'Statue of Columbus' employs a sense of hope for the both of them to lead a happy and successful life in America compared to the despondency endured in their life in Africa. This image mimics completely the symbolic 'green light' in 'The Great Gatsby' which represents Gatsby's hopes and dreams for a future with Daisy, as the 'Statue of Columbus' cultivates a sense of togetherness and long-lasting for Jende and Neni. However, the patriarchal society emerges as when his situation deteriorates and Jende understands that he will never be able to achieve his aims due to the crash of Lehman Brothers. This bodes ill for

Neni as she appears as the victim of this abuse and therefore falls as a victim of the patriarchal society as she is robbed of her happiness and independence as she is subject to such abuse. The short sentence that Neni 'didn't see the slap coming' highlights that this was unexpected and untrue to Jende's true personality. The repetition of the question 'did you just hit me?' fosters an unsettling mood to emphasise the utter shock that Neni is experiencing with the husband who used to look at her 'adoringly'. A sense of horror is evoked in the alliteration and repetition that he 'hit her hard. And another. And another' and pity is fostered for Neni who is evidently a victim of the patriarchal society and a vicious husband. Moreover, Neni is characterised as a victim of a patriarchal society in the triad that she 'squealed, stunned and pained' and that Liomi, her son, was 'speechless, motionless and powerless' as it reemphasises the shock endured by both Neni and her son, and the utter helplessness that they are experiencing. Similarly, the harsh adjective that it was a 'vicious slap' underscores the sheer force that Jende used to hit his wife and that he shows no remorse. Mbue uses the simile 'her cheek burning as if someone had rubbed black tar on it' to highlight once more the discomfort that Neni is experiencing and the effect that this abuse has had on her, emotionally and physically.

Jende does not just subject Neni to physical beating, yet also an emotional beating as he asserts control and authority over her. This is cultivated as their relationship begins to become under pressure and Jende reverts back to the stereotypical prejudice associated with his Cameroonian culture as he dictates Neni's actions. Her decision to start going to church and befriending Natasha, the pastor, causes uproar and debate as he depicts that she isn't a 'church type person'. It is evident that Jende is outraged that Neni has confided in a stranger surrounding their personal life and that she has suggested that they live together in the church in order to form a better life for her two children and prevent being deported back to Africa. His outrage is captured in the question 'a grown man like me, hiding in a church? For what?' and the visual metaphor that Jende 'shook his head' and 'let out a short decisive laugh' creates an oppressive mood to emphasise that the patriarchal society is imminent, and his decision will surpass hers. His interrogating and suppressive nature is accentuated in his question 'you didn't think you should tell me before going?' as it reemphasises my viewpoint that Neni is a victim of a patriarchal society who is robbed of her independence due to the tyrannical and old-fashioned nature of her husband. Mbue suggests that despite being set in 2007, females are still depicted as the weaker sex and there has been a lack of progression in the way that they are treated, echoing exactly the treatment that Daisy and Myrtle are subject to by Tom in 'The Great Gatsby'.

It could be argued that the females in 'The Great Gatsby' are not completely worthy of our sympathy, as instead of being a victim of a patriarchal society, they are victims of their own materialism. It is evident to me that Myrtle's romance with Tom is solely an illusion and she will never be a part of the upper-class society that she so desperately desires to be a part of. She is willing to leave her pride and degrade her own value as human being for wealth and luxury. The metaphor that 'I thought he knew something about breeding, but he wasn't fit to lick my shoe' creates a regretful tone which highlights the materialistic nature of Myrtle as she believed she was deceived by her husband into marrying a man who is of a lower social class than herself. Similarly, the visual metaphor of Myrtle 'raising her eyebrows in despair at the shiftlessness of the lower orders' places emphasis on the fact that due to her affair with Tom, she feels that she has the right to speak to those of the lower class in a condescending tone to assert her power. Therefore, Myrtle cannot be viewed as a victim of a patriarchal society that excludes her from the pursuit of happiness and independence as she victimises others based on their social class

and status.

Furthermore, in 'Behold the Dreamers', the patriarchal society is imbued as Jende's treatment and verbal assassination of Neni robs her of her happiness and independence. This is evident in the dynamic verb that she 'cried herself to sleep' whilst Jende slept 'in living room' and 'on the sofa'. Sleeping in separate rooms is a visual metaphor to highlight the opposing views of Neni and Jende and how their close relationship is now falling apart. It is evident that he falls back into macho patterns and treats his wife as inferior who is unable to make decisions and whom he even beats at a moment of highest despair. After being physically attacked by Jende, Mbue employs the financial simile that Neni's voice was 'as counterfeit as a dollar bill made on checkered paper' when uttering 'I'm okay' to her elderly neighbour. I am of the belief that this epitomises the patriarchal society as Neni robbed of her independence as she is unable to get help. It never occurs to Neni to file charges against him; that was unimaginable. A marital dispute 'was a family matter' and there was therefore no need to make anyone else aware of the goings-on in their home. The short sentence and rhetorical question 'She forgave him. What else was she supposed to do?' highlights that Neni is trapped in the patriarchal society which has robbed her of her independence and happiness as her only option is to forgive her husband as she will be unable to provide for her children alone.

Jordan Baker similarly defies the stereotypical role of women as victims of a patriarchal society as her cynical and egocentric nature marks her as one of the "new women" of the Roaring Twenties. Some may view Jordan through this perspective due to the introduction of Flappers which allowed women to become more liberated from the complete dictation of males. Flappers of the 1920s were young women known for their energetic freedom, embracing a lifestyle viewed by many at the time as outrageous, immoral or downright dangerous. Now considered the first generation of independent American women, Flappers pushed barriers in economic, political and sexual freedom for women. Therefore, Jordan, who is a Flapper, cannot be perceived as a victim of a patriarchal society who is excluded of happiness and independence as she strives to protect her social image and manipulates a patriarchal world to her own advantage. The simile that Jordan is 'like a young cadet' emphasises that she is not victimised, yet liberated as Fitzgerald depicts her in masculine terms which starkly contrasts to the beauty and subordination which was to be expected at this time. Similarly, Fitzgerald employs the adjectives that Jordan is 'small breasted' and 'jaunty' which denotes her male attributes as she is able to emerge as less feminine in a man's world.

However, Jende can be viewed as a man who keeps up the Cameroon morale and ideals, but he treats Neni as his equal, his love for her grants her a very different position from what it would have been like in Africa. Women's participation in national educational systems is biased due to the sociocultural and economic environments. There is also a lack of genuine political will to ensure that girls are given equal access to education in Africa. More than two-thirds of Africa's illiterates are women. Women are regarded as inferior to men and it would be assumed that educating women would make them too independent; taking them away from household duties. Furthermore, an uplifting mood is fostered in Jende's enthusiasm to achieve his American Dream alongside Neni and his dedication in order for them to attain it together. The adverb that Jende looked at Neni 'adoringly' emphasises that he truly does love her, and suggests that his abuse was a part of his culture and a moment of anger that he could not control. Similarly, the light imagery that there were 'millions of lights' looking at Neni emphasises the happiness and comfort she feels in her husband's company as that he does not exclude her from her pursuit of happiness, and instead he adds to it. The visual metaphor

that she sleeps with a 'passport under her pillow' accentuates Neni's excitement for a sustainable future with Jende and emphasises that her dream of becoming a pharmacist may in fact be achievable.

I strongly argue that in 'Behold the Dreamers' Cindy Edwards personifies a victim of the patriarchal society as her husband's infidelity is publicly exposed. The repetition of 'poor Cindy' fosters pathos for Cindy, as on the exterior, she has everything, yet internally she is broken. Cindy's mental rupture and internal downfall is accentuated in the metaphor that she is 'paranoid to a T' and the short sentence that 'she did not respond' to Jende emphasises that she is unable to communicate with others due to the emotional torment she is feeling. Moreover, the simile that she was acting 'like a madwoman' and the litany that she was 'barely eating; rarely going out; stumbling around the apartment with puffy, bloodshot eyes' cultivates a sense of concern as Cindy's alcoholism is evidently having a detrimental effect on her, and therefore depicts her as a victim of the patriarchal society as she has been robbed of her happiness due to the infidelity of her husband. This list juxtaposes starkly to the perfection associated with her apartment as the adjectives of the 'cream-coloured cabinetry' and a 'bowl of perfectly looking apples and bananas' is bitterly ironic as she is experiencing her own self-destruction and her exterior perfection is merely a façade. Cindy is characterised as a complete victim of a patriarchal society as her lonely and desolate lifestyle due to her husband's infidelity and lack of love from her parents led to the abuse of drugs and alcohol and ultimately to her grotesque and lonely death. The fact that she died on her 'marital bed' cultivates an ominous atmosphere as she was alone in her death, just as she was in her marriage, and her death is a visual metaphor of the destruction and damage that her marriage caused her.